Touchstone

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Faith and the Pandemic

Reviews

Editorial

Right address, wrong name

We apologize! As far as we know, all our subscribers received a copy of the October issue of *Touchstone*, but with someone else's name on it. It was a problem with the printing of the mailing labels which wasn't discovered until after the copies had all been sent. In future, we will double check to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Facing the Pandemic

A ministry student recently asked me how I thought the church had changed in the forty years since I was ordained. I replied, "I'm not sure the church has. The context in which the church exists has changed dramatically and the church has been reacting to those changes. But as for change at a fundamental level—I'm not sure it's happened."

Covid19 has been the most disruptive event that most of us have ever experienced. It has turbo-charged social and cultural changes that have been affecting the church for decades. Two themes devoted to the pandemic run through the contributions to this issue of *Touchstone*. First, while Covid may seem unprecedented, the church has dealt with many pandemics throughout history and has left us with a rich treasure of spiritual, ethical, and theological resources that can guide our responses. Second, this pandemic is unique in that we have access to communication technology unimagined even a few years ago. Our writers have approached the pandemic from different perspectives but all touch on these two themes.

Andrew Stirling draws on Martin Luther's conviction that Christ's redemptive suffering is the antidote to the power *Anfechtung*—spiritual attack—that appears in many guises and is a constant presence in Christian faith and the human condition. Covid has inflicted upon the world not only physical illness but isolation, disruption, loss, and, above all, grief. Andrew demonstrates how theology and pastoral response can be interwoven to offer the consolation of the Gospel in these times.

Tracy Trothen explores some of the ethical issues raised by the pandemic from a theological perspective. She offers insight into how "virtue-ethics" approach can help us respond to some of the "liminal zone" issues that are confronting us.

Mark and Chris Davis turn to biblical texts that have to do with breath—both the breath that is essential to human life and the *ruach* or *pneuma* of God. When a deadly airborne pathogen attacks our ability to breath, we are led to reflect on the theological meaning of spirit/breath.

Jean-Pierre Fortin explores how Covid has exacerbated growing trends of the postmodern, digitalized, atomised world. He argues that this

time when isolation is forced upon us can be an opportune moment to rediscover ancient traditions and practices of solitude, introspection and listening as a resource for fostering community and compassion.

Ben Jonathan Immanuel looks at the potential benefits to the church of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" of digital technology. The literature on the increasing dominance of virtual communication has tended to focus on its negative impacts on personal relationships. Ben suggests how the churches might take advantage of technology to foster new forms of community.

Karen Orlandi, in our "From The Heart" feature, reminds us that the effects of Covid are not evenly distributed. Drawing on her experience as an inner city minister, she gives us insight into what life has been like for the socially and economically disadvantaged people in our midst.

This issue is rounded out with a profile of Emily Spencer Kerby, a passionate and tireless 20th century advocate for women's empowerment in both the Methodist and United Churches. There is our usual selection of book reviews.

We cannot predict how Covid 19 will affect the ways in which we experience Christian faith, articulate our understanding of the triune God, or order our communities. There is no question, though, that those impacts will be far-reaching and long-lasting. I hope that these thoughtful contributions to the discussion will assist our readers in making sense of this once-in-a-century event.

Paul Miller

THE CHURCH IN LAMENT: THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE *DEUS ABSCONDITUS*

By Andrew Stirling

In the aftermath of the attacks in the United States of America on September 11, 2001, churches throughout the world gathered for prayer, reflection, comfort and the hearing of the Word of God. It was a time of immense trauma particularly for North America. Throughout the fears of uncertainty and the grief that accompanied it, however, people were able to worship and seek the spiritual comfort and solace of the Holy Spirit.[1]

Unlike that moment, the impact of the news of the Novel Corona Virus 19 (Covid-19) that swept the world in the late winter of 2020, had the opposite effect. Rather than gathering to seek spiritual nourishment through worship and fellowship, people were forced to move into isolation and places of worship were closed. The collective retrenchment that occurred in society left everyone feeling frightened, confused and alone. I want to look, therefore, at the spiritual impact of the paucity of in-person worship and the sense of isolation that continues to affect the church and its ministry. I also want to examine what the church can do as we go forward to address the spiritual hunger that is evident in the lives of so many people. To create a structure for our analysis, I am drawing on Martin Luther's concept of *Anfechtung* (*tentatio*) that appears in his Heidelburg Disputation (1518) Theses 17 and 21. According to Alister McGrath, "For Luther, death, the devil, the world, and Hell combine in a terrifying assault upon man [sic], reducing him to a state of doubt and despair".[2] *Anfechtung* is, therefore, a spiritual attack characterized by tribulation, struggle and despair.[3] It was that reality that initially caused Luther to see God as angry and pernicious and, as a result, he spent hours confessing his sins and hating God. Despite this overwhelming feeling and a growing belief in the *Deus absconditus*, on the advice of friends, Luther turned to Scripture and found there, "a faith that cannot rely on abstraction but on the concreteness of the incarnation".[4]

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[1] An example of sermons preached during this time is seen in Donald Elton and Aura Elton, *First Sunday. Spiritual Responses to the 9-11 Attacks* (Charleston: FirstSundayBooks 2011).

[2] Rob Clements and Dennis Ngien, eds., *Between the Lectern and the Pulpit: Essays in Honour of Victor A. Shepherd* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2014) 147.

[3] For a complete overview see, Mark Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) 731-732.

[4] Andrew Stirling, "Hearing the Word of God in an Age of Idols*,"* in Clements

For Luther, it was in rediscovering the impact of the cross of Jesus Christ where he found not only solace, but the victory of God. While reflecting on the cross in the *Heidelburg Disputation,* he concludes, "It is impossible to trust in God unless one has despaired in all creatures and knows that nothing can profit one without God."[5] God's redemptive suffering for humanity on the cross is not only the antidote to the power of *Anfechtung*, it is also the ultimate expression of the *Deus revelatus*.

How then do we deal with the sense of *Anfechtung* today and in what forms does it manifest itself in our time? Firstly we need to look at the tribulation that has occurred as a result of Covid-19. Despite the fact that the vast majority of those who have contracted the virus survive, albeit for some with long-lasting effects, many have died as result of the viral attack. The global death count rises steadily and humanity lives with this virus like the sword of Damocles hovering over its head. Many churches have adjusted to the reality that church members have died as a result of Covid-19 and have developed new liturgical formats to deal with the tragedy of these deaths.

The tribulation of grief

The spiritual impact of this collective grief, often exacerbated by the lack of formal religious rituals to deal with it, has been significant. The greatest impact has been loneliness. The sharing of the collective memories of the deceased, and the opportunity to mourn and lament the loss of an individual in a worship service, serves to provide a medium through which the Holy Spirit can speak a word of comfort to the gathered community. The opportunity to have true fellowship reminds those who grieve that they are not alone and reaffirms the conviction that God is present. In this sense, worship is an act of incarnational pastoral care. It is also true that the absence of ritual compounds the feeling of isolation and loneliness. In response to this loneliness, and because many church buildings have been closed and the usual funeral and memorial services have been suspended, new forms of burial services conducted outside needed to be created. As with prior plagues (541, 1347 and 1894 CE), religious rites and rituals had to adapt to the changing environment.

An example of this adaptation is what we at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church have called the "Covid-19 Burial". Essentially it is a hybrid service conducted at the graveside outdoors with a limited

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and Ngien, eds., *Essays*, 146.

[5] Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) 221.

attendance (as mandated by provincial public health rules). This service includes biblical readings, poems, short personal remarks by family members, prayers of comfort and an abbreviated homily. This is followed by the act of committal and the burial rite. While clearly not a replacement for the classic funeral/burial format, it has nevertheless proved to be profoundly comforting. It draws on the notion of lament (like Luther) but affirms the hope of the resurrection. While lacking the spiritual energy and dynamism of a regular memorial service, it has the charism of spiritual intimacy and the closeness that it engenders. In essence, the cemetery becomes the church. This is not unlike what happened in the 16th century when Luther asked, "Whether One May Flee from the Deadly Plague."[6] Luther argued that Christians have a biblically mandated duty to preserve life, but also a divine calling to serve others. He also said that a manifestation of that care makes the cemetery an importance place, "A cemetery rightfully ought to be a fine quiet place, removed from all other localities, to which one can go and reverently meditate upon death, the Last Judgement, the resurrection, and say one's prayers."[7]

The formal recognition of death, however, is only one aspect of addressing loneliness and isolation. There has also been the pastoral imperative. The restrictions on meeting in person, or exercising the method of visitation has compounded the fear that many have felt. Ministering to people is truly incarnational and involves bodily presence and the appropriate use of tactile gestures of touch such as the ritual of the laying on of hands and the anointing of oil. The hug of comfort has also ceased to exist and the very act of going to see someone, which alone is appreciated as a gesture of caring, has evaporated. In many ways these restrictions have acted as a reminder that the ministry of presence is very important and reinforces many of the biblical moments where Jesus touched the outcast and provided healing to the suffering (Mk 1:40-45). However, it has also led to a greater appreciation of the ministry of the spoken word.

One of the more positive spiritual insights from this pandemic has been the realization that words of comfort have meaning and power. At times when Jesus spoke, people were healed and miracles were performed (Matt 8:5-13). The power of the spoken word, when emanating from a caring heart, can have the power to heal. Many churches have put in place a systemized calling ministry where both clergy and laity have phoned members of the congregation to maintain contact and to offer a caring ear.

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[6] Dennis Ngien, *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser* (Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2007), 114.

[7] *Ibid.,* 116.

Others have utilized trained lay pastoral care givers (such as Stephen Ministers)[8] who maintain a regular and ongoing relationship with a few people to whom they are assigned. These meetings have all been "virtual" in nature and have utilized either a phone call or a Zoom meeting. Regardless of the method, there has been a powerful ministry of presence through the spoken world. When people feel lonely or isolated they question whether they are being heard or whether they matter. Like the Psalmist in Psalm 130 they cry out with a spiritual sense of abandonment, "Out of the depths I cry out to you O Lord. Lord hear my prayer and let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." A call from the church can be an expression that the voice has been heard and is a reassurance that people are not alone.

The Covid-19 virus has also brought the issue of death and dying to the forefront. It is not only the possibility of one's own mortality that has seized people, it is also the ubiquitous images and statistics that speak of death. *Anfechtung* is most poignant when dealing with death, and during this pandemic three major trends have emerged. The first is the concern that the ubiquitous presence of death is a sign that God is pernicious. People are questioning the goodness of God. Luther experienced precisely this existential anguish. As Gwenfair Walter Adams points out, "Through *Anfechtung*en, the devil attempted to make the Christian think that God is an angry judge rather than a loving father."[9] Adams argues that this anxiety looms larger at the prospect of death. It was heightened in its impact with the presence of the Plague. Clearly this has been echoed in many circles today and has been the subject of numerous pastoral encounters. Likewise, a second trend has been the notion that God has been totally absent throughout this ordeal. At one point in his life Luther clearly felt the *Deus absconditus* and questioned, not the existence of God per se, but the presence of that God in human affairs. The third trend concerns God's judgement and whether the virus is inflicted upon humanity as a sign of God's punishment for its collective sins. I encounter this question a great deal, particularly (and this is almost ironic) by people who are outside the church and are not confessionally Christian. Furthermore, there is an almost secular apocalyptic idea that is seizing our culture that wonders whether this is a moment of revelation and that the end of the world is imminent. This feeling, however, is being somewhat mitigated by the

[8] See *www.stephenministries.org* for more about their training procedures and theology of ministry.

[9] Mark A. Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther,* 731.

promise of the perceived panacea of a vaccine. In combination, these trends paint a picture of a spiritual crisis that needs to be addressed.

The relief from worship, the word of God and the *theologia crucis*

Anfechtung has run rampant during Covid-19, but the word of God has still been heard and its impact has been significant. Preaching as a response to the distress and dystopia of our time has had to include the concept of lament as a way of ministering to the spiritual questioning of our age. As a homiletical genre, lament brings the word of God alive in the church in a time of distress. This was pointed out by Paul Scott Wilson:

> Lament is best used as complaint addressed to God that finds some divine response by the end of the sermon. It gives voice to the sorrow that is in our hearts and God's and allows the word to illuminate especially those places of deepest suffering and need.[10]

At the heart of this proclamation, however, is the central place of the crucified Christ. This was the core of Luther's response to *Anfechtung* where the believer should approach God, "not through His triumphant glory, but rather through the suffering of Christ."[11] This is echoed in current homiletical writing that stresses the intermingling of God's tears with those of suffering people.[12] The cross is preached as the nexus of human weakness and the redemptive sacrifice of God in Christ. For Luther, it is precisely in the self-giving love of Christ where God's complete revelation is found. Rather than being the absent God of abstract thought, God is concretely present for a suffering humanity on the cross.

The word of hope found in the resurrection also includes lament. The first time I had to preach an Easter Sunday sermon after the first Covid-19 shutdown, I began the sermon by saying, "I miss you."[13] Even though the message was one of the hope of the resurrection of the crucified Christ and the victory of God, the lament and the sense of loss felt by the

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[10] Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire: Putting God at the Center of the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) 137.

[11] M. Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, 732.

[12] An example of such work is found in Sally E. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *Lament: Reclaiming the Practices of the Pulpit, Pew and Public Square* (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2005).

[13] Andrew Stirling, *Three Words From the Heart. www.temc.ca*; Internet: accessed April 12, 2020.

preacher, the ministerial team and all congregants had to be addressed. The Gospel is not spoken in a vacuum, but in a context of deep experience. It also illustrates the profound spiritual impact of the pandemic on clergy and those in paid accountable ministry. The isolation in preaching to an empty church or delivering a sermon from a living room, along with the complete absence of spiritual energy that finds its core in the gathered community, has been profoundly difficult for preachers. In addition, the lack of immediate response has caused many ministerial colleagues to question the validity of their sermons. Nevertheless, in many churches the creative presentation of sermons through various other forms of media (livestream, recorded messages, Facebook, radio) has had a positive effect of bringing the word of God into places that were hitherto not seen. Many congregations find that their virtual membership exceeds the number of worshippers in attendance in church prior to the pandemic. This should be a source of celebration.

Lament has not been limited, however, to the impact of the pandemic. Throughout the past year there have been profound social issues that have required a homiletical response. Systemic racism has been highlighted because of tragic and unjust incidents, and sermons of lament have dealt with the *Anfechtungen* of racial suffering. As William Morrow suggests, "Prayers of lament are cries for Justice. Complaint prayer assumes that divine providence is always potential but not always realized. For God has not eliminated chaos but eliminated it by thrusting it to the margins of the created order."[14] He argues that these prayers form the basis of proclamation in times of crisis and not only address the underlying social and spiritual depravity of the human condition, but also communicate, "the church's solidarity with those who suffer."[15] It is precisely in expressing outrage at these sources of injustice that the Word of God has been heard and has helped the victims of violence and discrimination know that they are not alone in their struggle. Preaching that has included petitions for the sufferers has been meaningful, especially if the Risen Christ is seen to be active in the midst of these events.

