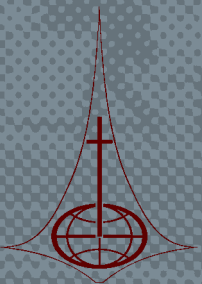


THEOLOGY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH Vol. 1

**Being the Church in
the Midst of Empire**
Trinitarian Reflections



The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches

Being the Church in the Midst of Empire

Trinitarian Reflections

edited by Karen L. Bloomquist

On behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation

Lutheran University Press
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Being the Church in the Midst of Empire

Trinitarian Reflections

Editorial assistance and layout: LWF-DTS

Design: LWF-OCS

Artwork on cover: LWF-OCS. Photo © Corinna Ascher

Copyright 2007 Lutheran University Press and the Lutheran World Federation

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in articles or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior permission.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Lutheran World Federation

Published by Lutheran University Press under the auspices of:

The Lutheran World Federation
150, rte de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

This book is also available in Europe using ISBN 978-3-905676-57-0.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Faith and human rights : voices from the Lutheran Communion / edited by Peter Prove.

p. cm. -- (Documentation series; no. 51)

ISBN-13: 978-1-932688-20-7 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-932688-20-X (alk. paper)

1. Human rights--Religious aspects--Lutheran Church. 2. Lutheran Church--Doctrines. I. Prove, Peter N.

BX8074.H87F35 2007

261.7088'2841--dc22

2006102424

Lutheran University Press, PO Box 390759, Minneapolis, MN 55439
Manufactured in the United States of America

Contents

7 **Foreword**

9 **Preface: “Theology in the Life of the Church”**

Karen L. Bloomquist

13 **Introduction: Being the Church in the Midst of Empire**

Karen L. Bloomquist

Empire as Entwined in our History and Faith

25 **Empire and Its Religious Legitimation: Betrayed by a Companion**

Charles Amjad-Ali

43 **Faith and Empire: Some Biblical Perspective**

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer

55 **The Knot: Autobiographical Reflections on Citizenship
and Faith within Empire**

William R. Strehlow

What or Where is the Church

71 **The Church as Confessing Koinonia of the Spirit**

Cheryl M. Peterson

91 **The Space in Between Spaces:
The Church as Prophetic Pest/Parasite**

Mary Philip

Criteria and Power for Confessing Today

109 **Confession and Empire: How the Gospel is at Stake**

Michael Hoy

125 **The Holy Spirit: Power for Confessing Faith in the Midst of Empire**

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

Trinitarian Resistance to Empire

149 Desire in Consumer Culture: Trinitarian Transformations

John F. Hoffmeyer

**163 Mutuality, Kenosis and Spirited Hope
in the Face of Empire**

Allen G. Jorgenson

Theology of the Cross Instead of Prosperity Theology

181 Empire's Export of Prosperity Theology: Its Impact on Africa

Faith K. Lugazia

193 The Cross, Friendship and Empire

Deanna A. Thompson

The Public Vocation of the Church amid Empire

209 An Ecclesiology of Belonging Through Otherness

Johannes Gerhardus Jacobus Swart

223 Ecclesial Communion, God's Publicity and Global Citizenship

Gary M. Simpson

Fundamentalism, Democracy and Empire

241 Some Fundamental Lutheran Problems with Fundamentalism

Wanda Deifelt

**257 Tolerance and Democracy Instead of Fundamentalism
and Empire**

Guillermo Hansen

283 Contributors

Foreword

Through the centuries, Lutherans have emphasized how important theology is for the life of the churches and the challenges they face in society. This is reflected in the extensive theological work that has long been associated with Lutheran churches, the importance placed on theological education, how “good theology” continues to be associated as a distinguishing mark of Lutheranism and in how Lutherans have led many ecumenical and interfaith developments. This is still largely the case, or at least the stated assumption.

Nonetheless, there are also indications that theology is at risk of losing its central role in the life of the churches and for critiquing what churches teach and practice when this compromises what is central to the church’s identity, confession and witness in society. This is why I welcome the “Theology in the Life of the Church” initiative that the LWF Department for Theology and Studies has undertaken.

The background for this first book in the Theology in the Life of the Church series is the overarching reality of empire. Many of us have lived under various kinds of political and economic empires, and directly experienced some of the positive but also the oppressive effects these can have. Empire can be so much a part of who we are and how we think that we do not even realize how much it shapes and influences us. The new forms and expressions of empire today, which this book addresses, are increasingly giving rise to concern.

How religion supports the ways of empire—or critiques and counters it—is highlighted throughout the articles here. Theologians, mostly from or currently living in the USA, were asked to draw upon theological insights that can counter the logic and realities of empire today—as a witness to the wider ecumenical family. What can we learn from what they write here? How can this provoke us to do similar theological work in relation to the related critical challenges we need to face in our respective contexts?

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

Preface: “Theology in the Life of the Church”

Karen L. Bloomquist

The overall program

In 2004, an overall LWF study program was begun in the Department for Theology and Studies under the title, “Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches: Revisiting Its Critical Role.” One of its central objectives is to deepen and expand how theology is understood and pursued in relation to the actual challenges or realities that Lutheran churches—along with others—are facing in today’s world. This entails not just talking about but actually carrying out theological work that has rigor and integrity with regard to the tradition and current contexts, so as to be able to meet emerging ecumenical, interfaith and ethical challenges.

As Christians we live out our faith according to a grammar that is grounded in God’s promises. This calls for imaginative and critical theological reflection within and across contexts, such as when

- We face systemic death and injustice that sap our energy and overwhelm us (track 1).
- We are overwhelmed with the presence, influence and challenges of multifaith realities (track 2).
- We are caught off guard by the popularity of charismatic movements and Pentecostal churches (track 3).
- Moral differences overwhelm what we thought was the faith that unites us (track 4).

Many have responded with an immediate sense of the contextual relevance that one or several of these tracks have for them and their church. It seems far more difficult, however, to draw upon Christian theology (not to mention Lutheran emphases) in order to deepen or elaborate theological

responses to these challenges. Actually to confess and live out faith in the Triune God in the midst of massive death and injustice in our world today, the influence of other faiths, competing spiritualities and differences that threaten quests for church unity—this explicitly theological move is a formidable challenge. Yet, it is happening in preaching and other ongoing practices to make the faith meaningful and persuasive in local settings. Some of the early responses to this appeal were posted on a special Web site, (www.luthersem.org/lwfdiscuss), but it soon became apparent that face-to-face seminars would become important venues for pursuing the purpose of this program.

The seminars at Arusha, Breklum and Höör

The first seminar in the Theology in the Life of the Church series was held in September 2006, in Arusha, Tanzania, as an extension of a larger LWF consultation on poverty and the mission of the church in Africa.¹ In this context, participants in the seminar were well aware of the many signs of injustice and death and of the need for theology to connect with and transform these experiences. A lay participant, not formally trained in theology, nudged the formally educated theologians to deal with the real questions confronting people in that context. Rather than focusing on theoretical theological discussions, attention focused instead on practices that connect with what people are experiencing, such as lament, which itself can become transformative. Worship is where the church's theology is focused and can become real (instead of irrelevant) for people, if attention is given to what is being communicated. Alternatives to prosperity theology need to be effectively communicated, practices need to transform ethnic boundaries and churches need to engage with civil society. Although empire *per se* was not discussed, the endless quests for Africa's land, minerals and other resources, at the cost of the continuing impoverishment of the African people, is an expression of such.

In December 2006, a predominantly European group along with representatives from Africa, Asia and the Americas gathered at Breklum,

¹ A joint publication documents presentations and discussions from both events. See Karen L. Bloomquist and Musa Pantu Filibus (eds), *So the Poor have Hope, and Injustice Shuts its Mouth: Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa. LWF Studies 01/2007* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2007).

Germany, for a seminar related to the second, interfaith track of the program. The purpose was to assess and respond theologically to the new challenges evoked for churches (especially in Europe) by the more visible presence of Muslims in their midst. After presentations and discussions, a statement was developed.² As a follow through to this seminar, further constructive theological work has been done by authors from around the world. Their findings will be published as the second book in this series under the title, *Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relation to Neighbors of Other Faiths*.

Various kinds of fundamentalism, in Christian, other faith and secular versions (or ideologies) permeate or cut across the multifaceted challenges the churches face. Religious fundamentalisms become evident especially around biblical interpretation and moral issues, particularly those related to gender, sexuality and moral issues, which at times seem to threaten church unity. Thus, to address this cross-cutting challenge, a third seminar, on "Fundamentals for a Lutheran Communion in the Face of Fundamentalisms" was held in March 2007, at Höör, Sweden, to which especially LWF church leaders from around the world were invited. The message from this seminar is posted at www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DTS/DTS-Current_Focus.html. One of the presentations there, by Wanda Deifelt, has been adapted for inclusion here, because of how instrumental fundamentalism is in legitimizing empire today.

In 2008, the Theology in the Life of the Church program will include two seminars especially for global South theologians and, in 2009, a large concluding global seminar. Further books in this series will include the theological work being done in relation to these seminars.

² See "Beyond Toleration: Assessing and Responding Theologically to New Challenges for Christian-Muslim Relations," at www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DTS/DTS-Current_Focus.html.

Introduction: Being the Church in the Midst of Empire

Karen L. Bloomquist

This first book in the “Theology in the Life of the Church” series is in relation to the overall global reality of what today, in shorthand, is considered “empire.” Empire does not primarily refer to a specific country but to an overall systemic reality. The logic, policies and practices associated with it contribute toward increasing injustices and lead to death for so many throughout the world. Naming and speaking out against specific injustices is crucial but not sufficient; the overall worldview or logic needs to be countered theologically. Many others have already addressed this ecumenically and in civil society, but what is distinctive in this book is that some recognizably Lutheran accents are brought together and developed in relation to these other discussions.

In his book, *Christ and Empire*, Joerg Rieger designates empire as

massive concentrations of power which permeate all aspects of life and which cannot be controlled by any one actor alone... . Empire seeks to extend control as far as possible; not only geographically, politically, and economically ... but also intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and religiously... . The problem with empire has to do with forms of top-down control that are established on the back of the empire’s subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes... . Empire displays strong tendencies to domesticate Christ and anything else that poses a challenge to its powers.¹

Here, as Mary Philip observes, empire is unquestioned power and hegemony that dominate not only by oppressive means but, slyly as a fox, without necessarily overtly using power. Allen Jorgenson refers to the

¹ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 2–3.

Babel-like propensity among humans to flatten difference and usurp freedom; empires are by definition totalizing and rationalizing.

In sum, empire refers to various interrelated processes of domination and their effects. These are in tension with biblical visions for life in community, which some of the writers here spell out in some detail. Countless effects and crucial ethical issues are raised by empire, especially in economic and political terms. But it also poses deeply theological challenges because of how all-encompassing empire becomes, permeating how we think about ourselves and others, our world, our hopes and our desires. This is what the different authors address.

This book does not seek to engage in a sustained description of or debate about empire but, against the backdrop of a general sense of what empire entails, to engage in some constructive theological reflection. Sharpening these theological perspectives, of course, needs to be done in collaboration with other disciplines, religions and worldviews.

Rather than looking only for short-term solutions, the emphasis here is on the long-term challenge of forming and shaping people differently. How might they live out their faith in contrast to the ways of empire?

The St Paul seminar

Today, throughout the world, people tend to associate empire with the policies and practices of the USA. This is why, by intention and design, this event was held in the US and gathered especially theologians who are teaching or studying there. The charge put to them, and which they forthrightly take up in their articles, was to develop theological responses that have the potential to counter, transform and nurture long-term resistance to empire, especially in and through communities of faith. In doing so, they were cognizant of doing that in relationship with those from other parts of the world, hearing their perspectives and drawing on their experiences. Writings by authors from other countries are also included in this book.

Why give attention to these matters through the LWF? Because of our growing awareness of the implications of being a communion of churches, united through Word and Sacrament and, as Luther put it, transformed into one another through the Eucharist. This profoundly affects what we see (notice), how we see (our perspectives), how we

are formed differently in relation to one another around the world and what we do in light of that.²

Over twenty theologians³ gathered 27–30 June 2007, in St Paul, Minnesota, USA, at Luther Seminary, who graciously hosted and cosponsored this seminar. Included were theologians who teach in church-related seminaries, liberal arts colleges and congregationally-based settings, theological doctoral students, those who are or have been parish pastors, activists involved in trying to counter the policies of empire in civil society and electoral politics and all for whom the practices of the faith and the life and witness of the church in God's world are crucial. Although half were citizens of the US, others were from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Kenya, India, Tanzania and South Africa.

Participants were well aware that empire is global in its interlocking scope and influence. How it is perceived, experienced and resisted is different, depending on where each one of us stands. These important differences made us cautious of generalizing for others. Yet, it is hoped that readers globally will find that the critiques and insights here can also be applied or adapted to their own situations.

Lutheran theology has not been the predominant religious influence shaping the American ethos and its propensities toward empire, even though Lutherans have admittedly been complicit with it. Even today, Lutherans represent less than five percent of the US population. Perhaps because of their immigrant roots, or a hesitance to participate more forthrightly in public life, Lutheran churches in the US have been less visibly identified as either legitimators of or critical resisters to empire. Those from Reformed, Anglican, Anabaptist or even Roman Catholic traditions have been more prominent.

A recognizably Lutheran grammar permeates the discussions. Some of the writers have been formed by this theological tradition since their baptism, others have discovered it later, including in the settings in which they pursue theological work. Some characteristically Lutheran themes and emphases are probably what is most distinctive about this book. These may be especially needed in our day to nurture resistance

² This theological-ethical framework was further developed in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization. LWF Documentation 50/2004* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

³ In addition to the authors in the book, participants included: Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar, Sekenawa Moses Briska, Hans-Peter Grosshans, Peter Lodberg, Deenabandhu Manchala, Elieshi Mungure, Margaret Obaga and Debra Wells.

to the dynamics and practices of empire over the long haul, as part of what is necessarily an ecumenical and interfaith effort, in collaboration with others in civil society.

Confessing and living out faith in the Triune God in the midst of empire

The book presupposes that the publicly embodied identity (or being) of the church in the midst of empire is fundamentally rooted in the life of the Triune God. “Confessing faith in the Triune God” is distinctively at the heart of the Christian faith. But how can confessing and living out of a Trinitarian sense of who God actually is transform us and the challenges we face today? How is this related to other key emphases in Lutheran theology that could be drawn on more creatively?

A question posed beforehand to the seminar participants was, Why does it often seem so difficult to confess and live out faith in the Triune God in the face of massive injustice and death? Have these realities, especially as they have been manifested through the global policies and practices of empire, enveloped us and destroyed hope that justice and life are possible? Is lamenting all that is possible? In the face of this, what do we say about God? How do we live out the faith we confess?

Much of the Bible was written in contrast to, if not in protest of, the ways of empire. Yet, the church has too often remained complicit in these assumptions and practices, rather than countering them out of a stance of being faithful to a much different divine reality. In its preaching, teaching, evangelism, mission, stewardship, oversight and governance, the church has too frequently been and continues to be tied to imperial assumptions. In its compliant support of overtly imperial practices, it is viewed suspiciously by those of other faiths (e.g., by many Muslims today). In contrast, the historic marks of the church (unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity) are declarations of hope that can become the basis for acting against empire. The “powers that be” must be critically engaged. To go along with or passively accept these realities is to succumb to the bondage of sin. When life seems to freeze over, the way things are feels inevitable, such that we lose hope and can see no alternatives.

How can we encourage one another when we are tempted to succumb to such cynicism and hopelessness? This does not occur by turning to a superficial optimism that “things will get better,” but by entering dark-

ness and despair, there discovering God's abiding commitment to life, through the cross. Here God is revealed as the opposite of what human beings tend to associate with imperial power.

In confessing, we are insisting that our allegiance is not to the reigning "powers and principalities" in society and the way in which they keep people captive, dependent, passive and thus entrenched in poverty—be they overtly colonial powers or, more recently, mandates of neoliberal economic globalization and neoconservative empire. These powers are not only external but also internal, in the form of power grabbing, often corrupt leaders and their policies, as well as how certain aspects of culture can be used to hold women, immigrants and others captive.

To begin naming what we are up against signals that confessing faith in this kind of God can be a dangerous act. The words have an effect; they provoke reactions. This is one reason why it is easier for people to do so when they are away from their home context than when they are speaking to their own people. It is all too evident that confessing in the midst of empire can be risky and lead to death, not only for Jesus in the first century but for those who follow him in our day, along with those who are not necessarily Christians. In the Philippines hundreds of church members as well as Muslims have been killed in recent years by suspected paramilitary forces because of their human rights activism. The resistance of Buddhist monks to totalitarianism in Myanmar is another case in point. To confess and live out our faith in the midst of the all-pervasive power of empire can be risky, especially when government is captive to economic and geopolitical interests, and strikes out at those who threaten these interests.

Communities living in the power of the cross, resurrection and hope

How then is the Triune God active in relation to oppressive systemic realities such as those in our world today? The power of God, as revealed through the cross, resurrection and eschatological hope, breaks into and transforms the human drama.

We confess our faith in a God of life who wills that all might live under secure, peaceful and dignified conditions, and who acts redemptively, thereby taking away our need to save ourselves or the world. The God who in Jesus Christ lived, suffered and died at the hands of the dominating

rule of his day, and was raised to new life, is a foretaste of the promised fulfilled communion of all with God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ is proclaimed and bodily present, nurturing and empowering gathered communities of his disciples to protest, resist and transform those forces that generate injustices and result in untimely death. God's spirit is active in and through communities of reconciliation rather than barricaded communities of unending recrimination and violence.

As indicated by different authors here, it is through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, by the imperial power of that day, that the suffering love of the Triune God is especially revealed. Here God is revealed as the opposite of what human beings tend to associate with divine power. "The one narrated and revealed between Good Friday and Pentecost as God's own Son constitutes the revolutionary subversion of all human thought and expectation, embodying the utter contrast between God's kingdom and ours."⁴ Rather than reinforcing the privilege of the powerful, God is with those who matter little in the eyes of the world—those who are poor, excluded and victimized, liberating them for new life in just, participatory communities. This is a conviction of our faith that cannot merely be repeated but must be lived out if it is to be credible.

The church is called to embody and live out this power of powerlessness, in testimony to the incarnation. Practices such as care, accompaniment, hospitality, advocacy and community building make this theology of the cross real, including among those whose convictions are not explicitly Christian. Our faith makes us open to life as lived by others. That was exemplified in how Jesus related to all kinds of people, without regard for their religious background. Rather than "lording" our faith over others in an attempt to convert them, the true meaning of what we confess and live out should be how it embraces and transforms human suffering.

The power of the resurrection showed up especially in how the early Christians lived, as already dwelling in God's new creation—through baptism, Eucharist and the life of discipleship—and by continuing to tell stories of Jesus and his triumph over death.

The divine Spirit at work in the resurrection is also at work within and among us, leading us into communion with the resurrected crucified One. The Spirit of God is experienced as a power that overcomes people's sense of political powerlessness. The Spirit lays hold of and

⁴ Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 310.

transforms domains of life and experience that obey different laws than God's law of justice and mercy.⁵

A Jewish theologian has captured as well as anyone the key to this transforming power:

To act in the face of terror is possible only if one suffers here the evil of terror and if one, at the same time, is somehow graced with participation in that future community in which one can act again, not as victims but as agents of the suffering and redeeming God To act with respect to the resurrected community is to act with respect to its rules of action—its rules of economic, social, political and sacramental activity, that is to say its rules of justice, relationship, charity, love, peace, and holiness. To act this way is to engage in small actions that are small—local and concrete and immediate—because they are of our humanity in this world, and that are also infinitely large, because they are of God's redeeming action in the world to come. To act this way is therefore to participate in the transformation of a wounded and dying community into a resurrected community.⁶

Developed in this book are theological themes and practices such as these that could bring people together rather than setting them apart from others, including with those of other faiths—by emphasizing a God of promise, not of threat, a God who can never be presumed to be on one side in the midst of a conflict, but who yearns for peace and justice for all.

The sections of the book

Empire as entwined in our history and faith

Charles Amjad-Ali, of Pakistani origin, critically examines the complex roots and history of empire globally, especially in the European usurpation of much that had been Muslim. He details the historical roots of American imperialism, which was sanctioned religiously by a certain

⁵ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 108, 147.

⁶ Peter Ochs, "Small Actions against Terror: Jewish Reflections on a Christian Witness," in Victoria Lee Erickson and Michelle Lim Jones (eds), *Surviving Terror*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), pp. 297, 298.

type of Reformed theology, and is now associated with evangelicalism or fundamentalism. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, writing in relation to current US politics that he himself is challenging, considers the imperial and non-imperial streams in the Bible. Much of the later is itself violent (e.g., in the Exodus); instead, he advocates for the non-violent ways in which Jesus challenged empire. William (Bill) Strehlow vividly describes how faith and citizenship were “knotted together” in his own life, as he grew up as an American and a Christian (in that order), and how he deals with this knot theologically today. His account provokes readers to reflect on how they personally have been shaped by empire and faith in their respective contexts.

What or where is the church?

In keeping with the title of this book, Cheryl Peterson probes into the being of the church (rather than what it does). She draws from theological understandings of the church as an event and as a communion before developing her own proposal that the church be seen as a “confessing *koinonia* of the Spirit”; she adds congregationally-based examples of this. Mary (Joy) Philip, draws on her Indian and scientific backgrounds, to ponder imaginatively and provocatively where the church is—in the margins, estuaries and adjacent reality of cell membranes. Here it is called to be both pest and parasite, shaking and speaking the truth to empire, to “pestorize” rather than pasteurize.

Criteria and power for confessing today

Michael Hoy hearkens back to Reinhold Niebuhr’s warnings about imperialism in another era, and then probes whether churches in the US need to recognize that this is a time for confessing—because the gospel itself is at stake. He draws on six criteria, as developed by Robert W. Bertram (including “ambiguous certitude”), for discerning when confessing is necessary. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda deplores the seeming powerlessness of North American Christians to act in the face of massive injustices, especially because of how the Spirit has been domesticated. She explores the relationship between divine power in the Holy Spirit and human power for doing God’s work on earth, in especially biblical and early church sources, and how receiving and embodying moral/spiritual power through the Holy Spirit can enable people of faith to challenge empire.

Trinitarian resistance to empire

Consumer culture's unceasing hunger and desire to have ever more, as an extension of the logic of empire, is John Hoffmeyer's point of departure. After analyzing this historically in American society, he contrasts this desire theologically with desire in relation to the Triune God, drawing especially on Gregory of Nyssa and Hegel. Allen Jorgenson underscores the totalizing and rationalizing tendencies of empire, and aiming to subvert this, develops Trinitarian perspectives that shape our being in the world in resistance to empire. He highlights the Word's dependence on the Spirit (Luther and Prenter), and how God's mutuality shapes us in such a way that we share in God's incarnate strategy of kenosis. "Hope points to the giving nature of God," in a community of mutuality where "the grace of interdependence informs a Lutheran response to empire."

Theology of the cross instead of prosperity theology

The logic and practices of empire are exported in countless ways, but as an African, Faith Lugazia is especially concerned about the US roots and misleading appeal of prosperity theology in her context. This movement encourages individuals to focus on material rewards that God will give them if they follow its dictates, instead of relying on God's free grace and pursuing more structural solutions to the realities of poverty in Africa. Deanna Thompson combines a discussion of Luther's theology of the cross—a direct counter to a theology of prosperity or glory—with deepened theological understandings of friendship, especially among women. "A community of Jesus' friends cannot be anything other than the *ecclesia crucis*." She calls for those in the global North to live out the vocation of friendship with women and men from the global South, and join with them in resisting concentrations of power under empire.

The public vocation of the church amid empire

In relation to his own experiences as a South African Reformed pastor during the time of transition from apartheid, Johannes (Jannie) Swart makes a case for "otherness" as a constitutive feature of the church's identity in society. This is informed by the social Trinitarian theology of Tertullian, an early North African Christian living under the Roman

Empire, and exemplified in the Belhar Confession of South African Christians living under the empire of apartheid. Against the backdrop of how neoconservative ideology holds sway in the US today, Gary M. Simpson continues the exploration of the church as communion, drawing upon the Trinitarian notion of *perichoresis*, along with key Lutheran themes. Further, he emphasizes the importance of repentant patriotism and “publicity” in relation to the wider community of nations and a “global citizenship saturated with just peace-building practices.”

Fundamentalism, democracy and empire

Featured in the final section are articles by two Latin Americans, a region that over the years has particularly felt the impact of US empire. Both analyze more deeply the fundamentalism that supports empire. Wanda Deifelt, from Brazil, views fundamentalism as “an anti-dialogical approach that is contrary to fundamental Christian teachings in general and to Lutheran teachings and hermeneutics in particular.” She contrasts Latin American fundamentalist movements with those in the US. Guillermo (Willy) Hansen, from Argentina, undertakes a sweeping and complex analysis of how tolerance and democracy are under threat today. Re-working classical Lutheran themes of justification, two kingdoms and the cross in relation to the present set of challenges, he seeks “a robust Lutheran public theology which inspires strategies to face the subtle power of empire and the enchanting choruses of fundamentalism.”

As you read these articles, and perhaps argue with the authors, may they provoke your own reflections as to how empire is affecting your setting and its implications for the church. How would you theologically engage the challenges you face in your context? We would like to hear from you at, kbl@lutheranworld.org.

Empire as Entwined
in our History and Faith

Empire and Its Religious Legitimation: Betrayed by a Companion¹

Charles Amjad-Ali

Globalization/globalism, and more recently American (read US) empire, have dominated much political, cultural and theological discussion. In the 1980s, the former emerged and was largely articulated as an economic term by the neoliberal/neoconservative monetarists, in what they perceived to be a failed Keynesian and neo-Keynesian economic policy. Globalization itself is obviously a much older phenomenon and should therefore be differentiated from globalism, which clearly has ideological and prejudicial structures behind it.

The matter of US empire, in its present form, is a much wider issue, though again its roots, and the critique of it, came much earlier.

The negative connotations of the word “imperialism” [in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries]... spread to the word “empire,” so that at the very time the United States was creating the most extensive empire the world had ever known, politicians and respectable intellectuals had to deny that there was an American empire.²

More than this, ideologically and with all its might, the US has until recently denied being an empire because it saw itself as the land of freedom, democracy and a product of a “revolutionary war” against colonialism. Schizophrenically, this has at the same time always been mitigated by a belief that it is a good and righteous empire with a mission (manifest destiny) and zeal that need to be extended to the world for the good of all. In recent years, across the political spectrum, all have acknowledged this imperial

¹ Cf. Mt 26:23; Mk 14:18-20; and Lk 22:21. The Latin roots of the word companion mean one with (*com*) whom one breaks bread (*pan*).

² David Ray Griffin, “America’s Non-Accidental, Non-Benign Empire,” in David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., Richard A. Falk, Catherine Keller, *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 3-22, esp., p. 3.

reality in one form or the other, however reluctantly. Most justify it as a dialectical historical necessity for promoting liberal bourgeois democracy, freedom, rights, or the free market, through the might of its power, which is clearly benevolent, or at least benign when compared to other empires. Both globalism and US empire have found great impetus since the end of the so-called Cold War. This is the case especially with the US empire because there is no longer a countervailing force nor a counter prevailing *Machtkritik*. The Europeans could have mitigated this, but in fact they end up mostly supporting this new empire—some more, some less.

Some historical perspectives on empire

Throughout human history, empires have risen and fallen. Although tautologically accurate, this generalization in no way removes the culpability of the Western empires. Almost all recent imperial structures originate from within the Euro-American context. The contemporary Euro-American empires began with Christopher Columbus in 1492 and Vasco de Gama in 1498. This was also the onset of the church's missionary expansion: Western *imperium* and mission began with the Iberian Catholic colonization. The Pope divided the world into the Spanish West and the Portuguese East through the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. However, since the sinking of the Spanish Armada in 1588, history has been dominated by the emergence of Western European empires, largely from Protestant countries, followed by their missionary activity.

Two eminent geographers clarify this:

Over the past five centuries Europe and Europeans have influenced and changed the rest of the world more than any other realm or people has done. European empires spanned the globe and transformed societies far and near. European colonialism propelled the first wave of globalization. Millions of Europeans migrated from their homelands to the Old World as well as the New, changing (and sometimes nearly obliterating) traditional communities and creating new societies from Australia to North America. Colonial power and economic incentive combined to impel the movement of millions of imperial subjects from their ancestral homes to distant lands: Africans to the Americas, Indians to Africa, Chinese to Southeast Asia, Malays to South Africa's Cape, Native Americans from east to west. In agriculture, industry, politics, and other spheres, Europe

generated revolutions—and then exported those revolutions across the world, thereby consolidating the European advantage.

But throughout much of that 500-year period of European hegemony, Europe also was a cauldron of conflict. Religious, territorial, and political disputes precipitated bitter wars that even spilled over into the colonies. And during the twentieth century, Europe twice plunged the world into war. The terrible, unprecedented toll of World War I (1914-1918) was not enough to stave off World War II (1939-1945) which ended with the first ever use of nuclear weapons in Japan. In the aftermath of that war, Europe's weakened powers lost most of their colonial possession³

In this context, rather than viewing history objectively, as Western academics have claimed to do, history has become a tool that serves the ruling powers' goals and ideology. To challenge certain empire serving interpretations of events and facts is to be accused negatively of "revisionism" or more recently of "political correctness." Any corrective attempts from outside are immediately disqualified by those who claim historical "objectivity." In fact, maintaining hegemonic history is much more important than the objectivity and integrity of historical data. Contemporary issues and new realities demand new interpretations and reconfigurations of the past, but "old pasts" are left unaltered and are even defended with the vigorous power the West now possesses, thereby justifying oppression.⁴ Thus, mistaken facts and concepts are corrected only reluctantly, if at all. "New pasts" are quickly squashed by "objective" Western scholars.

This mythical historical structure is then thrust on all others, who have completely different experiences of history due to the way in which the West has exercised power over them during the past five hundred years. Thus, even tribal wars inside the West become "world wars" while life-destroying wars all over the rest of the world are either innocuously labeled "Cold War," or more recently, "retribalization." Any challenge to the veracity of these myths is immediately condemned as a clear sign of all that is wrong with the victims—they are considered weak, "underdeveloped," lacking the ability to be objective and prone to jealous whining because of the West's success.

³ H. J. de Blij and Peter O. Muller, *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts*, 11th edition (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2004), p. 40.

⁴ For a very good and profound discussion of objective science and the role of traditional and organic intellectuals, see, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: Lawrence and Wishart and International Publishers, 1971), see especially chapter 1, "The Role of Intellectuals," pp. 1-23.

Although himself a Western academic, Michel Foucault deals with power and knowledge in significantly different ways. There are two voices in Foucault: the interrogator, with the arrogant stance of one who already possess all knowledge, and the respondent who is still on the way to knowledge, a child, not an adult. As William E. Connolly suggests, “both voices must be present in any text that seeks to speak to its own culture, while contesting some of its patterns of insistence.”⁵ This “maladjustment”⁶ (or schizophrenia) is present among those who are conscious of the link between knowledge and power and who want to critique both and the link between them. Thus, I here designate the voice of the interrogator as a priest, and the voice of the respondent as a jester:

[Priest] But if you claim you are opening up a radical interrogation, if you wish to place your discourse at the level at which we place ourselves, you know very well that it will enter our game, and, in turn, extend the dimension that it is trying to free itself from. Either it does not reach us or we claim it. In any case, you have promised to tell us what these discourses are that you have been pursuing so obstinately ... without ever bothering to define their status.

[Jester] I admit this question embarrasses [me] ... I am not entirely surprised by it; but I would prefer to leave it in suspense a little longer. This is because ... my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support... It can never be reduced to a single system of differences ... it is trying to operate a decentering that leaves no privilege to any center ... its task is to make differences: to constitute them as objects, to analyze them, and to define their concept.⁷

The West tends to negate, or at best simply minimize, the role of other peoples and civilizations and their sociocultural, political and economic

⁵ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 61.

⁶ The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. used this word in a university commencement address in 1961: “I call upon all men of good will to be maladjusted because it may well be that the salvation of our world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.” See James M. Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 208-216, esp., pp. 215-216.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 205.

histories. Thus, all that is good is Western in origin and all that is wrong is merely part of the larger tragedy of the human condition.

The best example is how the West has usurped the Mediterranean⁸ as part of its continuous, historical ownership. This overlooks that the Mediterranean was not a European but a tri-continental reality. North of it were what the Greco-Roman world referred to as the “barbarians.” The actual centers of Mediterranean civilizations and learning were located in northern Africa, at the hip where Africa was linked to Asia. Egypt was located in both continents, until the Suez Canal was cut through it, for the sake of European trade and movement.⁹

Africa and Asia had seen massive movements back and forth throughout the course of their histories, especially in the histories of the monotheistic traditions: the Israelites’ exodus from Africa (Egypt) to Asia (through Sinai to Canaan);¹⁰ Jesus migrating as a refugee from Asia (Bethlehem) to Africa (Egypt);¹¹ and in 615 CE, Islam’s first *Hijra* (migration) from Asia (Mecca) to Africa (Abyssinia).¹² Asia and the northern part of Africa were the centers of learning for the Mediterranean world, and they were the locations of the early church fathers and the early church’s educational institutions. Almost all ante-Nicean fathers came from North Africa and Asia, even if they served the churches in what is now called Europe and wrote in Latin. Yet this rich heritage of learning is usurped under the umbrella of European or Western history.

The second example of a Western usurpation of history is the recently coined, excessively used term, “Judeo-Christian” (with regard to heritage/history/culture/ethics, etc.). Especially since the end of the so-called Cold War, this term has been mostly used as a counter to the Islamic world and its values, and implicitly to suggest the superiority of the West and the

⁸ Although a sea, in Latin it ironically means the middle of the earth or land, see *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 5th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹ The French worked on the Suez Canal along with Egyptian interests from 1858-1869. The Egyptian interests were bought off by the British in 1875, who then worked on it with the French and together they ran the Canal until it was nationalized by Egypt in 1956.

¹⁰ Deut 32:48ff.

¹¹ Mt 2:13-15.

¹² This *Hijra* took place in order to escape the persecution from the Quraysh in Mecca. The Prophet Muhammad sent a group of Muslims to Abyssinia, which was largely Coptic Christian at the time; about eighty people went. The Quraysh sent a delegation to the Negus (king) of Abyssinia demanding the Muslims not be allowed to stay there, but having already met them, the Negus allowed them to stay. Some of these refugees only returned to Medina and Mecca (Asia) after Muhammad completed the peace treaty of Mecca in 628 CE.

barbarity of the Muslim East. Thus, the whole history of that part of Asia is usurped and made a part of the West. Not until after 1935 was the term “Judeo-Christian” coined and held together in its present form, because prior to this the Jews were still seen as “the abhorrent other.” They were seen as one of the most insidious problems in Europe, with Europeans participating in the *Judenverfolgung* (persecution of the Jews) and worse, searching for a *Judenreines* (Jew cleansed/free) Europe.¹³

By usurping and falsely claiming the history of others to be theirs, the West established a continuity with the southern and eastern part of the Mediterranean, disinheriting all other claimants. To achieve this effectively, the West had to negate or downplay the role of the Muslim world, through whom this Mediterranean knowledge had actually been acquired. This knowledge was consciously distorted and falsely dubbed “the Renaissance.”¹⁴

Most of this knowledge did not exist in the areas that claimed the Renaissance, whom the people of the Mediterranean referred to as barbarous. Thomas Aquinas learned his Aristotle and Plato from the Muslim philosophers within the traditions of Avicenna (Arabic, Ibn Sina 980-1037 from Bukhara) and Averroës (Arabic, Ibn Rushd 1126-98 from Cordova and Morocco). Such philosophers were teaching as early as the mid thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries at the University of Paris, one of the earliest major universities in what is now called Europe or the West.¹⁵ Here the West began to learn of Greco-Roman philosophy, law, sciences, mathematics, etc. In the unquestioned usage of “Renaissance,” the claim was that this knowledge originated in Europe but had somehow been lost during Europe’s “Dark Ages.” The latter term subsequently was applied to the rest of the world, thereby ignoring or negating the great learning and actual Renaissance that had already taken place in the Muslim world. Having fabricated certain facts, claiming all that is good, moral and high culture for itself, and sidelining or footnoting the contributions of others, Western empires built a seeming history and even justification for its imperial ambitions.

