Touchstone

Volume 34 **February 2016** **Number 1**

The Image of God in Humanity

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EDITORIAL

Apology

Some readers noted, and let me know, that a promised article in the October 2015 number on "Confirmation: *De Facto* Third Sacrament?" was not included. It had been planned that the article would be an integral part of our theme, Worship and the Sacramental Life. Somehow, when it came to the formatting of the full text of the number, the confirmation article fell through a crack in the editor's attentiveness. I have apologized to the author, Michael Brooks, and now apologize to all readers of *Touchstone* for this unfortunate omission. There is a little good news, though: the article, relevant in an encouraging way to pastoral life today, is included in this number. Brooks traces some of the history of confirmation in the ancient and reformation churches, and more recently in The United Church of Canada. He notes the challenges facing churches in engaging teen-agers in the journey toward confirmation, and presents an effective model currently operating in the congregation that he serves. Brooks also serves readers of *Touchstone* by presenting one of the book reviews.

Imago Dei

The theme of this number is the image of God in humanity, or, in short-form, the *imago dei.* Our lead article by Richard Topping provides a firm base in the Reformed tradition through its consideration of Calvin's teaching on the *imago.* He shows Calvin to be the scripturally focussed theologian and prudent exegete that he was, and also shows how Calvin used the *imago*, even in its state as compromised by sin, as a basis for ethical responsibility. In "Christ and the *Imago Dei*" David Deane raises the question of the purpose of the Incarnation, maintaining that even if the fall had not occurred, Jesus Christ would have fulfilled a role in "facilitating the full flowering of the *imago Dei.*" He also gives a full account of the more traditional understanding of the Incarnation as being necessitated by human sin, and argues that this traditional understanding should not be understood as based on literal readings of the Bible or on a dualist conceptuality. Moreover, he maintains that this traditional understanding can flourish alongside an understanding that a full flowering of the *imago* includes "radical participation in the divine life through Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the person."

These two first articles give us substantial accounts of, and insight into, the significance of the *imago* in the historic faith. Then come

two articles with a more contemporary focus. Shannon Craigo-Snell takes us into a hospital waiting room to reflect on the tension between unity and diversity that complicates our understanding of human nature as created in God's image. If being in the image of God means that all humans are essentially the same, what are we to make of the distinctive qualities—some ennobling and beautiful—that make us so different? Craigo-Snell finds help in maintaining a balance between sameness and difference by recalling the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.

Again in a more contemporary mode, Marilyn Legge lifts up the contribution of Christian feminist writers on the *imago*. She notes that, in response to patterns of exploitation and oppression that have bedevilled and still bedevil human flourishing, feminist voices have promoted instead a vision of justice-love and have re-imagined the *imago* as embodied. Legge presents the work of Dorothee Soelle as a model for understanding humans as created good, and for freedom, as co-creative with God. Following Soelle, Legge maintains that it is in claiming our own creative power for life that humans come to image God best.

Speaking "From the Heart," Lisa Waites reports on the challenge of living the *imago Dei* through all the messiness of family life. She recalls how a single painting has been a constant companion in family life, and how the triune Artist has constantly been at work on the canvas of her life. In our Profile, Austin Fennell provides a portrait of two remarkable spiritual leaders in early Lethbridge, Charles and Elizabeth McKillop. The flair and impact of the McKillop ministry leaves one humbled. Six book reviews round out the number.

Creation and the *Imago*

In an age when the importance and worth of human diversity is widely recognized, consideration of the *imago* needs to be multi-faceted. Initially intended for this number was an article on disability and the *imago*. Regrettably, illness prevented the author from submitting what would have been an important contribution to our theme. There are many different lenses that we might have used to view the *imago*, perhaps none more important than an imperilled creation and humanity's place in it.

The theme of our September 2012 number was climate change and the prospect of the destruction of our environment. It was titled Obituary for the Earth? So we already had put a lens on the relationship between humanity and creation, and taken theological stock of the pernicious role that humans have been playing in the well-being of creation. Still, matters only seem to get worse, and an article in the January *United Church Observer* ("This Baby's Life") paints a disturbing

picture of the world that our grandchildren will inhabit. Liveability and great beauty are at risk.

In the near north of Ontario where I live, this past autumn was especially mild and sunny. Days of rare beauty continued into December and the freeze-up of our lake (Cecebe) did not occur until early January. One day in November of this lingering autumn, I sat on our dock for an hour or more, rapt in open-eyed meditation. The lake was perfectly calm, and the reflection of pine and hemlock and cedar and rock in the water below was a perfect image of the originals above. The sun was brilliant in a cloudless sky, and an utter stillness wrapped the moment. No invitation to a more internal kind of meditation could have persuaded me to close my eyes to such beauty.

This experience brought to mind Calvin's teaching about the creation. He held that the works of creation are a theatre of God's glory; or again, a garment as it were, clothing the Creator. Were it not for the perversity of sin, we all would see it, and no further revelation of the divine character and its attributes would be needed. So great is God's beneficence in the works of creation that grateful humans should be engaged in uninterrupted contemplation of them. My experience of open-eyed meditation on that sublime November day seemed to fit the bill!

But what if we should compromise, even destroy, such a gift as is our Planet Earth for future generations? In what terms might we describe the desecration of a creation that mirrors God's goodness by humans who bear, in some measure, the image of God? What cry of mourning and grief would suffice? Might this be so grievous a calamity that it would be sin against the Holy Spirit?

One of our readers recently put that last question to me in an e-conversation. Harry Oussoren was attributing some of the theological responsibility for our ever-growing ecological crisis to Protestant distaste for anything approaching natural theology. He avers that this distaste has buttressed our failure to see the Holy Spirit in much larger terms than just "in me" or "of the church." This isn't to argue for watering down the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to undifferentiated pneumatology, i.e., "spirit" with intentional lower case "s." Oussoren recommends four vital books to help us see more clearly the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of *all* life. I offer the following mini-reviews from my friend:

- Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Rooted in the Christian heritage with its Trinitarian apprehension of the divine, Moltmann offers no undifferentiated spirit, nor a divine presence limited to the church, nor a Holy Spirit centred solely on human experience. Rather he explodes theology's

limitations with a holistic, ubiquitous pneumatology infusing all life in creation, thereby universalizing Christ's liberating and redemptive work. (London: SCM Press, 1992.)

- David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. Suzuki reinforced for me, from a scientific perspective, the deeply mysterious (sacred!) reality of creation and our need to re-think the role and place of humans. Now that humanity has developed the means (and, too often, the will) to plunder and destroy the earth, what/who can "redeem" us from what looks increasingly like a fatal hubris? (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group, 1997.)
- Pope Francis, *Laudate Si: On Care for Our Common Home*. This encyclical letter came like an epiphany into global public awareness, addressing me and "every living person living on this planet" with a gospel call for more humble and respectful ways of living on our earth home. (Frederick, MD.: The Word among Us Press, 2015.)
- Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity*. Spier gives ample reason for all humans to remember that "life" is so much bigger than humanity alone. In its diverse complexity and simplest forms, life entails an historical scope far beyond what can be reported about human beings. Anthropocentrism may be inevitable, but it is not sufficient for comprehensive scientific—let alone theological—thinking. (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.)

We could add to this list one of the books reviewed in this number, *Planted*, the story of an intentional Christian ecological community, *A Rocha*, in Surrey, BC.

May the Holy Spirit stir up the wisdom of the *imago* in humanity, leading us to resist and halt further reckless destruction of that part of the creation in which we are privileged to live.

Peter Wyatt

JOHN CALVIN AND THE IMAGE OF GOD:
CREATION, REGENERATION, REMNANTS, AND RIGHTS

by Richard R. Topping

Introduction

Calvin's understanding of humanity made in the image and likeness of God is an important thread that runs through his theology and ethics. In an act of divine love, God creates humans in God's image. This means that humans were endowed with an integrity of nature, "soundness in all parts,"[1] (right understanding, bounded affection, tempered sense) for which they directed praise to God. It means that human beings, unique among all God's creatures, participate in the powers of God—wisdom, justice and goodness—and so reflect God's glory.[2]

However, by willful perversity and sin, humans *entirely* corrupt (in Calvin's early work), and then *almost* entirely corrupt (in his later work), the image.[3] In Christ, however, we behold the image of God made visible so that we can make reliable judgements about what it is even as we are transformed by it and conformed to it (Eph. 4:23-24, Col. 3:10 and 2 Cor. 3:18). Indeed, Calvin infers the image of God at creation from the renewal of the image in and through Christ, who is "the most perfect image of God."[4] While we are never fully divested of our vices in this life, and the image only ever attains "its full splendor in heaven,"[5] the

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[1]Jean Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *Library of Christian Classics*, Vols. XX and XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I.xv.4, and Calvin's *Commentary on Genesis, http://www.christianity.com/Bible /coments/genesis/calvin/genesis1.htm* on verse 26, viewed 2 December 2015. See also Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 3rd printing, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 176.

[2]Institutes, I.xv.4. See also Randall Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 64, and John Thompson, "*Creata Ad Imaginem Dei, Licet Secondo Gradu*: Woman as the Image of God according to John Calvin," *Harvard Theological Review* 81, No. 2 (1988): 128-129.

[3]See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 64-68, for this transition in Calvin's thought and its theological/ethical rationale in neighbour love.

[4]*Institutes*, I.xv.4, II.viii.51, II.ix.1, and Calvin's *Commentary on Genesis*, verse 26. In all instances the integrity of human nature in all its parts is emphasized, with special attention to the locale of the image in the human heart and mind; that is, in the non-corporeal.

[5]*Institutes*, I.xv.4.

renewal of God's image in us is the goal of the Christian life.[6] It takes place through union with Christ, leading to a life of repentance and forgiveness, with the guidance of the law, and by the regenerating power and grace of the Holy Spirit. The divine image in humans is more easily recognized where the healing has begun—in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).[7] Nevertheless, divine kindness means that "remaining traces"[8] or "obscure lineaments"[9] of God's image remain in all humans that (1) distinguish them from "brute beasts,"[10] (2) enable them to serve God's humane purposes in the world,[11] and (3) move Christians to love and honour all people.[12]

The Original of the Image of God

> The image of God imprinted on man consists, then, of the integrity and righteousness which were the attributes of Adam when he came fresh from his Creator's hands, the perfect example of which has been shown in Christ, the second Adam.[13]

Calvin develops his understanding of the *imago dei* from Genesis 1:26 in conversation with the longer exegetical tradition. Unlike "the greater part, and nearly all,"[14] of patristic and medieval exegetes, Calvin does not observe a distinction between image and likeness. He finds that attempts to distinguish them using substance and accidents, or general endowments and special spiritual gifts, ignores the grammar of the text and the nature of Hebraic thought.[15] Even Augustine, who tries to find a reference to the Trinity in the *imago dei* comes under critical review for "excessive refinement" and "fabricating a trinity in man."[16] While readers

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[6]Guenther H. Haas, "Calvin's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 95.
[7]*Institutes*, III.vii.6.
[8]*Institutes*, II.ii.17.
[9]*Commentary on Genesis*, verse 26.
[10]*Institutes*, II.i.1 and II.ii.12, 17.
[11]*Institutes*, II.ii.17.
[12]*Institutes*, III.vii.6.
[13]Wendel, *Calvin*, 176-177.
[14]*Commentary on Genesis*, verse 26.
[15]Ibid., and *Institutes*, I.xv.3.
[16]*Commentary on Genesis*, verse 26. See also *Institutes*, I.xv.4.

who have leisure may want to read Augustine's account, Calvin maintains, in both the Genesis commentary and the *Institutes*, that an understanding of the image and likeness of God in humans ought to rest on a firmer (exegetical) base. Calvin notes that Moses uses image and likeness interchangeably, and sometime uses one term to refer to both. He also notes that Hebraic thought uses repetition, adding the second term "for the sake of explanation."[17]

Calvin also briefly engages Chrysostom who locates the *imago dei* in human dominion over creation. Calvin does not dismiss this interpretation, but regards it as a small portion of what the text affirms. He turns to the epistles of Paul (Eph. 4:23 and Col. 3:10) for the christologically derived "chief part" of the meaning of the *imago dei*, which consists of righteousness and true holiness and well-ordered faculties all located in the "chief seat" of the divine image in heart and mind.[18]

Calvin also enters into contention with the "anthropomorphites," that is, exegetes who want to seek resemblance to God in human corporeality, either directly or indirectly, through the glory of divine workmanship. Osiander and Servetus, the latter the more colourful and clever of the two, are specifically named in the *Institutes.*[19] Calvin argues that by extending the image of God to the human body and soul, these authors mingle heaven and earth. Osiander makes the case that Adam was created in the image of the human Christ. Calvin declares this to be "perverse ingenuity" and "futile invention,"[20] largely on the basis that the text says image of *God,* to be understood as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

While Calvin locates the image of God in non-corporeal features of the human creature, he does affirm that in the body "sparks"[21] of the divine image glow, that there is no part of the human creature in which "some scintillations"[22] do not shine, and that in "several parts of the world" the divine image glows.[23] Daniel Migliore is correct in noting

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[17]Ibid., and *Institutes*, I.xv.3.
[18]Ibid.
[19]*Institutes*, I.xv.3.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid.
[22]*Commentary on Genesis*, verse 26.
[23]*Institutes*, I.xv.3. See also Randall Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 235-237. He makes a delightful case that in the corpus of his writings Calvin develops the metaphor of the universe as a living image of God. "In particular, the universe is the image of God because of the powers of God that are

that, while Calvin wants to avoid anthropomorphism, he does not flatly reject an important relationship between the image of God and human corporeality. The "chief seat" of the image of God in humans may be the heart and mind, but the body is implicated in such a way as to affirm its value and importance as witness to God's image in humanity.[24]

Restoration of the Image of God

For Calvin, it is through Christ, the second Adam, that the image of God lost and corrupted through sin is restored. Through beholding Christ's glory (2 Cor. 3:18) humans are transformed and restored so that "with true piety, righteousness, purity and intelligence we bear God's image."[25] Human renewal to the image takes place through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, the law (in its third use) would seem to be a means the Spirit uses to conform us to Christ since it provides "instruction for believers in the nature of the Lord's will," and, if "people embody what it enjoins, they will express the image of God in their lives."[26] Human regeneration is not through an infusion of divine substance. As with our creation in God's image, our re-creation does not "mingle heaven and earth." While the grace of regeneration is richer than the grace of creation, it does not mean human beings are rendered consubstantial with God.[27] Salvation is not divinization in Calvin.

Restoration of the divine image in humans is a process. Calvin maintains that this is implied in the Lord's Prayer in the request for forgiveness. "We are never divested of our vices," and "there is always some taint in our flesh,"[28] and so our Lord provides a remedy in

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manifested in the works of God." Ibid., 236.

[24]Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 144. Here Migliore is more careful than Berkhof, who maintains that for Calvin, when it comes to his understanding of the image of God in humanity, the body is "only a perishable house of clay." See *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, rev. ed., trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 185.

[25]*Institutes*, I.xv.4.

[26]Guenther H. Haas, "Calvin's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 101. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.51. Here Calvin writes, "For God has so depicted his character in the law that if any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there, he will express the image of God, as it were in his own life."

[27]*Institutes*, I.xv.5.