The absence of tangible and incarnational aspects of ministry has also had a deep impact on the administration of the sacraments. Luther argued that the sacraments should be offered during the pandemic of his day, but in our context, this has not always been possible or allowed. There has been much debate about the appropriateness and theological validity

[14] William Morrow, "Laments" in *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching,* ed. Paul Scott Wilson *(*Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) 85.

[15] Ibid., 86.

of offering sacraments by virtual means. The arguments have ranged from affirming the ubiquity of Christ[16] that supports the validity of online communion being offered, to the position that this is a time of waiting before the church can share the sacraments until the community can gather again in person[17]. In certain congregations who operate within a non-conformist ecclesiastical tradition, it has been the lay leaders in consultation with the clergy who have made the ultimate decision on these matters. The choice has not simply been binary, as creative forms of serving communion within small gatherings outside of the church have also been employed. Regardless of the decision, the fact still remains that there is a sense of spiritual loss for churches. The gathered community cannot express in the usual way the physical and incarnational sharing of the sacrament. Words are powerful and can be supported by visual images which the Holy Spirit can still use, but the social dimension of offering, sharing and distributing elements at the same time and the fellowship with other believers that accompanies it, cannot be duplicated virtually. In a sense, the church is forced to bear the cross of not having everything it wants, but nevertheless seeks ways to affirm Christ's presence regardless of the constraints.

A final positive thought

The church in this pandemic time must continue to fight against the temptation to become overwrought by the situation it faces. Luther, "believed that God could redeem the suffering of *Anfechtungen*"[18] by revealing the loving heart that beats within the *Deus absconditus.* All Christians should be invited not to focus on the painful thoughts and disappointments of ecclesiastical life, but rather take the step of gazing on the cross and seeing there, not only the suffering of God for us, but also the victory of Christ who leads us into God's future. This, it seems to me, is the spiritual path we must now follow.

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[16] Rob Fennell, "*Filling my soul in a time of despair": Can Communion truly happen online?* ; Internet: Accessed November 12, 2020.

[17] Dirk G. Lange, *Digital Worship and Sacramental Life in a Time of Pandemic, https://www.lutheranworld.org/blog/digital-worship-and-sacramental-life-time-pandemic*; Internet: *Accessed November 20, 2020.*

[18] M. Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, 732.

PANDEMIC THEO-ETHICS: A LIMINAL ZONE
by Tracy J. Trothen

In this paper, I identify a selection of biomedical and social ethics issues relevant to the pandemic through a Christian theo-ethical lens. I find a virtue ethics approach very helpful in considering the relevance of Christian faith to the pandemic. Virtue ethics is concerned with who and how we are in the world. Virtue ethics asks what sort of person I wish to be and whether I am acting in a way that is consistent with that person. In this ethics approach, the values we hold are believed to be connected to our choices and behaviours: "[v]alues pertain to beliefs and attitudes that provide direction to everyday living."[1] For Christians and others, these beliefs and attitudes include care, compassion, justice, relationality, prudence, and more; in short, virtuous Christians will aim to emulate Jesus, however imperfectly we may succeed.

I do not cover the wide spectrum of possible ethical issues in this short article. I will introduce a few issues that are front and centre. My intent is to generate more conversation, and debate, and encourage more deliberate conversation in the public square about Christianity and Covid-19.

While teaching my undergraduate course on religion and biomedical ethics in February 2020,[2] the novel coronavirus began to make the news. Coincidentally, at the time, we were discussing vaccinations and religion. We looked at the case of a religious leader who swayed his congregation against vaccines on the basis that vaccines could be harmful.[3] While the prioritization of life and well-being is very justifiable, there are many questions around who gets to decide what constitutes harmful consequences that outweigh good consequences, and how religion relates.

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[1] Gerald Corey, Marianne Schneider Corey and Patrick Callanan, *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions*. 9th edition (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole/Thomson Learning, 2014), 14.

[2] I also thank my graduate students in the MSc in aging and health (through the Queen's School of Rehabilitation Therapy), who posted their thoughts on ethics and the pandemic. I have drawn on their wise reflections throughout this article. A big thank you also goes out to my colleagues in the Canadian Council of Churches' Faith and Life Sciences Reference Group. Thanks also to Marie Miller and Calvin Mercer who each reviewed a draft of this essay. Good ethics is consultative!

[3] Peter Kahn, "Bioethics, Religion, and Public Policy: Intersections, Interactions, and Solutions," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55/5 (2016): 1546-1560.

Religious leaders carry power and can be influential voices in the public square.

The students brainstormed ethical issues that might come with the spread of the novel coronavirus. Quickly, they linked biomedical to social ethical issues. While it is important to consider the traditional four bioethics principles (the duties to do good, avoid harm, respect persons, and promote just access to and allocation of resources), an exclusive principilist focus may lose sight of other principles outside of the four, and may not adequately address multi-dimensional systemic bias such as racialization, sexism, classism, or ageism.[4] I stressed the connections between biomedical and social ethics, and the need to examine what makes a response virtuous.

For example, how we see diverse bodies is influenced by our values and biases. Many students in my class were particularly concerned about the harassment of Asian-appearing students. As we moved into March, my students reported more such incidents of abuse. The destructive message was that "they" had brought Covid-19 to the world, Canada, and the university campus. This ingroup/outgroup thinking scapegoats and amplifies systemic racialization, including prejudice. As my colleague, Dr. Shobhana Xavier, put it, the disease becomes personified; the virus is condemned along with those stereotyped as bringing and even being the disease. Religious groups have a particular responsibility to speak out against the devaluing and even vilifying of particular lives.

Two other overarching ethical issues are in play, in addition to religious persecution, racialization and other systemic power imbalances: First, the tension between rights and responsibilities; and second, the interconnection and interdependence of all life. From a covenantal theology perspective, Christian creation stories are clear that we were created to need each other, the earth, and God. This mutual dependence is not accidental. Interdependence, from a Christian perspective, is a virtue, on balance not a detriment, despite potential harms (including a pandemic) that are associated with this connectedness.[5]

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[4] Martha Holstein, J. Parks, and M. Waymack, *Ethics, Aging, & Society: The Critical Turn* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2011).

[5] Tracy J. Trothen, "Christian Anthropology: Doing Good Through Science and Technology," in *Technology and the Image of God: A Canadian Conversation* (Canadian Council of Churches, Faith and Life Science Reference Group, 2017), 15-25.

Some Ethical Issues:

Masking and Vaxxing: Faith and Public Health Regulations

Some conservative evangelical Christian communities have gathered to worship in defiance of public health regulations. Some have also refused to "mask." (Yes, we now have a pandemic lexicon.)

Particularly in areas of the United States, the issue is framed as religion versus science. You believe in one or the other, but not both. In Canada's version, some Christian communities may accept science and "believe" that masking, physical distancing, and hand washing are needed to "flatten the curve," but nonetheless insist on gathering physically for worship. Some religious leaders seem to prioritize individual rights at the expense of social responsibility, insisting that any restriction on my right to gather to worship is unconstitutional and takes away my freedom.[6] Others may believe that God will protect them if they have faith. I also suspect that standing up to the consequences of fines, media attention, and other forms of persecution may add to a righteous sense of martyrdom and sacrifice for God. For others, it may be more a matter of Covid fatigue (another new term in our pandemic lexicon) and wanting to go to church as one would normally.

Many Christian communities have opted to remain closed, even when public health requirements have loosened, out of a concern for community health. Some clergy, like United Church minister Rev. Beth Heyward in British Columbia, have publicly supported public health regulations on TV.[7] Faith communities, other than Christian congregations, also have promoted public health measures. For example, the annual Muslim Hajj was restricted to only 1,000 pilgrims and physical distancing, with no confirmed Covid-19 cases arising from the religious event.

Anti- versus pro-masking reactions likely reflect theological and social tension between rights and responsibilities, and we will probably see this tension played out again with the availability of vaccines. While individual rights and dignity are a significant aspect of a creation theology, this is not the whole story. A covenantal faith prioritizes the well-being of others, even at the cost of worshipping in the way that one deeply desires. The biblical mandate to stand with the least and prioritize the well-being

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[6] Carrie Tait, "Alberta churches file legal challenge of COVID-19 restrictions," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 December 2020. *https://apple.news/AE6hBmBOuTAO72PVEyjA*.

[7] CBC TV interview, 29 November 2020.

of those on the margins is not easy. Figuring out how to creatively love self, others, and God while lamenting the costs of this pandemic, including the loss of in-person worship and gathering at funerals and weddings, is an ethical imperative if we are to live through this as virtuously as possible.

Communication

Good ethics begins with good facts, but in a Trumpian age of fake news, facts have become discredited. Claims of empirical truth can be met with outright denial or the dismissive rejoinder "that's your opinion." Our understanding of truth and facts is always provisional; more studies may yield additional or even unexpected information. Science evolves with work and time. That does not mean that current facts are not real. Entwined with the fake news dynamic has been the politicizing of the pandemic. A public health crisis has been twisted into a partisan struggle. Fortunately, in Canada there is less of that messaging, but we do spend significant energy on blaming political parties and figures for the pandemic and the social and fiscal consequences of the pandemic. A lack of consistency between levels of government also can negatively affects communication and transparency.

Ethicist Bryan Kibbe argues that the two main ethical obligations we have during a disaster are "to prioritize and carry out planning for disasters, and . . . to ensure effective communication and a commitment to collaboration between all those involved in responding to a disaster."[8] Communication affects everyone and especially the most vulnerable, including older adults in long-term care and healthcare professionals. As Christian ethicist Karen Lebacqz wisely stated, "disempowerment begins with failures of communication."[9] For example, when people are not informed about Covid-19 cases in their place of residence, a sense of powerlessness is cultivated, bringing increased uncertainty and fear. If we begin with an awareness of our interdependence, we may be more inclined to empathy, and empathy can help us make better decisions about the Information we gather and disburse. More information may

[8] Bryan Kibbe, "Disasters and the Elderly" (Chapter 13) in *Ethics, Aging, & Society: The Critical Turn*, edited by M. Holstein, J. Parks, and M. Waymack, pp. 255-279 (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2011), 263.

[9] Karen Lebacqz, "Empowerment in the Clinical Setting" in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*" 3rd edition, edited by M. Theresa Lysaught and Joseph J. Kotva (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 314.

also lead to more effective ways of responding to Covid-19. Many institutions have worked hard at developing policies and communicating them clearly, and this has paid off by keeping people as safe as possible.

While many people have been operating primarily out of care and have been prioritizing collective well-being, others may be driven by values such as competitiveness and greed. It does not play well in the media to have a Covid outbreak. An outbreak may affect future profit. These interests damage communication and honest sharing of facts. Widespread repugnance for dependence adds to the dynamic—it is too easy to think that if I do not live in long-term care, then Covid outbreaks will not affect me.[10] Such thinking is grossly insensitive, and much less correct. The consequences filter out to the whole.

Uneven digital and health literacy skills and problematic access to communication technology further hamper good communication in this pandemic. Much of the access issue is along lines of systemic disadvantage, which is of great concern from a Christian perspective. Many rural residents have neither access to adequate bandwidth nor reasonably priced internet service. If you are an older adult in a rural area, you are doubly compromised. In 2010, only 12 percent of older adults had adequate health literacy skills, which are needed for making basic health-related decisions.[11] Compounding this disadvantage, many older adults also have reduced incomes, decreased social contacts, and various comorbidities, making it increasingly difficult for them to access health care providers or health information during a time when they might need it the most.

Access to Healthcare: Limited Resources and Global Interdependence

Who will forget the run on toilet paper at the beginning of the pandemic? Or the disappearing bread yeast and pasta off the grocery store shelves? A pandemic makes us more aware of the things we think we need to survive. This awareness and fear can make us self-centered, less generous towards others. With limited resources, often our gut instinct is to look after ourselves, even if it means others may suffer.

Limited resources are available, and decisions around the just

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[10] George Agich, "Ethical Issues in Long Term Care" in *Bioethics in a Changing World*, edited by J. Parks and V. Wike, pp. 604-611 (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Pearson Education, Inc, 2010).

[11] The Public Health Agency of Canada (2010), as cited in the National Seniors Strategy (National Institute on Aging, 2020), 65.

distribution and access to these resources are thorny. Who gets priority to complex care in the hospital? How do we distribute personal protective equipment when it becomes scarce? Who should get a ventilator if there are not enough? Who gets vaccinated first? Who gets financial support and how much?

The morality of rationing has justifiably gained much attention. As we have seen, we can run out of life-sustaining or life-protecting resources. We have to decide who gets vaccines first. Ventilators have sometimes been in short supply, and patients have had to wait for the preferred treatment, or not received it at all. How do we judge the value of a life? As Christians we must ask how we think Jesus would judge the value of a life. Sometimes we must make these hard decisions. One criterion is the question: who has the greater chance of recovering if they receive the scarce medical intervention? This criterion need not be based on preformed valuations of certain groups in terms of ageism or racism. Nonetheless, it is not always clear who has the better chance medically.

Advance planning and sharing of resources such as equipment, medicine, and expertise are creative ways to address rationing crises. What are our responsibilities to people in other countries who are not Canadian? Is medicine really only designed for countries and people who have the needed money? As philosopher Ruth Fadan of Johns Hopkins University observed back in 2007: "It is reasonable to expect that the health, economic, and social burdens of a pandemic . . . will fall disproportionately on the poorest countries of the world and on the poor and otherwise systematically disadvantaged within the world's rich countries."[12] Not surprisingly, the richest countries "are first in line" to receive Covid-19 vaccines[13] and have greater access to healthcare and life-sustaining resources such as clean water for hand washing and drinking.

Within Canada, a disproportionate number of people of colour have died of Covid-19. A glaring example is the migrant workers in

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[12] Ruth Faden, "Social Justice and Pandemic Planning and Response" in "Ethical and Legal Considerations in Mitigating Pandemic Disease: Workshop Summary," The Institute of Medicine (US) Forum on Microbial Threats (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2007). *https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK54169/*. This document provides a robust discussion of the ethics of rationing during a pandemic.

[13] James Paton, "When It Comes to Covid Shots, Rich Nations Are First In Line" *Bloomberg* (2 August 2020). *https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-02/when-it-comes-to-covid-vaccines-rich-nations-are-first-in-line*.

Essex, Ontario. A study released at the end of October 2020, by the Public Health Agency of Canada, showed that Arab, Black, Middle Eastern, Latin American, South Asian and Southeast Asian Canadians accounted for over 80 percent of the Toronto Covid cases.[14]

The preferential option for the poor, championed by liberation theologians, and the conviction that all life was created purposely as interdependent, make attention to the most vulnerable a moral imperative. Who is my neighbour? Instead of hoarding, we are called to share and empower. Our interdependence cuts many ways. Interdependence can cultivate evil if we allow fear and self-centredness to dominate. Interdependence can also cultivate solidarity with salvific ends.[15]

Well-being: Costs of Being "Safe"

We want to be safe from the virus. But well-being has to do with more than physical wellness. Pandemic isolation measures have been associated with a surge in domestic violence, opioid deaths (disproportionately affecting Indigenous people), mental health struggles, economic hardship, and general increased anxiety and stress. These costs have not been borne equally. Socially disadvantaged people, healthcare workers, and those working in other essential service jobs have been hit particularly hard, carrying disproportionate burdens. More Black and Hispanic children are suffering with lower standardized school test results since the onset of the pandemic.[16] These lower scores are associated with greater poverty.

