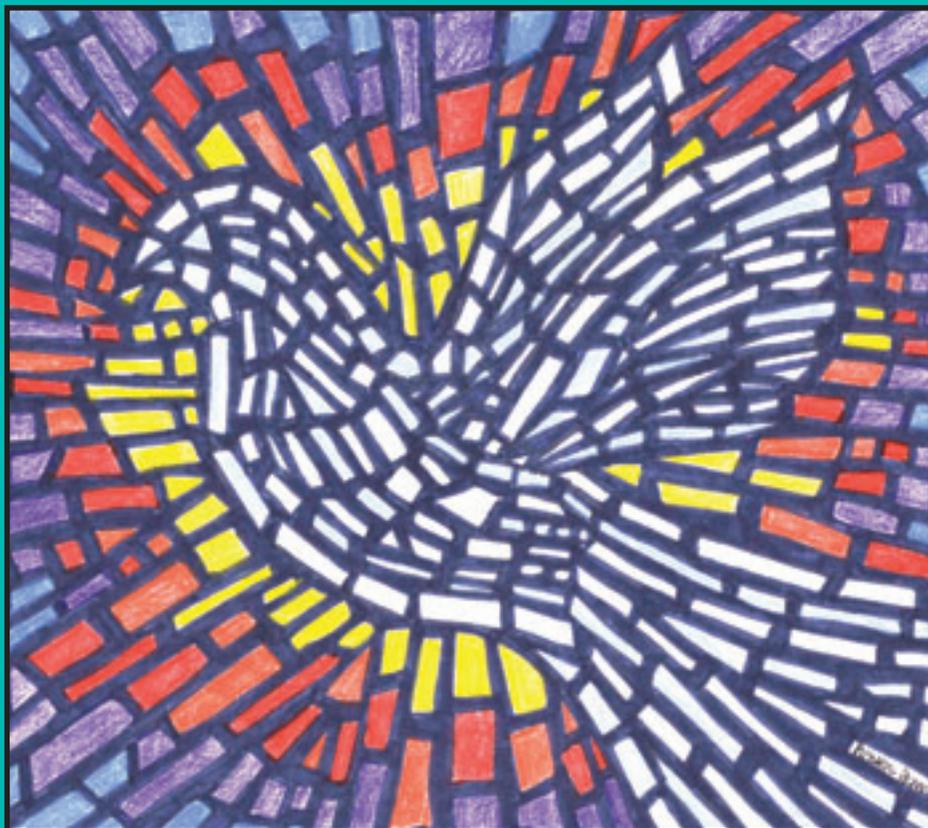

PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Student Journal



2011-2012

Perkins Student Journal

2011–2012

[The] need for love is an essential element in the structure of personality.
It is responsible for the establishing of a pattern of response to other
human beings that makes possible all forms of community
and relatedness between human beings in society.

~ by Howard Thurman

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

1 John 4:7–8 (New Revised Standard Version)

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The Perkins Student Journal (PSJ) is a student-produced publication highlighting the works of students at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas. Submissions to the PSJ are accepted from current Perkins Students and the previous year's graduates. Submission forms are available at Perkins by request. Copies of this issue of the PSJ are available from the Office of Community Life at Perkins School of Theology.

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Prologue

When the editorial board set out this year to begin the process of the call for submissions, among the many questions that were raised was: will there be a theme? After discussing it, we resigned ourselves to allowing a theme to form based on the work that we received. In other words, rather than putting forth some prescribed area of focus that we wanted our peers to adhere to, we believed that somehow there would be a common thread woven into the fabric of these collective works that would produce its own theme. And we were right in that regard.

As we began to sort through the submissions, doing critical theological reflection on each (as we are taught to do at Perkins), it became apparent that there is something remarkably provocative that connects us in the Perkins community in a way that speaks to the Christian cohesiveness that gels us together—intentional expressions of God’s love. This theme, if you will, began to emerge from the pages of the selected articles and artwork. In my own time of poring over the pages of these pieces, I had an opportunity to journey with my peers in their own experiences of recognizing God’s love from the simple beauty of preaching to a multitude of birds as Patrick Hoffman writes about in his review of St. Francis’ “Little Flowers,” to the challenging questions of what it means to love ethically and morally as David Browning addresses in his paper on theologian Karl Barth.

I thought of how the great theologian, preacher, author, pastor, and scholar Howard Thurman talks about love in his 1972 publication, *The Creative Encounter*. He writes: “There is no feeling quite comparable to the adult feeling that someone cares for you as *you* without any extras involved. Each person longs for the kind of relationship with others in which it is no longer necessary to pretend in any sense whatsoever. In other words there is the deep need to be dealt with in some sense that is total, that is all-inclusive, that is completely complete.” It is arguably this kind of feeling that Rebecca Garrett so beautifully illustrates in “*Regardless*,” challenging us to celebrate ourselves and to affirm the “regardless” that wants to resound in our beings. This encounter brings to mind the story of the woman in the Gospel of Luke who anoints Jesus Christ. Debra Rogers offers a feminist approach to a familiar passage, and in doing so, she raises some critical theological exegetical questions about how the woman in the text is perceived. Whether you’ve grown to embrace the feminist and/or womanist theology, I hope that this piece stirs within you a desire to revisit the Luke passage with a critical eye.

Can one fully appreciate the intentional expressions of God’s love without considering the barriers, constraints and restraints that often stand in the way of allowing that love to “live out loud” as is the common idiomatic expression that has recently been coined? Ask yourself that question as you journey with Rebecca G. Tankersley through the history of the Christian Movement as she shares about the lives of two 13th century Christian monks who leave Beijing to journey to the Holy Land of Jerusalem. Then prepare to encounter monastic spirituality and mysticism with Jose Sanchez-Perry as he explores the experiential and esoteric union with God in “Apparitions in the Darkness.” Not only do we learn how our Christian heritage has shaped our own view and experiences of our Christian life today, but we also are witnesses to how the truths of these religious experiences unfolded for Jose and

brought him face-to-face with answers to his own unsettled questions. Camille Reeder takes on a different path of mysticism. She brings us to the intersection of Christian mysticism by way of John Wesley's view of religious experiences and neuroscience. The biggest barrier that complicates intentional expressions of God's love is when it is deemed unconventional, different, or uncomfortable. Reagan Lunn shows us how "*Love Wins*" when we eliminate those fears. Finally, we learn from Filipe Maia how to experience God in the margins of the Latin American poor. Even in the artwork and photography shared by Kristen Hanna, Sari Frey, and Reagan Lunn, the elements of God's love can be seen.

I am appreciative to all the people who were involved in helping to produce this journal. To my peers who gave of their time and talents in serving on the editorial board, especially Sun Ah Kang, who reviewed papers all the way from her home of Korea. To Amanda Bresciani, last year's editor-in-chief, who offered encouragement and assistance. I am grateful to Dr. Heller, Tracy Anne Allred and Geoffrey Moore for their support and advisement. Finally in memory of D'Anna Chance, who served as editor-in-chief in 2009, and whose acts of intentional love are with us every day at Perkins.

It is my prayer that we will all have the courage to live God's love out loud.

~ Yvette R. Blair-Lavallais

Cover Photograph

She Flies On, by Kristen Hanna

This ink and colored-pencil drawing was inspired by a hymn text by Canadian hymnodist Gordon Light on the subject of the Holy Spirit:

*She comes sailing on the wind,
Her wings flashing in the sun,
On a journey just begun, she flies on.*

Over the summer, I ventured up to Christ United Methodist in Plano, Texas and had the blessing of being entranced by their stained glass windows. What is interesting about these windows is that there is considerably more solder than glass, and up close, they look less than extraordinary. However, when the sun hits the small shards, they flash the most beautiful, vibrant colors across the sanctuary. While reflecting on the Holy Spirit in the process of Credo-writing, I realized that this is how I see her: a wild bird, mid-flight, flashing the Creator's glory across the cosmos from the glint of her wings.

Kristen graduated in May 2012 with a Master of Sacred Music degree. She is the Director of Music Ministries at Preston Hollow United Methodist Church. In addition to art and music, Kristen enjoys sewing.

Howard Thurman Excerpt

Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 105

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The Little Flowers of Saint Francis

By Patrick Hoffman

The Christian spiritual classic, *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, has been formative for Christians attempting to glean insight from the great mendicant friar. Related to their ideas of extreme poverty, many of the lessons and stories of St. Francis and his disciples appear to be focused away from this world and focused primarily on the next. However, with an understanding of the deep humility, patience, and compassion these spiritual people exhibited, one can begin to understand how this disconnect not only leads to service in the world, but also new hope for those who suffer in this life. Also relevant to St. Francis' dependence upon God is his understanding of Creation, and how we as humans are to interact with it. All of these insights have led to a deepening of my own understanding of prayer and spirituality, appropriating the stories and following in the footsteps of the Little Poor Man of Assisi.

The stories of St. Francis and his disciples are rich and varied. Written a century after the death of Francis himself, the narratives contained therein evoke images and parallels to the scriptural accounts of Jesus and the Apostles. These stories consist of St. Francis and his followers living out their lives of poverty in direct opposition to the values of the world. The majority of *The Little Flowers* is concerned with recounting the deeds of Francis and his early followers. One striking aspect of these passages is their focus on the miraculous deeds performed by the friars, as well as their attitudes, while minimizing the attention given to their sayings. There is no doubt that the sayings of Francis and his early followers are important, and in many cases they appear to cause change even in animals they are spoken to. However, beneath these spoken words an attitude of humility and patience is clearly visible. In turn, the words are accompanied by the miracles performed by the friars. It is as though the author of *The Little Flowers* wants to convey the message that it is precisely these attitudes of patience and humility in the presence of God that allowed these ordinary people to live a life of miraculous deed and word.

If one focuses purely on the words of the friars, found in *The Little Flowers*, it would be easy to dismiss the sayings as false humility at best, and pathologically low self-esteem at worst. To do so would miss the spiritual insights provided by the friars whose humility and patience resulted from their relationship with God. This attitude of Francis and his early followers is perhaps best contained in the humorous story of "*How God Spoke to St. Francis Through Brother Leo*."¹ In the story, St. Francis and Brother Leo are preparing to say matins, when they realized they lacked the required books to perform the office. Instead, Francis

¹ Raphael Brown, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 60.

suggests that he chastise himself saying, “Oh, Brother Francis, you have done so much evil and sin in the world that you deserve hell,” to which Brother Leo is to respond, “It is true that you deserve the depths of hell.”² Brother Leo, the obedient friar and brother that he is, consents to this arrangement. However, when it comes time to fulfill his duty and affirm St. Francis’ self-censure, he can only respond, “God will perform so much good through you that you will go to Paradise.”³ Francis is understandably upset—his intention is to confess to God his unworthiness, and Brother Leo will not help him in this task. The exchange continues, with Francis chastising himself, and Brother Leo, though agreeing to be obedient, affirms God’s love for the penitent Francis. Eventually, Francis becomes “gently angry and patiently troubled,” and asks Leo why he would disobey a direct order from his superior. To this, Leo responds, with great theological insight, that, “God knows, dear Father, that each time I have resolved in my heart to answer as you told me, but God makes me speak as pleases Him, not as pleases me.”⁴ Though Francis sees himself as a failure, God’s grace and love have been revealed through Leo. Superficially, it appears as though St. Francis is simply showing false modesty, and that Brother Leo is simply praising his great master. Upon closer reflection, however, the deep spirituality and closeness to God of these friars is revealed. Francis is so close to God, his humility has taken on an almost obsessive quality. Likewise, Leo’s closeness to God forces his obedience to the higher power of God and not Francis.

The final theme, of the importance of creation, is present in an interesting way throughout *The Little Flowers*. In some cases, this theme is explicit. In the narrative of “*How God Revealed to St. Clare and Brother Silvester That St. Francis Should Go and Preach*,” the intimacy Francis shared with creation is seen on two occasions. The first occurs during his first sermon, when he ordered the swallows to keep quiet until he finished preaching. Perhaps more revealing of the intimacy of Francis with creation is seen when Francis, almost on a whim, begins to preach directly to a multitude of birds while traveling. Francis begins this sermon for the birds by reminding them of their dependence upon God, who has given them everything they have. Sustenance, feathers for clothing, and places to take refuge; all are signs of God’s love for them. Francis even reminds the birds of their own salvation history; when God saved their kind with the provision of Noah’s ark during the Flood. In response, according to Francis, the birds are to never be ungrateful and are to always praise their creator. According to the narrator, “at these words of St. Francis, all those birds began to open their beaks, stretch out their necks, spread their wings, and reverently bow their heads to the ground, showing by their movements and their songs that the words which St. Francis was saying gave them great pleasure.”⁵ It is clear that the message to the birds has importance to humans as well, but what is perhaps more important is the attitude toward creation seen in this story. The birds have been recognized as equal members of creation, dependent upon God and created for God’s praise. In joyous recognition of this sign from the birds of their acknowledgment of his message, Francis “devoutly praised the wonderful Creator in them and gently urged them to praise the Creator.”⁶ Humans, as creatures

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 61.

⁴ Ibid, 62.

⁵ Ibid, 77.

⁶ Ibid.

themselves, share this status with all of creation. The only response to such solidarity is joy, as seen with the example of St. Francis.

Beyond the theme of solidarity with creation, *The Little Flowers* reveals that creation is a place where we meet with God undisturbed. On many occasions, St. Francis is in the woods, meditating and communing with God. The woods, then, take on a central importance for Francis' spirituality. As refuge even from the monastery, creation provides a direct link to God. This importance is seen implicitly in the story of "*How a Young Friar Fainted When He Saw St. Francis Speaking with Christ*." The story recounts the faith of a young friar who, new to the monastery, was curious to see the holiness of Francis. After the other monks had retired for the evening, Francis went off on his own to "a hill near the Place where there was a very beautiful forest in order to pray alone in a small hut that was there."⁷ Later in the evening, when the boy searched for Francis in the woods, he heard a multitude of voices coming from the place where Francis was praying. Upon arrival, the boy saw "a marvelous light completely surrounding St. Francis, and in that light he saw Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist and a great throng of angels, who were talking with St. Francis."⁸ Understandably the young friar faints at such a sight, only to be discovered and lovingly returned to the monastery by Francis, who urged him to not speak of what he had seen. Superficially, this is an appropriation of the Transfiguration, in which Francis has taken the place of Jesus as human interlocutor with the divine. However, the message of this story, using the theme of the importance of creation as an interpretive lens, appears to be that for those who are appropriately spiritual, in right relationship with God, creation can serve as a point where the human and the divine can intermingle. It is only after escaping the holy confines of the monastery, in the midst of the beautiful forest, that Francis can experience the divine presence most fully. For the uninitiated and unprepared, in this case the young friar, such an experience can be overwhelming.

The second portion of *The Little Flowers* consists primarily of the stories of later friars and their actions and humility. These narratives focus primarily on the spiritual visions these friars received as a result of their patient and humble attitudes. Many are reported to have seen the risen Christ, along with Mary, angels, and the saints—primarily Francis. Others experienced help during times of illness. In the case of the friar whose name the narrator does not remember—a mark of the realistic nature of the author, the Virgin Mary visited and consoled him in his time of illness. In other cases, the intense spirituality of these friars allowed them to see the souls of the saints as they were released from purgatory and into heaven. Throughout all of these narratives, punctuated by ecstatic, otherworldly, and supernatural experiences, a constant theme of theologically rooted humility is expressed. This humility is concerned primarily with patience, expressed in the friar's contemplative actions and service for others. These two attitudes also result in a changed relationship with God and creation, where the focus is upon dependence and loving gratitude, not fear and exploitation. These attitudes form themes that are seen clearly in the stories of the friars who came after Francis.

⁷ Ibid, 78.

⁸ Ibid, 79.

The three themes of humility, patience, and right relationship with God and creation are clearly seen in the aforementioned story of the Holy Friar who was visited by Mary when he was ill. The mortally ill friar consoled by the Virgin Mary is said to have been “of such great holiness and grace that he seemed to be godlike.”⁹ In order to adequately describe the nature of this friar’s faith, the author recalls the time when he communed with God so deeply that birds rested upon him and sang as he meditated. Following this meditation, as if more confirmation was needed of such a personal experience with God, the narrator notes that “he was so overflowing with joy that he seemed rather like an angel, for then his face radiated in a marvelous way his communion with God, to such an extent that it aroused wonder and surprise in those who saw him.”¹⁰ And yet, perhaps because of his great humility, the author cannot remember the name of such a righteous person. It is almost as if, out of respect of this friar’s humility, the narrator has purposely omitted his name. Equally important in this story, beyond the friar’s humility and patience, is the relationship between these two attitudes and the importance of creation. It is because of his humility and patience that the friar is able to commune so serenely with God, and as a result, he draws creation to himself, represented here by the perching and singing birds—not to exploit it but to commune with it. This is but one example of the kind of humility, patience, and relationship with creation seen in some of the followers of Francis and the Order of the Friars Minor, as told by the author of *The Little Flowers*.

From my own perspective, reading *The Little Flowers* was a difficult exercise. Lurking beneath my expressed faith is a seditious suspicion of the miraculous. Born of enlightenment empirical reasoning, this hermeneutic of suspicion penetrates my psyche and influences my interpretation and experience of the spiritual. Therefore, my initial reading of *The Little Flowers* was of patronizing empiricism. These supernatural “stories” were at best rooted in explainable situations that had been aggrandized. At worst they were fantasy. The parallelisms between many of the stories of St. Francis, with the stories of scripture were too coincidental, too scripted. If these events did happen, the “true” event had become corrupted by myth and legend. The humility and patience of the friars seemed insincere and obsessive. Their righteousness appeared to me as self-righteousness. The miraculous stories of St. Francis’ experiences with creation, especially the sermon to the birds, and St. Anthony’s sermon to fishes, were interesting and enjoyable, but ultimately cartoonish. These “tall tales” contained valuable allegory and metaphor, symbols for the friar’s deep humility and patience, and of their relationship with God. All of these lessons are important for all people, especially those seeking to become spiritual. But as humanity as a species has evolved since the time of Francis, how were these lessons to be accessible to people living in an age when sermons are not preached to birds? I feared that I had made the wrong decision when choosing a book to report on. Instead, as I have come to discover, I should have feared that I lacked the spiritual discipline to see beyond such a simplistic and naïve interpretation, to the deeper meaning present in the words and deeds of St. Francis.

It wasn’t until I read another book, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden* (2001), in which author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi describes his personal journey discovering the

⁹ Ibid, 149.

¹⁰ Ibid.

mystic traditions of Islam and Christianity from an Israeli Jewish perspective, that I realized the consequences of my suspicions. Part of what makes Halevi's journey successful is that he is able to approach these separate, often conflicting traditions with respect. This allowed me to open myself to the possibilities contained within *The Little Flowers*. Something happened to those friars, to that little poor man from Assisi that allowed a deeper connection to God, which I, and many post-enlightenment people like me, can only begin to hope for. As such, *The Little Flowers* had much to teach me about my preconceived notions of spirituality, and how that related to the themes of humility, patience, and creation.

St. Francis didn't just appear to be humble; rather, he embodied humility. The story "About the Humility and Obedience of St. Francis and Brother Bernard" reveals the nature of this humility. Francis, nearly blind from the amount of penitential crying he has done, attempts to get Brother Bernard's attention while he is in the woods meditating. When he is ignored, Francis asks God for the reason behind Bernard's slight. God answers that "Brother Bernard, when you called him, he was united with Me, and so he could not go to you or answer you."¹¹ In response, Francis submits in humility to Brother Bernard his frustrations. Humility is the only response to the love and sustenance given by God. In response to infinity, we are reminded of our finitude. It was arrogance that prevented my full appreciation of this text. By accepting my own finitude, rejecting any attempt at false humility, and accepting the chastisement of this story, I have come to learn something about spirituality and prayer. In the narrative, it is St. Francis who is humbled by God. Now it is I who is humbled. This lesson of humility and patience is an important one for my own spiritual journey, and will doubt prove invaluable for both my ministry and my life.

At the same time, this narrative has taught me patience, its value for ministry, and its necessity for spirituality. Perhaps a by-product of post-enlightenment thinking, perhaps some deeper facet of my personality, I have the tendency to be pragmatic. If something doesn't work the way I think it should, then it has no use, and can be discarded. Sadly, I think this has been my approach to spirituality as well, precisely because of my lack of patience. I have attempted spiritual disciplines in the past, pled with God for answers to prayer, and saw no improvement, no answers to my prayers. Eventually, I stopped the discipline, and my prayer life waned. The lesson I take from St. Francis is the power of patience. In describing perfect joy, St. Francis says that "if we endure all those evils and insults and blows with joy and patience, reflecting that we must accept and bear the sufferings of the Blessed Christ patiently for love of Him, oh, Brother Leo, write: that is perfect joy!"¹² Part of the path to spirituality, of right relationship with God and others, is the practice of patience. If I cannot overcome my disbelief at some of the miraculous stories in *The Little Flowers*, perhaps it is because of my own cold pragmatism, my own lack of patience that is at the root of this disbelief. To overcome this disbelief I must be patient, accepting the stories for what they are, accepting myself for who I am, and trusting that God will be present and show me grace. This sense of patient dependence is the heart of St. Francis, and I hope that I can take this lesson not only into my spiritual life, but also into the world through ministry.