[28]*Institutes*, III.xx.45.

forgiveness. Through repentance and forgiveness, the believer is restored to true holiness and righteousness (1 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:24), not just for an end-time of glory but in this present life.[29] Regeneration, which Calvin understands as the restoration of the original but ruined image of God,[30] is begun when by faith the believer comes into contact with Jesus Christ. Union with him means having one's life patterned after his life, not slavishly through outward imitation, but through self-denial and suffering for the sake of the gospel (mortification) and meditation on the ultimate victory of God (vivification). "Believers have died with Christ to sin and the sinful nature, and they have been raised with Christ to a new life of the Spirit in fellowship with God."[31] Through union with Christ the believer is granted newness of life in correspondence with the righteousness of God. This new life of union with Christ involves sharing in Christ's sufferings, the benefits of his cross, and "the Spirit's work of transforming us into the image of Christ."[32]

Remnants of the Image of God as a Basis for Ethics

In a number of Calvin's writings, including the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin maintains that "when Adam slipped into sin, this image and likeness of God was cancelled and effaced, that is, he lost all the benefits of divine grace . . ."[33] This same verdict concerning the loss of the divine image in humanity through sin is repeated in his catechism of 1538. Randall C. Zachman observes, however, a moderation in this judgement as Calvin's theology and exegetical work develop. When Calvin comes to comment on Genesis 9:6, where warrant is given for the command not to murder, he reads: "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind." In his commentary on this passage, Calvin declares that human life is "sacrosanct" and cannot be violated without violating the image of God. What this text implies is that even post-fall, humans are image bearers. Some remnant of the image of God must remain or the sense of this prohibition is undermined.[34]

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[29]*Institutes*, III.ii.20.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Guenther H. Haas, "Calvin's Ethics," 95.

[32]Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 142.

[33]*Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), rev. ed., trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 15-16.

[34]See Zachman, *Image and Word*, 64-65.

Calvin will puzzle out what the lineaments, remnants, or, less positively, "misshapen ruins"[35] of God's image are in human beings. In later editions of the *Institutes* he maintains that humans are not "brute beasts" since sparks of the image "still gleam."[36] These sparks are understanding (partly corrupted and weakened reason), bravery, keenness, superior judgement, skilled and ingenious action,[37] even good government.[38] He makes the observation that all of these attest not only remnants of the divine image at work but the kindness of God, that is, God's common and special (though non-salvific) grace. Humans may be depraved and the integrity of their gifts corrupted by sin, but God still fits people to serve the divine purposes in the world.[39] In the examples Calvin offers of "remaining traces" of the image of God, he cites not only examples from Scripture (Saul and David) but also from Homer, who gives witness to "men who excel in natural ability."[40]

Spiritual discernment, however, is wholly lost until humans are regenerated in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. When Calvin contemplates whether philosophers are able to offer competent insights about God, Calvin responds that they always show a "giddy imagination"[41] when it comes to God and spiritual matters. They are like travellers in a thunder-storm who may see momentarily when the lightning flashes, "but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can even take a step—let alone be directed by its help."[42]

Calvin's interest in remnants of the image of God arose out of a concern for ethics. Regard for God's image in humans, even fallen humans in whom "sparks still gleam," motivates respect for human life as sacrosanct and offers theological warrant for the command, "thou shalt not kill." Calvin develops this recognition of the other made in the image of God into a Christian ethic of loving regard for all people. "Scripture helps in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to

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[35]*Institutes*, II.ii.12.
[36]Ibid.
[37]*Institutes*, II.ii.17.
[38]*Institutes*, IV.xx.24.
[39]*Institutes*, II.ii.12.
[40]*Institutes*, II.ii.17.
[41]*Institutes*, II.ii.18.
[42]Ibid.

which we owe all honour and love."[43] Here Calvin eloquently exhorts those in whom the image is being restored by the grace of the Spirit to allow themselves to be drawn to the "beauty and dignity" of God's image in the neighbour and so to "love and embrace them."[44]

> Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse him. Say, "He is a stranger," but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you . . . Say, "He is contemptible and worthless," but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. Say you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does not deserve even the least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions. Now if he has not only deserved no good at your hand, but has also provoked you by unjust acts and curses, not even this is just reason why you should cease to embrace him in love and to perform the duties of love on his behalf (Matt. 6:14; 18:35; Luke 17:3).[45]

Conclusion

In his recent work on human rights,[46] retired Yale philosophy professor Nicholas Wolterstorff has found in Calvin a rich source of support. Wolterstorff's argument, in brief and greatly simplified form, is that because humans are made in God's image, and actively loved by God,

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[43]*Institutes*, III.vii.6.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid. Jane Dempsey Douglas makes the point that Calvin stressed the solidarity of all persons made in God's image, and so there is an ethical claim on all Christians to use what resources they have to assuage human need, however sinful and undeserving of help people may appear. See "Calvin in Ecumenical Context," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 311, and Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," *Cambridge Companion*, 142.

[46]See *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), and the recent, and more accessible, *Journey toward Justice: Personal Encounters in the Global South* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

they have entitlements (rights) due to them, which ought not to be overridden. He calls this his theistic account of human dignity. Wolterstorff finds Calvin's comments on Genesis 9:6 especially helpful to a coherent account of human rights. He interprets Calvin as saying not only that people are made in God's image, but also that God has an attachment to human beings; and that when God discerns the divine image in the human creature (however marred, malformed, or limited), love for the creature is evoked in the Beholder. It is this love by God for all humans—God's desire for friendship with us—that bestows worth on people, and so obliges us to recognize that worth in the entitlements we observe. Calvin's comments on Genesis 9:6 and Wolterstoff's use of them are an important word for our world just now.

> Men are indeed worthy of God's care, if respect be had only to themselves; but since they bear the image of God, he deems himself violated in their person. Thus, although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favour of God, he looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and care for them. This doctrine is to be carefully observed, that no one can be injurious to his brother without wounding God himself. Were this doctrine deeply fixed in our minds, we should be much more reluctant than we are to inflict injuries.[47]

[47] *Commentary on Genesis, http://www.christianity.com/Bible /coments/genesis/calvin/genesis1.htm* on chapter 9, verse 6, viewed 2 December 2015, cited in Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 153.

CHRIST AND THE *IMAGO DEI*
by David Deane

If the *imago Dei* is in humans from birth, and this *imago* is the basis for humans' relationship with God, then what, if anything, does the incarnation achieve? The traditional answer to this question is that the *imago Dei* is either tarnished or lost in the Fall of Adam, and so Jesus' life, death, and resurrection restore in the human person that which has been lost. This has been the primary response to such an extent that Thomas Aquinas follows Augustine in holding (albeit somewhat agnostically[1]) that "if man had not sinned, the Son of Man would not have come."[2]

This emphasis brings some pastoral challenges today, not least as traditional accounts of the fall have increasingly held little sway in many Christian denominations. If Christ's role is seen as restoring the *imago Dei* after its loss, and the ambient understanding is that no loss of the *imago* ever occurred, then Christ's coming in the flesh becomes an answer to a question no one is asking.

My primary goal in the second section of this article is to outline the ontological significance of the incarnation in a way that *does not* necessitate a notion of the *imago Dei* being lost in a fall. There I hope to show that, even without a concept of original sin, Christ has an ontological role in facilitating the *imago Dei*. I aim to do so with reference to a Pauline model that does not need to be bound to its Augustinian or Barthian reiterations. Before that, in the first section, I will describe this more traditional version that we find in figures such as Augustine and Barth.[3] I will do this for two reasons. First, because it is the primary way in which Christ's role in establishing the *imago Dei* has been discussed within the history of Christian thought. As such, no account of Christ and the *imago*, even one as cursory as I am offering, can avoid engagement with it. Second, in outlining it, I hope to highlight what it is and also what it is not. The ease with which it is dismissed in

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[1] In that he concludes, in contradiction of his findings, "And yet the power of God is not limited to this; even had sin not existed, God could have become incarnate."

[2] *Summa theologiae* III, q. 1, a. 3.

[3] They are, of course, very different in their understanding of what precisely Christ makes possible. What binds them however is that their analysis is conducted in terms of a basic grammar wherein the epistemological and/or ontological consequences of separation from God, borne of human transgression, are overcome in and through the man Jesus.

our contemporary church is often predicated on understandings of it as (a) being bound to literal readings of Genesis, and (b) being fundamentally dualist in nature. Neither, as will be seen, is correct.

Christ as Restoring the *Imago Dei* Lost in the Fall

As Ian McFarland's important recent study shows,[4] the doctrine of original sin should not be understood as the result of a literal reading of Genesis. Augustine, for example, felt that a literal reading of creation in six days was "disgraceful and ruinous" in that non-Christians could "scarcely keep from laughing"[5] at a Christian who held it as literal. This is important to note, not least as our modern tendency is to assume that earlier Christians based their views on original sin on literal interpretations that we moderns can no longer hold. To be sure, in whatever ways Adam is understood by figures such as Augustine, he still provides a solid point of reference for explaining the shortcomings in the human, exposed through reflection on the true human, Jesus.[6] Nonetheless, as McFarland shows, it is not a slavishly literal reading of Genesis, but this reflection on the human condition in light of Jesus, that is the basis for what later becomes known as the doctrine of original sin.

Karl Barth[7] follows Origen[8] in holding that Paul sees Jesus as the person humans are intended to be and then, looking at himself in the light of Christ, sees many of his innate desires as problematic. Christ refuses to strike back when struck, refuses to defend himself under attack, lives for others, and never worries about basic human needs; Paul knows that he is not innately like this. When Paul is struck, being a human being, adrenaline courses through his body, causing a "fight or

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[4] See Ian McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Cambridge: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), Ch. 2.

[5] See Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. J. H. Taylor, S.J., (New York: Newman Press, 1982), Book 1, Ch. 19.

[6] The point here is that, while Adamic transgression is the most readily available rationale for the "why" of innate obstacles to being human as God calls us to be, the position that there are biologically innate (and thus inherited) limitations impeding humanity from Christoformity is not dependent, for Augustine, on an account of Adam's action. While Augustine attributes human fallenness to Adam's transgression, the "fact" of human fallenness is obvious to him irrespective of the cause.

[7] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 4:1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1956), 513.

[8] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6-10, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 36-43.

flight" response. Paul has a "desire to do what is good, but cannot carry it out" (Rom. 7:18). While he may yearn to embody peace, his body is oriented toward a set of responses that do not facilitate turning the other cheek when struck. This insight into his own desire—"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Rom. 7:19)—is at the basis of Paul's analysis of the law. There is no deficiency in the law, Paul reminds us in Romans; the problem is that he, like the Pharisees,[9] will use the law to assert himself over others, and to try to surpass others in piety. Because of these proclivities of human nature, the law, rather than facilitating God's justice, is co-opted into a strategy for social demarcation and hierarchy.

While he never uses the term "original sin," for Paul there are fundamental embodied orientations to a mode of being at odds with the one manifested in Jesus Christ. It is this deficiency "in the flesh" that Paul sees as being overcome in Christ. In later Christian thinkers such as Irenaeus,[10] Tertullian, and Cyprian, this restoration of the body's desires through Christ is seen as a restoration of the *imago Dei*, which Paul implies has been lost in Adam (Rom. 5:12).

Augustine deepens and clarifies these Pauline reflections in opposition to gnostic and other dualist readings of Paul. Perhaps obsessively he engages in analysis of his own desire. When he delights in how his voice sounds, in what, he asks, is he delighting?[11] Is it a desire to rise above others? From such reflection he becomes aware of orientations at odds with human flourishing as revealed in Christ. Within Marcionite and later Manichean thought, such orientations are part of a cosmic struggle involving binaurally opposed forces—good versus evil. In contrast, Augustine avers that God is good and that all that God creates is good. There is nothing created that is not from God. Therefore, there is no room for something other than good as an active force. Unlike gnostic dualism, for Augustine there is no binary, positive evil.

Instead, Augustine posits a "gravitational pull" on good desire that causes it to become decayed and disordered. Let me use an example. I have three daughters, eight, seven, and two. I love them very much. This is good and natural. It is part of my God-given natural desire that I

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[9] At least as they are portrayed in the New Testament.

[10] For a good reading of Irenaeus on this see Thomas Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei:* The Importance of Being Human," *Logos* 6, No. 4 (2003).

[11] See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford World Classics, 2009), Book 10, Ch. 33.

seek to care for them. But I am, for Augustine, subject to *concupiscence*, a gravitational pull on my good desire. And so, in a world where hundreds of millions of children are starving, displaced, and suffering (as I write in prospect of Christmas), I feel the pull of desire to spend far more money for gifts for my children than is needed. I have a good desire to care for my daughters, but these good desires, like all things that are not God, decay and so become disordered, leading me to spend more on my children, effectively taking resources that could be used to help children who are suffering in other parts of the world.

This concupiscence, for Augustine, is an ontological reality with which humans in the lineage of Adam live. Death, finitude, and separation from God are aspects of the reality of human life "outside the Garden," and, subject to this finitude, our desire decays into disorder. While the *imago Dei* was once so strong that human desire was not subject to decay, now, for Augustine, "*non posse non peccare*," that is, it is not possible not to sin. I simply cannot avoid actions in opposition to what we see in Christ as the good. My desire directs me to want to consume more than I need, not by virtue of bad desires but through the mutation of good desires. My good desire to eat for sustenance and survival mutates into a desire to eat more than I need in a world marked by hunger; my good desire for shelter mutates into a desire for too many possessions in a world marked by poverty; and so on. This is innate and biological. For Augustine, prior to the fall and by virtue of the *imago Dei*, the human body is not inevitably on a trajectory opposed to the form of humanity as embodied by Jesus Christ. But this image has been tarnished, and only the grace of God can liberate the human person from the hegemony of this fallenness.

For Augustine and the tradition in which he participates, this *imago Dei*, and with it humanity's *posse non peccare*, is restored through Christ in interrelated ontological and epistemological ways. (1) Ontologically, this restoration through the incarnation represents the coming of the Son from whom, for Augustine, the Spirit proceeds. The human person comes into union with the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. The Spirit is accepted by the person and with its coming the person is no longer apart from God as "the Spirit of the Creator who raised Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in your mortal body" (Rom. 8:11). The *imago Dei* resides in the body of the person quite literally for Augustine,[12] as Christ, the image of the Creator, dwells in the person through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (2) For Augustine the

[12] Although not for others within the tradition, such as Luther and Barth.

epistemological consequences of human fallenness are severe, but overcome with the restoration of the *imago Dei* through Christ. Karl Barth[13] represents a modern expression of this principle when he notes that human thinking is always shaped by context, such that we soak up the ideas and the prejudices of our environment. Why were so many Germans in Barth's lifetime caught up in the worldview of National Socialism? For Barth the world is marked by the logic of Babel where we are trapped by the worldview of our context. It is only when our gaze is directed to the Son by the Holy Spirit that we can see what the good is in a manner not determined by our context. While Stalin lives his life for "Social Justice," and while Hitler seeks "justice" after "the betrayal" of Versailles and the "persecutions of international Zionism," when our gaze is directed to Christ we see what Justice *actually is* in a manner that confronts and calls into question these socially determined constructions of justice. Thus, while some may see "power" as represented by the wealth and political power of Donald Trump, for Barth, authentic power is the power to serve others, manifested fully and finally in the cross of Christ. This reveals "power" in the manner of Donald Trump to be in error, an idolatrous construction at odds with power itself, which is revealed fully and finally in the self-giving service of the Lamb.[14]

This epistemological capacity, seeing what the good is, in and as Jesus Christ, corrects human vision and restores our gaze to its rightful direction. This direction is at once toward God and toward the lowly in whom God is revealed through Jesus. While fallen human orientation may be "upwards looking," towards the accumulation of power and wealth, when justified, that is, lined up in Christ, we can see God in the lowly and broken, and orient our service and love toward them. This is a re-orientation that opposes innate desires for "more," and gives us the power to refuse such orientations. This freedom, for Barth, is found in the image of the God who loves in freedom. Human freedom is restored through Christ and with it the *imago* of the God who alone is truly free.

Barth differs from Augustine in that Augustine holds the *imago* to be substantial as a real presence of God the Holy Spirit in the person. For Barth, in contrast, the person is caught up in God's self-giving in

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[13] See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 122ff. For a detailed reading of Barth on this process see my *Nietzsche and Theology: Nietzschean Thought in Christological Anthropology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), Chapter 4.