We are experiencing greater economic and social vulnerability, as well as greater mental and spiritual health challenges. Hospitals have halted many visitations, although some have offered creative, caring alternatives. Hospital professionals have brought patients who are to receive medically assisted death (MAiD) outside to allow loved ones private goodbyes from their cars. Nonetheless, there are many heartbreaking stories of people separated from dying or anxious family

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[14]John Paul Tasker, "Opioid deaths skyrocket, mental health suffers due to pandemic restrictions, new federal report says" (CBC News, 29 October 2020*) https://apple.news/AlGeMfESQQ4ud1ww6VfbMhg.*

[15] See Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths – Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) for a wonderful analysis of evil and salvation in everyday life.

[16] Megan Kuhfeld, Beth Tarasawa, Angela Johnson, Erik Ruzek and Karyn Lewis, "Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth" (NWEA Research, Collaborative for Student Growth brief, November 2020) (*nwea.org*).

members. Family instability and anxiety, job loss and insecurity, and inadequate childcare are a part of the unfortunate mix.

Spiritual health has suffered as people feel torn from their community places of worship, especially for those unable to access or use the internet. Anecdotal reports abound of widespread increased need for spiritual care and support. Spiritual distress results from the loss of familiar rituals, such as funerals, weddings, the eucharist, and praying and singing together. While worship-by-Zoom has been important, not everyone can access Zoom and it is not the same as face-to-face. "Spirit tech" was on the increase even before the pandemic, which is only adding to this trend, the long-term impact of which is yet to be known.[17] Add to the losses due to increased use of—and inability to use—technology, are stories of congregations who have gathered defiantly only to have those gatherings become Covid-super-spreaders. We are living in a time of compounded losses and grief.

Unsurprisingly, in these difficult days many people are struggling with their core values. Compromising one's core values engenders moral distress, a significant ethical issue with serious consequences for those experiencing it. Moral distress happens in response to the compromising of our core values. The loss of moral integrity leads to frustration, anger, exhaustion, guilt, and feelings of powerlessness and isolation with no voice.[18] Healthcare staff who must implement the rules and see the suffering that the rules can cause can likewise be caught in a moral dilemma. They must act against the moral impulse to help people relationally in favour of regulations that protect physical life. Parents, who choose to have their children attend school or stay home, are often compromising one core value in favour of another. Pandemic-inspired moral distress abounds.

We have to weigh the costs of a pandemic as we make choices about how to respond, and many more costs are not mentioned here. We need to protect those who carry disproportionate burdens. Healthcare professionals knowingly put themselves at increased risk, to provide

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[17] These trends are discussed at length in the 2021 forthcoming *Religion and the Technological Future: An Introduction to Biohacking, Artificial Intelligence, and Transhumanism*, by Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trothen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan). For more information, see *https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030623586*.

[18] For more on the concept of moral distress, see Mary K.D. Heilman and Tracy J. Trothen, "Conscientious Objection and Moral Distress: A Relational Ethics Case Study of MAiD in Canada" *British Medical Journal* (2019) 46/2: 123-127.

needed care, every day they go to work. Part of this extra protection, in theory, should be an increased following of public health measures by everyone. We are caught in a vicious circle. When we follow the measures diligently, we afford more protection to everyone against getting the virus. But following these measures can pose threats to other health dimensions including social, economic, and spiritual vulnerabilities. The dignity of all people is core to the Christian message. We need to protect the most vulnerable, prioritize public health measures, recognize that we are in this together, and get creative.

Hope in a Liminal Zone

Hope is an ethical, Christian, and Covid issue.

We are living in a liminal zone. We do not know what will happen before the vaccine gets widely distributed. We do not know how many or who will die, or how this pandemic time will affect us socially and economically in the long term. We have an opportunity to stand with each other, the earth, and become more deliberate about our values and what we believe.

We are in this together, like it or not. Christianity is a covenantal faith. Our interdependence is not by accident. Interdependence is part of being human and is a virtue not to be denied or decried. Covid-19 is not a time for blaming or scapegoating. Covid-19 is a time to confess our limitations and deep vulnerability. It is a time to stand together, prioritize the most vulnerable, and love one another. It is a time to grieve compounded losses and to lament broken and lost relationships. It is a time for solidarity and hope.

BREATHE ON ME, BREATH OF GOD: SPIRIT, BREATH, AND WIND DURING AN AIRBORNE PANDEMIC

by Christine Ruggle Davis and D. Mark Davis

Introduction

"[Jesus] breathed on them and said, 'Receive the holy breath'" (John 20:22). Over the last year, this moment from the evening of the first Easter has been transformed from a beloved gesture of empowerment and life to a scene that makes the skin crawl. At a time when wearing masks and maintaining a six-foot social distance have become the new realities for expressing care for one another, deliberately exhaling aerosols onto others could be construed as an act of assault. While Jesus' breath on the first Easter was an act of overcoming death, not spreading it, the immediate reaction one may have in reading this story during a novel Coronavirus pandemic invites us to consider how the experience of a global air-borne pandemic might help us to explore familiar texts and related theologies differently.

Students of the Bible with even a rudimentary understanding of Hebrew and Greek languages have often noted that the word *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek are polysemous, offering translators the choices of interpreting them as "wind," "spirit," or "breath." Exploring the multiple meanings of *ruach* and *pneuma* has often brought new light and possibilities to many biblical texts. The verse from John's Easter evening, translated in the first sentence of this essay above, is typically translated, "Jesus breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" We translated Jesus' words as "Receive the holy breath," which is equally possible semantically. The polysemy of *ruach* and *pneuma* discloses how multiple possibilities linguistically enable the reader to see multiple possibilities experientially.

In this essay, we will lean into the polysemy of *ruach* and *pneuma* and allow the experience of an airborne pandemic to challenge us to consider it more deeply. We will do so with reference to three biblical texts: A creation story in Genesis; the Pentecost story in the Acts of the Apostles; and a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. By pressing the polysemous nature of *ruach* and *pneuma* and keeping the experience of an airborne pandemic closely in view, we hope to do two things: Offer ways to think biblically and theologically about the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as bring out richer possibilities for hearing the biblical texts in light of the experience of the pandemic. In keeping with those twin foci, one of us is writing as a licensed massage therapist, whose

ministrations are predicated on the interplay between the mind, body, and spirit, as well as the interdependence of the respiratory system with all of the other processes that constitute life. The other writes as a pastor-theologian, who needles over the million little interpretive decisions that go into translating Scripture and discerning its meaning. Nowhere do our areas of interest intersect more powerfully than when we think together about the simple act of breathing as it relates to words that animate the Scriptures as the Word of God.

I. Breath and Life

"Then the Lord God formed the groundling from the dust of the ground and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life; and the groundling became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

The creation story of Genesis 2 connects the moment when God breathed into the groundling's nostrils and the pronouncement that the groundling is now a "living being."[1] We can begin, then, by honoring the ancient wisdom of how breath physically indicates the presence of life and holds significant symbolic power. Breathing is one of humanity's basic activities. Indeed, humans can survive days without food or water but only minutes without oxygen. Breathing or respiration involves both a taking in of needed oxygen (inspiration) and letting go of unneeded carbon dioxide (expiration). Our bodies brilliantly know how to adapt our changing needs for increased or decreased amounts of oxygen as we change our activities. Whether we are hiking in the mountains or sitting in a city park, our breathing rates adapt to our body's needs. Most amazingly, this complicated process primarily happens without our conscious awareness.

Inspiration literally means the "drawing in of breath" (oxygen). The air is warmed and filtered as it moves through the hairs and secretions of the mouth and nose then further filtered in the lungs. This oxygen eventually fuels all cells in the body. As much as the body needs the inhalation of oxygen, it also needs to eliminate carbon dioxide through the reverse process of expiration or exhalation. At rest most people breathe approximately 6 times per minute, without conscious control, using many muscles, both voluntary and involuntary. So, while breathing seems to be an involuntary act, it is more complicated than that.

To see how breathing can be more than just an involuntary way of

[1] The language of "groundling" is taken from the insightful descriptions of creation stories in William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

staying alive, we can look at "freedivers," ordinary people who have gradually expanded their lung capacity to hold their breath for up to 12 minutes. They are not super athletes; they have gradually optimized their lung capacity to be highly efficient at utilizing oxygen. As James Nestor describes it, "To them breathing wasn't an unconscious act; it wasn't something they just did. It was a force, a medicine, and a mechanism through which they could gain an almost superhuman power."[2] Freedivers demonstrate how breathing practices can be used to optimize lung function and orchestrate the overall wellbeing of the body.

That we breathe may be involuntary, but how we breathe can be consciously moderated. Breathing practices for thousands of years have been used to optimize health and bring spiritual awareness. Inhalation draws in oxygen, which fuels every cell in the body. Exhalation releases unneeded toxic gases from the body. The rhythm of respiration is the foundation of life, and the manner in which this "art" is exercised impacts every system in the body. By intentionally slowing this rhythm, the pulse and blood pressure and the entire nervous system can also be calmed. Spiritual practices such as yoga are built on the intentional use of the breath not just to calm the body but to experience the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. Hence, breathing can be a way of experiencing oneself as an integrated whole.

Long before science named inhalation and exhalation or distinguished between oxygen and carbon dioxide, the writers of the creation story perceived an inherent relationship between breathing and living. But that observation actually relies on other modes of thought and insight that can be traced to even earlier stages than the written texts themselves. One of those modes of thought that connects breathing and living is the whole presumption behind writing sacred texts. Many texts presume to know what God is thinking at any given moment. Some presume to record what God says even prior to the creation of ears to hear. The process of writing original theology—exploring the roots of life itself, speaking about that which lies beyond the verifiability of human senses, bringing the divine into human stories—are all acts of presumption, which faith traditions honour as more than mere products of imagination. In short, sacred writings are considered products of "inspiration." To declare the writings "inspired" is to say that God *breathed* life into the writing communities that produced them. Many liturgical practices around reading Scripture continue to acknowledge that words can be "the dead letter of the

[2] James Nestor, *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* (New York, Riverhead Books, 2020), xvii.

law" unless God breathes life into them.

A second connection between breathing and living that predates Biblical writings is perhaps less deliberate and more intuitive. Biblical writers can rely on the polysemous nature of words like *ruach* and *pneuma* because language allows them to. Somehow, in the development of Hebrew, Greek and many other languages including English, the relationship between breathing and spirit had already been inscribed into vocabulary. The writers of the first creation story did not have to stipulate that the word *ruach* could mean "spirit" or "breath." It was a possibility available to them as a result of how language evolved, a powerful example of intuition within ancient communities presciently affirming the close relationship between the act of breathing and the fact of living.

The experience of Covid-19, a deadly airborne pathogen that attacks the breathing activity of the lungs, enables us to appreciate the connection between breath and life in the creation story. But, there is a tragic side to this connection as well. If Covid-19 were water-borne one could trace the source and avoid it. If it were related to particular foods one could avoid the foods. One cannot avoid breathing. To make matters more challenging, one cannot engage in face-to-face community without sharing aerosols. And that leads us to another biblical text which the pandemic brings into new focus.

II. Breath and Community

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent breath and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. … All of them were filled with the holy breath and began to speak in other languages, as the breath gave them ability" (Acts 2:1-4).

The Pentecost story can be read and interpreted in a variety of ways. The Revised Common Lectionary of readings for worship, for example, presents the Pentecost story every year, but in each of the three-year cycle of readings it pairs that story with a different Old Testament story. Another way of exploring the Pentecost story is to read it in light of the polysemous nature of the word *pneuma*, which is repeated throughout the story. The translation of Acts 2:1-4 at the beginning of this section interprets each *pneuma*-related word as "breath." What happens when we read the Pentecost story to say that from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent *breath* that filled the house, or that all of them were filled with a holy *breath* and began to speak in other languages, as the *breath* gave them ability? That way of translating the word *pneuma* would bring the story of Acts 2 into much greater agreement with the story of

Jesus breathing on the disciples in the gospel of John that began this essay. But, more importantly, translating the *pneuma* terms as "breath" terms can offer some powerful reflections for the church, struggling to maintain its identity and witness during an airborne pandemic.

In the presence of an airborne pathogen, the act of breathing itself is dangerous to individuals and a threat to communities, as inhaling aerosols can cause illness and exhaling particles can infect others. Thus, respiration both sustains and threatens life. As such, the pandemic alters even the basic manner in which we breathe. Instinctively, fearful breathing is shallow. When anxious, people tend to hold their breath, trying to stay safely between the inhale and exhale, pausing for a moment of peace in the midst of anxiety. Ironically, shallow breathing weakens the lungs, making one more, not less, vulnerable to the pandemic. Taking the time to engage in a breathing practice where one becomes aware of and in better control of the act of breathing can strengthen the lungs. Likewise, a mask filters the air we inhale and exhale and makes it less of a risk to be near others, but the sensation of having a physical barrier impeding our breath can limit deep breaths, reducing the amount of oxygen available to the body.

Breathing is more than just what happens in the nose, mouth, and lungs. Another form of respiration occurs at a microscopic level. Cellular respiration is the exchange of gases between cell membranes, the process by which oxygen is delivered to cells throughout the body in exchange for carbon dioxide. In short, breathing is a process that takes place both externally, in the space of bodies gathered together, and internally throughout the body's cellular system.

The way that breathing takes place both in the body as a whole through the respiratory system and severally in each individual cell is a marvelous way of thinking about the holy breath that animates the church on Pentecost. However, the Pentecost story suggests that being community is to breathe together. But that is precisely what communities should not do during this pandemic. Hence, the church must ask some critical questions, the first of which is whether churches can even survive when the people are not able to gather. It is both a technological learning curve and a pastoral challenge. Some churches are well equipped to meet the technological challenges, while others are not. Some churches have an established network of organic, personal communication that sustains each of them when the need for care and feelings of anxiety are high. When churches are reliant on gathered worship to shape their life and community, the danger of breathing together raises unique challenges.

The lack of in person gatherings also raises questions about preaching. Preaching to the back of a smartphone is quite different than preaching to a live crowd. Is the difference because a live crowd of listeners boosts the ego, or does spirit-filled breathing together animate preaching? If preaching to a live congregation is more gratifying to the ego, the time of separation and virtual worship may provide an opportunity for preachers to recover the joy of preaching because of the content of the message alone. However, if what one misses is the genuine power of the spirit that is experienced as a congregation breathes together, then preachers may want to listen particularly to the Pentecost story as it appears in the Revised Common Lectionary in Year A, paired with a story from Numbers 11. In that odd story, Moses and most of Israel's elders are gathered on the mountain and the spirit of God fills them with the ability to prophesy. However, two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, are not gathered on the mountain, but are in the camp. They also begin to prophesy, startling the camp. It is a quirky story, but it shows how God's spirit can breathe power even into those who are apart from the gathered community. While the pandemic challenges many familiar ways of being the church, it also opens up new ways of being "filled with the holy breath."