Like humility and patience, I read *The Little Flowers* with a preconceived notion of what it

¹¹ Ibid, 46.

¹² Ibid, 60.

meant to be in relationship with the rest of creation. I knew the importance of healing that wound of the world known as ecological abuse, and recognized that through the doctrine of creation ex nihilo that all creation is equal in its status as formed from nothing. However, it wasn't until reading the stories of St. Francis preaching to the birds, and St. Anthony preaching to the fishes, as well as the story of the wolf of Gubbio, that I came to realize what treating creation as equal looked like. The true miracle of these stories is that St. Francis and St. Anthony treated these creatures as equals. In the case of St. Anthony, the creatures were more responsive than the heretics. Because these creatures were treated as fellow members of creation, provided for and loved by God, each with their own duty to praise their Creator, they responded in kind. Perhaps the reason we don't live in a world where birds and fish are spoken to, is because we don't try, and we're afraid they will ignore us, for too long we have ignored them as equals. This is the lesson I take from the theme of creation present throughout *The Little Flowers*, to treat creation as an equal.

The Little Flowers of Saint Francis has been formative for generations of Christians seeking a more intimate relationship with God. Now, I count myself among that multitude. The lessons of humility, patience, and equanimity with creation have all been impressed upon me through the sayings and stories of the little poor man from Assisi. Hopefully, these lessons will lead to a deeper spirituality, and a greater recognition of my utter dependence upon God. Hopefully, this recognition will lead to the day when I, too, can preach to a flock of birds about the glory of God's salvation and sanctification.

Patrick Hoffman is a 2nd year M. Div. student who is pursuing elder ordination in the UMC. He is a certified candidate in the Texas Annual Conference and plans to continue on the path to ordination upon graduation. He received his Bachelor's degree in Criminology from the University of Texas at Dallas and works part time at UTD as tech support. Having grown up in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and different places in the US, Patrick appreciates the global theological perspective that Perkins offers. When he is not busy writing and doing critical theological reflection, he enjoys spending time with his family.

Karl Barth: Ethics, the Church and State, and a Respect for Life

By David Browning

Brethren, how must it fare with me,
Or how am I justified,
If it be proven that I am he
For whom mankind has died;
If it be proven that I am he
Who being questioned denied?

Rudyard Kipling, "The Question"¹

During the first half of the twentieth century, the practices involved in warfare seemed to evolve at an unprecedented pace. An example of such developments occurred during the First World War, with the introduction of new weapons such as the sub-machine gun. Later, as the scope of the Second World War expanded to include both European and Asian theatres, the pursuit to develop atomic weaponry became an international priority. Thus, even in such a terse overview as this, it is possible to see that technological developments in modern warfare have resulted in military action being waged at greater distances, and the capability to inflict greater casualties upon an enemy combatant. Although these are only two of the many complex issues involved in modern warfare, they nonetheless allude to the ethical dilemmas that confront thoughtful Christians in times of war.

Indeed, the incipient ethical question for the Christian must regard the extent to which one's faith will limit or permit participation in a war. However, following the Constantinian settlement, this ethical dilemma has been further complicated by the involvement of the church in the affairs of the state, resulting in the so-called Christian state. Yet, a Christian who desires to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ will likely be perplexed by the difficulty in an attempt to reconcile the teachings of Christ with the often violent demands of the state. Early attempts to resolve such tensions between the church and the state resulted in the development of what is known as just war theory, which allowed Christians to engage in warfare as long as the war could be considered just. Alternatively, other Christians, especially those from the Anabaptist tradition, have understood Christ's message of peace-making as one of the clearest directives upon the Christian life. This conviction has led these groups to follow a particular form of non-violence that may be categorized broadly as pacifism. However, as previously alluded, the realities of modern warfare have complicated ethical

¹ Rudyard Kipling, "The Question," *Rudyard Kipling Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf in Everyman's Library, 2007) 191.

deliberation upon such matters, including attempts to respond faithfully to warfare in an atomic age. A perspective that acknowledges this complexity of the Christian position in modern warfare can be seen in the writings of Karl Barth, a theologian who was quite familiar with the horrors of the world wars.

As one may anticipate, Barth's approach to ethics in general, and warfare in particular, is unique to his systematic framework, as well as characteristically nuanced. Yet, this position is arguably worth considering as a viable, Christian approach to ethical consideration, the modern state, and warfare in an atomic age. Although the following essay will conclude that Barth's argument is misguided in particular areas (viz. regarding its own internal coherence), the primary goal of the essay will be to present Barth's sympathy with pacifism and the limits of Christian involvement in warfare. Thus, this essay will proceed in the order that has been suggested, beginning with a summary of Barth's approach to ethics, continuing on to his understanding of the relationship between the church and state, then to Barth's understanding of human life, and finally a more direct account of his convictions concerning Christian participation in war. This analysis will conclude with a brief critique of Barth's position from his own student, John Howard Yoder, who arguably understood this aspect of Barth's position better than many other critics.

Farewell to Casuistic Reasoning: The Role of Ethics in Barth's Dogmatics

Before attention may be given to Barth's understanding of the sanctity of human life and warfare, one must first understand his more general approach to ethics, which he describes in *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* (CD III.4). Barth begins this section by describing the broad category of theological ethics, and its role in dogmatic discourse. He posits that ethics, or more precisely, theological ethics, is given the task of understanding "the Word of God as the command of God."² That is, theological ethics is the area of dogmatics in which doctrine is applied. More specifically, according to Barth, when theological ethics is employed to respond to the problems that confront humankind, such a response can only be considered good insofar as it is "...sanctified by the Word of God which as such is also the command of God."³ Thus, the important qualification that is added to the task of theological ethics, as part of the dogmatic task of the church, is to sanctify the actions of humankind by the command of God.

Within this broad category of theological ethics exists two sub-categories, only one of which may be viewed as a legitimate pursuit of Christian dogmatics.⁴ The first aspect of theological ethics consists in directing the gaze upward, "...in relation to the divine action." This important act within theological ethics is a return to Barth's concern that human action

2 Barth's use of the phrase "the Word of God" is always multifaceted, and rarely refers simply to the text of Scripture. Rather, with characteristic nuance, Barth's concept of "the Word of God" does not refer to the biblical narrative exclusively, but to the event in which the text becomes "the Word of God" by the movement of the Holy Spirit. Regardless, of difficulties presented by this concept, it does allow for a reference to "the Word of God" in which Scripture is always becoming revelation broadly, and, through Christ, ensures that revelation is always understood as personal and *ad extra*. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I.2 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004); *idem*, vol. III.2, 2.

3 This argument is clearly dependent upon Barth's view of the Word of God (see above). *Ibid.*, CD III.4, 2.

4 To be clear, Barth does indicate that there are occasions in which theological ethics may not be a legitimate task of dogmatics. Cf. *Ibid.*

should be properly understood as submissive to the divine. From this upward gaze comes the designation for the first sub-category, which Barth calls, “general ethics,” which is the area of theological ethics that is concerned to show the “...extent that human sanctification and therefore good human action are effected by the action of God in His command.”⁵ In order to accomplish this task, general ethics must demonstrate three things. First, general ethics must show the way that the command of God is made upon human(s). Second, general ethics must acknowledge and show that the command that is given, and subsequently accepted by humans, is always God’s decision. Third, and perhaps most significant, general ethics must show that the command of God upon human(s) is also God’s judgment upon human(s). The significance of this final requirement is located in Barth’s view of judgment. Although the reader may initially consider this reference to “judgment” as sounding somewhat bombastic, for Barth, this is a “judgment of His grace by which man is at once condemned and acquitted and thus becomes free for eternal life.”⁶

Having shown that the concern of general ethics is the understanding of the Word of God, through which the command of God is given, Barth elucidates the specific task of general ethics as being no less than the evaluation of human action. Although this would seem the most opportune time for such an inference as to how such evaluation is accomplished, Barth is cautious to avoid suggesting that the “upward look” of general ethics could be associated with the mere reference to general principles and norms. Instead, general ethics evaluates human action by affecting the human (viz. spiritual) posture before God, resulting in a person’s submission to the command of God. This command to which a person submits is not a timeless truth excised from Scripture, but a direct claim upon the human by the Word of God. Subsequently, this claim will judge and free the human being to obey, which, incidentally, is the true *τέλος* of human existence. This end, or goal, of human life is no less than complete sanctification before God. However, Barth understands a human as sanctified when (s)he is freed “for eternal life by God’s judging grace.”⁷

After describing the goal of human life, which is part of the task of general ethics, Barth continues on to the more familiar area of “special ethics.” This second sub-category of theological ethics looks “downward...to the man who acts.”⁸ That is, this area of special ethics takes the command of God and assays how it may be obeyed. However, in describing the task of special ethics, Barth also allows his argument to take a more polemical tone:

The command of God does not hang ineffectively in the air above man. Its particular aim and concern are with him and his real activity. It is in his sanctification that its divine majesty, truth, and power are revealed.⁹

In case this appears to be a pleasant observation, one should not overlook Barth’s insistence that the command of God meets human beings in the concrete realities of life, and that it is not hanging “ineffectively in the air above man.” This should be recognized as nothing less than a thinly veiled critique of Immanuel Kant’s understanding of the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid.

“universal law,” to which one must transcend before determining a correct course of action in a particular situation.¹⁰ This type of “categorical imperative” is exactly what Barth is attempting to avoid in his ethical theory, which is perhaps the reason for his vehement opposition to the typical way in which ethics is performed. That is, in this section Barth attempts to provide an alternative to casuistry as an ethical method:

‘Special ethics’ is sometimes taken to mean the understanding of the command of God as a prescribed text, which partly written and partly unwritten, is made up of biblical texts in which there are believed to be seen universally binding divine ordinances and directions, of certain propositions again presumed to be universally valid, of the natural moral law generally perceptible to human reason, and finally of particular norms which have been handed down historically in the tradition of Western Christianity and which lay claim to universal validity.¹¹

This is essentially the process known as casuistry, which Barth argues is “basically unacceptable,” though perhaps nonetheless enticing. Although he does allow for the possibility of a very particular form of casuistry, it seems that he does so lest his critique of norms become a norm in itself.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Barth is frustrated by ethics that are based upon casuistry, and he provides the three reasons for his disdain of the approach. First, he argues that casuistry is essentially flawed because it involves a misplaced understanding of authority. That is, the “moralist wishes to set himself on God’s throne,” which means that casuistic ethics place a mediator between the command of God and one to whom the command is given.¹² Here, Barth’s criticism is aimed at both Protestant and Roman Catholic ethical systems, which have tended to draw special attention to the attempt to find guidance in “...ethical statements compiled by him [the Protestant or Catholic] and his like from the Bible, natural law and tradition.”¹³ No, he argues, there is only one form of casuistry that is tolerable, and it is a “practical casuistry.” While this may sound like an unnecessarily complex nuance, it is Barth’s attempt to rescue the field of ethics from its sojourn in a realm of discourse between experts. Instead, a practical casuistry is one in which the human recipient meets (the Word of) God, and in such an encounter receives the command of God for a specific, concrete situation in reality. As a brief summary of this first critique, it is important to notice that Barth sees ethical casuistry as a reversal of the subject-object relationship

¹⁰ For a more detailed, and direct, account of Kant’s theory, please see: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. III.4, 4.

¹² Barth says of the casuistic thinker, “At a safe distance from the ethical battlefield—like a staff officer of the Lord—he manipulates for himself and others a method of correct decisions—correct in the sense of the law that he has set between the divine decision and his own or that of others.” Although it is unlikely that the association can be proven, it is tempting to wonder if Barth had a specific individual in mind when speaking of the “staff officer of the Lord.” It certainly brings to mind the pejorative writings of Cornelius Van Til, who argues that this is actually the correct way in which the apologist and/or systematic theologian should understand him/herself. This speculation is even more enticing by considering the degree to which Barth and Van Til disagreed with each other. Cf.: Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, second edition, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

¹³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 8.

between God and the human, expressing the most rebellious desire of humankind. Rather, practical casuistry, if driven by a “prophetic *ethos*,” keeps this relationship intact and ultimately finds freedom to obey.¹⁴

Secondly, Barth argues that casuistry is flawed because it seeks in the Bible, tradition, or a conclusion of natural law “...the objectively untenable assumption that the command of God is a universal rule, an empty form, or rather a tissue of such rules and forms.”¹⁵ While the former objection was directed against the individual “moralist” who claims the authority to interpret and determine ethical situations, this objection relates to formulation or quest for universal norms in general. Such an objection is directly related to Barth’s understanding of the Word and the command of God. For him, the attempt to make even Scripture into a universal norm is objectionable in that it is an expression of human hubris that makes the personal God described by Scripture into an impersonal deity.¹⁶

Lastly, Barth argues that casuistry is flawed because it inhibits human action under the command of God. In a direct and pointed phrase, Barth calls this “a destruction of Christian freedom.”¹⁷ As alluded to earlier, Barth describes human freedom as submission to the command of God that is given to each person. This is greater than mere human choice or preference in that it is the freedom to obey. However, casuistry, according to Barth, interferes with the ability of the human to obey by placing “something other and alien” between the command of God and the human’s opportunity to obey. Although it is said with subtlety, Barth draws the conclusion of a reformed thinker, arguing that casuistry jeopardizes salvation (i.e. “free for Him and therefore for eternal life”).¹⁸

However, the question remains: how, then, does one make an ethical decision at all? Barth suggests an approach that remains in the area of special ethics, but would be more properly characterized as practical, special ethics. He argues for an ethical approach in which one attempts to discern the command of God given to individuals in concrete, specific situations. In this “ethical event” the command of God is given, and the human obeys. There is no universal norm that is sought and no intermediary to avoid. However, one also lives in community and in this community one is to develop a “formed reference,” which entails avoiding anticipatory judgment on an action under the command of God, but to offer definite instruction regarding this event.¹⁹ Although one may question the extent to which this approach is feasible or even preferable, such queries must be delayed until a later point. Instead, having provided an overview of Barth’s approach to ethics, this essay will now turn to Barth’s understanding of the church and state, and then attempt to draw the two together in his beliefs concerning a respect for life and the broader issue of war.

Critiquing the Demonic: The Relationship of Church and State

Barth’s most direct discussion of the relationship between the church and state may be found in two places. The first is in his commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans*, and the

¹⁴ Ibid., 8, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14–15.

second is in a brief work titled, *The Church and State* (originally, *Justification and Justice*). Although both works are admirable for their systematic rigor and basis in exegesis, the latter provides the most succinct summary of Barth's perspective regarding the church and state.

He begins the work with a brief historical overview of the topic with which he is to engage. The flaw in previous assessments of the church and state, he argues, is traceable to the Reformers, who held the opportunity to mold future Christian understanding in this area. However, though a review of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli may reveal a belief that the church and state should be separate, the idea is mostly disregarded in the writings of these three thinkers.²⁰ Yet, Barth does reflect upon this neglect with sympathy, concluding that the desire of the reformers was primarily upon the presentation of the Gospel and that this oversight was unintentional. Nevertheless, the silence of the reformers allowed for the possibility that later generations would postulate various and often flawed doctrinal connections between the church and the state. This has meant that in some places the state has become excessively involved in the administration of the government, to the neglect that the Gospel was diminished. Alternatively, it has also meant that the separation between church and state has been excessive and that Christian justification is presented in isolation from involvement with the state.²¹

As an attempt to rectify the perceived failings of the past, Barth endeavors to present the areas in which the New Testament comments directly upon these issues: "For the dubious character of the Reformation solution is decidedly due to the questionable character of the authoritative scriptural arguments on this subject presented at that time."²² Here, Barth's perspective turns away from the epistolary emphasis of the reformation, and, influence by K. L. Schmidt. Rather, Barth points to the Gospel portrait of Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate, and then his subsequent execution, as the clearest picture of the state's regard for the New Testament community. Thus, when posing the question about the nature of the state, one must conclude that it is "of those angelic powers (ἐξουσία) of this age, which is always threatened by 'demonization,' that is, by the temptation of making itself an absolute."²³ Alternatively, the church is presented throughout the New Testament, but no less at the Passion of Christ, as the authentic *πολίτευμα*, the real community that foreshadows a taste of the new heavens and the new earth.²⁴ However, the new heavens and the new earth are yet to be revealed in all their glory, which means that the church, as a part of that new reality, is also partly hidden in the present. In terms of the way in which the state relates to the church, the church is a "foreign community (*παροικία*)," but it is also in solidarity with those who are caused to suffer because of the state. Therefore, the church acknowledges that it is "responsible for the State and for Caesar, and it finally manifests this responsibility, [as] 'the prophetic service of the Church as Watchman.'"²⁵

²⁰ For example, Barth finds that, though Calvin's *Institutes* have a section on the role of government, it is nonetheless lacking in much needed content. Please see Karl Barth, *Church and State*, trans. G. Ronald Howe (London, UK: Student Christian Movement Press, 1939) 1–10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Barth further nuances Schmidt's exposition of the New Testament understanding of the relation between the church and the state in an attempt to formally clarify the New Testament understanding of the conflict between the two. Here, like Schmidt, he sees the critical passage, and the correct starting point, as Christ before Pilate (cf. John 19:11). He hones in upon the words of Christ, in which He declare that Pilate has no power that he has not already been granted by God. This means that Pilate, as the representative of the state, is confronted with a choice. He can either act in an entirely just way, which is the biblical task of the state, or he can pervert justice and subsequently pervert the God-given role of the state. By releasing Jesus, who was innocent of any crimes, the state would have shown itself in solidarity with the Gospel and the church. However, this was not the choice that Pilate made. By condemning Jesus to death and instead releasing a guilty man, justice was perverted, and the state showed itself not as a neutral spectator asking a question about truth, but as a force that tends toward the demonic, threatening God's purpose(s) and his people. Thus, in a survey of New Testament literature, Barth argues that two descriptive points emerge concerning the church and the state: "the State, in its 'demonic form, and thus its authority as the 'power of the present age,' on the one hand; the homelessness of the Church in this age, on the other hand."²⁶ The Church, therefore, is given the duty of acting as the critic of the state, attempting to ensure that it faithfully administers justice so that peace may be established.

"Dona nobis pacem"²⁷

Having briefly examined Barth's perspective on the church and the state, this essay will now return to *CD* III.4. Here, Barth draws together his ethical theory and his understanding of the church and state in the development of a Christian perspective on warfare. While this essay is primarily interested in *CD* III.4, discussion will also be expanded to include material from John Howard Yoder's work titled, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*. In this work, Yoder provides an extensive, cogent summary of Barth's approach to this topic, which is an invaluable resource due the complex nature of isolating this topic within Barth's dogmatic framework.

Barth begins the section titled, "Respect for Life," by acknowledging that his thought on this subject is indebted to Albert Schweitzer, though he disapproves of Schweitzer's self-proclaimed "mystical" ethics.²⁸ Nevertheless, as has been previously stated, in Barth's approach to ethics, obedience to the command of God results in the freedom of the human for God. By returning to this point, Barth reintroduces it as a way of showing the significance of human beings. That is, he attempts to answer the question, why should humans have reverence for life? The first answer, as already noted, is that humans are created to obey God, and they are free to choose to obey or disobey. However, obedience of the command of God is the purpose of human existence, resulting in freedom, which is the (existential) meaning of life: "Obedience to the command of God the Creator is also quite simply man's freedom to

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁷ This is a phrase that Barth uses with sporadic frequency. It is taken from the "Agnus Dei," which is said or sung prior to partaking of the Holy Eucharist (i.e. "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.").

²⁸ The work by Schweitzer to which Barth refers is *Kultur und Ethik*, 1923. Cf.: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 324.

exist as a living being of this particular, i.e., human structure.”²⁹

Following his reiteration that obedience to the command of God is the purpose of human existence, Barth describes four ways in which humans can be considered significant, and thus require a respect for life. The first, which has already been mentioned, is that humans are significant in that they exist as free before God and for fellowship with God. Secondly, humans exist to live in togetherness with other human creatures. That is, humans are humans because they are made for fellowship with God and fellowship with others. Third, humans are humans by the simple reality that they are alive, being comprised of soul and body. Fourth, and finally, humans are constituted as limited beings.³⁰

As the reader may anticipate, it is the third aspect in Barth’s list, humans as living beings comprised of body and soul, that is most relevant to Barth’s analysis of war. The section of *CD* III.4 that focuses upon this directly is titled, “The Protection of Life.” Here, Barth begins with the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the prime example of God’s free gift that constitutes human life:

Human life—one’s own and that of others—belongs to God. It is His loan and blessing. For God has unequivocally and fully accepted it in Jesus Christ, in the incarnation of His Word. Therefore, respect is due to it, and, with respect, protection against each and every callous negation and destruction.³¹

Based upon this assertion, one can easily see why physical life is “good,” namely because life is a necessary prerequisite for obedience to God. However, for Barth this “good” is also a “relative good,” because it is always limited by obedience to God. Therefore, “if obedience should call for the surrender of life, then we could no longer hide behind the statement that life is good: that would be to refuse obedience.”³² As one may infer, this is a return to some of Barth’s primary concerns in the *Dogmatics*. That is, if human life is accepted as a relative good in its obedience to God, then this supposition will subsequently influence any perspective on justified killing, and even war itself. For Barth, this exception that must be allowed as obedience to God, is a concept that is captured uniquely by the term, *Grenzfall*. Barth’s usage of the term includes a certain nuance that complicates translation, but it can nonetheless be understood as referring to those ethical cases that are “limiting,” or “borderline.” Thus, if one will recall previous discussions which focused upon Barth’s frustration with casuistry, it is clear that a provision for (*Grenzfall*) cases in which killing (including suicide) might be acceptable is an attempt to provide an alternative previous ethical reasoning. That is, casuistry presumes that universal norms exist and that ethical decisions are made by applying the norms to particular situations. In dismissing casuistry and focusing upon special practical ethics, Barth has created a problem in which there are no universal norms. The resolution to such a predicament is, for Barth, the “prophetic *ethos*,” which is subject to the command of God and is always open to the possibility of an exceptional (i.e. *Grenzfall*) case. Again, this is

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 324.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 324–564.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III.4, 397.