[14] Barth's theology here is perhaps at its clearest in his account of the "Royal Man" in *Church Dogmatics* 4:2.

revelation. As Colin Gunton,[15] Graham Ward,[16] and others have argued, Barth sees this as an ontological process wherein God the Father (the revealer) reveals Godself as the Son (the revealed) through the Spirit (revelation itself), and this process relationally incorporates the human, who through the Spirit turns to the Son as the image of the Creator, into God's life. The person is incorporated in the sense that someone who is caught up in a gale encounters the wind or a person caught up in a wave encounters the water. One does not become wind or water, but is subject to their power. As such, while for Augustine the *imago Dei* is restored through the presence of Christ (the image of the Father) in the person through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, for Barth the *imago Dei* is restored as the person comes to see the good in Jesus. Because of this, the person comes to also know what sin is, since, without Christ, one knows neither the good (seen in Christ), nor what sin is, as "the other" of this good.

Thus the person comes to be the image of God through representing the freedom that is God's alone by right. Without knowing the good (Christ) and sin (as the other of Christ—if Christ is peaceful, sin is violence and so on), the human person is never free to choose between sin and righteousness as one can never, for Barth, properly distinguish between sin and righteousness apart from Christ. Humans are enslaved to follow desires that are not obviously sinful, apart from the light of Christ. How else, for Barth, do we know that not turning the other cheek is sinful? or that failing to see God in and as the lowly is sinful? unless we know Christ first, in whom God binds Godself to the lowly from all eternity? Humans come again to know God, know the good, and are free once again to choose it over what, in light of Christ, they now know as sinful. This freedom represents the restoration of the *imago Dei*, the image of the God who for Barth is uniquely free.

Both Augustine and Barth represent the majority tradition in which the *imago Dei* is tarnished or lost[17] through human sinfulness, and is restored in the person by virtue of Christ either substantially, as in Augustine's indwelling of the Spirit, or in terms of attributes such as

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[15] See Colin Gunton, "No Other Foundation; One Englishman's Reading of *Church Dogmatics*, Chapter V," in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 61-79. "Chapter V" is to be found in *CD* 2.1.

[16] See Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13-35.

[17] For some, such as Bonaventure, tarnished; for others, such as Luther, lost.

freedom, for Barth.

Christ as Facilitating the Full Flowering of the *imago Dei*

Having described how Christ is seen as restoring the *imago Dei* lost through human fallenness, I will conclude this article by outlining a model in which Christ is seen as enabling the full flowering of the *imago Dei* irrespective of whether anything of the *imago* was ever lost or tarnished. Such a model is not based upon, but neither is it competitive with, a model that begins from a "lower" anthropological starting point.[18] Like the alternative, it is also based in Scripture and engaged throughout the tradition.[19]

The focus on Mary the mother of Jesus in the first five centuries of the Christian era can be confusing to modern Christians, especially Reformed ones. While some of the focus is on Mary herself,[20] the majority of the focus is on what Luke 1: 26-28 reveals about the form of the Christian life. At the annunciation the Spirit of God is accepted by Mary and the result is the very real presence of Christ within her body. In the Pauline writings this process is, *in nuce*, the form of the Christian life. For Paul, Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11), "Christ lives within me" (Gal. 2:20). As such, the image of God, not simply an analogical *imago Dei* but Christ, comes to dwell in the person. This is central to the Pauline model of salvation and as it is modelled at the annunciation in a very clear way.

For Paul an action can be oriented by the "flesh" or the Spirit, each representing power impelling action, not unlike the way that coal in the furnace of a steam train impels motion. The Spirit (Rom. 8:11) orients Paul's mortal body toward Christoformity. Christoformity, and with it the restoration of the image of the living God, is the consequence of life animated by the Spirit. As such, Paul claims, it is no longer he who lives

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[18] Such as we find in Augustine or Barth.

[19] Usually "alongside" the former model. Aquinas, for example, will speak of Christ's incarnation being necessitated by the fall, but the fall does not annihilate the *imago Dei*. The person retains likeness with God through "prevenient grace," grace sufficient for knowing and relating to God to some extent. As well, the procession of the Spirit from the Son in the incarnation enables the participation of the person in the divine life This is, for Aquinas, "efficient grace" where the Holy Spirit is the active agent in the orientation of the person.

[20] For example, the Protevangelium of James and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Ch. 19.

but Christ who lives in him. His actions—giving up all he has, living for others, proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth—these things in which he boasts are proper to Christ and not Paul. Paul is one with Christ and so re-presents the living God through the presence of the Spirit. For him, the Spirit "Christifies" bodies, enabling utterly radical modes of being in the service of others and God.

Perhaps even more radically, the full flourishing of the *imago Dei* is not limited to the person, for Paul, but can also be found in the community comprised of such persons. The Holy Spirit is one, and so "we were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). This theology helps explain the radicality of belonging in early Christian communities. For Paul, each person permeated by the Holy Spirit is not a solitary prison for the Spirit. Rather the ontological integrity of the person is subordinated to the ontological integrity of the Holy Spirit. Thus believers, "though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4) as all are one in the one Holy Spirit.

As the Triune life is marked by oneness, so too, as the Spirit is one and Christ is one, the Christian community is one. This is no mere metaphor for Paul but is the ontological reality made possible through the Spirit. Not simply do members of Christ manifest the image of God through the presence of the Son, but the community manifests the image of a God who is one despite being comprised of distinctive persons. Just as people would no more say that their leg or arm is infected with a disease, but that they themselves were fine, neither is it rational to suggest that one member of the body is homeless, but I am fine; one member grieving, but others fine. In Paul's understanding the communion represented by early Christian community, based on this distinctive theology, manifests the *imago Dei* communally.

As there are Pauline trajectories leading to Marcion, and others, as we have seen, to Augustine and Barth, Pauline models for the restoration of the *imago Dei* through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit leading to the presence of Christ within believers are found all through patristic Christianity and beyond. In them Christ enables the full flourishing of the *imago Dei* in a manner that does not necessarily require an earlier loss, or tarnishing, of it. Rather, a radical participation in the divine life beyond anything natural to the person is made possible through Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the person.

IMAGO DEI IN THE WAITING ROOM

by Shannon Craigo-Snell

Everyone is the same in the waiting room on the cancer ward. The room itself is spacious and nicely decorated. There are tables, chairs, couches, plenty of outlets for cell phones and laptops, and even an area with recliners. In an act of generosity and solidarity, a family who once waited in this room has donated money to make the space comfortable. We are, the furniture affirms, all in this together.

People arrive early in the morning, starting at 5:00, and check their loved ones in for surgery or treatment. Most come in small groups, but a few arrive alone. Some have experience with these long days of waiting: they bring coolers filled with drinks and snacks, blankets for napping, and books to read. The veterans share with the first-timers, who come in awkwardly and quickly shuffle through the tired magazines. We wait together for hours in the odd intimacy of shared anxiety. A young person with tattoos and piercings reads a section of the newspaper that a man in a business suit has pulled from his briefcase. Two teenage girls in pajama pants and sweatshirts offer Doritos to a fashionable woman in her sixties whose face is gray with worry. There is a palpable sense of common humanity as social divisions fall away. Social hierarchies based on class, race, age, and gender are unmasked as illusions in this space. Each person present has been drawn here by love for another person. Each person present worries that their loved one will die from this disease. In this room of love and death, our common humanity is both a blunt reality and a source of strength and comfort. We are all in this together.

Although we do not often feel it so palpably, a sense that we all share a basic identity is vital to our common life. The concept of human rights informs our political structures. An affirmation of human dignity shapes our ethical norms. The assertion that we are all essentially the same guides us towards compassion and enables solidarity. In many settings, the claim that we all share one human essence—a stance called "essentialism"—is profoundly useful.

However, it can also be quite harmful. Focusing on our similarity can obscure important differences. Some wait for a child; others wait for a grandparent. While they share much, the differences matter. Other differences—in prognosis, family support, and so forth—are significant. In the American medical system, financial resources translate into consistent medical care and early diagnosis. Patients without insurance are often diagnosed after the disease has progressed. Some of the people in the waiting room will face bankruptcy due to medical costs. There is a

boy, maybe ten years old, sitting alone. Is he waiting for a parent, or for his own name to be called? Perhaps his mother could not miss work to accompany him.

Other differences in the room are delightful. There are many bonds of love present: siblings and spouses, friends and neighbors, co-workers and classmates. Each of the people waiting has a distinctive tale to tell of the one they love and their particular relationship. For each one, facing cancer is an irreducibly singular journey, involving specific joys and strengths as well as particular difficulties. These differences can be hard to take seriously and celebrate in essentialist views. When what we value in one another is based on our common humanity, it is hard to find differences positive. The wild diversity within humanity becomes a puzzle or a problem, rather than a blessing.

Furthermore, many argue that emphasizing sameness can actually foster hierarchy. If everyone is fundamentally the same, then we can be judged and compared to one another easily, apples to apples. Essentialism does not see the possibility of various goods of equal value—the possibility that there are apples and oranges that ought not to be compared on the same hierarchical scale.

This can seem counterintuitive, as many people assert that everyone should be treated equally because all people are essentially the same. Theologian Ian A. McFarland says this is a "correlation of equality with uniformity."[1] McFarland states: "There is no positive role for difference within such an anthropology: where it is judged to be real, it is a mark of inequality; where it is viewed as merely a matter of appearance, it needs to be eliminated, or at least studiously ignored."[2]

This problem becomes clearer when we try to define what precisely is at the core of our common humanity. What is it that makes us human? In the early modern West and the Enlightenment, authors who were trying to lessen conflict and promote tolerance emphasized rationality as the essence of humanity. Human beings think and reason. René Descartes famously declared, "I think; therefore I am," encapsulating a vision of humanity as essentially rational.[3] Regardless of the egalitarian motives of these thinkers, one of the effects was to make educated people engaged in intellectual pursuits appear more human than

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[1] Ian A. McFarland, *Identity and Difference: A Theological Anthropology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 9.

[2] McFarland, 7.

[3] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 25.

people without education engaged in more physical labour. Nursing mothers, manual laborers, and enslaved persons appeared less than fully human under this description. Young children and people with intellectual disabilities were similarly sidelined from the normative description of humanity. Attempts to ameliorate these difficulties by defining the essence of humanity in different terms do not quite escape the trap. Perhaps the core of humanity is to love? Then those with attachment disorder, autism, or just plain loneliness do not quite meet the standards for full inclusion. Unfortunately, a long history of subjugation of certain groups of people—and of theological justifications for such—prevents us from dismissing these as purely academic issues.

These concerns, and others, lead some theologians to reject essentialist views all together. It is not useful to affirm and identify one essence that all humanity shares in common. Instead, we should recognize that the identity of human persons comes to fruition over time in relationships. Who we are is socially constructed. We are profoundly shaped by our families, cultures, and experiences. Uniformity is not our base-line starting point. Rather, difference, change, and variation are all part of what it means to be human.

This position is called constructivism. From this perspective, the human person is the site of intersection of various cultural forces, shaped by diverse cultural practices, expectations, and ways of viewing the world. There is no single description that fits all of humanity. Nor is there a single description sufficient to the identity of any one human being; each person inhabits and performs multiple roles within a fluid web of cultural forces. Although this might sound strange, it is actually consistent with how we describe ourselves. To tell you who I am, I will need to tell you about my family, where I come from, what has happened in my life, and even about a Palestinian Jew who lived two thousand years ago. Who I am is, in some sense, a product of all of these relations and events.

Constructivist views of the self reject the idea of a stable human nature that we can identify. If such a stable essence of humanity exists, we can only know it through the various cultural lenses that are learned in communities over time.

There are many things to commend a constructivist approach, including a positive valuation of difference and an understanding of the importance of history and relationships in forming who we are. There is hope, as well, that hierarchical arrangements in our current society can be changed for the better. However, something is also lost. On a very practical level, it is difficult to organize a political movement based on

multiple differences rather than shared identity. It is hard to make normative ethical claims without some shared sense of rights or dignity common to all persons, regardless of culture or individual circumstances. On a theological level, there are certain essentialist claims to which I am deeply committed, including that we are all beloved children of God. I want to state this not as political strategy, but as truth as I know it. I acknowledge that social context shapes how I understand the love of God for all persons, but I also believe that this claim about humanity is more than simply a cultural production.

While this statement is not as clearly problematic as the above-mentioned claim that reason is the essence of humanity, it is structurally very similar. We are all the same. Differences are secondary. Rather than focusing on human capacities (such as reason or love), this claim focuses on a relationship with God. And while it might be a bit more difficult, there is still opportunity to judge some persons as more or less human, only now based on religious values rather than intellectual ones.

Various theologians have navigated the essentialist/constructivist divide in creative ways. Serene Jones describes a "strategic essentialist" position, which both accepts constructivist critiques and also recognizes the pragmatic and political values of being able to make normative claims. Strategic essentialists therefore deploy essentialist language for strategic ends. At the same time, they understand such normative visions as also being socially constructed; so they are free to critique and revise current views of what is essential to human nature as political and pragmatic concerns warrant.[4] While it is useful in political organizing and ethical norms to say that we are all essentially the same, this is a strategy, rather than a metaphysical claim. Jones develops a particularly Christian form of strategic essentialism that she calls "eschatological essentialism." This hinges on the idea that, while we are all socially constructed and diverse in the here and now, we are beckoned towards "a vision of God's will for a redeemed humanity," and this vocation shapes our yet-to-be-fully-realized essential identity.[5]

I confess I find these creative ideas lacking explanatory power in the cancer ward waiting room. We really are—here and now—all the same and all in this together. We really are—in ways wonderful and strange—wildly different from one another. Both of these things are true, and somehow they are most true together. How can we speak both these

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[4] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 45.

[5] Ibid., 54.

truths together?

There is a particular tradition in Christianity called apophatic theology that might be helpful here. One way of understanding apophatic theology is that it proceeds by negation. Kataphatic theology describes who God is, using descriptions and images to help us know the character and characteristics of God. Apophatic theology, in contrast, says what God is not. The apophatic tradition is closely related to mysticism, and reflects the truth that God exceeds all our descriptors and overflows our categories. For example, kataphatic theology says that God is good. Apophatic theology says that God is not good. This does not indicate that God is bad, but rather that it would be false to take our human category of goodness, super-size it, and apply it to God. If we imagine that God is good as we are, only more so, we have actually diminished God in our understanding.

There are two related reasons for apophatic theology. First, the otherness of God means that all our categories and images for God are inadequate. Based on human experience, they cannot do justice to a God who is not another object in the matrix of our human perceptions. In particular, the mystery of the Trinity—God is one-in-three and three-in-one—exceeds our comprehension. The concept of unity in distinction and relation, while theologically vital to Christianity, is also mind-boggling. God is beyond us, and all our attempts at describing God drag God into our limited views and cut God down to size. Apophatic theology is needed to counter our constant impulse to make the Creator of the universe small enough for us to comprehend. The second reason is deeply connected: human language is inadequate to describe God. Our feeble words and phrases cannot capture or convey the glory of God. Apophatic theology gestures toward this glory by breaking language open through paradoxical imagery and juxtaposed descriptions.

It is important to note that apophatic theology is not just negatives run amok or willy-nilly denials of all descriptions of God. Rather, it is a distinctly Christian discursive strategy, warranted by the otherness of God, involving affirmation and negation in careful tension.

The work of Pseudo-Dionysius, a Christian theologian who wrote roughly in the sixth century, exemplifies this way of speaking about God. Pseudo-Dionysius begins *The Mystical Theology* with a prayer to the Trinity:

> Trinity, which exceedeth all Being, Deity, and Goodness! Thou that instructeth Christians in Thy heavenly wisdom! Guide us to that topmost height of mystic lore

> which exceedeth light and more than exceedeth knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty![6]

The juxtaposed descriptors of God within these sentences—"dazzling obscurity" and "invisible fairness"—are a small sample of the larger rhetorical strategy.