III. Breathing and Creation

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the breath, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23).

In addition to the connection between "spirit" and "breath," another translation possibility for both *ruach* and *pneuma* is "wind." The customary translation of the Pentecost story says the Holy Spirit comes with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind. Likewise, in Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, God speaks to the prophet saying, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." While the connection of "breath" and "wind" is not terribly surprising, the connection of life-giving breath coming from the "four winds" takes that relationship farther than we typically think. Particularly, a relationship between a global phenomenon like the wind and our own breathing provides a way of seeing ourselves as part of the created order. Indeed, every time we breath, we are taking in or sending out some form of the dust that has been emanating throughout the universe since the Big Bang. As James Nestor put it, "To breathe is to absorb ourselves in what surrounds us, to take in little bits of life, understand them, and give pieces

of ourselves back out. Respiration is, at its core, reciprocation."[3] In the same way, when referring to the kind of breathing and groaning that a woman experiences before childbirth, Paul connects birthing and breathing, just as Ezekiel calls the "four winds" of the earth to bring life.

Paul's identification of "groaning" or "sighing" as a part of the birthing process provides the Christian church with a way of acknowledging the tragic nature of Covid-19. Groaning is a genuine response to a virus that has taken the life of more than a million persons prematurely. The separation that is needed to prevent even further infection adds pain on top of pain, as families and friends are unable to grieve in the ways that they've always known. One way that the church can be faithful during this time is to breathe by groaning faithfully.

But, Paul's identification of "groaning" with the birthing process means that the tragedy of the pandemic does not have to be the last word. This groaning of creation, fraught with pain and genuine danger, can give birth to new life. And as a people who came into being by means of a wind-swept Spirit, a people who can envision a valley of dry bones receiving the breath of life from the "four winds," the church is magnificently equipped to give voice to the possibility of new life. It is not automatic. Stillbirth is possible, so a successful birth can never be glibly assumed. But, by drawing on the imagery of the wind and its life-giving potency, the church can emerge from this pandemic with greater awareness of our place in the world and a stronger resolve to live with sensitivity toward the earth itself. And that lesson is imperative for the church because, when the immediate concern about Covid-19 itself wanes, the prospect of climate change looms large with many of the very same qualities, tragedies, and challenges.

Conclusion

The polysemous nature of *ruach* and *pneuma* provides much more than creative wordplay for clever exegetes. It discloses a wisdom in the biblical traditions throughout the years of the inherent connection between life itself, the spirit, breathing, and the winds of the earth. The Covid-19 pandemic provides a possibility for the church to find a way through this tragedy both groaning our pain and finding hope.

[3] Nestor, Ibid., 39.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AS COMPASSIONATE LISTENING: LEARNING TO BE HUMAN IN TIMES OF A PANDEMIC

By Jean-Pierre Fortin

> I am talking about a special dimension of inner discipline and experience, a certain integrity and fullness of personal development, which are not compatible with a purely external, alienated, busy-busy existence. … A certain depth of disciplined experience is a necessary ground for fruitful action. Without a more profound human understanding derived from exploration of the inner ground of human existence, love will tend to be superficial and deceptive.[1]

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly altered the lives of Canadians. Education and spiritual formation are no exception. New ways of assisting individuals to give expression to their professional/ministerial vocations had to be devised in a matter of days or weeks. With the sudden migration of educational experiences to the online environment, new light was shed on the relationship of North American culture and technology and its impact on the development of personal identity. The pandemic may have accelerated a process already underway: the virtualization of human identities and relationships with the help of advanced communication devices (such as smartphones). The present article explores the effects of the pandemic on the spiritual condition of North Americans in light of the use they make of technology. I maintain the readiness of North Americans to use remote modes of communication during the pandemic reveals a dependence on technology resulting from lack of competency and explicit unwillingness to engage in personal interaction. This assessment is followed by an invitation to (re)learn to be quiet and listen to oneself, others and creation, move from loneliness to solitude, re-enflesh human existence and learn to serve. The goal pursued is not to dispense with, but rather to determine how to make optimal use of technology to foster wholesome human development. Leading communication scholars and pastoral theologians will assist us in accomplishing these tasks.

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[1] Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 157-58.

Pandemic Effect

Let us begin by noting the momentous impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives. Tapas Kumar Koley and Monika Dhole succinctly summarize:

> Covid-19 has changed the way of life for millions of people across the globe. Social distancing, self-isolation, quarantine, curfew, travel bans and closures (of pubs, cinemas and malls) have completely disrupted social life. … Economic devastation is equally widespread. City lockdowns, curfews and the closure of shops and industries have resulted in widespread job losses. … In many countries which observed complete lockdown, economic activity came to a near halt.[2]

The enforcement of constraining public policies intended to lower the communal transmission rate of the new coronavirus by national and local governments led to the disruption of "normal" ways of living. The sphere of individual freedom was practically reduced to the home. Activities usually accomplished in the public realm had to be delayed or completed remotely. As Koley and Dhole further explain, people have been stuck at home in the cities under lockdown. Social events like marriages have been postponed; several families have been separated, even stranded; and people are not able to look after their sick relatives. There has been a radical shift in work practices, with many nonessential jobs witnessing a move to remote work overnight. Working from home is perhaps the new normal. Even students are attending their classes online.[3]

These significant unplanned changes to daily life and schedule detrimentally impacted the mental health of individuals and communities. Curtailed freedom, an unpredictable future and the inability to nurture significant relationships through in person interaction favoured more frequent and sustained experiences of negative emotional/mental states and behaviours. "People are worried about their own life and the lives of their loved ones. … Loss of sleep, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, family neglect, substance abuse and worsening existing health conditions are common all over. Overwhelming dread and panic have set in."[4] Counting for 70% of healthcare workers and the majority of those fighting

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[2] Tapas Kumar Koley and Monika Khole, *The Covid-19 Pandemic: The Deadly Coronavirus Outbreak* (London: Routledge, 2020), 106 and 114.

[3] Ibid., 111.

[4] Ibid., 106-07.

the virus on the frontlines—in addition to being the primary caregivers at home, women are especially at risk of contracting the disease and experiencing negative effects on their physical and mental health.[5] The practice of social distancing over several months particularly affects family dynamics. Heather Prime, Dillon T. Browne and Mark Wade observe that "the effects of extended isolation and home confinement inherent to the Covid-19 crisis are causing profound changes to family routines and rituals that are often taken for granted."[6] The disruption of longstanding habits and the accompanying reorganization of family space and time (following frequent changes in public health policy) subjects caregivers to "highly elevated levels of stress, their mental and emotional resources are drained, making the task of positive leadership in the family challenging, if not insurmountable."[7] As a result, the quality of relationships among family caregivers is itself detrimentally affected.[8]

In countries where significant disparities exist in the level of comfort and security enjoyed by citizens, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic can be even more impactful. "The pandemic," argues Katariina Mustasilta, "risks exacerbating inequalities and further burdening already vulnerable groups within conflict-affected societies."[9] The global scale of the crisis is made plain when the plight of migrant and poor populations is taken into consideration. These particular populations are subjected to dire living conditions, which render them more vulnerable to the virus. As David Hollenbach points out, many very poor and displaced people live in cramped informal settlements or camps that make social distancing impossible. They face malnutrition and other deprivations that make the virus more dangerous. They have minimal access to social services, including health care. Their access to reliable information about the disease

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[5] See Sana Malik and Khansa Naeem, *Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women: Health, Livelihoods and Domestic Violence* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2020), 2. *https://sdpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Covid19-impact-on-women-_8-May-2020.pdf*.

[6] Heather Prime, Dillon T. Browne and Mark Wade, "Risk and Resilience in Family Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *American Psychologist* 75, no. 5 (2020): 631-43, at 634.

[7] Ibid., 634.

[8] See ibid., 632.

[9] Katariina Mustasilta, *From Bad to Worse? The Impact(s) of COVID-19 on Conflict Dynamics*, Brief 13 (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2020), 2. *https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2013%20Covid%20and%20conflict.pdf.*

and its spread is limited. The plight of children and the threat of gender-based violence are particular concerns among the poor and displaced. Humanitarian efforts are being disrupted both by the effects of the disease on agency workers and by the political instability and economic consequences of the pandemic.[10] This reality, further claims Hollenbach, places on wealthy nations the moral duty "to provide assistance to those who are especially vulnerable."[11]

Communication Breakdown

In his recently released encyclical Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis concludes from the previous observations that the current human plight results from causes predating the Covid-19 pandemic. These causes reveal an endemic problem requiring a systemic response. "The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations, brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence."[12] Pope Francis perceives in the widespread rise of aggressive nationalism a new form of selfishness and neglect of others that promotes the globalization of individual interests at the expense of the common good.[13] The loss of common ideals and sense of purpose leads to social distancing and isolation. Trapped within walls they have built, individuals can no longer perceive the humanity they share with all human beings. As "the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading," a "global context dominated by uncertainty, disillusionment, fear of the future, and controlled by narrow economic interests" arose.[14] Human beings are no longer perceived as persons of infinite inalienable value worthy of sustained attention and care.[15]

Pope Francis finds a source of resilient hope in the millions of individuals who despite the raging pandemic put their lives at risk to provide essential services: "doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and

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[10] David Hollenbach, "The Most Endangered Victims of the COVID-19 Crisis: Strategies for Including the Poor and Refugees in the Global Common Good," *America* 222, no. 12 (2020): 32-35, at 33.

[11] Ibid., 34.

[12] Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), Encyclical Letter (3 October 2020, last accessed 15 December 2020, *http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.pdf),* § 33.

[13] See ibid., § 11-12.

[14] Ibid., § 29-30.

[15] See ibid., § 18.

supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, … volunteers."[16] As the Covid-19 pandemic took on global proportions, a renewed awareness of human interdependence emerged. To appreciate and nurture this regained sense of relationality, we need to consider the modalities under which humans communicate with one another. Today, technology operates as the *sine qua non* mediator of human interactions, significantly altering their form and quality. Sherry Turkle, professor at MIT, has studied the conversational skills of tech savvy university students and young professionals. "The first generation of children that grew up with smartphones is about to or has recently graduated from college. … Employers report that they come to work with unexpected phobias and anxieties. They don't know how to begin and end conversations. They have a hard time with eye contact. They say talking on the phone makes them anxious."[17] These young adults have little experience and skill in oral interaction, to which they eagerly substitute email exchange. More significantly, they cannot consider the perspectives of other individuals, which they do not understand.[18] Middle school teachers make similar observations in their classrooms; their students are ill equipped for face to face conversation.[19]

The real issue, according to Turkle, is that "online life [is] associated with a loss of empathy and a diminished capacity for self-reflection."[20] While the Internet and smartphones give access to quasi-infinite amounts of information and "the possibility of sharing our views with anyone in the world, [they] also can support information silos where we don't talk to anyone who doesn't agree with us."[21] Search engines (algorithms) are designed to present results likely to meet the expectations of users, who therefore find themselves "in a particular world that constrains [their] sense of what is out there and what is possible."[22] Similarly, social media adepts quickly discern what is deemed more "likeable" by their followers and adapt the identity and information they share accordingly. Technologically informed communicators can craft avatars interacting with others on their behalf to obtain acceptance and recognition from an audience conveniently kept at bay. The irony is that

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[16] Ibid., § 54.
[17] Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 28.
[18] See ibid., 259.
[19] See ibid., 162.
[20] Ibid., 41.
[21] Ibid., 50.
[22] Ibid., 307.

while connected individuals feel they have more control over their "connections," they themselves fall under the spell of being connected. The constant urge to look at their smartphones reduces the attention they can devote to something or someone else, including themselves.[23]

Split attention is the hallmark of the digital age. Whoever chooses to live in an "echo chamber" is never confronted by her limitations and cannot learn anything new. Turkle argues that the prevailing unwillingness to engage in face to face interaction triggers what she calls the "robotic moment," where humans prefer interacting with machines that simulate human behaviour over engaging other human beings. The problem with such interaction is that it does not involve actual conversation. Ersatz human interactions contribute to the formation of ersatz human identities.[24] Human beings become adept at performing superficial personas instead of forging their own embodied personal identity. Time is not seen as an opportunity and medium in which the person can learn to relate to herself and explore her inner world, but rather a commodity to use efficiently. Being connected enables self-avoidance and instrumental use of time and others.

When Speech Precludes Conversation

The digitally connected self-generating performances intended to provide expected benefits constitutes the most recent iteration of what Susan Cain calls the "extrovert ideal" norming personal identity and social interaction in North American context. As she explains, this ideal refers to a value system grounded in "the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favours quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups."[25] Cain carefully retraces the rise of the extrovert ideal from the industrial revolution and the massive movement of populations from rural to urban areas. As they settled in cities, individuals found themselves no longer part of close-knit communities where good behaviour and character made the difference, but of anonymous masses where a distinctive personality operated as a decisive factor in the competitive struggle for success.[26] Cain argues that what

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[23] See ibid., 212.
[24] See ibid., 338-39.
[25] Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* (New York: Broadway, 2013), 4.
[26] See ibid., 21-29.

originally served as pragmatic strategy progressively acquired the status of normative ideal to be pursued by everyone.[27] The extrovert ideal is both the result and the source of the individualistic context in which it is embedded: North American culture. Cain describes the latter in the following terms:

> We see ourselves as self-contained units; our destiny is to express ourselves, to follow our bliss, to be free of undue restraint, to achieve the one thing that we, and we alone, were brought into this world to do. We may be gregarious, but we don't submit to group will, or at least we don't like to think we do. We love and respect our parents, but bridle at notions like filial piety, with their implications of subordination and restraint. When we get together with others, we do so as self-contained units having fun with, competing with, standing out from, jockeying for position with, and, yes, loving, other self-contained units. Even the Western God is assertive, vocal, and dominant; his son Jesus is kind and tender, but also a charismatic, crowd-pleasing man of influence.[28]

In such a cultural setting, not who one is, but who one is seen to be is of utmost importance. Moral and spiritual formation become subservient to the acquisition of performance skills. The self no longer needs to be valued in itself, but rather inasmuch as it can produce successful outcomes. Those who cannot perform do not actualize their human potential. In such an environment, "the pressure to entertain, to sell ourselves, and never to be visibly anxious keeps ratcheting up" to the point that shyness becomes a diagnosed pathology.[29]

The same extrovert ideal prevails within Christian communities. In Adam S. McHugh's apt words,

> Imagine a person who is highly sociable and gregarious, someone who is expressive and enthusiastic and transparent, with overt passion and a broad smile, a person who shares her faith easily, who assumes leadership responsibilities and meets new people quickly, someone who participates in a wide variety of activities and groups, and a person who eagerly invites people

[27] See ibid., 42.
[28] Ibid., 189.
[29] Ibid., 31.