³² John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970) 28. Yoder is referencing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 334–335.

due to Barth's conception of human existence in terms of freedom to obey God, which must allow for the possibility of *Grenzfall*—an exceptional case—in which the human recipient is submissive not to an ethical norm but to the command of God.³³

An obvious question arises, however, upon consideration of Barth's hesitation to allow for ethical norms. Should not even the Ten Commandments, as God's law, be considered universal norms, and do they not prohibit killing? Here, Barth makes a distinction between killing and murder, concluding that the commandment of God prohibits murder, but may permit killing if God so commands. In this sense, then, not even God's law is allowed to be elevated to the place that is intended only for the specific command of God. Nevertheless, building upon an already stated reverence for life, this distinction between killing and murder forms the foundation for Barth's ethic regarding war, which he believes is confirmed by the biblical witness. That is, the distinction between killing and murder is not an arbitrary invention by Barth, but is visible throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, in an arguably strained tone that expresses a desire for confirmation of his abandonment of universal norms, Barth directs the readers' attention to occasions when the command of God instructed the people of Israel to kill another group of people, or the imprecatory psalms in which the psalmist recalls or asks for the death of an enemy.³⁴ Although they are part of the biblical narrative, such instances are to be understood as exceptional cases in which the command of God has been followed and this has resulted in killing. However, when one moves into the books of the New Testament, it is clear to Barth that a change has taken place in the former distinction between killing and murder. Although the New Testament, according to Barth, certainly does not construct a norm against all killing, it does further restrict the possibility of exceptional cases in which killing is permissible. That is, after the crucifixion of Jesus, one must be exceedingly cautious, lest the command of God is misunderstood or misappropriated and a life is taken in murder and not by killing.³⁵

However, Barth provides a series of cases in which one could feasibly understand the command of God as killing and not murder.³⁶ It is important to notice the example he provides regarding suicide, as the method he uses in this case is almost identical to that which he uses when addressing the issue of war. Parenthetically, he says that suicide is not necessarily more or less forgivable than any other sin, and that the person who has committed suicide is not farther from God's grace or less able to repent. Rather, all human beings must encounter the judgment of God, but that it is always a judgment of grace. Proceeding on, he provides a hypothetical example, rather than a general rule, which is arguably a difficult attempt at consistency with his own ethical theory. In this example, there could be an extreme case in which one is commanded by God to take one's own life, since taking one's own life would, perhaps, save the lives of others, and thus it would conceivably be more gracious to die.³⁷ However, the difficulty of *Grenzfall* and the necessity of

³³ Ibid., 24–27.

³⁴ Ibid., 28–29.

³⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 400.

³⁶ Please note that these should be understood as possible examples in which killing is permissible, and not as a series of normative exceptions.

³⁷ John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, 31.

submission to the command of God become exceptionally apparent at this point, primarily because Barth seems to realize the potential for inconsistency on his part (i.e. drifting back into casuistic reasoning) and the potentially dangerous mindset that he has taught his readers:

The possibility of the extreme case [suicide], here as elsewhere, is a particular possibility belonging to God himself; it is permitted to no one simply to persuade himself that this extreme case has come for him. That can only be commanded to a man. If he kills himself without having received the command to do so, then his act is murder.³⁸

This is a tedious point in Barth's theory, when, as mentioned, he begins to provide examples so as to avoid the possibility of creating universal norms, but he is nonetheless pressed to assess such cases with what appears to be universal norms. In any case, these examples include suicide (above), abortion, euthanasia, and even self-defense. However, the case and method behind the example of suicide was the most important for the purposes of this analysis.

Finally, having described possible instances in which killing may be deemed permissible under the command of God, Barth turns to the issue of war. Barth revises the traditional perspective on war, eliminating the possibility that any modern war could be considered justified. Instead, he argues for a realization that war is vile and narcissistic, and utilized in the modern age for the purpose of economic gain. John Howard Yoder paraphrases Barth's position in the following manner:

We know that war is a matter of selfish interests; it is an economic matter. War is a symptom of the sickness of our "peacetime" life, a symptom of man's incapacity to master his situation and to organize a peace justly. War no longer means an attempt to neutralize the enemy, as may have been the case in some periods of human history. This is the point at which classic arguments justifying war are unrealistic. War's intention is not only to destroy the resistance of the enemy, but also to destroy the enemy himself.³⁹

This is representative of Barth's critical assessment of zeal in warfare, which he attempts to show as entirely misplaced. Indeed, if one were to characterize Barth's position, perhaps it could be called a nuanced pacifism. He has endeavored to form a theory that is as close to pacifism as possible, while still allowing for exceptions under the command of God.

Finally, within this framework of a nuanced pacifism, Barth returns to the role of the church as a prophetic guide for the state. This must mean that a state is never (without exception) permitted to have a national policy that sees war as a normal instrument. Rather, war is a last resort for Barth; it is a *Grenzfall* on a national level. Such exceptional cases occur only in times when a state's existence is threatened within its own borders, "and at a time when this nation has no right to run the risk of extinction."⁴⁰ However, the church can only condone such an action by the state when, and only when, it has fully embraced the call to peace that is present in the New Testament and Christian tradition.⁴¹

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 400.

³⁹ John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III.4, 463–465.

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The Lives of Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ and Rabban Sâwma

By Rebecca Tankersley

The author of the Syriac text, *The Lives of Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ and Rabban Sâwma*, is unknown.¹ The document recalls the lives of two 13th century Christian monks who left Beijing in the land of the Mongols on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.² We know relatively little about their origins. Sâwma appears to have been a Uighur who joined a monastery in approximately 1250, and Yahbh-Allâhâ may have been a member of the Onguts tribe.³ The men made it as far as Baghdad before violence associated with the Mongols' advance halted their pilgrimage and prevented them from returning home.⁴ Yahbh-Allâhâ became the patriarch in Baghdad, and his experience with Mongol rulers made him an ideal bishop for the region and enabled a good relationship with King Arghôn.⁵ When Arghôn later sought a military alliance with Western Europe to facilitate his conquest into Muslim territory, Yahbh-Allâhâ recruited Sâwma to be Arghôn's ambassador.⁶ *The Lives* is replete with information regarding the historical context of the Christian church in the thirteenth century. In addition to serving a clear biographical purpose, *The Lives* reflects that language, idiomatic expressions of the Divine, and cross-cultural diffusion continued to play critical roles in Christianity during the late Middle Ages and also reveals marked changes in the church's poly-centricity.

It is unclear how much Sâwma and Yahbh-Allâhâ knew about the context into which they pilgrimaged when they left China. The Christian landscape had already changed significantly from that of the early church, due to the spread of Islam from the Arabian peninsula to China in the East, through the Holy Land and across northern Africa, and then northward from there into Spain in the West. As a result, Christianity had been all but eradicated from many of its original centers such as Carthage and Alexandria, while Christian communities in other centers such as Edessa and Antioch were significantly diminished under Muslim control. Just 200 years earlier, Western Christians themselves had undertaken a series of crusades designed to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim control. These crusades had gone terribly awry and resulted in the sacking of

¹ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, volume 1. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 461.

² John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, "The Lives of Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ and Rabban Sâwma" in *Readings in World Christian History: Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2010), 373–384. Coakley and Sterk do not indicate whether the document is believed to have been *autobiographical* or written by an unknown-third party.

³ Irvin and Sunquist, 461.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Constantinople, which had been a center of eastern Christianity from the earliest days of the church.⁷ To this war-torn region, the Mongols of the East added another contextual influence in the early 1200s as they rose to power and swept through Russia into Eastern Europe, with their eyes on Egypt.⁸ It was into this once-vibrant center of Christianity that the two monks from China ventured on their would-be pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with neither likely realizing that his life's work would be dedicated to building relationships in such a landscape.

The monks' origins likely played a significant role in their twist-of-fate on the trip. Both men are believed to have come from tribes in or near the area where the Mongols rose to power; thus both men would have been familiar with the Mongols' language, culture and customs and would have been well-suited to serve as church leaders in areas under Mongol control. Moreover, Sâwma had been a monk in China for twenty-five years, and Yahbh-Allâhâ was raised by a Christian leader and had himself become a monk under Sâwma.⁹ As Christians in China, historically rich in religious diversity, these men likely would have been steeped in eastern-Christian traditions and would have been accustomed to cross-cultural diffusion with traditions such as Buddhism, mysticism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism.¹⁰ This background would have equipped Yahbh-Allâhâ and Sâwma to minister to Christians in and around Baghdad who would have shared their eastern-Christian identity. Subsequently, both men left China with experience working alongside Mongols and an expression of the Christian faith that was well-versed in engagement with other cultures. Likewise, both probably drew upon their backgrounds during the period described in this account.

Christianity has always been a religion of translation, and *The Lives* reveals that language significantly influenced Christianity in the thirteenth century. Sâwma was chosen for the embassy because "there was no [other] man who knew the language."¹¹ While the document does not indicate which language was essential for the trip, the list of destinations suggests that it was Latin, the language of both church and state in Western Europe at the time.¹² It appears, then, that Sâwma was well educated and multilingual. His native tongue would likely have been an Asian tribal language and he must have been learning some Syriac as a bishop in Baghdad. Similarly, we know that Yahbh-Allâhâ could only speak a limited amount of Syriac but that this did not preclude him from becoming patriarch in that region.¹³ His lack of fluency in his Christian flock's native-tongue seems to have been trumped by his cultural familiarity with the Mongol rulers in charge of the city.¹⁴ Sâwma and Yahbh-Allâhâ appear to have been successful in their Christian work because of their familiarity with non-native language and customs.

⁷ Ibid., 394–405.

⁸ Irvin and Sunquist, 452.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Indeed, the particular version of Christianity that developed in China was Nestorian, likely due to the influence of Alopen, so the men likely were influenced by that tradition. Irvin and Sunquist, 316–319.

¹¹ Ibid., 373.

¹² Irvin and Sunquist, 425.

¹³ Ibid., 461–462.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Another defining characteristic of Christianity that is well developed in *The Lives* is its poly-centricity. The Christian church had been poly-centric from the beginning, but by the time these men arrived in Baghdad, the location and number of its centers had changed dramatically. As described above, long-time powerhouses of Christian-thought such as Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage, essentially had disappeared from the Christian landscape. Constantinople had not recovered from the fourth crusade and had lost its status as the seat of the patriarch to whom Eastern Christians looked for direction. As a result, Yahbh-Allâhâ effectively became the patriarch of the Christian East (hence his title “Mâr Catholicus”).¹⁵

This changing landscape is evident in the list of Sâwma’s destinations and descriptions of his activities in each city. He first went to Constantinople, yet notably, did not engage in substantive discussions regarding the nature of his mission.¹⁶ Whereas prior to the fourth crusade, anyone attempting to garner Christian support of a fight against Muslims would have certainly sought the support of the patriarch in Constantinople, Sâwma’s visit there might be better described as a pilgrimage rather than as an embassy. He toured the Hagia Sophia Cathedral, saw shrines and relics, and ate a meal with the king and his nobles, but does not appear to have discussed the purpose of his trip. Rather, Sâwma’s diplomatic discussions appear to have taken place only in Rome (and there, only after a pope had been installed), Paris and England. This shift in the Christian landscape is typified in the description of Sâwma’s visit with King Philip in Paris. While proudly showing Sâwma his city’s relics (including pieces of Christ’s crown and cross), King Philip stated “When our fathers took Constantinople, and sacked Jerusalem, they brought these blessed objects from it.”¹⁷ The document is silent as to Sâwma’s reaction to the statement, which raises questions such as to whether Sâwma was outraged by the admission of looting in Constantinople and whether he was sufficiently familiar with the history of the iconoclast controversy in the 700s to observe the irony of the Western church’s proud display of the Eastern idiomatic expressions of the Divine. In any event, *The Lives* makes clear that the patriarchs of the old centers of Christianity no longer collectively shared the authority and symbols of the faith as custodians of the church universal. Instead, the document reflects how Christian authority and historic idiomatic expressions of the divine were increasingly concentrated in Western Europe with the papacy and the monarchs.¹⁸

An important impact of this shift in Christianity’s landscape is evident in reading *The Lives*. Western and Eastern Christians during this period were increasingly isolated from one another—their brothers and sisters in the faith. This isolation is reflected in the conversations between Sâwma and the Cardinals in Rome. They repeatedly asked him where he was from and why he had come, where the Catholicus lived and which Apostles

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Although the larger biography may contain reflect that such conversations took place while Sâwma was in Constantinople, it is significant that Coakley & Sterk did not describe such activity in their excerpt (373–374).

¹⁷ Coakley and Sterk, 376. It seems that King Philip was showing off relics taken from Constantinople in the fourth crusade.

¹⁸ Ibid. It is unclear whether the author of *The Lives* distinguished between the papacy and the monarchs in Western Europe. In describing Sâwma’s meeting with Pope Nicholas IV, the author describes the Pope as “seated on his throne” and relates that Sâwma approached the Pope “bowing to the ground.”

took the Gospel to his “quarter of the world.”¹⁹ In conveying Sâwma’s responses to these questions, the biographer suggests that the Cardinals knew nothing about the missionary work by Eastern Christians with the Mongols. Moreover, the isolation between East and West is reflected in the description of Sâwma’s visit to the universities in Paris. The biographer includes details about the sheer size of the schools (“thirty thousand scholars”), the breadth of subjects studied (“Scriptures . . . and also profane learning”) and the economics of the church (“pupils received money . . . from the king” while “five hundred monks” performed burials and “all ate and drank at the expense of the king”).²⁰ To an Eastern Christian like Sâwma (always in the minority), the world of Western Christianity must have seemed utterly foreign. It would have been interesting to have heard the conversations between Sâwma and the Christians in Baghdad to whom he ultimately returned and reported about his trip. He must have shared these details with others for them to have made their way into *The Lives*. One can only wonder about the reaction of his audience at the time.

The Lives not only reflects a dynamic Christian landscape, but also depicts differences in Christians’ status depending upon their location within that landscape and the political leaders in charge of their region. In the West, as noted above, Christianity and religion were intertwined so closely that when Sâwma sought Western Christian support for Arghôn’s military plans, he spoke with the Pope and with kings. Certainly there were power struggles between these two, but they were internal struggles that did jeopardize the status of Christianity as the majority religion in Western Europe.²¹ The document reflects a very different situation, however, for Eastern Christians. Although King Arghôn was sympathetic to Christians and appears to have worked well with them during his rule, his successor – a convert to Islam—began to persecute Christians in Baghdad. The accounts of the brutality against Yahbh-Allâhâ and other Christians are reminiscent of the accounts of persecutions of early church martyrs. As such, they stand in stark contrast to the lush lives of dining with royalty led by the Western Christians, as observed by Sâwma. The ability of Western Christians to interweave their faith so thoroughly with the political powers of the West can be seen as having radically changed Christianity in the West to the point that it may have been almost unrecognizable to Eastern Christians. Sâwma’s traveling to Europe from a world embroiled in disputes between Muslims and Mongols, and in which the status of Christians was so tenuous as to topple when one Mongol king was succeeded by another, might have experienced a greater degree of culture-shock (to borrow a modern term), in this second journey than when he had left his homeland so many years before.

There is hope for reconciliation between the two disparate worlds depicted in *The Lives*, and it can be seen by reading the account through the lenses of Scripture and worship. This hope is most evident in the description of Sâwma’s meeting with Pope Nicholas IV. The men greeted one another with Christian hospitality reminiscent of Matthew 23:12 (“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”). Sâwma

¹⁹ Ibid., 374. While some questions of this nature might reflect nothing more than the fact that Christianity had always been an apostolic tradition, the fact that the Cardinals in Rome—leaders of the Catholic Church—had to ask more than once for information (“he replied in the selfsame words had had already spoken to the”) suggests that they were largely ignorant about Christianity in either Baghdad or China or both.

²⁰ Ibid., 375–376.

²¹ See, e.g., the description of the Investiture Controversy in Irvin and Sunquist, 387–390.

acknowledged the Pope's authority. The Pope gave Sâwma "more honor . . . than was customary," after which each side celebrated the Eucharist for the other.²² The Western Christians' response to Sâwma's celebration reveals that there was hope for reunion in the thirteenth century. "The language is different, but the use is the same."²³ They recognized each other and were united as Christians through sacramental worship together.

Although we know relatively little about Yahbh-Allâhâ and Sâwma, *The Lives* contains valuable information regarding Christianity during the thirteenth century. In light of the shifts of power within the Church universal that created the stark contextual differences between Eastern and Western Christians reflected in this biography, it is not hard to understand how the schism of 1054 endured into the thirteenth century. Through *The Lives*, Christians today can gain a glimpse into our history of separation and power struggles and begin to understand sacramental worship as a way to unite disparate people under Christ's ultimate authority. *The Lives* thus beautifully illustrate Christ's promise in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." When Yahbh-Allâhâ and Sâwma set out on their pilgrimage to the Holy Land they likely could not have anticipated the turn that their lives would take nor the impact that they would have on Christians for centuries to come. Still, their biography offers hope to Christians everywhere who yearn for reconciliation within Christ's fragmented church. Praise be to God for their biographer and his beautiful account of their lives.

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²² Coakley and Sterk, 376.

²³ Ibid.

Regardless

By Rebecca Garrett

There's a quote by Alice Walker that I so badly wish defined my friends, my family, myself.

“Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.”¹

~ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*

Why do I wish it defined us? Because it's a picture of a strong, self-assured, vivacious person who runs into the wind with her hair blowing and her arms flung wide.

Why does it not yet define us? For me, at least, it has to do with that little problematic word right at the end: “regardless.” That's the one I've been battling recently. And more than that word, it's the fact that it comes right after “loves herself” that's giving me trouble. I can put the word “regardless”—that notion of unconditionalness—after almost any other noun in the sentence except the one it actually follows. Loves music regardless? *Absolutely*. Loves dance regardless? *Indubitably*. Loves the moon regardless? *Assuredly*. Loves the Spirit regardless? *Unquestionably*. Loves love and food and roundness regardless? *Unmistakably* (though “roundness,” for many of us, proves a difficult thing with which to come into balance). Loves struggle regardless? *Resoundingly*. Loves the Folk regardless (for me, Folk are those journey mates of mine with whom I share experience and faith and strife)? *Overwhelmingly*. Loves herself regardless? I guess I'm a work in progress.

When will we learn—we as women, we as men, we as youth, we as children, we as *humans*—that humility and self-respect can and must co-exist? When will we learn that false humility never did anyone any good? When will we learn that pretending to put others first to the utter detriment of our own souls is just as selfish as ignoring others completely, that starving ourselves of respect soon renders us unable to help anyone at all? When will we learn that to whirl through our days thinking less of ourselves than what we ought only adds to the pain of the galaxies? When will we untie the masks of both arrogance and self-deprecation and realize they're one and the same mask, both disguising the truth of a steadfast commitment to loving oneself regardless of flaws and beyond successes?

My sisters, my brothers, my children, my parents, my journey mates, listen! We are fearfully and wonderfully made! *Regardless! Regardless! Regardless!* Look at yourself in the mirror—truly *look*—don't check your makeup, don't fix your hair, don't straighten your collar, don't pluck lint from your jacket, don't smooth your beard, don't even wipe your nose or scratch your ear. Look at and study and take in all the music, dance, moon, Spirit, love, food, roundness, struggle, folk, and self that are reflected in your beautiful body. Celebrate yourself and affirm the “regardless” that wants to resound in your being.

¹ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, (San Diego: Mariner Books, 1983) xii

Regardless! Regardless! Regardless!

We serve a God who lives, regardless of death and sin! There is a “regardless” kind of love within the conditional shadows of Lent. We, too, are given a “regardless” of our own with which to dance and sing and love through our days. Embrace yourself! And in so doing, embrace the image of God in whom you are made.

Rebecca E. Garrett is currently pursuing a Master of Sacred Music where her focus is in choral conducting. In addition to singing, she plays flute, piano, and global percussion. Her dedication to sacred music, intellectual scholarship, and creative worship runs deeply, and her vision of her ministry is holistic—utilizing body, intellect, and spirit as equal partners in worship.