Pseudo-Dionysius explains his own intentions and method in instructions to his reader, Timothy. He writes:

> Such be my prayer; and thee, dear Timothy, I counsel that, in the earnest exercise of mystic contemplation, thou leave the senses and the activities of the intellect and all things that the senses or the intellect can perceive, and all things in this world of nothingness, or in that world of being, and that, thine understanding being laid to rest, thou strain (so far as thou mayest) towards an union with Him whom neither being nor understanding can contain. For, by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and all things, thou shalt in pureness cast all things aside, and be released from all, and so shalt be led upwards to the Ray of that divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence.[7]

The mystery of the Holy requires this apophatic approach:

> While it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the universal Cause), yet in a stricter sense It does not possess them, since It transcends them all, wherefore there is no contradiction between affirming and denying that It has them inasmuch as It precedes and surpasses all deprivation, being beyond all

[6] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology.* *http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.v.html*, accessed 15 November 2015.
[7] Ibid.

positive and negative distinctions?[8]

Perhaps most significantly, the aim of apophatic theology is not a perfect account of God, but rather a posture of wonder and awe. It is a linguistic method aimed at furthering relationship between the speaker and God. Pseudo-Dionysisus describes this as "hymnody":

> Unto this Darkness which is beyond Light we pray that we may come, and may attain unto vision through the loss of sight and knowledge, and that in ceasing thus to see or to know we may learn to know that which is beyond all perception and understanding (for this emptying of our faculties is true sight and knowledge), and that we may offer Him that transcends all things the praises of a transcendent hymnody."[9]

Could the discursive practice of apophatic theology be used in describing human beings? Would this help us speak truly of one another? Perhaps, following this particular Christian tradition, we could speak in a pattern of affirmation and denial in regards to one another. We are the same; we are not the same. We are different; we are not different. If we take these statements in the context of apophatic theology, they are not pure contradictions. Rather, the tension between them increases their descriptive power. The truth of the affirmation requires the negation. The statement that we are all the same is not fully true without the statement that we are not all the same.

The obvious question that arises is "why?" The complex manner of speaking used in apophatic theology is needed because of who God is. God is other than humanity. God exceeds human categories. God is triune. Apophatic theologians do not (one assumes) speak about their daily lives in convoluted paradoxes. Rather, it is the particular subject of theological language that requires apophatic ways of speaking.

Why would one use apophatic theology in relation to humans, who do exist within human categories? One of the most basic claims of Christian faith is that human beings are made in the image of God. Who we are is deeply related to who God is. Our identity is rooted in the mystery of God. While we are mundane earth-dwellers, we have been instilled with the breath of God, are sustained by the power of God,

[8] Pseudo-Dionysius
[9] Ibid.

redeemed by the love of God, and drawn toward a future with God. Reformed Barthians would say we can only know what it means to be human by looking at Jesus, the true human. Catholic Rahnerians would say that in looking at ourselves we will see that we are open to God—that God's offer of God's own self is the innermost constituent element of humanity. These very different strands of Christian theology—and many others besides—all state that we cannot describe who we are without talking about who God is. Humanity is not separate from the mystery of God. Indeed, Christian traditions affirm that it is our connection to this divine Mystery that makes us human.

Even further, we are made in the image of the *triune* God. Unity in distinction is not external to humanity; not simply a state in which we find ourselves occasionally. Rather, it is who we are at the deepest level. We are one; we are not one.

If we take this seriously, it is warranted to employ the discursive strategy of apophatic theology to humanity, albeit in a limited way. It would not make sense to speak in patterns of affirmation and negation about all human characteristics. The sentence, "She is left-handed; she is not left-handed," is not warranted by theological claims. However, in regard to our unity-in-distinction, to our imaging of the Triune God, apophatic language fits. We are the same; we are different. The affirmation of our sameness is not fully true without its negation. The affirmation of our unity is false without the recognition of our diversity.

As with the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, the goal of such a way of speaking about humanity is not a precise account of humanity. Rather, employing this language might be a way to nurture a posture of wonder and awe towards one another. It is a linguistic practice intended to further relationships among people in the presence of God.

There is a sense of awe and wonder for the person sitting beside one in the waiting room. We snack, and sleep, and worry. We are grateful for the feeling that we are not alone; for the tangible comforts of shared resources. We are curious about the different paths that brought us here, the different stories each person brings, but does not tell in these quiet hours. By the evening, when most of those waiting have left, I have started to pray for the loved ones of the strangers sitting nearby, whose names I do not know. In my own exhaustion, I glimpse in each of them an "invisible fairness," an un-seeable beauty that is the image of God.

ON BEING CREATED HUMAN IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: CHRISTIAN FEMINIST VOICES

by Marilyn J. Legge

In the beginning. . . God created the heaven and the earth . . . Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:1, 26).

Beauty is the living up to and living out the love and summons of creation in all our particularity and specificity as God's human creatures, made in God's own image and likeness.[1]

Relationships of solidarity are rooted in the mutual recognition of the human dignity that everyone possesses and that Christians understand as a reflection of the imago Dei.[2]

Introduction

How has Christian feminism reshaped Protestant understandings of *imago Dei*, and what may have changed in imagery and rhetoric, attitudes and behaviour, as a consequence?[3]

What does it mean to be human as created by God, and how does, or how should, this affect our daily lives in relation to oneself, God, neighbours, strangers, others, and creation? Protestant traditions teach that humans are created free, and thus also are capable of flawed and destructive choices, and that humans are awesomely saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, these colossal Christian theological claims swoop back to the first and second creation narratives in Genesis 1-2—about humans being created in the image and likeness of God to have "dominion over the earth," about God creating humans male and female, and about God seeing everything made as very good. This early Christian belief of being

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[1] Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 18.

[2] Rebecca Todd Peters, *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 10.

[3] I have revisited and adapted some ideas from my earliest writing on this topic in "Colourful Differences: 'Otherness' and Image of God for Canadian Feminist Theologies," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 21/1 (1992): 67–80, in conjunction with further research. I thank Kim Penner for research assistance and Melanie Kampen for editorial acumen.

created in the image of God orients theological anthropology, the vocation of being human in God's good creation. As such, Christians are called to be related to what God creates, loves, and redeems through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. "This ancient phrase—*imago Dei*—helps us to plumb the depths of what it means to be human in relationship to God through Christ . . . and how do we live in openness to God's continuing creative work?"[4]

Some feminist Christians declare that to be human is to be co-creating in Jesus' Way. Recall just two familiar biblical guideposts for this vocation: We know what God requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God's way (Micah 6:8). And Jesus' greatest commandment to the disciples is: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength [energy]. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12: 30-31; Matt. 22: 37-39; Luke 10: 25-28 ends with "Do this and you will live").

In response to this understanding of a co-creating humanity, and in step with various wings of women's movements around the world, feminist theologians and their allies ask about the moral and spiritual agency of women.[5] Feminist theologians in predominantly white middle-class contexts of the global North have persistently challenged the sexism and andro-centrism that have compromised Christian monotheism. These initial efforts have been challenged and re-shaped by different voices assessing diverse contexts and relations of oppression and privilege, for example, of colonization, embodiment, globalized capitalism and racialization.[6]

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[4] See Michelle J. Bartel, *What It Means to Be Human: Living with Others before God* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001), 9, 16. See also Angie Pears, "Gender Matters," in *Doing Contextual Theology* (NY: Routledge, 2010), 103, and Linda A. Moody, *Women Encounter God: Theology across the Boundaries of Difference* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

[5] See for example, Janice McLaughlin, *Feminist Social and Political Theory: Contemporary Debates and Dialogues* (New York, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003).

[6] Just as different strands of feminism around the world have furnished and continue to construct important insights into contemporary problems, so too Christian feminisms are shaped by diverse concerns, contexts, hermeneutics, strategies and politics, with various designations for communities of accountability that may also overlap and intersect (Asian, African, decolonizing, GBTLQQII, indigenous, womanist . . .) Consider

Feminists argue against any double standards that are applied unjustly in different contexts—for example, when love is normative only for the private sphere and justice for the public. Rather, if we are to embrace the radical ethic of Jesus, there will be one norm for all of life, private and public, social and ecological, politics and religion: justice-love.

The task of Christian feminist theological anthropologies, therefore, is to articulate the passion for justice-love. In particular, in diverse historical contexts and with the understanding that creation is unfinished, justice-love refers to the human longing for psycho-spiritual and bodily well-being, and to imagining right-relatedness with others. Justice-love—in daily life, roles, politics, and all relations—requires "mutual respect and care and a fair sharing of power."[7]

Feminists Re-Imagine *Imago Dei* As Embodied

One key element for re-imagining the *imago Dei* adequately is embodiment. For feminist Christians, embodiment is theologically rooted in the incarnation of the eternal Word in Jesus, who embodied shalom and kin-dom, the way of God. Salvation through Christ encompasses the totality of experience, including the body. "Body" has a capacious reference: to both individual bodies and also the body of society. For embodied seeking of justice, love, and the integrity of creation one needs power; for feminists this is often referred to as empowerment, a form of creativity involving the building up of oneself in community. Theologically, power is the capacity to act with God in co-creation. Humans created in the *imago Dei* engage personal, eco-social, and institutional relations of power with a commitment to find out what causes women's suffering—in order to empower and sustain the well-being of women and their communities.[8]

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for example, the discourses of women in post-colonial and decolonizing contexts such as First Nations/indigenous women, women of colour, women of varied cultures, languages, and sexualities around the world.

[7] See Marvin Ellison, *Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis* (Pilgrim Press, 2004), 142 -143. On basepoints, or conjunctions for adequate feminist methodologies connecting moral agency with the *imago Dei*, see Elizabeth Bounds, Pamela K. Brubaker, and Mary E. Hobgood, "Introduction," in *Welfare Policy [feminist critiques]*, ed. Elizabeth Bounds, Pamela K. Brubaker, and Mary E, Hobgood (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999), 12-17.

[8] See for example, Janice McLaughlin, *Feminist Social and Political Theory: Contemporary Debates and Dialogues* (New York: Macmillan, 2003).

Humans are embodied selves; one does not merely "have a body." Our minds and emotions are an integrated aspect of our body systems, shaped by our sensate being in the world, with the human body as the integrated locus of our perception of all reality. Through it, by touch, sight, and sound we experience our relations to the world. Through our deep responsiveness, our passion, we experience longing for connectedness to the whole. But our passion is more than this. It is also the source of our energy, which is to say, our power to act.[9]

Hence all our relations—with ourselves, God, cosmos, neighbour/stranger/others—are mediated through our bodies. Bodies are the locus of our perception and all knowledge. Our senses mediate the manifold world to us. We are not split compounds, of mind and emotions, or body and spirit.

Various Aspects of Bodily Experience

However, bodies ought not to be taken as inevitably a source of dignity and pleasure, always part of the goodness of creation.[10] *All* forms of embodiment are socialized and negotiated through specific cultures, societies, and histories; some are valorized while others are despised, based on dominant social norms. Hence the contexts of particular humans must be investigated and evaluated to know how the *imago Dei* is faring and being embodied—and according to what operative normative roles, rules, and relations.

For example, Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix poignantly assess how some are marginalized and treated as less than fully human:

> There are millions of women today who remain marginalized, treated as a "problem," or construed as the focal point of a moral panic—women suffering poverty, disease, lack of water and proper sanitation; women who themselves or their households are scattered across the

[9] Beverly Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language: Towards a Normative Theory of Justice in Christian Ethics," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1983): 20; see also her "Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," in *Making the Connections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 12-15.

[10] See, e.g., Jackie Leach Scully, "When Embodiment Isn't Good," *Theology and Sexuality*, Volume 9 (Jan 1998): 10 – 28; Charlotte Caron, *Not All Violins: Spiritual Resources for Women with Disabilities and Chronic Illness* (United Church Publishing House, 1977).

> globe as economic migrants, undocumented workers, as refugees and asylum seekers; women whose bodies and sexualities are commodified, fetishised, criminalized, racialised, disciplined and regulated through a myriad of representational regimes and social practices.[11]

This assessment of the evil that can be embodied in social relations does not deny the theological claim that all are created in the image of God. But it does make claims on what is needed to live creatively and faithfully in the *imago Dei*.

Troubling Marginalizing Effects of the *Imago Dei*

Historically some humans fit the set conditions of *imago Dei* as insiders, while others are deemed deficient and therefore outsiders. Feminist Christians critique dominant theological legacies that use the text of Genesis 2: 21-22, "male and female He created them," and Eve as cause of the fall, to justify patriarchal rules that identify the fullness of humanity with maleness. As a result, the subordination of females in Christian traditions has been justified in part because of being considered deficiently created in the *imago Dei.*

A Christian Feminist Interpretation of the *Imago*

Dorothee Soelle offers a profound Christian feminist anthropology of what constitutes being created by God in God's image and likeness. It rests on three base-points: first, we are created good and for freedom; second, as created free, we are therefore capable of sin and evil, and deny, disparage, break, and lose that image causing tragedy, suffering, and death; and third, we renew our humanity by becoming co-creators with God in redeeming creation by acts of love and taking courage together to resist evil and seek justice.

First, we are created good and for freedom. According to Jewish and Christian traditions, human creatures are created free—Adam and Eve were free to eat or not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; they were not compelled by destiny; they were not forced by necessity. Hence, we become human—that is, we image God—when we claim our freedom. Freedom is the power to name and shape our world as self-respecting, other-regarding persons in relation. To put it another way,

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[11] Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix**. "**Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5, No. 3 (May 2004): 78.

to be like God is primarily to be creative, to resist sin and evil, and to flourish in life-giving ways. To be human as created in the image of God is to have the power to act with God and one another within the finitude and particularities of a given life.

As creatures created in the image of God, we live most creatively as moral agents in the ongoing project to live as self-defining, other-regarding, morally accountable persons in relation. For Soelle, to be created in God's image means that "my creative power is my power to renew the world for someone or for a community. Through it I attempt to rebuild the house of life out of the ruins in which we now live."[12]

Second, freedom includes the capacity for sin, traditionally defined as alienation from God, the state of being opposed to God as the result of the misuse of human freedom, which includes alienation from self, neighbour, and creation itself. Everywhere we look it is plain to see that people are not treated as images of God. Dehumanization and loss of the conditions to create fullness of life are evil. In feminist theology and ethics the critical task is to uncover the massive social denial and distrust of women's moral agency.[13] Various forms of interlocking oppressions operate in direct contradiction to a theology of active and responsible engagement for a flourishing creation. On the one hand, then, there is the formal theological claim that each human being is of equal value; on the other hand, there are the empirical realities of oppression—exploitation, injustice, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and violence,[14] as well as inhumanity, ecocide, and death. Models of being human that assume abstract, a-historical, disembodied, grand notions of human nature and dominion over creation eviscerate what it means to be created human in the image of God.

The third basepoint in a Christian feminist reconstruction of the doctrine of the image of God attends to *grace as the work of co-creation.* Christian doctrines of salvation teach that humans are delivered from the

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[12]Dorothee Soelle with Shirley Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 37.

[13] Kathryn Pauly Morgan discusses four manoeuvres in ethical theory and moral practice that deny women's moral agency in "Women and Moral Madness," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Supplementary Vol. 13 (1983): 210-226.

[14] Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Rethinking Power*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (State University of New York Press, 1992), 174–195.

alienation of sin by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus came that all may have life, and have it abundantly. Salvation is experienced, that is, embodied, as the ongoing healing of the separation from God, others, and creation. In response, human evil is resisted with the ongoing grace of God when we act as co-creators to reshape our social relations, institutions, and cultures, in order to realize our shared humanity. In the way of Jesus, disciples are called to seek the kin-dom of God.

The embodied, material transformation of how everyday life is organized is required to resist structural sin and evil for the sake of material survival and abundant life for all creation. Doing this is neighbour-love, sharing energy to generate co-operation, friendship, and eco-social solidarity. Wherever there is creative human power for choosing life and not death, we see the Spirit affirming who we are against all the "lies, secrets and silences" (Adrienne Rich). We "image God" when we claim our own creative power for life, when we learn to recognize others' problems and possibilities as the interconnecting basis for solidarity, and when we live into a future in which all persons can be whole.