> into her home. Such a person would likely be praised as the perfect Christian, the very epitome of faith, disciple of disciples, someone who truly gets what it means to follow Jesus.[30]

In Christian communities leadership roles are to be assumed by extrovert individuals who successfully perform in all aspects of these roles. "Those in charge are called on to provide visionary, intellectual, administrative, financial, social, spiritual, and emotional leadership. The superstar leader is the rare person who excels at everything."[31] These high expectations leave little room for imperfection and error (i.e., learning and growth) and severely downsize the pool of applicants. The systematic promotion of extroversion as template for human existence tends to equate spirituality with sociability, because "the mark of a progressing faith is familiarity with a growing number of people and participation in an increasing number of activities."[32]

Correlatively, since individuals divest most of their energy and time into performing for others, they have little to spend cultivating their own spiritual lives. McHugh makes a most important observation: overtly extrovert cultures prevent the development of rich individual subjectivities which in turn limits the possibility and occurrence of deep formative social interactions.[33] The quality of interpersonal relationships is tributary of the quality of the relationships individuals entertain with themselves. Retrieving the classic distinction between solitude and loneliness,[34] McHugh argues that healthy relationship to self enables healthy relationships with others. While loneliness estranges from others by entrapping the person within her wounded self, solitude expands and creates space within the self to welcome and be enriched by others. Venturing into the depths of her soul, the person encounters God, whom she can then find in every other. Discovering that who she is called to become transcends what she understands and controls, she is humbled and

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[30] Adam S. McHugh, *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 17.
[31] Ibid., 126.
[32] Ibid., 23.
[33] See ibid., 75.
[34] See Henri Nouwen's reference treatment in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 13-44.

led to reach out to others to learn more about humanity and God.[35]

Learning to Listen

McHugh enjoins his readers to counterbalance the excesses of an overtly extrovert culture with the help of typically introvert spiritual practices. Authentic extroversion does not negate, but rather presupposes introversion, in the form of cultivating a rich inner life. To have something profound and impactful to say, the speaker must give herself time to explore the well of meaning that is her own self. The processing and integration of life experiences occurs through contemplation (meditative reflection). Overemphasis on extroversion leads to overuse of and over-reliance on words, which then tend to become self-enclosing entities no longer carrying meaning. To understand ourselves, others and God truly, we must reach the meaningful silence that lies beyond words.[36]

When embraced with openness to being transformed, introspective solitude becomes the fount of compassion. The source of hatred for others resides in self-avoidance and loathing. Learning to accept oneself (the good, the bad and the ugly) in humility and truth enables loving recognition of the humanity of others. Reckoning with one's own vulnerability empowers authentic encounter and bonding with others.[37] The real challenge, claims McHugh, is not to learn to speak so loud and convincingly that others have nothing to say, but rather to learn to stop talking so as to be able to listen to what others have to say. To actively listen is to create the conditions for someone else to have a voice. To actively listen is to have the courage to make oneself vulnerable and recognize that others also speak the truth. To actively listen is to acknowledge Christ's presence to others in their hearts and the desire to share in this gift. To actively listen is to demonstrate love in a Christlike way.[38] Learning to listen is not easy; in fact, this is not something human beings can achieve by themselves. Listening is something they receive from God.

> Listening is a gift. It is a gift from God to us that sparks intimacy, that helps us grow into servants and disciples, that promises constant learning and self-discovery, that helps us never lose the childlike gift of being surprised, and that assures us of guidance

[35] See McHugh, *Introverts in the Church*, 78-79.
[36] See ibid., 77.
[37] See ibid., 101.
[38] See ibid., 187-88.

> and the awareness of God's presence. It is a gift that God offers—in the staggering discovery that God actually listens to us—and it is a gift that we offer others, an open invitation to receive whatever they choose to share with us.[39]

In times of pandemic, to exercise the gift of listening is especially challenging. The shock produced by the sight of so many individuals getting sick with and dying from a disease whose spread hardly is contained, the constant fear for one's life and the life of loved ones, the anxiety generated by having to adapt to a confined mode of living involving working from home and homeschooling children all contribute to reducing the ability to listen to someone else's plight. Having to bear one's own burden of pain severely limits the willingness to take on the suffering of others. One feels directly challenged by their pain, in response to which one has no more answers to offer than to one's own.[40] In these moments, the temptation to speak is quite strong (an experience to which Job's friends bear canonical witness). To create the inner space needed, muster the patience to wait for God to draw near and speak when God wills is by no means easy in "normal" conditions. To do this when one's heart and agency are crippled by fear and powerlessness certainly is a challenge. The truth of the matter is that listening to God "will involve a radical openness to surprise, to risk, to change, even to suffering. … To truly listen will necessitate learning how to wait and to trust, or even sometimes moving before we feel we're ready."[41]

McHugh's words intimate a basic fact about Christian faith and practice: listening—not speaking—is the principle of the ongoing conversion enabling faithful discipleship. Faithful action and service flow from the repeated act (habit) of listening to God speaking through the person of the neighbour in need. Listening empowers for service by training into a life of free obedience, translating the truth disclosed into right action. As they submit to the absolute truth that is the Lord Jesus Christ, disciples freely choose to act in accordance with this truth. Obedience consists in the exercise of finite freedom within the divine freedom and will.[42] The practice of obedience leads to the formation of a personal identity (character) in the image and likeness of Christ equipping

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[39] Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 214.

[40] See ibid., 166.

[41] Ibid., 58.

[42] See ibid., 21.

the individual to exercise effective leadership.

Forming Servant Leaders

Confrontation with real life challenges forges a resilient personality able to discern and follow, in difficult situations and circumstances, the most faithful course of action. "True leadership is not cultivated in the limelight; it's won in the trenches. The mark of godly leadership is not a magnetic personality; it is discipline, because discipline develops character."[43] Christian leadership is not exercised by imposing one's person, ideas and policies on others, but rather by opening oneself up to reveal one's vulnerability. The courage to share one's vulnerability demonstrates the reality of one's struggle to be and remain human, and incites others to do the same. Trust is built on the foundation of a common humanity accessed through the sharing of vulnerability, not the imposition of strength.[44]

Christian leadership is servant leadership, which takes the form of active listening oriented toward understanding and empowering others to speak with their own voice. Christian leadership is inherently dialogical. In the sixth chapter of Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis thus defines dialogue: "approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word 'dialogue.'"[45] Authentic dialogue does not involve dia-monologuing whereby multiple interlocutors speak past each other because they do not listen and understand one another in service to a common search for truth. In a world and era where most human interactions are technologically mediated, dia-monologues can deceptively feel like actual dialogical communication. The distance set by technology between interlocutors incites the latter to assume that their meaning-making and sharing processes are normative for all interlocutors participating in the conversation.

Without ongoing self-reflection continually subjecting one's linguistic and semantic presuppositions to the critique levelled by other interlocutors, effective dialogical exchange cannot take place. "Dialogue needs to be enriched and illumined by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view."[46] Authentic dialogue reflects and contributes to the formation of a "culture of encounter." Such a culture is

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[43] McHugh, *Introverts in the Church*, 132.
[44] See ibid., 157.
[45] Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, § 198.
[46] Ibid., § 211.

one "where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations" and readily assumes that "each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expandable."[47]

Imitating God's way of acting as embodied in Jesus' life and ministry, Christ's disciples do not let themselves be scared or stopped by differences they perceive in others, but reach out to the common humanity embodied in each human person. Christ's disciples set aside time for others. Like the Good Samaritan, they put their own agendas on hold and relate to the vulnerability of others in a way that summons them to act as caring neighbours.[48] With Francis of Assisi and Charles de Foucauld, Christ's disciples are moved by a compelling desire to become brothers or sisters to every human person. Such "universal brothers and sisters" can act as leaders empowering all humans to have a voice and listen to one another so as to be able to search together for solutions to the great challenges of our time: the ecological crisis, the social-political crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic.[49] Following the example of essential workers who every day put their lives on the line for others, let us now take the time to listen and respond, in both word and deed, to our fellow humans. Let us remind one another that each human person is called to both learn from and teach every other what being human entails and demands. We are not alone, we have each other. We can be there for one another, if we deign only listen.

[47] Ibid., § 215.
[48] See ibid., § 67.
[49] See ibid., § 287.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN COVID-19 AND THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN CHURCH LIFE[1]

Ben Jonathan Immanuel

Introduction

The Internet shrinks our perceived sense of space and time. A person can be in any corner of the earth and connect instantly with another person in any place and at any desired time through the internet. This reality did not really strike us until the whole world was brought to a standstill due to Covid-19. We have had to adapt to alternative ways of communicating with one another. Among all realms of human life, members of church communities are the most affected by this scenario, particularly those whose spirituality primarily depends on physically congregating. The Church worldwide has journeyed through a few rough months trying to navigate a new normal, trying out newer means of communing with one another.

In this article, I wish to discuss a few challenges and opportunities that are to be encountered in church life during a pandemic and in the era of the fourth Industrial Revolution. Throughout this article, the word "church" is used in a multi-faceted sense. While some would prefer the word "ecclesia", "church" is the common, real-world term. Church is: a building, a gathering of people, an activity, a feeling, an emotion, a called out community with expectations, a change-making and influential social movement, a prophetic community, and a dedicated time and space, physical or virtual, for communion with God and God's creation. From this understanding, Church life can be defined as communion with God, communion with oneself, and communion with the neighbor, which is all of creation.

Covid-19

Coronavirus disease, first reported in 2019, referred to as Covid-19, is the most recently discovered coronavirus that has become a pandemic. As of October 19, 2020, over 40 million people around the world have been infected by this virus, and over one million have died. Covid-19 has highlighted weaknesses in global and local systems of healthcare, governance, economics, and polity as well as religion. It has also marked the onset of a new epoch in human history.

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[1] A longer version of this article was first published in NCC Review Vol. CXL No. 08 September 2020.

The 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR)

Epochs in human history often have been preceded by revolutions. A revolution is a phenomenon that brings about a massive change in human living conditions. An industrial revolution[2] can be defined as "the period of time during which work began to be done more by machines in factories than by hand at home."[3] Human history has already witnessed three industrial revolutions.[4] The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) has seen the rise of artificial intelligence, robotics, the internet of things (IoT), autonomous transportation, 3D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, quantum computing, etc.[5] Here are some of the features of the 4IR that help us in understanding its importance in our current milieu.

- ***Artificial Intelligence (AI)***

Artificial Intelligence is the phenomenon where technology seemingly has the ability to gather, perceive, analyze, process, and respond to data, in ways similar to humans. One of the popular forms of AI is intelligent assistants on smart phones such as Siri, Alexa, and Google. With simple fingerprint or voice recognition, technology translates heard commands into desirable actions. Other examples are smart machines such as robots designed particularly to do most human tasks like cooking, cleaning, problem solving, memory management, and scheduling. Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and one of the first voices to speak about 4IR, observes that our devices have become an increasing part of our personal ecosystem, listening to us, anticipating our needs, and helping us when required, sometimes even

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[2] The first profound shift in human way of living from hunting to farming was made possible by the domestication of animals. This is called *the agrarian revolution*. Animals automated human labor. The next big shift was in terms of creation of machinery to aid mass production and to automate human labor. This is called *the Industrial Revolution*.

[3] *https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/industrial-revolution* (accessed 18th August, 2020).

[4] The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. R. Christopher Rajkumar, "Humanising '4th Industrial Revolution': A Mission Agenda", NCC Review Vol. CXXXVIII No. 04, May 2018: 44.

[5] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 7.

if not asked.[6] Some of us may also be aware that most of our devices are listening to us unless permissions are disabled.

- ***From Information Technology (IT) to Data Technology (DT)***
  One of the chief characteristics of the 4IR is the shift from information technology to data technology. There is, today, an unlimited access to knowledge not merely of information (processed data) but of data itself. Jack Ma, the founder of one of the leading multinational technology conglomerates, Alibaba Group, says that "the IT era turned humans into machines while the DT era transformed machines into smart beings."[7] What this means is that everyone's personal data sooner or later will be on the public domain so that machines can access them and do everything humans ought to be doing. There are also ambitious projects being approved to transfer human intelligence onto machines to preserve them even after the death of the person.

- ***Digitization***
  Digitization means automation or computerization of everything physical and tangible into digital versions accessible through a device. This cuts down on space, and cost, as well as capital in terms of business investments, thereby leading to easy profit-making. Educational institutions, academic journals, news and media companies and churches are sectors that are moving to digital media. The New Educational Policy (NEP 2020) of India, which has garnered global attention, also has one of its ambitious focuses on digitalization of education. Churches too are moving to online documentation, online meetings, and maintaining websites with necessary information. Digitization is an ongoing process which has become necessary for preservation of data and information and to survive in the new 4IR era.

- ***Space versus Cloud***
  Data and information are now increasingly being stored in the new space called "the cloud". With a few data centers controlling most data of the world, cloud computing allows seamless workflow as seen in collaborative applications such as Google Docs, Slides, Forms, Sheets, etc. and other independent apps such as Padlet, and Mentimeter.

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[6] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*), 7.

[7] Mo Hong'e, "China is progressing from IT to DT era: Jack Ma". *http://www.ecns.cn/cns-wire/2015/05-27/167059.shtml* (accessed 19th August, 2020).

Moreover, with the advent of the 4IR, personal and inter-personal relationships today are masked with the image of the person portrayed in the virtual world. Humans are getting increasingly comfortable interacting with each other online. Societal bonding happens more over the cloud than in real time and space. Relationships, including marital arrangements, are founded on online platforms. Moreover, data storage has moved from physical hard-disk drives to the cloud. In a way, the 4IR is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.

The Church's dependence on 4IR during the COVID-19 pandemic

Covid-19 and the 4IR are the big world-defining contexts right now. All around the world, due to "social distancing" norms to control the spread of the coronavirus, churches have been forced to keep their buildings closed. But this has only meant that they have had to force open some lesser known windows so that the people of God can continue to commune with one another. There has been a "Zoom boom" in churches and church-based organizations. Almost every church, which did not previously have an established online streaming platform, has taken to digital platforms to host services, prayer meetings, and other church routines. In many ways, the Church is indebted to the internet and to online services such as Google, Microsoft, and platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others including the archbishop of them all, Zoom.

A few months ago, when church services and programs happened in church buildings and halls, a lot of thought and hard work went into conducting a worship service or an event. From cleaning the sanctuary to setting up the altar, from arranging the hymnals to choir practices, from organizing the liturgy to having every element being led by designated people, from prayer and preparation to the worship service itself, a host of people were involved in the whole process. Over the past few months, most of these activities have been replaced or altered. Now, there are one or more "hosts" for every meeting and, depending on what form of technology one employs, either Live or Pre-Recorded, different people have different roles. Even though it seems fascinating, novel, and simple, so many things have to fall into place for an uninterrupted worship experience. In many ways, it is more taxing and tiresome than previous times.