¹³ See Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Boston: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); and Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

¹⁴ Re+naissance—from the Latin *nascentia* meaning born—means to be re-born. Cf. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, *op. cit.* (note 8), i.e., a revival of a knowledge which has been lost and is brought back.

¹⁵ The other being Salerno in the ninth century and Bologna in 1088. Along with Paris, the other two universities established in Europe in the twelfth century were Oxford and Cambridge.

In *The Human Condition*,¹⁶ Hannah Arendt argues that in order to be a citizen (*politês*) in ancient Greece, you had to overcome the “coercion of need.” Neither slaves (*doulos*) nor women (*gunê*) were able to overcome this and therefore both were tied to the *oikos* (household) and not the *polis* (public space). Consequently, it was on the backs of the labor and productiveness of women and slaves that certain men were able to acquire the freedom from the “coercion of need” and thus become citizens of the *polis*. While in the Athenian model these freedoms, and through them the acquisition of citizenship, were achieved within a respective *polis*, in the imperial model, for the colonizers this was achieved across national boundaries, at the expense of the colonized. The colonization of territories and peoples and the exploitation of their resources were essential to overcome the coercion of need within European/Western societies. While this was the case with the Europeans, the aggression in the immigrant states of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. was worse since this was not based on some abstraction but on taking over, or blatantly plundering, the land of the First Nations and forced labor from slaves. Therefore the “right” to own property was based on the right of occupation and arms, and was by fiat. These were then given false scientific and pseudo moral, theological, political and other justifications.

In his *Prophecy Deliverance*, Cornel West carries out a thorough critique of the Enlightenment and scientific rationality because of their potential to hide behind and create “objective” and rational arguments for generating prejudices and suppressing the “other” and making this suppression scientifically permanent.¹⁷ Ronald Takaki argues in a similar vein about the scientific cataloguing and placing of people on an hierarchical scale, which in the case of literature, he applies specifically to the US experiment.

Like the crew of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville’s epic story, *Moby Dick*, Americans represent the races and cultures of the world. On deck, Captain Ahab and his officers were all white men. Below deck, there were European Americans like Ishmael, Africans like Daggoo, Pacific Islanders like Queequeg, American Indians like Tashtego and Asians like Fedallah.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁷ See Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

¹⁸ See Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993), pp. 425-426. For how the gendering of science occurred in a similar way, see Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Post-Enlightenment rationality and post-liberal republicanism could not flatly justify the emergence or sustainability of the imperial model and the imperial state, nor could they maintain that it was justified by God. So the modern imperial model justified itself by its “humanitarian” intentions for others: the doing good, technological advancement, educational uplifting, medicine, infrastructural development, democratization, etc. Thus they were able to claim high and noble ideals as the motives behind the subjugation and exploitation of peoples, nations and their lands and regions. They did not acknowledge that they were acting out of egocentric self-interest, nor did they hide their condescension and arrogance towards those whom they ruled. It was always for “their” good (that of subjugated peoples) that the empire was established and carried out.

The truth is that we can find numerous accounts of brutalities and atrocities in every colonial structure vis-à-vis the native population. The British, however, normally claim a high level of morality for themselves, “as opposed to the disgusting brutality of the French, Dutch, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish and German colonial empires.”¹⁹ However, as Neal Ascherson points out,

... the myth that British colonialism guaranteed a minimum standard of behavior toward “natives” cannot—or should not—survive the evidence of twentieth century Kenya. In the field, the security forces behaved like Germans on an antipartisan sweep in occupied France. In the detention and work camps, and the resettlement villages, the British created a world no better than the universe of the Soviet Gulag.²⁰

In the 1885 Berlin Act, the Western powers—Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Russia, USA, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Turkey—carved up Africa among themselves. The Act allotted “spheres of influence” to the relevant powers in different regions of Africa²¹ and also advocated free trade and

¹⁹ See Neal Ascherson, “The Breaking of the Mau Mau,” book review of Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2005), and David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), in *The New York Review of Books*, vol. III, no. 6, (7 April 2005), pp. 26-30, esp., p. 26.

²⁰ Ascherson, *ibid.*

²¹ I have often wondered whether the concept of “mission comity” which parceled out different areas and regions to different denominational bodies learnt this from the Berlin Conference and developed it fully at the 1910 World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, of the International Missionary Council.

access to all the European countries. The first three clauses of this act clearly were precursors of today's World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements, although it must be remembered that these advantages applied exclusively to Europeans, not to Africans:

I. The trade of all nations shall enjoy complete freedom

II. All flags, without distinction of nationality, shall have free access to the whole of the coast-line of the territories ...

III. Goods of whatever origin, imported into these regions, under whatsoever flag, by sea or river, or overland, shall be subject to no other taxes than such as may be levied as fair compensation for expenditure in the interests of trade ...²²

When African independence returned after 1950, the legacy of political fragmentation from this Act was difficult to overcome.²³

A paradigmatic example of the imperial and colonial Manichean dualism—of benighted natives and “do-gooder” colonizing Westerners—is found in *White Man's Burden*. This famous anthem was written in 1899 by the British colonialist literati, Rudyard Kipling, to urge America on to be a colonist and imperialist power, in order to contribute to the “dark” and benighted people. The first of several stanzas reads:

Take up the White Man's burden—
 Send forth the best ye breed—
 Go send your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' need
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild—
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half devil and half child.²⁴

²² For full details, see “The Berlin Conference: The General Act of Feb. 26, 1885,” at <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~jobrien/reference/ob45.html> (accessed 25 September 2007).

²³ See de Blij and Muller, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 340.

²⁴ It was first published in the February 1899 issue of *McClure's Magazine*, and later in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1929).

The USA as empire

Although the US is the newest member of this Western imperial club, it has a much longer imperial history than is generally acknowledged. It has been an empire at least since the colonization of the Philippines in the 1890s, if not earlier through the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and John Quincy Adams' foreign policy. This imperial status is now being openly recognized and even proudly claimed. But its imperial history is in continuity with the classical European pattern laid out above; the core values of this imperial project remain the same. Because of this continuity, there is no excuse for European self-righteousness toward contemporary examples of US imperialism, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a proverb in my mother tongue, Urdu, puts it, "Having eaten 900 mice the cat has decided to go for *Hajj* (pilgrimage)."

When the colonizing forces first came to the Americas, they were certain of God's support: God would give them victory against the heathens and lead them to success and wealth. In 1492, the victorious flush of the Reconquista of Spain allowed Isabella and Ferdinand²⁵ to think of establishing trade routes, markets and *imperium*, for which they found willing executors in the church and in Christopher Columbus. God had brought them success against the Muslim empire which had ruled Spain for almost 800 years (beginning in 711 CE), and God would guide them in this new venture and ensure their success.

The other critical migration to the Americas was the paradigmatic arrival of the Puritans. This was quickly justified with a Reformed predestinarian theology. Ostensibly it was seen as a covenantal crossing by the Puritans out of the "Ur of the Chaldeans," of monarchical England, to the Canaan/Promised Land of Portsmouth Bay and Cape Cod of Massachusetts.²⁶ However, unlike Abraham, these Puritans were leaving because they had faced difficulties and persecution under Elizabeth I and Charles I. Charles II, having defeated the Puritans in parliament, then dissolved it and restored

²⁵ In 1469, the two main powers of Christian Spain were formally united through the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. This consolidated the power needed to confront the Moorish kingdoms and lay the foundations of the modern Spanish state. In 1478, a papal bull was obtained, establishing the Spanish Inquisition, which led to the expelling of at least 70,000 Jews from Spain. On 2 January 1492, the Castilian and the Aragonian banners flew from the towers of the Alhambra, marking the conquest of Granada and the end of the long struggle against the Moors (the Reconquista). In August of the same year, Christopher Columbus sailed from the small port of Palos, Spain, for India (actually the Americas, such that the native peoples living there were wrongfully named "Indians").

²⁶ The "pilgrims" landed in 1620 and began the Massachusetts Bay Colony which was further enhanced when Winthrop's fleet landed in 1630. This together is seen as the first mass exodus of Puritans from England, which stopped in 1640.

the monarchy and took revenge for his father's "regicide." He had Cromwell's body exhumed, hanged and the head put on a pole over Westminster Hall, where it hung for at least the next twenty years, signaling the defeat of the Puritan cause in England. It must be remembered that the Puritans had only ruled from 1649-1660, yet they absolutely and obstinately believed that they represented God's cause, and that God was on their side.

This failed English community experienced similar failures in the new colony. Of the 102 people on the passenger list of the *Mayflower*, at least fifty percent perished within the first year. Yet, they portrayed their coming to America and their colonizing of the native population as God's will because of their chosen status as God's people. The biblical Exodus story of the Israelites leaving a life of persecution and oppression in Egypt and journeying to the Promised Land, would seem to have been a better paradigm for the Puritans, but that would have changed their status to that of a slave in England, which was unacceptable. Instead, in the Americas, this story came to be more associated with enslaved African immigrants and in some cases First Nation peoples.

One is forced to ask, What is it about the Reformed double predestinarian theology which, in at least two significant locations (viz., the US and South Africa), has had such unjust and malevolent effects? Those identifying with this theological heritage quickly justified their malicious and spiteful practices by defining themselves as God's chosen people, with the right to others' land and labor. The original people were considered to be under the permanent curse of a negative predestination, and thus not entitled to their own land or even their own future. If vicious and malicious acts occurred in the theft of their land and their labor, this was not due to the usurpers' sin because this was seen as God's intention rather than based on human volition. Thus, confession of sins and penitence were not required, nor was restorative justice or retribution.

It was not as if the US did not have other Protestant theological positions available, but that they chose this particular understanding is a clear indication of the issue of the interpretation of power and knowledge referred to earlier. For example, the US could have picked up on Martin Luther's critical dialectics of *simul iustus et peccator* (that we are justified and sinners at the same time) and *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus* (the revealed and hidden God). The former undermines any privileged position on either side, while the latter prohibits us from claiming God exclusively for ourselves with disregard for others. This second dialectic also subjects any claim of total revelation of God, who also remains hidden from us.

Will Herberg has argued that in the US it does not matter whether you are a Jew, a Catholic, or a Protestant because in significant ways

everybody falls prey to the theology described above and its justification.²⁷ One must be aware that this theology has dominated US foreign policy, especially in the recent years. The US is seen as the righteous one because it is preordained to this status, and the enemy, whoever that might be, is totally wrong. This is so because of their negative, preordained ontological status, and because they dare challenge the God-ordained power and status of the US. This blissfully ignorant, uncomplicated and simplistic understanding of ourselves and the “enemy” takes very interesting and pathological forms, and at times causes major theological and metaphoric confusion. This confusion is most visible when the US wants to be both David, in maintaining the righteousness and justness of its cause, and also Goliath, in its display of military power which can only be there because of God’s special blessing (*Cf.* 1 Sam 17, especially vv. 4-11 and 41-51). This schizophrenia in US foreign policy is at times totally unbearable and, for its victims, an unmitigated disaster, as in the current war in Iraq.

Religious legitimization of US empire

A certain kind of evangelical fundamentalism was needed to provide the underpinnings and legitimation for US empire. The evangelicals and fundamentalists located knowledge and reason exclusively as revealed in the Bible, which allowed them to counter the Enlightenment as well as the location of knowledge and reason in the human, and to fight for God’s role in creation and all other aspects of life. This provided certitude and security, and required a positive dogma, however ossified, based exclusively on divine revelation. In relation to this, the human is to be passive, lest what is revealed be contaminated by the human. Knowledge is to be verifiable by a narrow reading of the biblical text, so that human rationality and knowledge can be provided with permanent, universal, true and fixed foundations. Interpretive possibilities are curtailed: human reason, knowledge and intellect need not be used because the text is self-interpreting, with no human input in either the writing or the interpretative task. Thus, the Bible acquires a very high and almost God-like character.²⁸

²⁷ See Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955).

²⁸ Because of this commonality between evangelicals and fundamentalists I have used them interchangeably, though I am aware that many argue for significant differences between them. See, e.g., Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

This position is based on an almost Manichean dualism, docetism, gnosticism or Arianism. Having a problem with the materiality of God in Christ, that which contains God's revelation must also escape this materiality and contamination. Roman Catholics tend to divinize Mary through the immaculate conception, whereas evangelicals emphasize the "immaculate conception" of the biblical text, the carrier of the *logos tou theou* (the Word of God). Evangelicals humanize Mary and divinize the text, whereas Catholics have no problem humanizing the text but end up divinizing Mary. In the end, both violate the orthodoxy of the three *personae* and one *ousios*²⁹ of the ecumenical Trinitarian creedal formulae by adding a fourth *persona*—Mary for the Catholics and the Bible for the hard-line evangelical Christians—having the same *ousios* as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit so that the divine Trinity is not contaminated by human materiality. Thus, central tenets of the Nicean Council of 325 CE are violated, as well as the two-natures creedal formula of the Chalcedon Ecumenical Council of 451 CE. The "two natures" apply to Christ both as divine and human, which includes the material is not held in claiming the Bible to be exclusively divine without any human materiality.

The *sola scriptura* of Luther and the Reformation was seen by these evangelicals not so much as a clash with the status of *traditio* (tradition), *ecclesia* and *magisterium* (the church and its teaching authority), but as a counterpoint to Enlightenment rationality and scientific reality. In spite of these obvious and critical differences, the evangelicals saw themselves as the true heirs of Luther's *sola scriptura* and claimed this status, condemning all other approaches to Scripture and the hermeneutical task as "liberal." Therefore, one of their central commitments is to the inerrancy and perspicuity of the text, which should not be subjected to some modernist and/or postmodernist "relativizing," based on the use of the intellect and/or reason. Therefore, it is ironic that given their commitment to the perspicuity of the text, they produce more diversity of interpretation, each claiming to be simply an extension of the revelation as well as the truth.

For a large majority of such American evangelicals, their faith and America are synonymous. Thus statements against America and the flag are seen as blasphemous, for they regard what America does in the world as nothing less than God's intervention in history, based on true and faithful

Also, it is important to be aware that what "evangelicalism" refers to in the US is quite different from what "evangelical" means in much of the world, e.g., in designating Lutheran churches.

²⁹ *homoousios*—of the same substance or essence—of Nicea 325 CE and Constantinople 381 CE ecumenical councils creedal formulae.

service to God, and not as an extension of some self-interested *imperium*. So, unlike the Catholic position of the church being the sacrament in history, based on the metaphor of the body of Christ (the *corpus Christi*), or of the church as having a sacramental vocation in history, the evangelicals have no problem in seeing the US as part of the divine will for the world.

Earlier evangelicals, at least on the surface, had been suspicious of worldly and material matters. Any preoccupation with the contaminated and fallen state would lead to evil and therefore the punishment of hell. They therefore wanted to escape both the material world and punishment and instead seek a rebirth and a closer walk with God to avoid all such temptations. At the same time, their prayers have been more petitionary than classical liturgical prayers. They prayed very hard for material goods and tried to live a highly pious, sanctified life in order to ensure material success: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Such successes have been quickly interpreted as the sign of their prayers being heard by God, who blesses them as a *quid pro quo* for their pious and righteous life. The kingdom of God is thus reduced to personal salvation, piety and resultant wealth and success—in contradiction to their anti-material theology.

This theology is then very quickly extended from the individual to a nationalist theology. God blesses America, based on its chosen and right relationship with God, its piety and righteousness. As God’s chosen, this nation is a light unto the world (Isa 42:6; 49:6, Mt 5:14), a beacon on the mountain (Isa 30:17) and a city on the hill (Mt 5:14). And because of this choosing, America is able to fulfill the will of God and thus succeed, continuously acquiring ever-expanding power and wealth unmatched in history. This is clearly based on the bad covenantal theology articulated by the Puritans. It continues to dominate the US political psyche, but usually without direct reference to God. It is represented by people such as Francis Fukuyama,³⁰ Samuel Huntington³¹ and Benjamin Barber,³² who still believe in the special, almost “dispensationalist” role of the US in history, but without claiming it as ordained by God. The secular position

³⁰ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History,” in *The National Interest*, 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 4-18; later converted into a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3 (summer 1993), p. 22-28; later converted into a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

³² Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

has deprived it of its theological moorings and is thus more debilitating, seeing itself as the highest development but without the imaginative and participatory quality of the earlier religious asceticism.

The theological schizophrenia is operational on both the personal and nationalist levels. Claiming a special relationship with God is itself profoundly un-Christian and un-Christ-like. It is more Abrahamic than Christ-like in its faithfulness. Jesus stands in total contrast to this form of “Wall Street” piety with blessings as the expected return on investment. Jesus dies in his 30s, an unnatural and horrible death on the cross which is clearly “a stumbling block ... and foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23) to this investment/return based Wall Street theology. He is unmarried, with no indication of his having any progeny/offspring (the *Da Vinci Code* sensationalism notwithstanding). He has no place to call home: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20 and Lk 9:58). And after some three and a half years of teaching, he is able to attract only twelve disciples, one of whom sells him out to the enemies, and another who denies him publicly to a “powerless woman” (servant girl).³³ As for his petitionary prayer being answered as a reward for faithfulness, when Jesus knelt down and prayed with the greatest intensity (i.e., “his sweat became like great drops of blood” Lk 22:44), “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me...” (Lk 22:42 ff.), that prayer appears not to have been answered; instead, thanks be to God he was crucified for our sake.

The other side of evangelical/fundamentalist faith has been its apocalyptic emphases, as reflected in the multilayered millenarian arguments that have dominated its American versions. This millenarianism began to emerge among European pietists and in Protestant scholasticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with simultaneous movements of a piety largely focused on the soul/spirit apart from the body/materiality. These movements influenced the American evangelical and fundamentalist revivals, though for very different reasons. They focused on predictions in the apocalyptic prophecies in the New Testament and some in the Old Testament, and tried to date them with timetables tied to world events. In recent years, this has focused especially on developments in the Middle East, specifically with regard to Israel. There have been constant shifts in both the timetable as well as the specification of the enemy—the Anti-Christ and the mark of the beast (e.g., the Papacy, the

³³ Cf. Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:54-62.

Soviet Union, even the European Union, and most recently, Islam). The fact that these enemies have in recent decades matched those defined by the US empire's foreign policy is not recognized by these adherents as being an ideological interpolation. Thus, we see a very clear connection between their faith and US foreign policy interests, especially in defining the enemy and exercising dominating power on the world stage.

Because of their chiliastic agenda, such evangelicals seem to be very concerned with world affairs, yet they remain epistemologically otherworldly in their "left behind," "Second Coming," and *parousia*-type theologies. Their present-generation, egocentric and conservative sociopolitical agenda does not allow for an intergenerational, interspecies, just and sustainable future. Indeed, in their theocentric apocalyptic vision, according to which the world is coming to an end very soon, all creation- and human-centered concerns for the future are seen as useless gyrations. For them, the Bible is "categorically clear" about the blueprint for the future.

The recently established role of the evangelicals in public life and their serious attempts to control US policies—through control of the offices of the executive/presidency, legislature and judiciary—have produced an essential shift in their overall theological and ethical epistemology. This is not simply an adaptive or contextual move, but a major, critical shift in the core of evangelical theology. It has changed from seeing the public square as evil, and therefore to be rejected. No longer is an ascetic Calvinist piety demanded, unencumbered by either the quest of power in public life or control of morality in the public square. Just a few decades ago, such evangelicals condemned approaches such as those that equated the kingdom of God with the church, or a particular social action, or different liberation theologies and struggles. More recently, however, they have not only adopted these positions themselves, but have even claimed these movements as part of their own heritage and distorted them for the sake of a conservative moral, cultural and political agenda in the public square—even vociferously demanding the application of a kind of "Christian Shariah."

Even these justifications of civic responsibility in the public square sound quite hollow because of their foundational commitment to a very high individuality. Personal conversion, piety and morality become exclusive imperatives and the high point and benchmark of evangelical faithfulness, thus undermining the exclusivity of grace and a theology of the cross. This undermining of the centrality of the theology of the cross is necessary because of their lack of a sacramental understanding of the

cross in history, and the vulnerability the cross represents. A sacramental understanding of the cross sees salvation as an act of grace, and provides the paradigmatic example for faith-based praxis. This undermines the necessity of our piety and morality to achieve success and wealth as reward, based on the *quid pro quo* Wall Street theology, discussed above.

Therefore, the formation of citizens for the sake of the *polis*, public square or civic responsibility, is not possible because this requires an organic collective and not merely a voluntary association. Neither the *polis* nor the *ecclesia* can or should be reduced to the modernist myth of voluntary association of otherwise isolated individuals. These evangelicals' commitments to the larger *polis* is also suspect since personal piety and its related asceticism must produce individual success, wealth and affluence at the cost of someone else. This is a fundamental reversal of the old monastic piety that critiqued wealth and affluence and required them to be abandoned for the sake of God, seeing the blessings of God instead through simplicity, poverty and service to others. Instead of opting for a piety of martyrdom, as in the early church, they clearly have opted for the *Constantinian imperium*—a Christianity that equates *regnum dei* with imperial rule, and justifies it by quoting Luke 20:20-26 and Romans 13:1-7. Within this frame of reference, “empire” becomes proof of the righteousness of their cause, whether or not they acknowledge the double predestination behind this position. Thus, some will lose not because the empire is nasty and oppressive, but because God has foreordained them to be subjected, ruled and dominated by those who are chosen by God to carry out their covenantal responsibility.

It must be added here that this Constantinian captivity of the church plagues not only the evangelicals, but also the Western church as a whole. Therefore, anyone attempting to critique the empire while living in its midst will not only have to critique the empire itself but, equally and even more vehemently, the church which sold itself to the empire. If Luther had written on the Constantinian, rather than *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, this captivity might have been part of the Reformation critique.³⁴ Through its Constantinian captivity the church has betrayed the gospel and submitted itself willingly to the yoke of slavery, whereas in the Babylonian captivity the Jews were unwilling victims of

³⁴ Such a move was already initiated by the Franciscans and the Nominalists, such as Marsilius of Padua (1290-1342) in *Defensor Pacis* (Defender of Peace) and Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) and his critique in *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine*.

a nasty hegemon who destroyed their cities and temple and took away all its precious and holy items.

This hard certainty of certain evangelicals vis-à-vis the sacred text produces an epistemology which demands similar certitude on all other levels of faithfulness. This produces not only a textual and confessional conservatism, with no room for doubt or vulnerability, but also results in political and social conservatism tinged with chauvinistic nationalism and cultural chauvinism. Both are immediately given sacred status and serve imperial purposes, justified ironically in the name of the crucified one who himself was the victim of such imperialism.

Even the demand for the Christian conversion of all is a type of imperial Christianity. For this Christianity, the emphasis is on having a common language that produces a particular kind of imperial politics, society, culture and economy, which the current globalism is also demanding. This of course goes against the Pentecostal experience of the church as depicted in Acts 2 and thus also of the power of the Holy Spirit. The well-known Pauline quote, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), is heard as hegemonic homogenization, rather than the freedom that Paul so emphasized: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). This freedom in Christ is to be protected and guarded jealously. Textual certainty, imperial power and homogenized grammar all find immediate expression in understanding America’s power, wealth and special status as God’s chosen imperial agent in history. Through this, the evangelicals see America as the sacrament of God in history and its imperial power as God’s preordained gift. Therefore, giving up some freedoms, for the success of this nation and thus God’s plan for the world, is given religious legitimation.

In this way, such religious voices in America are indeed like Judas Iscariot who, though he was at the table with Jesus, breaking bread and eating with the other disciples, had already made arrangements with the imperial powers and their colluders to sell his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Even more reprehensible, this betrayal was carried out by kissing his friend, comrade and teacher.

Faith and Empire: Some Biblical Perspective

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer

If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?¹

This remarkable quote featured on the Cheney family Christmas card just months after the US invasion of Iraq. It is disturbing for at least three reasons. First, it makes clear that in the mind of the war's principle architect the purpose of the invasion and occupation of Iraq is to expand US empire. America's neoconservatives, who orchestrated the war with Iraq, believed the USA had no rival because of the demise of the Soviet Union. They wrote openly about their ambitious plans (they called it "America's Grand Strategy") to turn present US military superiority into permanent global domination. Elements of their strategy included dramatic increases in military spending, a regime change in Iraq, control over the world's oil supplies, positioning permanent military bases in the Middle East, developing a new generation of "useable" nukes, militarization of space and pulling out of international agreements that restricted the unilateral use of US power.²

A second troubling feature of the Christmas card quote is that the "success" of US empire is understood to reflect the will of God. Finally, the quote itself is from Benjamin Franklin, which tells us that belief that US empire reflects God's will is deeply rooted in the American experience.

Claims, judgments and hopes

In my book, *Saving Christianity from Empire*, I make two claims, value judgments and statements of hope.³ My first claim is that the US

¹ A quote from Dick and Lynne Cheney's 2003 Christmas card.

² See Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Saving Christianity from Empire* (New York/London: Continuum Books, 2005), for a detailed analysis of neoconservative documents including "Rebuilding America's Defenses," from the Project for the New American Century.

³ *Ibid.*

has been an empire for a very long time by which I mean it has exercised sufficient control over the international system and other nations to secure the interests of powerful political and economic sectors within the US. Our concerns about US empire, therefore, must extend well beyond the excesses of the Bush administration.

My first value judgment is that pursuit, establishment and defense of empire are destructive to the interests of many US citizens and people throughout the world. Long before the rise of the neoconservatives, Michael Parenti warned that “the republic is being bled for the empire’s profits, not for [the peoples’] well-being.” Real national security, he wrote, “means secure jobs, safe homes and a clean environment.” The US empire “which is paid for by their blood, sweat and taxes, has little to do with protecting them or people abroad and everything to do with victimizing them in order to feed the power and profits of the few.”⁴

It should be remembered that, throughout history, empires have described themselves as benevolent and have claimed a divine mantle. For example, the imperial presumption of God’s favor was evident in the writings of the aristocratic Jewish historian Josephus, a Jewish leader who was captured by Rome during the first Roman-Jewish war, 66 to 73 CE. He told his fellow Jews that to resist Rome was to resist God:

Fortune, indeed, had from all quarters passed over to them [the Romans], and God who went the round of the nations, bringing to each in turn the rod of empire, now rested over Italy... . You are warring not against the Romans only, but also against God... . The Deity has fled from the holy places and taken His stand on the side of those with whom you are now at war.⁵

It is experience that dictates whether one sees in empire or in empire’s boastings gain or loss, truth or hypocrisy, God or human haughtiness. Virgil, a poet of Roman imperial arrogance, wrote in the *Aeneid*:

Roman, remember by your strength to rule
Earth’s peoples—for your arts are to be these:
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.

⁴ Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1995), p. 69.

⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 31.

A first-century rebel general, Calgacus, offered a far different description of the Roman Empire:

Robbers of the world, now that earth fails their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea; if their enemy have wealth, they have greed; if he be poor, they are ambitious; East nor West has glutted them; alone of mankind they covet with the same passion want [poor lands] as much as wealth [rich lands]. To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace.⁶

Closer to home, the Voice of America was known within the US as a voice for freedom, but in some settings it was understood as a mouthpiece for US propaganda. In the 1980s, Brazilian bishop and poet, Pedro Casaldaliga, wrote in the context of destructive US policies in Latin America:

People should realize
That this is the Voice of those who have a voice
Because they have their dollars
And they have the power to kill, with a button,
the whole human race
and under their own roof the power
to kill, day by day, with counter information
their own sickly conscience.⁷

Despite President Bush's arrogant claims about ridding the world of evil,⁸ the present thrust for US empire is a leading contributor to global insecurity and violence. Far from bringing democracy and freedom to the world, the reckless militarism that marks US policies in the aftermath of the 2001 terror attacks has resulted in widespread carnage, increased terror, diminished international law, eroded democracy and reduced living standards at home and abroad.

My first statement of hope is that there is a positive, realistic alternative to US empire that I describe as a republic. The government of a republic is concerned with all its citizens' well-being, within the context

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁷ Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga, *Prophets in Combat* (Oak Park: Meyer Stone Books, 1987), pp. 24-25.

⁸ President Bush, "Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance," at the National Cathedral, 14 September 2001.

of its responsibility to the community of nations of which it is a part. The government that serves empire defines itself by virtue of its superior military power and special mission that put it above international law or the community of nations. It uses kindly rhetoric but pursues domestic and foreign policies aimed at global domination in service to privileged sectors at the expense of its own citizens and people throughout the world. As citizens, we must actively choose between empire and republic.

The high domestic and international costs of US empire and the strength of the worldwide revulsion against it may lead to a long overdue reassessment of the role of the US in the world. This could lead US citizens to reject empire. I share a hope similar to that expressed by Paul Krugman.

I have a vision—maybe just a hope—of a great revulsion: a moment in which the American people look at what is happening, realize how their good will and patriotism have been abused, and put a stop to this drive to destroy much of what is best in our country.⁹

My second claim is that Christianity is distorted by empire and that a destructive US empire is made possible, in part, by distortions in Christianity. There is no single expression of Christianity, no one correct interpretation of the Bible and no unified Christian support for empire. One of our principle tasks as theologians is to illuminate honestly that the Bible presents diverse and irreconcilable images of God, incompatible explanations for historical disasters or triumphs and conflicting ideas on empire and how to live a faithful life. The Bible contains a veritable witch's brew of biblical images of God, many of them violent. It lends itself nicely to politicians determined to defend or expand empire.

My second value judgment is that Christians living in the US must reject complicity with empire. There are mutually reinforcing links between destructive empire and distorted Christianity that are deeply troubling. The politics of empire are woven with numerous religious threads. These include President Bush's frequent references to God in public pronouncements, speeches peppered with overt or subliminal biblical references,¹⁰ foreign policies described in relation to the nation's special mission and the recurrent use of apocalyptic

⁹ Paul Krugman, *The Great Unravelling: Losing Our Way in the New Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), p. 20.

¹⁰ Bruce Lincoln has examined "a vast subtextual iceberg" of biblical images and references in President Bush's speeches. See Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 30.

categories of good versus evil that dangerously oversimplify and distort complex issues. Christianity needs to be saved from empire and the republic must be protected from violent and theocratic streams of Christianity. In recent years, legalistic Christians have embraced Bush, a wrathful God, theocracy at home and militaristic foreign policies abroad.

The apocalyptic worldview and messianic pretenses of a president and his supporters among the so-called Christian right, however, are only the most visible threads in the religious web of empire. Christian support for US empire extends well into mainstream Christianity. Traditional Christians often support destructive US foreign policies and mainstream Christian theologies, liturgies and songs reinforce violent images of God that can reasonably be cited to justify human violence against others in service to God.¹¹

Violent, diverse and contradictory portraits of God, troubling explanations for historical catastrophes, good versus evil dichotomies and incompatible story lines concerning empire make the Bible a useful and dangerous book in the hands of empire builders and other militarists. It was a particularly dangerous weapon in the hands of President Bush and his followers. As the leader of the most lethal empire in human history, Bush saw himself as God's emissary and believed that US military power was an instrument of God's justice or God's vengeance and, in the minds of some, an instrument to hasten God's plans for an apocalyptic end-time.

My second statement of hope is that Christians can and should embrace a nonviolent, anti-imperial stream of Christianity. Christians living in an empire where patriotism, nationalism, Christianity and militarism have formed an intricate web have all too often expressed faith in empire. We have an obligation to come to terms with violence, including violent foreign policies and violence at the heart of the Bible and the Christian tradition. Authentic and less imperial expressions of Christian faith are possible but they require a much needed reassessment of biblical texts and traditional Christian theologies.

Competing perspectives on empire

Competing biblical perspectives on empire can best be understood in the context of the violence of God traditions that dominate three major story

¹¹ This is a problem for many religions, including and especially monotheistic religions. For a discussion of how violence dominates the Bible and the Quran see Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

lines of the Bible.¹² The first is the exodus, understood in the tradition as the story of God's liberating violence. Exodus theology said that God intervened in history on behalf of a chosen people who, although oppressed by the Egyptian Empire, were destined by God for greatness and freedom. With divine power, God liberated the Israelites and ordered them to take control of a land occupied by others within which to be God's people. God made a covenant with the chosen people that linked God's blessings to their faithfulness.

The second story line is exile, understood in the tradition as a story about God's punishing violence. Exile theology was born out of historical catastrophes. Exodus theology said the people of Israel were chosen by a powerful God and destined for freedom. Within real history, over many hundreds of years, one empire after another dominated Israel (Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Seleucid, Roman). Exile theology explained the people's plight. They had displeased God, which triggered God's punishing violence. Exile theology also promised a glorious reversal in fortune. God's violence, although deserved, was temporary. The people could trigger God's liberating violence through proper conduct and correct worship. Israel would then be restored to greatness and, in effect, become God's chosen empire.

The third main biblical story line promised God's vindicating violence at the end of history. Like exile theology, apocalyptic theology responded to historical disappointments and calamities. The glorious reversal promised by the theologians of exile did not materialize and oppression intensified at the hands of foreign rulers. As a result, apocalyptic theology was and is extremely pessimistic about history. Earthly existence was hopelessly corrupt and human beings could not do much to improve things. God was fighting a cosmic battle between good and evil and was thus preoccupied and unable to redeem Israel. The good news was that God would soon win a final cosmic battle against evil. God would rule and eventually end the world, punish evildoers and vindicate the faithful with resurrection and a permanent, heavenly reward. The payoff for fidelity included the satisfaction of having one's enemy's fry. The New Testament writers frequently interpret Jesus in an apocalyptic light.

In the context of these story lines, we can see that the Bible presents diverse and incompatible perspectives on empire. It has a pro-empire stream, an anti-imperial stream linked to God's violence, and a nonviolent anti-imperial stream rooted in the historical Jesus.

¹² See Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), chapters 7-10.

A pro-empire stream

God's promise to Abraham is that he will be the father of empire, "a great and mighty nation" (Gen 18:18). In response to Abraham's willingness to kill his son Isaac, God says: "I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies..." (Gen 22:17). The biblical hero Joseph has a cozy relationship with the Egyptian empire and is blessed by God. God made Joseph "a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen 45:8). Although the Exodus story is said to express God's commitment to liberate oppressed people from empire, there is no sign of God being averse to empire in the Joseph accounts. God blesses Joseph who rules the Egyptian Empire on behalf of Pharaoh. Joseph's father (Jacob) blesses Pharaoh. Pharaoh in turn allows Jacob and Joseph's brothers to settle "in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land" (Gen 47:11). Joseph pleases both God and Pharaoh and pleases God by serving Pharaoh. With God's blessing, he enriches the Pharaoh and dramatically expands the power of the Egyptian empire. Joseph even uses food as a weapon against both Israelites and Egyptians in ways that would have made any IMF structural adjustment broker proud (Gen 47:14-21).

Some prophetic promises offer an additional example of a pro-empire perspective within the Bible. Exile theology promises were at times manifestly imperial. Isaiah promises empire, including sweet victory and sweet revenge. All the wealth of the world will flow to a redeemed Israel. One day, the oppressed will be oppressors within God's empire. Enemies will bow down and lick the dust from the people's feet: "and the house of Israel will possess the nations as male and female slaves in the Lord's land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them" (Isa 14:2).