Overall, Soelle affirms that the basis for reverence and trust in the world is at the heart of Jewish and Christian faith: it is sharing the power of a God who creates, liberates, and sustains all that is. This goes against the theological pessimism of much Protestant anthropology, for example, whenever the second creation story in Genesis has been used misogynistically to blame women for "the fall," and whenever issues of embodied human eco-relations of power are disparaged as separate and inferior to the work of "real" theology. Instead, this account names humans as flawed, fragile, and free—yet as fundamentally good by being created in God's image by the Originating Power.[15]

Where Are We Now?

Turning to how things may have changed as a consequence of Christian feminist anthropologies in relation to the *imago Dei*, we look for any evidence that justice/right relations matter in ecclesial work and witness, in life and worship. In a positive vein, I cite the most recent United Church of Canada statement of faith, where imagery, rhetoric, and images of God cohere with voices in the conversation above to articulate divine-human-cosmic relations.

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[15] Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking about God* (London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1991), 42- 45.

Made in the image of God,
we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God.
Yet we choose to turn away from God.
We surrender ourselves to sin,
  a disposition revealed in selfishness, cowardice, or apathy.
Becoming bound and complacent
  in a web of false desires and wrong choices,
  we bring harm to ourselves and others.
This brokenness in human life and community
  is an outcome of sin.
Sin is not only personal
  but accumulates
  to become habitual and systemic forms
  of injustice, violence, and hatred.

We are all touched by this brokenness:
  the rise of selfish individualism
    that erodes human solidarity;
  the concentration of wealth and power
    without regard for the needs of all;
  the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry;
  the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies
    and human passions through sexual exploitation;
  the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth
  that threatens our home, the earth;
  the covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity
  with empires and systems of domination.
We sing lament and repentance.

Yet evil does not—cannot—
  undermine or overcome the love of God.
God forgives,
  and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings
  with honesty and humility.
God reconciles,
  and calls us to repent the part we have played
  in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other.
God transforms,
  and calls us to protect the vulnerable,
  to pray for deliverance from evil,
  to work with God for the healing of the world,

that all might have abundant life.
We sing of grace.[16]

And in this spirit, another key resource of the United Church affirms that "we are committed to announce the good news of the Gospel of *equality of all human beings* and that all are invited and have a place at the table. To embody this call for equity and respect for differences within the body of Christ is foundational to our identity as a denomination."[17]

Yes, all future conversations should create spaces of sociability and solidarity; however fragilely, such relations are forged with deep compassion where diverse voices and rightly shared power foster connections for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Then dances of faith, hope, and love embody this blessing:

> With the whole church
> we affirm we are made in God's image,
> befriended by Christ,
> empowered by the Spirit.
>
> With people everywhere
> we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity,
> planted more deeply than all that is wrong.
>
> With all creation
> we celebrate the miracle and wonder of life,
> the unfolding purposes of God,
> forever at work in ourselves
> and the world.[18]

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[16] *A Song of Faith. http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/songfaith,* 4.

[17] "Towards 2025: A justice-seeking, justice-living church (2012)," *http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/pcpmm_2025.pdf* .

[18] *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Wild Goose Publication, 2001). With thanks to Bill Kervin, who confirmed that this affirmation is used as a sort of credo in the Iona worship services.

CONFIRMATION: *DE FACTO* THIRD SACRAMENT?
by Michael Brooks

Introduction

On a sunny Sunday morning in May at Port Nelson United Church in Burlington, Ontario, a relatively large crowd has gathered for worship. For the liturgically astute, it is the Fifth Sunday in the Season of Easter. For most present, it is Mother's Day. But for youth in the tenth grade and their families, it is Confirmation Sunday.

Having been introduced to the gathered community as those seeking to renew and have their baptismal faith confirmed, and having made professions of faith, the youth come forward, one by one. Each, in turn, kneels at the baptismal font and, as I lift the outward and visible sign of water from the font, I speak the summary words: "Remember your baptism, and be thankful." I then place my wet hand—a sensory reminder of the moment—on the head of each youth, joining the hands of parents, godparents, mentors and the symbolic hand of the entire community, as we pray: "The power of the Holy Spirit work within you, that being born of water and the Spirit, you may continue to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ."[1] Now officially "confirmed," the young people rise and return to their seats.

What has just happened? Is it, as one pastor eloquently suggests, "the weight of hands, the electricity of the Spirit, and the proclamation of unity in the Body of Christ" that point to an experience that is not in any way merely everyday or common?[2] Or is it the last step in a reluctant metaphorical kicking and screaming contest between an adolescent and her well-meaning parents?

Confirmation in the Christian tradition has been described as a rite seeking a theology.[3] Questions abound concerning its purpose, practice, and meaning. Of all the aspects of Christian ministry in which I engage, it is the church's practice of confirmation of which I have been most skeptical. Yet as a minister, I have planned and led confirmation programs, and presided at the rite of confirmation every year since I was ordained. I have witnessed well-meaning parents drag their teen-aged children to confirmation discussions. I have also been on journeys of discovery with people who have had awakenings of faith and for whom

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[1] *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services*, ed. Karen Verveda (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 365.

[2] Andrew O'Neill, e-mail to author, 29 June 2015.

[3] *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, ed. Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum (New York: Church Publishing, Incorporated, 2000), 118.

confirmation is a profound movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives in the form of a public rite.

In all of this, there have been moments of extreme frustration and amazing grace. Amid both, I continue to ask the questions: Is confirmation a meaningful, effective way for the church to live out the gospel call to make disciples? Or is it yet another example of how human and institutional structures may impede the free flowing work of the Holy Spirit.

No doubt some of my skepticism flows from my own personal experience. I was never "confirmed." I came to The United Church of Canada and was baptized as a young adult, having left the church of my childhood. Therefore, I never participated in a confirmation program as a youth. I wonder if I would be an ordained minister today if I had been subjected to the common practice of adolescent confirmation as it was mostly structured twenty-five years ago—that is, as a didactic experience of learning *about* faith. Would I have endured it, kicking and screaming, only to end up taking a permanent pass on church? Or would it have been a time of claiming faith and deepening discipleship?

Rather than participating in a structured confirmation program as a prerequisite to church membership, I first discovered what it felt like to belong to a loving, nurturing faith community. That experience, in turn, compelled me to explore my faith and, eventually, come to some understanding of what it meant to "believe."

I suspect I am not alone in my wonderings about the efficacy of confirmation. For many, confirmation continues to be a rite seeking a theology. Yet, despite its theological tenuousness, confirmation endures as a significant practice in many United Church congregations. While confirmation is not a sacrament in the Reformed Protestant tradition, it continues to function in much the same way as our officially recognized sacraments, Holy Communion and Baptism. Confirmation may be experienced as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, and is an intensification ritual of the sacrament of Baptism. Hence, it could be categorized as the United Church's *de facto* "third sacrament."

Despite my skepticism, the spirit of this article is positive. In short, my experiences of the last ten years of ministry—particularly those of the congregation I currently serve—have convinced me that a highly *experiential* confirmation program, rooted primarily in the defining human experience of *relationship*, can nurture meaningful discipleship.

Confirmation in the Early Church

We are fairly certain that most, if not all, baptisms in the earliest church as recorded in Scripture were of adults. Ritual washings were often visible signs of the inner spiritual change that early Christians had first experienced (see Acts 2: 37-41, and Acts 8: 34-39). Presumably, due to this reality, Charlotte Caron reminds us that, "in the earliest church there was no such thing as a separate rite of confirmation. Baptism that involved use of water and laying on of hands with the invocation of the Holy Spirit was the full act of Christian initiation."[4]

However, despite early baptisms of adults, there were still instances when the act of laying-on of hands followed after baptism. For example, in Acts chapter 8 we read of Peter and John laying hands on Samaritans who had already been baptized, but had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8: 14-17). While baptism may have been the sole rite of initiation in the earliest church, it seems spiritual considerations necessitated subsequent acts of the laying-on of hands following baptisms, even though Joseph Martos reminds us that "the imposition of hands does not seem to have been always connected with baptism."[5]

Nevertheless, as Christianity grew numerically, and spread geographically, and as ecclesiastical authority was solidified, bishops began to travel to "confirm" baptisms initially conducted by local priests. Indeed, "by the year 200 most of the Christian communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire had an initiation ritual which included both water baptism . . . and an additional rite signifying the reception of the Holy Spirit."[6] As the distances travelled became greater, the elapsed time between baptism and the subsequent rite increased. Therefore, "what had been one ritual became two,"[7] though the name "confirmation" was not used until the middle of the fifth century.[8]

Confirmation and the Protestant Reformation

The common use of a two-part ritual continued in earnest until the Protestant Reformation, at which time debate about supporting theologies

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[4] Charlotte Caron, *Eager for Worship: Theologies, Practices, and Perspectives on Worship in The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2000), 50.

[5] Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 2001), 187.

[6] Ibid., 188.

[7] Caron, 50.

[8] Martos, 191.

and practices of confirmation ensued. Positions varied. While initially dismissing confirmation as something that God "knows nothing about," Martin Luther later suggested a non-sacramental purpose for confirmation whereby pastors would "examine the faith of the children to see whether it is good and sincere, lay hands on them and confirm them."[9] From this was born catechetical instruction in Bible, doctrine, and spiritual practices that was deemed necessary preparation for the reception of the sacrament of Holy Communion. John Calvin viewed the laying-on of hands as a form of solemn blessing that followed a public profession of faith.[10] Other Reformed communities and theologians saw no place for confirmation in any form or practice.

In offering a somewhat harsh critique, James White claims that the overall result of the Reformation's influence on confirmation was that it "changed it into a didactic experience expressed as a graduation exercise for those who had mastered the catechism."[11] However, the catechetical preparation that continues to be important in some Reformed traditions today suggests at least some enduring value to this approach.

All of this points to the reality that confirmation has historically been (and continues to be) about many things: religious education, an unofficial sacrament of initiation, a coming of age ritual, an intensification ritual, a bestowal of church membership, a fulfillment of familial expectations, a graduation from church school, a life stage, and a next step on the journey of faith. Perhaps the only point of overarching agreement may be the hope that the Holy Spirit is active in nurturing individuals' growth in Christian discipleship.

Confirmation in The United Church of Canada: Early Years

The practice of infant baptism has been part of the liturgical and spiritual life of the United Church since its formation. However, the doctrinal articles in the 1925 Basis of Union do not speak of a "Rite of Confirmation" *per se*. Article XVI.i states: "The parents or guardians should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and should expect that their children will, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, receive the benefits which the sacrament is designed and fitted to

[9] Martos, 199.
[10] Ibid.
[11] James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship,* third ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 190.

convey. The Church is under the most solemn obligation to provide for their Christian instruction."[12]

It was the initial vision of the United Church that parents, guardians and the Church itself would play important roles in nurturing Christian discipleship. The United Church's most significant practical response to this task was the publication of the 1944 Catechism that flowed from the 1940 Statement of Faith. *A Catechism* contained no fewer than 86 questions covering a range of topics from beliefs to church structure and governance to Christian practices to sacraments. In his volume on the history of United Church worship, William Kervin reminds us that an entire generation of church members were confirmed using the questions of the 1944 Catechism.[13] The document summarizes an understanding of what we would now call confirmation: "When those baptized in infancy profess their faith in Christ, God confirms and equips them as soldiers of the Cross, and the Church receives them into full communion with all its rights and duties."[14] Kervin notes that, by 1950, there had been 280,000 copies of the Catechism printed.[15] Clearly, the *Catechism* was highly influential in the formation and discipleship of tens of thousands of Canadian Christians.

The Contemporary Context of Confirmation

For most of the history of Christianity, the church sought first to introduce seekers to various beliefs and doctrines which had shaped previous generations of disciples. It was expected that exposure to the historical faith of the church would compel new believers, in turn, to join a faith community. The United Church's understanding of nurturing disciples has largely followed suit, as belief was first professed, and then the belief and faith were confirmed by God; as a result, people were received by the community and so came to belong. The language and content of the 1944 Catechism—arguably the most influential and widely known catechetical document in the United Church's history—certainly suggests this was the case.

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[12] "The Basis of Union: Doctrine," in *The Manual* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2013), 14.

[13] *Ordered Liberty:Readings in the History of United Church Worship,* ed. William S. Kervin (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2011), 52.

[14] The United Church of Canada, *A Catechism* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1944), Q.37.

[15] *Ordered Liberty*, 52.

It will be no surprise to readers that much is being made in the twenty-first century church about the value of *experience*. In what she labels the "great reversal," Diana Butler Bass suggests that belonging-behaving-believing is now the path of discipleship followed by most new Christians formed in faith.[16] Rather than first asking people to subscribe to a set of beliefs or creedal statements that would lead to expected behaviour and subsequent belonging in a faith community, Bass suggests the starting point is now the experience of belonging, which may result in certain behaviour and, ultimately, belief. Bass's "great reversal" typology has been influential in the last decade.

Experiential Confirmation at Port Nelson United Church

Every year, I am amazed at the fanfare and ceremony that surround the liturgical event of confirmation in our congregation. It is one of the largest community Sundays of the year. Families of those being confirmed purchase new outfits to be worn by the confirmands during the service. There is a cake and posed photographs. A spirit of celebration pervades amid great attention to the details of "the show."

Part of my amazement stems from the relative ease with which the confirmation program itself unfolds. By "ease" I do not mean the confirmation program is in any way "easy." What I mean is that the confirmation program at Port Nelson United Church is free-flowing, flexible, and highly experiential. The youth experience both planned and spontaneous outreach activities in the local community, such as helping with community meals, preparing a Thanksgiving dinner open to everyone, visiting senior congregants, and touring funeral homes, hospices and the facilities of community organizations that the congregation has sponsored. Following each experience, there are opportunities for youth to discuss their discoveries and, specifically, how their learning informs and enhances Christian discipleship.

In addition to experiential outreach, our program consists of discussions on major topics of belief such as christology, sacramentality, and life after death. A variety of resources are employed, including biblical stories, DVD reflections from contemporary thinkers, and conversations with various people in the congregation. While these topics may seem fairly typical of a confirmation program, what distinguishes our approach is that the discussions are always rooted in the experiences of the youth. For example, a discussion of sacraments would typically

[16] Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

follow experiences of Baptism and Holy Communion in worship, and a time when youth take the communion elements to senior church members in their homes. Following the worship experiences and in-home visits, the youth would be given questions upon which to reflect, such as: What did the bread and the juice taste like? Describe your reaction when the baby screamed as water was poured on her head. How did Mrs. Smith seem to feel when you offered her the Communion elements?

By seeking to begin with experience, we strive to show youth that they too are included in all experiences of the church when it gathers. Questions and discussion about Christian behaviour and belief (such as the action of God in Baptism and the presence of Christ in Holy Communion) then typically flow more naturally.

The confirmation program attempts to offer youth a variety of experiences to explore faith in action (the "behaving" in Bass's typology) that are paired with debriefing conversations that gently delve into what was experienced and how these experiences fit with being a disciple of Jesus Christ (the "believing" in Bass's typology).

At Port Nelson, youth usually begin the confirmation program at the beginning of Grade 9 and are given the opportunity for confirmation at the end of Grade 10. The two-year program model has been in place for about thirty years. Every year, I visit with the youth about their confirmation experience, and they have unanimously affirmed the value of the two-year model. Youth have shared that two years permits adequate time and space for personal and group reflection, and integration of experiences. The two years of the program also facilitate a much more flexible schedule. New possibilities for experiences can easily be added as the program unfolds.

Relational Confirmation at Port Nelson United Church

While a variety of programmatic experiences of faith formation, in order to grow disciples (which we dare to hope God fully blesses) is key, such opportunities are only part of experience itself. The second aspect of experiential confirmation—and I suggest the more significant aspect—is the experience of relationship. I am convinced that the primary value of the confirmation program at Port Nelson in growing disciples lies not only in the variety of faith-based experiences in which youth participate, but even more, in the pre-existing relationships among youth and their pastoral leaders.