Let us now turn our attention to some challenges and opportunities that arise from the current nexus between 4IR and Covid-19 and its impacts on church life.

Challenges to Encounter

As previously mentioned, church life can be defined as communion with God, communion with oneself, and communion with the neighbor. Increasingly, these connections will be mediated technologically with profound implications for church life. An online event[8] conducted by the World Bank in February this year primarily dealt with how much influence the 4IR has on job roles in society. Statistics presented at the event show that, at least in developing countries like India, there is still a huge need for skilled labor and is predicted to remain this way well into the 21st century. The 21st Century Skills adapted by global institutions thus become a necessity for churches too. The 4C's of these skills are Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity.[9] These skills emphasize interpersonal relationships, technological ability and critical thinking, all of which have been encouraged and fostered by the Church's ministry through the ages. The Coronavirus pandemic has in many ways already brought the clergy and laity into an interdependent relationship, as the clergy needs the laity to handle some of the technological tasks. This is what the future looks like and there is a need for the clergy to up-skill in order to meet the demands of the future. With online church communities becoming a growing reality, there is a second set of challenges to encounter. Here are a few:

a. Technology – A Sign of Privilege

Online church life itself is a sign of privilege because the church member needs an electronic device (laptop, desktop, mobile phone, or a tablet), good internet connection, and the necessary software in order to participate. It is fascinating to see how quickly churches have made the shift to conducting worship services and other meetings seamlessly through online platforms with additional options of live streaming and recording the proceedings.

However, other churches and church members have been disadvantaged because of poor internet in rural areas, unequal socio-economic situations, and unequal technological abilities. India is among

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[8]Are robots coming for our jobs?, *https://live.worldbank.org/are-robots-coming-your-job?cid=ECR_TT_worldbank_EN_EXTP* (accessed 27th August, 2020).

[9] Paul Madsen, *21st Century Skills and the Responsibility of the Christian Teacher*, *https://acsieurope.org/cms/en-us/21st-Century-Skills-and-the-Responsibility-of-the-Christian-Teacher#:~:text=What%20are%20these%20skills%3F,on%20modern%20society%20and%20education.* (accessed 27th August, 2020).

the top three most Covid-19 infected countries and has been under extended lockdowns and restrictions since March 26th 2020. Ever since India went into a lockdown, completely bamboozled by its magnitude, there have been large-scale disruptions in social life. While the privileged sections of society have been able to adapt and move on, the vulnerable communities including migrants, daily wage laborers including construction workers have endured suffering of great proportions.

Threat to Privacy and Security: One of the greatest threats of the 4IR is the threat to privacy and security. Hacking and kidnapping for exploitation are major concerns. It has already come to the point where the internet has more information about individuals than family, friends, and colleagues. With the syncing of bank accounts, mobile networks and other online mailboxes and social networking accounts, privacy and identity theft are at issue. Moreover, there is room for stalking, cyber bullying, and inappropriate behavior on online platforms.

Lack of Embodied Communication and Communion: Church life is about physical closeness as much as it is about spiritual wellness. A handshake, a hug or even a smile can go a long way in comforting one another. Lack of physical contact plus a discontinuation of eucharistic celebrations could damage church life. Fortunately, churches are looking for alternatives to engage in embodied communication by using or creating available, safe spaces and creative ideas such as virtual coffee meetings, virtual meals, and online game and icebreaking sessions.

b. The rise of Webinars and Content Fatigue

There has been a significant rise in the frequency of online meetings, which has caused "Zoom fatigue."[10] Reasons for this fatigue include struggling with connectivity issues, bad audio quality, intense concentration periods, and lack of the stimulation that real person to person interactions occasion. It is important to navigate these issues when it comes to church life.[11] Zoom interactions may not be in the best interests of everyone's mental wellbeing.

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[10] *https://www.forbes.com/sites/marksparrow/2020/08/07/why-do-we-suffer-from-zoom-fatigue-its-all-about-the-sound/#9819a314d87a* (accessed 31st August, 2020).

[11] *https://www.vidyard.com/blog/zoom-fatigue-tips/* (accessed 27th August, 2020).

c. Technology - The New Empire

As Christopher Rajkumar observes, "In permeating through technology, humans have not only found a new master to control over, but have subtly moved the authority to technology to enslave humans."[12] There are reported incidents in the present time when AI has tended to control humans. It is seen in Robotics and even in Genetic engineering. On the other hand, even though robots are infused with artificial intelligence and machine learning ability and have become smarter and more autonomous, they still lack an essential feature—moral reasoning—lack of which could produce results of violence and injustice. We are staring at a new empire in the 4IR which could perpetually and virtually control human beings if not handled critically, pandemic or not.

Opportunities to Embrace

The Church is no longer as it used to be. Nevertheless, this nexus has opened up many opportunities which, if embraced, can lead to a more open and outgoing church.

a. Open Church and Wider Communion – True Ecumenism

Now, you and I can be in any part of the world in any time zone and still be able to access church. Yet we are all still stuck to our own community churches. We participate in church pretty much as before and we are still continuing its tradition even though the community church has moved online. Have we considered the possibility of wider ecumenism?

There is an open opportunity for people who have not experienced our church to easily and anonymously attend a worship service or Bible study or any fellowship of any church. This definitely takes courage on the part of the church. But this is a perfect opportunity for us to enjoy different hymns sung in a completely different style, listen to different liturgies and experience different sermons and preaching styles, all of which are based upon the same gospel of Jesus Christ. This is an opportunity for all of us to commune in newer ways as the one household of God in the true sense of the term "Ecumenism".

b. Church beyond the church

Even as we have discussed how time and space are shrunk by the internet, we must remember that time and space are luxury constructs especially for less privileged communities in India and other places. With families of an

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[12] R. Christopher Rajkumar, "Humanising '4th Industrial Revolution': A Mission Agenda", NCC Review Vol. CXXXVIII No. 04, May 2018: 47.

average of 6-8 members living under the same roof, the Coronavirus has been more of a disaster. How can one maintain social distance if there is no space available? How can one use the Internet to attend schools when there is no privacy and only noise? There are many communities who are suffering in this present scenario without means and privilege to thrive during a pandemic. These communities have always been neglected. Thanks to Covid-19, light has shone upon the injustices they face. The Church is receiving yet another call to love the neighbour. This is a divinely appointed time for church life to go beyond the walls of the church into the needy places. There is now an opportunity to live out the Christian life on the streets, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless and to side with and embrace the victim.

Conclusion

We live today during a global pandemic amidst a technological revolution that together in a nexus are fundamentally altering the way we live, work, and relate to one another. Technological advancements and global pandemics drive transformation around the world and can cause ripple effects on societies, institutions and economies. They have the potential to bring a fundamental change in the identity of human beings in issues related to sense of self, mental health, privacy, notions of ownership, consumption patterns, times of work and leisure, careers, skills, and inter-personal relations. The response to this drastic change of world order involves all participants of the global polity. This is a chance for a prophetic engagement from the church. There is a need for church communities, clergy and laity, to consciously engage with the current 4IR and, in prophetic voice, embrace its potential for enhancing church life. There is a need for church communities to be in the forefront of dealing with Covid-19 in a safe and integrated manner. Here is an opportunity for the renewal of church life, even amidst challenges, to create faith communities offering hope, grace and love to the world.

From the Heart

Karen Orlandi

The pandemic has been hard on all of us. The isolation, the new routines, the online learning, the precariousness of employment, the closing down of businesses. Some of the folks hardest hit are those whose lives were already tougher than most.

My name is Rev. Karen Orlandi and I have the absolute joy of ministering in downtown St. Catharines, Ontario at Silver Spire United Church. I would like to tell you how the pandemic has affected the people we work with.

The novel coronavirus launched itself into our lives in mid-March, near the end of the Out of the Cold Season, which involved seven different churches serving dinners, a different one each night. With the advent of the pandemic, no dine in was allowed and overnight we switched to offering takeout meals. In addition, most of the volunteers for this program are of an age where the risk was very high.

Overnight we moved all the meals to our kitchen, with the churches bringing us food, and we went from serving 150 meals per night, to 300 meals per night. Folks who live with food insecurity were hit hard. In the downtown core there are no grocery stores, and if the Giant Tiger doesn't have toilet paper, they aren't able to drive around the city trying to source the products that they need. The beautiful part was how the community folks and church-young (those less than 60 years old) all came out to pack and distribute meals. Many of the people who came to our door asked for an extra meal for an elderly neighbour who couldn't leave their apartment.

Immediately after the pandemic began, all available access to indoor spaces as well as access to shelter, bathroom facilities and potable running water ceased. Within one month, the overnight portion of the Out of the Cold program was closed, and there was nowhere for homeless folks, or those suffering from precarious living arrangements to gather. The pavilion in the downtown park, as well as the children's playground, were fenced off to eliminate accessibility to these shelters.

Here at Silver Spire, we are home to a chapter of the Bear Clan Patrol, which walks the streets of the downtown core and the Queenston neighbourhood next to downtown on Friday and Saturday evenings. During these walks we interact with folks living, working, and shopping downtown, as well as folks who have no other place to go or to be in community.

In the early months of the pandemic, we began to notice more

erratic behaviours as the supply of drugs from the United States was reduced with border closures. This created a vacuum in the market which was filled with product blended with more dangerous products, creating a risk to all who live with addiction. This has increased as the border remains closed. We also visited many tent encampments throughout our parks and into the bush lining Twelve Mile and Dick's Creek. Many of these were quite disheveled with the squalor one might expect from folks living without running water, bathrooms or garbage facilities. Others were quite lovely, homey and beautiful. One such encampment was in Centennial Park, on the slope within the woods. It was quite hidden. You wouldn't know it was there if you were walking your dog or playing disc golf. In the early days, the parks were also off limits, and so there was no one to find the camp disturbing. It had a beautiful stone firepit and flowering plants had been planted all around the edges. It was clean, tidy and well taken care of. A couple of weeks later, on patrol we all noticed bobcat (small bulldozer) tracks leading up to the encampment, and sure enough it had been bulldozed.

In April, when public washrooms were to open for "the season" in the downtown park, they remained locked and closed. Finally, in June, portable units were set up near city hall, but they were and remain substandard. There is no running water available to those who don't have access to homes. Many meal programs, and services dried up as the pandemic continued, but others stepped up. This summer may be remembered as being the summer of Covid, but it was also an incredibly hot one. A cooling centre was opened by the city (without washrooms), but not in a proximate area to the downtown, so Silver Spire opened our doors. We also looked at the services available in the area and ascertained that while there was minimal capacity within the neighbouring drop-in centre, it was only operating during the week. Silver Spire with the assistance of the United Way opened as a drop-in on weekends, holidays and as a cooling centre. We were able to offer a cool space, dinners, bathrooms and showers.

In addition to feeding the folks inside, we also delivered take-out meals through a team of community members to the main encampments where folks had set up tarps and tents. One of the most wonderful experiences we were able to have was to make dinner, send it out into the community, and then, as we walked with the Bear Clan patrol, meet folks who were just finishing those meals and hear how much they enjoyed them.

Our summer programs were well utilized, but as they drew to a close and the weather began to get colder, the wear and tear began to take

its toll. We had been lobbying for 24 hour access to washrooms to no avail, but the portable units were still available. We began recruiting other churches and other neighbourhood groups to endorse our petition, and harangued our city councilors and mayor.

But for the folks on the street, it often felt as though they were forgotten. Every meal was take-out, save the few at Silver Spire. As the cold descended, we saw folks eating their take-out breakfast on the cement curb, their take-out lunch seated on the grass, and their take-out dinner on cement stairs. They still had no access to running water, or to the pavilion at the park to get out of the heat, the cold, the rain, the snow.

Once again, the city and region looked to dismantle the encampments in October, with outreach workers and bulldozers. We petitioned the city and won a reprieve till the Out of the Cold Program opened, where folks can have a bed overnight in another United Church in our community. The dinners are still take-out only.

On Christmas night, walking with the Bear Clan, we met fifteen folk who chose to stay outside rather than go into a shelter. There are many reasons for this—the inability to stay together as a couple, or the ban on pets indoors are both understandable. Some reasons are a little more complex. Some folks who struggle with substance abuse disorders believe that they will be kicked out if they have product or paraphernalia with them, which is true in many shelters. For Out of the Cold it is permissible, although one must go down the street to the Consumption and Treatment Site to ingest the product. Other folks with some form of mental illness cannot bear the close proximity.

These are all normal factors for folks accessing these services and they happen every year, but this year is different. When everyone is being asked to stay within their small bubbles, some folks find the communal sleeping area of Out of the Cold frightening and would rather stay outside rather than potentially expose themselves to Covid-19.

Here at the Spire, we've been able to open once again on the weekends, serving a hot meal on a real plate, with real cutlery at a real table. They can take a shower, use the washrooms, and even take a nap. It's become an oasis within the downtown community as we enter into another lockdown.

For folks on the margins, gone are the areas where folks supported one another in community. Gone is access to washrooms and water. Gone are many of the supports they had come to rely on. Increased is the number of times they encounter the word "no" in a day. Longer and colder are the commutes outside, more dangerous is the drug supply, and higher the level of fear from external factors like Covid-19.

But what these people have is an abundance of resilience and gratitude. Their anxiety level is through the roof at the best of times, and the pandemic has lifted it to new levels, but yet the number of times I hear "thank-you", "God bless", "thank God you guys are open", has been phenomenal. As our friend James who frequents many programs here at the church tells us, he likes coming here because it's church.

This is church in action. We have these giant buildings in the hearts of so many cities. We have the space for folks to gather and still be socially distanced. Once the lockdown is over we have so much opportunity for folks to be able to gather responsibly. We just need to open our doors.

Many of us lament the times when our churches were the centres of our community, but we're the same people who are terrified of turning our churches into community centres. We are in a time of golden opportunity. We have space. Folks cannot gather without space—throw open the doors in a physically responsible way! Look around your neighbourhood and address your local needs.

Traditionally the deacons, (diaconal ministers) were the keepers of the keys, charged with ensuring the gifts of the changed were exchanged for the needs of the streets, but I tell you that the streets have the gifts, and we have the needs. An Episcopal bishop in the United States said something to the effect of "When will we know there are enough deacons? When the blood in the streets matches the blood in our chalice." Being a diaconal minister means embracing the idea of community and church in one big hug, bringing people together. On occasion, it means another person in a pew on Sunday morning, but most often not. More often it just means a fulfilment of our call as a community of faith within a wider community—not separate, but intertwined, blended and seamless.

Blessed be.

Emily Spencer Kerby—"Not Afraid to Express Her Opinion"

> The church today is not dealing with the woman of ten centuries ago, but with the modern twentieth-century woman – an educated, reading, thinking woman, and a 'not-afraid-to-express-her-opinion woman' of the year 1928.[1]

The history of the western world has long been seen primarily from a male perspective. Even if women did write their stories, few of those stories survived. Fortunately, that began to change in the early 20th century. The writings of Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy are significant in western Canadian history. Less well known is the work of teacher, minister's wife, mother, activist, and writer Emily Spencer Kerby. Emily Spencer Kerby, usually under the pen name Constance Lynd, certainly was one who was not afraid to express her opinion! Many of her papers are preserved in the United Church Archives within the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) in Edmonton. The collection includes several scrapbooks containing the many tributes paid following her death in 1938. Her work focused on many aspects of women's rights including suffrage, working conditions, birth control, and especially on women's place within the church.