Photo Gallery

Love Wins

By Reagan Lunn

This image is on the West Bank Wall, in the town of Bethlehem. Amazingly, it was one of the first things that we saw when we first entered Palestine on our immersion trip. To me, it is the ultimate message of the Gospel. The Gospel is our hope and our assurance that in all times, love wins!

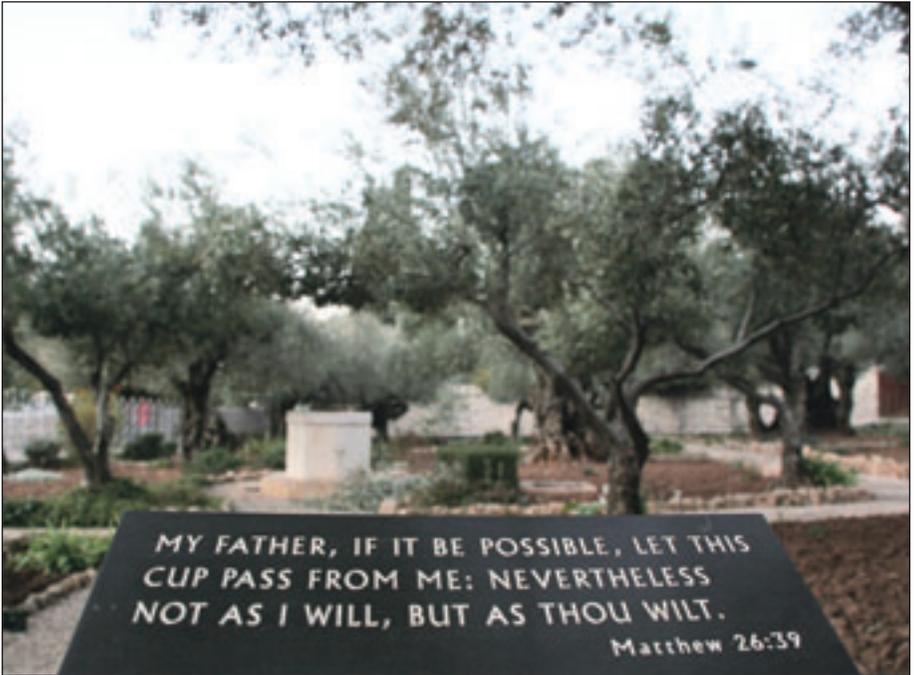


Garden of Gethsemane

By Reagan Lunn

During an immersion trip to Palestine and Israel in January, I paused to reflect on the significance of this incredible event in our Christian faith.

Reagan and his wife Ashley live in Denton with their two boys Parker and Jacob. As Reagan works toward ordination as an elder in the United Methodist Church, both he and Ashley continue to support the Church's moves toward full inclusion of all God's people into the body of Christ. This essay is dedicated to the late Rev. Deanna Chance. She was the editor of this essay and someone whom we are proud to have known as a friend.



Bell Tower

The Basilica of the Transfiguration at St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt

By Sari Frey

Very early in the morning, I made my way to the Basilica for Matins. Dr. Karas joined me there. After leaving the Basilica at the end of the service I looked up toward Mount Sinai. I marveled at the incredibly blue sky and the mountain beyond proclaiming for all the magnificence of God's creation. The monastery has given witness to our faith since early in the 6th century.



Baptism

By Sari Frey

This beautiful image is of the Greek Orthodox Church at Bethany, just beyond the Jordan River. It is just near the area where Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

Sari Frey will graduate in December 2012 with a Master in Christian Ministries. Her area of focus is Christian Education. She is a textile artist and makes banners, paraments and stoles for churches as well as art quilts. She uses photos she has taken to inspire her textile art.



A Feminist Interpretation of the Story of the Anointing Woman as Presented in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

By Debra Rogers

Both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke recount the story of a woman who anoints Jesus with expensive ointment from an alabaster jar.¹ While the story portrayed by the two Gospels is strikingly similar,² the Lukan version, in which the anointing woman is identified as “a sinner,” is the one most people remember.³ A deeper wrestling with the two texts in the context of the editorial revisions made to the Markan Gospel reveals pertinent differences in the two stories.⁴ These differences that surface lend support for a conclusion that the two authors view the role of women in the early Christian church in significantly different ways. In this paper, I will argue that these contrasting treatments of this story found in the First and Third Gospels demonstrate a dim view of women by Luke in comparison to the Matthean viewpoint. In support of this argument, this paper will analyze three significant Lukan editorial revisions found within this story⁵: 1) Luke’s characterization of the woman; 2) his chronological placement of this narrative within the wider Gospel; and, 3) Luke’s failure to include the memorial statement made by Jesus at the end of the story. This is in contrast to both Mark’s and Matthew’s presentation of this story.

Before turning to the analysis of the Lukan account of the anointing woman in contrast to Mark and Matthew, some initial work concerning source criticism and what is meant by the phrase “a feminist hermeneutic” is in order.

¹ Matt 26:6–13; Luke 7:36–50.

² At least one scholar has argued that the two stories do not involve the same woman or the same event. See Kent Van Til, “Three Anointings and One Offering: The Sinful Woman in Luke 7:36–50” in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol. 15, no.1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006): 73–82.

³ Jane Schaberg, “Luke” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 374.

⁴ Given that the actual authors are unknown, all references to Mark’s, Matthew’s, and Luke’s views or perspectives on women are solely intended to refer to the perspectives that emerge through their respective gospels. Additionally, “Mark,” “Matthew,” and “Luke” will be used to refer to the unknown authors/redactors/editors of the respective gospels.

⁵ Certainly Luke’s treatment may reflect more his view of Jesus as one who ministers to the poor and oppressed than it does to the woman, but I submit that the editorial changes made to this particular story are evidence of the Lukan negative view of women, whether conscious or unconscious.

Source Analysis

As a first step in this analysis of the Lukan and Matthean Gospels, it is helpful to understand their relation to each other as well as their relation to Mark's Gospel. Accounts of a woman anointing Jesus appear in all four Gospels: Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13; Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–8. Scholars are puzzled about exactly how the accounts are related, but what seems likely is that one event lies behind all four.⁶ Most scholars agree that both Matthew and Luke were written after Mark's Gospel, using Mark as a source.⁷ This understanding of the chronology of the Gospels is known as the Markan Priority Hypothesis.⁸ In addition to the use of Mark as a source, most scholars now believe that Matthew also used the Septuagint, a collection of Jesus' sayings, or the Q source, and additional material unique to this Gospel known as the M source.⁹ Similarly, scholars believe that the Lukan author also used the Hebrew Bible, Mark, Q, and material unique to Luke known as the L source. Some scholars have proposed that Luke may have also had access to a woman's source—a collection of stories and teachings perhaps written or preserved by women providing insight into women's experience of the Jesus movement.¹⁰ However, while Luke may have utilized a womanly source, his use of it cannot be taken as simply expressing the viewpoint or reality of early Christian women. Rather, as this paper will demonstrate, Luke's editorializing of the material available to him makes the case that according to this Gospel the roles of women in the Christian movement must be restricted.

A. A Feminist Hermeneutic

The common starting point of all feminist approaches is a profound suspicion of the results of a patriarchal system of thinking in which women are often excluded from the symbolic, public, and social forms of communication, and by which femaleness has been devalued and frequently reduced to the role of victim.¹¹ The place in history, culture, and society occupied by the reader inevitably influences what she or he can perceive in any text and what questions seem important to ask about the text and its context.¹² Women's questions about women of biblical times and about the implications of the Bible for women's lives reflect the fact that, for good or ill, the Bible is a book that has shaped and continues to shape human lives, communities, and cultures. As such, scholars and laypeople alike appreciate the influence it can have on how we see the world and how we see ourselves in this world. Because of this power, the question of interpretation goes beyond merely understanding the Bible. How we interpret a particular text influences how we each understand ourselves in relation to the text. As this paper will demonstrate, the Lukan telling

⁶ Schaberg, "Luke," 373.

⁷ Material used in this paragraph was gained from Amy-Jill Levine, "Matthew" in *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded ed., Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 339; Schaberg, "Luke," 364–65.

⁸ Mark Goodacre, "The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem," last updated November 2002, <http://NTGateway.com/Q> (last accessed November 14, 2011).

⁹ Levine, "Matthew," 339.

¹⁰ Schaberg, "Luke," 364.

¹¹ Monika Fander, "Historical-Critical Methods" in *Searching the Scriptures, Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001), 205.

¹² Material used in this paragraph was gained from Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible" in *WBC*, 1–9.

of the story of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a relevant case in point.

The Lukan characterization of the woman who anoints Jesus

As discussed above, all four Gospels include an account of the anointing woman. Most scholars agree that it is likely that one event lies behind them, an event that was changed radically in the telling, and to which Mark's version is in some respects the most faithful.¹³ Both the Markan and Matthean woman remains anonymous. In John, the woman is identified as Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus (12:1–2). However, most striking in its contrast to the Markan Gospel is Luke's characterization of the woman as a "sinner" (7:37). This one identifying detail added by Luke has a profoundly demoralizing effect on the woman's role as understood and interpreted by the Gospel reader. Although the text does not say what sort of sins she had committed, much attention is given to speculation on the nature of her sinful past.¹⁴ Scholar Teresa J. Hornsby notes that for almost 1800 years, the interpretations of Luke 7:36–50 are nearly unanimous in their assumption that the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a prostitute.¹⁵ Lukan scholar Jane Schaberg goes the farther arguing that Luke intends for the audience to identify this woman's sin as notorious sexual activity—prostitution.¹⁶

A comparison of the Matthean and Lukan characterization of the anointing woman provides further insight into the dramatic effect accomplished by Luke's peculiar change to the Markan narrative. The Matthean story describes the woman's action as anointing Jesus' head. This action would have two meanings for Matthew's audience: 1) preparation for burial; and, 2) a sign of royal commission.¹⁷ Thus, Matthew's anointing woman is cast in the untraditional, but esteemed position of priest or prophet.¹⁸ By contrast, Luke portrays her action of anointing Jesus' feet as highly erotic and lavishly physical.¹⁹ Hornsby suggests that any reader, first century or present-day, familiar with the book of Ruth, would take notice of Luke's attention to a woman at a man's feet²⁰ as a sexual nuance of the narrative in the tradition of the scene between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3:3–4). The woman who anoints Jesus in Luke is not portrayed as a prophet designating the Messiah as in Matthew and Mark, but a sinner whose appearance on the scene causes Simon to question Jesus' status as prophet.²¹ Thus, Luke's interpretation of her as "a sinner" results in her presence as a dangerous threat

¹³ Schaberg, "Luke," 374.

¹⁴ Barbara E. Reid, "Do You See this Woman?: A Liberative Look at Luke 7:36–50 and Strategies for Reading Other Lukan Stories Against the Grain" in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, Amy-Jill Levine, ed. (NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 113.

¹⁵ Teresa J. Hornsby, "The Woman is a Sinner/The Sinner is a Woman" in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, Amy-Jill Levine, ed. (NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 121.

¹⁶ Schaberg, "Luke," 374.

¹⁷ Levine, "Matthew," 348.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Hornsby, "Sinner," 122.

²⁰ "Feet" is a euphemism for male genitals in the Hebrew texts, the Septuagint and other Hellenistic and Greco-Roman literature. See Hornsby, "Sinner," 129. Luke uses the word "feet" seven times in this narrative. See Van Til, "Three Anointings," 78.

²¹ Mary Rose D'Angelo, "The ANHP Question in Luke-Acts: Imperial Masculinity and the Deployment of Women in the Early Second Century" in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, Amy-Jill Levine, ed. (NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 60.

to Jesus' ministry rather than as a celebrated disciple.²² Further, the Lukan anointing bears no relation to the death and burial of Jesus. Rather, the woman's act of love is reduced to a display of unusual affection on the part of an intruding sinner. By erasing the female prophet from Mark's story, Luke has refused to honor her memory. Therefore, in contrast to Matthew, Luke's Gospel is a menacing text that retains and reinforces the oppressive social structures present in the Greco-Roman world.

As a final point in support of Hornsby's observation that the interpretations of Luke 7:36–50 are nearly unanimous in their assumption that the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a prostitute, the following anecdote is provided. On November 9, 2011, the Lukan narrative was interpreted through monologue and dance at the foot washing service held in the Perkins Chapel. Rezolia Johnson played the role of the anointing woman in Rachel S. Gerber's and Heidi A. Miller's "Monologue based on Scripture: Luke 7:36–50."²³ In character, Ms. Johnson dramatically moved from the balcony, up the center aisle, and then onto the altar of the chapel shrouding her face from the audience while lamenting:

But I have money. Lots of money. Money. You do it for the money, but money doesn't mean much when you sell your soul . . . and your dignity. All I am to them is a body. That's all. I'm really a nobody. Nobody. Just a body.²⁴

This monologue is founded upon an interpretation by the authors that the Lukan woman is a sinner who feels a deep shame and worthlessness.²⁵ She is a prostitute.²⁶ This anointing woman is one who comes to Jesus in need of forgiveness. This woman is not the woman of Matthew's Gospel who Jesus declares will be remembered throughout the whole world for her actions. This woman is the submissive, guilt-ridden woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears.²⁷

As a woman and scholar of this particular Scripture, it was difficult to witness this dramatic interpretation of Luke 7:36–50. However, this interpretation is not at all unfair given Luke's deliberate inclusion of the word "sinner" to describe the woman. But knowing that Matthew portrays this same woman as a priest and prophet and that Mark honors her memory as Jesus proclaimed, I could only feel disappointment as I watched the Lukan interpretation perpetuated within the bounds of a United Methodist seminary.

B. Luke's chronological placement of this story within his Gospel

As discussed above, all four Gospels relate an account of a woman anointing Jesus. However, when laid side-by-side, Mark, Matthew, and John all position this story as a prelude to Jesus' passion in Jerusalem.²⁸ In Luke, however, a woman anoints Jesus early in his ministry up north in Galilee at the house of Simon, a Pharisee (7:36–50). Luke does not

²² Amy-Jill Levine, *Feminist Companion to Luke* (NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 1.

²³ Rachel S. Gerber and Heidi A. Miller "Monologue based on Scripture: Luke 7:36–50," last revised by Heidi A. Miller, October 2011 (Performed at Perkins Chapel, Dallas, Texas, November 9, 2011).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Interview of Heidi A. Miller by author (Perkins Chapel, Dallas, Texas, November 16, 2011).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Brigitte Kahl, "Reading Luke Against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the 'Scriptural Principle' in Luke 1" in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, Amy-Jill Levine, ed. (NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 73.

²⁸ Schaberg, "Luke," 374.

present Jesus' passion narrative until much later in chapters 22 and 23, long after the anointing woman's appearance. The effect of the Lukan chronologically on this woman's story can be better understood through the use of an outline of the Gospel. Thus, the Lukan Gospel, in terms of its relevant parts, can be outlined as follows:

III. Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1–4:13)

A. The Temptation of Jesus (4:1–13)

IV. Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:14–9:50)

A. *Jesus Proclaims the Good News* (4:14–44)

1. The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry (4:14–15)
2. *The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth* (4:16–30)
3. The Man with an *Unclean Spirit* (4:31–37)
4. *The Healing* of Simon's Mother-in-Law (4:38–41)
5. Jesus Preaches in the Synagogues (4:42–44)

B. Mission and Controversy (5:1–6:11)

1. Jesus Calls the First Disciples (5:1–11)
2. Jesus *Cleanses* a Leper (5:12–16)
3. Jesus *Heals* a Paralytic (5:17–26)

C. Jesus Instructs His Disciples (6:12–49)

D. The Compassionate Ministry of Jesus (7:1–50)

1. Jesus *Heals* a Centurion's Servant (7:1–10)
2. Jesus *Raises* the Widow's Son at Nain (7:11–17)
3. Messengers from John the Baptist (7:18–35)
4. *The Anointing Woman* (7:36–50)²⁹

V. On the Way to Jerusalem (9:51–19:48)

VI. Teaching in the Jerusalem Temple (20:1–21:38)

VII. The Passion of Jesus (22:1–23:56) (emphasis added)³⁰

Using this outline as a reference, Luke's placement of the anointing woman within that portion of the Gospel dealing with the early stages of Jesus' ministry, binds her appearance to those who come to Jesus for healing. Unlike the male disciples who have just been called by Jesus to preach, teach, witness, and heal, this woman simply joins the ranks of Lukan women who are not called to similarly engage in these aspects of Jesus' public ministry.³¹

Stepping back a moment to flesh this theme out further, I want to show that the outline above identifies the long set of episodes that follow Jesus' temptation account (4:14–44) leading to the beginning of Jesus' ministry.³² It is in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, that Luke provides the key to Jesus' self-understanding of his mission here on

²⁹ Given the page restraints for this paper, Luke's insertion of the Parable of the Two Debtors into the story of the anointing woman and its effects on the Lukan view of women is not treated in this paper.

³⁰ This outline is an adaptation of the outline provided by Joel B. Green, "Luke Introduction" in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, Walter J. Harrelson, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1849–50.

³¹ Reid, "Do You See This Woman?" 118.

³² Abraham Smith, "Commentary on the Rhetorical Development of Luke's Gospel," class handout for New Testament I (Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas, Fall 2011), 4.

earth through Jesus' reading from the scroll:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news
to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim *release*³³ to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed *go free*,³⁴
to proclaim the year³⁵ of the Lord's favor.³⁶

Jesus' reading is a conflation of the texts found in LXX Isa. 58:6 and 61:1–2.37 Jesus boldly proclaims to his auditors, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”³⁸ After those who are present scoff at his proclamation, Jesus states, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.”³⁹ And with these words of explanation, it is clear that Jesus' mission is as prophet and healer, fulfilling the Hebrew Scripture. It is also clear that Jesus' audience is highly suspect of his self-proclamation of fulfillment of the Scriptures, suspect to the point of wanting to take his life (4:28–29).

It is through Jesus' reading of the scroll that Luke sets up the theme of forgiveness or release (*aphiemi*)⁴⁰ in Jesus' ministry.⁴¹ This motif first emerges in 4:18b (*aphesin, aphesei*) and 5:21, 24 (*aphainai*) which together helps to establish Jesus' authority to “release” and “set free” those who are bound and to “forgive” those who have sinned.⁴² As the Lukan narrative continues in chapters 4 and 5, Jesus will perform miracles and healings further establishing his credibility as prophet and healer (exorcizing a demon, 4:31–37; healing Simon's mother-in-law, 4:38–39; and healing the sick, 4:40–41). Then in chapters 5 and 6, Luke introduces Jesus' twelve male disciples (5:1–11 and 6:13b–16). As the narrative moves toward 7:36, the public demonstration of Jesus' abilities to heal and forgive sins is working to clarify his ministry as proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth.

And it is at this critical juncture in chapter 7 that Luke chooses to drop in the scene of the anointing woman. As the scene unfolds, Jesus has entered the home of Simon the Pharisee. Unlike the twelve men just recently introduced to the audience, the woman is not said to have been called as a disciple but rather has come to Jesus as a suppliant in gratitude for forgiveness—*aphiemi*—of her sin. Her appearance on the narrative stage is in juxtaposition

³³ The Greek word for “release” is *aphesin*. Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 155–6; Wesley J. Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 62–3.

³⁴ The Greek word for “go free” is *aphesei*. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 155–6; Perschbacher, *New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 62–3.

³⁵ By his interpretation of Isa. 61.2, Jesus boldly tells his audience that he is the one chosen to usher in the long-awaited year of the Jubilee. Van Til, “Three Anointings,” 77.

³⁶ Luke 4:18–19 (emphasis added).

³⁷ Green, note in “Luke,” 1860.

³⁸ Luke 4:21b.

³⁹ Luke 4:24.

⁴⁰ Luke uses the term *aphiemi* four times in this narrative. See Van Til, “Three Anointings,” 77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Smith, “Commentary,” 5; see also Van Til, “Three Anointings,” 77.

to the twelve who have just been called by Jesus. From 7:30, the Lukan audience knows that the Pharisees as a group, are particularly suspicious of Jesus and his ministry. Certainly Simon must know of the opposition growing against Jesus when he invites him to his home for table fellowship. Yet, it is at this very moment that Luke introduces his audience to “a woman in the city, who was a sinner.”⁴³ Her very presence causes Simon to question Jesus’ status as a true prophet capable of discerning the kind of woman who was touching him. Unlike the men called by Jesus to join his ministry, the woman’s appearance only serves to cause confusion and doubt in Simon, who then questions whether Jesus is indeed a prophet. Thus, rather than furthering Jesus’ ministry goals, the woman serves as a stumbling block to Simon. Luke’s placement of this woman in this scene works to slander Jesus before the eyes of Simon the Pharisee.