Five years ago, the congregation decided to create a staff position dedicated solely to youth ministry. That pivotal change has resulted in a positive spillover effect on confirmation. Every September we hold a

casual gathering for any youth and their families interested in the confirmation program. Prior to the change in staffing model, the majority of youth who typically attended the annual September gathering did not know one another well, if at all. Now, most of the youth who gather are already actively involved in the life of the congregation. They regularly share gifts of drama, dance, music, and technological assistance in worship. They participate in youth groups, retreats, and service activities. Confirmation has become another aspect of an already existing youth ministry where relationships have been established and continue to grow. To follow on Bass's typology, it is not an overstatement to claim that, by the time most youth begin the confirmation program at Port Nelson, they already feel as if they belong.[17]

It seems that, somewhat unconsciously, we are living into Bass's belonging-behaving-believing model. It is perhaps never wise to attempt to quantify the free-flowing action of the Holy Spirit, but our experience in the last five years has been that youth are increasingly remaining active in the faith community following confirmation at the end of grade 10. Confirmation has become less and less a graduation, or religious education, or fulfillment of familial expectations, and more and more a coming of age ritual, an intensification ritual, and a next step on the journey of faith.

Leadership in several other confirmation programs in United Church congregations indicates similar approaches to experiential and relational confirmation are also bearing fruit. For example, at Hillhurst United Church in Calgary, John Pentland stresses that confirmation is "an important opportunity [for youth] to reconnect."[18] Hillhurst's youth typically participate in confirmation in grade 12 which permits more time for relationships to be nurtured and "belonging" to be cemented. Of her most recent confirmation group at St John's United Church in Oakville, Ontario, Kim Belanger says, "This group provided my deepest and most meaningful experience, and I think that is because the [youth] had such a strong sense of community and desire to be together."[19]

Of course, authentic Christian discipleship runs deeper than simply "being together." But a genuine experience of "being together"—

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[17] For example, during a visit in 2013 with a youth about his confirmation experience, he shared that he had "found community" in the church's youth programs, and that he would not have participated in the confirmation program had he not first been a part of the "youth community."

[18] John Pentland, e-mail to author, 11 June 2015.

[19] Kim Belanger, e-mail to author, 22 June 2015.

of belonging—is likely the most important first step in setting the course toward Christian behaviour that may, ultimately, lead to a claim of belief.

Conclusion

As the youth of Port Nelson United Church stand in front of the congregation that has nurtured their journeys, the profession of faith they make is itself relational and experiential. Rather than asking blanket questions about belief in God, in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit, we ask if their experiences of an inclusive community that cares, seeks to grow spiritually, reaches out, and worships are experiences that the youth will continue to pursue intentionally. Then, having responded to the questions about experience and relationship, those being confirmed agree to "love the Lord their God." Thus, the confirmation vows themselves are the culmination of an experiential, relational confirmation program. The intent is not to diminish or soften a profession of faith, but rather, to be authentic to the twenty-first century reality of how disciples are formed, and how discipleship is nurtured through experience and relationships.

No doubt the United Church of Canada's *de facto* third sacrament of confirmation will continue to be a rite that seeks a theology, as it has been for centuries. In spite of this, if we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit for which we pray when hands wetted by the waters of baptism are laid on a disciple's head, then we trust that the wind of the Spirit will continue to blow where it chooses. We may even trust that, despite our human and institutional fallibility or omission, God will raise up new disciples who experience the most powerful relationship imaginable—a relationship with Jesus the risen Christ. That promise is worth confirming in any age.

FROM THE HEART

ART PRINTS AND HOCKEY PUCKS

by Lisa Waites

Back when we were newly married graduate students, my husband gave me a Robert Duncan print called *An April Storm*. Duncan's prints were mass marketed during the 1990s to people who appreciated "shabby chic" decor, and also to people like us, whose budget was just plain shabby. I pronounced the print an ideal gift, and tacked it to the wall above the threadbare couch in our tiny living room. It was a magical piece of art, enabling the tired furniture and water stained ceiling tiles to fade from view as I imagined myself as the girl in the painting, surrounded by contented animals and pristine snowflakes. I entered the world of the artist as I gazed at his painting, and my visual forays into his pastoral scene kept my dreams of country living alive on many dreary city nights.

When we purchased our first home, we had *An April Storm* properly matted and framed in celebration. Over the years, we've moved several times, changing couches and wall colours the way some folk change their socks, yet throughout our vocational and domestic adventures, the painting has remained a constant visual reminder of our love and commitment. It has hung in every living room of every house we've owned.

Our home has also been filled with the sound of laughter and learning as our three wonderful, challenging children took their places in our hearts and around our kitchen table over the past fifteen years. Through all the ups and downs of family life, through the good, the bad, and the ugly, we have tried to live intentionally as a family of faith, a family showing outward evidence of the *imago Dei* in every aspect of our lives. We certainly have our flaws. We have created our share of desperate moments and tearful confessions, of slamming doors and teenage obsessions; despite our virtuous ideals and godly intentions, we are imperfect creatures living in a world not yet fully restored.

Our own beloved children recently showed us their flawed human capacities for blatant disobedience and deceit. Arriving home early and finding themselves without adult supervision, the children decided to play a quick game of forbidden floor hockey in the living room. To this day, no one will admit which sibling fired the fatal slap shot that shattered the glass of *An April Storm.* The velocity of the hockey puck was such that the print itself was also ripped, leaving the girl in the painting torn asunder. Immediately conscious of their guilt, the

children disposed of the glass shards littering the carpet, and then tried to repair the print with generous quantities of "invisible" Scotch tape before the adults got home. They were busted shortly thereafter. The fragments of glass sparkling on the couch cushions, the badly tilted picture frame, and the wad of tape bulging from the surface of the print all betrayed their sin.

The damaged print continues to hang on our wall. It has been professionally mended, but it still bears the faint impression of a puck-shaped scar. I still think it is a magical piece of art, but it captivates me differently than it used to. I now enter the world of the Artist as I gaze at the painting, and find myself reflecting on the many ways we humans tend to tear our lives asunder. There is one original painting of *An April Storm,* but thousands of exact reproductions. If only the *imago Dei* could be reproduced within human hearts so easily! Tragically, the effects of sin have marred the replication of God's original design for humanity. Until we are clothed in Christ (Gal. 3:27), humans naturally embody only a flawed approximation of the beautiful image of God painted within us.

I have heard it said that we live "East of Eden," in a world that can still be beautiful, but is also deeply broken, a world that bears the not-so-faint impression of our sin-shaped scars. The collective picture frame of humanity has been knocked off kilter. Bits of broken glass bear witness to the jagged edges of our distorted perspectives as we try to tape our wounded hearts together with wads of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, instead of clothing ourselves in the righteousness of Christ. Despite our predictable attempts to deny or dismiss God's presence within us, the *imago Dei* remains. As the words of the New Creed remind us, *we are not alone; we live in God's world*. God will never leave us or forsake us.

No matter how disturbing global affairs, national concerns, or our own personal circumstances may seem, the words of Genesis 1:27 still ring with truth. Together, as male and female human beings, we reflect something of God's image. The full meaning of this gracious gift of God is both a profound mystery and a divine invitation, but we can be confident that the *imago Dei* is not a static concept. The image of God being carried in human hearts is no still-life painting that can be objectively viewed at a safe distance, like an art critic dispassionately assessing a painting in a climate-controlled museum. No, the *imago Dei* is more like a dynamic invitation extended to us by a loving God who paints continually on the canvas of our lives, offering us creative opportunities to participate in God's redemptive purposes for creation.

The triune Artist chose, in perfect community and eternal unity,

to create male and female human beings in the image of God. It may be easier for us to imagine the unblemished *imago Dei* being carried within human hearts amid the creative paradise of earth before the fall; yet the image of God was not forever lost to humanity when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. As we meditate on the Word, we are still drawn into the world of the Artist today. These spiritual forays help us preserve our God-given dreams for the future, dreams of God's will being done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Having been made in the image of God implies an anamnetic remembrance of the past, a making present of the story of God while simultaneously anticipating the future in proleptic hope while we inhabit our creaturely identities as God's image bearers on earth. Like the girl in my favourite painting *après* hockey puck, I have been torn asunder by sin, but through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God has restored my life, and the lives of all willing people, changing our spiritual identities from death to life, from sin to grace.

Despite our perpetual creaturely disobedience, God continues to paint a gloriously redemptive masterpiece on the canvas of human history. As God's restorative purposes are revealed in and through us, we behold the generosity of a patient Creator who nurtures creation, inviting us into a dynamic, intimate relationship with the One who creates, heals, redeems, and sustains us. As Christians, we are called to express the *imago Dei* in every area of our lives, demonstrating God's prodigal love and mercy to others wherever we go, whatever we do, with whomever we meet, for however long God gives us life and breath.

After recognizing that we carry the *imago Dei* within us, how will we choose to express this precious gift to those around us? Are we willing to bear witness to the gospel in uncomfortable circumstances, or do we tend to take the easy way out, reverting to the selfish tendencies that wreak havoc on the body of Christ just like malignant cells wreaking havoc on a human body afflicted with cancer? Will we choose to live as faithful stewards of God's image, reflecting what God has displayed for us in creation, recorded in Scripture, engraved on our hearts, and embodied most clearly in Jesus Christ? Will the imprint of our lives bear a true likeness to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, or will we reflect mostly our own personal faults and limitations, like the faults embedded in the artwork of a poorly trained apprentice? I hope that as followers of Christ, we will choose to prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit, trusting in God's redemptive power, power to save us from ourselves, and from hurting one another.

Sometimes finding God's image in others seems like quite a

challenge; yet all who follow Christ are known as God's handiwork (Eph. 2:10). I am comforted by the image of Jesus working in and through us, continually shaping his followers until we become like living works of art, proudly displayed in God's celestial living room. We are, in Christ, a constant reminder of God's love and commitment; of God's redemptive purposes for creation. Let us embody the *imago Dei* during our moments of joy over commitments honoured and gifts received, and also during moments of sorrow over trust betrayed or gifts destroyed. Even when we send a hockey puck sailing through the frame of faithful living, the image of God within us is not shattered. As Philippians 1:6 proclaims, we can be confident that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.

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PROFILE

THE STORY OF THE REV. CHARLES AND ELIZABETH McKILLOP

by Austin Fennell

The McKillop name is attached to the United Church on 15th Ave. South in Lethbridge, Alberta, a church that was begun in 1954. Charles (b.1848) died in 1907. Born in 1858, Elizabeth (d. 1938) is memorialized by the city of Lethbridge with a park bearing her name in Legacy Ridge, on the north side of the city. They were Presbyterians before the union of Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians in 1925. They belong to the period when Lethbridge was just beginning as a town and before any of the present churches existed.

Preparation for Ministry

Charles McKillop was born in the Campsie Fells (Oban), Scotland, and moved to Canada with his mother upon the death of his father. He was a scrappy youth, learned to box for self-defence, and had many occasions on which to say, "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teaches my hands to war and fingers to fight" (Ps.144.1). He demonstrated to author Ralph Connor just how a Highlander could defeat his opponent. He planned to study law but went to Normal School (teacher's college). In the classroom, he was a strict disciplinarian and had no patience with boys who were bullies. He also worked in the lumber camps, sometimes as a cook.

During this period Charles regarded himself as unsaved, living as he did in the rough surroundings of the lumber camps. McKillop told Alex Gordon, his successor at Knox Presbyterian Church, that these were his wasted days, for he called himself an atheist, "clouded with doubt"—a time without God. Questions haunted him, "What if there be a God after all? And if there is a God, what is going to happen to me?" He dated his conversion from that struggle. He began to read the New Testament: "Not in rioting and

drunkenness, not in clamoring and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus, and not make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom.13.13, 14). Thus the divine voice spoke to him and he resolved to dedicate himself to the work of ministry.

Charles's old associates, lumbermen and shanty town men, now jeered at him. In spite of lingering doubts and his own uncertainty about his fitness for the job, he told Gordon, "Dare I let this task go past me? Am I prepared for the responsibility of allowing it to drift into weaker hands?" He saw that God was fitting him for ministry and that he was able to capture the ears of lumbermen. In the ensuing years, Charles was determined to pay his own way and "own no man anything." He took his divinity (theological) studies at the Presbyterian Theological College in Montreal, excelling in philosophy, and earning the gold medal upon graduation. During summers he taught school, sometimes as a tutor, and preached on Home Mission fields. He was ordained in 1879. His first charge was at Admaston, near Renfrew, Ontario, where he remained for seven years until heading west.

Charles McKillop and Elizabeth Fisher were married on June 23, 1881. Charles said it was "'the day I did the best day's work of my life, for on that day I married Elizabeth Fisher.' And what a help mate she was! Even with the cares of a young and large family [they had eight children] with inadequate household assistance, and with the open hospitality of a western manse, she found time to take part in everything which concerned the community."[1]

Appointed through the influence of the Presbyterian Superintendent of Home Missions, Rev. James Robertson, Charles came to Lethbridge without his family in the late summer of 1886. During the course of the journey west on the "first through train" to the Pacific coast he composed a diary of his journey. His daily reports appeared back in the Renfrew *Mercury*.[2] He was fascinated by features of the prairies, such as the piles of buffalo bones which at first he mistook for white tents. His first year in Lethbridge with its very late fall and very early spring led him to believe that winter lasted six weeks with land prepared for seeding in February. One farmer told him of his four crops of oats in one year.

Charles went to the General Assembly meeting of the

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[1] John D. Higinbotham, *When the West Was Young* (Lethbridge: Ryerson Press, 1933, second ed. 1978), 178.

[2] The diary, in a private collection owned by the McKillop family, contains clippings of Charles' reports to the *Renfrew Mercury*, August-September 1886.

Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg in 1887, and, according to the Lethbridge *Daily Herald* (6 March 1887), this was when he brought his wife, Elizabeth, and their two children to the manse in Lethbridge. He had built the manse for his family, and attached to it was a "glebe," a parcel of land where he could raise feed for his horses and plant a garden.

Elizabeth was born in the farming town of White Lake, Ontario, and before her marriage had been a governess and the choir leader at Admaston church. Lethbridge was a rough town when Elizabeth arrived. "In her memoirs she notes that she did not think there was a sober man in town. But she was a fitting wife for the man who was called the Fighting Parson, who defended his right to wear a silk top hat above his curly red hair."[3] She was a homemaker with eight children to raise (three of whom died in childhood). "She was always ready to give advice, sympathy and encouragement to anyone in trouble or distress."[4] At her funeral, Rev. J.M. Pritchard spoke about her hospitality: "In the early days of the community, just to be invited to the manse for Sunday dinner was enough to send the weary one back renewed and ready to face the temptations of life."[5] The McKillops had no money for a Christmas tree, so they tied together two ladders in their living room, and decorated it as best they could, to the delight of their children. She was the first woman in town to bring in a piano and the first to bring in a hand-powered washing machine.

Contribution to the Life of the Church:

The Presbyterian Church had been built when Charles McKillop arrived. He was sent for a three year appointment but stayed for twenty-one years, eighteen as minister of Knox Presbyterian Church, and three at the Raymond church. He arrived at a time when the newspaper was full of stories of drunken brawls among the miners in the city. They took their drinking and fighting to Medicine Hat, where, said the newspaper, they made "Rome burn."[6] The lumber industry was thriving. Settlers were coming into the area, and ranching had already claimed huge areas of land.

Charles's task was to build up the Presbyterian Church in the

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[3]Leona Thompson, quoted in Shelia Petherbridge et al, *100 Women in 100 years, 1885-1985* (Lethbridge, 1985), 14-15.

[4] Ibid., 13.

[5] J.M. Pritchard, Funeral Sermon for Elizabeth McKillop, *Lethbridge Herald*, 1938.