Emily Spencer Kerby was born March 26, 1860. Her father, James Spencer, a Methodist minister, was a professor at Victoria College and editor of the *Christian Guardia*n. However, he was not a direct influence in her life as he died in 1863.[2] She and her mother lived in Paris, Ontario and, following graduation from the Toronto Normal School, she returned to Paris and taught and became principal of a public school there. However with her marriage to Methodist minister Rev. George Kerby in 1888, Emily was forced to resign from teaching. They moved about as George served several pastorates in Ontario. The couple had two children during that time,

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[1] Constance Lynd, "Tired of Being a Woman," clipping, unknown publication. PR75.387, Box 181, Item 6028, United Church of Canada Collection, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton. 1928.

[2] Anne White, Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol. XVI (1931-1940), *www.biographica.ca/en/bio/spencer_emily/16E .html*; retrieved November 11,2020.

Helen Javera and Harold Spencer. Harold served in both world wars with the British Air Force. In 1901-1902, George toured as an evangelist. She then encouraged him to accept a 1903 call to Central Methodist Church in Calgary. There Emily became very involved both in church and civic affairs. Patricia Roome states that "with her assistance, Rev. Kerby built Central Calgary Methodist Church into an important Calgary Protestant congregation. Emily worked in the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, taught Sunday School and led a class of young men called the Anti-Knocker's Bible Class."[3]

Emily was also active in many organizations beyond the church. No doubt because of her own experiences, she worked tirelessly for women's rights. She had been active in the YWCA in Ontario and in 1907 she convened an inaugural meeting of the YWCA in Calgary. That group included Elizabeth McDougall, wife of Methodist missionary John McDougall, Catherine Underwood, wife of a former mayor of Calgary and Alice Jamieson who, in 1916, became the first woman in the British Empire to be appointed a juvenile court judge. The group's first issue was the lack of appropriate accommodation for single immigrant girls. They set about fundraising and soon opened the first YWCA residence in the city.

In 1911, George became principal of the new Methodist Mount Royal Junior College in Calgary. According to Anne White, Emily was appointed co-principal, along with George, and "taught the junior grades for years, but officially she was never recognized in these capacities by the board of directors of Mount Royal College and she never received even token remuneration for her services."[4]

In 1912, Henrietta Muir Edwards, who later was known as one of the Famous Five for affirming in Canadian law that women were persons, was instrumental in establishing a Calgary Local Council of Women. She became its first president and Kerby was vice-president. The group lobbied for enfranchisement, as well as legal aid for women and inclusion on government boards and committees. By 1914, the group had collected 44,000 signatures on a petition requesting votes for women. Kerby, Jamieson and Annie Langford, representing the Women's Christian Temperance Union, presented the petition in person to Alberta Premier Arthur Sifton. When the bill was passed in 1916, Sifton, who was a

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[3] Patricia Roome, "Emily Spencer Kerby: Discovering a Legacy." *Journal: Alberta and Northwest Conference United Church of Canada Historical Society,* Vol. 14, May 2001, 1.

[4] *A New Day for Women: Life and Writings of Emily Spencer Kerby*, ed. Anne White (Calgary: The Historical Society of Alberta, 2004) xiv.

member of Central Methodist Church, notified-Kerby personally.[5]

In 1917, British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst toured Canada, speaking of the First World War and the importance of women in the work at home. In 1930, Kerby recalled this visit following the unveiling of a London statue of Pankhurst. In the draft of an article entitled "A Triumph for Womanhood," the name Constance Lynd is crossed out and credit is given simply to "One of them." As two women (presumably one was Kerby), searched for an appropriate venue for the Calgary speech, a well-known man told them disdainfully that a little room in the library would suffice for "that woman!" Central Methodist was still undergoing reconstruction because of a fire the previous year but a large Baptist church was available. It filled beyond capacity, with many standing throughout the ninety-minute speech. Another crowd waited outside, and Pankhurst also spoke to them. She stressed the importance of the Woman's Suffrage Organization and their work in maintaining the work of the home front as men served in the military. Kerby felt that Pankhurst "was fighting the greatest battle of the world—the emancipation of women." Following this powerful presentation, "these men and women, on whose souls was dawning for the first time, the greatness of the woman, went to their homes admiringly, thoughtfully, quietly, touched to the very depths of their being."[6]

Kerby wrote passionately on the need for equal pay for equal work. Complaining that "women have long been the world's drudges, she argued in 1919: "Girls taught for the magnificent sum of two hundred dollars a year, while her favoured brother got for his initial salary five and six hundred dollars, and that in Old Ontario—the girl having the same qualifications, working the same hours and frequently better at work being done than by the man." She did not see motherhood as the only appropriate work for a woman. "For the sake of the race, she must be free to labour, free to love, free to work out her own ideas in life as a person."[7]

Because she felt motherhood should be a choice, Kerby must have been a keen follower of the news. Following the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops in 1920, she made clear her views on birth control. The conference had considered 80 resolutions. Numbers 67-72 dealt with

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[5] Ibid. xvii.

[6] Constance Lynd, typescript, "A Triumph for Womanhood," 1930. PAA 75.387 Box 181 Item 6028.

[7] Constance Lynd, "Women's Independence for the sake of the Race: Woman Must Become as Economically Independent as Man," *Woman's Century*, October 1919, 16.

"problems of marriage and sexual morality." Resolution 68 was "an emphatic warning against the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception" which was considered "a threat to the race," defining children as the "primary purpose of marriage." It urged "deliberate and thoughtful self-control" as the only appropriate means.[8] The resolution was defeated.

Kerby felt all Protestant women should be grateful to these Anglican bishops. She wrote that it was time for women to speak on the issue, asking, "What do (men) know about it from any concrete angle?" She was particularly perturbed that a Protestant bachelor and a Catholic priest had been speaking on the issue. She considered that these men had been "practicing birth-control with a vengeance!" She believed women should be free to choose, for, "the willing mother brings to this world the finest type of humanity because it is a wanted child and not a forced one."[9] Despite support for birth control from the Canadian Medical Association in the 1930s, it was not legalized in Canada until 1969.

As part of her work with Mount Royal College, Kerby was keenly interested in promoting education for women and was instrumental in establishing the Mount Royal Educational Club for female students. The club met monthly. According to Anne White, "Each year a specific country would be researched" and groups "would study the country's religious, historical, political and cultural compositions."[10] According to sociologist Nanci Langford, the many women's clubs and organizations of the early twentieth century were not representative of all women, for "they were largely composed of middle- and upper-class women" and "were still characterized by class and special interest differences."[11] However, educator-historian Michael Owen considers that Kerby was "a representative voice for women within the Methodist/United Church tradition."[12]

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[8] Resolutions of Lambeth Conference 1920. *www.anglicancommunion.org*.document-library. Retrieved November 13, 2020.

[9] Constance Lynd, "Ladies, The Bachelor and Birth Control," PAA, 75.387, Box 181, Item 6028. nd.

[10] Anne White, "Emily Spence Kerby: Pioneer Clubwoman, Educator and Activist," in *Alberta History*, Vol. 46, 3, 1998, 6.

[11] Nanci Langford, "All that Glitters: The Political Apprenticeship of Alberta Women, 1916-1930." in *Standing on New Ground*: *Women in Alberta*, ed. Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Edmonton, 1993 University of Alberta Press) 81.

[12] Michael Owen, "Do Women Really Count? Emily Spencer Kerby - An Early Twentieth Century Alberta Feminist." Historical papers 1995: Canadian

Emily was genuinely concerned about women's place within that Methodist tradition. She was biblically literate and often used biblical stories and verses in her writings. Following the Methodist General Conference of 1914, she wrote: "Our brothers, the professed followers of the Christ, in whose kingdom there is neither male nor female, bond nor free . . . persist in recognizing male and female, and in being responsible for much of the bondage of women today." She concluded that "future generations, reading the minutes of General Conference of 1914, will laugh at their old fogeyism and their denseness."[13]

Does language influence attitude? Emily Kerby believed so. In the *Calgary Herald* in 1922, she recalled that as a child, "we believed that God did not think much of women. We were here for one purpose, to make this world nice and homey for the men . . . The preachers were always ringing the changes on the awful peril of 'women and wine,' so I had a sort of feeling that some day we might be legislated out of existence, like the whiskey, and it behooved us to mind our P's and Q's."[14] She certainly saw the church as less than liberal. In the same article (three years before the United Church was officially constituted), she questioned denominational focus. "These were the days when the Presbyterians preached 'predestination,' the Baptists salvation only by the water route; while the Methodists had a wider line, 'free grace.' It sounded wider but when you got on, you found that they were all running on the 'narrow gauge.'"

One of Kerby's strongest beliefs was in the right of women to be ordained. When Dr. Ernest Thomas wrote an article in *Chatelaine* in 1928 opposing such ordination, her rebuttal was strong:

> What womanhood is asking is not some corner in the sanctuary where she may 'appropriately render service' but freedom to work where she deems best. It is not an entirely new thing, there are a number of ordained women ministers on this mundane sphere . . . (Doctrine) has gone the way of the tallow candle, the idea of a flat earth, as well as the fable that man (the male) was 'lord of creation.' . . . It is not *feminism* or any other *ism* we are seeking, but *liberty*.[15]

Society of Church History, 2. retrieved at, Nov. 11,2020

[13] A Western Correspondent, "The Women and our Church Courts," clipping, publication unknown, 1914. PAA 75.387, Box 181, Item 6029,

[14] Constance Lynd, "Grandmother's Bonnet," *Calgary Daily Herald*, June 3, 1922, 15

[15] Constance Lynd, "Women and the Ministry: Constance Lynd Replies to Dr.

To Thomas's argument that ordination "has always been restricted to men," she replied, "*Has been* is never a reason for anything; lots of *has beens* of the past have become *are* today."[16] It took another eight years before Lydia Gruchy, who was already well-qualified (apart from her gender) when she had first applied for ordination in 1926, became the first woman to be ordained by the United Church of Canada.

That beginning did not finish Emily's fight. A year later, she wrote in *The Arrow* that, "Lately we have been hearing a great deal regarding man's intention of 'shoving women gently but firmly back into the home.'" That intention certainly aroused her ire. "It was Eve, not Adam, who was looking for wisdom and the Tree of Knowledge attracted her as she had heard it would make her wise." After discussing the state of the world and the differences women had made as they became more educated, she concluded: "We'll organize because man is not sufficiently civilized to live peacefully with the finer made creature woman, and has forced her into this …Men would be advised to take another thought and quit shoving.[17]

Of course, Emily's life included a husband and family. She and George had a son and a daughter. Throughout their married years, Emily and George supported each other and worked together. Their commitment to the church, to education and to each other was strong. George too was a writer and in 1921, they co-founded the Calgary branch of the Canadian Authors Association. At her death in 1938, just days before their fiftieth wedding anniversary, there was significant newspaper coverage. *The Albertan* quoted George: "No man could have had a better partner than my wife … In all my work, both of church and college, Mrs. Kerby has been a great factor."[18] *The Calgary Herald* reported that more than one thousand people attended her funeral, including the Anglican bishop, who spoke of her influence throughout the country, stating: "Her memory will live as a greater beacon on the horizon to challenge our young women to loftier lives." [19]

Emily Spencer Kerby lived a life of service—service to her family,

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Ernest Thomas," letter to the editor, *New Outlook*, November 7, 1928, 18, 20.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Constance Lynn (sic), "Man, Woman and Freedom.," *The Arrow*, December 1935, 3,17. PAA, 75.387 Box 181, Item 602.8.

[18] Roome, 2001, 3.

[19] White, 2004, 131.

to her church and to society. It is impossible to capture in brief quotes the passion, but also the wit in her writings. Fortunately those writings have been preserved and for those interested, it is possible to share in the words of a "modern twentieth-century woman—an educated, reading, thinking woman, and a 'not-afraid-to-express-her-opinion woman,'"[20] a woman who, with many others of her time, was fighting for justice for women.

[20] Constance Lynd, "Tired of Being a Woman," clipping, unknown publication, PR75.387, Box 181, Item 6028, United Church of Canada Collection, PAA Edmonton. 1928.

BOOK REVIEWS

Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Anxiety

Walter Brueggemann. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. Pp. xii + 80.

At 87 years old, legendary scholar and retired professor of Old Testament theology, Walter Brueggemann has nothing to prove. He does, however, have a lot to offer to us in the time of Covid-19. In the first quarter of 2020, when the pandemic was still in its infancy he swiftly put together this thoughtful little book (only 80 pages) that comes straight from his vast knowledge base and his own personal faith. It is a book that is intended for preachers and church leaders, and explores the first questions to arise from Christian communities about what, if anything, God is doing in and/or through this global crisis.

Brueggemann acknowledges that in the midst of the pandemic people naturally want to know "why" it is happening and what can be done about it. Science is important but is limited in the answers it can give us. As people of faith, it behooves us to look to the Bible to see how our ancestors in the Judeo-Christian faith have experienced similar trials. For Brueggemann, the natural field of study is the Old Testament, which is where we find more stories of pandemic and plague to study.

In the opening chapter, Brueggemann's study of the Old Testament offers three angles of interpretation that God's people used to understand the coming of a "plague." The "first and most obvious" that he identifies is the "transactional mode of covenant" (2), also called the *quid pro quo* (3). According to this angle, trouble is the result of forsaking and disobeying God (3). The second angle of interpretation he identifies is "YHWH's purposeful enactment of force in order to implement the specific purpose of YHWH" (5). According to this angle, God "mobilize[s] the various elements" in order to execute God's plans and purposes for creation (5), or to act against anything that contradicts those plans and purposes (10). The third angle of interpretation is "YHWH's holiness enacted in freedom" (10). This angle could be summed up as: God is God, and God is free to do what God will do, and humanity is in no position to question God's freedom to act as God wills. From that thoughtful study of the Old Testament, Brueggemann moves to consider how these angles of interpretation of "pestilence" or "plague" might "invite imagination and reflection" with regard to the current pandemic (21).

He resists a straight "application" of the texts to our current situation, but affirms that the biblical examples invite "open imagination that hopes for the best outcomes of serious scientific research. At the same time, it affirms that deeply inscrutable holy reality is in, with, under, and beyond our best science" (25).

The remainder of the book explores how great figures of the Old Testament—David, Jeremiah, Solomon, Isaiah—related to God during times of great trial, and from them discerns faithful ways for us to respond to our own difficult circumstances. Through their examples, Brueggemann encourages us to trust in God's mercy and the promise of restoration, even when our assemblies and celebrations are stopped (28); to pray as an "effective antidote to every type of disaster" (37); and to turn away from self toward God, and continue to affirm all those things we believe about God when times are good (46).