An anti-imperial stream

The most prominent biblical perspective on empire is an anti-imperial stream linked to divine and/or human violence. This stream dominates the tradition because although many of the biblical writers aspired to empire, history dealt them a bad hand. Foreign domination was so widespread and brutal that it fed biblical theologies of holy war, messianic desires, hate-filled fantasies of apocalyptic violence and more than a little schizophrenia. Schizophrenia

resulted not only because there were both pro- and anti-imperial theologies, but because exile theology embraced the idea that God used foreign empires to punish the people and would one day crush these empires and free Israel (Isa 10:5-6, 12, 16). The Bible's anti-imperial stream is rooted in promises and expectations of God's violence. According to Exodus theology, a holy warrior God liberated slaves from the Egyptian empire (Ex 15:3-4).

Troubling features abound within an anti-imperial reading of the Exodus as a "liberation" story. The Exodus establishes divine and human violence as keys to "justice," and it legitimizes genocide (Ex 23:31b, Deut 7:2, Josh 11:20). The Exodus also equates power with violence and establishes superior violence as the proper measure of divinity. God proves to be God among competing claimants through superior violence (Deut 4:34-35). It is equally troubling that God's superior violence inspires belief, allegiance and worship (Ex 12:23-27) and the Exodus story defines salvation as defeat of enemies. This definition came to dominate the Bible (Ex 14:30 and 15:1-3a, 4a; Ps 18:45-48a; and Isa 25:9-10).

The biblical writers portray God as powerful and capable of liberating the people, but the people themselves were subjugated and dominated by foreign empires. Although there was no agreement about why this happened or what the people should do differently, nearly all Jews living in first-century Palestine embraced one of two anti-imperial scenarios by which empire would be judged or defeated. Some expected God to send a military messiah who would help them defeat their enemies (now Roman) and bring Israel to prominence. According to this view, human violence was part of an anti-imperial struggle that would be aided by God.

Others became disillusioned with messianic promises. History had taught them that redemption (salvation) was impossible within history and so they embraced apocalyptic expectations. God would come soon to end history as we know it, defeat evil, destroy destructive empires and vindicate the faithful. According to this view, human violence was not a necessary part of the anti-imperial struggle. The people could wait, prepare, or act nonviolently with confidence that God's apocalyptic violence would bring an end to empire at the end of history (Rev 14:10).

Jesus' nonviolent challenge to empire

After Jesus was crucified, the gospel writers explained his death in ways that made little sense to most Jews but caught on among Gentiles. In a

nutshell, they said that Jesus was the long awaited messiah sent by God to save Israel and all believers. The people who had expected a military messiah to defeat empire within history, however, had been wrong. Instead, the gospel writers said either that Jesus' blood sacrifice effectively appeased God and/or that Jesus' death and resurrection were part of God's imminent apocalyptic plan. Oppressive empires would be destroyed, the world would end and the faithful would be vindicated within the lifetime of most believers as Christ returned to oversee a final judgment.

I believe these explanations would have made little sense to Jesus. Fortunately, when telling their various Jesus stories, the gospel writers included historical material about Jesus that strongly suggests that he said no to empire itself and to the violent "solutions" to the problem of empire. Jesus rejected the violent images of God and expectations of history that dominate the Bible, including expectations of messianic, sacrificial, or apocalyptic violence. This historical material reflects a nonviolent "mustard seed" view of Jesus. This is the basis of an alternative Christianity that counters both destructive empire and the illusionary fantasies that empires will be defeated with divine or human violence within or at the end of history.

Jesus taught love of enemies (Mt 5:43-45), redefined salvation as healing, and described how we might be saved by our enemies (Lk 10:29-37). He exposed the futility of violence in a parable about the peasant revolt (Mk 12:1-9), modeled creative nonviolent action (Mt 5:38-42) and spoke of God's reign as a small present reality symbolized by a mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32). He modeled human generosity in his experience of abundance rooted in God (Mt 6:25-30) and described God's unlimited grace (Lk 15:11-32). He described judgment as self-exclusion and not the action of a violent, punishing deity (Lk 14:16-24). He modeled compassion and stressed the present nature of God's presence while rejecting apocalyptic expectations (Lk 17:20-21).

How Christianity became the servant of empire

Christianity was a bizarre candidate to become a servant of militarized empire. It was born in the context of an anti-imperial people with a long tradition of hostility to empire. In first-century Palestine, Jews resented injustices and indignities connected to foreign occupation and they longed for freedom from Rome. The cross was Rome's preferred instru-

ment of state terror and Jesus, a founder of an anti-Roman Jewish reform movement, was crucified by the empire with support from collaborating members of the Jewish aristocracy and priestly élites.¹³ Jesus resisted Roman arrogance and power but through nonviolent means.

An anti-imperial thrust was also visible in the early church. Christians declared “Christ is Lord” in direct opposition to Roman imperial claims concerning the emperor. About forty years before Jesus’ birth, the Roman Senate declared the emperor Julius Caesar divine. His son, Octavius, was the “son of a divine one,” and his birth was heralded as “the beginning of the good news.” Octavius was known as a savior who brought peace to the world through war.¹⁴ The first verse of Mark’s Gospel offers an anti-imperial counter claim: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1:1). If you want to know where God is working in history then look not to empire, Mark said, but to a victim of empire, the crucified nobody named Jesus. Paul established his alternative Christian communities precisely where the Roman emperor cult and imperial patronage system were strongest. Christian communities, in other words, were established in direct opposition and as fledgling alternatives to the Roman imperial system.¹⁵

When Christianity took on a radical apocalyptic edge, it did so out of frustration with the arrogant, abusive and enduring power of the Roman Empire. Rome was the target of its violent fantasies. Unable to defeat Rome in history, apocalyptic Christianity warned Christians not to be seduced by Roman power. It imagined the defeat of the Roman Empire and Christianity’s own vindication through God’s apocalyptic violence at the end-time (Rev 11:17-18; 14:10). Although the gospel writers interpreted Jesus in an apocalyptic light, the early church’s commitment to Jesus’ nonviolence lasted almost three hundred years. “It is noteworthy,” John Driver writes, “that between 100 and 313 no Christian writers, to our knowledge, approved of Christian participation in warfare.”¹⁶ This strong, nonviolent, anti-imperial stream ended in 313 CE with Emperor

¹³ See Pallmeyer, *op. cit.* (note 12), chapters 13-16. See also John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

¹⁴ Crossan, *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ See Richard Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

¹⁶ John Driver, *How Christians Made Peace with War* (Scotsdale: Herald Press, 1988), pp. 14-15.

Constantine's edict of toleration, which paved the way for Christianity to become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Christianity, which began as a nonviolent, anti-imperial religious reform movement within Judaism, later morphed into the official, militaristic religion of the very violent Roman Empire. This mutation is not as strange as it may seem. The Bible, as noted previously, offers competing portraits and stories about God, faith and historical destiny from which to choose, including a pro- and an anti-imperial stream. That is why today you can have liberation theology Christians in Latin America and imperial Christians in the US living under the same tent, even though they are diametrically opposed on almost every religious and political issue. They read the same Bible from radically different historical vantage points picking and choosing verses, stories and themes along the way. Ironically, one of the few things they share from their readings of the Bible is the presumption that God's violence is on their side. More ironic still, biblically speaking they are arguably both right.

Dominant Christianity's transition from being persecuted to privileged and powerful is another example of theology adapting to historical circumstances. Aspirations to empire rooted in God's will, favor and power were part of the tradition from the very beginning. Dire historical circumstances prevented their realization. This gave rise to Exodus theology's longing for liberation, exile theology's explanation for historical catastrophes and promise of glorious reversals and apocalyptic theology's despair about history altogether and its projection of end-time vindication through unimaginable divine violence.

Many biblical themes have been adapted and reached ascendancy in the context of US empire. All Christianity had to do to become a servant to US empire, was to stress certain biblical themes over others and to interpret and apply them on behalf of imperial objectives. Useful themes, adaptable to US empire, include the idea of a particular people being chosen by God; the notion that God works through an exceptional nation to accomplish divine purposes; the association of salvation with defeat of enemies; the definition of divine and human power as superior violence; the belief that historical prominence is a sign of God's blessing; and the use of sharp dichotomies such as good versus evil to define the nature of the cosmos, earthly life and spiritual struggle.

Christians living in the midst of empire need to confront a troubling contradiction: eighty-four percent of US adults identify themselves as Christian; Jesus taught love of enemies and called his followers to

peacemaking; and the US today is the most militarized empire in human history accounting for half the world's military spending. As citizens, we must choose republic over empire. As Christians, we must also choose between faith in empire and following the example of Jesus.

The Knot: Autobiographical Reflections on Citizenship and Faith within Empire

William R. Strehlow

Biography is rudimentary data for theology, and every biography is significant for the knowledge it yields for the Word of God incarnate in common life. Vocation is the name of the awareness of that significance of one's own biography. To have a vocation or to be called in Christ to discern the coincidence of the Word of God with one's own selfhood, in one's being, in its most specific, thorough, unique and conscientious sense. (William Stringfellow)

Today is a time of passage for me, a time for nostalgia, hope and confessional reflection. These are autobiographical reflections that speak of two self-involving stories or liturgies that are America and the Christian faith; both have shaped my character.

All of my life, and I am now sixty-five, I have had difficulty untying knots. Knots bother me: whether it is a knot in my shoelaces or the knots in my stomach or throat—they trouble me. I have little patience with them.

In too many ways, knots describe my all too often anxious life as a Christian and as a citizen of the USA which today, by its own admission, is the world's sole superpower but denies that it is, by past definitions, an empire.¹ Both my citizenship and my faith are identities, convictions, allegiances, energies and conundrums, which since my early years, have been tied together into too tight a knot that I am now working to loosen. In 1999, when after twenty-five years as a parish pastor I left Chicago to come to Geneva, Switzerland, I began a process of immersion into New Testament studies and early Christianity and its relationship to the Roman Empire. Through this I have come to some understanding as to who and what I am in relation to what I believe as a Christian and a citizen of the US. Put another way, from abroad, I began to look

¹ For my purposes here, I am using the word empire as an archetype. It is an idealized concept of a nation from which similar instances are derived, copied, patterned, or emulated.

biblically at my home land and my faith and their shaping experiences for me. I did so with other members of our Geneva congregation, who come from every continent on the planet

As I sought understanding, I recalled that each weekday during the late 1940s and early 1950s, I attended Jahn elementary school in a white working class neighborhood on the north side of Chicago. During the day, our parents worked hard as bus drivers, butchers, housewives, department store clerks, machinists, etc. Our parents also drank beer and ate pretzels and on Friday nights went bowling. Each morning, along with my classmates at Jahn, I stood, faced the American flag, put my right hand over my heart and pledged allegiance to the “flag and to the republic for which it stands.” It was a mandated exercise for the building up of patriotism. No one was exempt and no one objected. It was expected and it was done. America had been victorious in war and was resolved to celebrate that victory. At the beginning of the Cold War, it was also important to contain the atheistic power of our—and freedom’s—new menacing enemy, the Soviet Union. Once a week, the air raid sirens sounded as an alert to the new enemy and calling us to be alert. In our home, we feared the Russians more than God.

Each Sunday I was taken to Ascension Lutheran Church and there, along with other working class families, I confessed my sins and the pastor told me I was forgiven. At the age of seven, I was not too sure what those confessed sins were, but I trust that they only had something to do with my moral behavior. In addition, along with everyone else, I stood and confessed my faith in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through the words of the Apostles’ Creed, without really knowing what I was saying. As with the pledge to the flag, no one was exempt and no one objected. It was expected and it was done.

Together, the daily pledge of allegiance to the flag in my schoolroom, and the weekly confession of faith in my church, was the beginning of the tying of a knot between faith and citizenship. I began to discern that as a churchgoer, as a Christian, I owed allegiance to an America that allowed me to live and worship without persecution. The two were bound together. Not to be a contributing member of a congregation, remarked a pastor in Chicago, was an act of treason. At the time, I had no understanding that my confession of faith was also an allegiance to Jesus and the God to whom he pointed. It did not occur to me that the latter might critique the former. Nor did it occur to me that my pledge of allegiance to America, in its celebration of victory in war and its

emerging triumphant story and practices, set the stage for prescribing, managing and shaping how I was to live as a Christian citizen. In essence, one was to support, improve and make the other better. It was a secure knot that tied faith and citizenship together.

At the age of eight, I asked my father how we, as Americans, got this flag to which I was pledging allegiance. His answer, as best I recall, was because America had won the war. I misconstrued his answer to think that there was one flag and that it was awarded to the victor of a war. I thought, we must hold on to this flag! General Dwight D. Eisenhower became President and believed strongly that America was “great” because America was “good.” To doubt that courted rebuke. “Ike” was liked and in an effort to knot faith and citizenship together, he added God to the pledge of allegiance. We were, it was believed, a divine nation, a nation set apart geographically, without cumbersome alliances—an invulnerable nation. We were to contain Communism. The American economy boomed and people began to intensify their allegiance to certain brand names. With the approval of Congress, the military and our growing industries developed a complex working relationship. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was begun, and when its headquarters were built, etched in marble in the entrance were the words, “You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32). CIA became the nation’s good shepherd. Billy Graham, soon to become known as “America’s pastor,” conducted revivals in many American cities. A knot was being tightened that gave evidence to the belief that empires need a religious foundation for its claim to glory. As a moral young man, I was part of that support.

What was not stated nor yet understood by me, was that America was a principality and power; and that biblically, as with other nations, it was fallen. In retrospect, I invested myself in the false promises and intrigue of a nation’s arrogance, a nation embarked upon a journey of grandiosity. I was not fully aware that there was a wider scope to church and an ongoing and deeper thinking of the faith which warned of the incompatibility of faith and unbridled empire.

A good deal of time and money was spent by the many leaders of the church who had “served” in World War II, on preparing youth for leadership in the church and as citizens, especially through the Luther League. We met weekly, we read the Bible, we went bowling; we were a knotted group, and we had a hymn: *All Christians Leagued Together*. Luther Leaguers sang this hymn with gusto, with a military tempo and a militant use of the faith:

All Christians leagued together, to battle for the right
Arise and don your honor, put the foe to flight
We've given our allegiance, to server without surcease
The mighty Lord of armies, the gentle Prince of peace.

Sung weekly in the late 1950s, this hymn that emphasized Jesus as the mighty Lord of armies, was a perfect accompaniment to America's war victory and the theme for the first Youth Sunday in our congregation. I was asked to preach and I was honored to do so.

The theme, developed by the national board of the Luther League and printed in the preparation guide for student preachers was, *In this Sign Conquer*. It had to do with the Roman Emperor Constantine's acceptance of Christianity, and the use of the cross of Jesus as a symbol on his warriors' shields that they took as they conquered their adversaries. Jesus' cross was inverted and became Constantine's sword. What better way to tie together into a knot Christ and citizenship. What better way to blend Christ and culture. But, there was to be more to this knot. At a convention of the Luther League, the pastor selected to preach was the Rev. William B. Downey, the chaplain who had offered a prayer for the crew of the bomber plane Elnora Gay before they dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.² As I recall, he never mentioned the immorality of war or the horror of the bomb. The fact that it ended one horrible war and began the horrible arms race was never mentioned. We had the bomb; it was dynamite. Other nations, now envious of and threatened by such destructive power, wanted that dynamite too. Looking back, the knot was getting tighter. Nations want all of a citizen. They promise security and life everlasting through lethal weapons. Such promises are attractive temptations but they are bogus. Empires are self-involving stories. So is the Bible, whose story tells us that the nations are under the domain of Satan (Mt 4:8).

Looking back, the prophetic word of God as spoken in the Bible seems to me to have been absent in those days. It never occurred to me that a contrarian voice to this American story could be heard. Prophetic faith,

² "Almighty Father, who wilt hear the prayer of those that love Thee, we pray Thee to be with those who brave heights of Thy heaven and who carry the battle to our enemies. Guard and protect them, we pray Thee, as they fly the appointed rounds. May Thee as well as we know thy strength and power and armed with thy might may they bring this war to a rapid end We pray thee that the end of the war may come soon, and that once more we may know peace on earth. May the men who fly this night be kept safe in Thy care. And may they be returned safely to us. We shall go forth trusting in Thee, knowing that we are in Thy care now and forever. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

as Douglas Hall reminds us, clashes with empire.³ American propaganda cloaked that reality for me. The propaganda showed that other countries served a useful purpose for this American strategy. Their errors, indeed sins, could be pointed out, while our own were ignored. Others became foils by which we measured ourselves as good. And yet, in retrospect, there must have been a moment when, at least for me, God's prophetic Word was presented to me and my view of things slowly began to change.

Significantly, the change began during worship. It was Lent, and our pastor was preaching about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem accompanied by his reluctant disciples. The pastor spoke of the necessity for us to find an individual moment for a decision for Christ in his preaching about Jesus' cross. Well, right there and then, sitting in a pew on the northwest side of Chicago, I said, "yes" and then, I began to ponder and asked, What does this mean?

Looking back now, I understand that this was my pastor's Bultmannian way of bringing Jesus as Christ into the conscience of his parishioners. Jesus as Christ was to be lifted up and found in the preached word. But, it was a Jesus who was separated from his Jewish past and his community and from the narrative of the gospels. I was being taught through pastoral authority to think of "salvation" in an individualized way; Jesus' died for my personal sins, my imperfect moral behavior and in so doing, my soul was saved. To know Christ was to know his benefits. Any notion of the "historical Jesus," or of his life actually saving folks from the empty and false powers to which they had accommodated themselves was not addressed. Any notion of societal sin was, to say the least, absurd. With the emphasis on Paul and the Reformers, I was told that I was the beneficiary of Jesus' death on the cross, period. Looking back, I had found the knot of citizenship, faith and salvation knotted in and around individualism, and I began to give attention to the theological significance of this, to the historical Jesus and to American history. It was a kairotic moment.

In high school, while others pondered theorems and axioms, to the alarm of my geometry teacher, I pondered the death and resurrection of Jesus. I read *The Passover Plot. Jesus and the Revolutionaries*. At twenty-two, I moved to San Francisco and early on a pastor friend of mine placed in my hands Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*, and William Stringfellow's, *My People is the Enemy*. On my own, I purchased and read, indeed studied, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I now believe

³ Douglas Hall, *Public Lecture*, Montreal, Canada (2004).

that I was beginning to recognize the knotty problem of citizenship and faith. The Apostles' Creed to which I gave my earliest confession of belief in the Triune God, without realizing what I was saying, was beginning to make sense and became a supreme help in my musings.

I entered seminary, was ordained and became pastor of an African American congregation. In so doing, as the African American pastor of another black Lutheran church in Oakland, CA, and my mentor, told me, "You have taken a step out of your culture and you will never return." Right he was. The knot was being loosened. I was thinking, professing, and confessing the faith within society; a practice I now find crucial for the way of faith and my citizenship as an American.

It is time to talk about now. In his book, *Bound and Free. A Theologian's Journey*, the Canadian theologian, Douglas John Hall, gives particular attention to the word "now." Now is an attempt to describe the present. It is a valuable word both linguistically and biblically. Now is more than chronological, it is also kairoitic. According to Hall, what has been, has been. What will be, will be.

I have learned that history is not my past. My past was, my history is. My past reveals that all too often I have allowed to go unchecked the claims by America upon my investment as a Christian to make America better. As a wise chap once stated, America is "in me." True. Yet, once upon a time, at baptism, my forehead was sealed with the sign of the Holy Spirit and I was marked with the cross of Christ forever. The knot was tied by God in God's claim to dwell with us.

The kairoitic time is time understood qualitatively. These are illuminated times, pregnant with meaning and hopeful. For America, Lincoln at Gettysburg understood this well when he said, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war testing whether this nation or any nation can long endure."

For the people of God called Christians, the central kairós time is the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ: but now, the righteousness of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. That is biblical and it is political.

So, where am I now? The "now" for me had something to do with that moment of deciding for Jesus, and my beginning to think of what that decision had to do with my life as an American and as a Christian, in a nation that was wrestling with civil rights, assassinations and Viet Nam. This involved thinking and acting in ways that questioned the consuming character of America's story, as I discerned it through the giving and graceful story of God as indicated in the narratives of the

gospel of Jesus. This thinking continues now as America bears the price of its reckless past and its unchecked quest for a destiny and a belief in America as God's chosen people, with a mission to redeem the world; our secular project of making the world "safe for democracy." America was built on the notion that its vision was the future for the world and that its life was everlasting.

Our ancestors in the faith lived their lives in a land occupied by the Roman Empire. In all too many ways, it was a taxing situation. Not only did Rome occupy their land, but Rome also occupied their minds and daily habits. Jesus was a prophetic voice to those who struggled against Roman Empire and the religious authorities. The Bible, as a political and religious library, describes those ways. Now, America occupies other lands and many Christians attempt to come to an understanding of how to think and act in response to what many consider to be America's current imperial and religious folly. How can life be lived under such an occupation? So important was this theological task to the Apostles that they chose others to serve tables and assist the Hellenist widows in the community, so that they could give attention to the Word, i.e., do theology. How do we now, as our ancestors did then, think and practice a specific religious identity that is centered on the resurrection of Jesus? How is Jesus' resurrection, and not America, the good news?

To be clear, Jesus' death by execution came as a result of his lived life. Jesus' mission, especially in Matthew, was to "save people from their sins" amidst empire. Such sins of our ancestors had much to do with accommodating their lives to the ways and practices of Rome at the cost of abandoning the ways and practices of God or, in the case of the Pharisees, of using the law to maintain Jewish identity as an added burden to Roman rule (Mt 11). As Jesus spoke and acted publicly, others who were soon to become his opponents reacted to him publicly. Jesus spoke to his disciples about opposing violence as a way to overcome Rome, not only because violence would not work, but because violence and domination were Caesar's practices, not God's. Jesus was encountered by folks who had internalized Roman oppression (i.e., were occupied by the legion (*Cf.* Mk 5:9) and lived among the dead (Mt 8:28-33; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 4:33-37). Those thought of as sinners, people who were blind and lame and ill, came to him and were healed. His time was spent with folks on the margins. Our ancestors in faith were those on the margins of the Roman Empire. Are we on America's margins? If some of us are, then how do we negotiate our lives as people of faith within the American empire?

As an American and as a Christian my autobiography has been of two self-involving stories. One is the story of America founded in so many ways as a commercial venture, whose early adherents were people of faith who saw their task was to build a “holy nation.” Was the American errand into the wilderness an errant errand?

The other is the authoritative story of God as Blessed Trinity that is embedded in Holy Scripture. I confess that throughout my life I have given allegiance to both; though now, I do not pledge allegiance to the flag, but do confess allegiance to God. I have also come to know that the knot with empire cannot be fully untied. In the incarnation, Jesus tied God’s story with that of empire.

Our earliest ancestors in the faith did not attempt to make the Roman Empire better. Time and again, from place to place in that empire, they thought and worked hard and in diverse ways to distinguish themselves as a people, a resurrection people rising within empire. We need to remember that the early communities that heard the first gospels were very small. It is estimated that Matthew’s church numbered perhaps twenty; they lived as an alternative community on the edge of empire with a new worldview, a people whose minds and habits of heart were not knotted to the ways and means of Rome. Their experiences, which we discern in Scripture, are an essential guide⁴ for us as we attempt, perhaps once again in small worshipping communities, to “negotiate” our lives as Christians in and around but not of the “American Way.”

Lutheran Christians are simultaneously citizens who have a calling out of love to serve the neighbor in the public arena. Is there a Lutheran difference to approaching and acting in America? On our better days we speak, hear, discuss and live out the gospel with each other as church within America. On our better days, we understand that the Holy Spirit is alive in the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church, and in the governance of the world, among those “saints” who seek genuine justice. To make America better as an empire is to succumb to a pervasive theology of glory. Such a glory is challenged by a social ethic of the cross. Lutherans might point out that it is sinful to immerse ourselves in and accept without challenge the shaping and sentimental story that America offers with the iconic words—“liberty, freedom and justice for all”—if we do not also work for liberty, freedom and justice for all. More often than not, those words

⁴ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament. An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

are used in an unbiblical way by Americans and by the American church whose theology has been contaminated and stained by them.

Lutherans adhere to and practice a theology of the cross in that we see the reality of sinfulness and, on our better days, confess that we contribute to that reality. Because there is violence, there are still crosses; because there is the negation of life within the American story, there is the resurrection of Jesus, giving light in the darkness and the opportunity to rise and work within it, one step at a time.⁵ It is learning to live within the ambiguities of life. The light shining highlights the ambiguities. People who accept the responsibility to be accountable for advancing redemption, as seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, are oriented toward faith not sight, hope not consummation, love not abusive power. God's love is God's self-imposed weakness practiced by Jesus and sustained by the Spirit within the church as the community of saints. Lutherans acknowledge the presence and reality of that which negates and threatens life. Death, doubt and the demonic are still with us, but they do not curtail us. Luther never tired of talking about them and struggling with them in his calling for "neighbor love." Any faith that depends on denying all that darkness or the overcoming of darkness and evil is not at all faith in the biblical sense of the term; it is self-deception.

A recent publication of the Lutheran World Federation⁶ speaks to this very appropriately, because it is a step beyond the diagnosis and the rants in and around empire. It suggests a way to put into action theological beliefs and words that left alone turn vacuous. Guillermo Hansen writes of the "urgent need for the promoting of citizenship"⁷ by the people called church in the practice of political and civic vocation. Reading these words, I hear the "community organizer" within me saying that there are essential values of the gospel (love of neighbor) that also belong to and in civil society. Such values are lived out in our secular life through social institutions and offerings. Christians live out their political life by exercising citizenship. This citizenship is seen in giving of oneself to the needs of the other. It is a community of belonging, a community of giving and receiving. The people of God are a community of belong-

⁵ Douglas John Hall, *Christ and Empire*, paper presented to the United Church of Canada (2005).

⁶ Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability. LWF Documentation 50/04* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

⁷ Guillermo Hansen, "Neoliberal Globalization. A Casus Confessionis?," in *ibid.*, p. 173.

ing; we belong to one another and to God. As such, there is the practice of self-giving. Our self-interest lies in getting to know one another as community and in relating to communities beyond ourselves.

Obviously, this implies more than voting; voting is the least common denominator in a democracy. Citizenship is more than electoral politics. We will not wish or vote globalization away. Citizenship involves the organizing of values, money, time and power for the building of institutions across national boundaries for the interest and promotion of the common good; or what Luther called, “neighbor love.” This, along with the skills of organized communities (which local congregations are), makes protest more than a passing moment, but an ongoing activism that makes sense both globally and locally. Such organized communities give flesh to the hopeful words of the LWF publication mentioned above. When organized, citizens, whether they be Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu or secular, are trained to discern the “goings on” and the use of power for the sake of the common good. This is hard work. Such communities must have checks and balances to examine continuously their own sense of certainty, lest it slide into triumphalism.

The church as people of faith needs to be involved, indeed knotted, as citizens in politics, because politics is too wide, too shallow and too self-serving without it. For faithful people, negotiating is a call to collaborate in promoting citizenship that firmly rejects the practice of “going shopping.” Soon after 9/11, President Bush urged Americans to leave their homes and go shopping. There was no mention of gathering in churches, mosques, synagogues, clubs, etc. to begin to understand what had happened and why. He named a highly individualistic American activity: shopping. In other words, reacquaint yourself with the brands to which you belong, not reacquaint yourselves with the communities to which you belong.

In Matthew we are told that Jesus’ mission was to “save people from their sins.” Warren Carter suggests that sin, to be sure, has to do with the cross. It saves! Yet, from a narrative perspective, if Jesus saved primarily through the cross, then there would be little point to Jesus’ day-to-day life and his encounters with people caught by the powers of Rome and the inaction of the religious leaders. Saving from sin refers to the transformation of, or release from, social sins and to different patterns of social, economic and political interaction that oppress and dominate. It is a saving from the practice and habits of empire, and to be transformed into the politics of God’s compassion. It points clearly to the notion of what happens to religious folks who seek their power

and glory within electoral politics: they are promised a ride on the king's elevator, but in time, they are given the royal shaft.

We live in the world as “anticipatory communities”⁸ gathered in and around worship redeemed from its false practices. In so doing, we advance God's redemption through our participation in history. As people assembled and sent in God's name, other names and powers, named and unnamed, pale in significance. We are an interim people who announce that Christ has died, has risen and will come again. These are political words and worldviews. Jesus' ascension is an earthly good—Jesus ascends into our minds and the habits of our hearts and the ways in which we live in society. Early on in the Christian story, Rome referred to our ancestors living out this ascension of Jesus as a pestilence on the land. They knew that in its occupation of their land, Rome also occupied their minds and habits. In various and often diverse ways, they worked together to negotiate a way of life that followed Jesus' way, with no guarantee of being correct.

The truth of the Triune God tells us that Jesus, not empire, is our and the world's future; it is in God, not empire, that there is everlasting life. At the eschaton, it is Jesus who will come to judge the nations rather than the nations judging one another. And yet, as we are drawn into the words of the creed we see that this judgment will not be one of divine punishment but of Jesus' compassion, deliverance and redemption.

Warren Carter claims that the irony of the Gospel of Matthew is how God's salvation is depicted as the triumph of God's empire. Put another way, Matthew's Gospel is contaminated with the mindset of empire. We live in a world in which the question of the shape of the future has become one of absolute urgency. As people of God, we confess that if there is to be any future at all it will be shaped by Jesus,⁹ who has lived, died and will come again. This is Jesus' particularity within God's pluralistic world. The particularity of the gospel presents empire's propaganda with a social and theological challenge. In empire, religion all too often is a heavy yoke, but Jesus' yoke is light.¹⁰

⁸ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 143.

⁹ Theodore Jennings, Jr., *Loyalty to God: The Apostles' Creed in Life and Liturgy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

¹⁰ Matthew 11

Jesus was resurrected into the real world where streetwise dogs devoured the rotting flesh of victims of crucifixion. It is a world in which Jesus instructs our ancestors in the faith—and us—to be as wise (cunning) as serpents and as innocent as doves. He was aware of wolves.

Luther seems to have taken Jesus at his word. He would and could not shut his eyes to the things wrong with the world. He was aware of the deadly effects of the powers and principalities of his time, and the lack of compassion and justice. He knew first hand the sorrows of living. He counseled people to live by faith and in trust that God had raised Jesus from the dead. He knew the persuasive power of the living Word of God. No easy answers, no triumphant glory. He knew too that the less he turned in on himself and the more he opened himself to the power of the Spirit, the more he was grasped by the gospel of Jesus. He knew that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life; even though he stumbled on that pathway, all other ways were folly. Luther, a man excommunicated by the church and declared an outlaw by the emperor, lived his life on the edge. His thought provides a hopeful anticipation of God's transformative practices. He lived and wrote as a fugitive. His life and work make a difference to our vocation as confessors of the Blessed Trinity amidst empire. Our task, as Douglas John Hall has written, requires us to float the frail boat called church with eyes open to the real perils of the depths of living in this world, yet with courage and expectancy.¹¹

Our vocation, our ongoing autobiography, is to come to an understanding of who/whose/and what we are as a people called church amidst the ambiguities of empire that are buried deep within us. This includes wrestling with all that attempts to pull us away from the vocation of social critic within our times. While writing these reflections, I read historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's superb book, *Team of Rivals. The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, in which she reminds us of Lincoln's words, "With malice towards none, with charity towards all." The empire that America is today seems to have lost sight of these words.

America is in me and it is hard to erase the America within, especially an America that does not have confession and repentance as part of its political tradition. Therefore, confessing faith in the Triune God in the midst of empire is difficult. It draws upon the following essentials for conversation and action:

¹¹ Douglas Hall, *op. cit.* (note 3).

- Empire claims that it sees and enacts the future. Wrong! The future is the resurrected Jesus and the God who has raised him from the menacing power of death.
- Empire claims that there is a future in power and domination. Wrong! In domination there is no future.
- Empire claims that it is the giver and protector of life. Wrong! The Holy Spirit is the giver and protector of life and is alive in the church and world as it molds a communion of Saints.
- Empire claims that its power through victory is bringing the world to justice. Wrong! Justice is brought to the world by God.
- Empire claims it has everlasting life. Wrong! Everlasting life is in God. Empires decline and fall.
- Empires do not confess or repent. God's people do. And on the best of days, we promote forgiveness.

Our ancestors in the faith began their journey as a people who followed Jesus in small gatherings on the margins of an imperial society. In such gatherings, hymns were sung, prayers spoken and the Word preached, heard, discussed and lived out. On our journey, may we know Jesus as our companion, our daily bread.

What or Where is the Church

The Church as Confessing Koinonia of the Spirit

Cheryl M. Peterson

Introduction

What does it mean to be the church in the midst of empire? To some, this might seem secondary to the real issue at hand, viz, What is the church to do in the midst of empire? Why focus on the church's being or nature when we should be focusing on the church's response to empire? Addressing the failure of the German church in Nazi Germany, Gustaf Aulén has argued that "the principal reason for the passivity of the church is to be found in her individualistic interpretation of Christianity."¹ Indeed, the church was easily co-opted by both Enlightenment individualism and nationalism because it had lost its identity as church. This suggests that ecclesiology may not be so irrelevant to the question at hand.

To help answer the question, What does it mean to be the church in the midst of empire? we need to be know what we mean by "church." Perhaps because as Lutherans we have traditionally not emphasized ecclesiology in our theology, at least as a constructive endeavor (in other words, we are more clear on what the church is not, i.e., it is not an institution nor an hierarchy, etc.), this is possibly the more difficult question to address. Further, we have assumed a common ecclesiology among Lutherans, when in fact Lutherans at different times and places have operated with a variety of church concepts, many of which are beholden to older contexts and questions that no longer shape our lives and ministry in the same way. For example, the Norwegian Free Church model was imported to the US and took root in spite of the differences in context between nineteenth-century Norway and nineteenth-century America, not to mention the differences today.

Nicholas Healy's concept of blueprint ecclesiologies is helpful in addressing this issue. He writes,

¹ Cited in Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 244.

Ecclesiology is not about the business of finding the right way to think about the church, of developing a blueprint suitable for all times and places. Rather, I propose that its function is to aid the concrete church in performing its task of witness and pastoral care within what I call its “ecclesiological context.”²

Thus, ecclesiology is a systematic task that is necessarily contextual. But that does not mean that ecclesiology can be reduced to sociology. Even if we adopt the method of an “ecclesiology from below” (rather than “from above” by attempting to give an account of the “essential nature and structure of the church that transcends any given context,”³), and begin with the context and concrete ecclesial practices, we still can (and must) inquire into the church’s being. In what follows, I shall explore “ecclesial entry points” for Lutherans concerned with what it means to be the church in the midst of empire.⁴

Lutherans and other Protestants are often wary of speaking of the church in ontological terms, that is, the relation of the church’s being to God’s being and how this plays out in the structures of the institutional church. Historically, the Protestant concern had to do with the Thomistic doctrine of the analogy of being, not with the question of ontology itself, which simply means accounting for something’s nature or existence. Even so, the debates over ontology continue to plague discussions of Lutheran ecclesiology.⁵ Too often, the ontological is contrasted with the functional: either the church is defined by what it does, or better yet, what God does (i.e., what happens in it when God speaks through the Word), or else the church is defined by who God is (i.e., by analogy in terms of God’s own being).

² Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 38.

³ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History, Vol. 1: Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum Press, 2004), p. 19.

⁴ The term “ecclesial entry points” comes from the ecumenical consultation in 2002 that addressed neoliberal globalization with participants who were Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, as well as Lutheran. See “Ecclesial Entry Points, Communique of an Ecumenical Consultation, 2002,” in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion, Responsibility, and Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization. LWF Documentation 50/2004*, (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004), pp. 133-134.