C. Absence of Jesus’ memorial statement in the Lukan Gospel

Perhaps the most telling Lukan revision of the Markan source is the complete absence of Jesus’ memorial words for the woman:

Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.⁴⁴

Mark Allan Powell says of these very words repeated in Matthew⁴⁵: “In the entire NT, this woman is the only person other than Jesus whom Christians are told to ‘remember’ in their celebration of the Gospel.”⁴⁶ In contrast, Luke’s erasure of Jesus’ words in the retelling of this narrative is strong evidence of a very different view of this woman in particular, and of first-century women in general. Luke’s editing of this story is an arrogant refusal to honor her memory. Politically, prophetically, what she has done will *not* be told in memory of her.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The Gospel of Luke has more stories about women than any other evangelist, but the roles in which he casts women tend to be silent and passive.⁴⁸ Luke provides no narratives of women who are called, commissioned, endure persecution, or minister by the power of the Spirit, as there are of men.⁴⁹ The story of the anointing woman is an illustrative example of the Lukan view of first-century women. Comparing Luke’s version to both his Markan source as well as his contemporary Gospel-writer, Matthew, the following three Lukan editorial revisions demonstrate Luke’s negative view of women: 1) Luke’s characterization of the woman as “a sinner;” 2) his early chronological placement of this narrative within the wider Gospel; and, 3) his refusal to honor her with the inclusion of the memorial statement made by Jesus. For a church working toward equal discipleship for women and men, stories

⁴³ Luke 7:37.

⁴⁴ Mark 14:9.

⁴⁵ Matt 26:13.

⁴⁶ Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew” in *HarperCollins Commentary*, James L. Mays, gen. ed. (New York: HarperCollins 2000), 897.

⁴⁷ Schaberg, “Luke,” 375.

⁴⁸ Barbara E. Reid, “Excursus: Women in Luke and Acts” in *New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*, Walter J. Harrelson, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1975.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

such as the Lukan anointing woman cannot be taught, preached, or passed on uncritically. Strategies are needed for unmasking Luke's kyriarchal framework and for reinterpreting and recontextualizing the stories. From a feminist perspective, seeking equality for both men and women, it is time for the Markan or Matthean versions of this story to replace the Lukan account that is now most prominent in peoples' memories.

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Apparitions in the Darkness: Reflections on Monastic Spirituality and Mystical Theology

By Jose Sanchez-Perry

Introduction

I graduated from a small liberal arts college in the middle of nowhere, Iowa, where I majored in religious studies. Before finishing the program, and after being influenced by agnostic authors, I came to see the church as a structure that engendered ignorance. The questions that were being asked in my education—Did Moses really write the Torah? Did the conquest of Canaan ever happen? Was Jesus like the Gospels illustrated him?—my church community wanted nothing to do with them. At this point, my evangelical rearing was of no help. The academic institution, therefore, became the antithesis of the ecclesiastical enterprise. This initial religious education taught me a few things, but one theme was most prominent: if my church community was not serious about answering important critiques that were quite crucial in biblical interpretation, then, the church was not a reliable source of knowledge.

Consequently, my faith diminished. My sincere love for God became more difficult to maintain. The very program that was meant to help me communicate God's faithfulness to others, generated in myself the rejection of God's faithless people. I became cautiously aware about my biblical rhetoric, and more importantly, cautious of others. I wanted to make sure that statements about the bible and God were compatible with the latest historical criticisms, or so I thought. Swiftly, I forgot to ask myself if this was compatible with God's purposes. Did I really think that I could comprehend all there was to know about God? I was completely certain, hitherto. A journey with Pseudo-Dionysius (henceforth, Pseudo-Denys) has helped me articulate my own fallacy and misinterpretation of what a theological education was meant to engender.

The influence of Pseudo-Denys in Western spirituality has been voluminous and intricate. His literary work traveled from the heterodox East to the Orthodox East, and finally to the Roman Catholic West, "through which it eventually acquired [its inclusion in the postbiblical canon of faith and piety] and was given an honored place" in the Roman Catholic Church.¹ Interestingly enough, those seeking faith and piety in these post-modern

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, edited by John Farina (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 13.

transitions have turned to Pseudo-Denys in order to reclaim the enigmatic characteristics of Christianity; in particular, the interest arises out of an “apophatic rage” towards the certainty of modernity.² And I suppose that similar reason ignited my curiosity for this literary masterpiece. Pseudo-Denys culminated the balance which I was in search of: academic methodologies “asserting” that very little could be said about God.

In this essay, I will explore the impact of monastic spirituality—in particular, the experiential and esoteric *union* with God—that Pseudo-Denys employs in *Mystical Theology*; in this literary text, Pseudo-Denys illuminates, with fervent detail, the mystery and intimacy of those who experienced God in the ascetic life of the monastic movement. Although I do not find in the monastic literary record, a direct reference to the work of Pseudo-Denys, parallels between the praxis of asceticism and the rhetoric found in *Mystical Theology* may very well exist.³ Women and men, who attempted to conceal themselves from worldly desires, thereby creating a space for the experience of God through self-denial and darkness, have helped me expose my intemperance in modern religious knowledge.⁴ To this we turn.

Historical Background

It is a common consensus among scholars that the author of *Mystical Theology* was not the actual disciple of Paul, that is, the convert that is written about in Acts chapter seventeen. Pseudo-Denys is, however, considered to be part of the patristic corpus. The work is dated between the fifth and sixth century, but the location of where the text was originated is not known.⁵ These dates have been solidified because Pseudo-Denys makes his “first orally cited appearance” during the reign of Justinian (532–533), in a controversy between bishops and a group gathered around Severus of Antioch.⁶ Pseudo-Denys’ radical linguistic expressions of the union with God that were cited during the controversy between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, provided a support for the latter’s expression of the relationship between the Son and the Father. In fact, because of Pseudo-Denys’ unintended association with Severus, some even accused him of being a *Monophysite*.⁷ Although, Pseudo-Denys was popular among the non-Chalcedonian Christians, he was just as popular, or even more so, among the Chalcedonian Christians.⁸ It is thanks to Gregory the Great, and Maximus the Confessor that, ultimately, Pseudo-Denys becomes so influential in the Roman Catholic Church.⁹

² Sarah Coakley, “Introduction—Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite,” in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 28.

³ According to William Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), Pseudo-Denys’ “familiarity with the living traditions of the Church in her Scriptures and her liturgical practices at his time,” suggest that he “may well have been a monk” (William, 28). If Riordan’s treatment of Pseudo-Denys is fair, then, my thesis may have some foundation.

⁴ By “modern religious knowledge” here, and throughout the essay, I am referring to both, the ecclesiastical structure, which holds to modernized, preconceived notions of divinely sanctioned authority, and to the historical critical method, which holds to a complete certainty by means of systematic methods.

⁵ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁶ Riordan, 23

⁷ According to Andrew Louth, “The Reception of Dionysius Up to Maximus the Confessor,” *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43; see also Riordan, 23.

Another piece of evidence that supports the dissemination of the work until the sixth century is the fact that according to István Perczel, all the Greek manuscripts that we have derive from a single edited version, with a commentary by John of Scythopolis in Palestine (536–548).¹⁰ This manuscript, ultimately, becomes the most influential annotation on how to read Pseudo-Denys. In fact, according to some scholars, it seems that John of Scythopolis sustained the legacy of hermeneutics on the Pseudo-Denys corpus. In other words, when subsequent generations read Pseudo-Denys, they were not reading the author, rather the annotations of John of Scythopolis. According to Andrew Louth, one should not immediately attribute a control scheme on John of Scythopolis, who, as is commonly attributed, tried to smooth out the heterodox tendencies on Pseudo-Denys' literature. Instead, Louth proposes that we see the *annotations* from John of Scythopolis as one who attempted to "maintain the legacy of the apostolic age" and "capture a drop of honey from the Apostle Paul's convert and friend."¹¹

The "Mystical" Method

In modern Mysticism, we find three important aspects to language and methodology: apophaticism, silence and paradox. All three appear in the rhetoric that Pseudo-Denys implements in *Mystical Theology*. This method of interpretation implies, then, that words about God will always be insufficient. One could even perceive a development in language: when language becomes insufficient, it engenders silence, creating a paradox between assertions and negations. This is the case in Pseudo-Denys' *Divine Names* in which "each of the divine names becomes the opportunity for a new variation on the theme."¹² It is precisely these "assertive" and numerous derivative linguistics expressions of the divine that enable the "negative" language about God that, ultimately, become paradoxical. According to Pseudo-Denys, "the more it [language about God] climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond ascent, it will turn silent completely."¹³ This might very well be the essence, vision and masterpiece of *Mystical Theology*.

Many theologians, therefore, have undertaken Pseudo-Denys' theological rhetoric and used it as a pointed critique of modern religious knowledge, which claims absolute and divine objectivity; both Pseudo-Denys and post-modernists critique the certainty in which one could, presumably, know everything there is to assert about God. Pseudo-Denys' argument in *Mystical Theology* is that when one has exhausted all proclamations about God, language will become silent, rendering it insufficient; but when one denies all things about God, then, we have truly began to experience a genuine union with God. "So, this is what we say," writes Pseudo-Denys, "the Cause [God] is above all; it is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched; it is neither perceived nor is it perceptible . . . it passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing which the senses may be aware; none or all this can neither be identified with it nor attributed to it."¹⁴

¹⁰ István Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 28.

¹¹ Louth, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ Pseudo-Dionysius, "Mystical Theology," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* translated by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

Dorothee Soelle points out that this apophatic method creates an interesting dynamic with modern religious knowledge, but not a complete rejection. “This unknowing,” she writes, “does not come out of ignorance, it comes to be *after* knowledge” (emphasis added).¹⁵ It is a sort of post-knowledge perspective that, after finding assertive attributes about God, counts them as inadequate; and the paradox, between the two polarities of assertion and negation, remains unresolved.¹⁶ The reaction of post-modernity, therefore, functions as that which points out the fallacies of modernity, without providing any concrete solution.

The mystical method ignited a re-interpretation of my religious studies. That God appeared in darkness, uncertainty and imperceptibility did not produce doubt; rather, it is quite the opposite, actually—the rejection of certainty produced faith. The theological assurance of security in the midst of the unknowing, which is dependent upon God’s faithfulness, is the very praxis of women and men who ventured into the desert to deny the world and themselves for God’s sake.

Monastic Spirituality and Mystical Theology

The *Monastic* movement does not begin with the Christian tradition, although it may be recognized as a large part of early Christianity. The monastic movement does, however, begin to acquire more impetus in Christianity, as the church kept attracting more and more members from wealthier classes. According to Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, “the increase in both the numbers and the overall social status of the church’s members are often cited as reasons for the relaxation in church discipline that can be seen during this period.”¹⁷ This, of course, becomes exacerbated by the legalization of Christianity and the social support of the Roman emperors. The various protagonists of these ascetical movements, therefore, saw their expressions of the Christian religion as a form of martyrdom from the new frivolous pleasures of the church. Soelle points out that “the early church refused to involve itself in several of the social benefits and obligations of the empire . . . In a *minority* Christian culture, abstinence, separation, dissent, opposition, and resistance flowed one into the other.”¹⁸ (emphasis added) The minority, presumably, concerns the separatists. These practices, ultimately, “led Christian women and men to free their bodies from excessive attachments to the social and material world, and thus find a path of holiness that enabled one to approach God.”¹⁹

Although these believers sought to confine themselves from the rest of the world, their practices proved to be attractive to a large number of people who traveled to the desert in order to seek deeper spirituality.²⁰ For example, Athanasius in *The Life of Anthony*, records that Anthony expanded his reputation for having spiritual gifts, especially against demons,

¹⁵ Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁷ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 142

¹⁸ Soelle, 193.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

which gained him a rather large following.²¹ By the middle of the fourth century, “a vast network of communities in the desert had emerged, populated by women and men who had renounced their worldly connections in order to pursue lives of holiness.”²² According to O’Donnell, those who withdrew into this enclosure “were less concerned to reject the world and flee from it than they were to imitate Christ in his perfect submission to the Father’s will.”²³ O’Donnell’s conviction is that the monastic movement was less about the political reaction against the church of the Empire, and more about the search for communion with God. It is, perhaps, the political and the theological informing each other congruently.

It was the burning vision of the possibility of knowing God in an intimate way that drew so many women and men to turn from the relaxation of the church of the Empire to the harshness and loneliness of the desert. Recognizing the need to provide a better structure for those seeking the deeper spiritual life of monasticism, an Egyptian ascetic named Pachomius (292–346), early in the fourth century, drew up a new rule of community order.²⁴ Women and men who lived according to Pachomius’ rule ate regular meals together, sustaining from meat and wine; meals were conducted in silence; twice a week everyone fasted; and all were expected to live in poverty, and wear simple clothing that resembled the dress of peasants.²⁵ These conditions of rigid self-denial are the essence of monastic spirituality.

This commitment to knowing and experiencing God through the depravity of physical leisure, *vis-à-vis* the material attachments of the world, demonstrated the insufficiency of worldly pleasures in the path to God, diffused and articulated by Pseudo-Denys in *Mystical Theology*. Pseudo-Denys’ critique originates by establishing the inadequacy of words about God by intellectual means. In other words, in order to strive upwards towards union with God, “who is beyond all being and knowledge,” all that one must do is “leave behind everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is.”²⁶ In the shadows of uncertainty, as scripture proclaims, there dwells the One who is beyond all things, where God has made a hiding place.²⁷

That God is beyond human intellectual capabilities is quite a radical statement, especially for those of us who are seeking, and further developing a religious education. God’s knowledge, according to Pseudo-Denys, is only for those who have passed “beyond the summit of every holy ascent, who leave behind them every divine light, every voice, every word from heaven, and who plunge into the darkness.”²⁸ Just like the ascetics of the desert, who left everything behind in order to eliminate social distractions, a mystical union with God is esoteric. Those who have committed themselves to finding God, through intellectual means, on the other hand, are the uninformed who naively think that there is nothing

²¹ Ibid; see also, Gabriel O’Donnell, “Monastic Life and the Search for God,” in *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, edited by Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 55.

²² Irvin and Sunquist, 210.

²³ O’Donnell, 56.

²⁴ Irvin and Sunquist, 210.

²⁵ Ibid, 212.

²⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, 135.

²⁷ Ibid, 136.

²⁸ Ibid.

beyond the level of being or existence, which is known to us.²⁹

The theological trope of ascension into darkness is quite the underpinning for Pseudo-Denys' apophatic rhetoric.³⁰ By presenting an allegorical interpretation of Exodus 20, Pseudo-Denys gives the reader an image of encountering God: (1) in the darkness and (2) in negative idiomatic expressions of the divine. He writes:

Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priest, he [Moses] pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents. And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells. This means, I presume, that the holiest and highest of the things perceived with the eye of the body or the mind are but the rationale which presupposes all that lies below the Transcendent One. Through them, however, his unimaginable presence is shown, walking the heights of those holy places to which the mind at least can rise. But then he [Moses] breaks free of them, away from what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind of knowing nothing.³¹

This interpretation, ultimately, frames Pseudo-Denys' idea of ascension into the darkness, "the thick darkness where God was" (Exodus 20.21), that one must make in order to truly experience union with God. In the biblical account, a dark cloud, with thunder and lightning, surrounded Mount Sinai while Moses received the Ten Commandments. The Israelites, after witnessing the immensity of the smoking mountain, were afraid and trembled, and stood at a distance: "You speak to us," the Israelites told Moses, "but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." The idea of being able to see God, face to face, would frighten anyone; and the presence with which God appeared at the top of the mountain ignited a withdrawal for the Israelites, from the esoteric nature of God, into security, certainty, and stability. Meanwhile, Moses drew nearer to the thick darkness. For Pseudo-Denys, this narrative is a crucial model because God is manifest only to those who make this journey, who leave behind the lights and voices, who approach the summit of the divine ascents.

Pseudo-Denys is operating under the assumption that in order to *know*, one must *renounce*, just like Moses forgot about himself and was unified with God on Mount Sinai. How do I know that God is in the darkness? Is God not in the light? The light, for Pseudo-Denys, functions as the theological place where believers may feel completely comfortable. Do I have enough faith to renounce my certainty and preconceived notions—the light—of God, in order to ascend into the abyss? Or do I remain at the bottom of the mountain, frightened

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Pseudo-Denys' theological trope would also come to influence later Christian spiritual writings; specifically in John of the Cross, we find reference to this "darkness" as the place of encounter with the Divine, in the context of a spiritual journey that entails detachment from the senses (Dark Night of the Senses).

³¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, 138.

and trembling in certainty? That one should renounce all that the mind can conceive and leave behind the divine light, is not that different from saying that in order to follow Jesus, one must renounce from excessive attachments to the social and material world, which includes human modern religious knowledge. “To gain one’s life, one must lose it,” or so the saying goes. For Pseudo-Denys and Monastic spiritualists, to know God meant the denial of all that we see and know, even if that meant the preconceived notions of who God was or what it meant to be a Christian.

Conclusion

Were the agnostic religious influences during my undergraduate studies correct in stressing the capabilities and superiority of human knowledge, while dismissing any folk theological expressions of Christian ideas? Was the evangelical church that I attended correct in dismissing any sort of biblical criticism, while keeping to social methods and constructions that were, presumably, divinely sanctioned? Real knowledge about God, Pseudo-Denys would say, is found in places where we do not expect it: in darkness and mystery, in the desert of unknowing, at the top of Mount Sinai in the clouds of lightning and thunder, where those who are filled with certainty may not enter. Who is more certain? The church? The academy?

I have found a new assurance in “knowing” that not everything is certain, that God remains enigmatic, and that it is not up to modern religious knowledge to lift the veil or remove the cloud of darkness. Through the parallels that exist between the Monastic movement of the early Christian church and Pseudo-Denys’ *Mystical Theology*, I have shown that a religious alternative exists: a movement that is identified by un-identifiability. Soelle best describes this alternative by saying, “when we are a part of the movement of nothing, it means that we too live with our nothing, confront our nothing or, as mystics have always put it, that we become *annihilated* [emphasis added] . . . To be ego-less, possession-less, and nonviolent is to be identified with the nothing that wants to be everything even among us.”³² Women and men who attempted to conceal themselves from worldly desires, creating a space where experience and knowledge of God can happen in unknowing, have helped me comprehend and re-interpret what a theological education is meant to engender: heuristic processes that enable religious knowledge to transpire in all places, and in no places.

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³² Soelle, 194. Soelle has in mind here, not a rejection or departure from the world, but a resistance to the status quo; to be part of the movement of nothing means, therefore, to be part of the movement of resistance. Although this essay does not explicitly address resistance as a form of mysticism, the essay does, however, address the re-interpretation of the status quo: from preconceived notions and absolutes, to uncertainty and nothingness.

Knowledge and Vital Piety

By Camille Reeder

The objective of this paper is to examine the intersections among Christian mysticism, John Wesley's view of religious experience, and neuroscience. Although this may seem to be a motley grouping of topics, it is my hope to shed some light on their relationships to one another. Ultimately, I believe this exposition could aid in the evangelistic endeavors of the church today. My discussion will be structured in the following way: first I will briefly define Christian mysticism, then I will provide an overview of the conflicts and thoughts surrounding religious experience in the eighteenth century, followed by some of Wesley's thoughts on mysticism and experience, and in conclusion I will provide an analysis of the role neuroscience is playing in relationship to religious experience today.

Initially Christianity employed the term mysticism to, "refer generally to the hidden depths of divine meaning in the Scriptures. The term came to be applied by analogy to the spiritual significance underlying the practices of Christian worship."¹ This unity of scripture, worship, and articulation of experience is reflective of the Trinitarian theology that permeates the Christian faith. Put another way, God reaches out by means of the Holy Spirit in order to transform humanity into the image of Christ. The purpose of God's transformational work through humans is always rooted in bringing about missional action in the world.² Therefore, the mystic becomes a reflection of or vehicle for God's self-revelation in the world.

God's self-revelation is worked out via two major aspects of mysticism, apophatic and kataphatic spirituality. The imminent Trinity may be expressed in terms of apophatic spirituality or the negative way. This aspect of mysticism may be further broken down into three main characteristics that acknowledge: a recognition of God's transcendence of limited human language and understanding, a detachment from things or thoughts that create a barrier between a person and God, and a way of suffering following the kenotic example of Christ.³ Apophatic spirituality tends to be held in high regard in the Eastern Orthodox traditions of Christianity, while kataphatic spirituality is more visible in the Western traditions of Christianity, primarily Roman Catholicism. Kataphatic spirituality, or the affirmative way, is concerned with humanity's experience of God through the Incarnation of Christ. This self-revelation of God is an expression of the economic Trinity, or the working out of salvation through the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ. This form of experience has some quality of tangibility such that the mystic might experience a deep

¹ Mark A. McIntosh, "Mystical Theology," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Philip Sheldrake; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 455.

² Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

³ Edward Howells, "Apophatic Spirituality," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Philip Sheldrake; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 117.

sense of joy for example. As noted by Louis Bouyer, a mystical experience does not “consist so much of the experience of ecstasies or visions... but quite simply in total self-abandonment in naked faith, through an efficacious love of the Cross that is one with the very love of the crucified God.”⁴ This statement provides a valuable link between Christian mysticism and the Wesleyan tradition.