[6] *The Lethbridge News*, 26 March 1886, 2.

young town. He did so with a deep sense of what Presbyterianism was all about. Everything was to be done in "good order." The session was established to govern the spiritual life of the church and the board of managers to manage the property and money. The session governed the worship life, the membership, the celebration of Communion, and the discipline of the membership. Charles instituted the practice of a service of preparation on Friday night before Communion, and a service of thanksgiving on Sunday evening after Communion. He introduced a subscription plan—a pledge system to make regular contributions possible, together with a plan for holding to account those who pledged. He presided over all gatherings of the congregation. When Hungarian Presbyterians moved to the city, he led in incorporating them into Knox Presbyterian church. During his ministry there was an outreach to the Chinese with the formation of a Chinese Sunday school class. One of the Knox members, Janet White, was enlisted to go as a missionary to China. The congregation grew ten-fold during his ministry and the town was growing also.

There is an account by the Rev. Alex Gordon, minister at Knox when Charles died, of a funeral Charles conducted early in his ministry. The funeral was for a notoriously blasphemous and wicked woman. It was the custom to give a funeral address. He saw it was not a time for platitudes or for flattery. He never indulged in these things. He said to the assembled company, "There is no need to mince matters. We know where this woman's soul is. We cannot help things now, or make matters any better. I shall not speak about the dead, but I do wish to speak very plainly to the living." And he did, preaching not "hell-fire theology" but the love of God to sinful men and women. He spoke to them so plainly and so pointedly that those who heard him never could forget. That evening he was visiting one of the houses in his parish, Mr. Fisher's, when a message was brought that the son of the dead woman wanted to see him at once. He took a fresh horse and drove to see the man. He spent the night with him, and that night the man was converted. Ever afterward, he was one of the minister's staunchest friends. No wonder Mr. McKillop believed in being outspoken.[7]

Robertson, the Presbyterian Superintendent of Missions, who had asked Charles to come to Lethbridge, said that Charles was "evangelical to the core . . . preaching the gospel of God's grace," and "stood for that righteousness which alone shall exalt the nation."

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[7] Alex Gordon, Funeral Sermon for Charles McKillop, *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, 29 August 1907.

There is also a famous story of Charles being mocked for his silk hat and red hair. The pharmacist, John Higinbotham, local founder of the Sunday School, recorded the incident as related by McKillop:

> On a bright, hot afternoon while I was going about my pastoral duties, I had occasion of passing the window of a certain office . . . and saw a number of grinning faces behind the glass. I stepped into the office. A young lawyer . . . remarked in his drawling manner, "Mr. McKillop, we wish to know where you got that hat." "Well, gentlemen", said I, very pleasantly, "If you will permit me to put my hat and coat on this shelf, I will give you an answer that perhaps will be satisfactory." Having rid myself of my coat and that obnoxious hat, I turned and faced the half dozen young men. "Gentlemen, for answer, I propose to pitch you all out of this office." A chorus of jeers greeted this statement. Like a whirlwind I turned myself loose, as we say in the West, and in a few minutes the job was done. The lawyer . . . as he was dusting off his coat, said, "Mr. McKillop, I am very sorry to say that I have lost all interest in that hat." This closed the episode, but I noticed the next Sunday evening a marked increase in the size of our congregation. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, yet the Lord can use even such poor means to win men.[8]

There may have been other similar occasions, for Charles apologized to the congregation at an annual meeting for his tempestuous nature.

Elizabeth was an important leader in the church life as well. She organized the first Ladies' Auxiliary, whose members set about immediately to raise money with which to buy an organ. Her biographers speak of her as a woman with great enthusiasm—"a key note of her personality . . . and with a wonderful sense of humor."[9] She was the first president of a local Foreign Missionary Society west of Brandon, and the first President of the Alberta Women's Missionary Society. For her church work, she was known as "Mother of Israel," one of three titles by which she was honored in the community.

Elizabeth sided with the majority at Knox in 1925 when the

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[8] Higinbotham, 160.

[9] Hazel Ross, quoted in Petherbridge et al, *100 Women*, 12.

Presbyterian Church had to decide whether to join the new church union with the Methodists and Congregationalists. She was an advocate for that union. This was a particularly bitter and divisive issue in Lethbridge that ruptured the Presbyterian Church, and a large group left to form a dissenting Presbyterian church. Later, when Knox United resolved to join the Wesley United Church in 1935, she also resolved to go with that union as well. She was an elder, a member of the session long before women were elders across the church. When Charles died, the congregation gave her a small annual pension.

Part of Town Life

The second designation awarded Elizabeth was to be called the "Mother of Lethbridge." She told in her many talks on early Lethbridge how it fell to the women to prepare caskets for bodies to be buried. There was no undertaker. The men built and the women lined the caskets. The most famous of her contributions was her organization of aid to soldiers returning from the front lines in World War I. She would meet them at the trains with provisions to help them get started again in civilian life. She was made a life member of the Great War Veterans' Association. She was a charter member of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, which established a scholarship in her memory. She was made an honorary member of the Quota Club, which was dedicated to the championing of women's rights. That club gave Elizabeth her third honorary epitaph: "The Builder." Her later years were filled with speaking engagements when she told stories of early life in the town.

Charles McKillop, his wife said, by virtue of his prowess and thorough knowledge, became a true leader of the town. If the saloons were particularly noisy, his wife recalled, the question was asked, "What is McKillop doing?" He effectively handled the "red light" district, and kept rowdyism and drunkenness within bounds, she recalled. In 1898 the Temperance and Moral Reform Society, headed by Rev. Chas. McKillop, started putting pressure on the town council, convincing it that it should have its own by-laws about prostitution. By-law 94 was passed which said that no person within the town's limits could keep a bawdy house, house of ill-fame or disorderly house, with a fine of $50 or thirty days in jail. It further provided that anyone found on the premises not being a bona fide resident in the house would be liable to a $20 fine or ten days.[10] The Council and police quietly ignored the by-law, yet had to engage

[10] Avice Frayne Anderson, "Charles McKillop," *Lethbridge Senior Citizens Magazine*, February 2005, 102.

themselves in trying to deal with the problem.

Charles thought Sunday opening of the post office was unnecessary. The law also took this view, but was often ignored. Petitions had no effect on maintaining the closure, nor were the strictures of the General Assembly more effective. Charles prepared a letter to the Canadian public, setting forth the facts of the case and sent a copy to the Postmaster-General. The result was a feisty meeting in Lethbridge between the Inspector for the Postal Service from Winnipeg and Charles, which settled the case once for all. John Higinbotham, the local postmaster as well as the pharmacist, described the stormy meeting that took place in one of his rooms. He and McKillop demonstrated that the local petition requesting Sunday opening of the post office was filled with the names of bar-room loafers and fictitious persons, and of persons with no standing in the community. The Inspector's own canvass of the town proved there was little support for Sunday opening. That encounter led to lasting legislation that has kept the post offices closed on Sundays.

Like many ministers of the era, Charles was a vigorous supporter of the Temperance movement, sharing in the organization of rallies and advocating for licensing. One has to remember how rough the town was, and how great had been the abuse of trade with the Indigenous people who were easy victims of those promoting the liquor trade.

Charles prayed for the welfare of the town and stayed at his church even though there were several years of economic depression. At McKillop's funeral, Gordon praised Charles for keeping abreast of the times with his "fresh and keen interest . . . in men and books and events . . . It was a terrible wrench to him to resign this charge to go to live elsewhere. His reason for going to Raymond was that he was no longer able to lead the Knox Church because of his failing health—a stroke—"that he might use the remainder of his strength in the work of the ministry."[11]

Legacy

Higinbotham's history of Lethbridge records a poem he wrote as a tribute to "The Fighting Sky Pilot" on Charles's death, with the following final verse:

> Open your arms, O Mother Earth, receive
> The poor, worn vestments which a mighty soul
> Hath cast behind him in the arduous race,

[11] Higinbotham, 167.

> Well run, for his imperishable goal.[12]

Charles McKillop represented what was known as "muscular Christianity," and his life and ministry demonstrated it. He tackled issues of the day as they appeared in the life of the community. He was evangelical to the core, believing fervently that people needed to be converted from sin and disbelief, no doubt why he could be in harmony with the Methodist ministers. He was a Presbyterian who translated the essence of that church into the new congregation. Session after session meeting recorded the admission of new members into the congregation.

Rev. J.M. Pritchard said at Elizabeth's funeral: "In her whole life, nothing took priority over her services to her church. She had that loyalty that springs from the love of God."[13] St. Augustine's Anglican Church sent her children a letter that said in part, "Some people live to make money, some to gain fame, but Mrs. McKillop lived for others. Words fail in describing the fine influence of such a life . . . in this community over a period of more than half a century."[14] Elizabeth's multiple roles of homemaker, church and community leader made a lasting impression on the people of Lethbridge, as the city singled her out among pioneer women to give a municipal park her name.

The social, moral and ecclesiastical issues with which Charles McKillop engaged may be unlike those that grab our attention today, but, we see his social passions echoed in today's drive to be involved in contemporary issues. His influence on the city has placed him among the most honoured of its pioneers. At the same time, McKillop's commitment to evangelical preaching was uncompromising. His evangelical fervour might make him a stranger in today's United Church, and perhaps critical of it too. Yet, it is important that the United Church claim the memory of these two saints and their contribution to our Christian legacy.

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Pritchard Funeral Sermon, *Lethbridge Herald*, 31 January 1938.
[14] Ibid.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Conscious Endeavor: A Judeo-Christian Reflection on the Distribution of Wealth

Terence Wenzl. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014. Pp.178.

When I was making my way through theological college so many years ago, social justice was an important subject. It found its way into almost every class we attended and every subject we took. It even wormed its way into meal times and after-hours conversations. We covered a lot of ground. We talked about gender, race, and economics. We discussed names such as Marx, King, and St. Francis of Assisi. We tried to think about what social justice looked like in a congregational setting. We discussed and debated the distribution of wealth. We talked about the gap between rich and poor, and studied what the different writers of the Bible said about how we should use our financial "gifts."

Looking back I wish we had had Terence Wenzl's new book, *A Conscious Endeavor,* to use as a guide for our efforts and conversations. Wenzl is a former Franciscan who has worked in different fields (both figuratively and literally) in his working and vocational life. He has confronted a number of economic issues involving people from many different walks of life. The book is built on this experience and the reflections that emerge from this experience. Wenzl also studies Scripture and how its stories feed our reflections, beliefs, priorities, and commitments.

Wenzl asks questions about our current economic situation. He defines terms we may find unfamiliar and confusing. He tells stories about his work with working-class people from a variety of backgrounds. What does the Bible have to say about how we spend our money? What does Jesus say about how we treat the people who work for us? What do we think about minimum and living wages?

Above and beyond the questions we have about our own spending habits and economic ways, Wenzl shows us how our greed can cause a rift between ourselves and the people around us. He also shows us how greed can affect our relationship with God. Wenzl doesn't stop there, however. He also teaches us how these rifts can be bridged and healed. We can care for one another. We can challenge the powers that control our society. We can relate to God's creation in a way that is life-giving and sacred.

We may not like what we read here. We may find it unsettling. The questions may be too overwhelming and the implications too great. What's important about a book like *A Conscious Endeavor,* however, is

that we can give the content some consideration and prayer. It is also important that we act on whatever conclusions we reach. When we look at the economic and environmental realities around us, it becomes obvious that the stakes are extremely high and that we have to do something to bring the world around us into a sacred whole.

This extremely accessible book will appeal to a wide audience. Clergy, students, denominational leaders, and teachers will find it useful as a basis for both their own reading and their respective work and study commitments. Lay people will find it helpful not only to reflect on their own experiences and situations, but also to discover the teachings of their traditions about the management of our resources. *A Conscious Endeavor* would certainly be of great use in group settings where people can share their questions and insights in a place of safety, inclusion, and openness.

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Jesus of Nazareth: Jew from Galilee, Savior of the World
Jens Schröter. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014. Pp. xix + 305.

With this book, Jens Schröter, Professor for Exegesis and Theology of the New Testament and New Testament Apocrypha at Humboldt University, Berlin, makes a valuable contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus. Schröter reviews the quest's history and argues that it can inform Christian faith with historical knowledge about Jesus. The primary sources for this are the New Testament gospels, which incorporate pre-Easter Jesus traditions into post-Easter perspectives. Jesus came from Nazareth, a village in Lower Galilee. He was active mostly around the Sea of Galilee and in its surrounding regions. Schröter uses archaeological research to sketch the religious and economic conditions of this context. Jesus' public ministry aimed at a renewal of Israel that would inaugurate the beginning of God's reign, already present in anticipatory fashion in his activity.

John the Baptist, a prophetic preacher of repentance, deeply influenced Jesus. Schröter identifies important continuities between their messages. He argues that Jesus began his own public activity on the conviction that God had decisively de-throned evil and that through his healings, exorcisms, preaching, teaching, and table fellowship, the reign of God was being established. Jesus' message and the extraordinary events of his ministry demanded a decision about who was at work in what he did: God or Satan? This became a polarizing issue concerning

Jesus. He called people to participate by joining the community around him. At the heart of this community were the twelve disciples, symbolically representing the twelve tribes of the renewed Israel. They seem to have come from the middle class, although Jesus' message was directed first to the poor.

The Pharisees, who focused on daily observance of the Mosaic law, were Jesus' most important competition, but seem to have played no role in his passion. Jesus typically evaluated legal injunctions in terms of what he discerned to be the divine intention behind the law as a whole. Purity was important to him, but he saw it not as something to be protected, but as something contagious, as his activity drove out impurity. Sinners became pure by welcoming him.

For Jesus the reign of God was a religious reality, rooted in Jewish tradition that had social and political implications. Schröter studies the notoriously ambiguous "Son of Man" sayings and concludes that Jesus used this term to stress the decisiveness of his person. Jesus did not reject the term "Messiah" when applied to himself, but reconfigured its meaning. Both terms helped shape how Jesus was understood after Easter. Schröter suggests that Jesus did not intentionally go to Jerusalem to stage a confrontation with the religious authorities, but that, while he was there, the conflict provoked by his message and claim about himself escalated and led to his death. Through an extended study of accounts of the Last Supper, Schröter argues that Jesus faced his approaching death convinced that the reign of God had begun and would increase, and that through his death he would enter into it.

There are many more important insights in this book than can be recounted here. However, Schröter's reconstruction of how the Easter faith arose is open to question, as it doesn't do justice to the conflict between Jesus' death and his message. According to Schröter, Jesus did not see his death as necessary to his mission or as refuting his message. Jesus interpreted his fate as that of a prophet rejected and killed by Israel. The experiences his followers had of him during his ministry, and Jewish hope in the resurrection, formed the basis for belief in his resurrection. This seems unlikely, as Jesus' implicit claim was not that he was a prophet, but a messiah-like figure of decisive significance. No Jewish traditions envisioned a crucified messiah. His death therefore seemed to refute his preaching, until his death was refuted by his resurrection.

Schröter is undoubtedly correct that a strong continuity exists between the Easter message of the early church and Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry raised the question of who he was and whether he spoke for God. His condemnation and crucifixion were intended by the

perpetrators to show that he was not the Messiah, and did not speak for God. For the early church, Jesus' resurrection was God's "Yes" to Jesus, a reversal of the negative judgment his opponents expressed through his cross. Jesus' resurrection ultimately would make sense to his followers as God's vindication of Jesus and his ministry.

But Jesus' resurrection also seems to have come as a bewildering shock to his followers. While it vindicated Jesus' person and work, it was not expected and faith in it was not based on his disciples' previous experiences of him. For Jesus' followers, his resurrection was as much an interruption as his death. Schröter overlooks this.

This criticism notwithstanding, this insightful, informative, well-written book carries forward the quest for the historical Jesus. It is suitable for clergy, educated lay people, and New Testament scholars. Everyone interested in what can be known historically about Jesus should read it.

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No Turning Back: The Future of Ecumenism
Margaret O'Gara. Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2014. Pp. 258.