⁵ Paper given by Paul Collins (University of Chichester), at the Ecclesiological Investigations Group at the 2006 AAR, in which he compared an “ontological concept” of communion that relates to the immanent Trinity (as, for example in the theology of John Zizioulas), to an “event of communion” as the basis for ecclesiological understanding. I suggest that one can have an “event ontology,” that is, an explanation of the being of something in terms of a series of events.

The traditional Lutheran position understands the church's being in terms of the Word of God. The church is defined as a creature of the Word. Its being is rooted in what happens when the assembly gathers—what later Lutheran theologians refer to as the “Word event.” According to Christoph Schwöbel, this emphasis is developed most systematically in “Concerning the Ministry (1523),” which culminates in Luther’s statement that “since the Church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a Church.”⁶ Because of this paradigm’s connection to the Confessing Church movement,⁷ this might strike us as the most obvious ecclesial entry point for Lutherans to turn to in the midst of empire.

However, a new ecumenical paradigm has emerged that interprets the being of the church in terms of God’s being, which is communion. Here communion is understood in terms of a relational, rather than substance ontology. Ecclesial communion is modeled on the idea of the communion of persons within the Trinity and is experienced horizontally as well as vertically, pointing to “organic relationships, mutual participation, and the imparting of life benefits” in the body of Christ.⁸ In spite of its widespread use among Lutheran ecumenists (including the Lutheran World Federation), it is still met with suspicion by some Lutherans who are troubled by any suggestion of ontological realism with reference to the church’s self-understanding.⁹

This paper will briefly explore each paradigm for a Lutheran ecclesiology in the midst of empire (specifically with the US context in mind). I shall then suggest, as an alternative to these two concepts, a third that draws on aspects of both—the church as a confessing *koinonia* of the Spirit. Elsewhere I have called this an “ecclesiology of the third article.”¹⁰ This concept is also Trinitarian and suggests a more central role for the

⁶ Luther, “Concerning the Ministry” (1523), in Conrad Bergendoff (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 37, cited in Christoph Schwöbel, “The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers,” in Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (eds), *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 122.

⁷ I recognize that the Confessing Church movement is not as homogenous as is often presented, so I do not suggest that this paradigm reflects the ecclesiology of all Confessing Church theologians (e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

⁸ Karen L. Bloomquist, “Engaging Economic Globalization as Churches,” in *Ecumenical Review* 53/4 (2001), p. 496.

⁹ For example, Dennis Bielfeldt, “Options on Church (2005),” at www.wordalone.org/ppt/bielfeldt.ppt (accessed 10 August 2007).

¹⁰ Cheryl M. Peterson, “Whither Lutheran Ecclesiology?” in *Trinity Seminary Review* 27/2 (2006), pp. 107-120.

Holy Spirit.¹¹ The Holy Spirit is not only the power to confess and speak prophetically,¹² but is the person of the Trinity who calls, enlightens and sanctifies the church into being a “communion of saints” that lives out the forgiveness of sins. The first confession the church makes is to God (of sin), and then to the world (of the life-giving power of the gospel).

Further, I suggest that the method appropriate to this ecclesial entry point is narrative. Rather than getting bogged down in the “ontological versus functional” impasse that seems to plague Lutheran ecclesiology, I suggest that we can best discover the being of the church through the stories in Scripture that narrate the church’s identity (especially Acts of the Apostles). The church is a *koinonia*, a people created “to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.”¹³ In other words, the right question to ask is not, What is the church? but, Who is the church?¹⁴ This approach also incorporates positive aspects of the other two paradigms: the primacy of God’s acting, creating the church through Word and Spirit, as well as that the church’s identity is found in its relationship to God as a communion of persons.

The church as event

When asked for a “Lutheran concept of the church,” most Lutherans appeal to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”¹⁵ Several twentieth-century Lutheran theologians brought a Barthian interpretation to bear on this

¹¹ See Stephan Bevens, “God Inside Out: Notes toward a Missionary Theology of the Holy Spirit,” at www.sedos.org/english/Bevens.html (accessed 10 August 2007).

¹² See Cynthia Moe-Lobeda’s article in this volume.

¹³ “The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called, and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Constitution (2005 edition), Section 4.01, adopted by the Constituting Convention of the ELCA (30 April 1987), at www.elca.org/secretary/constitutions/ConstitutionsBylawsandContinuingResolutions2005.pdf (accessed 10 August 2007).

¹⁴ Michael Jenkins also raises this as an appropriate question to guide ecclesiology, for it is a question that encompasses both sides of ecclesial existence, i.e., the church’s divine and human nature. See Michael Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Postmodern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 94.

¹⁵ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 42 [German text].

article, which resulted in the idea of the church as a Word event. For example, Edmund Schlink writes that this article provides a sufficient definition of the church that tells us two things: first, the church is a community of believers; and secondly, this community is “defined by what is done in its midst.”¹⁶ Or in Kent Knutson’s words, “the church is constituted by ‘event’.”¹⁷

This understanding of the church begins with the Word: God’s address to humanity in the living Christ and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The “event” is the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accord with this gospel. The essence of the gospel is the verbal proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and the administration of the sacraments in their actual celebration in the congregation of believers. These two marks of the church constitute an event that presupposes a reception by the community in whose midst they are occurring.

This has become a major paradigm in Lutheran theology, especially in the twentieth century, and continues to be presented by many as the traditional Lutheran view of the church. For the purposes of this essay, however, I am most interested in exploring this concept of the church as a resource for an ecclesiology in the midst of empire. Here it seems pertinent to reflect on how this ecclesiological paradigm became a resource for the “times of confessing” during the German church struggle, which was primarily a struggle against the “German Christian” party, rather than the Nationalist Socialist state.¹⁸ Edmund Schlink spoke of the struggle in terms of reclaiming the confession of the true gospel in the face of false teachings. In combining Christian teachings with the tenets of National Socialism, the German Christians had “camouflaged”

¹⁶ See Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 198; Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 126 and 135; and Kent S. Knutson, “The Community of Faith and the Word: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church in Contemporary Lutheranism,” Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1961. The idea of the church as “event” comes from Reformed Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who proposed that the church is continually being recreated by the event of revelation. See Karl Barth, “The Church—the Living Congregation of the Living Word Jesus Christ” (1948), in W. A. Visser’t Hooft (ed.), *Man’s Disorder and God’s Design I* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), pp. 67-76. “The Church *is* when it takes place, and it takes place in the form of a sequence and nexus of definite human activities.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV, part 1, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (eds) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), p. 652. Italics are his.

¹⁷ Knutson, *ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁸ Arthur Cochrane, *The Church’s Confession Under Hitler*, 2nd ed., Pittsburgh Reprint Series, no. 4 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976), p. 19.

their persecution of the church and the Jews, by claiming to represent “positive Christianity” against “godless Bolshevism.”¹⁹

The German church struggle brought to light the truth about the faith of the German Christians. Their apostasy was evident both in terms of their easy conscience in the face of persecution of others and of the loss of the sense of urgency of the gospel. The church was revealed to be little more than an empty shell, co-opted by the political powers, and devoid of the living gospel. The state church had lost its identity and moorings. What was needed was a dynamic ecclesiology tied not to natural theology or orders of creation, but solely to the event of God’s Word as address and confession in response to that Word.

In the preface to his classic textbook, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, Schlink wrote that

Temptations and heresies take on new forms as history moves, but the Christ who saves us and whom we are called upon to confess remains one and the same. For this reason the confessing act of the individual and the Confession of the church belong together.²⁰

The confessing act is a response to the gospel, a spoken and written act by the church in response to the grace it has received through Word and sacrament. This confession must be made to God (as a confession of sin) and to the world (as a public witness to Jesus Christ) to demonstrate that the world does not have a prior claim. The church’s confession is a sign of its struggle against the powers of evil. According to Knutson, it follows that

When thus spoken to God and the world, the confession makes the church real and actual. When the confession is proclaimed, the church becomes visible, takes its place in the forces of history, and accomplishes its call. Further, it makes the one church real.²¹

Thus, in this first paradigm, the church’s being is rooted in the act or event of God’s addressing humanity by the Word and of our proclaiming

¹⁹ Edmund Schlink, “The Witness of the German Lutheran Church Struggle,” in *Man’s Disorder and God’s Design, The Amsterdam Assembly Series, Vol. 1: The Universal Church in God’s Design* (New York: World Council of Churches/Harper & Brothers, 1948), pp. 98-97.

²⁰ Schlink, *op. cit.* (note 16), p. v.

²¹ Knutson, *op. cit.* (note 16), p. 281.

the gospel and confessing God's Word to the world. There is much in this paradigm to commend it for an ecclesiology in the midst of empire, in particular, the act of confession. This goes back to the time of the Reformation and continues to be used by theologians in situations of oppression, such as the German church struggle, South Africa under apartheid and Latin America as it faces the effects of globalization.²² In such situations, the term "confession" has come to refer to those particular situations of political or religious persecution which require a public defense of the gospel (*status confessionis*). In Robert W. Bertram's words, "those singular occasions when Christians have had to disobey secular authority, including the church's own, in order to testify that for the integrity of the church of Jesus Christ his one gospel-and-sacraments is authority enough."²³ The act of confession includes both acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Lord of the church (which rules out any human lords, per the Barmen Declaration), and also recognizing the ways in which we have not been faithful to God's Word and claim on our lives, but have allowed ourselves to be co-opted by other powers and principalities. The act of confession itself can be a form of resistance to empire.

Paul Wee appeals to the example of the Confessing Church in his recent book on the calling of the church in the midst of empire.²⁴ Wee is careful not to draw too fine a parallel between Nazi Germany and the US today, but notes his concern over the close relationship between the religious right and the Bush administration. This perhaps points to the first difficulty with this paradigm for a Lutheran ecclesiology in the midst of empire: the Confessing Church was a movement within a state church system that was being co-opted by a tyrannical state for its own purposes. For the ELCA, which is not a part of the religious right (at least institutionally, even if some individuals agree with their agenda), does the paradigm of church as "event" or "confessing movement" help us to think about how we are to be the church in the midst of empire?

A second concern is raised by Guillermo Hansen. He points out that the Confessing Church's agenda was more inter-ecclesial, that is, aimed more at the German Church than at the National Socialist government.

²² Guillermo Hansen, "Neoliberal Globalization: A Casus Confessionis?," in *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability, op. cit.* (note 4), p. 163.

²³ Robert W. Bertram, "Confessing the Faith of the Church," in Carl E. Braaten (ed.), *The New Church Debate: Issues facing American Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 124.

²⁴ Paul Wee, *American Destiny and the Calling of the Church, Lutheran Voices Series* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006).

The idea of a “state of confession” therefore is limited as it relates to the church resisting the state (much less neoliberal globalization); it requires a clearer distinction between the two reigns.

Finally, although the priority of God’s act in creating the church is protected by this paradigm, to speak of the church’s “being” in terms of event raises questions about continuity and community. This was a criticism Kent Knutson raised against Barth’s dynamic understanding of the church: that it is in danger of being a “discontinuous ‘gathered’ community” or “succession of events without any real continuity.”²⁵ Does the church exist only when it is being “actualized” in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments? What about that community’s existence outside of worship—in the world? The zeal to protect the primacy of God’s word in speaking of the church’s existence can lead to a thin ecclesiology, a thin sense of the church as a community called into being by the Word.²⁶

The church as communion

A second possible ecclesial entry point for a Lutheran ecclesiology in the midst of empire is that of communion. Not only has communion emerged as the dominant paradigm for ecumenical ecclesiology today, it also has been adopted by the Lutheran World Federation for its ecclesial self-understanding. In 2003, the Tenth Assembly of the LWF added “communion” to its title to make it explicit that it is a communion of churches. The LWF had previously explored the concept in a 1996 document, “Toward a Lutheran Understanding of Communion.” The document affirmed that the foundation of communion in the church is the communion of the divine life. Ecclesial communion is modeled on the communion of the three persons within the Trinity. Each person of the Trinity maintains a distinctive identity, but through mutual interpenetration (*perichoresis*) among the persons, shares a unity of being and will.

²⁵ Knutson, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp. 273, 302.

²⁶ As an example, see Mary Jane Haemig’s address to the 2005 WordAlone Network Theological Conference, where she states: “When Lutherans talk about the church they should talk about what’s happening—not about who’s in charge or even about who is there.” A statement like this makes it sound like the people who are called into relationship with God by the Word and how they live out the faith are epiphenomenal, that all that matters is the speaking and hearing of the Word, and not the community that is created by this event. Mary Jane Haemig, “God be praised, a seven-year old child knows what the church is,” at www.wordalone.org/docs/wa-haemig-2005.shtml (accessed 15 August 2007).

The being of the church is thereby related to God's being, but the substantialist metaphysics of a Thomistic analogy of being is replaced with a relational ontology, an ontology of communion. Thus, ecclesial communion is both vertical and horizontal: it is interpreted in terms of a perichoretic participation (*koinonia*) in the Triune God, whereby believers are brought into union with the Triune God (and one another) through their incorporation into the body of Christ through participation in the Lord's Supper. Thus this paradigm retrieves both the sacramental and relational understandings of communion: i.e., communion means participation in the Triune God through the Eucharist, and by extension, participation in the body of Christ, the church.

Because of its emphasis on participation as union with God and one another, communion ecclesiology has been heralded by its proponents as a promising ecclesiological concept for enabling Christian unity, which in turn is a sign of the communion that God desires to have with all people.²⁷ The church's nature and mission, then, are drawn from an understanding of God's being as a communion of persons.

The 1996 LWF document calls the church to live in accordance with this communion that is a gift from God and based in God's self-giving nature and action. Communion is described as a process of deeper understanding, mutual recognition and sharing between distinct "others" (for example, ecclesial traditions, socioeconomic and racial groups, etc.) and the spiritual and material gifts that each brings, leading to greater and deeper unity in both the ecclesial and human communities that reflect the perichoretic union of the Trinity. As a communion, the church is also called to proclaim to a "threatened and broken world in word and deed, through the witness of its life that God's salvation, hope, and reconciliation have come into our midst in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."²⁸

The 2001 LWF working paper, "Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion," published along with several background papers exploring the concept of *communio* as a basis for ecclesial resistance to

²⁷ See George Tavad, "Considerations on an Ecclesiology of Koinonia," in *One in Christ* 31 (1995), pp. 42-51; Susan Wood, "Ecclesial Koinonia in Ecumenical Dialogues," in *One in Christ* 30 (1994), pp. 124-145; Günther Gassmann, "The Church is a Communion of Churches," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 93-105.

²⁸ "Toward a Lutheran Understanding of Communion," in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology. LWF Documentation 42/1997* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997), p. 23.

neoliberal globalization in the LWF book, *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability*,²⁹ asserts that

this communion becomes an embodied sign of the interdependence of all life, [and that] in communion, we are bonded together so that when one suffers, all suffer (1 Cor 12:26). The sharing of spiritual and material gifts, which is implicit in communion, cannot be isolated from examining the causes of inequities in wealth and joining with others to change such.³⁰

As an ecclesial entry point for being the church in the midst of empire, communion also has much to commend it. It offers an alternative communal vision to that of empire. Communion ecclesiology offers a theological foundation not only for ecclesial unity but for the unity of humankind by overcoming and reconciling differences. Guillermo Hansen shows that a concept of *communio* was as much at the heart of Bonhoeffer's theological vision as was *confessio* in his open resistance to the state's racist and discriminatory policy regarding Jewish membership in the churches. This is so because such a policy posed a threat to the essential aspect of the church's life as *koinonia*.³¹ The concept of communion can be a basis for the church's resistance to attempts of an American or global empire to seek control by pitting one group of people against another.

In spite of its Trinitarian basis, the central image of communion ecclesiology is the body of Christ. Although we tend to think of this as a "high and strong" ecclesiological image, Joerg Rieger suggests that here "high" runs counter to the top-down flow of power of the Roman Empire. He writes,

Paul's image of the church as Christ's body says as much: when he discusses the "weaker" and "less honorable" members of the body, he points out that "God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member" (1 Cor 12:24).³²

²⁹ *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability*, *op. cit.* (note 4).

³⁰ "Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion: A Working Paper of the LWF (2001)," in *ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

³¹ Hansen, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 165.

³² Rieger, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 51. In contrast, "The fundamental problem with empires, including the Roman one, is not that they happen to endorse morally reprehensible behavior but that they pursue their own logic of top-down power and thus are built on the back of the weakest," p. 54.

In the context of Paul's other writings, Rieger suggests that this is in fact a revolutionary image that we should be interpreting kenotically.

Nonetheless, the image of the body and its concomitant concern for unity can and has led the church to focus on its internal life and to develop hierarchical structures to ensure unity, using an appeal to unity as an ideological weapon to suppress disagreements and movements calling for change. A working paper of the LWF cautions that "*Communio* can become a closed, static reality. It can also embody oppressive realities of power If *communio* becomes too focused on the body of Christ imagery, questions of power and authority (and debates over who is the head) can dominate."³³

The ideal of unity (especially rooted as it is in the immanent Trinity) can become idealistic, leading to the practical problem of oppressive structures, as well as to the twin problems of seeking the true church in idealized, utopian, countercultural communities and associating actual historical churches with the reality of sin. If the church is an icon of the Trinity, how does the church deal with the concrete reality of its own sin? Is *perichoresis* the appropriate model for understanding a communion that includes reconciliation not only of diversity and difference, but of sin and brokenness?³⁴ For the church that lives in the midst of empire,

³³ "Communion, Responsibility, Accountability," in *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability*, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 269. The concern to preserve hierarchy and authority, although clearly present in some forms of *communio* ecclesiology, is challenged by other forms of *communio* ecclesiology which offer a more egalitarian picture of the church as modeled on a doctrine of the social trinity. See Dennis M. Doyle's fine survey of the breadth of communion ecclesiologies, in Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

³⁴ It should be pointed out that where Luther uses "communion" to describe the church (in his "Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament and the Brotherhoods" (1519)), it is not based on a concept of Trinitarian *perichoresis*. In language reminiscent of the "happy exchange" in "On the Freedom of a Christian" (1520), Luther speaks of an "interchange of blessings" by which Christ takes upon himself our form; i.e., our sin and infirmity, and we take on his form, i.e., his righteousness. Communion therefore includes the forgiveness of sins. This has implications for the communion among members of the body of Christ. Luther goes on to state, "Again, through this same love, we are to be changed and to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own; we are to take upon ourselves their form and their necessity, and all the good that is within our power we are to make theirs, that they may profit from it ... in this way we are to be changed into one another and are made into a community by love." This is a reconciling work by which sin is overcome and barriers are healed, both in the human/divine and the human/human relationship. Christians are called to live out this horizontal aspect of communion in both spiritual and physical ways, from bearing one another's burdens and afflictions to sharing material goods with those in need, as St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:23. Luther recognizes how difficult this calling is: "Now if one will make the afflictions of Christ and all Christian his own, defend the truth, oppose unrighteousness, and help bear the needs of the innocent and the sufferings of all Christians, then he will find affliction and adversity enough, over and above that which is his evil nature, the world, the devil and sin daily inflict on him." Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), pp. 56-58.

the need to recognize and confess sin is of the utmost importance, as the church will continually be tempted by the power of the empire.

The church as confessing *koinonia* of the Spirit

As ecclesial entry points, event and communion enabled theologians to articulate ecclesiologies that addressed concerns and goals raised by a particular context. In the case of the Confessing Church, this meant calling the church back to its confession of Christ, because this basis for its identity was in danger of being lost in the apostasy of the German Christians. For ecumenists, the concern is to enable visible Christian unity as a sign of God's intention for the world. If the function of any ecclesiology is to aid the concrete church in performing its tasks of witness and pastoral care in its context, we must consider which ecclesial entry point will be most helpful in the context of an emerging empire, where the stated goal is resistance to empire.

I propose a third ecclesial paradigm that develops the second (communion) in light of the Holy Spirit as the ecclesial entry point, but in ways that also draw in elements of the first (confession). The concept of *koinonia* or communion tends to focus almost solely on the Pauline image of the Body of Christ and the communion and unity that we share through our common participation in the breaking of the bread (1 Cor 10:16-17). However, in the New Testament, *koinonia* is related not only to Christ, but also to the Holy Spirit, for example, in Paul's greeting in 2 Cor 13:13, and narratively in Acts 2:42 in terms of the *koinonia* that follows the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. A narrative approach to *koinonia*—one that “starts with the Spirit”³⁵—offers an ecclesial entry point that is still Trinitarian but that helps to avoid the ontological versus functional impasse.

A narrative method is one that draws on literary theories or genres for theological reflection. Although associated especially with Yale theologians such as George Lindbeck, according to L. Gregory Jones, “There is not so much a distinct position known as ‘narrative theology’ as there is a variety of ways in which theologians argue for the significance of narrative for theological reflection.”³⁶ I propose a narrative approach to

³⁵ The phrase is taken from D. Lyle Dabney, “Starting with the Spirit: Why the Last Should Now Be First,” in Stephen Pickard and Gordon Preece (eds), *Starting with the Spirit: Task of Theology Today II* (Australian Theological Forum, 2001), pp. 3-27.

³⁶ L. Gregory Jones, “Narrative Theology,” in Alister E. McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclo-*

ecclesiology that inquires into the identity of the church by considering its place in the scriptural narrative, in terms of its character, relationships, purpose and goal or destiny. What is the character of this people called “the church”? What is the church’s relationship to the God who has called it into a new life through Christ’s death and resurrection? What purpose does the church have in God’s intended destiny for all of creation?

I posit that a narrative approach ecclesiology is especially appropriate for the church in the US today. Allen Hilton appeals to narrative as the appropriate method for exploring the church’s identity, arguing that communities (even nations) take on a story-formed character.³⁷ He goes on to contrast the “nation’s story” with the “church’s story.” However, it is not as simple as telling the story of the church, for as Neil Ormerod states, “The story of the Church will include the story of the stories of the church.”³⁸ Further, the stories of nation and church have intertwined to create a meta-narrative of a Christian America. It is well known that the Puritans arrived in the hope of establishing a Christian society based on biblical laws and spoke of America’s election through the covenant and role in God’s providence.³⁹ What is less well known is the role that the voluntary principle played in sustaining a “Christian society” after the legal disestablishment of the Puritan commonwealths.⁴⁰

By incorporating two related ideas—the church as a voluntary association of believers who chose to belong for reasons of their own, and the free cooperation of congregations, denominations and individuals for promoting common causes in a republic—the voluntary principle shaped a distinctive “American ecclesiology” with an anthropological (rather than

pedia of Modern Thought (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 395-398.

³⁷ Allen R. Hilton, “Who are We? Being Christian in an Age of Americanism,” in Wes Avram (ed.), *Anxious About Empire* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 150.

³⁸ Neil Ormerod, “Structure of Systematic Ecclesiology,” in *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), pp. 3-30. Ormerod holds that all systematic ecclesiology should have a narrative structure and will tell the story of the church from its origins to the present.

³⁹ Ernest Cassara, “The Development of America’s Sense of Mission,” in Lois Parkinson Zamora (ed.), *The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), pp. 64-96; and Perry Miller, “The Puritan State and the Puritan Society,” in Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 141-152.

⁴⁰ Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). The voluntary principle contributed to the victory of religious liberty and became a means for churches not only to survive but even flourish without state support in the new American colonies. See also James Luther Adams, “The Voluntary Principle,” in Elwyn Smith (ed.), *Religion of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 217-246.

theological) foundation.⁴¹ The nineteenth century opened with the goal of maintaining the Christian character of the nation by voluntary means, and “the mission of Christian faith was virtually being identified with national destiny, with the progress of civilization.”⁴² Sidney Mead argues that after the Civil War, the US had in effect two religions, and “that the prevailing Protestant ideology represented a syncretistic mingling of the two.” One was the religion of the denominations articulated in terms of Protestant orthodoxy but practiced in terms of pietistic revivalism. The other was the religion of the democratic society, rooted in the rationalism of the Enlightenment, articulated in terms of the special destiny of America to be an example to other nations, and practiced in terms of the free-enterprise system that worked to improve society materially.⁴³

Although some theologians were decrying the “end of the Protestant era” by the mid-twentieth century, World War II brought a new revival of religion. It was not so much a “revival of historic Christianity as it was a revival of interest a ‘religion-in-general,’ more specifically ‘a religion of democracy’ ... in part a sociological replacement of the old dream of a Christian America.”⁴⁴ The experience of World War II was cast in terms of a fight for democracy and freedom. This civil religion gave a new impetus and articulation to America’s special role in providence as a nation under God’s law called to carry out God’s will on earth, particularly by sharing the “light” of democracy with other nations.⁴⁵ Although today many mainline denominations are facing the disestablishment of a *de facto* Christendom in North America, there is a revival of a new kind of American civil religion in the religious right, which is troubling because of its close relationship with empire.

As Allen Jorgenson and others point out, the fear that drives empire is the penetration of its borders by those it deems “other” who allegedly do not value the American ideals of “freedom and democracy.” Empire thus

⁴¹ C. C. Goen has argued that the voluntary principle made inevitable this anthropological foundation for the church, going so far as to say that the American churches’ accommodation to American culture has been a “loss of the doctrine of the church itself.” C. C. Goen, “Ecclesiocracy without Ecclesiology: Denominational Life in America,” in *Religion in Life* 48 (1979), pp. 17-31.

⁴² Handy, *op. cit.* (note 40), pp. 110, 111.

⁴³ See Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 135, 141.

⁴⁴ Martin Marty as is cited in Handy, *op. cit.* (note 40). See also Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 12-18.

⁴⁵ See other essays in this volume for a discussion of what constitutes this emerging empire. My point can be made whether one sees America itself as the emerging empire or as a major player in a decentralized transnational global reality described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

claims borders greater than its own and, in light of its stated goals, ironically establishes “borders within as a means of control” to squelch dissent.⁴⁶ An empire is driven by its own self-determined destiny—self-protection through the spread of “democracy and freedom”—and seeks ways to accomplish that end, using economic, military and ideological means.⁴⁷

In order to be the church in the midst of empire, the church must reclaim the biblical stories that give it identity. A way to appropriate a narrative method is to ask after the character of this people called the church, its relationship to the God who calls the church into being, and its purpose in God’s intended destiny for all of creation. The church knows that its true mission and destiny are not to spread American values to the rest of the world, but to bear witness to the kingdom of God which has already broken into the world through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. The church receives its distinctive character from the resurrection; as Paul teaches, this is an act of the Holy Spirit.

This suggests a shift in focus from the immanent Trinity to the economic Trinity, as the starting point for exploring the church’s being and identity. Neil Ormerod points out that while the attempt to link ecclesiology to the Trinity by means of *communio* and *perichoresis* is admirable it is problematic because

the divine unity is where God is most different from God’s creatures, even the creation that we call church. What is first in our knowledge of the triune nature are the divine missions of Word and Spirit, which in turn ground our knowledge of the processions and persons of the Trinity.⁴⁸

If we start with the Spirit in the biblical narrative, we see the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11) and blew on the nascent church at Pentecost. As a down payment of our final destiny, the Spirit is the first fruits and power of new life, forgiveness and faith for the church in its pilgrim existence. The Spirit brings the church into being as *koinonia*, whose destiny is the kingdom of God, whose character is new life and

⁴⁶ See Allen Jorgenson’s article in this volume, “Mutuality, Kenosis and Spirited Hope in the Face of Empire.” See also Claes G. Ryn, “The Ideology of American Empire,” in *Orbis* 47 (Summer 2003), pp. 383-397.

⁴⁷ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 17 September 2002, at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html (accessed 15 August 2007).

⁴⁸ Ormerod, *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 29. See also Stephen Bevans, “God Inside Out: Notes toward a Missionary Theology of the Spirit,” at www.sedos.org/english/Bevans.html (accessed 15 August 2007).

whose purpose is to bear witness to the power of life over death. The New Testament tells the story of a people who are called into communion and mission by the power of the resurrection. They are being raised daily to a new creation, which also requires daily dying to sin through confession. The Spirit creates *koinonia*, but as John Reumann points out, it is less a synonym for church (except by way of 1 Cor 10:16) than it is a description of its character or way of being in the world. It refers

to that which believers are called, namely fellowship with Christ and the Spirit, participating in the blessings of Jesus' death and being a part of Christ's body, through faith, with responsibilities for mission, care of the saints locally and in Jerusalem, and hospitality and benevolence.⁴⁹

In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther also describes the church in pneumatological terms as a holy community that lives by the gift of the forgiveness of sins. "The Spirit first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ."⁵⁰ Believers are simultaneously incorporated into the holy community as "a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses."⁵¹ The Holy Spirit also enlightens the church with its gifts and blessings (foremost of which is the forgiveness of sins), and in doing so sanctifies the church as an eschatological "holy people," a "communion of saints" to continue the Spirit's work until the last day.

As a *koinonia*, the church is oriented toward life and "the other." As Alan Hilton writes, "The premise of other-interested life and conduct is the central identifying characteristic of Christianity, embedded in the primal narratives of creation and cross."⁵² To be the church for others means that the church moves with vulnerability beyond its own borders, following Jesus in self-giving service. It moves outside of its own ethnic circles to bring good news and healing to a broken world, to feed the hungry and the marginalized. All of these practices are counter to the self-serving and protective

⁴⁹ John Reumann, "Koinonia in Scripture: Survey of Biblical Texts," in Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann (eds), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993. Faith and Order Paper No. 166* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications), p. 51.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 436.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁵² Hilton, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 154.

policies of American imperialism. N. T. Wright envisions the church in the midst of empire as a network of colonial outposts, subversive in its

claims to be the reality of which Caesar's empire is the parody; it claims to be modeling the genuine humanness, not least the justice and peace, and the unity across traditional racial and cultural barriers, of which Caesar's empire boasted.⁵³

We find all of these themes in the Acts of the Apostles. It is an untapped resource for the church to reclaim its identity as a *koinonia* of the Spirit in order to resist empire. Historically, Lutherans have been suspicious of the Acts of the Apostles because of its association with church growth movements and Pentecostalism, fearing it leads to a theology of glory. But in the narrative of Acts, the Spirit not only is present where there is harmony and growth, but also convicting members who let sin and greed prevail rather than putting *koinonia* first, as the story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates (Acts 5:3).⁵⁴

In contrast to empire "theology" that is based on fear of the other, in Acts we see glimpses of what this new *koinonia* of the Spirit is like. The movement of the Spirit drives the apostles to cross ethnic boundaries and lines of social class and wealth to create a new community that does not fear the other. We can see the Spirit at work nurturing communities to resist the kingdoms of this world throughout many of the narratives of the New Testament: for example, the *paraklete* in John's Gospel who has come to "prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn 16:7-8) and the word of conviction that the Spirit brings to the churches for their complicity with empire in Revelation 2-3.

Conclusion: Resisting empire as a confessing koinonia

If the church is to resist empire, it must first know who it is. It must learn the stories that have shaped its identity both negatively and positively, the story of Christian America and of empire, and the stories in

⁵³ N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," at www.etinquiry.org/publications/wright.htm (accessed 15 August 2007).

⁵⁴ In his catechetical writings, Martin Luther makes no such distinction between cross and Spirit; the Spirit is the one who brings us to the crucified Christ. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, in her article in this volume, reminds us that Luther speaks of the Spirit in terms of "bold, undaunted courage."

Scripture that give the church its identity as a confessing *koinonia* of the Spirit. Indeed, Natalie Watson suggests that it is in the sharing such stories that we are the church.⁵⁵

Mark Lewis Taylor writes that

the heart of this gospel is that there is a way of existing in the world, which combines justice and love in such a way that power is released for resisting and transforming a world of suffering and oppressed peoples and creation, even under the comprehensively threatening powers of empire.⁵⁶

However, he disparages that this way of life can be found in the church today, seeing it at work instead in contemporary counter-imperial movements, many of which are secular.⁵⁷

What if the church lived into the stories that give us our identity as a *koinonia* of the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead? What if we gathered for worship each week and lived as if our proclamation of “Christ is risen!” was more than a pious belief? What if we really lived as if the Spirit indeed was making us into new creations and working to bring life out of death, reconciliation out of sin and estrangement? When the church allows its story to be shaped by the stories of Scripture, then the church as a *koinonia* of the Spirit can and will bear witness to the life-giving power of the Spirit in the midst of a death-dealing empire. I conclude with two examples of how the church in the US can live into these stories and embody its identity as a confessing *koinonia* of the Spirit.

Many of us take for granted the power of the liturgy to shape the stories by which we live. In April 2004, when news of the abuse and torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison made headlines, I was serving as a parish pastor in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Normally we began our worship service

⁵⁵ Natalie K. Watson, in her work on feminist ecclesiology, offers a narrative theology that emphasizes the continuing story of the church, told not only by those past saints who offered their lives in witness to God (in the scriptural narrative or later tradition), but also by women struggling to reclaim the authority that the patriarchal church has denied them for so long: “That women, men, and children begin to find spaces in which they can flourish and live in relationships of justice, is rooted in the story of the Triune God sharing God’s own being with humankind and in doing so sharing their being.” The “larger story” in which these are told is the story of the incarnation. The story of our humanity is rooted in the story of God’s sharing the struggle and pain of humanity in the incarnation. See Natalie K. Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology, Introductions in Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), p. 118.

⁵⁶ Mark Lewis Taylor, “Theology and Global Empire Today,” in *Reformed World*, vol. 56, no. 4 (December 2006), p. 418.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

with a general confession of sins from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. That Sunday, however, we decided that we must “call a thing what it is” and as Americans offer a prayer of confession for these terrible atrocities committed by our nation’s military. There was a sober tenor to the rest of the service and the coffee hour afterwards. Many members—both those who supported the war and those who did not—expressed their appreciation to be able to make an act of confession at this moment in our nation’s history as a community together in our common liturgy. Pastors and leaders need to take these singular moments when they happen, name the sins of empire and expose the narrative for what it is, that we may yet, in the words of James Baldwin, “achieve our country.”

In Milwaukee, I also learned about congregation-based community organizing (CBCO), a way for congregations to resist empire by organizing from below. A rapidly growing phenomenon that remains largely beneath the radar screen of the national media, CBCO “is a deliberate process of bringing religious congregations together around shared concerns and values to challenge the economic, political, and social systems to act justly.”⁵⁸ Whereas empire thrives on a

dispirited sense of isolation and helplessness, on the frivolous distractions of consumerism and mass culture ... [CBCO offers] the shaping of a community in which people to learn to claim their power, to engage in sociopolitical analysis and discourse, to take control of their neighborhoods and influence their cities, and to propel their values and interests powerfully into the public arena.⁵⁹

Recent CBCO efforts in Milwaukee have ensured that low-income families will benefit from a new publicly financed development in the city—a partial means of addressing the massive job losses in a global economy. The Gamaliel Civil Rights of Immigrants Campaign works tirelessly to secure the release of immigrants who are unjustly imprisoned, such as Salim Yassir, a Palestinian, who had entered the US as a stowaway and

⁵⁸ This definition is given by Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART), one of four national networks of CBCOs which are active in the US, at www.thedartcenter.org/community.html (accessed 15 August 2007). The others are the Gamaliel Foundation, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the Pacific Institute for Community (PICO). See also Stephen Hart, “Getting Organized: Faith-Based Alliances Make a Difference,” in *The Christian Century* (7 November 2001), pp. 20-25.