John Wesley’s concern with sanctification is the very junction of his theology and mystical theology. As defined by Dr. Elaine Heath, sanctification is “knowing and sharing the will of God, the *sarx* falls away so it is a death of false self. We increasingly become united with Christ in union with God. True self is deeply rooted in Christ as we are sanctified and the false self is washed away.”⁵ The shedding of the false self in order to more fully unite with God and God’s will is foundational to all Christian mysticism. I would push this and say that releasing the false self is fundamental to living an incarnational life in Christ. Evidence of the mystical aspects of the Christian faith, including within Wesleyanism, appear predominately in written texts. The primary written genres of these mystical texts include, but are not limited to: spiritual biographies, prayers, instructions on living, hymns and meditations.⁶ John Wesley wrote prolifically, leaving scholars a legacy robust in mystical experience, including apophatic as well as kataphatic pieces. These texts will be addressed after shedding some light on the impetus for the texts, namely enthusiasm.

The backdrop for much of Wesley’s writing concerning experience was rooted in negotiating the Enlightenment era thought of the eighteenth century. This quest for reason and empirical evidence left no stone unturned, including the realm of religion. Ultimately, the goal was to define religion, in this case Christianity, in secular terms. The impetus for this exercise was an attempt to isolate true religion from enthusiasm⁷ thus rendering a conflict between formalism and enthusiasm. As a backlash to the uncontrolled behaviors often associated with enthusiasm, religious leaders such as Charles Chauncy, a New England Congregationalist minister, pushed for church settings conducive to the suppression of emotion and experience. In Chauncy’s view, many preachers elicited wild behaviors by subtly communicating the response they expected to the congregants. For instance, vivid depictions of hell could cause a weak person to lose control and fall to the ground crying. Further examples of enthusiastic behavior include: dreams, trances, visions, involuntary vocalizations and bodily movements referred to as fits, falling as if dead, crying out, and shouting. According to Ann Taves, “The discourse of formalism, enthusiasm, and true religion extended into the early nineteenth century and informed the development of American Methodism in the decades immediately after the Revolutionary War.”⁸

Alongside the battle between restraint and expression were scientific discussions concerning the possible reasons for seemingly uncontrollable behavior. Essentially,

⁴ James A. Wiseman, O.S.B., “Mysticism,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (ed. Michael Downey; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 682. Wiseman quoted Bouyer in contrast to von Balthasar’s position that one must have some sort of ecstatic experience to qualify as a mystic.

⁵ Dr. Elaine Heath, *Studies in Wesley: Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, class lecture on 6 September 2011.

⁶ Heath, class lecture, 30 August 2011.

⁷ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 20.

⁸ Taves, 4.

experience could be understood in natural terms (secular theories of the mind) or in supernatural terms allowing room for the influence of the Holy Spirit. Skeptics of the supernatural, such as David Hume, believed the theory of religion was conjoined with superstition.⁹ In tandem with some philosophers, scientific explanations favored the study of nerves and nervous disorders as a means of debunking religious experience. Hence, in addition to blaming pastors for eliciting the expressive reactions of congregants, Chauncy also claimed that persons with weak nervous systems were more susceptible to this type of behavior. For him, enthusiasm was a disease that predominately afflicted young women because of the “weakness of their nerves” and due to this weakness was “their greater liability to be surprised, and overcome with fear.”¹⁰ Correlating to the weakness of women, enthusiastic men were considered to be melancholy. Whether weak or melancholy, unsuppressed behaviors were unacceptable symptoms of illness and false religion.

John Wesley sought to define true religion in the midst of the war between formalism and enthusiasm. True religion was equated with conversion and the continuing process of sanctification¹¹ both of which included the bearing of fruit. Critical to Wesley’s thought was the preservation of the possibility of direct religious experience without the marks of enthusiasm. *Sermon 37: The Nature of Enthusiasm* is a prime example of his vacillation of thought on the subject of experience. At one point he beautifully articulates the apophatic dynamic discussed in the definition of mysticism, saying “...God has enabled his to rejoice in Christ ‘with joy unspeakable and full of glory: If a man is indeed alive to God, and dead to all things here below; if he continually sees Him that is invisible, and accordingly walks by faith, and not by sight. . .’”¹² Here Wesley is commenting on the world’s view of Christianity as madness, yet a few sections later he attacks enthusiasm and experience as religious madness. That is, Wesley is defending the negative aspects of faith such as the “unspeakable” and “invisible” which are apophatic characteristics. Although affirmed here, Wesley often struggled with this dynamic and tended to seek out kataphatic experience in his frequent desire for assurance. Scripture was the bedrock for Wesley’s thought and praxis and provided for him a tangible interaction with God.

In his sermon, Wesley points to Scripture as a means of understanding the negative aspects of enthusiasm or false religion. He names several types of enthusiasm all of which may be mediated by a careful understanding of the biblical text. Among those participating in the negative practice are those who: imagine they have grace without repentance, imagine themselves Christian who are not because they are unholy and love the world, imagine they have gifts from God such as healing and raising the dead, expect things from God with no scriptural ground, and expect to understand the Scriptures without reading them. Wesley sums up his estimation of enthusiasm by saying, “Thus expect a daily growth in that pure and holy religion which the world always did, and always will, call ‘enthusiasm;’ but which, to all who are saved from real enthusiasm, from merely nominal Christianity, is ‘the wisdom of

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹¹ Ibid., 48.

¹² John Wesley, *Sermon 37, “The Nature of Enthusiasm”* (available online at <http://gbgm-umc.org/UMhistory/Wesley/sermons>).

God, and the power of God;’ the glorious image of the Most high; ‘righteousness and peace;’ a ‘fountain of living water, springing up into everlasting life!’”

Providing an inclusio for *Sermon 37*, are two discourses Wesley wrote addressing the witness of the Spirit. The first was written in 1746 and the second was written twenty years subsequent. Romans 8:16 provides the scriptural foundation for these discourses in which Wesley expounds his sentiments on the action and evidence of the Spirit’s witness to believers.¹³ In a move characteristic of apophaticism, Wesley states, “It is hard to find words in the language of men to explain ‘the deep things of God’. Indeed there are none that will adequately express what the children of God experience.”¹⁴ He goes on to say that the testimony of the Spirit is something of an inward impression on the soul whereby the Spirit directly witnesses to the love and sacrifice of Jesus. Following this experience, the spirit of the believer becomes a testimony to the Spirit of God. Recognizing the somewhat obscure nature of this experience, Wesley seeks to explain how one might distinguish between a “presumption of a natural mind and from the delusion of the devil.”¹⁵ Here he makes the kataphatic move of turning to Scripture as a guide for understanding repentance (Matt 3:2; Mk 1:15; Acts 2:38, 3:19), being born of God (Eph 2:1,5,6), and the love of God and the desire to keep the commandments (1 John 5:3; John 14:21). In other words, if the Spirit has truly witnessed to our spirits, we will repent of our sins and keep the commandments of God with joy and humility. “By the fruits which he hath wrought in your spirit you shall know the ‘testimony of the Spirit of God.’ [...] The immediate fruits of the Spirit ruling the heart are ‘love, joy, peace;’ ‘bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering’. And the outward fruits are the doing good to all men, the doing no evil to any, and walking in the light...”¹⁶ This discourse presents the ideas which were foundational to Wesley’s theological understanding of Christian experience.

Wesley chose not to negate experiences such as dreams, visions, and bodily movements; however, he approached them with some degree of caution. He did note that these experiences were not an indication of salvation and were not equivalent to the fruits of the Spirit. All experience must be viewed in light of fruit that is visible in a person’s life. Wesley reiterates this point in his second discourse on the witness of the Spirit. He provides further clarification of the Spirit’s witness: although some may think they have had an experience but do not, this creates no prejudice to real experience; the purpose of the witness is a confirmation of our status as God’s children; the fruit of the Spirit always follow the witness of the Spirit, and at times the testimony of our own spirit will not be sufficient assurance that we are God’s children, in which case “the direct testimony of God’s Spirit can assure us we are his children.”¹⁷

Perhaps Wesley’s reluctance to completely dismiss outward signs of experience was founded in his own religious experiences. In 1738, he had his famous Aldersgate experience

¹³ John Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse I,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). Both discourses can be found in this compilation. From the NRSV, Romans 8:16 reads, “it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 402.

in which his heart was strangely warmed. As a result, he says, "I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."¹⁸ About a year later, Wesley was part of a collective experience that took place at a love-feast, an agape meal, in Fetter Lane.¹⁹ A group of about sixty peers were engaged in prayer when they sensed the power of God on them. Many of the participants cried out with joy and others fell to the ground. "As soon as we recovered from shock and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.'"²⁰ Each of these experiences emanated from circumstances of prayer, worship, shared meals, or deep searching of the scriptures. Meditation on Scripture is tantamount to all forms of Christian mysticism and interestingly enough, Wesley adapted a methodical way to read and pray scripture. Step five for scripture reading states, "Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used, before we consult the oracles of God, seeing 'scripture can only be understood thro' the same Spirit whereby it was given.' Our reading likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written in our hearts."²¹ Wesley's appreciation of scripture is a reflection of his deeply rooted Trinitarian theology that is also the bedrock of Christian mysticism as a whole.

Perhaps Wesley's monk-in-the-world view of life and discipline created the space within him to not completely dismiss mysticism, experience, and enthusiasm. Despite the propositions of the Enlightenment to disregard experience in exchange for empirical evidence, Wesley ultimately found a solution to the problem. Although he felt it was rare for God to manifest in visions and dreams,²² Wesley concluded that for an experience to be authentic it must bear fruit. Such fruit is evident in the likes of E. Stanley Jones and Phoebe Palmer, both dynamic spiritual leaders and writers ~ one influenced the Protestant movement in India and the other was the mother of the Holiness movement in North America.²³ Needless to say, John Wesley bore much fruit; thereby, he is a mystic.

Having examined Christian mysticism, the issues surrounding eighteenth century religious experience, and Wesley's account of experience, it is now time to turn to neuroscience. Science as a whole has come a long way since Wesley's time; however, the understanding of the mind in some ways has not evolved at the same pace. That is to say, most neuroscientists are materialists, understanding the mind to be nothing more than biology and chemistry. Nevertheless much has been determined in these areas since Wesley's day. Mario Beauregard, a researcher in psychology and radiology at the Neuroscience Research Institute at the University of Montreal, is currently working in the realm of neurobiology and mystical experience investigating the neurological underpinnings of religious spiritual mystical experiences (RSMs).²⁴ In *Mystical Brain*, a 2006 documentary

¹⁸ John Wesley, journal entry available at <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/aldersgate-wheaton/aumname.html>

¹⁹ Taves, 72.

²⁰ Ibid., 72.

²¹ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: April 25, 1765), preface. (available at <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/wesley/bible.stm>).

²² Wesley, *Sermon 37*, point 21.

²³ Heath, class notes 30 August 2011 and 13 September 2011.

²⁴ Mario Beauregard, "The Spiritual Brain", (video available at <http://www.nourfoundation.com/media-gallery/videos/The-Spiritual-Brain/>)

by Isabelle Raynauld,²⁵ Beauregard shares the research he conducted concerning Carmelite nuns. He and fellow researcher, Vincent Paquette, employed FMRI and QEEG testing technology to measure oxygen levels and electrical activity in the brain while the nuns practiced meditation. The goal of the project was not to prove or disprove the external reality of God, as that is beyond science. The primary objective was to take a look at the correlates of the brain activity during states of deep meditation. The results revealed a complex network of brain functions encompassing much more than temporal lobe function.²⁶ The Carmelites reported a variety of experiences including profound joy, unconditional love, peace, and a desire to surrender to God. Interestingly enough, this mirrors the fruit of the Spirit held so dearly by Wesley.

Andrew Newberg and his late research partner Eugene d'Aquili conducted similar research and have written prolifically on the topic of neuroscience and spirituality termed neurotheology. Although their research is not devoted solely to Christian spirituality, the goal is not to prove or disprove God. An interesting comment and possible explanation of apophatic theology reads, "The universal experience from many cultures is that language is incapable of adequately capturing these states (hyperlucid visions, trances, and senses of religious awe). Neurophysiologically, it seems that the language centers are generally bypassed in the generation of mystical experience. Thus, language elements are at best peripheral to the core experiences."²⁷ Their findings also yield an obliteration of the self-other dichotomy also evident in Beauregard's research. The subjects experience a union of self with a transcendent reality. Of utmost concern to the content of my work here, is their proclamation that "mystics are not crazy;"²⁸ rather mystical states are associated with particular states in the brain. As research in this arena progresses, mystical experiences are becoming more easily distinguished from psychopathic conditions. Further attestation to the phrase "mystics are not crazy" is the fact that mysticism is a multicultural practice found in most all forms of religion. D'Aquili and Newberg conclude with, "The road to God is paved with many stones: metaphor, poetry, music, ritual experiences, prayer, and meditative experiences—all are culturally conditioned but they point to that which is 'really real'." The hope of their research is to aid in the cultivation of ecumenical religious dialogue, love, and compassion in the world.

I would like to present one final example of current research concerning the processes underlying meditation practices. Clifford Saron is a researcher with the Shamatha Project at the Center for Mind and Brain at the University of California at Davis. Dr. Saron's work is focused on the training of attention and emotion regulation through contemplative practice.²⁹ As many researchers in this field of investigation have discovered, Saron's work has shown evidence of neuroplasticity. That is, the idea that the brain can and does change

²⁵ Isabelle Raynauld, "Mystical Brain," 2006. (available at http://www.Nfb.ca/film/mystical_brain)

²⁶ Much of my research concerning neuroscience and mystical experiences revealed activity in the temporal lobes. Early on, temporal lobe seizures were blamed for mystical experiences with God thereby discrediting their validity as an encounter with God.

²⁷ Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 117.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁹ Clifford Saron, The Shamatha Project, (<http://www.mindbrain.ucdavis.edu/labs/Saron/shamatha-project/overview/>).

in response to how it is stimulated. His recent project revealed that intense meditative practice leads to an increase in telomerase, an enzyme associated with aging that protects genetic material during cell division. Other findings include: an increased sense of awe, increased psychological wellbeing, and increased compassion to the point of being moved to help others.

So what? Evangelism. Perhaps the union of God experienced during meditative practices and the consequent fruit of the Spirit could have a life-giving impact on the church and the world today. The purpose of the church is to aid in the transformation of the world. In order to undertake such an endeavor, healing must take place within the church. I believe healing is available in the Wesleyan archives. Wesley established the class meetings as a means of intensifying devotion. The meetings were centered on prayer, hymns, and confession and were a means of monitoring enthusiasm, fostering spiritual development, and testifying of experience.³⁰ Spiritual fruit and the assurance of being children of God were the underpinnings of Wesley's writings regarding Christian experience. In addition, Wesley named outward fruit as doing good to all men, doing no evil, and walking in the light. Each of these are conducive to evangelism as defined in the following way: the holistic process of initiation into the reign of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and anchored in the church for the transformation of the world.³¹ Each of these is also evidenced in recent results of the previously mentioned neuroscientific endeavors. Although Wesley had no empirical data to support the benefits of spiritual disciplines, today there is a growing collection of scientific data reflective of his convictions. Wesley was not on a scientific quest; rather, he was merely living out his faith in such a way as to bring about transformation in the world. The cultivation of compassion, peace, and love through meditation grounded in the Holy Scriptures to bring about union with God just may be the healing ointment the church so desperately requires.

In honor of faith and science, mysticism and neurobiology, I would like to conclude with a hymn composed by Charles Wesley.³² Lord, hear my prayer.

Unite the pair so long disjointed
Knowledge and vital piety,
Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love let us all see
In these whom up to thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine to die and live.

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³⁰ Taves, 72.

³¹ Dr. Elaine Heath, term defined in *Evangelism 7307*, Spring 2011.

³² Charles Wesley, *John and Charles Wesley: Selections from Their Writings and Hymns—Annotated and Explained*, (an. Paul Wesley Chilcote; Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011), 181.

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Love Wins

By Reagan Lunn

In 1992, on a Saturday afternoon, Kyle and Lee stood in front of their friends, family, loved ones, and a minister and made vows of commitment to one another. They took rings, and after the minister blessed them, each of them placed a ring on the finger of the left hand of the other. There was a reception afterward where family and friends danced together, ate cake, gave toasts, and a few people had a bit too much to drink. When the party ended Kyle and Lee went on a vacation where the two of them could spend time alone together to celebrate the party they had just been a part of. Then they came home to the same house where they would live together from that time on.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about this celebration. It was like hundreds, maybe thousands, of other ceremonies that took place on that Saturday in 1992. Change the names and the story would still work for most people. There was, however, a significant difference. The difference between this celebration and others was that Kyle and Lee are both male. And because of this one difference, other significant differences are found. Typically when a celebration like this one occurs, the government and the church recognize it as a ceremony of marriage, or a wedding, but when two people of the same sex have the same ceremony, the state and the church give it no more recognition than any other party on a Saturday afternoon. According to the church and the state, when this party ended nothing changed. According to the state and the church, the vows of marriage taken by two people of the same sex are as good as the vows two children take to be best friends forever.

My position is that when two people of the same sex vow to be in an exclusive, covenantal relationship with one another based on mutual love, affection, and care-taking, they have entered into the covenant of marriage in the same sense that two people of the opposite sex have. In other words, marriage should be based on relational intention rather than on biological compatibility of genitalia. Using the teleological model, this essay will argue that a covenant of marriage is established anytime two people, regardless of gender, enter into the covenant consensually as long as it leads to a greater love of God and love of neighbor.

The teleological method emphasizes the goals and the ends rather than the means taken to get to the goal. Something is good if it brings a person to the goal and something is bad if it prevents a person from attaining the goal.¹ Another way to express this would be to say that something is morally acceptable if it helps a person to reach the goal and something is morally unacceptable if it prevents a person from reaching a goal. Using this model, the first thing that needs to be done is to determine what the goal is. Inside the realm of Christian ethics, there are a number of sources that can help determine the goal, including, reason, experience, tradition, and scripture.

¹ Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 66.

In this essay, determining the goal of the moral Christian life will rely heavily on the Holy Scriptures, beginning with the teachings of Jesus. In the three synoptic gospels, there is a story told about a lawyer who comes to Jesus with a question about the purpose of life, and how one should live out that life. The lawyer comes to Jesus and asks him “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” and Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:34–40 cf. Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28) Similarly in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus gives a new commandment, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35) These commandments to love God and to love neighbor are not new ideas from Jesus himself, but they come from the Hebrew Scripture, in Torah (cf. Exodus 3:6; Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

The Christian canon contains more writings by the Apostle Paul than any other author in the New Testament. Paul is often interpreted as only teaching that what matters is “faith” in Jesus Christ, and faith alone; yet even he picks up the teaching about loving one’s neighbor:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet;” and any other commandments, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8–10)

For the teleological model, this passage is a good example of how the “ends” (i.e. loving your neighbor) are more important than the “means” (i.e. not committing adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting). In other words, what Paul is teaching is that what matters most is the outcome, and the list of vices to avoid are there to help in reaching the goal.

A last example comes from the first epistle of John where the author writes, “The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:21). Again, the end goal is to love God and to love neighbor. This example, combined with the previous examples, shows that from the Torah to the New Testament, for followers of God, the end or goal is to love God and to love neighbor. H. Richard Niebuhr writes, “[The New Testament] and the witness of Christians in all ages confirm the affirmation that love is one of Jesus Christ’s great virtues, and that what he demands of his disciples or makes possible to them is love.”² Based on the teachings of Torah, the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the early Christian writers, this essay will use love of God and love of neighbor as the goal for the moral Christian life. If same-sex marriage can be seen as enabling people to love both God and neighbor, then it will be considered morally acceptable and even encouraged. However if same-sex marriage is shown as impeding people’s ability to love God and love neighbor, it will be considered morally unacceptable.

One problem of having the goal of love is determining an adequate definition of love.

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper One, 2001), 15.

Even in the Scriptures, different words are used to indicate different types of love. In the New Testament there are three Greek words for love: *rós* (passionate love), *agáp* (brotherly love), and *phíla* (friendship). Recognizing the complexity of a subject such as love, this essay will work with the framework that love is self-giving to something outside of oneself. Robin Lovin writes, “Love is the orientation of individual life toward a center outside of itself, recognizing that my own value is not absolute, but derives from relationship to God. Love likewise, values other people and things as they are related to God, and not as they are useful or important to oneself.”³

When talking about same-sex marriage, a framework for what we mean by marriage also needs to be established. The definition of marriage is dynamic. It is dynamic both in relation to history and culture. A marriage in the Ancient Near East is different from a marriage in the modern Western world. In the Ancient Near East, marriages were arranged and were legal agreements between families, often times not consulting the persons who were to be married to each other. Many times the persons to be married would not even meet each other until the day of the wedding. There are many cultures today that still have similar practices and understandings of marriage. Even Christian families in the Middle East still practice the tradition of arranged marriage. This is in contrast to the modern Western way of marriage that includes dating and getting to know a person, often times multiple persons, before two individuals decide for themselves they have found the person they want to be married to. The “traditional” marriage many Americans espouse is far from traditional. There are, of course, many other ways marriage is arranged and defined throughout history and across different cultures. What is important to note is that marriage is defined by what a singular culture considers marriage, and a society can define and redefine its definition of marriage as often as it chooses.⁴

Among those who see marriage inside the framework of the “traditional” American marriage, some see same-sex marriage as an oxymoron based on their definition of marriage. With some definitions, same-sex marriage cannot exist because the definition requires a husband and a wife. This way of defining marriage is problematic because its cyclical nature defines itself in relation to itself. As Richard Mohr observes,

Most commonly, dictionaries define marriage in terms of spouses, spouses in terms of husband and wife, and husband and wife in terms of marriage. In consequence, the various definitions do not work in explaining what marriage is and so simply end up assuming or stipulating that marriage must be between people of different sexes.⁵

Other definitions or descriptions of marriage do not require a “husband” and “wife” to complete the definition. Daniel Maguire says that “Marriage is the highest form of interpersonal commitment and friendship achievable between sexually attracted persons.”⁶ In this definition there is no requirement that the persons be of the opposite sex. However,

³ Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 77.