Margaret O'Gara (1947-2012) was a Roman Catholic theologian deeply committed to ecumenism. She served as Catholic representative on bilateral dialogues with the Anglican Church (1976-1993); the Disciples of Christ (1983-2012); the Lutheran Church (1994-2012); Evangelical communities (2008-2012); and the Mennonites (2002-2012). *No Turning Back: The Future of Ecumenism* is a posthumous collection of seventeen articles, including several previously unpublished texts and a complete bibliography of her writings.

From her extensive experience in bilateral ecumenical dialogues emerges O'Gara's vision of truly ecumenical ecclesiology. These themes include the need for ecumenical partners to purify past memories, especially painful memories of how ancestors in the respective religious denominations had mistreated members of the other denomination. Among the examples of the purification of memories and personal transformation, she refers to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) with the comment: "Past positions once thought to be contradictory can now be seen as complementary" (45).

Another essential feature of her ecumenical theology is the exchange of ecumenical gifts. Christian denominations have certain ecclesial "gifts," which may consist of doctrines, liturgical practices, or organizational features that they uniquely possess or particularly emphasize, and that are lacking in, or under-considered by, dialogue partners. These particular features of a church are potential "gifts" to be offered to ecumenical partners: "Ecumenical dialogue can be understood as an exchange of gifts" (51). She gives examples of "liturgical gifts" such as more spontaneous worship (from The United Church of Canada and Pentecostals), and "good sermons" (from Lutherans and Presbyterians). Reflecting on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, she remarks that Lutherans have a good theology of local congregations, "but their theology to describe the cluster of congregations shepherded by a local bishop was less strong." The opposite prevails in the Roman Catholic Church, which has "a full theology of the local church as a cluster of congregations shepherded by a bishop, but very often [has] no adequate theology of the parish or congregations that make up the diocese" (19).

For O'Gara the most important gift that the Roman Catholic Church has to offer to its ecumenical partners is the papacy, as a symbol of the unity of the Church. At the same time she is aware of the problems that the papacy raises among non-Catholic Christians, and thus suggests that the papacy as currently conceived and exercised since Vatican I is not a suitable "gift" to be offered to the entire Church of Christ. The papacy is "a gift for the whole of Christ's church," but first "it needs repair" (22).

O'Gara attaches considerable importance to personal friendship among those engaged in long-term dialogue. In fact, friendships within one's own church communion and with colleagues in other church traditions is essential to ecumenical perseverance: "Friendship establishes the proper context of ecumenical dialogue, enhances understanding between dialogue partners, and nurtures the perseverance necessary for making progress" (29). Friendship, based on a common recognition that the dialogue partner is also a sincere and loving Christian, spills over into common prayer: "When we pray together without ceasing for the unity of the church, we stop listening to ourselves and we can hear God speaking," and "We also hear each other speaking" (24).

O'Gara has a very open vision of the church. She often speaks of particular Christian communities as "communions," reserving the word "church" to refer to the universal church, "a communion of communions" (17). The basis of the one church of Christ is not institutional adherence,

but rather faith and the universal significance of baptism; Catholics are thus in "real though not full communion with all those sharing the same faith and baptism in the one church of Christ" (16). O'Gara affirms the underlying unity of the church despite visible diversity and even division: "Unity is not uniformity," she reminds her readers; Christians must recognise "the diversity of Christian expressions that come from other churches" (9).

Obstacles on the path towards Christian unity can be overcome if ecumenical endeavours are motivated by a focus on truth, not primarily on confessional identity. "Ecumenical work today is a long-term enterprise," O'Gara advises, "and it demands survival tactics . . . ecumenical dialogue is a form of asceticism. It invites Christian scholars to enter into a process that may achieve no tangible success or rewards during their lifetime" (38).

She describes as "ascetic practices in ecumenism" such features as fasting from the Eucharist at each other's liturgies; the time-consuming study of the positions of other churches; embarrassment and frustration over the sins of one's own church communion—and those of the dialogue partner's communion—and the suspicions of members of their own church of the efforts of those involved in ecumenical work (35). In her ecumenical theology and activities over a period of 40 years, Margaret O'Gara represented a fresh, open, luminous, loving spirit, characterised by honesty, sincerity, and a positive outlook, always seeking what is true and best and highest in teachings of other churches, institutions, teachings and events, and always ready to overcome obstacles and move forward in the search for the unity of the one Church of Christ.

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Preaching as Poetry: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth in Every Sermon
Paul Scott Wilson. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014. Pp. 157.

The saying that a good sermon might consist of "three points and a poem" is a reminder that poetry and preaching have long been closely related. Indeed, since the so-called New Homiletic movement of the 1970s, scholars have explored how sermons can extend beyond a narration *about* a particular genre of literature to becoming an actual embodiment *of* the form.

Now, a generation later, "three points and a poem" is taking on new meaning. Homiletical work is emerging that seeks to delve deeply

into the post-modern tendencies of culture, and the post-Christendom reality of church.

In his latest book, *Preaching as Poetry: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth in Every Sermon,* Paul Scott Wilson summarizes his understanding of homiletics in this new context by suggesting that "preaching recently has moved away from heavy reliance on propositions and in the direction of story, and now it needs to be reconceived as a kind of poetry" (6). In a culture where sciences and math predominate, the volume explores the rich nuances of poetry from theological, biblical, theoretical, liturgical, practical, and, of course, homiletical perspectives. In doing so, one of North America's most respected teachers of preaching offers the church the gift of a new way of conceiving preaching as art, while taking seriously the context of a math culture in which art is often rendered.

This timely book seeks to address genuine concerns faced by every preacher today. As evidence of Wilson's desire to embrace homiletically the new post-modern reality, he stresses the need to replace what modernity viewed as certainty with a more fluid worldview. In the past, most homileticians suggested that sermons ought to take root in at least one classic Christian doctrine, such as atonement, justification, or the providence of God. Karl Barth, Daniel Migliore, Shirley Guthrie, and others led the development of classic doctrine in the twentieth century. Preachers relied on these classic doctrines to give credence to their sermons, and to help convey a strong sense of certainty. In his own signature work, *The Four Pages of the Sermon,* Wilson himself suggests that every sermon should have one doctrine as its foundation.

Now, in twenty-first century post-modern preaching, Wilson suggests that the values of beauty, goodness, and truth are a more helpful foundation, even as Wilson himself admits that the foundation is fluid and other values could just as easily have been chosen. This calls into question traditional understandings of the role of Christian theology—something with which not everyone will be comfortable. Nevertheless, challenging modern assumptions seems to be an important goal of the book.

Throughout this work, Wilson unpacks the term "theopoetic preaching." Various characteristics of theopoetic preaching, such as its reliance on relationship, imagination, diverse perspectives, and invitation, are developed as they pertain to the theory, act, and resulting spiritual practice of preaching rooted in the three values.

To uncover the practical aspects of beauty, goodness, and truth, Wilson chooses to highlight three significant portions of the Christian story that he believes have enduring value in post-modern preaching:

Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. While it is clear that these key seasons have been foundational to the modern understanding of Christianity, this reviewer wonders if the same can be said for postmodernism. Certainly Christmas is on the post-modern cultural radar, even if Christ is mostly absent. Easter may still make a showing in the form of chocolate bunnies and spring flowers. But one wonders if Pentecost has any traction at all outside the church. Wilson does stress that modernism in the Christian mainline context tended to diminish expressions of the Holy Spirit, but a subsequent emphasis on "Pentecost" as an attempt to compensate might inadvertently hearken back to homiletical modernism.

Perhaps the greatest strength of *Preaching as Poetry* is the success with which Wilson achieves a balance between practicality and theology. In short, he skilfully and succinctly accomplishes a number of varying tasks at once. The book itself poetically offers fresh images and metaphors to weave together post-modern understandings of his chosen values of beauty, goodness, and truth with contemporary homiletical theory and, perhaps most importantly, how theology and theory lead to Christian practice. Additionally, a healthy dose of unique liturgical theology is sprinkled throughout the volume. For example, Wilson challenges some of the routine practices of the church in worship, such as the age-old Easter greeting "Christ is risen," and how, for the present generation, such practices have lost much of their meaning (92-93).

Preaching as Poetry is the inaugural volume in Abingdon Press's new "Artistry of Preaching" series. At the same time it may well prove to be a landmark book in the homiletical literature in helping to hasten the shift from preaching in the modern context to preaching in the postmodern reality.

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Belief beyond Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious

Linda A. Mercadante. Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 336.

I started to have doubts about organized religion when a camp counsellor told me there would be no baseball in heaven. In my eight-year-old mind, the beauty of heaven was that, with God's glory providing 24/7 daylight, my sandlot ball games would never have to be called on account of darkness. With baseball out of the picture, I was stymied. "Then what are

we going to do?" I asked. "Sing hymns of praise to God," was the reply.

Thus began my long slide away from the church. Eventually I found my way back, but for a long time, I was one of the "Nones"—those who, when asked to name their religious affiliation, check the box labelled "None." Many in that group now identify themselves in a more positive light as being "spiritual but not religious." So commonplace is this phrase that it has its own acronym: SBNR.

In *Belief Beyond Borders*, Linda Mercadante—herself a former SBNR and now a Presbyterian minister and Professor of Historical Theology at Methodist Theological School in Ohio—analyzes the stories she heard during 105 in-depth interviews with men and women who identify themselves as SBNR. Her work, she writes, is qualitative rather than quantitative—she relies on others' research for hard data. And she admits that the interviewees are a "non-random" sampling of the SBNR population. Everywhere she went, she asked for volunteers who call themselves SBNR and who were willing to sit down for a one-to-two-hour interview, which was based on four questions: (1) Is there anything larger than myself, any sacred or transcendent dimension, any higher Power? (2) What does it mean to be human? (3) Is spiritual growth primarily a solitary process or is it done with others? (4) What will happen to me, if anything, after death?

Although her work focuses primarily on belief (and unbelief) in the United States, Mercadante says that forays into Canada and Scotland demonstrate that SBNR thinking is widespread. Indeed, "Nones" now comprise the world's third largest "religion."

Overall, she finds that the SBNR fit into remarkably few categories. She identifies them by generation (Great Generation, Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millenials) and by type (Dissenters, Casuals, Explorers, Seekers, and Immigrants [an unfortunate term for those who recently adopted a new spiritual homeland]). Very few of the interviewees identified with the term "New Age," which was most associated with spiritual dilettantes.

While admitting that her interviewees self-selected for thoughtfulness (having volunteered to talk about their thoughts for at least an hour), Mercadante was still impressed by the seriousness with which they tackled the questions. Although their spiritual beliefs were sometimes contradictory and occasionally shallow, they were sincerely held. A prominent theme of the book is that theology—typically thought to be uninteresting to the SBNR—often plays a decisive role both in the interviewees' rejection of religion and their development of a meaningful spirituality.

Among the theologies rejected by the SBNR: an angry, judgmental, "guy-in-the-sky" God; notions of eternal reward or punishment; church/temple/synagogue hierarchies; anything at odds with science; and any claim of exclusive truth. Interviewees were apt to support their arguments by citing fundamentalist beliefs and superficially understood dogmas. No surprises there.

The value of Mercadante's work lies in her descriptions of what the SBNR do believe. In short: all religions are basically the same (making it acceptable to borrow ideas or practices from them all); karma (if you get cancer, it's because of something you did); reincarnation (endless spiritual progress); a desire to experience what Mercadante calls Ultimate Reality; the therapeutic power of "divine energy" (healing, not holiness, is the goal); and especially, a relocation of spiritual authority from the external (church leaders and teachings) to the internal (spirituality is personal and no one but I can say what works for me). Fascinating.

What does it all mean? It's too early to tell, says Mercadante. We could be witnessing the end of organized religion. Or perhaps we are in the midst of a great spiritual awakening that will move religion in an entirely new direction. If so, *Belief beyond Borders* gives us a valuable early look at the emerging spirituality.

Unfortunately, the book itself is a bit choppy and repetitious, reading as if the chapters were written one at a time, with long breaks between. Occasionally she even uses the same quote from the same person to make the same point in different chapters, as if she forgot she had already done so. But it is remarkable to hear from the SBNR themselves. And also to know that, according to their philosophy, if I say there's baseball in heaven, then there is.

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Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling, and Community
Leah Kostamo. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. Pp. 152.

Planted is part memoir, part handbook, part call to action. This delightful little book chronicles the establishment of the first Canadian *A Rocha* environmental centre, in the Little Campbell River Watershed, in Surrey, British Columbia. *A Rocha* is an international Christian environmental conservation organization. Its centres seek to combine conservation work, hands-on education, and sustainable agriculture projects, all rooted in and supported by biblical faith.

The organization was started by Peter and Miranda Harris, in Portugal, in 1982. The seeds for *Planted* were sown when the Harrises took a year-long sabbatical in 1996, part of which was spent teaching at Regent College in Vancouver. That's when and where, by her own admission, Leah Kostamo fell "hopelessly in love" with Peter and Miranda, and their "thorough integration of belief and life" (9). What began in that class is the backdrop for *Planted,* the story of *A Rocha* in Canada, beginning with early days when hope was far and away their most abundant resource, to the current centre in Surrey. There faithful scientists, students, seminarians, staff, and volunteers tend to the Little Campbell River and its surrounding habitat, conducting studies, all manner of conservation work, growing vegetables for a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) project, and striving to live, eat, and work together sustainably and hopefully. All of their work is rooted in the belief that they are called, as Christians, to co-operate with God in "making all things new" (56). However, more than just a story of an organization, *Planted* journeys with Leah, her husband Markuu, and a varied group of like-minded supporters and friends as they seek their own integration of theology, vocation, and daily life.

To that end, form follows function in Kostamo's writing. With grace and charm, easy humor and keen insight, she weaves together stories of perseverance and providence, of community life and scientific wonder, of biblical truths and empirical data, often shifting from one to another without a pause. Throughout *Planted*, there is a kind of willful, even playful, disregard for categories—a witness to the inter-connectedness of all things that *A Rocha* seeks to highlight through education, and foster in its communities.

Scattered among the stories and statistics are simple, often amusing, illustrations that complement the tone of *Planted*. There is an unassuming quality to the book that seems to mirror both the author (who is often cheerfully self-deprecating) and the mixed bag of characters (dreamers and disciples and scientists and everything in between) who have joined the *A Rocha* adventure of vocational creation care. This is one of the more refreshing things about this book: while the underlying message is a gritty, dirt-under-fingernails realism about the increasingly dire environmental state of things and the Christian responsibility to tend to God's good creation, there is not a moment of heavy-handedness. Instead, "convinced that matter matters to God, who created the stuff and even became the stuff, and calls us to steward the stuff on his behalf" (8), Kostamo offers a glimpse of a way of life that is infectious, a way of being that invites readers and witnesses to get a bit of dirt under our own

fingernails, to engage in "radical amazement" at the sheer gift and wonder of creation (130).

This is a particularly timely book, especially for the church. It is fair to say that more and more Christians are coming to realize that our faith, and the biblical witness that undergirds it, compel us to take seriously issues of environmental conservation, and acknowledge that our lifestyles and choices have an impact well beyond ourselves. In many church circles we have moved past *A Rocha*'s initial struggle to be recognized as a legitimate Christian ministry, when "the subtext of our name back then, *Christians in Conservation*, read like an oxymoron" (10). Yet many of us still find it difficult, if not impossible, to extricate ourselves from the cultural and spiritual influences that discourage, and even condemn, the kind of simple and humane living (119) that would make a difference in this broken and groaning world. Further, when it comes to matters of conservation and faithful living, often guilt—not radical amazement—is the motivator.

Avoiding both easy prescriptions and self-righteous moralism, *Planted* offers insight into what joyful, integrated living can look like. Amid doomsday forecasts about the catastrophic effects of rampant over-consumption and environmental disregard, Kostamo and her community invite us, in the words of Wendell Berry, to "be joyful though you've considered all the facts" (151). In the end, this unassuming book is not just a frolic with a band of idealistic, Jesus-following nature lovers, but a prophetic call into the wilderness, where we might share in the hope and promise of repentance and new life, in and for this world that God so loves.

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