⁵⁹ Dennis A. Jacobsen, “Resisting Empire,” in *ibid.*, p. 14. Jacobsen is an ELCA pastor in Milwaukee and director of Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus.

was imprisoned for four years before his release.⁶⁰ Occasionally, a local CBCO will take symbolic action to address injustice. Dennis Jacobsen describes such an action in Milwaukee in which the local group, MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope), conducted a vigil outside of the federal building in downtown Milwaukee on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq. When MICAH conducted a prayer vigil at the site of a city homicide, an angel was painted on the sidewalk in front of the federal building, thereby making a connection between the brutalities of empire abroad to those in their city, and standing together as a community against all violence. In reflecting on the *koinonia* that he experienced that night, Jacobsen writes, “Perhaps the most significant resistance to empire is not found in the issue of campaigns of congregation-based community organizing, but in the building of community.”⁶¹

To address the question, “What does it mean be the church in the midst of empire?” we do well to start with the Spirit—the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and brings us out of sin and death to new life. This same Spirit calls a community or *koinonia* into being through the Word to confess Christ as Lord amidst its brokenness, breathing into it the new life of the resurrection, amidst the suffering and death that surrounds it.

⁶⁰ These and other actions of CBCOs are described by Jacobsen in *ibid.*, pp. 12-13. See also Shayna Strom, “Organizing like Jesus: The Politics of Faith-Based Community Organizing,” in *The Next American City*, Issue 3 (October 2003), at www.americancity.org/article.php?id_article=71 (accessed 15 August 2007); Jill Mazullo, “Organizing for Regional Equity: The Gamaliel Foundation,” in *Poverty and Race*, Research Action Council (Sept./Oct. 2004), at www.prrac.org/full_text.php?text_id=1000&item_id=9320&newsletter_id=77&header=Community+Organizing (accessed 15 August 2007).

⁶¹ Jacobsen, *op. cit.* (note 59), p. 14.

The Space in Between Spaces: The Church as Prophetic Pest/Parasite

Mary Philip

What is the church's calling in an age of empire? What is its role? Where and how can it happen? "Where church happens is inseparable from when it happens,"¹ and how it happens.

The empire

Empire refers to unquestioned power and hegemony and encompasses a plethora of meanings. It dominates by oppressive means, without necessarily overtly exercising power. It includes the global forces of transnational conglomerates symbolized by Wall Street, the World Bank, the IMF, the superpowers, the G-8, the Pentagon, governments and their policies, military regimes and even democracy itself. In Arundhati Roy's words, "Democracy has become empire's euphemism for neoliberal capitalism."² Globalization is another power that has emerged from this empire, digging its claws into the most guileless lands and peoples.

In India, where the majority of its people live in rural areas, eking out a dismal livelihood through farming or menial and seasonal jobs, and where social inequality has been religiously sanctioned and institutionalized through the caste system, what is globalization going to do but create more disparity and discrimination? Who is it going to help? The hapless poor fall prey to the promises of large corporations to supply electricity, water and other basic commodities, only to find that the existing gap between them and the privileged has become unbridgeable. The Narmada Valley Project is a typical example of this.³ While one hand holds out the promise of the

¹ Vitor Westhelle, Lecture at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, spring 2004.

² Arundhati Roy, *Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), p. 56.

³ The Narmada, India's largest westward flowing river, flows through 1300 km of thick forests and one of most fertile agricultural lands in India. It is of immense religious and cultural importance to the people living on its banks. Narmada Valley Project is the largest river development project in the

land of milk and honey, the other snatches whatever means of livelihood the local population had. How do we understand this?

We live in an era where wars are waged, allegedly to bring peace. Daily we are faced with the brutal inequalities plaguing our societies; our lives and that of others do not seem to count. What matters are power and progress, to be achieved at any price. With their seductive promises, the empire's cronies strip people of their volition. Caprice is used to rob people of their faith in ordinary, simple, things. And once it is done they become mere putty in the hands of the cronies.

Power is fortified not just by what it destroys but also by what it creates. Not just by what it takes, but also by what it gives. And powerlessness is reaffirmed not just by the helplessness of those who have lost, but also by the gratitude of those who have (or think they have) gained.⁴

In the fields of science and technology, India has developed in leaps and bounds, and it holds tremendous power in terms of trade and commerce. But whom has it benefited? Power and progress, aka exploitation and globalization, have achieved a sort of standardization. Both rich and poor yearn for the same things, which only the rich can afford. As long as we have the power to invade other countries, subdue and occupy their land, deprive them of their wealth and health and make them rely on us for their livelihood, why worry where and how the people die, are killed or displaced? As long as we are on the road of progress and our investments and lifestyles have improved, why bother about what debris is piling up?

Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, illustrates this beautifully. It depicts an angel who seems about to move away from what he is staring at.

His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees on single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay,

world, and is to construct thirty large and hundred and thirty small dams along its length. Two of the largest proposed dams, Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar, are already under construction, the former supported by a 450 million USD loan from the World Bank. Between them, the dams will displace over 25 million people, largely poor peasants and tribals, not to mention the immense ecological damage. Even though promises have been made, so far the displaced people, mostly tribals, have not been adequately resettled, nor has the ecological damage been compensated for. The projected benefits of hydropower, irrigation and drinking water have also turned out to be a façade.

⁴ Arundhati Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 136.

awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. This storm is what we call progress.⁵

Yet, we need to live in this messy world, and it is not the dying but the living we must fear. The only way we can live and make any sense of it all is by facing this and getting involved by virtue of being a part of the human community. To use Roy's words again, "it is time to snatch our futures back from the experts."⁶ At a time when opportunism is everything, when hope seems lost and cynicism reigns, we must pluck up the courage to dream,⁷ to dream subversively. At a time when the empire has struck again with its hegemony and idea of progress on a global scale, how do we snatch our futures back? How do we not fear living for the now? More importantly, how do we confront the empire as a church?

In Roy's article, *Public Power in the Age of Empire*, she says,

... how do we understand "public power"? When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neoliberal capitalism, when reform means repression, when words like "empowerment" and "peacekeeping" make your blood run cold—why, then, "public power" could mean whatever you want it to mean. A biceps building machine, or a Community Power Shower.⁸

I choose to use in its place "church power," which I will define as I go along.⁹ In the process, I hope to weave together what I understand church power to be.

The church

A friend once told me about a pastor (now a bishop) who told the faculty at a seminary that it was their job to teach Bible, church history and

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 392-93.

⁶ Roy, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 210

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116

⁸ Arundhati Roy, *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000), p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

theology, with a spice of ethics. The rest he said, we the church will teach them, just send them to us. So, what is the church teaching? What is the church doing? What is the church?

A century ago, Alfred Loisy said that Jesus foretold the kingdom and it was the church that came. What is the church's relationship to the kingdom? The church is that which lies beside the kingdom and announces its arrival. Its role is that of John the Baptist who proclaimed a baptism of repentance and shouted aloud "...prepare the way ...The one who is more powerful than I (*all*) is coming after me... ." The kingdom is the power of God, but whose power does the church exercise? What is its stance and role as far as empire is concerned?

I am reminded of Little Red Riding Hood. There are many versions of this story: Little Red Riding Hood is portrayed as a virgin, the red cloak symbolizing the hymen; as a prostitute, etc. According to the well-known tale, the girl is called Little Red Riding Hood, after the red hood she wears. Her mother sends her to her grandmother's house with some food. The girl walks along the edge of the woods where she encounters a wolf who wants to devour her. Slyly he approaches the girl, befriends her, and she tells him where she is going. He tells her that her grandmother would like some flowers. While she is picking flowers for her grandmother, the wolf goes to the grandmother's house and gains entry by pretending to be the girl. He then ties up the grandmother, disguises himself as the grandmother and waits for the girl. When the girl arrives, he tries to eat her. A hunter, however, comes to the girl's rescue and all is well.

Imagine the community called church as Little Red Riding Hood—although the church as we know is not that gullible—and the wolf as the empire. Keep in mind that analogies and imagery, although helpful, have certain limits.

Church, as Luther puts it, is an earthly institution with a difference. Church is this community of love, the community of those who "know," to use Juan Segundo's terminology. It is the community that not only "knows," but knows better and does not conform to this world. It is different in that it inhabits spaces that are in-between spaces, at the margins. Margins rarely follow rules, or, if they do, they follow a different set of rules. The church is called not to follow or conform to the rules of the "empire," but to follow a different set of rules.

In the fall of 2002, Vitor Westhelle,¹⁰ while lecturing on eschatology, said, "Margins are the threshold to eschatological experience, and this

¹⁰ Dr. Vitor Westhelle, professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago,

happens in two ways—as experiences of condemnation or of liberation.” I cannot think of a better way to explain what the church’s location is and needs to be. Its place is at the margins, the site of eschatological experiences. An eschatological experience is one that either leads to death, is life giving. And that is precisely what one experiences when crossing a margin or a boundary, be it social, political, economic, cultural, racial, ethnic or whatever. By being at the margins, the church has a dual function—being both curse and promise. The margins are the limits of the empire and at the same time they border the kingdom. At these margins, the two sides, the inside and the outside, chafe against each other and bleed. From the ensuing blood arises a third space, neither in- nor outside, but calling both into question. This third space is filled with the perils and possibilities that create and suck in marginalities.¹¹ When margins rub against each other to such an extent that they are displaced, as in earth plates, what results is a tsunami, an all-consuming tidal wave, or an earthquake that swallows the earth into itself. Have we not seen the devastation and havoc this can cause? This is the part of the eschatological experience of crossing margins that leads to death or condemnation. But that is not the only possibility. There could be emplacement (putting something into place) instead of displacement. It is also the eschatological experience that takes us to the place where there is neither death nor destruction.

The estuarine character of this space between spaces

Associations with margins are commonly negative, but that is not what sets them apart. While they are the sites of oppression, there is a lot more to margins than that: they are also about vitality, tenacity, promise and hope. So, what does it mean that the church needs to be this space between spaces, on the margins, a parasite that shakes the system and powers that be, manifesting to the center its very illness and vulnerability? In the first place, being on the margins is a risky business, something a “church” (*qua* institution) wants to avoid at all costs. But the place of the church is at the margins, exhibiting the property of adjacency

is my mentor and advisor and has been instrumental in my progress as a student of theology.

¹¹ Rekha Menon, “Transgressions: Redressing Tradition,” in *Ijele: Art eJournal of the African World*, issue 6 (2003).

and going on to focus on the vitality and what happens at the margins. By highlighting its characteristics, I would like to reiterate my claim that margins are not just sites of oppression but are also about vitality, tenacity, promise and hope, which is what the church is all about.

The eschaton points to a reality that is beyond us and yet is part of our everyday experience. Rudolf Bultmann writes, “In every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You have to awaken it.”¹² How can this sleeping possibility be made an actuality? The answer lies in our willingness, however apprehensive we may be, to step out of our safe cocoons. Every time we step out of the familiar, when we cross the boundaries that safeguard us, we experience something new. In the monotonous routine of our everyday lives, we operate within our skeletons, within what we can control and manage, not open to the possibility of there being something, be it promising or condemning, that is outside of this framework. Our inability to cross borders, to step out of the familiar, is our incapacity to look beyond the frame, to get beyond the known. Frequently this is not just because we are afraid of what lies ahead but because of what it might demand of us.

You will never know what lies on the other side unless you step over. It can either annihilate you, or bring about an experience filling you with life more than ever before. Stepping out of your space is a frightening experience. By staying within our comfort zones, within our skin, we preserve ourselves, and at the same time deprive ourselves of experiencing novelty. Margins are the playgrounds of danger, death and menace. When we come to the margins, we come to that which separates and protects us from whatever is outside. So, crossing over is indeed a risky business. But as Hölderin says, “Where danger lies, grows also that which saves.” Is it not death that brings life? Would there be a beginning without an end? Yes, the step that you take across the margin is risky, but it is precisely in taking this risk that you experience the eschaton. However, unlike existential eschatology’s conjuring of decisions that will awaken the eschaton, those at the margins are living in it. It is their condition, not their decision. Their eschatological experience is not the existential awakening, but the apocalyptic indwelling at the end and the beginning of a world out of sink.

¹² Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology. Gifford Lectures, 1955* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1957), p. 155.

How then do we understand margins? How if at all can they be defined? In simple terms, a margin is something that brings about a separation, a demarcation into in- and outside; a division into two sides. It is a space in between two spaces. Let me use my body as an example. My skin is the margin of my body. Because of the skin there is an in- and an outside. The skeleton forms the frame for my body, but it is the skin that puts the finishing touch to it. It covers my exposure, my vulnerability and gives the final shape with all its contours and trajectories. This margin, my skin, when intact, is all well and good. But when infringed upon, all hell breaks loose! The in-/outside division is no longer there and I am susceptible to what threatens me from outside. It reveals the inside, exposing it to the dangers, the virus, the germs (or possibilities) outside. In facing the danger, what happens is that it brings to the fore mechanisms that were not operating before: the antibodies. When attacked by germs from outside, the body (to be precise, the leukocytes in the blood) produces or activates the antibodies, which in turn fight the toxins or the germs and restore the bodily functions. Forces that were recessive or subdued are activated, even created anew. The openings or orifices, as Mary Douglas calls them, represent the most vulnerable points of my body. And what comes out of them is marginal stuff that is either life giving or life consuming. To quote Mary Douglas again, "these are marginal stuff of the most obvious kind."

So, what does this mean? How does it redefine or reconfigure our understanding of margins, and especially the notion of church at the margins? Margins are spaces of contrariness, where there is a constant dialogue/interaction between opposites, a delicate balance between incongruent entities. They are places of tension, between ends and beginnings; it is this tensility that sustains margins. The imagery of estuaries (from ecology) best portrays this tensile region.

As in an estuary, the church's situation and environment are constantly changing. This instability or variability is one of its most important characteristics; herein lies its strength. It nurtures in its inhabitants not an adaptability, but a vitality, a vigor that gives rise to an entirely new environment. An estuary is not the blending of two environments but a new environment which brings about a change, an awakening in whoever or whatever comes in contact with it. The life that thrives in estuaries, at the margins, is best described by the concept of hybrids. Estuarine margins are characterized by the presence of hybrids that emulate the vim and vigor of the estuarine margins. The term hybrid refers to any entity that is made up of constituent elements that are incongruent.

That which results from this murky marriage of brackish and fresh water is in itself deviant. They are quite adept to “crossing the line”; in other words, hybrids transgress. But their transgression is distinct: in their crossing over they neither blend with nor concede themselves to the other. They do not follow the rules of the game but they rule the turf. Hybridity is encouraged, when and wherever, with the intention of creating something that is efficacious in some way, be it a miniature Kentshire heifer with high quality milk or a high yield plant.

While estuaries are home to hybrids with staying power, they are crucial zones of transition where a struggle for existence occurs. They are the burial grounds for a variety of aquatic organisms, which cannot tolerate the mixing up, or do not survive the crossing over. But, they also serve as a home to a variety of organisms, some of them endangered species, and also hybrids. They are the breeding grounds for several species of fish and serve as “nurseries.” The productivity of an estuary is estimated to be eight times that of agricultural land because of the rich organic material that the river deposits. An excess of this organic material leads to the growth of algae, which depletes the oxygen and leads to pathogen contamination, both of which are detrimental to the life of its inhabitants. So, these margins or transitional zones are not just life giving but also life consuming. Here life begins and ends; they are death traps yet a source of life. The incoming water and the ocean tides create a chaos where life becomes a struggle because of constantly changing environmental conditions. Estuaries are places where fatalities are common and yet life thrives here. Here life is exploited but also nurtured. Here, our eyes, hitherto closed and protected, are opened to the reality of the world. At these margins, an unveiling, a revelation, takes place. Is this not what the church is supposed to be?

The adjacent reality–cell membrane

While estuaries are a metaphor for the borderland nature of the church, with its ever-changing conditions and hybrid communities, the analogy of the cell membrane helps highlight the adjacent character of the church. The cell membrane has the estuarine characteristics of changeability, defiance and tenacity, but its location in between cells and its peculiar constituents better suits it as an image for adjacency. I shall therefore switch from ecology to cytology, to the imagery of a cell membrane. Church is like the

cell membrane, the space that separates cells/tissues. But more than the separation, it is the property of adjacency that is relevant here.

The cell membrane forms the outer margin of a cell, giving it a shape and framework. It also affords protection. The cell membrane is made up of a bilipid layer within which are embedded protein molecules. The vital phospholipids, necessary for sensing and responding to various stimuli in and around the cells, and the G proteins necessary for the signaling between cells make the cell membrane the prime organ of communication between cells. This is an important feature of adjacency. In addition, the membrane is semi-permeable and thus does not allow the free passage of materials in and out of the cell. The crucially important passage that occurs is carried out by the channel and carrier proteins on its surface. The channel proteins allow the free passage of certain solutes, while the carrier proteins bind the solute and take it across to the other side. In this way, the cell membrane allows materials to pass from cell to cell.

Church is the cell membrane occupying that space between two cells; there is tension but at the same time, it is embedded with various proteins (people/community). Church by definition is *tradere*: it is in the business of passing on. Church thus is the mediating entity between revelation, the divine promise and eschatology, the fulfillment of the promise. As the adjacent reality, the church is the communicative reality that proclaims the arrival of the kingdom and the death of the empire. It is that space, the community, which lies adjacent to the kingdom and announces its arrival. It is not the reality but the adjacent reality. Adjacent spaces are permeable, as in a cell membrane. There is communication between the two but it is not one. Adjacency has the property of being alongside. It lies by another reality—the kingdom—being “at ease” in the face of otherness, *ad-jacere* (adjacency), ready to be no more.¹³

It is the church's character of adjacency that allows familiar limits of ethnicity, gender, psychology and culture to be crossed over. Margins are the playground of menace, from where dangers infiltrate. Crossing over is risky and I am vulnerable. When I step over the lines of the familiar, or when another crosses over to my world, I am faced with the unfamiliar, which may very well prove to be perilous. In taking that step, I experience a world that belongs to others. But by not taking that step, I deprive myself of a novelty that could be liberating. It is risk versus promise; a risk because we are no longer in control, a promise because

¹³ Vitor Westhelle, Christian Theology III lecture, spring 2003.

of the possible liberation on the other side. The community called the church is this space between spaces that I occupy and nourishes me to make those little crossings, in order to enable me to embark on that one passage from where there is no return. Church is the eschatological community, the space that allows me to face the end, that which motivates me to cross the frontier of this world. It is that space, that cell membrane, whose proteins carries me over to the other tissue, the other side. I am crossing over to an unfamiliar place. The church is that space that equips me, upholds and sustains me. Its healing community gives me the garment that provides protection and helps me to cross the next barrier. Its channel proteins ease me over, or if met with resistance, its carrier proteins carry me over.

The prophetic pest/parasite

The church is defined through Word and sacrament. Thus, whenever a new reality (the kingdom) is called upon (the proclaimed Word) and whenever the community is nourished and renewed (sacraments), there is church. Furthermore, the church's calling, although risky, offers promise and hope.

Over and above being at the margins, it also needs to be a pest/parasite. Interestingly, those who live at the margins are often “lovingly” referred to as pests or parasites, as indeed they are. What does a pest or parasite do? It creates a pestilence, disturbs the order of things, threatens the *status quo*. It calls the center into question. As Mary Douglas puts it, “every society is fragile at its margins.”¹⁴ The church's call in an age of empire—and every age has its empire—is to be socially dysfunctional in order to signal the kingdom that is not of this age. In its parasitic function it is not only annoying but also upsetting. I believe that is what the church is called to do: to put the empire's nose out of joint. This corresponds to the “church of the way,” (Acts of the Apostles), not in the sense of a holy pilgrimage, but rather as being called out of your daily routine, your comfort zones. Church is both a theological and sociological reality. It is in the midst but not of the world. As long as it is an earthly institution as Luther always insisted, it also has some earthly functions. That is where its parasitic function comes into play. Parasites are like hybrids in that they inhabit

¹⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 150.

the in-between spaces. They are neither in nor out. They live in between, exhibiting characteristics of both the in- and the outside. Their parasitic adaptations are diverse, with some developing devices that help them to attach themselves to the body of the host, while others develop penetrating devices for gaining entry into the host's body. They live in the lining of walls, spreading disease and finally dismembering.

Jesus is a parasite *par excellence*, a hybrid, born of the union of the divine and the human, who lived at the margins. He crossed lines, whether social, religious, cultural, ethnic or gender, constantly challenging and calling the center into question.

Church is this parasitic space that shakes the empire. Wherever the empire is shaken by the power of the kingdom, there is church. Church needs to be the parasite that lives within the body of the empire, gnawing at its very foundation and venturing into the promises of its peripheries. Generally, parasites and pests are found hidden in crevices and cracks. Parasites that live in between the cells, in the cell's walls or lining, are the dangerous ones because they create cracks and weaken that which holds the structure/body together. They destroy the network. Pest/parasites, like hybrids, are in this business of transgressing. Fortunately for them, they do not know what will face them. They are either engulfed or make sure that they engulf. The church knows what it is called to do: it needs to be the parasite and infiltrate the walls of empire.

Recently it has been suggested that another wall of the empire may have been brought down by infiltration from inside. Biblical accounts and archaeological evidence cast doubt on Joshua's military conquest of the land of Canaan by bringing down of the walls of Jericho. According to the biblical account, the Israelites marched around the city for seven days. On the seventh day, the priests blew their trumpets, the people shouted and the walls of Jericho collapsed (*Cf.* Josh 6:20). Is that how it really happened or is there another version? Joseph Callaway says that Israel emerged not as a result of outsiders coming into the country, but as the result of a peasants' revolt against the empire of their time, the Canaanite overlords.¹⁵ This view has been supported by George Mendenhall and Norman K. Gottwald with minor modifications. A disputed thesis and although historically not accurate, it is ecclesiological correct. It views the conquest of Canaan not as a military conquest but as one

¹⁵ Joseph Callaway, "The Settlement in Canaan," in Hershel Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), p. 71.

where Israel came to occupy the land through a revolutionary social movement among the people already in Canaan. Israel allied itself with the suppressed and disenfranchised elements of Canaanite society, which included peasants, farmers, pastoralists, mercenaries, outlaws, etc.¹⁶ It was a revolt, an internal uprising, comparable to a parasitic infiltration from within, against the overlords in the cities, “ignited by Hebrews who advocated commitment to, and covenant solidarity with Yahweh, the liberating God the Exodus.”¹⁷ The parasitic attack by a community of people, held together by their faith in the liberating God of Exodus, did indeed sound like the trumpets of Joshua’s army and brought down the walls of the empire. If the peasant church of Canaan of yore could do it, why not the church of now? So, how does the church do this?

Lutheran churches work with the imagery of the “people of God.” The church is not an end in itself. It is nothing in and of itself, but here to announce the Word, audibly and visibly. In other words, the church proclaims its end because it announces the kingdom of God. What does this entail? If the church is the people of God, then its power lies in its people or the community it is. Thus, church needs to be this public power, meaning the people, especially those who suffer the consequences of the empire and globalization. In its people, the community the church has an abundance of parasitic adaptations, and the power of the people lies in the truth, the truth of suffering. Announcing that truth is a risky business. The one who dared to cross the line and speak the truth about people’s suffering was crucified; that is what the church is called to do. It is to transgress the limits, be parasitic either by developing penetrating devices or reconfiguring/restructuring what it has. Its function is to turn upside down (Acts 17:6-7), be subversive, countercultural. Like parasites that live within the walls of the body, the church, by virtue of the power of the truth, seeps into the walls of the empire, creating cracks and finally brings it crashing down. It is in the in-between spaces at the margins that, to quote from Walter Benjamin’s grave, “Truth itself lies on trial, and it is the border that defines and redefines it.”¹⁸

This is precisely what Luther meant when he said that the seventh mark of the church is the cross. Church is the community that stands at risk, daring to name a thing for what it is, to speak the truth at all costs. The

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michael Taussig, *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

cross was the result of cross-ing, the crossing of boundaries of established norms, rules and customs by the one who dared to speak the truth. The church is marked with the cross of Christ. It is the community that dares to stand at the boundary, cross it, to be on trial, to be on the cross.

In its parasitic, transgressive function, the church is to engage in cross-ing. It is to hold hands with suffering, name it and risk disclosing the truth in the suffering. What does this mean? When suffering is named, the church is naming and calling into question the cause of and those responsible for the suffering—the empire. It is the power that Paul calls law, which on the one hand manifests the condition of suffering and, on the other, brings the threat of death.¹⁹ Marked by the cross, the church is to be this community that names the law that kills and practices the healing love that restores.²⁰ And as exemplified by the truest and quint-essential parasite, Jesus, it is done by “stepping into the margin of the law, stretching it to its limits and even transgressing it.”²¹ The church is to name the empire for what it is; a naming that crosses and challenges its systems and power. It is to infiltrate, a cross-ing that entails a truth telling that rocks the system in its foundations. This comes at a price.

In its theologizing, the church should put truth on trial and facilitate a stirring. This means supporting actions that are “socially wrong” or even illegal, such as the illegal occupation of land by the landless and displaced tribals/peasants. It is fighting for the rights of Adivasi²² children. It is standing with the poor farmers in their fight for their right to procure money and equipment to cultivate their own land, against the government and World Bank. It is signing a memorandum against the war and lobbying for an arms embargo. It is speaking out about unjust immigration policies and rejecting unreasonable ordinances of the Supreme Court. Every time the church pronounces a condemning word, be it through boycotting or protest, it is calling the center into question, creating a dent in the wall.

The church’s strength lies in its ability to come together. I am a mere drop and on my own I cannot get to the ocean. On a hot day I will evaporate. I can only get to the ocean as part of a water body, a community.²³ As

¹⁹ Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Tribal.

²³ Discussion at the Asian Theological Summer Institute at Philadelphia, May 2007.

a community the church is joined by the truth of suffering, oppression, abuse, violence and death—all the while making that buzzing sound of permeation. Termites, when eating into the wood, make a drumming sound just like bees. This sound actually acts as a catalytic force and aids penetration. By singing the song of rebellion and resistance the church, inch by inch, penetrates the empire's rigid walls. Yes, it comes at a price, as exemplified in Luther's final mark of the church, the cross. The church is the community that stands on trial, at the boundary.

A safe haven

While playing the subversive role, the church is also to be a safe haven. Pests can be both harmful and beneficial. For example, bacteria are generally harmful but some are beneficial, in fact, crucial, to our health. The lactobacteria (*lacto bacillus*) that inhabit the lining of the intestine are necessary to digest cellulose. The absence of these bacteria results in the decay of partially digested food that causes bad breath and harmful yeast infections. Candida infection is serious in that it brings about the suppression of the immune system that protects our body and keeps it safe. Another example is Gambusia, a small fish that inhabits streams and small rivers that run between paddy fields in tropical countries. While considered pests, they do something that no vaccine or medication has so far achieved. They ingest mosquito larva infested with *plasmodium falciparum* and *p. vivax* that cause the dreaded disease malaria. This corresponds to the "church in the house" imagery. While being a space that kicks you out of your safe cocoon, it is also a place that safeguards you from the harshness of the world around it, of which it is a part. Church is that space or house where people are gathered and welcomed; it is a place of hospitality, solidarity and healing, where one is rejuvenated and strengthened. It is this salvific function of the church that brings about health.

The church is the place where the unspeakable can be uttered. Church is that which allows one to be a *parrhesiast*, to stand up and face the tyranny of empire. Monica Furlong goes even further to say that the church is that which protects you from the radical otherness,²⁴ which can be too overwhelming, which protects you from the *eschata*. The analogy of the

²⁴ Monica Furlong, *Contemplating Now* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1983), p. 36.

cell membrane serves to highlight this protective function of the church. Pocketed with receptors and antigens, it aids in the protective function of the cell membrane. Molecules targeted toward that specific cell will bind with the surface receptors (the caring community of Marthas and Priscillas), which then alters the behavior of the cell. Sensory proteins in the membrane detect the presence of any foreign materials. The antigens in the cell membrane (of sincerity and solidarity) will then mobilize the immune system, thereby affording safety and refuge.

Church and empire

This age of empire, which thrives on the idea of progress, implies that we are better off than people were in the past. We are on the road of progress without having to look back. Progress is the “truth” of this empire. Progress is how reality is measured. Progress has become a realized eschatology.²⁵ But, as the church, we know that this is a facade, a fetish. Progress would say that God becoming man, a hybrid, a parasite at the margins, in Galilee, is not the end. While progress triumphs on one side, there is tragedy on the other, as it closes the possibility of revelation. While striving for perfection, the empire denies itself the possibility of anything other than a misguided notion of progress, resulting in there being no novelty, which alone could have given it meaning. There is no rupture. Difference is not a possibility and the mission is that there be none.²⁶ But that is not what we are about. Christianity is being countercultural, counter tyranny. We are not about perfection but about ruptures. We are different and we bring about a difference. Church is church (*ekklesia*) whenever and wherever it is the parasite/pest that brings about the rupture, the difference. We are a community who know and know better. We know what is to be feared and what is to be dared, and dare we must. That is the calling of the church.

So what is the church to teach? To become pastors who pasteurize? Yes, we do need some purification. Or, is the church to teach pastors to pesterize? Pesterization as opposed to pasteurization is about infecting with germs; the difference is that the infection leads to rejuvenation,

²⁵ Vitor Westhelle, GTS lecture, *Issues and Options: The Modernity of our Discontent*, spring 2006.

²⁶ This entire section is a summary of one of the sessions of a graduate seminar class taught by Vitor Westhelle at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, spring 2005.

to new possibilities. So, I would say, as a space in between spaces, the church needs to be in the business of training pastors who pesterize. What the pest/parasite is actually trying to do is to make intelligible to the empire the language of those whom it is tyrannizing. It is paving the way for their cries, their voices to be heard. The cracks and ruptures they create allow their voices to be heard, and collectively their voices bring down the walls of the empire.

Coming back to the story of Little Red Riding Hood, the empire/wolf initially is in its own cloak/skin and later disguised as the caring grandmother. At the receiving end is the not so gullible church alias Little Red Riding Hood. First, the empire offers helpful and seemingly attractive suggestions. The eager to please Little Red Riding Hood now shares her visions and way. Knowing what her intentions are, the wolf becomes conniving and, disguised as a gentle, loving caretaker, gets the unsuspecting victim to nestle up to him, only to be devoured by him. Sadly, a woodcutter only very rarely comes to the rescue. History provides ample evidence for this kind of a narrative and we cannot afford to repeat history.

So, what is the church going to be and what is it going to do? Is it going to want to cuddle up to the wolf or is it going to be the parasite that infiltrates the walls of the empire, creating cracks? The church is called to stir up parasitic insurrections that sound like the horn blowing of Joshua's army and send the walls of the empire crashing down. It needs to be the prophetic voice that tolls the fall of the empire's walls. Yes, margins are sites of oppression, but they are also about vitality, tenacity and hope. And that is what the church's power is. Paraphrasing Arundhati Roy's words, on a quiet day, I can hear its gnawing prophetic sounds heralding the fall of the empire. Another world is not only possible, the church is on its way.²⁷

²⁷ Arundhati Roy, *War Talk* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003), p. 75.

Criteria and Power for Confessing Today

Confession and Empire: How the Gospel is at Stake

Michael Hoy

Niebuhr's prolepticism

Over fifty years ago, the American theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr warned that the USA could someday be guilty of committing the same sin it perceived all too well in the rise of Communism: the irony of “pretension,” or national pride.

While the US could at one time claim the “innocency of responsibility,” Niebuhr contended that this was no longer the case. He cautioned about the risk of exercising responsibility “beyond our own borders” and of engaging in an unforeseen turn of events stemming from “our cherished values of individualism”:

Our exaltation of the individual involves us in some very ironic contradictions. On the one hand, our culture does not really value the individual as much as it pretends; on the other hand, if justice is to be maintained and our survival assured, we cannot make individual liberty as unqualifiedly the end life as our ideology asserts.¹

Those of us who share roots in the Reformation must own our own part in shaping that individualist culture; but there is also a need to clarify our differences from this national scene, as Niebuhr perceived it then. Niebuhr regarded both Luther's *Freedom of the Christian*, which underscored the individual freedom that comes by faith and is above all human authority, and Calvin's emphases on providence and blessing as contributing to national pride. But Niebuhr was astute enough to note the differences between the Reformation and the accents on American individualism, as well as divine providence and virtue in American democracy.² For Niebuhr, the Reformation had a stronger accent on the

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 8.

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Son,

nature of human sin, which is missing in most American nationalist perspectives. My sense is that a closer examination of Luther, if not also Calvin, would stress faith in Christ for the individual as distinct from, and perhaps also critical of, the prevailing concepts of individualism in American-nationalism today.

“Imperialism,” Niebuhr contended, “is a perennial problem of human existence.”³ Truth be told, he could not foresee this becoming the US’ central problem. Niebuhr believed that “modern democratic nations” have and would continue to have checks and balances on their own power by 1) distributing economic and political power, thus preventing undue concentration of one or the other; 2) bringing the use of power under social and moral review; and 3) establishing inner religious and moral checks upon the use of power.⁴ The political-ethical question today is whether such a democracy still exists.

Niebuhr was more concerned with the possibility of a nuclear showdown that would result in the one or two superpowers of that time being able to claim victory. But he could not foresee what has transpired in the last twenty years: the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its aftermath of a declared economic victory; and the militant response of America to what was perceived as an attack on its economic and militaristic prowess on 9/11 (disguised as an attack on “freedom”). Niebuhr’s opening words in discussing the American irony ring with a shuddering prophecy:

The victors ... face the “imperial” problem of using power in global terms but from one particular center of authority, so preponderant and unchallenged that its world rule would almost certainly violate basic standards of justice.⁵

And his closing words warn of a day of final doom:

if we [i.e., America] should perish ... the primary cause would be that the strength of a giant nation was directed by eyes too blind to see all

1943), pp. 184-212.; *ibid.*, pp. 43-64.

³ Niebuhr, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

the hazards of the struggle; and the blindness would be induced not by some accident of nature or history but by hatred and vainglory.⁶

Are our own eyes blinded by the plight of imperialism today, and most especially to the promise of our Lord?

Recognizing the “signs of the times”

Jesus used the phrase “signs of the times” (Mt 16:4; *cf.* Lk 12:56) to note the blindness of religious authorities to the promising “sign” of his gospel.

In their provocative “ecumenical faith stance,” the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) also uses the phrase “signs of the times,” but point to an “empire on the rise” as that sign.

The most outstanding sign of our [!] times is the suffering and cries of human persons and other living beings throughout the world, as their victimization proceeds in a systematic and unprecedented manner under the global US empire/market regime. As the beginning of the 21st century, all living beings in the cosmos are threatened with death and destruction. Their groaning echoes throughout the universe and is joined by the Spirit’s groaning. As expressed in Romans 8:18-39, the powers and principalities of this world—with a comprehensive destructiveness in the form of the global empire—are causing creation to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation.⁷

The real sign of hope, the statement declares, is “a liberated earth community”—the liberation of the very victims who are suffering as a result of the empire.

There is no denying the plethora of victims. The toll that has been taken on human life as well as on the environment and fabric of creation contributes to a long list of named injustices: “brutal atrocities,” “hunger and malnutrition,” “child mortality,” “oppression, rape and violence against women,” “economic refugees,” “violations of human rights,” “environmental degradation and pollution.”⁸ In the Philippines, which is seen by the US as the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁷ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “An Ecumenical Faith Stance Against Global Empire For A Liberated Earth Community,” in *Reformed World*, 56:4 (December 2006), p. 434.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-437.

“second front of the war on terror,” there are signs of “the country’s return to murders, abductions, disappearances and incarcerations of political dissenters, among them priests and pastors who lived out their faith and prophetic ministry.”⁹ Countless other victims have suffered directly as a result of the imposition of this militaristic/market-driven empire, killed in war-torn countries or subjected to other forms of violence, whose voices will be silenced from a fair trial in the global tribunal.