⁴ Angela Bolte, “Do Wedding Dresses Come in Lavender? The Prospects and Implications of Same-Sex Marriage” in *The Gay & Lesbian Marriage & Family Reader* (Jennifer M. Lehmann ed.; New York: Gordian Knot Books, 2001), 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶ Daniel Maguire, “The Morality of Homosexual Marriage,” in *Same-Sex Marriage: The Moral and Legal Debate* (Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum ed.; Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 63.

the definition also lacks important details that may include monogamy, consent, ongoing commitment, or ceremony. With Maguire's definition, both a young couple struck with "puppy love," and a couple in a long-term committed relationship could be considered married. His definition is too vague and does not take the covenant element of marriage seriously enough. The other element that his definition does not include is love. How does the union of two people either enhance or detract from their ability to love God and to love neighbor?

Is being gay a sin?

Much of the debate in the Christian church about the morality of same-sex marriage revolves around the question of whether or not being gay or lesbian is "a sin." What may at first seem like a straight forward "yes" or "no" question is actually quite complicated because before an answer to the question "Is homosexuality a sin?" can be given, the question "What is a sin?" must be addressed.

If sin is seen as an action that follows a list of "dos and don'ts" and a list of "rights and wrongs" found in the Bible, then all one needs to do to answer the question is look to the Scriptures and find out what the rules say. But that raises the problem of subjects that the Bible does not address. How are we to know what Internet videos we can watch and which videos we cannot watch? Our Scriptures do not address anything regarding the movies or the Internet. However, the Scriptures do address specific issues that concern our society today such as adultery, murder, gossip, and a list of other things that are relevant to the modern world. So can we just follow the rules addressed in the Scriptures? What about where Scripture affirms certain actions that are unacceptable and categorically immoral in today's culture as well, such as slavery? Is a slave who escapes committing "a sin" because they did not obey their master (cf. Colossians 3:22)? Trying to use the Scriptures as a rulebook does not work for a variety of reasons, but primarily because that was not their intended purpose. And viewing a singular action as "a sin" also does not work because it does not give enough power to the force of sin in the world. Sin needs to be seen as a power rather than an action. If sin is seen only as an action, it does not have enough influence because it can easily be eradicated.⁷ That is not to say that actions are not involved in sin. Anytime our actions do not lead to love of God or love of neighbor, then they become sin. Take the example of buying a twenty-dollar t-shirt; is that a sin?

More than half the world's population lives on less than two American dollars a day and there are more than one billion people in the world without access to clean drinking water. Every ten seconds a child under the age of five will die because of a water-related illness, but for twenty American dollars, a family of five can have clean drinking water for five years. When a child dies so that a person can add another t-shirt to their t-shirt collection, sin is present. Sin has occurred because love of neighbor has been ignored, or at least not initiated. The person buying the shirt has invested more in themselves rather than looking to the needs of others. Of course, the person buying the t-shirt is not aware that their actions are affecting the life of a thirsty child, but nevertheless they are. Remember the serpent in the garden was crafty. This example does not include the effects on the environment that it takes

⁷ Curran, 39.

to produce this excess of clothing and to dispose of unwanted clothing. It does not include the effects on the people who made the shirt, who could very well be working in subhuman conditions with unfair compensation while the corporations make obscene profit. None of these people and entities are showing love to their neighbor, nor are they showing love to God either. The ripple effect of suffering and oppression from the purchase of a twenty-dollar t-shirt can get pretty large pretty quick, regardless of peoples' intentions.

What about the ripple effect of a person identifying as gay or lesbian? The identification of an individual as gay or lesbian can have serious repercussions. "Coming out" can cause strain on family relationships, friendships, work relationships, and so on. However, a person's identification as gay or lesbian does not create a ripple of oppression or suffering that brings harm to others. In other words, identifying oneself as gay or lesbian does not impede love of God or love of neighbor. If being gay or lesbian does not cause damage or harm that prevents love of God and love of neighbor from happening, then it can be concluded that there is nothing sinful about being homosexual.

The Sanctity of Marriage

The framework of the modern Western tradition of marriage, deeply influenced by the Judeo-Christian culture, including reciprocal pledges of lifelong monogamy and fidelity, are not universal. Marriage is significantly different from the way it was originally. In the past twenty years alone, there have been numerous changes to marriage. Marriage has changed. From the elimination of fertility laws to the advent of the no-fault divorce, marriage is constantly evolving.⁸ But there are defenders of the so-called "traditional marriage" who do have a universal ideology regarding marriage. Cal Thomas writes, "If gay 'marriage' is allowed, there will be no stopping others who wish to strike down what remains of foundational truths once thought to be self-evident... If gay 'marriage' becomes possible, then there is nothing stopping polygamists, or anyone else, seeking redress of unique grievances."⁹ Thomas, like many others, is worried about the "sanctity of marriage" if gays and lesbians are allowed to marry. Opponents of same-sex marriage are concerned that if gays and lesbians are given the right to be married, then there will be nothing stopping polygamy and incest.¹⁰ This line of argument is based on their belief that God has ordained marriage to be between one man and one woman, based primarily on the book of Genesis. Jeffery Hart writes,

The paradigmatic couple in Genesis is named "Adam and Eve." The representation is valid not just because it is in the Bible, but in the Bible because it is valid. It is amusing to imagine what would have been the response from the rabbis in the Temple of Jerusalem if a theological poet had shown up with a proposal for Genesis featuring a first couple named "Adam and Henry."¹¹

⁸ Bolte, 42.

⁹ Cal Thomas, "Marriage From God, Not Courts," in *Same-Sex Marriage: The Moral and Legal Debate* (Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum ed.; Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 42–43.

¹⁰ Jonathan Rauch, "Marrying Somebody" in *Same Sex Marriage: Pro and Con* (Andrew Sullivan ed.; New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 285ff.

¹¹ Jeffrey Hart, "Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Henry," in *Same-Sex Marriage: The Moral and Legal Debate* (Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum ed.; Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 30.

Aside from Hart's "amusement" with an idea that is different from the one he ascribes to, his understanding of marriage as a static institution that has not changed since the time of Adam and Eve is naïve and wrong. As was discussed above, marriage is constantly evolving and being redefined based on the culture and the time period it is in. While Hart's argument for marriage to be between a man and a woman lacks an acknowledgment of evolution in marriage, those who do recognize evolution in marriage see that evolution as part of the basis for accepting same-sex marriage. Angela Bolte writes, "Given that marriage is a perpetually evolving notion, same-sex marriages would not necessarily have a 'negative' impact on the institution of marriage."¹²

Although the institution of marriage is dynamic and ever-evolving, there are aspects of marriage found in the Genesis creation poem that are still relevant today and relevant to the idea of same-sex marriage. The idea of a set-apart union of two people to serve each other and become one holds true for marriage regardless of time, culture, or whether it is a union of persons of the same sex or of the opposite sex. Ignoring this basic element is one of the major fallacies in the argument that if same-sex marriage is allowed, it will lead to marriage anarchy, including polygamy and incest, and that the sanctity of marriage will be destroyed.

One area that the idea of polygamous and incestuous marriage relating to same-sex marriage comes from is the false assumption surrounding same-sex marriage that persons who are gay and lesbian want to marry anybody they want, which is not what gays and lesbians are asking for. What they are asking for is the right to marry, not anybody they want, but somebody they love, which is not the same thing.¹³ This is the same right that heterosexual persons have, to choose someone and commit themselves to that person in marriage. Wanting to marry the person you love is a far cry from wanting to be polygamous or incestuous, and trying to connect the two reveals a person's ignorance on the issue, not to mention being highly offensive to the LGBT community.¹⁴

When two persons are denied the right to choose to be in union with each other, there is a loss of love of neighbor and love of God. If part of creation is that persons will give up their individuality in order to become one with another, and if the church and the state deny them that opportunity, or at least do not recognize it, the community suffers because it is not able to experience fully God's plan of creation. In the same way, the way we love God is by loving our neighbors (Matt 22:34–40 cf. Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28), and if persons are denied entering into a union based on the highest love of another on earth, their love of God will suffer. Indeed, the community can be aided by learning from the love and commitment by those in same-sex relationships. Andrew Sullivan writes, "It is also true, however, that homosexual relationships, even in their current, somewhat eclectic form, may contain features that could nourish the broader society as well. Precisely because there is no institutional model, gay relationships are often sustained more powerfully by genuine commitment."¹⁵ By seeing this kind of genuine commitment, persons in heterosexual

¹² Bolte, 28.

¹³ Rauch, 286.

¹⁴ My friend Rev. D'Anna Chance added this last part when she edited this essay. I trust her judgment without reservation.

¹⁵ Andrew Sullivan, "Virtually Normal" in *Same Sex Marriage: The Moral and Legal Debate* (Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum ed.; Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 130.

marriages could possibly learn ways to sustain their own marriages, and as a consequence of that, people in homosexual unions, unintentionally, show love to their heterosexual neighbors.

By not allowing persons of the same sex to be married, numerous negative repercussions occur. Denying same-sex marriage can benefit no one, but it can be harmful to gay and lesbian men and women, their children and families, and all who care about them. Gay youth are sent messages of inferiority and exclusion, and they will grow up knowing that their difference will mean that they will miss out on certain aspects of “normal” life, in this case marriage. In addition to being harmful to gay and lesbian men and women, by placing discriminatory restrictions on marriage, damage is done to the idea of the equality of all people.¹⁶ For the American, the idea of the self-evident truth that all people were created equal is damaged, and for the Judeo-Christian, the belief that all people are equal because they are created in the image of God, is damaged. When the belief in equality is damaged, then it leads to hierarchy, control, greed, jealousy, oppression, and a multitude of other sins that get in the way of love of God and love of neighbor. The ripple effect of the pain and suffering that is caused by this cruelty can again get really big really quickly.

According to the state, the vows of marriage that Kyle and Lee took on a Saturday in 1992 were meaningless. More painful still, the church’s position and teachings are that the vows they took that day were meaningless, if not offensive, in the sight of God. In many ways what the church was saying then, and what it is still saying today, is that love is restricted. There are certain parameters that love must fit into or God does not recognize that love. That is a cruel and hateful teaching coming from the church. When the church continues to teach that God’s gift of love between two consenting persons is not actually love, but rather sin, there is little hope that love of God and love of neighbor can find room to rise above the hate.

Those who call themselves Christians are called to a life of love; love of God and love of neighbor. Christians who live in fear of the unknown or fear of the new are not able to fully participate in love of God and love of neighbor. When Christians are able to let go of their fear and trade in judgment of the other for faith in the God of love, all of God’s gifts are made available so that the goal of love of God and love of neighbor can be met.

Reagan and his wife Ashley live in Denton with their two boys Parker and Jacob. As Reagan works toward ordination as an elder in the United Methodist Church, both he and Ashley continue to support the Church’s moves toward full inclusion of all God’s people into the body of Christ. This essay is dedicated to the late Rev. D’Anna Chance. She was the editor of this essay and someone whom we are proud to have known as a friend.

¹⁶ Evan Wolfson, “Enough Marriage to Share: A Response to Maggie Gallagher,” in *Marriage and Same-Sex Unions: A Debate* (Lynn D. Wardle ed.; Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 27.

Preferential Option for Whom? Latin America, the Postcolonial Debate and the Option for the Poor

By Filipe Maia

*En este mundo tan separado
no hay que ocultar de donde se és,
pero todos somos de todos lados,
hay que entenderlo de una buena vez.*

~Jorge Drexler

On a visit to a hospital, bored with the waiting, I reached for a leaflet with medical explanations about the prevention of hospital contaminations. The appearance of the term “Colonialism” called my attention and I devoted a few minutes to reading the information. The definition that is presented there is interesting: “colonialism is germs present in a body without causing an infection.” That led me to think about colonialism in a different sense. Coloniality, a term coined by the Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano, is still alive in our midst—as can be seen in this apparent harmless medical leaflet. Colonial presence is perceived as harmful only when it creates some diseases. In and of itself, colonialism is simply part of reality, just like germs are part of our bodies.

In Latin America, the “germs” of the colonial administration for the most part have been gone since the nineteenth century, but indeed the “infections” have remained in the life of the sub-continent. In fact, the passage from colony to independence should not be celebrated in Latin American countries as a passage from bondage to freedom, but properly addressed as a change in the “owners” only. The enormous financial crisis that Spain and Portugal experienced in the nineteenth century contributed to the fact that the internal dependency that these old colonial empires developed in relation to the British Empire became the mark of a new form of colonialism in Latin America. Also beginning in the nineteenth century, the arrival of the United States into the world’s imperial elite added a new force of influence in the continent that would be highly intensified during the years of the Cold War.

In this sense, Latin America is certainly part of the world’s colonial history. Yet, it is worth asking ourselves whether it is properly said to be part of the world’s *post*-colonial history. The rise of postcolonial studies, as important as it is, has tended towards an emphasis on the liberation struggles for independence in Africa and Asia in the twentieth century, but the experience of Latin America is often times overlooked. Having this reality in mind, this

essay will explore the critiques that have emerged within Latin American and Latino/a theorists about the postcolonial debate and the particular impact this discussion has in the theological notion of the option for the poor, firstly articulated by Latin American liberation theologians. The essay, therefore, will be comprised by a trifold movement: first, I will be discussing the historical connection the sub-continent has with colonialism both past and present; second, I will present the “de-colonial turn” movement in its debate with postcolonial and subaltern studies, especially in the work of Latino theorist Walter Mignolo; finally, I will end this essay with a theological reflection about the “preferential option for the poor” and the meaning of the “poor” amidst the proliferation of subaltern subjectivities in these post- and de-colonial circles. It is my contention in this final part of the essay that Mignolo’s notion of “border thinking” can help us in further exploring this preferential option for the poor which, ultimately, is an option for the God of the borders – a *b-order* God.

History

Latin America is the result of colonialism, quite literally. Both as “Latin” and as “America,” the sub-continent is named after inventions under specific colonial processes which, of course, not only left their “literal” mark in the name of the region, but also their corporeal marks in the peoples of this region.

As “America,” Latin America is the fruit of the projection of the male colonizer who baptizes the feminized land as the silent woman of the explorer. Amerigo Vespucci (the first to propose the thesis that the “new” world was not the Orient, but indeed a “new” continent so far unknown to Europe) creates America, the fragile side of his conqueror (phallic) ego.¹ America was not discovered, so announced the Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman in the 1950s—it was *invented*. “[I]t was necessary,” he states referring to the scope of his project, “to undertake a critical inquiry aimed at retracing the whole history, not of the “discovery of the America,” but of the *idea that America had been discovered*.”² This thesis brings implications that go beyond a mere challenge to a historiographical paradigm, but it actually points to the formation of a new global design whereby Europe takes the post of the center of the world. The invention of the Americas is precisely the “birth of *modern subjectivity*.”³ Therefore, Enrique Dussel states: when we say “I” in the modern sense of the term (the Cartesian “I think”), we are connected with this colonial subjectivity which is rooted in the denial of the Amerindian otherness.⁴

The world map and the power dynamics in it is completely reorganized after the invention of America: Africa is now seen as the “Black” continent, the place of the semi-human labor force;⁵ the Orient becomes the projection of the Occident, an exotic place of

¹ See: Louise Montrose, “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 180; Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, Translated by Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), 46–47.

² Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the and the Meaning of its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 4.

³ Dussel, *The Invention of the*, 17.

⁴ See: Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key*. (: SCM Press, 2009), chapter 2.

⁵ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (, and : Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 41.

imagination for the European man;⁶ and, of course, Europe is now the center and the top of the world map with the Greenwich tropic in England directing (from the center of power) what is West and what is East. Modern Europe thus is defined after its peripheries⁷ and the peripheries—America, in my case of discussion here—are defined as a second-class mode of the European ego.

Yet, as a part of America develops in accordance to the modern paradigm to become an extension of the European project—that is, the “Anglo” America—a new classification is required to understand this new reality in colonialism. Herein lies the second “literal” colonial inheritance of Latin America. As North America grows in wealth and imperial power, a first “reordering” of the modern/colonial world is required, as Walter Mignolo asserts.⁸ He points out to the formation of an “*imperial difference*” amidst Europe during the eighteenth century according to which the “enlightened” countries of northern Europe start to detach themselves from the “savagery” of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial past:

It was in France, Germany, and England that the distinction between the South and North of Europe was imagined (imperial difference). And it was in Spain and Portugal, first, and in England, France, and Germany, later, that the differences between Europe and the two Americas were defined, described, and implemented (colonial difference).⁹

In other words, sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese colonialism created a colonial difference between Europe and America but eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French, German and British colonialism created an internal colonial distinction in Europe that is reflected in the Americas with the invention of a “Latin” America, which is the American correspondent to the imperial difference within Europe. This division, Mignolo stresses, is not “cultural;” rather, they mask “colonial power differentials” constructed in Europe and imposed in the Americas.¹⁰ Internally, the idea of “Latinidad” is appropriated by the Creole elites in Latin America with enthusiasm; and this same elite would then maintain the continent as in fact a *sub*-continent, still subservient to the old rulers, though the countries themselves were now politically independent.

What is important to remark here is that colonialism functions as a phenomenon of divisions and, as a result, Latin America is the fruit of two great movements of rupture within colonialism—the first, with the invention of America, the break with the ancient world map (and its power dynamics), and the second with a colonial distinction between South and North and the creation of the category of “Latin” America, as opposed to the “Anglo” America. Mignolo even points out to a third rupture in the colonial history, that is, the new identification of the “Latinos/as” in the United States as the country becomes the new world’s super-power: “*for the imperial imaginary*, ‘Latin’ Americans are second-class Europeans while Latinos/as in the US are second-class Americans.”¹¹

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [Copyrights 1978]).

⁷ Dussel, *The Invention of the*, 17.

⁸ Mignolo, *The Idea of*, 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

As “Latin,” Latin America is projected not as a geographical region of the world per se, but as a part of the world that *belongs* to a dominant culture. It is a place that is not defined as a “place,” but by the matrix of power that relates the land with an imperialistic power that controls this region. So, discursively, when we talk about Latin America we talk about this “geo-politics of power” that invented the continent under the categories of the powerful colonizers.

No doubt, this is not only true as a “discursive” matter. Latin America also belongs to the interests of the economic conglomerates of the modern world. Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano has famously defined Latin America as the “region of the open veins.” He argues that in the international division of labor and production of wealth, the sub-continent has been relegated to a position of dependency to the metropolis, a fact that creates the great formative paradox of modern capitalism: “this history of Latin America’s underdevelopment is, as someone has said, an integral part of the history of the world capitalism’s development. *Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others.*”¹² Galeano’s book fills this basic premise with numbers and historical data that attest that the modern production of capital is intrinsically connected with the production of poverty.¹³

Galeano’s work also goes beyond a blind nationalism (that would foster resentment against European peoples) to defend that European population, for the most part, did not benefit from the exploitation of its colonies in Latin America. Galeano shows how the riches of the Americas flowed freely to the hands of a small nobility in the metropolis, namely, to the hands of German, Genoese, Flemish, and Spanish bankers: “The rich empire had a poor metropolis, although the illusion of prosperity blew increasingly large bubbles into the air.”¹⁴ With this dynamic at place, colonialism (in the colonies) helped with forming internal forms of “colonialism” in the metropolis—a fact that US history of racism and segregation evinces. Thus, the creation of bubbles of wealth is a landmark of capitalism since its inception. Addressing the problem of free-market capitalism, Joerg Rieger does so in *No Rising Tide*, showing that capitalism creates illusionary bubbles of wealth that eventually collapse and demand sacrifices from those who did not create these bubbles.¹⁵

In his historical introduction to Post-colonialism, Robert J.C. Young places Latin America in a “special place in the history of anti-colonialism,” perhaps as one of the first regions of the world to become “post”-colonial, even before some European nations became nation-states in the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Young, however, as most Latin American scholars, is not at all excited with this historical “advance” toward the “post”-colonial. Beginning in 1823, he explains, the Monroe Doctrine began a series of imperial interventions of the United States in the region that certainly does not operate under the previous colonial paradigms but still tries to maintain Latin American countries under the

¹² Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, transl. by Cedric Belfrage (New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1973 [Originally published in 1971]).