While rich with biblical scholarship, *Virus as a Summons to Faith* is not a taxing read. The short chapters lend themselves beautifully for devotional use, as a way to think about who God is, where God is, and how we are to live faithfully during these difficult times. To assist this devotional use, Brueggemann ends each chapter with a prayer. Thoughtful, scholarly, and pastoral, this is the book we all needed right now.

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Convergent Knowing: Christianity and Science in Conversation with a Suffering Creation

Simon Appolloni. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018. Pp. 273.

This book is about the convergence of knowing between Christian faith and the natural sciences, i.e., a hermeneutic of openness and a close, permanent relationship of two significant ways of knowing the world. Specifically, the author's concern is with eco-liberation, where the liberationist and ecological theologies come together with a bias for the poor and excluded and a commitment to "the liberation of all creation." It is essential, in the author's view, that the voices of all Earth subjects and the entire Earth community be heard, and that each sphere of inquiry and thought "affirm, clarify, inform and qualify the others" (6-10) .

Appolloni focuses on four Roman Catholic scholars, all of whom

attempt such a convergence, and exhibit such concerns in their thought: Rosemary Radford Ruether, American eco-feminist theologian; Leonardo Boff, Brazilian Fransiscan eco-liberationist (silenced by the Vatican in 1985); Diarmuid O'Murchu, Irish priest, quantum-ecological theologian, and social psychologist; and (the late) Thomas Berry, American priest of the Passionist order, "geologian" and cosmologist (also disciplined by the Vatican). The author points out the similarities of these four, noting their common use of the work of such scientists as Hawking, Lovelock, Margulis, Swimme and Teillhard de Chardin. All resist, to various degrees, the authority of church dogma, and insist on theological openness to all sources of truth. Our author thinks it is significant that all four are Roman Catholic (though somewhat ambiguously related to the church magisterium), pointing out that the "Catholic imagination" is open to a sacramental universe, to natural theology and the natural law tradition. This is less common, he thinks, among Protestants, who are more exclusively bound to Scripture (232-237). Anyone interested in these four authors will find here a substantial chapter of exposition, analysis and critique of each of them.

To speak of "the liberation of all creation" raises a number of ethical questions. The author draws upon Schweitzer's language of "reverence for life," and Lovelock's concept of "Gaia"—the vision of the Earth as a single self-regulating organism—to speak of a respectful, reciprocal relation to the natural world. It is essential for humans in the "Anthropocene"—the new epoch of planetary history dominated by humans—to give space and to "listen" to nature. This pertains to animals, who are not as different from humans as we have usually thought, and also to plants and the land. It becomes necessary, for example, to "listen to the voice of rivers." Do nature and the sciences of nature therefore prescribe the appropriate goals of human society? Our authors, all theologians, do not simply derive "oughts" from what is. For them, a religiously based ethic of compassion is still basic. Science must be engaged with religious and ethical traditions to discern what is necessary for an "eco-tethered liberation." The liberation movements must be seen as one—women's, men's liberation, the liberation of animals, plants, air, and forests. The rights of a river to flow naturally, and the right of a poor Guatemalan woman to draw water from the river, must be held together. This implies the necessity of new religious and ethical visions of reality.

It seems evident, as one reads this book, that theologians are more interested in "convergent knowing" than most scientists, who enjoy great social prestige, are often highly specialized and confident of the value and status of their work. Our author appreciates those few scientist/theologians,

e.g., Teillhard, Polkinghorne, and those philosophically inclined scientists, e.g., Bohr, Heisenberg, who practise what he calls "post-normal science." By this he means a science that embraces an "expansive epistemic framework" rejecting a vision of the universe as mechanistic, reductionist, and purposeless. He challenges suppositions that science produces final, precise information about reality that are free from uncertainty. Rather, a new paradigm views the universe as "deeply relational, self-regulating, and self-determining, and therefore open to uncertain outcomes" (175). He engages in detailed debates among scientists, philosophers of science and theologians about the ethical implications of evolutionary theory, e.g., regarding competition and predation, versus cooperation and mutuality. He, and his interlocutors, appreciate James Lovelock's "Gaia," which he sees as "an excellent myth" that can bridge science, philosophy and religion, affirming "a commingling of mysterious spiritual thinking with the scientific empirical thinking so needed today" (196). A good example is how theologian Boff, through his panentheistic/Trinitarian thought, works with scientist Mark Hathaway, to affirm that "creativity" is inherent in the very fabric of the universe (207). Against a simplistic mechanistic empiricism, Appolloni and his interlocutors want to insist that the scientific process is not purely rational. It entails the entire spectrum of human experience, involving a fragmented social community, social forces, habits and biases.

This is sometimes a heavy read, engaging complex matters of great contemporary importance. It is richly informative and rewarding for those who persevere.

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Beyond the Noise of Solemn Assemblies: The Protestant Ethic and the Quest for Social Justice in Canada

Richard Allen. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018. Pp. xxxi+388.

Richard Allen, formerly of the faculty of history at McMaster University, was arguably the foremost historian of the Canadian social gospel until his death in March 2019. This book is a collection of his essays; ten previously published, but difficult to access for non-scholars, and six published here for the first time. Allen was interested in the engagement of religion with surrounding society. His main focus as a historian was on the era of the

social gospel in Canada, 1880-1920, and immediately after. These essays make a fitting conclusion to his illustrious career.

The first autobiographical essay describes Allen's upbringing in United Church manses in British Columbia during the 1930s and 40s. It offers a fascinating snapshot of what the Student Christian Movement/social gospel wing of the United Church and a United Church Sunday School were like then. Chapter 2 reports Allen's impressions gained from a visit to Eastern Europe in 1948 and the questions it raised for him. Chapter 3 is the first of two essays assessing Max Weber's famous thesis concerning the relationship between the spirit of western capitalism and Reformed Christianity. Chapter 4 studies the rise of totalitarianism and notes that the Nazi ascent to power was made possible by a series of breakdowns in the areas of law, politics, economics, culture and religion. Chapter 5 studies how the concept of providence was transformed into the notion of progress in Canada, becoming what Douglas John Hall called the official optimism of White Canada.

Chapter 6 is the first of seven chapters devoted to the Canadian social gospel, each a goldmine of detailed analysis that highlights its distinctive Canadian themes, its colonial aspects and its accomplishments in helping create a more just society for many. Chapter 13 examines the influence of religion on the life and work of Norman Bethune. Chapter 14 studies a Canadian minor theological classic, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, a multi-authored book published by the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order in 1936 as a response to the social crisis of the Great Depression. Allen notes how the more conflictual analysis of society here moved beyond the social gospel, marking, in his words, "a significant turning point in Canadian intellectual history."

Chapter 15 was first delivered as a lecture in 1991 responding to Francis Fukuyama's thesis about the end of history. It brings Allen's study of the interaction of religion and social issues up-to-date. Here Allen argues that the ecumenical justice coalitions such as Project North had a significant impact on Canadian society by keeping social justice issues before churches and parishes through the 1970s and 80s. By doing so they contributed to the advance of social democratic politics in Canada.

Chapter 16 is the second essay on the debate over Weber's thesis. The postscript offers reflections on the interaction between the secular and the sacred in Canada and North Atlantic societies in general. Allen argues that religion is present in the secular sphere at present, in the form of myths that underlie many economic theories and political movements. He criticizes the idea that religion is inherently divisive and should be banned from the public sphere. Instead, he rightly notes that religion can provide

a starting point and impulse for social regeneration that diverse peoples can gather around in their search for a better social order. Allen, though, is careful to nuance his vision of how religion should be present in a culturally and religiously diverse society. Religion needs to engage public issues dialogically, as one perspective among many, and in ways that are able to link up with other perspectives and movements, so as to form united front.

The term social gospel is sometimes used as a slogan in the United Church with little concrete content. Allen's careful work brings the issues, personalities and events of the Canadian social gospel to life, delineating the strengths and weaknesses of this important era and movement in the history of Canadian English-speaking Protestantism. His discussions of Weber's thesis will primarily interest academics. But everything else here will be helpful to anyone interested in how Protestants in Canada have addressed social issues in search of a more just society, and how religion and secular society have interacted in English-speaking Canada.

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Mission and Migration: The Changing Mission Goals of The United Church of Canada and the Mission of Koreans within It
HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Don Schweitzer. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2019. Pp. 144.

Mission and Migration is the new book by HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Timothy Eaton Memorial Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, and Don Schweitzer, the McDougald Professor of Theology at St. Andrew's College, University of Saskatchewan. It is published by The United Church of Canada (UCC), originating from engagements with Korean-speaking United Church leaders and lay people across the country.

Mission and Migration is the third part of the six-year project named "an intercultural adventure" (5) after the co-authors' books, *An Introduction to The United Church of Canada* (Daejeon, South Korea: Daejanggan, 2013) and *The Authority of Interpretation of Scripture in The United Church of Canada* (Daejeon, South Korea: Daejanggan, 2016). This book is a pioneering work in introduction to Korean migrant's experience of intercultural mission in the UCC. It first reviews the brief

history of the UCC mission goals, then demonstrates the migration experience of Koreans in Canada, and finally focuses on the intercultural mission of Koreans and what roles they could play in the UCC and Canadian society.

The book seeks to be an intercultural bridge between Korean immigrants and the UCC because of the many differences in language, culture, behaviour, customs, and law base between minority Korean speaking people and their settling mainstream Canadian church, the UCC. On the one hand, it tries to help Korean immigrants understand the UCC better from the perspective of its mission goal history; on the other hand, it argues Korean UCC members can effect mission in the UCC as "a constructive and prophetic role" (6). Kim-Cragg and Schweitzer propose an intercultural hybrid model for Korean immigrants in order to help them avoid the simplistic destiny of "cultural assimilation" that is expected of new immigrants.

This book's first half offers an important intercultural lesson by illuminating the history of the UCC mission goals when most of Canadian new immigrants came from culturally different regions such as Asia, Africa, Oceania, Latin America, as well as some parts of Europe. The authors offer an interpretation of the cultural hybrid policy of the UCC and account for the reasons for the church's current policy with regard to five mission themes (local congregations, Canada, overseas, international affairs, and morality).

The second half of this book is a case study of Korean immigrants' cultural experiences in Canada and Christian spiritual practices within the intercultural mission of the UCC. This part is contextual and very inspiring to other minoritized peoples like me (a Chinese immigrant and a new member of the UCC). According to Kim-Cragg and Schweitzer, the good news to these minoritized peoples does not necessarily mean "the pain of marginalization" (100) in their context of "dislocation, disorientation and discrimination" (90). Korean Canadian Christians can create a cultural hybrid space in the UCC system as Korean, Canadian, and Christian simultaneously in one body.

The event of the tower of Babel, as depicted in the Old Testament, has become both history and reality in the intercultural mission. What is the way to carry on the responsibilities of a Christian in a postcolonial world today? How could the traditional white mainstream church like the UCC survive in the global context? Kim-Cragg and Schweitzer's book *Mission and Migration* proposes a theological path of intercultural mission about minority people within a dominant culture. To them, the "intercultural mission" means to create a "hybrid space" for God's mission

(*Missio Dei*) where different cultures coexist without hierarchy while hybridizing to a new culture and identity.

This space provides equal dialogical opportunities for different cultures freely meeting, democratically negotiating, and humanely interacting in Christ.

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The Interface of Science, Theology, and Religion: Essays in Honor of Alister E. McGrath

Dennis Ngien (ed.). Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2019. Pp. vii-234.

There are certain voices in any field of study that command an attentive audience. In the realm of science and faith, one of those voices is Alister McGrath. In this *Festschrift*, many voices address the influence of McGrath's ideas. This compellation representing a diverse academic community invites the reader to witness the impact of McGrath's work from a theological perspective.

Many collections of essays such as this have a certain inequality where some rise to the heights of profundity while others languish in obscurity. This work which is carefully edited by Dennis Ngien does not suffer from such a disparity.

Ngien's introduction sets the stage arguing that theology is deeply relevant and "offers manifold service to the church, and speaks to the world, to culture and to society in general" (1). Each of the essays falls into one or more of these general categories: didactics, polemics, apologetics, spirituality or ministerial.

Of particular interest to our readership is Tony Lane's work on baptism and initiation. He argues that baptism is not taken seriously enough by the broader church and especially in the British evangelical community. The latter group, he suggests, has created "surrogates" (27) to the sacrament such as Altar Calls and the "Sinner's Prayer" (27). This error is particularly noticeable in the teachings of well known clergy such as Nicky Gumbell and John Stott who have overemphasized other expressions of commitment over the immediate baptism of new believers. Lane argues that this is un-biblical and is also a deviation from not only

the "early church fathers but also the Reformers" (26).

Patrick Franklin is similarly provocative in the essay, "The God Who Sends is The God Who Loves." His cogent thesis is that the church needs to reclaim its trinitarian understanding of mission. This is in direct response to "a tendency to promote pragmatic and functional approaches to mission" (33). He echoes the theology of Augustine and Mowry LaCugna and challenges the methods of Guder and Frost. For Franklin, it is the Trinity that is the "model for human relationships and the church" (38) and that "God's mission to the world is rooted in God's love for the world" (46). With this I totally agree but I think his criticism of the pragmatists is a bit harsh.

Another insightful work is Graham Ward's "Christology and Creation: Another Kind of Naturalism." Herein lies a significant engagement with McGrath's ideas. He argues along with McGrath, that there is no such thing as pure "nature" (155). Rather, the Christian sees nature through the Christian *Imaginarium*. This is founded in Augustine's "De Trinitate" which examines creation from God's point of engagement in which each person in the Triune Godhead is involved.

A somewhat more esoteric essay is by Bethany Sollereder (a Canadian). She suggests that it is necessary for those engaged in the dialogue between theology and science to develop a third culture within ourselves. This arises from an humble identity that lets go of mastery and embraces uncertainty. She cogently describes this process as becoming a "150% person" (198). This new perspective allows us a broader view of both experience and knowledge. I found this argument helpful in this important dialogue.

The *piece de resistance*, however, is by Michael Lloyd, who is a colleague of McGrath's at Wycliffe Hall. Lloyd gently challenges McGrath's concept of theodicy. His argument can be distilled into the way he challenges the proposition that the omnipotence of God, the reality of evil, the limitlessness of God and the belief that good eliminates evil, are philosophically incompatible. He feels that McGrath rejects the latter of these propositions along with the notion of the impassibility of God. McGrath, he feels, is trying to avoid the critique of theists by atheists that an omnipotent God would allow suffering. McGrath's response is to uphold human free will that allows for the existence of suffering. Lloyd counters that if we look at the ministry of Jesus, it is a divine assault on evil where Jesus is outraged at the devastating nature of evil and seeks to overcome it (220). He seems to suggest that the good will eliminate evil in Christ.

As Phil Ziegler states in his cover note, all the essays help the

readers “engage their intellects, encourage their thinking, and enliven their souls.” This is a good read.

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