At a more subtle level, however, the victims are not so distant. “As the spirit of empire penetrates souls, the power of global empire possesses the bodies of all living beings. Lord of its domain, it builds temples for the global market to serve Mammon.”¹⁰ In other words, those of us who are in the empire also become its victims. This is true also of the oblivious oppressors who unwittingly cooperate with the empire’s designs for global domination and control.¹¹

The injustice which empire foments is not only political but deeply theological and spiritual, especially when we consider to whom we are finally accountable. No wonder empire resists this accountability. Without a doubt, the world community is keeping careful watch, though often in fear. The response to the attacks of 9/11 generated world support and sympathy for the pain of the American people. But the aftermath of America’s unilateral invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq has drawn sharp, though guarded, criticism. While global terrorism is roundly chastised, there is a failure to recognize the terrorism that comes in claims to freedom and democracy by a Bush administration that sees itself as the guardian of the world. Even in the current political climate within the US, where the war has become quite unpopular, this has not inhibited the stubborn “resolve” of the administration to press the agenda further, even to press the limits of the nation’s laws on privacy.

I appreciate Rabbi Michael Lerner’s observation that the effects of current utilitarian strategies which lead to basic inhumane treatment of others and even creation itself, is now causing a thirst for a deeper and more meaningful spirituality.¹² People who are so discarded may

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 447, 434.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

¹¹ I find intriguing Ann Coulter’s comment that derides liberals who “deny the biblical image of dominion and progress, the most ringing affirmation of which is the United States of America.” Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 3.

¹² Michael Lerner, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 2006). Lerner himself is less inclined to use the language of

find themselves among the victims of the injustices of our times. Like Lerner, Jim Wallis desires harmony even with those of the religious right in recognition that the human condition is such that oppressed and oppressors suffer together in this plight.¹³

Liberationists, however, are quick to point out that this can also be compromising.¹⁴ The religious right has played a major role in shaping the spiritual character of the current empire, and for that too it must be held accountable. Cornel West correctly observed that there is “an unholy alliance” with the political and religious right.¹⁵ The manifestations are evident not only in the efforts to sanction crusades with principles that are apocalyptically Manichean,¹⁶ but also by politically legitimizing an absolutized set of moral values that exclude any real moral deliberation. Lerner and Wallis are therefore correct to point to the need to move beyond the unhealthy polarization in the nation; but the divide is deeply spiritual, pointing to signs of legalism, exclusivism and anti-intellectualism, as well as continuing to foster consumerism and market-driven ideologies.¹⁷

Confessing in the midst of empire: How the gospel is at stake

In the midst of this global scenario, the WARC statement calls for a “process of recognition, education and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction (*processus confessionis*).” This process was already initiated in their 2004 Accra Confession, and is reaffirmed in their 2006 “Ecumenical Faith Stance.”

“empire” or “imperialism,” though his arguments support those who are critical of imperialist tendencies in the US and its supporters.

¹³ Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 2005).

¹⁴ This was evident in the remarks of Marc Ellis and others who also see the current era as one of “hopelessness,” in presentations and responses at the Society of Christian Ethics, “Are the Ethics with Liberation Theology Still Alive and Relevant? An Interfaith Conversation,” Dallas, Texas, 5 January 2007.

¹⁵ Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 2. Cf. also Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

¹⁶ The references to Manicheanism in this article are based on Bruce Lincoln, “Bush’s God Talk,” in *Christian Century* (5 October 2004), pp. 22-29, at www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3135 (accessed 25 September 2007).

¹⁷ Marian Saltzman and Ira Matathia, *Next Now: Trends for the Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), these authors see these phenomena on the rise.

Are we now in a *tempus confessionis* (time for confessing) in which there is a need for a “confessional stand” (*status confessionis*) in the midst of empire? Our Lord encouraged us to pray, “do not bring us to the time of trial” (Mt 6:13; Lk 11:4). The Reformers at Augsburg were also concerned not to take confession lightly: “For we certainly wish neither to expose our own souls and consciences to grave danger before God by misusing the divine name or Word.”¹⁸

One thing is certain: if the gospel of our Lord Jesus the Christ is at stake in the midst of the current empire, then we are in a “time for confessing.”

A helpful resource for deliberating and discerning this matter is *A Time for Confessing* by the late Robert W. Bertram.¹⁹ Bertram’s examination was based on the Protestant Reformers’ concept of *status confessionis*, especially presented in the Formula of Concord, Article 10. From his analysis of that confessional crisis and others in church history, Bertram elaborates six criteria for discerning what constitutes “a time for confessing”:

- There are witnesses who are on trial for their faith, oppressed by authority, usually the church’s own; it is not only they who are persecuted, but the gospel itself.
- These witnesses point to the authority of the gospel as authority enough for the church’s life and unity.
- Their witness is profoundly ecumenical, shared by the whole faithful church.
- By their faithful testimony, these witnesses reprioritize the church’s evangelical authority so that the gospel is not confused with the temporal authority of the law, or vice versa.
- These witnesses appeal for and to the oppressed who are afflicted in this time of oppression, which is also a time for confessing.

¹⁸ “The Augsburg Confession, Conclusion to Article 21:1,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 58.

¹⁹ Robert W. Bertram, *A Time for Confessing*, edited by Michael Hoy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, anticipated by early 2008).

- No one is more aware of their ambiguous certitude in making this confession than the confessors themselves—but they are nonetheless right in making their confession.

Here I will explore these criteria in greater detail in relation to the current imperial crisis.

Thesis one: There are witnesses who are on trial for their faith, oppressed by authority, usually the church's own; it is not only they who are persecuted, but the gospel itself.

The imagery here is forensic. It is grounded in the New Testament, but also in church history, where faithful witnesses to the gospel are arraigned on trial before critical superior authorities. The authorities which have been appointed by God and before whom these witnesses stand may be secular or temporal, but more often than not, are ecclesiastical. Yet their real appeal as confessors is “before God” (*coram Deo*). In the face of the church, which oppresses the gospel of Jesus the Christ with a pseudo-gospel of its own, the confessors lay a bold claim to the one gospel of Jesus the Christ.

According to Bertram, such times of confessing are “agonizingly short and non-postponable.” Yet the confessors, seeking to remain faithful “witnesses” (*matyres*) to the very gospel of Jesus Christ that is in jeopardy, will not keep silent. “Their answer is too good to be silenced, in view of whose it finally is.”²⁰

It would take several essays to do justice to the intricacies of the arguments of the “faithful witnesses” who have already spoken on this matter of the current imperial crisis.²¹ Their statements of faith, sometimes coming more as sharp criticisms against empire, are intended to address forthrightly the crisis they perceive in the current realities and signs of our times. “Crisis” is an apt description for connoting “judgment” (*krisis*), trusting theologically that the final judge is not a human authority but God.

In the midst of the current crisis, the Christian religious right is foremost in proclaiming a pseudo-gospel of domination and control

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Some of these “faithful witnesses” I have already noted: Catherine Keller, Cornel West, Jim Wallis, Michael Lerner. Others might include those in Wes Avram (ed.), *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004); and also and especially the recent pronouncement of the WARC, *op cit.* (note 7), pp. 433-450. This latter document reads like a confessing statement.

that supports empire.²² Through its elaborate system of publications and influences, it has fostered an American folk religion (together with its mantra of “God Bless America”), endorsing a Manichean agenda. Good and evil are juxtaposed in such a way as to set the will of one people over that of others and puffed up with apocalyptic bravado. The religious right has had the most pervasive voice in political circles for much of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, even to the hegemonic exclusion of other voices within the wider ecumenical community.²³

To be sure, there are other signs within the wider ecumenical communion that suggest a “time of confessing.” One might consider the stance and actions taken by the Episcopal Church (USA) and the resistance this has generated within the wider Anglican Communion.²⁴ Or the claims of some who embrace the spirit of Vatican II’s *aggiornamento* at a time when the Roman Catholic Church seems more intent on a retrenchment from Vatican II’s wider ecumenical vision.²⁵

Some mainline church leaders in the US, including of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), have been outspoken regarding the persistent danger of imperialism. Yet, there has been a debilitating and conservative silence—or at least duplicity—when the realities of empire come to bear in local congregations. As one bold witness proclaimed, at the level of the parish—especially in large congregations—“prosperity theology” is more pervasive than “prophetic theology.”²⁶ Bishop Mark Hanson of the ELCA has raised the question,

What gospel are we proclaiming? Gospel itself can be a word vacuous of meaning to someone who hasn’t heard the good news of Jesus Christ.... There’s huge pressure on pastors to preach some other good news to hold

²² As evidence of such claims within the religious right, cf. Lerner, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 8.

²³ One sign of such evidence is the disrespect given to the representatives from Christian traditions (including from the LWF) other than the religious right to voice concerns on the matters of international conflict.

²⁴ E.g., the Anglican rejection of Bishop Gene Robinson and the first female Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori.

²⁵ Specifically, this would include the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s “Dominus Jesus” (2000), and the “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church” (2007). Cf. also Jared Wicks, S.J., “Not-so-fully church,” in *Christian Century*, vol. 124, no. 7 (21 August 2007), pp. 9-11.

²⁶ Robin Meyers, “On Having a Larger Vision,” at www.eden.edu/wp-content/uploads/meyerscommencementaddress07.pdf (accessed 17 September 2007), pp. 3-4. This was the commencement address at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 18 May 2007.

their members, and largely by making them feel better about their life in a very competitive, consumptive culture that seems to continually beat them down. And I think we've got to find context in which to hold each other accountable for what gospel is it that we proclaim.²⁷

"People pleasing," contra St Paul, supplants the bold affirmation of the gospel (Gal 1:10). In the meantime, the powers of empire rampage on.

Even if overt pressures are not there from ecclesiastical superiors, are pastors being faithful in standing up for the gospel of the cross in the face of subtle, covert and manipulative pressures within the parishes themselves, which have already been infiltrated by the "spirit of empire"? In other words, is the good news of Jesus the Christ being overturned in favor of a pseudo-gospel of prosperity, dominion and control? If so, I cannot imagine a time more ripe for *status confessionis*.

The gospel is at stake when an oppressive, unholy alliance of political and religious right penetrates souls and possesses human beings to the point where the Word of the gospel is being silenced. In churches and parishes, this may manifest itself when power plays, legalism, exclusivism, prosperity and other agendas hold the key to where power resides. These false gospels are a veiled, or not so veiled, Manichean legalism, bereft of any real promise and hope. Nonetheless, they are tugging at the depths of people's spirituality and faith, creating an environment of "us" vs "them." The gospel is not about domination and control (*theologia gloria*), but about forgiveness, healing and wholeness in Jesus the Christ, who places himself in the breach of all those oppressed by powers and principalities, and even God's own law, through his death on the cross (*theologia crucis*). This message is inclusive of the oppressors themselves, if they have ears to hear and hearts to trust.

Thesis two: These witnesses point to the authority of the gospel as authority enough for the church's life and unity.

What constitutes unity in the church? The Reformers held that the gospel and sacraments are enough for unity (*satis est*).²⁸ Conversely, when other criteria or adiaphora (matters that would normally be indifferent)

²⁷ Mark Hanson, Response, "Living Together in the 21st Century: As Lutherans in the ELCA," Hein-Fry Lecture Series, February 2006.

²⁸ The Augsburg Confession, Article VII.

are placed ahead of this gospel, or even alongside it as “also necessary,” then confessors will object and call for the gospel as alone sufficient for the church’s life and unity.

The confessors’ plea here is not to create disharmony or division. On the contrary, they recognize that disharmony and division already exist because of the presence of an “alien gospel” that undermines the church’s unity. Their plea is that the churches embrace its one source of hope and promise in Jesus the Christ.

It recognizes that the gospel is at stake when an alien gospel becomes the presumed source for life and unity. Clearly, there is an alien pattern in the empire, one that is doomed to fail because it is not based on faith but on fear. When it becomes the pattern also for the church, then confessors will lift up the one gospel as authority enough.

Thesis three: Their witness is profoundly ecumenical, shared by the whole faithful church.

This thesis emphasizes ecumenicity in times of confessing. There is already an emerging ecumenical vision on the matter of empire. In addition to the WARC, there are voices within the World Council of Churches (WCC), the United Church of Canada, the LWF and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) that together constitute a kind of “*processus confessionis* related to global economic injustice and ecological degradation.”²⁹

The WARC statement, “An Ecumenical Faith Stance [!],” calls for the development of “*courageous* responses in cooperation with other ecumenical organizations.”³⁰ What would make the responses truly courageous is if they were made in ways that make abundantly clear that, for the sake of its own integrity, the church ecumenical will boldly affirm that the gospel is at stake.

There are signs of this in some of the claims already made by ecumenical confessors. The United Church of Canada’s, “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire,” contends that “the present time is critical for the discernment of the gospel.”³¹ WARC asserts that “[in] the face of the present crisis created by US global empire today, we reach for new un-

²⁹ WARC, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 450.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Author’s own emphasis

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

derstandings of the gospel message.”³² Jim Wallis accurately perceives that we need

to reassert and reclaim the gospel faith. [...] We see that [this gospel] faith creates community from racial, class and gender divisions and prefers international community over nationalist religion, and we see that “God bless America” is found nowhere in the Bible.³³

These are among the courageous voices of ecumenical witnesses who are lifting up the gospel in our time of empire. When the gospel is at stake, then it is a matter that is profoundly ecumenical.

Thesis four: By their faithful testimony, these witnesses reprioritize the church’s evangelical authority so that the gospel is not confused with the temporal authority of the law, or vice versa.

Part of the nature of our current crisis is how law and gospel have become so mixed as to diminish the message of both. Interestingly, one of the shared tenets of both the religious right and liberationists on the left is to overcome the separation of religion and politics. This concern is not an illegitimate one. In fact, as I along with others have contended elsewhere, Lutheranism has tended to be too quietistic for its own authenticity.³⁴

But there is still a distinction, and an important one, between law and gospel. This distinction has sometimes been unclear, such as in the WARC statement. My greater concern is how the spiritual forces of empire, the religious right, have particularly fused the two. On this matter, WARC is quite clear:

Concerning absolute power. The US global empire today, with a spirit of divine pretension, lays claim to absolute power. In so doing it becomes a force that contravenes the gospel of life revealed in the Galilean Jesus.

Concerning imposed messianic agendas. The US global empire with its messianic spirit, its sense of a sacred destiny (“manifest destiny”) to

³² *Ibid.*, p. 444.

³³ Wallis, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 4.

³⁴ This was a central point in my doctoral thesis, “The Faith that Works,” later published as Michael Hoy, *The Faith that Works. The Relationship of Faith and Works in the Theology of Juan Luis Segundo, S.J.* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

save and liberate the world from evil, usurps the saving role of God in the resurrected Christ. The power of the resurrected Christ is not given through any one nation's drive to power over others ...

Concerning imperial justifications of war. The US global empire claims a right to kill and destroy, assuming that Pax Americana is the final arbitrator of justness and goodness. There is godlike pretension in the empire's posing as righteous dispenser of freedom for all other peoples. [...] We reject the empire's use of theological and biblical language to justify its wars and other exploitative and oppressive designs. We reject the kind of apocalyptic messianism among Christians that misuses the Book of Revelation and the book of Daniel to justify its imperial violence and destruction of "others."³⁵

The nature of the theological problem that is correctly identified here, is that gospel is being subsumed under the law of empire. Indeed, it has. But the real problem which the "Galilean Jesus" was about in his "gospel of life" was how to free people from the very law of God. That, too, is being promulgated by empire's spiritual advocates, the religious right, but it is not the whole law of God.

Here, on the substance of the law, is where the religious right makes its greatest *faux pas*: it uses the law only legalistically, even its Manichean legalism, as a tool to help justify its own existence by pitting some people over others. Hence, it is not only foreigners abroad who are targeted by this weak version of the law, but those made foreign at home, such as feminists, gays and lesbians, etc.

The truth of this thesis is that the law cannot finally be an ally of the promise. The law, in its fullness, "accuses" and condemns.³⁶ It condemns even its users.

Because the religious right fosters only a watered-down version of the law (legalism), it does not promote the gospel of Jesus the Christ. In fact, it cannot even begin to see beyond the blindness of its legalism how it is only promoting what Bonhoeffer, in the midst of another imperial reality, called "cheap grace."³⁷ It promotes a *theologia gloria* that cannot reconcile with Christ's accusations on human pride and pretension, and that lacks a spirit of repentance. A *theologia crucis* will take seriously the Christ who suffered and died to free us from the judgment of the law of the very God

³⁵ WARC, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 445.

³⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV.

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: SCM Press, 1959).

who holds us accountable, and rightly so considering our own blindness to our practices of violence, “hatred and vainglory” (Niebuhr). In other words, the so-called gospel of the religious right does not really set people free. It only leaves people in bondage to the empire, as well as to the law.

Yet, for all its promising vantage, WARC also seems to miss this deeply theological discernment in its presentation of the Galilean Jesus. “In the spirit of the Galilean Jesus who took on the Pax Romana, we find it necessary to lift our voice against some prominent features of the current Pax Americana.”³⁸ I prefer instead what one other Reformed confessor said by way of illustration from his own personal encounter with empire:

I pulled up behind a Hummer (a military vehicle) in Oklahoma City the other day and it was covered with little fish symbols, and I thought to myself, “That’s nice, this is not just an entitled white male driving an urban assault vehicle. It’s a follower of Jesus who is protecting his family, and who may need to crush a few smaller cars to get a parking space.” That’s when I noticed his bumper sticker. It said, KICK ASS CHRISTIAN. I’m not making this up. I wish I were making this up. But where I live, Christians are not the most gentle, humble people on the block. And why should they be? For years now, their role models have been taunting our enemies instead of praying for them. It’s hard for me to imagine Jesus ever saying, “Bring em’ on!” Or “Either you’re with us, or you’re with the Gentiles.”³⁹

The issue here is precisely the issue that Bonhoeffer realized as the mistake of Barth and Barmen. In their effort to speak out boldly in the face of imperial realities and the pseudo-gospel of the *Deutsche Christen*, the confessors did themselves no favors in creating the same mix of law and gospel. Particularly, the first two theses of Barmen needed the “responsible interpretation” that Bonhoeffer and others provided, one that did not diminish the law as a Word of God—a Word that ultimately accuses and condemns us—but nonetheless advocates for the gospel in Jesus the Christ as God’s final Word that trumps over that condemnation.⁴⁰

³⁸ WARC, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 444.

³⁹ Meyers, *op. cit.* (note 26), p. 4.

⁴⁰ For a detailed examination of Bonhoeffer on this matter, see Bertram *op. cit.* (note 19), chapter 5, “Bonhoeffer’s ‘Battle(s) for Christendom’: His ‘Responsible Interpretation’ of Barmen.”

Justice is not the promise. But the promise will empower the work for justice. And it will empower the work that justice cannot bring, which the religious right cannot seem to tolerate—mercy, even for one’s enemies.

Thesis five: These witnesses appeal for and to the oppressed who are afflicted in this time of oppression, which is also a time for confessing.

The goal of confessing is to lead not only the whole church to stand up with the confessors, but to empower especially those who are most oppressed. Therefore, a time for confessing will address the problem of the “systematic demoralizing of people” (Bertram).

In the current imperial crisis, this seems especially so for those who are oppressed by false hopes of a “free democracy” that is neither free nor democratic. Freedoms are hampered by legalistic practices that restrain people from exercising basic freedoms of dignity and privacy, and under which democracy entails not rule by the people but by the oligarchy. Even within the US, some of those most oppressed by imperial standards sanctioned by the religious right are gays and lesbians. But even those for whom liberation struggles have been underway for some time—women, minorities, the poor—face new difficulties under imperial oppression.

Because the gospel of Jesus the Christ sets people free at the very core of their being, even before God (*coram Deo*), there is no diminishment of one people in relation to another. The Manichean legalism of the religious right and empire stands in the way of this kind of “good news” getting through, in part, because it would undermine the retaining of privilege and dominance over others.

Confessors appeal first for the oppressed. That is, they appeal on behalf of the victims who have been subjugated because of the false gospel that is promulgated by those in authority (ecclesial and political). The confessing witnesses may even be among those who are so oppressed. But with their blinders removed, they can certainly see and speak out when people and creation are being oppressed.

Confessors also appeal to the oppressed, to find in the boldness and the real freedom that the gospel brings, the real power to stand up against oppression. Even when the forces of empire seek to restrain, the oppressed realize that the empire’s days are numbered. Emil Fackenheim once referred to the faithful witnesses who died as victims of the Holocaust as “witnesses to God and man even if abandoned by God

and man.”⁴¹ The victims of the current imperial crisis plead their case to God as the final arbitrator. The empire’s real enemy is not terrorism, but the God who will repay vengeance. That is why empire tries so hard to suppress. But no one knows that better, and with greater final hilarity, than the world’s very oppressed who are liberated in the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Thesis six: No one is more aware of their ambiguous certitude in making this confession than the confessors themselves—but they are nonetheless right in making their confession.

The most difficult demon of all for the confessors is their own conscience. As much as the confessors will make their claims bold—as well they should in a “time for confessing”—they are also deeply aware that they too are culpable for the same reality in which they live. That is, empire has also penetrated their souls. They have even reaped from its fruits, in pension plans, places of privilege and the like. They cannot even avoid the money of the empire: Jesus challenged his hypocritical critics by focusing on the emperor’s head on the coin of the day and asking the provocative question, “whose head is this, and whose title?” (Mk 12:17). That is the stinging truth of Margaret Thatcher’s claim that “there is no alternative,” which we “are made to believe and confess.”⁴²

Bertram addresses this ambiguous certitude this way:

that very feature of confessional movements—“Who are *they* to be pointing the finger!”—may be the one thing more than anything else which accounts for their ambiguity. Namely, people who themselves are demonstrable sinners, and are that perhaps most demonstrably in the way they criticize others, nevertheless have to bear the overwhelming burden—more overwhelming even than any loss of “goods, fame, child and wife”—of being for once in their lifetimes embarrassedly, mortifyingly right. My own observation is that most of us, and most of us for reasons of conscientious humility, find exactly that burden too crushing to shoulder: that known wrong-doers should be made a laughing-stock by being made to stand up for what is absolutely right. But then, doesn’t

⁴¹ Emil Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 97. I am indebted to Bertram for this reference.

⁴² WARC, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 441.

it become just that much more urgent to recall *whose* rightness it is they are being made to represent? And if that makes them look like fools for his sake who bear his rightness as an “alien righteousness,” and drives them to act recklessly as if they were going to live forever when all the world can see how obviously they and their movements age—well, then maybe that very ambiguity is of the essence of their confession. But have you noticed how shamelessly they laugh, as if the joke on them were ultimately on someone else—“who died for them and rose again?”⁴³

Confessors against global empire, therefore, are finally humble and contrite by the sheer weight of evidence against them. For some, this has driven confessors underground, even into submission. Even at the heart of their confessing is the gnawing realization that they could be guilty of blasphemy, misrepresenting the very God they are proclaiming. Their critics also will not be without evidence of their hypocrisy, adding to the heightened sensitivity. But confessors will be bold in affirming the gospel of Jesus the Christ, realizing that the greater blasphemy is apostasy. They entrust their final vindication to the Lord of the church who says, “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32), and who gives us the promise that “this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).

⁴³ Bertram, *op. cit.* (note 19), chapter 7; originally published in “A Time for Confessing: or When Is the Church a Confessional Movement,” in *The Cresset: Confession and Congregation, Occasional Papers III* (Valparaiso: Valparaiso University Press, 1978), pp.78-85.

The Holy Spirit: Power for Confessing Faith in the Midst of Empire

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ.¹

Confession and power

In ordinary times, Christians are called—after prayerful, community-based discernment—to evangelical defiance of dominating forces that breed death and degradation. In extraordinary times, a particular set of life-defining circumstances may bid us, in addition, to confess our faith in relationship to “that little point [God’s truth] that the world and the devil are at that moment attacking.” Discerning what this means, in word and deed, at any given moment in history is the work of all who would confess faith in the Triune God.

Confession of faith is called forth when social powers—be they political, economic, military, cultural—have persuaded a people that 1) what is evil is good; 2) ways of living opposed to the ways of God are divinely ordained; and 3) what is not God warrants ultimate trust. Said differently, we are to confess our faith where evil convincingly parades as God and, in this disguise, effectively shapes life or death for many. When this occurs “the world and the devil are ... attacking” the truth of God. Confessing faith discloses the deception and confronts the attack. To do so is inherent in the church’s vocation to participate in the work of God on earth. Traditionally, confession entails both words and actions coherent with them.

¹ Martin Luther cited in Douglas John Hall, *Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. vi.

In the early church, to confess “Jesus is Lord” was to confess that “Caesar is not Lord,” at risk of death by torture. Imperial powers demanded ultimate allegiance and had convinced the people that the emperor was divine. Christian confession defied that deception and refused that demand. In some parts of the early church, baptism included bodily expressing a confession of faith; it was a confession of what was and what was not to be trusted ultimately, of where to place allegiance and where to refuse it. Before baptism, these confessors faced Rome, and immediately after turned to face Jerusalem. Confession of faith was dangerous, life changing and, for many, life threatening.

Reigning powers in the mid-sixteenth century had convinced people to place ultimate trust in human constructs about salvation rather than in God. That false allegiance shaped people’s lives away from the truth of God’s gracious love. Again, confession of faith was called forth, in spite of possible deadly consequences.

In fascist Germany, dominating powers persuaded a people that evil was good. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words, “the great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts.” “Evil,” he wrote from prison, “appear[ed] disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice” Bonhoeffer aptly decried the preponderance of people “capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil.”² For the Confessing Church, confession of faith was power discourse that confronted evil and its truth claims.

Clearly, in the traditions of the early church and later in Lutheran traditions, confession has power. It discloses evil in the guise of divine good and counters attacks on the truth of God. The three historical moments noted above show another life-shaping power of confession. It strengthens and encourages Christians to speak and live in ways faithful to God in spite of the consequences, and to resist evil. Confession nourishes Christian community capable of resisting dominating and seemingly indomitable social forces. Herein lies confession’s power, and here too its peril.

Lutheran theology cautions against attributing to confession another form of power: the power to know or name the ultimate and absolute truth. We know that our discernment of truth, even confessed truth, is at best fallible and finite. While indeed we are called in faith to discern God’s truth, three clear teachings protect the confessing community from the power to know with absolute certainty the fullness of that truth:

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 4, 9.

sin's pervasive presence, human finitude and the infinite multivalence and splendor of God's truth. These prohibit and protect us from claiming full or fully correct knowledge of God's truth.

We have noted three features of confession in relationship to power: the kind of idolatrous power that compels confession, the power that confession has and the power it does not have. Here I shall consider a fourth feature, the power for confession. Where the people of God are called to confess allegiance to the Triune God in the face of imperial forces, knowing that confession may elicit brutal recrimination, wherein lies the moral and spiritual power and courage to do so?

This inquiry is written from and to those Christian communities of the global North who are economically privileged and, hence, are situated as "beneficiaries" of empire and participants in it (albeit unwittingly so). Taking seriously the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, my aim is to ferret out and sketch the possibilities for moral and spiritual agency to defy empire as part of faith's confession. How can communities of faith (and other people of good will) more fully receive and embody the Spirit of God for the sake of allegiance to God in the contemporary context?

Scripture teaches that the power for faithful living comes from God. The language and imagery used for millennia to describe that power of the Triune God is *ruach*, *pneuma*, *espíritu*, Spirit, Holy Spirit ... the breath of God given to God's creatures enabling them to do God's work on earth. God's Spirit gives faith and gives God's people (and other created things) the power to serve God's healing and liberating work toward abundant life for all.

The witness of our faith ancestors to that power is clarion. Luther, for instance, was convinced that the Holy Spirit imparts courage, strength and power to those who believe. Christians, he writes, are "far more powerful through the Holy Spirit, and are undaunted by the world, the devil, death, and all kinds of misfortune The Hebrew word "spirit" might well be rendered 'bold, undaunted courage.'³ This is the Holy Spirit's office, he writes, to rule inwardly in the heart, making "it burn and create new courage"⁴ Luther's confession of faith required that courage.

³ Martin Luther, "Sermon on the 16th Sunday after Trinity," in John Nicholas Lenker (ed.), *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), p. 275.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The problem

According to the biblical witness and countless subsequent voices, the Spirit of God indeed brings moral courage for faithful living, despite the dangers entailed. However, these claims contrast sharply with reality as we, the church of the global North situated within empire, experience it.

Today, Christians in the global North live and breathe as players in a great “masquerade of evil.” Most of us do so unintentionally, many unwittingly. We tend to see the economic lifestyles we have adopted, as “good.” Yet, never before has humankind had the capacity to feed all, while simultaneously organizing economic life such that 225 of the world’s people own wealth equal to forty-seven percent,⁵ and 30,000 children are killed daily by poverty. The scale of evil is new in yet another sense: never in earth’s history has one species threatened earth’s capacity to sustain life as we know and love it. In this context, one society, mine, leads the devastation. In households throughout the USA, citizens buy and sell, construct and transport, recreate and dress themselves in ways deadly to global brothers and sisters and to the earth’s life systems. In boardrooms and investment firms across the country, decisions are made that kill by poverty and ecocide.

This maldistribution of goods and power is not the greatest manifestation of evil in our day. Greater still is how it is seductively disguised as good. The society most “benefiting” from the over consumption, most responsible for the ecocide and arguably most linked with the controlling economic powers, generally accepts these arrangements as a “good life.” In general (but not exclusively), it demonstrates effective allegiance to this way of life and the power arrangements that enable it. As a society, we are ensconced in ways of living that, on the whole, devastate the life web that God has and is creating. We live as “un-creators,” tacitly conceding to moral blindness and inertia.

Many people around the globe consider the political, economic and military power structures that enable some to consume exorbitantly at the expense of others’ impoverishment and earth’s distress to be “empire,” with the US at its center. Empire claims to be good and demands ultimate allegiance. The church’s unwitting and unintentional complicity with that deception and demand, using Luther’s words, “attacks [two] points

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, 1998 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 29-30.

of God's truth:" 1) that we are created to receive and trust the love of God, praise God for it and then love as God loves; and 2) that the Spirit of God empowers for that work. For the church, benefiting from empire, confessing faith in the Triune God entails disclosing and defying the deception and resisting the attack. Our faith tradition teaches that the moral/spiritual power to do so is given by God's Spirit.

By and large, the North American church has not thus confessed. We have not claimed this power of the Holy Spirit. To speak of the Spirit enabling us to participate in God's healing and liberating work appears as theological hubris and mass self-deception, unless at the same time we acknowledge the overwhelming reality of all our apparent failure to receive that power.

That unclaimed power is the focus of this inquiry, that contradiction its motivating force. How can today's North American church receive and embody the moral/spiritual power through the Holy Spirit to challenge empire? In response to that question, we pose five others.

Five questions

- According to the Old Testament, what does the Spirit's morally empowering role look like? What forms does it take? What does the Holy Spirit do in relationship to human moral agency?⁶
- How do we account for the apparent contradiction between biblical claims about the Spirit's morally empowering role and the apparent absence or invisibility of that in our contexts?
- What hinders or impedes our capacity to receive, accept, trust and heed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as moral-spiritual power for evangelical defiance of empire?
- What might enable Christian communities in the global North to receive and embody more fully the Spirit of God for the sake of allegiance to God in the midst of empire?

⁶ In the larger project of which this essay is a part, this question expands to include the witness of New Testament communities and the early church.

- What are the implications of these claims for exposing and challenging imperial powers today?

I shall address the first three of these questions, and initiate a response to the fourth and fifth. At issue here is the relationship between divine power in the Holy Spirit and human power for doing God's work on earth. We seek insight that will enable us faithfully to accept the power of the Spirit for challenging empire where it sucks us into its employ.

A degree of absurdity, ambiguity, possibility, challenge and self-deception accompanies any attempt to understand more fully the power of God's Spirit in human life. Vast diversity—even incompatibility—characterizes various biblical and early church attestations to the Spirit. How are we to “study” that which, for centuries, has defied systematic analysis?⁷

According to the Old Testament, what does the Spirit's morally empowering role look like? What forms does it take? What does the Holy Spirit do in relationship to human moral agency?

“Spirit,” where it refers to the Spirit of Yahweh translates the Hebrew, *ruach*.⁸ The word appears 378 times in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ Two hundred and sixty-four of these are rendered *pneuma* in the Septuagint.¹⁰

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the ancient Hebrews experienced a power of the One whom they called YHWH (among other names) reaching into their lives and into the entire created world, making things happen according to the will of that One. They called this power *ruach*. It worked directly, through human agents, or through other elements of creation. *Ruach* (like *pneuma* and *espíritu* and spirit, its most frequent renditions in Greek, Latin and English respectively) has multiple denotations as well as connotations in the biblical texts. Its meanings shift

⁷ I identify and work with these and related methodological issues, in *Ethics for the Uncreators*, forthcoming from Fortress Press.

⁸ The Hebrew *neshamah* is also rendered “spirit” or “breath” in English. However, it refers to the power of life in a less personal sense than in “life blood.”

⁹ Yves M. J. Congar, *The Holy Spirit in the Economy*, vol. 3, of *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman and New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 3.

¹⁰ Veli-Matto Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 25.

over the centuries of the Old Testament, and among different cultures and trajectories within it. The denotations range from a forceful movement of air to the essential energy of God.

The word's root significance "probably had to do with the movement of air,"¹¹ or more specifically with a "gale,"¹² but over time took on varied meanings. They include a tempestuous or raging wind belonging to God or sent by God (the *ruach* that separated the Red Sea in Ex 14:21); breath; an impersonal supernatural force; a temporary or roving mood or disposition sent by God to occupy a person and influence their behavior (the "*ruach* of jealousy" in Num 5:4, and "an evil *ruach*" tormenting Saul in 1 Sam 16:14); the breath or animating life-force of all living things, usually but not always given and withdrawn by God and resulting in life or death (Gen 7:22 and Ps 104:29-30); the personal vivifying force or energy of a human being¹³ ("Into your hand I commit my spirit [*ruach*] in Ps 31:5, and "the spirit [*ruach*] of their father Jacob" in Gen 45:27); and the essential energy of God.¹⁴

When referring to the *ruach* of God working within humans, it is the life force of God extended to human creatures by God. It may be "poured upon," or "put within" them.¹⁵ Some texts indicate the *ruach* itself as the agent; others depict God working through the *ruach*. It is given at times to the people corporately and at times to individuals.¹⁶

¹¹ Alasdair Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), pp. 3-4.

¹² Helen Schungel-Straumann, "*Ruach* (Geist-, Lebenskraft) im Alten Testament," in Maria Kassel (ed.), *Feministische Theologie. Perspektiven zur Orientierung*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1988), pp. 59-73, esp., p. 61, cited in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 318.

¹³ As a force that vivifies the human, *ruach* is the human spirit or deepest self, the essential energies of the persons, the source of feeling, thinking, responsive, responding deepest self of. (The *ruach* of Pharaoh was troubled, Gen 41:8.) In this sense *ruach* of a human and *ruach* of God are inseparably linked, sometimes in fact indistinguishable. In Gen 41:38, when God's *ruach* is withdrawn, the human *ruach* is gone and life dies.

¹⁴ The porous nature of boundaries among these is clear in the varied translations of a single text. According to the NRSV, Genesis 1:2 may be "a wind from God wept over the waters," the spirit of God," or "a mighty wind." Psalm 51:12 is translated as "...uphold me [with thy] free spirit in *Young's Analytical Concordance*, and as "sustain in me a willing spirit" in the NRSV. The *ruach* of God, of humans, and as an elemental force are not always clearly distinguishable.

¹⁵ "Then afterward I will pour out my spirit [*ruach*] on all flesh" (Joel 2:28); until a spirit [*ruach*] from on high is poured out on us" (Isa 32:14-18); "I will pour my spirit [*ruach*] upon your descendants" (Isa 44:3-5); "I will put my spirit [*ruach*] within you" (Ezek 36:24-38).

¹⁶ For the former, see Isa 63:11 ("Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit"), and for the latter Ps 51:10-11 ("Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit [*ruach*] within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit [*ruach*] from me").