¹³ Take for example the case of silver and gold: “Between 1503 and 1660, 185,000 kilograms of gold and 16,000,000 kilograms of silver arrived at the Spanish port of Sanlucar de Barrameda. Silver shipped to Spain in little more than a century and a half exceeded three times the total European reserves—and it must be remembered that these official figures are not complete.” *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 193.

surveillance and subservience to an imperialistic US regime.¹⁷ Having affirmed this, Young goes on to explore how Latin American movements and intellectuals were pivotal in the formation of a new revolutionary Marxism, well represented in the thought of the Peruvian sociologist José Carlos Mariátegui and, of course, in the Cuban Revolution of 1959.¹⁸

As an “introduction,” Young’s project obviously is not capable of delving deep in other historical movements of resistance in Latin America and also on the more recent attempts of the world’s imperial power to control Latin American countries with even more subtle but nonetheless deep ways. Nevertheless, written forty years ago, Galeano’s project is already aware of the new dynamics of this imperial intervention in the continent and the numbers that follow from this are striking. “According to the International Banking Survey, there were 78 branches of U.S. banks south of the Rio Grande in 1964. By 1967 there were 133... In 1968 and 1969 the foreign bankers’ advance picked up speed—they had \$810 million in deposits in 1964 and \$1.27 Million in 1967.”¹⁹ This invasion of the banks was obviously greatly facilitated by the dictatorial regimes established in Latin American countries during the Cold War. The love affair between neoliberalism and the dictatorial regimes in Latin America should always be a reminder when talk about freedom and democracy showing up in neoliberal circles; in the history of Latin America, at least, the combination of these terms is an oxymoron.

“Neoliberalism,” broadly speaking, refers to the economic doctrine of the free market which arose after the capitalist crisis in the late 1960s, stressing the decrease of the role of the state in the economy and the subsequent increase of the private sector’s role in the flow of money. Particularly in Latin America, neoliberalism functioned to integrate the sub-continent into a global free market economy with the promise of great development—in Brazil, the military regime talked about an “economic miracle” in the 1970s (the gods of the market sent the bill of the “miracle” in the 1990s!). In practice, however, at the turn of the twentieth century, what Latin American countries began to experience was the total collapse of this system, with the case of Argentina being perhaps the clearest example.

William I. Robinson, a scholar devoted to “critical globalization studies,”²⁰ has recently compiled the numbers of this new reality in Latin America showing that in the span of ten years (from 1995 to 2005) the percentage of exportation in the production of Latin American countries has increased exponentially, primarily due to the formation of “export processing zones” (the “maquiladoras”), the landmark of the new international division of labor. In Mexico alone, for example, there were 2,810 maquiladora plants in 2004,²¹ compared to 65 in 1965;²² in Guatemala, in 1987, a semi-skilled worker earned an average of \$0.88 per hour of work in a maquiladora.²³ It is estimated that by the end of the 1990s, there

¹⁷ Ibid., 194.

¹⁸ Ibid., 197-200; 204–208.

¹⁹ Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 244.

²⁰ William I. Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism: a Critical Globalization Perspective* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), xii.

²¹ This figure was even higher in 1998 when there were 3,051 maquiladoras in Mexico. The reason for the decrease in this number is the opening of 600 new plants in China (a country where the workforce is considerably cheaper), a fact that left 250,000 Mexicans without jobs.

²² Ibid., 103–108.

²³ Ibid., 112.

were 80,000 people working on these plants.²⁴

As these numbers show, Latin America's veins are still open—and the responses from empire to this situation have not changed so much. Doing the research for this essay, I was confronted with a somewhat amusing book title: *Preferential Option: A Christian and Neoliberal Strategy for Latin America's Poor*.²⁵ The title itself calls for a question: how are we to have a “preferential option for the poor” within a financial system that finds ways to maintain workers under salaries like \$0.88 per hour? This option could not lead to a more different conclusion about the role of Christians in this free market economy. According to the author, Christians ought to “protect the poor from [democratic capitalism’s] negative effects, and they can also help to ensure that the final product is a political economy that facilitates “holistic” development.”²⁶ Hence, Christianity is passive (should we say subordinated?) in relation to the market: its function is simply to protect the poor from the “bad” part of neoliberalism in such a way that, of course, the market itself is never questioned, but accepted in faith. Another recent study about the financial system in Mexico ends with the conclusion that for the development of the country’s economy, what is needed is *patience*. Though the author promptly states that this answer is “insufficient” given the fact that wages are still low in Mexico, the faith in the market is truly high: “The banks are stronger, well capitalized, and profitable.”²⁷ What this means for those still under the low wages is quite clearly to wait until the banks become even stronger; the faith here is that this growth of power of the banks will be transferred to the poor. What these two authors propose is rightly defined by Frantz Hinkelammert as the “greatest virtue” of neoliberalism, that is, the virtue of “humility”—understood as the passive acceptance of the supernatural powers of the market and its economic miracles.²⁸ Those who question the logic of the capital are filled with “pride,” the original sin of the free market gods. The answers of empires to the open veins of Latin America have not varied so much in the past five centuries; in Brazil, the popular saying goes: “we are the country of the future – and should always be.” “Wait and see,” says the empire to the other side of the Americas.

In concluding this section, it is worthwhile to mention that while some still believe in the healing powers of the market, Latin American peoples and countries have been experiencing some alternatives to this logic. On the political level, in the last decade, South America saw the rise of what some call the “new” left that occupy the majority of the countries’ governments in the region. In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez has been conducting the “Bolivarian revolution” with successive victories in elections since 1998; in Brazil, a survivor of the hunger epidemic in the Northeast became president; Argentineans under Nestor Kirchner have strongly accused the IMF monetary policies in the country. Consider also that a socialist Aymaran leads Bolivia; a liberationist Bishop governs Paraguay; a former member

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁵ Amy L. Sherman, *Preferential Option: A Christian and Neoliberal Strategy for Latin America's Poor* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷ Barbara Stallings, *Finance for Development: Latin America in Comparative Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 220.

²⁸ Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Crítica de la Razón Utópica*, edición ampliada y revisada (Bilbao: Editorial Desclée de Brouwer, 2002), 162 (my translation).

of the revolutionary guerrilla is the chief of Uruguay and Rafael Correa in Ecuador has denounced Colombian government's subservience to the US policies for controlling the region. The numbers coming from these countries reveal that this political rise has a strong impact in the lives of the Latin American poor. In Venezuela, for example, during Chavez's administration, poverty in the country has dropped from 50.5% of the population in 1999 to 31.5% in 2007;²⁹ in Brazil, famous for being one of the most economically unequal countries in the world, recent numbers show that the income of the poorest has grown more than 52%. It also shows that the income of the wealthiest is at 12%, thereby leaving some 23 million people in the condition of abject poverty.³⁰

Post?

Despite progress in some areas, the talk of a *post*-colonial era in regards to Latin America is received with suspicion by many. According to several scholars and analysts, the dynamics of power inaugurated by the conquistadores in the late fifteenth century have maintained their footprints across the history of the sub-continent. The prominent voice representing this critical approach in the context of the United States is certainly that of the Latino theorist, Walter Dignolo, whose work I will be addressing with particular interest in this essay. This section will therefore address the "decolonial turn" in postcolonial studies headed by these authors and it will explore some of the issues raised by the group.

The introduction of Latin America into the scholarly debate in postcolonial studies is dated from the early 1990's, particularly in an article published by Patricia Seed in 1991, "*Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse*."³¹ In responding to this article, Walter Dignolo articulated a pivotal notion to an insurgent response from Latin American scholars to postcolonial studies: "the Third World is not only an area to be studied but a place (or places) from which to speak."³² For this reason, Dignolo stresses the need to identify the scholar's locus of enunciation and to "decenter" the centrality of the imperial powers as an action that "provides new perspectives on colonial and postcolonial discourses."³³ From the beginning, therefore, the reception of postcolonial studies by Latin American scholars (especially those working in the United States) is, to say the least, ambivalent.

The editors of the recent volume *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* argue that the unrestricted adoption of the prefix "post" as that which has been "culturally erased and/or transcended" most likely is the fruit of a "depoliticized evaluation of contemporary history."³⁴ The option taken by these authors is that of a reference to a "*critique of colonialism and coloniality*" as opposed to postcolonial theories.³⁵ This move,

²⁹ <http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Mundo/0,,MUL980475-5602,00-EM+DECADA+DE+CHAVEZ+POBREZA+CAIU+NA+VENEZUELA.html>.

³⁰ <http://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2011/05/taxa-de-desigualdade-no-brasil-atinge-minima-historica-diz-fgv.html>

³¹ Cf. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, "Colonialism and its Replicants," in: Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

³² Walter D. Mignolo, "Colonial and postcolonial discourse," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 3 (July 1993), p. 123.

³³ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁴ Moraña, Dussel, Jáuregui, "Colonialism and its Replicants," 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

based on the historical experience of Latin America, is not articulated on the basis of an “exceptionalism” of the Latin American case, but rather on the emphasis on what Mignolo names the “colonial difference,”—that is, a different “time-space where a particular region becomes connected to a world-system of colonial domination.”³⁶ Globalization and neoliberalism are demonstrations of a consolidation of a New World order where “national and international relations” maintain a “structuring principle” which is proper to colonialism making it impossible to believe that a post—in the historical sense of something “after”—can be used in reference to the colonial powers.³⁷ It is important to remember, despite this relevant point, that for many scholars interested in postcolonial theory, normally “post” is not only a historical reference but “an ethical intention and direction” to go “beyond” colonialism.³⁸

As it could be evident by now, Walter Mignolo is the major voice in this discussion. In *The Idea of Latin America*, he criticizes Edward Said’s classical *Orientalism*—one of the foundations of postcolonialism as a discipline—by pointing out Said’s failure in perceiving that “Orientalism” could only be projected after an established idea of “Occidentalism” was already at place. The invention of this Occident must be traced not to the Enlightenment but to the “discovery” and invention of the Americas which properly placed Europe as the new center of the world-system.³⁹ Mignolo posits that Edmundo O’Gorman’s *La Invención de America*, published in 1958, already posed this thesis and was, therefore, close to the project Said would conduct two decades later.⁴⁰

Yet, the major critique Mignolo addresses to postcolonial theorists is the lack of an attack to “epistemic” forms of colonialism. In *Local Histories/Global Designs* he asserts that modern epistemology operates a (colonial) distinction between “epistemology and hermeneutics and, by doing so, has subalternized other kinds of knowledge...”⁴¹ Mignolo frames his overall project in these terms:

To describe “in reality” both sides of the border is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority (in the Levinas’s sense). The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between a “hybrid” object (the borderland as the known) and a “pure” disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontained by the border matters that he or she describes.⁴²

The basic claim being made here, precisely, is that colonialism consists of a mode of knowing that takes place through a central distinction between the subject that knows and the object that informs knowledge—a distinction, Mignolo implies, that is tantamount to the division between colonizers and colonized. Postcolonialism, insofar as it operates under these

³⁶ Ibid., 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 12.

³⁸ Cf.: Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, “Introduction: Alien/Nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground,” in: Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 6.

³⁹ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 35-37. See also: Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 57.

⁴⁰ Mignolo, “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse,” 123.

⁴¹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 13.

⁴² Ibid., 18.

same categories, fails to tackle this epistemic coloniality. “If postcoloniality is not able to break away from modern epistemology,” Mignolo concludes, “it would become just another version of it with a different subject matter. It would be, in other words, a theory *about* a new subject matter but not the constitution of a new epistemological subject that thinks *from and about* the borders.”⁴³ While postcolonial theory calls for a “thinking at the limits,” as Stuart Hall has suggested, “the study of *coloniality* implies, in turn, the challenge of thinking *across* (frontiers, disciplines, territories, classes, ethnicities, epistemes, temporalities).”⁴⁴

The moment of “rupture” between postcolonial studies and the Latin American critique to postcoloniality took place in 1998 in the encounter between the South Asian and the Latin American Subaltern Study Groups at Duke University. Philosopher Ramon Grosfoguel, present at the encounter, explains that the basic reason for the rupture related to the fact that most Latinamericanist scholars still operated under this colonial paradigm of the North as the knower and the South as the place to be known. “They produced studies *about* the subaltern rather than studies *with* and *from* a subaltern perspective.”⁴⁵ “These debates,” he concludes, “made clear to us the need to decolonize not only Subaltern Studies but also Postcolonial Studies.”⁴⁶

B-orderly thinking and b-order God

The proliferation of new “areas” of studies is followed by the creation of a number of subjectivities present in the area preferred in a particular area of study. The names abound in the literature: the wretched,⁴⁷ the other,⁴⁸ the subaltern,⁴⁹ the Oriental,⁵⁰ the oppressed,⁵¹ the marginalized,⁵² the multitude,⁵³ the queer,⁵⁴ and the disabled.⁵⁵ The multiplicity of this list, more than anything, attests to the fact that empire has multiple ways to invade people’s subjectivity and create multi-layered and multi-focal forms of oppression. Nevertheless, should we ask whether this variety of subjects is related to the simple multiplication of area studies with “new” subjects being identified to be spoken about when new “areas” of study are created? When multiplying the subjects of our studies, are we not still talking *about* the subalterns, rather than speaking from a position of subalternity?

Latin American theology’s notion of preferential option for the poor is in the turmoil of

⁴³ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁴ Moraña, Dussel, Jáuregui, “Colonialism and its Replicants,” 17.

⁴⁵ Ramón Grosfoguel. “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2/3 (March 2007): 211.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, transl. by Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

⁵⁰ Said, *Orientalism*.

⁵¹ For example in: Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: history, politics and salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973).

⁵² Anibal Quijano, *Imperialismo y “Marginalidad” en America Latina* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1977).

⁵³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000), chapter 2.2.

⁵⁴ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: theological perversions in sex, gender and politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁵⁵ Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

this debate and many have critiqued it for falling trap to this colonial mentality of speaking *about* the poor. In this final section I want to address this issue by naming two critical projects that internally question liberation theology's developments in the past decades and therefore call for a revitalization of the notion of the "poor" and the preferential option for them. Have the poor of liberation theologians become just one more name in this list of subaltern voices? In order to tackle this question, I will come back to Mignolo's work now to explore his notion of border thinking in the intention of articulating a notion of thinking "b-orderly" which, theologically, equals to thinking [of] God on the margins or, more accurately, a b-order God.

Speaking strictly about Latin American liberation theology, Marcella Althaus-Reid is one who thinks that the preferential option for the poor has granted liberation theology with a new market value that eventually commoditized this theology into global capitalism, especially when it comes to the matter of "selling books."⁵⁶ She seems to agree with what some conservative colleagues of mine in seminary would cynically say, "since I opted for the poor, I have become rich." Althaus-Reid's prescriptions to avoid this is to remain connected with "people's praxis without the expectation of the theological market"⁵⁷ and suggests that postcolonial theologies have surpassed liberation theology as they are better equipped to address the problems of Latin America's poor⁵⁸ (even though many theologians would not place a clear distinction between postcolonial theologies and liberation theology—in fact, for some, postcolonial theologies *are* liberation theologies).⁵⁹ Although I believe Althaus-Reid misses the point when she relates the "selling of books" with liberation theology's assimilation to global market (after all, if the selling of books is the sign that liberation theology has become co-opted by capitalism, why write yet another book to claim this?), I do believe that she presents an important issue to be explored by liberation theologians.

Ivan Petrella is another name that stands out as one of the new articulators of a self-critical approach to liberation theologies. In his book *Beyond Liberation Theology: a Polemic*, he defends that liberation theologies, in its diversified forms, fall prey to four basic mistakes that he identifies as monochromatic (in the case of the black theology of liberation), amnesia (in the case of *Mujerista* theology), gigantism (with Gutierrez in Latin America), and naiveté (expressed in the romanticizing the problem of poverty and its overcoming).⁶⁰ Petrella critically identifies the path of liberation theology in the past decades as the passage from the "siren-filled nights and submachine guns to tenure and academic respectability."⁶¹ He says that liberation theology needs a new rebellion—this time against liberation theology itself. "Moving beyond liberation theology as it stands today" is a call to a refusal to becoming "a theology for the middle class."⁶² Pivotal to Petrella's argument is the idea that

⁵⁶ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 112, 129, 140.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 128, 140.

⁵⁹ Keller, Nausner, and Rivera, "Introduction: Alien/Nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground," in: *Postcolonial Theologies*, 5.

⁶⁰ Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: a Polemic* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 84–110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 122.

liberationist scholars have to give special attention to the particular contexts in which they are immersed but without forgetting that there is a common context that unifies all these contexts under a common umbrella.⁶³ Joerg Rieger has rightly addressed this overarching context to which liberation theologies respond, not as a context in general, but as the context *that hurts*.⁶⁴ Petrella uses an expression from Brazilian anthropologist João Biehl to refer to this context: *Vita*—the place “where those who have no one and nothing wait for death.”⁶⁵ Petrella’s insight thus contributes to a rearticulating of the option of the poor as a rearticulating of one’s location, from the center of comfort (power) to the margins of imperial power.

The theorization of the margins and the borders is a major contribution that Mignolo confers to this debate. He argues that the movement to the margins entails a dis-location of power in the form of a dis-placement of the center. According to him, the dichotomy of the colonial differentiation between Western and non-Western worlds—Europe versus Americas, for example—is questioned when one changes the place of enunciation to the borders, where the colonial “*ordering the world in dichotomies*” is transgressed by the appearance of “*dichotomous concepts*.”⁶⁶ This is the core of what he terms *border thinking*. Colonial thinking, Mignolo would argue, creates concepts on the basis of “global designs” which are always controlled and projected by “*certain* kinds of local histories.”⁶⁷ Border thinking, on the other hand, emerges from local histories where imperial conflicts are presented creating a type of “other thinking.”⁶⁸

Thinking b-orderly—if that could be invented as a concept which, by the way, would interestingly subvert the “orderly” thinking of modern science—is, in my view, another way to understand the move to the margins that liberation theologians stress. Thinking b-orderly puts the order of the global designs in brackets and adds a surplus from the margins of the local histories—a “b” that precedes and thus messes with the “orderly.” The move to the margins (to the local histories) allows one to perceive that behind the discourse of the center of power (the imperial global designs) lies local histories that can and should be addressed as such—that is, as *local*. While Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri might be right when they affirm that Empire is a de-territorial category,⁶⁹ this should not mean, I believe, that there is not a *source* of oppressive power that can and should be located, a task that can be accomplished with the vision that the b-orders give of the coloniality of power.

Theologically speaking, the movement to the borders and within the borders adds a surplus of value to the faith in God—the prevenient “b” of the b-order is a theological difference that emerges from the margins that the ordered centers cannot contain. Homi Bhabha properly addresses this as the “ambivalence” of the postcolonial reality which sees the rupture of a novelty in the midst of the colonized peoples.⁷⁰ A b-order God is the God

⁶³ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁴ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: from Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 7.

⁶⁵ Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, 9.

⁶⁶ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid., 67.

⁶⁹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, see the Preface for the authors’s definition of Empire as a non-territorial category.

⁷⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010 [Copyright 1994]), 152–160.

that becomes *necessary* in the movements from the territory of death to the land of life—like Hagar’s cry from the wilderness showing the presence of God in these places where the excluded cry for help (Gen 16:15–20). The borders, as places of circulation and tensions, are locations where prayer is not the exceptional word but the ordinary word that cannot *not* be said: “Do not let me look on the death of the child,” is Hagar’s prayer (v. 16). This is the place where God is in transgression: crossing boundaries, challenging propriety lands, displacing the center.

For this reason, the preferential option for the poor should not be thought of as an option for talking *about* the poor as we could see with the case of the title *Preferential Option: A Christian and Neoliberal Strategy for Latin America’s Poor*. It is also not the talking *for* the poor nor exclusively *with* the poor. In the first case, it is assumed that the poor do not speak and on the latter, it is neglectful that there are still differences between the poor and the non-poor that cannot be overcome through conversation alone. The call of the preferential option for the poor is indeed more radical. It is the calling to talk from the perspective of the poor and among the poor—from their histories and among their struggles. As Mignolo stresses—the poor produce different forms of knowledge and, more to the point, different *theologies*. The theology that begins with listening to this difference is a theology with a preference for the poor.

The theological surplus of thinking b-orderly is that a different God emerges when the orderly thinking is transgressed by the borders of the marginality of power. The option for the subaltern places of empire is an option for God, an option that seconds God’s own preferential option for the margins. The theology of the subaltern voices is not the theology of a specific subjectivity that can be multiplied as new areas are “discovered.” This theology is one that appears, from the b-orders, as the voice that cannot go silent and in response to the presence of the b-order God walking along the dusty roads of the margins. Whom shall we prefer in our theologies—should it be the poor, the wretched, the queer, the disabled? The answer is, I believe, all of the above insofar as these are subjectivities that meet and circulate on the margins of the order of things, the home of the b-order God.

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Cross-Shaped Creation

By Yvette R. Blair-Lavallais

At first glance, this little damselfly might look like a regular little insect. The fact that she is drawn to water and is constantly renewed there, says something about how all of God's creation is spiritually rejuvenated. On an even closer look, when the damselfly is perched atop an object, ready to take flight, she takes on the shape of a cross, as if she is praying before her journey. When she is in flight, she glides easily as if she is praising God. It is an example of our connection with earth and nature and how all of creation responds to God. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

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