The *ruach* of God:

- Instructs people to act according to God's will and how to do so (e.g., God's spirit "instructed" the Israelites in the wilderness in Neh 9:20).
- Enables people to act according to God's instructions especially before the monarchy (e.g., Gideon in Judg 6:34; Samson in Judg 14:6).
- Provokes and enables prophecy, particularly in the pre-exilic period (e.g., Num 11:29; 1 Sam 10:6; Joel 2:28-29).
- Enables people to bring forth justice, righteousness, peace, secure dwelling: "I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1, see also Isa 11).
- Restores a deep, intertwining of the good of human societies, human individuals and the other-than-human (especially the land): "Until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field" (Isa 32:15-16). Elsewhere too the "pouring out" of God's Spirit or God "putting my spirit within you" is linked to both human flourishing and the land's flourishing (Isa 44:3-4; Ezek 36:26-36). With the Spirit, the land and the people are mutually restored.
- Constitutes a particular gift, most frequently associated with wisdom (e.g., Gen 41:38-9; Ex 28:3; Deut 34:9; Ex 35:31; in the pre-exilic period as with Samson in Judg 14:6, 19; Isa 11:1-5, the wisdom of Yahweh).
- Gives life and is necessary for life to remain.¹⁷
- Renders people to be dwelling place of God and to be as God's people.
- Shapes the community of God's people.¹⁸

¹⁷ "The spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). "If he should take back his spirit [*ruach*] to himself, and gather to himself his breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust" (Job 34:14-15).

¹⁸ "The Hebrew Scriptures credit all of the gifts that build the life of the community to [the Spirit's] inspiring, resting upon, or moving within different persons. The courage and wisdom of national

- After times of despair or devastation, especially devastation attributed to the people's unfaithfulness manifest in ignoring the poor and hungry (Isa 32:6-18), restores both life and right relationships.¹⁹

In sum, the Spirit of God is the force of God emanating from God that enables people to act or that acts in people. It is that dimension of God that reaches into the depths of the person or the people and awakens agency—or is agency—for being and doing what is pleasing to God. The *ruach* of God is

used to speak of God present and active in the world and in particular among human beings The *ruach* of Yahweh ... is his living impact here and now The *ruach* of God in the Hebrew Scriptures does not as a rule describe God's inner personality ... [but rather] God's activity in relationship to the world.²⁰

This Spirit usually refers to God's presence and activity in specific times and places rather than to God's general ubiquitous presence.²¹

Yves Congar summarizes the role of the God's Spirit in the Hebrew Scriptures as "first and foremost what causes [humans] to act so that God's plan in history may be fulfilled. It always refers to a life energy."²² In fact, as Moltmann notes, by the post-exilic Israel, "God's historical activity in the world is attributed to the *ruach* of Yahweh."

Given the apparent powerlessness of the church to challenge empire, let us note that in the Hebrew Bible God's Spirit:

- Lifts people from powerlessness, hopelessness, or despair in the face of enormously powerful forces.
- Saves people from bondage to prevalent injustice, from the bonds of structural sin.

leaders, the strength of defenders, the energy of seers, the wisdom of teachers, the creativity of musicians, poets, dancers, and artists are all gifts of the Spirit." Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), p. 139.

¹⁹ In Ezek 37, after Ezekiel is led by the Spirit into the valley of bones, God declares life to the dry bones: "I will put my spirit [*ruach*] within you, and you shall live."

²⁰ Heron, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 8.

²¹ An example of an exception is in Ps 139: "Where can I go from your spirit [*ruach*]?"

²² Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9), vol. 4, p. 3.

- enables people to pursue justice
- liberates from demonic possession, the powers of evil, or sin
- rescues people from dire distress, from social chaos, or disintegration
- delivers from self destruction.

How do we account for the apparent contradiction between biblical claims about the Spirit’s morally empowering role and the apparent absence or invisibility of that in our contexts?

Common explanations follow two patterns. First, the church lives historically within the paradox of a God

- who is intimately ever present, but who at times appears utterly absent
- whose reign on this earth is “already,” and so clearly “not yet”
- who will restore the earth community, and yet an earth community being destroyed.

Generally, we accept the paradox, thankful for the ways in which the Spirit indeed is acting in our world, enabling acts of mercy, compassion and justice in countless ways. It is comforting to know that God’s work among us may be invisible to us. Furthermore, we are not assured that justice and peace will be realized in our time, but we do have the conviction through the cross, that even where God seems most absent, there God is. These claims for which I am most grateful, mean life to me. However, to rest in peace in these claims, while allowing injustice to persist, is to betray the God of justice making love.²³ Why is the church, along with others, not resisting the policies and practices of empire that continue to suck resources out of Latin America in the form of NAFTA and CAFTA, out of

²³ “Production sharing agreements” are mechanisms for privatizing Iraq’s oil supplies and putting them under the control of global oil corporations.

Africa in “debt” payments, and out of the Middle East through military invasion and the quest for “production sharing agreements?”

The second customary explanation is that the Spirit’s power is limited by the pervasive presence of sin. Few take this more seriously than Luther: As individuals, a society, even a species, we are “selves curved in on self” (*se incurvatus in se*), in bondage to sin, both private and systemic. We do not fully live out our call to trust and love God and to love neighbor, because on this side of the grave we will always be both sinner and saved. We cannot do fully the moral good that we long to do. We thank God that we are forgiven by the grace of God alone, a forgiveness that, perhaps literally, has saved my life.

Taken alone, that moral anthropology bears a lie. Luther insists that, having been filled with the living Christ and fed in the Eucharist, we are no longer solely curved in on self; we also are people, who by the power of Christ’s indwelling love, serve the good even at great cost to self. Luther declares: “... by means of this sacrament [Eucharist], all self-seeking love is rooted out and gives place to that which seeks the common good of all.”²⁴ This dialectical moral anthropology—*simul iustus et peccator*—refutes the possibility of moral perfection in earthly life. However, it also disavows any claim that sin’s ubiquitous presence renders us morally powerless.

Does explanation for the contradiction lie elsewhere? Perhaps we are mistaken to claim that by God’s baptismal covenant, we are “to seek justice and peace in all the earth.” Could it be that the Spirit’s power only confronts individual sin, and not structural sin? Is the Spirit powerless in the face of social structural evil? No, it is impossible to read the Prophets and not perceive that God calls and enables God’s people to seek justice in the face of oppressive power.

Perhaps the picture of a Spirit capable of breathing life, liberation and healing into the most death-dealing realities is merely a social construction, or the meta-narrative of a creating, saving and sustaining God only a story. But that would mean disavowing faith in the very God revealed in Jesus Christ. What other factors then are at play in our apparent inability to realize the power of the Triune God, as given in the Spirit?

²⁴ Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, and the Brotherhoods” (1519), in Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 67. .

What hinders or impedes our capacity to receive, accept, trust and heed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as moral-spiritual power for evangelical defiance of empire?

One factor: Killing the Spirit's abode

Throughout the ages, theologians have claimed the presence of God's Spirit dwelling within the created world. The Holy Spirit, said Irenaeus of Lyon, "is diffused throughout all the earth."²⁵ Martin Luther insisted that "nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power."²⁶ "God ... exists at the same time in every little seed, whole and entire, and yet also in all and above all and outside all created things."²⁷ For Catholic theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, the "Spirit is the living God at her closest to the world, pervading the whole and each creature to awaken life and mutual kinship."²⁸ Eco theologians Sallie McFague and Mark Wallace recall the ancient theme of God's Spirit immanent in creation. "Earth," claims McFague, is the "body of God." For Wallace, the Spirit is the "life force ... living within all life-forms." The Spirit "ensouls the earth with the quickening breath for divine life, and the earth enfleshes the Spirit."²⁹

These voices and countless others testify that God Immanuel is "God with us," not only as Jesus Christ but also as the Spirit "flowing and pouring into all things."³⁰ God has determined to be "with us" corporally, not only once in history, but for all time. God dwells within and saves the creatures and elements of this good earth.³¹ Christian faith is staked on the belief that the only power which truly can heal the world is incarnate in it.

²⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*.

²⁶ Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics" (1527), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 58.

²⁷ Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528), in Timothy Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 272.

²⁸ Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 147.

²⁹ Mark Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

³⁰ Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of John," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957) as cited by Larry Rasmussen, "Luther and a Gospel of Earth," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 51:1-2 (1997), p. 22.

³¹ Note that claims to the Spirit's immanence in the earth and its creatures does not identify the

What then happens, when that loci of God's life-creating and life-saving work is being destroyed? What happens when its capacity to regenerate life is being undone? As we continue to destroy the conditions for life on earth, what happens to the Spirit embodied in that very life and earth?

A second factor: Domestication of the Spirit in Western theology

Western theology generally has been characterized by rather modest pneumatological assumptions. Often linked with the Latin/Orthodox split that culminated in the eleventh century, this tendency actually began long before it.³² Has the progressive "domestication" of the Spirit throughout the last two millennia deadened the Euro-western church's capacity to perceive, hear, heed and receive the power and presence of God's spirit?

"Domestication" here includes: interiorizing and spiritualizing the Spirit; privatizing the Spirit; subordinating the Spirit to the other two persons of the Trinity; collapsing the Spirit into the church; and minimizing aspects of the Spirit's work that might cause upheaval or challenge power or privilege.

Spiritualization and interiorization of the spirit

As Yves Congar explains,

Spirit has different connotations when translated from Hebrew into Greek The Greeks thought in categories of substance, but the Jews were concerned with force, energy and the principle of action. The spirit-breath was for them what acts and causes to act and, in the case of the Breath of God, what animates and causes to act in order to realize God's plan.³³

The spiritualizing of God's Spirit, then, accompanies the later church's movement into cultures more shaped by Greek thought. That shift is even more pronounced with the subsequent Latin influence. However, many early patristic writers' understanding of the Spirit closely reflected the

Spirit as singularly immanent. The Spirit's presence within does not mean solely within, for the Spirit is not only within but also above, below, and beyond transcending all things.

³² One might argue in fact that the shift begins even in the New Testament writings and communities.

³³ Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 3.

texts of the Hebrew Scripture.³⁴ Their writings indicate a Spirit understood to be given in baptism: indwell the church; sanctify and animate it; inspire the prophets and apostles; work intimately with the Word in the work of salvation; provide courage and fortitude to the martyrs. With Irenaeus of Lyon, the Spirit is a life-giving force, powerfully active in both creation and in the restoration of the entire created world.³⁵ Through Athanasius and the Great Cappadocians, a rich doctrine of the Spirit emerged as powerfully present in the events of life.

In contrast, groundwork for Western Christianity's pneumatology was laid by Augustine, for whom the Spirit was more exclusively interiorized.³⁶ Augustine argues that the Spirit is essentially the "love of the 'Father' for the Son" and the "love of the Son for the 'Father,'" the bond of love uniting the Trinity in a mutually loving communion. While this image has powerful implications for the ontologically relational nature of the divine and the mutuality of that relational model, it also affirms a more exclusively interior function of the Spirit. This shift remained the direction of the Western church throughout the Middle Ages.

The implications for the moral life, of course, depend on the interpretation of "love." A Hebrew Bible interpretation of love implies justice and holds that justice making on behalf of those marginalized by dominating powers is integral to love as a biblical norm. With Augustine, in contrast, the Spirit as *vinculum caritatis* (the bond of love between the "Father" and the Son) displays a pronounced drive towards interiorization—the Spirit is the inner love of the Trinity, the inner animating principle of the church, the source of the inner life of the soul" and, ultimately, of the unity between the soul and God.³⁷ This perspective, especially as

³⁴ See John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 167. McGuckin notes also that before the Arian crisis and the Council of Nicea, worship of the Spirit and acknowledgment of its active presence developed more rapidly than did a firm doctrine of the Spirit.

³⁵ Perhaps in part due to Irenaeus' commitment to refute the tendency of Marcion and other so-called "gnostics" to separate the God of creation from the God of salvation.

³⁶ Eastern emphasis—as evident especially in Basil of Caesarea—included this interior role of the Spirit as the love which binds the Trinity into an eternal "dance" of communion, but far less exclusively so. The Spirit's agency in the word is not displaced. See Basil in *De Spiritu Sancto* 16.

³⁷ Heron, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 88. See also pp. 90-91

expressed in his *De Trinitate*,³⁸ “guided [Augustine’s] Western successors for a thousand years or more.”³⁹

Subordination of the Spirit to the other two persons of the Trinity

With this interpretation, Augustine reasons that the Spirit proceeds from both “Father” and Son, rather than from the Father alone. This logic (expressed also by Ambrose and Jerome and earlier by Tertullian) issued in the *filioque*, expressed first in liturgical practice and, by 589 CE, in documents of the church. Eastern Christianity has long argued that the Western church, with the *filioque* and attendant theologies, has “subordinated” the Spirit to Christ, pneumatology to Christology.⁴⁰ The work of the Spirit, it argues, has been eclipsed by the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit underestimated. Western theology, unlike Orthodox Christianity, has attributed the “functions” of creating, saving and sustaining to the “Father,” Son and Holy Spirit respectively, and then has given primary attention to salvation, the work (it claims) of Christ. The role of the Spirit in salvation, strongly affirmed in much Pre-Augustinian theology and in subsequent Orthodox theology, was eclipsed by a singular focus on Christology.⁴¹

The developing Eastern tradition, in contrast, maintained a more cosmic and all encompassing sense of the Spirit’s power and role. It held that all three persons are involved in creating, saving and sustaining the world. Irenaeus writes repeatedly of the “two hands of God” as the main characters in the great drama of redemption: Son and Spirit, or Word and wisdom.⁴² This affirmation of the Spirit’s activity in creating and saving is seen in multiple figures, perhaps most poetically in the Great Cappadocians, especially St Basil, and later in John of Damascus. In his text, John of Damascus writes:

³⁸ See especially Augustine *De Trinitate*, VI.7.

³⁹ Heron, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 88.

⁴⁰ See Stanley M. Burgess, in *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), pp. 10-14, 48-52.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Johnson notes that the Spirit was “the last of the Trinitarian persons to be named explicitly divine,” Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 128.

⁴² Son and Spirit “raise man to the life of God.” Irenaeus, vol. V, p. 1. The role of the Spirit in salvation is evident throughout *Against Heresies*, and also in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*.

We likewise believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life ... who proceeds from the Father and is communicated through the Son and is participated in by all creation; who through himself creates and gives substance to all things... . Accordingly, all things whatsoever the Son has from the Father, the Spirit also has⁴³

The Orthodox position, in no uncertain terms, affirms the Spirit as equal with the Son, proceeding directly and only from the Father in order to create, save, give life and bring all of creation to participate in the movement of the Triune God.⁴⁴ This Spirit is “uncreated, complete, almighty, all-working, all-powerful, infinite in power... .”⁴⁵ She is “transformer of creation by whose energy the cosmos is transfigured... .”⁴⁶ Indeed, this Spirit, as expressed by Irenaeus, John of Damascus and the Great Cappadocians is not subordinate to, less important than, or less present and active in changing the material world than is Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth Johnson, drawing upon a number of theologians, illustrates the contrast in Western theology:

As Herbert Mühlen observes, when most of us say God, the Holy Spirit never comes immediately to mind; rather, the Spirit seems like an edifying appendage to the doctrine of God Of the three divine persons the Spirit is the most “anonymous,” in Norman Pittenger’s view, indeed the “poor relation” in the Trinity. Many have written of the Spirit as the “unknown” or at least “half-known” God, as Yves Congar has pointed out Wolfhart Pannenberg notes, [the doctrine of the Holy Spirit] seems curiously “watered down” from its biblical fullness.⁴⁷

⁴³ John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, I.viii.

⁴⁴ Heron, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84

⁴⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 129-130, citing Herbert Mühlen, “The Person of the Holy Spirit,” in Kilian McDonnell (ed.), *The Holy Spirit and Power* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 12; Norman Pittenger, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974) 7-8; Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9), vol. 3, p. 6; and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Apostles Creed: in Light of Today’s Questions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 130.

Privatization of the Spirit

In the biblical texts, the work of the Holy Spirit is rarely a private affair between an individual and God. The Spirit has public or community presence or impact. In stark contrast, contemporary Christianity in the US sees a significant move into “privatized” forms of Christian faith and spirituality.⁴⁸ This is not new in Western theology. “Protestant theology and piety traditionally privatized the range of the Spirit’s activity, focusing on the justifying and sanctifying work of the Spirit in the life of the individual believer, and emphasizing the Spirit’s gift of personal certitude” and inner peace.⁴⁹

Orthodox sacramental theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, expresses the subtle dangers of this move.

Lost and confused in the noise, the rush and the frustrations of “life,” [the human] easily accepts the invitation to enter into the inner sanctuary of his[her] soul and to discover there another life, to enjoy a “spiritual banquet” amply supplied with spiritual food. This spiritual food will help him[her] ... to restore peace of mind ... to lead a more wholesome and dedicated life, to “keep smiling” in a deep religious way.⁵⁰

Will this private inner “peace” and “religious smiling” nourish resistance to powers of dominion, especially where resistance is fraught with complexity, danger and moral ambiguity?

Collapsing the Spirit into ecclesiastical structure and ministry

Yves Congar argues that “the Holy Spirit has sometimes been forgotten,” or overshadowed by teachings and liturgical practices that assimilate its functions into those of the church and, in the case of the Roman

⁴⁸ Ronald C. White summarizes this trajectory well, in “The Trajectory of Disestablishment: Public and Private Religion in America,” in Ronald White and Albright Zimmerman (eds.), *An Unsettled Arena: Religion and the Bill of Rights* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), chap. 3.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 129. See also Lora M. Gross, “Spirit and Resistance: A Theological Perspective on Lillian Hellman,” in Robert H. Stone and Robert L. Stivers (eds.), *Resistance and Theological* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2004), p. 286.

⁵⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), p. 12.

Catholic Church, the functions of the Pope and the Virgin Mary.⁵¹ Congar is not alone in arguing that, to a significant extent, the Spirit has been eclipsed by the church. Elizabeth Johnson notes that

Post-Tridentine Catholic theology ... [tended] toward institutionalizing the Spirit, tying the Spirit's activity very tightly to ecclesiastical office and ordained ministry... . The cumulative effect of this rather meager Western pneumatological tradition has been that the full range of the reality and activity of God the Spirit has been virtually lost from much of [Western] Christian theological consciousness.⁵²

Minimizing aspects of the Spirit's work that might cause upheaval or challenge existing arrangements of power or privilege

Could it be that ecclesial “fear” of the Spirit’s power has limited our capacity to realize that power? Finnish theologian, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, argues that

The church’s ambiguous experience with charismatic and prophetic movements has often led the leadership of the church to try to control the work of the Spirit out of fear of chaos and lack of order. Some theologians wonder, for example, whether the church catholic in its rejection of the second- and third-century charismatic-prophetic movement, Montanism, lost an opportunity to integrate charismatic pneumatological spirituality more fully into its life. What were the church’s criteria for a “heretical pneumatology” in this case? Many erroneous arguments were advanced in the condemnation process.⁵³

Centuries later, the reform movements that paved the way for the Reformation saw a dramatic increase in attention to the Spirit as a power not mediated by the church. Those movements and their successors, the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation, were denounced and repressed—first by the pre-Reformation Roman church and then by the magisterial Reformation—in part for their teachings about and claimed experience of the Spirit unmediated by the church.

⁵¹ Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9), vol. 1, pp. 159-166. Congar offers numerous illustrations.

⁵² Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 130.

⁵³ Kärkkäinen, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 18.

This is perhaps not surprising. The power of the Spirit, as acclaimed in the Hebrew Scriptures and the church's first centuries, surpasses all human power structures. It draws people into allegiance to God over all other authorities. It "accustoms" humans to life as God would have it, and gives courage for that life, despite the contrary demands of imperial forces.⁵⁴

Domestication of the Spirit: In sum

The Spirit of Yahweh, revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, is an undeniably moral force in the material world. God's *ruach* acts within human beings, shaping their attitudes, behaviors and corporate life. It acts on other living creatures and on earth's elements, bidding them to heed God's will. The bidding of the Spirit has life and death consequences. It confronts powers of deception and domination. Almost never is the Spirit of the Holy One disembodied, immaterial, privatized, or withdrawn from confronting powers that counter God's will. The cumulative effect of movements to "domesticate" the Holy Spirit has been to obscure these socially transformative implications of being recipients and bearers of God's Spirit.

The issue here is the impact of this trajectory on the moral-spiritual agency of contemporary Christian persons and communities as they seek to be faithful in the context of empire. How does this domestication keep the Spirit from working within us to save this good creation from all forms of sin, including the structural sins of empire? What is the enormous loss of moral-spiritual power wrought by "domesticating" the "person" of the Trinity who first and foremost "causes to act so that God's plan in history may be fulfilled?"⁵⁵

What might enable Christian communities in the global North to receive and embody more fully the Spirit of God for the sake of allegiance to God in the midst of empire?

As contemporary theorists argue, human identity and moral power are shaped by the historical narratives in which we situate ourselves, usually without being fully aware of doing so. This essay has uncovered

⁵⁴ Irenaeus of Lyon uses describes the Spirit as "accustoming" humankind to union and communion with God, and "accustoming" God to dwelling within humans.

⁵⁵ Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 4.

narratives of the Spirit informing the lives of early Christians, Jesus and their Hebrew forebears that differ from the story tacitly assumed by many Christians in the US today. We tend to assume a rather interior, private Spirit who invites us

to enter into the inner sanctuary of [the] soul and to discover there ... a “spiritual banquet” amply supplied with spiritual food. This food will help [us] ... to restore peace of mind ... to lead a more wholesome and dedicated life, to “keep smiling” in a deep religious sort of way.⁵⁶

This Spirit leads us to find “peace of mind” within unjust social structures, rather than to disrupt or denounce them. In contrast, many of our Hebrew forebears, Jesus among them, and many of his followers in the next three centuries situated themselves as players in an epic saga in which God’s Spirit “causes [humans] to act so that God’s plan in history may be fulfilled.”⁵⁷ It is a Spirit active in the world, creating, disrupting social structural sin as well as individual sin, enabling allegiance to Jesus Christ over allegiance to reigning powers. This heritage is a thundering message of hope.

What moral-spiritual power would we nurture in our children and youth by teaching them that they are heirs to powerful resisters? These people and communities, by the power of God’s *ruach*, defied the imperial powers of their day in order to be faithful to that God. How might worship open our eyes and hearts to the very Spirit who freed our ancient Hebrew forebears to speak truth to the élites of ancient Israel who oppressed the poor? This Spirit enabled the early generations after Jesus to live according to his way while risking prison and death. This Spirit anointed Jesus to “let the oppressed go free,” despite the deadly animosity that this aroused in the people who heard him (Lk 4:14-30). What if children and adults in our churches today were nurtured on stories of this “cloud of witnesses.”

I recall a recent sermon on Acts 16:24-25 depicting the apostle Paul in prison. Our pastor recounted her time shackled in prison as a result of civil disobedience at a nuclear submarine base. She spoke of the Spirit’s presence with her in a tiny cell, enabling her to sing hymns to quell her claustrophobia. It was the same Spirit who accompanied and encouraged Paul in shackles for his faith. Paul’s story and experience of the Spirit

⁵⁶ This is the tendency against which Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann warns, cited previously. See note 50.

⁵⁷ See Congar, *op. cit.* (note 9).

had sustained our pastor. I rejoiced that seven-year-olds, seventeen-year-olds (including my own) and seventy-year-olds in the congregation were being located in that story and its formative impact.

I think too of a recent children's sermon. After enacting Jesus' resistance to the powers of his day in order to heal a broken woman on the Sabbath, the lay preacher spoke of destructive powers that the children would face as they reentered the social world of the school year. Surprised by his own tears and broken voice, he asked the children if they too could include the outsiders even if it meant risking social estrangement from powerful kids, because Jesus' Spirit lived in them through their baptism. Never will I forget the look on the children's faces. Were I a "left-out" kid on the playground, I would hope that those young baptized followers of Jesus were at hand.

In the "Affirmation of Baptism," as Lutherans we affirm our commitment to a "covenant that God made with [us]" when God poured the Holy Spirit into us in baptism. According to that covenant, the baptized will "strive for justice and peace in all the earth." What if we embodied this commitment in this rite? Perhaps we would baptize in lakes and rivers that the community had been laboring to restore from ecological disaster, or baptize during demonstrations for fair trade or just wages.

Imagine people being cautioned not to internalize, privatize, or spiritualize the Spirit of the living God. Imagine teaching people to discern carefully the Spirit's bidding to act in solidarity with those who suffer under the daggers of imperial power. What would happen if in our weekly "confession of faith" we did more than repeat the words: "I believe in the Holy Spirit?" What if—in the footsteps of many early Christians, Luther, Bonhoeffer, etc.—"confessing" belief in the Holy Spirit meant also acting to resist whatever powers displace our allegiance to God and the ways of life reflecting it? If we grew to maturity in the faith, trusting that God's *ruach* poured into us in baptism would enable us—along with our faith family throughout the ages—to stand up against the powers of evil in our day, empire would not go unchallenged.

Closing

It has been decades since I began to see that life of economic privilege in the US is built upon the brutalities of empire. From such knowledge, the human heart longs to flee. Seeing the magnitude of our complicity in imperial injustice is shattering unless one glimpses also something

else. It is the mystery of God's Spirit breathed into us, granting power to turn from empire toward the in-breaking reign of God.

We began by noting that:

- Where evil convincingly disguises itself as godly, demands ultimate allegiance and has deadly consequences for many—as in the case of empire—God's people are called to confess faith in the Triune God.
- Said confession, inherently a challenge to entrenched power, may be dangerous and require courage.
- According to Christian tradition, God's Spirit brings moral courage for the faithful confession of faith, despite the dangers that entails.

Making these faith claims in the contemporary context of empire produced a contradiction of tremendous import: in the face of imperial powers today, the church, intimately intertwined with them, is not, for the most part, challenging them through its confession of faith. We have tended not to claim this power of the Holy Spirit. This article has probed that contradiction in order to unearth clues to receiving the Spirit's power for confession, in word and deed, that challenges the seductive lure of empire.

Trinitarian Resistance to Empire

Desire in Consumer Culture: Trinitarian Transformations

John F. Hoffmeyer

In her moving essay, “Empire’s Sleepy Embrace,” Lilian Daniel writes:

The struggle for Americans about empire ... is a personal struggle related to our lifestyle, to what we consider to be necessities in life, but which God might reveal to be mere luxuries. It is at the table [i.e., the Communion table] that our unceasing hunger and anxiety to have more is met head on by a generous God.¹

Although Daniel does not use the word, she clearly identifies consumerism as an important element of US empire.² In the second sentence of the quotation she points to a central feature of consumer culture when she contrasts God’s generosity with “our unceasing hunger and anxiety to have more.”

Like Daniel, David Harvey finds it natural to discuss consumerism when analyzing US imperialism. In his book, *The New Imperialism*, Harvey asserts that consumerism occupies a sacrosanct status in the US empire. He repeatedly invokes the biblical notion of the Golden Rule to describe “the endless consumerism to which the US was committed” (and still is). Consumerism is “the golden rule of internal peace within the US,” in the sense that consumerism has “always been the basis of social peace” within the imperial US. Since the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, in Harvey’s estimation, the golden rule has prevailed “that expenditures on imperial purposes abroad should not interfere with the endless spiral of consumerism at home.”³

What Harvey’s assessment leaves out are the multifaceted ways in which the spread of consumerism serves the imperial extension of US

¹ Lilian Daniel, “Empire’s Sleepy Embrace,” in Wes Avram (ed.), *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 181.

² Although the term “American empire” is widely used, the arrogation of the word “American” to only one of the countries of North America, not to mention Central America and South America, is international bad manners. Finding alternative modes of expression may seem a bit clumsy at first, but it is a good exercise to remind people in the US to take their international neighbors into account.

³ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 65, 70, 66, 81.

power and influence or of élites identified with the USA. As an intermittent visitor from the US to El Salvador over the last fifteen years, I have witnessed the proliferation of brand-name supermarket items, fast-food outlets and hotel chains that have their roots in the US. In many ways, El Salvador functions as a colony of the US. Since early 2001, US dollars have replaced the old Salvadoran colones as the country's official currency. Opportunities to earn a decent wage are limited, and the desire for low-cost labor to support US lifestyles in the powerful neighbor to the north are so strong, that Salvadorans have poured into the US, whether legally or illegally, to find work. The situation has progressed to the point where the amount of money sent back to family and friends in El Salvador by Salvadorans working in the US now exceeds the total expenditures of the Salvadoran national government.

If this article were about US imperial relations with El Salvador, it would be important to consider these economic developments in relation to US financial, military and political support of the Salvadoran government and military as they fought a brutally repressive civil war in the 1980s. Since our focus here is on consumer desire, I would like to recount only one specific experience in El Salvador in January 2007. As the vehicle in which I was traveling with a group of seminarians passed through a roundabout on the outskirts of San Salvador, two boys ran beside us, one hand on our van, hoping to sell us some small item to make a bit of money. As we came out of the roundabout, a large billboard showed a group of affluent young people enjoying themselves and wearing fashionable jeans. The advertisement—entirely in English—touted these particular jeans as “real jeans for real people.”

What is real? Who is real? What does it mean to suggest that a way of life is so desirable that it is real—in unspoken contrast to forms of life that must be less real, even unreal? What does it mean for children, whose circumstances differ so radically from the life depicted in the commercial images, to have to wrestle with the message that their way of life is not real? What does it mean for children to confront a message about desirability that, if it succeeds, necessarily tells them that their own life is undesirable, maybe even that they are undesirable?

In this paper I will not say much about empire and imperialism directly. I am convinced that the topic of consumer desire is inseparable from the current form of US empire, but I shall not be arguing that conviction in this paper. Instead I shall present some Christian theological reflections for engaging with what Daniel describes as the “unceasing hunger and

anxiety to have more” in the US empire. Rather than simply juxtaposing God’s generosity with the desire characteristic of consumer culture, I will track twists and turns in the relation between that desire and the human desire for God. I shall explore how the Trinitarian symbols of Christian faith clarify both the similarities and the deep differences between consumerist desire and desire that finds its orientation in God.

Creating a culture of desire

Consumer culture is a culture of desire. A century ago, the architects of the nascent consumer culture in the US saw that making people effective consumers would require a transformation of people’s desires. In 1911, Walter Dill Scott wrote in the book, *Influencing Men in Business*,

The man with the proper imagination is able to conceive of any commodity in such a way that it becomes an object of emotion to him and to those to whom he imparts his picture, and hence creates desire rather than a mere feeling of ought.⁴

For the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, duty—the sense of ought that arises out of respect for the moral law—was the only genuinely moral motivation. For Scott, whatever moral value the sense of ought might carry, it is not as effective as desire in getting things sold.

Special responsibility for the cultivation of desire in a consumer society falls to advertising. The Latin etymology of the word “advertising” suggests that its function is to engage in or to stimulate a process of “turning toward” (*ad-vertere*). Perhaps advertising functions to turn people’s attention to desires that they previously did not realize they had. At the beginning of the twentieth century, *The Thompson Red Book on Advertising* stated, “Advertising aims to teach people that they have wants, which they did not recognize before, and where such wants can be best supplied.”⁵ Or perhaps the function of advertising is to turn people in desire toward objects that they did not previously desire. This is the

⁴ Cited in Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 31.

⁵ Cited in Rodney Clapp, “The Theology of Consumption and the Consumption of Theology: Toward a Christian Response to Consumerism,” in Rodney Clapp (ed.), *The Consuming Passion: Christianity and the Consumer Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 185.

view expressed in 1926 by Calvin Coolidge, at the time President of the US, as he addressed the American Association of Advertising Agencies. President Coolidge described advertising as “the method by which the desire is created for better things.”⁶

Whether the function of advertising is to bring desires to awareness or actually to create them, Christian critics of consumer culture have frequently denounced desires to consume as temptations luring human beings away from spiritual values and concerns. Christian sermons during the Christmas buying season have often warned against losing the spiritual meaning of Christmas. The analytical shortcoming of this approach is that it fails to recognize that desire itself is a spiritual issue. The recognition that desire is a spiritual issue is the kernel of truth in Calvin Coolidge’s exhortation to advertisers:

Advertising ministers to the spiritual side of trade. It is a great power that has been entrusted to your keeping which charges you with the high responsibility of inspiring and ennobling the commercial world. It is all part of the greater work of the regeneration and redemption of mankind.⁷

Coolidge was not alone in his conviction that the significance of advertising extended far beyond merely material interests to emotional desires, psychological attachments and spiritual longings. Listen to the words of Helen Landon Cass, speaking to a sales convention in Philadelphia, in 1923, several years before Coolidge became President:

Sell them their dreams. Sell them what they longed for and hoped for and almost despaired of having. Sell them hats by splashing sunlight across them. Sell them dreams—dreams of country clubs and proms and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don’t buy things to have things. They buy things to work for them. They buy hope—hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won’t have to worry about selling them goods.⁸

⁶ Cited in Ewen, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 37.

⁷ Cited in James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 50.

⁸ Cited in Twitchell, *ibid.*, p. 271.

Contrary to some Christian critiques, it is misleading to conceive of consumer culture as an obsession with material things. Consumer society cultivates the energy of dreaming, of longing, of hoping.

An overemphasis on material things as such could easily lead to stagnation in consumer sales. In 1928, American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) rejoiced that over half of US homes had now acquired a telephone. For years, AT&T had been trying to convince consumers that a home telephone was a necessity. The marketing efforts seemed to have been a success. At least one AT&T executive was not celebrating, though. Arthur W. Page, vice-president for publicity, could see that sales would now go downhill. Over half of the homes already had a telephone. How could the company expand future sales, besides waiting for old telephones to wear out or the number of homes to increase? Page proposed that AT&T should seek to persuade so-called normal families to buy “all the telephone facilities that they can conveniently use, rather than the smallest amount they can get by with.” Besides spreading the vision of multiple telephones in the family dwelling, Page also proposed luring potential buyers with the offer of colored handsets. The telephone was no longer to be regarded simply as a necessary material form of communications technology. Now the goal was to persuade consumers to see the differently colored handsets as “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.”⁹

The fact that a major corporate executive could quote one of Christian theology’s textbook definitions of a sacrament in order to describe how he wished consumers to view his product makes it clear that he wished to appeal to more than merely material interests. Consumer culture challenges Christian faith not by drawing people away from spiritual concerns to material ones, but by forming dreams, longings, hopes—ultimately spiritual desires—in alternative ways. Mapping out these alternatives is a complex affair, for neither consumer culture nor Christianity is monolithic. Given the confines of this article and my own knowledge, I will not explore the various influential conceptions of desire developed in the history of Christian theology. I shall focus on the one that I find the most illuminating in pondering the challenges of consumer culture.

⁹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 117.

Engaging desire theologically

The fourth-century theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, insisted that longing for God is a perpetual condition of Christian life. In his commentary on the Song of Songs he writes that

the mantle of [the soul's] sadness is taken away through learning that the true enjoyment of the One she longs for is always to progress in seeking and never to desist from the upward path, for desire, always being filled, gives birth to another desire for the One who lies beyond.¹⁰

In Gregory's view, communion with God does not result in leaving desire behind. On the contrary, desire is reborn precisely in its fulfillment. One never attains God in a sense that the trajectory of desire would be left behind. Indeed, for Gregory to claim that one's desire was now sated because one had seen God would be proof that no real seeing of God had occurred. In a remarkable discussion of the passage where Moses is allowed to see only the backside of God, because seeing God face-to-face would spell death, Gregory rejects the idea that an encounter with the very source of life would result in death. Instead, he argues that God is always beyond us, as ungraspable transcendence. To claim to see God face-to-face would be to claim to have grasped or circumscribed God's transcendence. Such a claim substitutes a false graspable god for the true transcendent God. The result is death, because one is looking for life in a false god who can not provide it.

Just as the claim to have seen God face-to-face is proof that one has not seen God, Gregory can also assert the converse: "never to reach satiety of desiring is truly to see God."¹¹ One of the best US writers on Christian faith and consumer culture, Roman Catholic theologian Vincent Miller, rightly observes that precisely this point of Gregory's theology highlights the fact that the relation between consumer culture and Christian faith is far from one of simple opposition. Miller writes: "Consumer culture poses a particularly vexing problem for Christianity because the shape and texture of the desires that it cultivates are profoundly similar to

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Canticorum*, vol. 6 of Hermann Langerbeck and Werner Jaeger (eds), *Opera* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), pp. 369, 22ff.

¹¹ Cited in Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 107.

Christian forms of desire.” Specifically, Miller claims, both Christian desire and consumer desire “know endless, insatiable longing.”¹²

As the above indicates, consumerism is not just about buying and selling material things, or is it just about the proliferation of wants and the confusion of wants with needs. Consumer society depends on the sowing of dissatisfaction. As an article published in 1930 in the advertising trade journal, *Printers' Ink*, put it, “advertising helps to keep the masses dissatisfied with their mode of life, discontented with ugly things around them. Satisfied customers are not as profitable as discontented ones.”¹³ More recently, theologian Rodney Clapp has located the heart of consumerism in “the idealization and constant encouragement of insatiability—the deification of dissatisfaction.”¹⁴ Consumerism feeds upon and feeds insatiable desire.

If both Christian desire and consumer desire “know endless, insatiable longing,” as Miller suggests, how can Christian faith distinguish its desire for God from consumer desire? Is it possible, as Robert Kelly wondered in an online posting at the LWF theological discussion site, that Christian preaching may even reinforce consumer desire? An adequate response to these questions requires first an analysis of the complex structure of insatiable desire in consumer societies.

There are two aspects to this insatiable desire. The first is a kind of treadmill effect. As the passage from *Printers' Ink* highlighted, advertising promises satisfaction just on the horizon, as soon as you purchase the next wonderful product or experience. Once you make the purchase, the luster starts fading, often very quickly. A few years ago, a computer advertisement appealed to potential buyers with the words, “Buy tomorrow’s computer today.” Particularly in an area where new technology develops so rapidly, what could be more alluring than to be on the cutting edge, owning tomorrow’s computer before tomorrow has even arrived? The problem is that when tomorrow does arrive, tomorrow’s computer that you buy today will become yesterday’s computer. There will be a new computer for a new tomorrow, with accompanying advertisements to convince you that your computer, which only yesterday was so splendid, is really now quite unsatisfactory and needs to be upgraded.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³ Ewen, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 39.

¹⁴ Clapp, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 188.

This treadmill of dissatisfaction is not a chance phenomenon of consumer society. It is part of how consumer culture functions. Advertisements directly or obliquely cultivate dissatisfaction with one's present possessions or experiences. Advertisements promise that satisfaction is just around the corner—all you have to do is make this purchase. But then, there are more advertisements to cultivate dissatisfaction and to offer a different fix for the problem. Already in 1889, the economist Simon Patten observed that rapid turnover is a central value in a consumer society when he wrote, "It is not the increase of goods for consumption that raises the standard of life ... [but] the rapidity with which [the consumer] tires of any one pleasure. To have a high standard of life means to enjoy a pleasure intensely and to tire of it quickly."¹⁵

The treadmill effect is only one aspect of the insatiable desire fomented by consumer society. Desire has a complex structure. Desire can be directed beyond itself; it can also be directed towards itself. Desire can find itself desirable. As Judith Butler puts it, desire has a two-fold structure: both intentional and reflexive.¹⁶ The reflexive moment of desire has insatiability built in. If I find desire itself desirable, the only way to satisfy my desire is through the experience of desire. But that is no satisfaction in the usual sense, because it renews desire rather than stilling it.

The reflexivity of desire helps explain why so many people keep pouring themselves into consumption, even though the consumer objects do not deliver the promised satisfaction. It is not just that people think, "Oh, if I make this purchase, then I'll be satisfied." In a consumer culture, consumer desire itself becomes desirable. Indeed, it may be the most important object of desire. Using the metaphor of a racecourse to describe consumer society, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes:

It is the running itself which is exhilarating, and, however tiring it may be, the track is a more enjoyable place than the finishing line. [...] The arrival, the definite end to all choice, seems much more dull and considerably more frightening than the prospect of tomorrow's choices canceling the choices of today. Solely the desiring is desirable—hardly ever its satisfaction.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cited in Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 51.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 57.

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 88.

Consumer culture depends upon the complex interaction of the intentional aspect of desire (desire for objects beyond itself) and the reflexive element of desire (desire for the experience of desiring). Bauman overstates his case when he says that “solely the desiring is desirable.” Without some promise or at least intention of satisfaction in an object beyond itself, desire would never be sparked in the first place. It is in the nature of seduction both to promise and to postpone satisfaction. Consumer longing desires objects that would supposedly satisfy it, yet it simultaneously desires to prolong or to renew the experience of desiring.

Let us now return to the question of the relation between consumer desire and Christian desire. Consumer desire is insatiable in two primary ways: first, it moves endlessly from one object to the next; secondly, its own desiring becomes its most desirable object. Neither of these ought to be true of Christian desire. Its object is ultimately God. As the Westminster Catechism says, the true end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. It does not say that we are to enjoy God for a couple of months and then move on to something else. Similarly, although the desire for God may indeed be desirable, its desirability can never outweigh or even compare to the desirability of God. Otherwise, the desire for God would function as God. As Martin Luther put it, where you hang your heart, there is your God.

Modern theology in circles heavily influenced by the European Reformation have too often suffered an inability to talk about human desire for God because of an overly abstract and unbiblical division between *eros* and *agape*. In this misleading division, *eros*, or desire-love, was attracted to the loveliness of its object. The charge then was that *eros* was ultimately self-serving, seeking how it could benefit from the love relationship. By contrast, *agape* was pure gift love. It gave itself unconditionally. Its love was not in any way inspired by the lovability of the object. It was not drawn to it object. In that sense, it did not desire its object. Instead, it loved because that was the nature of *agape*: disinterested, selfless love. In this scheme, *eros* is typically human love, while *agape* is divine love.

There is much that could be said, and said critically, about this distinction. Here I only want to argue that the distinction splits apart elements of God’s love that belong together. It is thankfully true that divine love is unconditional—our lives depend upon that. It is not true that only the non-divine *eros* is attracted to the loveliness of its object. Certainly, we do not have to produce some loveliness of our own as a condition for God’s loving us. Nonetheless, part of the wonderful char-

acter of God's gift of unconditional love is that God finds us lovely, God finds us desirable. God loves and desires each one of us unconditionally, but not irrespective of who we are. God desires and delights in each of God's creatures, in our particularity.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the German Lutheran philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, provided one of European modernity's most astute analyses of desire. Hegel argued that in human societies, desire comes to its proper fruition only in the process of mutual recognition. That is, my desire can only be satisfied as genuinely human—it can only receive a genuinely human satisfaction—in a free gift from an equal. At the same time, the other's desire can only be satisfied as genuinely human in a free gift from me. While desire might want to control or absorb the other as a way of ensuring the satisfaction of desire, such satisfaction would not be a human or, as Hegel would say, a spiritual satisfaction. Free, interdependent, mutual recognition provides the properly human satisfaction of desire. To put the whole relation in the language of desire: my desire can only be satisfied when I desire and receive the free desire of an equal, who is simultaneously desiring and receiving my free desire. For Hegel, what I most desire is neither a desirable object, nor the reflexive desirability of my own desire, but the freely given desire of another who delights in being freely desired by me.

Hegel's analysis can illuminate a Christian conception of desire for God, but only partially. God both does and does not stand in a relationship of free and equal mutuality with us. God is always beyond, never reducible to our level. God is also nearer to us than any creature could be—including ourselves, as Augustine rightly said. By contrast, we are not beyond God. Nor do we come nearer to God than God does to Godself. In both these dimensions, we can not relate to God as a mutual partner.

Yet, in Christ, God became bodily available and vulnerable to us in a relationship of mutuality, as a creature within our creaturely sphere. Jesus' resurrection means that this creaturely vulnerability and mutuality are not confined to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean two thousand years ago. The Gospel according to Mark concludes with the promise to Jesus' followers that they will meet him in Galilee: that is, on their home territory, on the streets and fields that constitute the spaces of their familiar, everyday life. That promise continues true to this day. The risen Christ encounters us in creaturely vulnerability in the spaces of our everyday life. The great story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 emphasizes that we encounter Christ in the

vulnerability of human persons who are hungry, lacking adequate clothing, imprisoned, sick, or otherwise in pressing need.

The Triune God and desire

God both is and is not in a relationship of mutuality with us. One of the functions of the doctrine of the Trinity is to keep that assertion from degenerating into a vague paradox. God is always beyond us and all creatures. In this dimension, God is the source of all, the begetter of the Word through whom all creation comes into being, the breather of the breath of life that animates all creation. God is also nearer to us than we are to ourselves. In this dimension, God is the Spirit indwelling creation, the breath that breathes within and deeper than our own physical breath. God is also present to us as a vulnerable creature, the last or ultimate Adam (*eschatos Adam*), as Paul puts it in 1 Cor 15:45. Or, remembering that the Hebrew *adam* comes from *adamah*, meaning ground, dirt, or earth, we could say that God is vulnerably present to us as the ultimate earth creature. In the risen Christ, the ultimate earth creature, the transcendent God who is always beyond any limits that we might impose, is also with us and for us right here and now, in the vulnerable conditions of creaturehood, including creaturely desire.

On this Trinitarian appropriation of Hegel's insight, God's relationship with us is both mutual and other than mutual. Our desire for God ought never to presume that God is another creature. Our desire for God is always grounded in and responding to God's prior desire for us. At the same time, our desire for God cannot find fulfillment in any way that stands at odds with mutual creaturely recognition. By this criterion, every consumerist appeal that suggests that your desires can be satisfied by buying something, rather than by the work (and play) of mutual interpersonal respect and engagement, is fundamentally off base.

The doctrine of the Trinity also serves to remind us that our desire for God is genuinely our desire—we are not simply absorbed into God—and yet that desire is a gift from God, a fruit of God's desire for us. Our desire for God is genuinely our desiring. Otherwise, the phrase "our desire for God" would not make sense. Yet, it is the Holy Spirit who quickens our desire for God "when and where the Spirit will"—to borrow language from Article V of the Augsburg Confession. Gregory of Nyssa uses poetic imagery to say that creaturely desire for God is indeed creaturely desiring,

while simultaneously being the work of the divine. Gregory says that the soul is wounded with love by an arrow from the divine archer, so that the soul becomes an arrow in desiring flight toward the divine beloved.

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds Christians that faithful speaking of God requires us to speak of God in multiple ways that are simultaneously true. I have just been arguing that God is both the ultimate object of human desire and the agent who quickens human desire—although not in a way that excludes human agency. Trinitarian theology pushes us to go further. Simultaneous with the dynamic trajectory of desire aimed toward God is God's presence with us, already right here and now. Gregory of Nyssa rings a further change on his archery imagery to express this simultaneity. The desiring soul says, "I am at once shot forth like an arrow and at rest in the hands of the archer."¹⁸

God is the source of the desire that animates our present. God is the goal of our desire, drawing us beyond our present desiring toward the promise of enjoyment. God embraces our present, embraces us in our present, even as we seek to live our lives in movement toward God. As source, goal and present embrace, the Triune God does not dissolve the temporal tension of our desire. God enables a dynamic balance, a proper "tensing" of the tension. Consumer desire lures us toward a future of new objects to be acquired, while we reject our present as unsatisfactory, a source of discontent. God the Spirit lures us toward the future of the beloved community.¹⁹ At the same time, in the risen Christ, God is with us and for us right here and now. Our desire is for a world of peace and faithfulness and creaturely flourishing that is too obviously not yet present. At the same time, we need not go anywhere in order to encounter the God who already takes delight in us. Our desire leans toward the future, longing for the great banquet at which there is food and a place for all. The risen Christ meets us already in our present where, as in the gospel story of the feeding of the multitude, there are only a couple of fish and a few little loaves of bread, yet Christ says, "Thank God for these gifts. They are enough to share and to supply nourishment."

This simultaneity of unquenched desire for God, while being already embraced in one's present condition by God's love, distinguishes a Christian understanding of desire for God from prevalent consumer forms of

¹⁸ Cited in Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 94.

¹⁹ The phrase is, famously, from Martin Luther King, Jr.

desire. In consumer culture, the restlessness of desire carries the day. The salvation promised by consumer culture is always somewhere else, always further along the trajectory of desire—even if that trajectory is maintained mostly by a self-involved desire to desire. As the shrewd author of *Printers' Ink* recognized, “satisfied customers are not as profitable as discontented ones.” For this reason, the Canadian theologian Mary Jo Leddy rightly diagnoses craving—the chronic discontent for which nothing or no one is ever enough—as the essential spiritual sickness of consumer culture.²⁰

Desire nourished by gratitude

The jeans billboard that I saw in El Salvador is a cruel demonstration of how the enterprise of fomenting consumer desire built upon discontent—the desire to have something else, to be somewhere else, to be someone else—can take shape in the context of US empire. The young boys working the roundabout were in one sense a world apart from the fictitious people depicted on the billboard. The real people certainly could not afford the clothes worn by the fictitious people. Yet here was an advertisement, declaring in an imperial language that was not the boys' own, that the real people were the ones on the billboard, while the actual human beings struggling to make a living in the shadow of the billboard could not be real, since they could not afford the right clothes. The fact that if the boys had some success, they would receive their small sums of money in the imperial currency printed in the same language as the billboard, only adds another layer to the outrageous scene.

By contrast, the Spirit who inflames our hearts with promises of God's reign—*¡Otro mundo es posible!* (another world is possible)—also anoints the Christ to meet us in the particular flesh of our condition here and now. Just as Mary Jo Leddy names craving as the central spiritual malaise of consumer culture, she identifies gratitude as essential to Christian resistance to consumerism.²¹ Such gratitude has nothing to do with accommodation to present injustice. Gratitude instead grows from the recognition that this world, here and now, is God's creation; that this world, here and now, with its imperial deformations, is where the risen

²⁰ Mary Jo Leddy, *Radical Gratitude* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 19–23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

Christ meets us, just as at the end of Mark's Gospel the risen Christ goes before the disciples to meet them in Roman-occupied Galilee.

In his brilliant little book, *Christ on Trial*, Rowan Williams expresses well the contrast I am seeking to draw between desire built upon chronic dissatisfaction and desire nourished by gratitude. He writes that the pain of

trying to push away and overcome what we currently are or have been, the bitter self-contempt of knowing what we lack, the postponement of joy and peace because we cannot love ourselves now—these are not the building blocks for effective change. We constantly try to start from somewhere other than where we are. Truthful living involves being at home with ourselves, not complacently but patiently, recognizing that what we are today, at this moment, is sufficiently loved and valued by God to be the material with which he will work, and that the longed-for transformation will not come by refusing the love and the value that is simply there in the present moment.²²

²² Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 86.

Mutuality, Kenosis and Spirited Hope in the Face of Empire

Allen G. Jorgenson

Introduction

A Christian response to empire is grounded in the confession that hope is not victim to the machinations of evil. Hope subverts empire's stranglehold. We are included in a community of mutuality, where we recognize need as a gift that makes us kenotically open toward others. This chapter will explore how this advance of hope grows out of our encounter with the God named Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In explicating this thesis, I will first underscore the nature of empire and its totalizing and rationalizing tendencies. I shall then consider the Trinitarian themes of mutuality, kenosis and hope, which name the ways in which God in Christ transforms us by the power of the Spirit for love's sake. Finally, I consider how a Lutheran theology engages these themes in addressing the totalizing and rationalizing tendencies of empire.

Empire

Is empire a bad thing? Insofar as empire refers to the Babel-like propensity among humans to flatten difference and usurp freedom, empire is manifestly evil. Yet, is it necessarily the case that empires operate in this way? While history bears out such a generalization, it might be argued that another kind of empire is possible. Might there be a benevolent empire in the offing? Certainly this is the presupposition of those advocates of a world power that advances the end of democracy by means of global capitalism. It is, however, my contention that all manifestations of empire fail to advance human freedom and creativity on two accounts: empires are by definition totalizing and rationalizing.

In her masterful study of the Pentagon Papers in *Crises of the Republic*, Hannah Arendt explicates an astounding development in American foreign

policy during the debacle that was the Vietnam War.¹ She discovers the arrival of a new canon by which Washington determined its course of action in the world: being seen to fail supplanted failure *per se* as what is to be avoided at all costs. Arendt chronicles the frightening cost such a move exacted from both the Vietnamese and American people, and thereby invites us to consider the significance of such a strategy for explicating the nature of empire. Empire's fear of perceived failure trumps failure proper only because empires trade upon influence in place of government. Empires by nature are overextended and can only operate by way of coercive collaboration. Yet, at some point, the power upon which they trade becomes a fiction at some point, which elicits fear as empire's way of being in the world. The greatest fear that drives empire is the penetration of its border, and so it first protects its real borders by way of two strategies that seem at first glance to be at odds with one another. In the first instance, the empire claims borders greater than its own. Second, the empire establishes borders within as a means of control. I will first consider this second path.

Empire proliferates borders within precisely by subverting the public's ability to discern truth in public discourse. The path to this fiction is advanced by incremental steps that heighten the public's anxiety about well-being. Within the republic, this fear is realized by marketing the enemy as those voices of public discourse which counter the rhetoric of the republic. When "not to be with us is to be against us" frames a politic, dissent itself becomes a border within a people. Of course, borders within borders are more commonly called prisons, and thought itself is enslaved by the refusal to entertain dissent. But empire is not yet happy with this. Empire also seeks to extend its borders indefinitely because it proliferates borders within for the sake of obliterating borders without.

Empire aims first to extend, then to extirpate external borders. The first step to achieving this aim of totalization is hyperextension of the empire's sphere of influence. This can advance by way of both charity and militarization, which are not so different as first imagined. Both of these strategies position empire in the world in such a way that it can make claims of exceptionalism.² At this point, empire becomes a law unto itself. What is good for the empire is good for the world; the global

¹ Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics," in Hannah Arendt, *Crises in the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, 1972).

² Linda McQuaig, *Holding the Bully's Coat* (Missauga: Double Day, 2007), p. 41.

neighborhood has been subject to the *nomos* (law) of the dominant *oikos* (household) in an effort to turn the neighborhood into an *oikos*, subject to the *nomos* of the *dominus* (lord). The new economic (*oikonomikos*) order is posited on the presumption that the *dominus* alone can order the affairs of the household. In other words, father knows best.

Empire, then, aims at a sort of self-definition that is tautological, since the other that is needed to define the self is denied. Yet what finally funds this fictionalized self is a maze of prisons demanded by a hunger for security that is never sated. This hunger, in its insatiability, endows an alarming technical capacity that astounds and witnesses to the fecundity of human imagination, even in this, the prison of human propensity for rationalization.

By rationalization, I refer to the modern propensity to quantify by means of instrumental reason. In the worst of modern thought, classical reason is supplanted by an arid logic that counts on its ability to quantify. Moreover, the greatest tragedy of this prejudice is the astounding success with which modern thought achieves this Luciferian goal. It is not without reason that the Master of Heaven and Earth censored census taking. Quantification in the context of the narrative of Holy Scripture is an act of unfaith. The One who promises descendents “without number” precludes numbers as the principal quality whereby truth, beauty or goodness are discerned. Yet the mastery of numbers remains a metaphor for the propensity toward efficiency in global capitalism.

Richard Sennett has studied the manner in which contemporary versions of capitalism have advanced, first by adopting the efficiency of the army in order to leverage sheer quantification.³ Yet in global capitalism a new situation arrives. Efficiency is exponentially increased by disposing of the implicit and explicit contractual relationship between employer and employee. Sennett argues that the pyramid figured the old capitalism, while the CPU (Central Processing Unit) symbolizes the new. The genius of the CPU is that data is managed by manipulating it. This is the very mark of a computational age. Reality is reduced to facts, which are rendered as statistics to be analyzed. The skill rendered obsolete in this process, however, is judgment, the very foundation of society.⁴

³ Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 21, 22.

⁴ Arendt, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 37.

At the very heart of judgment is the ability to recognize limits as gifts which make artful technical engagement possible. But such a judgment presumes the *perichoresis* of truth, beauty and justice, the very unity lacking in our technical age.⁵ In an economy of rationalization, in which quantifying reality as facts allows these to be manipulated for the sake of the totalization of empire, research outstrips action, and mania for securing cause obscures attentiveness to the obvious.⁶

The upshot of such an economy in our contemporary context is that possibility rather than skill marks the ideal employee.⁷ Skills, of course, are both attainable and cumulative in character. The new global capitalism slowly usurps the usefulness of skill. Increasingly employees are valued, not for a slowly and painfully attained skill, but for how manipulable they are. When the primary mark of a corporation's success is its ability to court the human obsession for novelty, the new normal becomes an instability that cannot afford to reward long-term contractual relationships. An up-and-coming corporation certainly cannot afford to endure "dead weight" and dares not let their shareholders detect a soft underbelly. As Sennett points out, the ideal employee is one "with potential" rather than "skills." Yet it is not only employees who are thus evaluated. This propensity for calculating value by utilitarian potential is also writ large in the public of nations. The power differential exploited in certain employer/employee situations is also seen in relationships between the so-called "have" and "have not" nations. In empire, the "inter" of international becomes "intra."

Empire as I have sketched it here is manifestly evil, yet like all evil phenomena, empires only attain this to a degree. Empires are finally parasites, which self-destruct by over-extension. The tragedy, of course, is compounded in that it is not only self-destruction which follows in the wake of empire. Consequently, it is important to underscore the cancerous character of empire, as well as the fact that every manifestation of empire is a kind unto itself. Responding to empire, then, requires particular attention to the nuances that mark its particular manifestation at any given time. Yet, attentiveness to context does not alone mark theologically rich discourse. Christians respond to context from a particular *locus*, complete with the blessings and banes attending

⁵ Cf. George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), p. 65.

⁶ Arendt, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 73.

⁷ Sennett, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 123.

their place in the history of Christian thought. I turn now to consider how theological discourse of the Trinity can orient our response to the claims of empire in a way consonant with our confessional discourse yet appropriate to the particular challenges facing us.

Mutuality, kenosis and hope

Crafting a Christian response to empire demands a strategy that counters its mania for totalization and rationalization. Christians discover in the Triune God, revealed in Jesus Christ, characteristics that shape our way of being in the world in response to empire. In what follows, I shall first examine the Word's dependence on the Spirit as the first instance of mutuality in the economy of God. I shall then explore how this mutuality is further evidenced in patrology, before turning to ponder how God's mutuality shapes us in such a way that we share in God's incarnate strategy of kenosis. I then consider hope as the consequence of God's incursion in our life in a kenotic mutuality; this differentiates our way of being in the world from that of empire, and engenders in us postures of resistance that will be explored in the subsequent sections.

Although the Christian tradition has sometimes failed to underscore the mutuality at the heart of God's identity, its own confession of God as Triune presumes exactly that. Treatments of the Christian tradition have sometimes dealt with creation, redemption and sanctification as if they were doctrinal topics dissociated from one another. However, insofar as the tradition asserts that our encounter with God is always an encounter with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a treatment of one topic presumes the inclusion of the others and the mutuality inherent in the relationship which God is. This is first evident to us when we consider the significance of pneumatology for Christology, a theme close to Martin Luther's heart.

Regin Prenter has masterfully expounded the manner in which Luther understood how the Spirit and the Word work in concert. This point of emphasis had its impetus in Luther's countering the propensity of the left-wing Reformation to understand the immanence of the Spirit as itself a guarantee and certification of things theological. While this emphasis on the mutuality of Christology and pneumatology is important to the whole of Luther's theology, my contention is that the history of Lutheranism too often is one in which the role played by the Spirit has been usurped by a sort of "Christomonism." In too much of Lutheran theology and

history, the work of the Spirit is given a nod, and not anticipated as an agent of engagement in the life of the believer. This has been manifest in orthodoxy's tendency to render justification in forensic terms alone, and in pietism's tendency to make of Christ an exemplar. In both cases, the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer has been eclipsed and the role of the Spirit in the Trinitarian relations has been missed.

In theological discourse, pneumatology has typically been reduced to the problem regarding the *filioque*. Among contemporary theologians, Sergius Bulgakov provides one of the most penetrating analyses of this problematic, from an Orthodox perspective. He notes that the supposedly contesting options of describing the spiration of the third person of the Trinity through (*dia*) or from the Son (*filioque*) peacefully coexisted in Eastern and Western theology in early Christian history.⁸ Bulgakov recognizes that a willingness to live with this ambiguity attended an early Christian intuition of the interdependence of Son and Spirit in a relationship he labels Sophia. Sophia as the divine *opus* has a creaturely correlate which we call Word and spirit. The work proper to the divine Sophia is the revelation of the Father. In Bulgakov's estimation, both Western and Eastern theology fail to emphasize this work of the Son and Spirit in concert because they problematize the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit in viewing it in terms of cause and origin.⁹ Luther, likewise, condemned a theology of the Spirit that is obsessed with causation:

When Luther maintained an insoluble connection between the Spirit and his outward means, it is not right to think of this connection through concept of an effective means of grace. For this concept belongs to an anthropocentric view. [...] The concept, which in the theocentric view takes the place of the concept of the effective means of grace, and which does not contain any opposition to the thought of the sovereignty of the Spirit and the insufficiency of the outward Word, is the concept of the sign of revelation.¹⁰

Revelation only occurs through the divine decision to self communicate. This is patently evident in the event of the incarnation, manifestly evident in the confluence of Word and sacrament in the life of the church, yet

⁸ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149

¹⁰ Reginald Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), p. 259.

also latently evident in creation, insofar as we are able to discern God's self communication as Creator by the grace of the new creation.

Luther follows the tradition by insisting on identifying the Father with the giftedness of creation. He invites us to reconsider the significance of the first article of the creed for receiving the creation by way of recreation. The first article of the creed invites us to ponder again the gift that being is. Too easily we fail to wonder at the world and thereby fall short of that praise particular to eyes: seeing creation anew through recreation.

Such, very briefly, is the meaning of this article. It is all that ordinary people need to learn at first, both about what we have and receive from God and about what we owe him in return. This is knowledge of great significance, but an even greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given to us himself with all creation and has abundantly provided for us in this life, apart from the fact that he has also showered us with inexpressible eternal blessings through his Son and the Holy Spirit, as we shall hear.¹¹

This quotation is significant. That the Father gives God's self to us with creation is an astounding and often missed theme in theology. Jesus is deemed to be God's self communication which renders us children of God. The Spirit makes Jesus present for us in faith. Yet this theme does not yet speak to the significance of the Father's self giving for Trinitarian thought. More can and must be said: insofar as God communicates God's self to us in creation, we look for the revelation of the Father in the world. Yet, we recognize that the graced character of creation is only received by way of the mutual mission of the Spirit and the Son:

For, as explained above, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.¹²

Mutuality is evident in how Luther treats the creed. The Spirit effects the presence of the Son who shows us the Father, who is revealed as the One

¹¹ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 431.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 439, 440.

who “has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes,” but who “also daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune.”¹³ We only know the Father as beneficent because the Son and Spirit demonstrate this to be so, and thereby demonstrate the mutuality of the Trinity.¹⁴ The event of revelation reveals not only God’s “fatherly” heart, but more importantly, it reveals the Trinitarian mutuality seen in even the Father’s revelation as fatherly.¹⁵ This “dependence” and mutuality runs in the opposite direction as well. We recognize the Father as the sole source of Son and Spirit. Of course, this designation is already evident in calling the first person of the Trinity the Father of the Son. Yet, something more is affirmed by referencing the Father as source.¹⁶ The Father is not only the sole source of Son, but also of Spirit.¹⁷ Being source, then, is proper to God the Father and this speaks to an affirmation of creation in the first article of the creed. Yet the first article of the creed leads us into the second, wherein we encounter the one incarnate and so kenotic.

The theme of the kenosis of the Son is of some consequence for our understanding of being in Christ and our response to empire. In considering Luther’s treatment of kenosis, Marc Lienhard has noted a shift in his understanding of kenosis as found in the Philippians 2:5-11 passage

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁴ *Cf.* also the notion of the Father’s waiting upon the Son’s return of the Reign, now made subject to the Son (1 Cor 15:20-28) as evidence of Trinitarian mutuality. I am indebted to Gary Simpson for this insight. Moreover, this mutuality speaks to who God is as much as what God does insofar as in “attempting some kind of conceptual paraphrase of this matter, it is crucial that the life-communicating missions of God *ad extra* be fully integrated with the divine processions in which God preserves the life-filled abundance of his own immanent being.” John Webster, “God’s Perfect Life,” in Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (eds), *God’s Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 150.

¹⁵ Rowan Williams notes Jesus alone gives content to the vocative “Father.” Father, then, is not a ready-made description of divine attributes, but a recollection of the prayer of Jesus and our inclusion in it. *Cf.* Rowan Williams, *Resurrection* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), pp. 70-73, 93. Thanks to Deanna Thompson for this reference.

¹⁶ Robert Jenson notes that the East “has located the oneness of God in the Father’s monarchy,” while the West “in the utter simplicity of the divine *ousia*” yet in such a way that “the Father is *arche* of the Son and the Spirit as constituted in that simplicity.” Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology - Volume One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 116. *Cf.* Catherine Mowry LaCugna for a critique of the misuse of *arche* in relationship to God. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (New York: Harpers Collins, 1973), pp. 286, 394. *Cf.* David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 72ff., for a provocative engagement of “Source” that avoids the pitfalls of “Monarchy” using “Source, Wellspring and Living Water” to identify the Triune God. Thanks to John Hoffmeyer for alerting me to this.

¹⁷ This does not prejudice the *filoque* insofar as the Son is instrumentally the means by which the Father is source of the Spirit, just as the Spirit is instrumentally the means by which the Father is source of the Son as evident in the Annunciation.

between the years 1518 and 1525.¹⁸ Whereas Luther used to follow the tradition in understanding kenosis as the decision of the preexistent Son to be incarnate, he later concluded that kenosis was the mode of being of the incarnate Christ. This significant shift identifies self emptying as Christ's mode of existence, the path of authenticity. Moreover, this theme further clarifies Christology, insofar as Christ is understood to be the self communication of God as the second person of the Trinity precisely in his giving of self. Self communication, then, is self-giving in a way consonant with the inverting Reign of God. Kenosis is not a onetime event, but the way that Christ lived in the world, continues giving himself to the world, and consequently the way that Christians live in the world by being in the Way, who is Christ. Christians live in the world by way of giving, in the Spirit who enables us to give of ourselves by first giving to us God's self.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in concert with the themes of creation and redemption, speak to God's decision to give God's very self in such a way that God draws us into the mutuality revealed in the divine decision to be kenotic in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the agent of our inclusion in this relationship of mutuality, a point theology often misses by failing to see grace as God's encounter with us by way of the Spirit, a theme Luther underscored.

Luther is understood to have reversed the late scholastic tendency to reify grace by signaling that grace is the presence of Christ through the Spirit, instead of a late medieval Catholic view of grace as being what the church dispenses for the sake of reordering the flesh to the spirit.¹⁹ The Roman Catholic theology that Luther countered was one in which grace was reified as a resource given to humans, who do what they are able to in order to defeat the flesh that counters the spirit.²⁰ Luther asserted that the spirit too is in need of the converting grace of the Spirit. Moreover, insofar as he understood humans as hostile to their conversion, his assertion—that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone for Christ's sake alone—can only be properly understood by those who identify grace as the Christ presenting presence of the Spirit, and faith itself as that gift which is the effected presence of Christ.²¹ In conver-

¹⁸ Marc Lienhard, *Au Cœur de la foi de Luther: Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Desclée, 1991), p. 77.

¹⁹ Prenter, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 8.

²⁰ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 136.

²¹ Cf. Prenter, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 8, and Regin Prenter, "In ipsa fide Christus adest. Der

sion, the human is wholly passive, and the agent of our conversion is the symphonic operation of the kenotic Word and self-giving Spirit to reveal God's "fatherly" heart. All of this speaks to the theme of mutuality, a theme that names the life of the Trinity, and derivatively, our baptismal way of living. This mutuality ushers us into hope.

The nature of hope is illumined by the realization that in hoping we always hope for someone or something. Hope necessarily points us beyond ourselves. Hope demands that we look to another for what we lack. Hope initiates us into the Christian vocation of waiting: we are baptized as those who are in need and who meet others' needs, in the power of the Spirit for the sake of relationship. Paul's treatment of hope in Romans reminds us that "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Hope orients us to God's nature as giving as well as the nature of divine giving. Giving is that authentic mode of being that finds partnership in receiving. This interplay of giving and receiving is a *theologoumenon* (word concerning God). To speak of God as Trinity is to speak of giving and receiving in God's very self. Furthermore, to speak of giving in God is to speak of giving in the reign of God. To say "it is more blessed to give than to receive" is to problematize an inauthentic idea of giving. Under empire, this fails to see that we only receive when we finally give, and that giving itself is occasioned by need.

Hope then points us to the giving nature of God, in whose fellowship we also find ourselves to be giving, and thus kenotic. Moreover, giving itself becomes a gift precisely by engendering in us an anticipation of how the giftedness of need creates a community of mutuality. This grace of interdependence informs a Lutheran response to empire.

Subverting totalization

The distinct theological resource given to Lutheran Christians to respond to the totalizing claim of empire is its celebration of Word and sacrament. If empire aims to bracket, silence, or sublimate voices that counter its claims, then the church remains a dangerous place by virtue of the truth telling of Word and sacrament. Here we encounter Christ

Schnittpunkt zwischen lutherischer und orthodoxer Theologie," in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung; zum ökumenischen Dialog*, (Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), pp. 10-93.

made present by the grace of the Holy Spirit, a grace that empowers us who are marked by the cross and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

The self-giving of the Father itself points to the Father's mode of being, and the Spirit and the Word are powerful precisely by waiting one upon the other. Therefore, we can anticipate that the power we receive for confessing in the face of empire will be kenotic in nature and communal in character. In encountering grace, we are face-to-face with God, mediated to us via Word and sacrament, as the Holy Spirit effects the presence of Christ. In the revelatory moment, we encounter God in Christ through the Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are present to us for the sake of our salvation. Grace identifies the Spirit, faith the Son, and the predestinating call which justifies and glorifies us identifies the Father (Rom 8:30).²² In concert, the Triune God acts to empower us in the face of empire. But what is the nature of this power and how is it engaged?

The New Testament witnesses to the Spirit as the power by which the Father raised the Son from the dead (Rom 8:11). Unfortunately, we all too easily interpret this verse with a sense of the Spirit as an instrumental power. Such an understanding of power is too poor to make sense of power as exercised in community and power as a description of the Spirit. The following definition of power, as offered by Hannah Arendt, echoes the emphasis of mutuality implicit in God's relationality as explicated in *perichoresis*:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.²³

Theologically, this notion of power as communal is further clarified by insights from Trinitarian theology. We have already spoken of the self-giving of the Father as that *theologoumenon* which points to mutuality at the heart of giving. We now consider how the Christ made present by the Spirit through Word and sacrament enables us to confront the totalizing nature of empire. Much can be said, but I will restrict my observations to the following: Christology reminds us that Christ is gift

²² And so the Father's being source of Son and Spirit is correlative to the Father's being source of our call and election.

²³ Arendt, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 143.

before being example, and pneumatology reminds us that God grants us both grace and peace as modes of engaging the world.

One of Luther's clearest critiques of Christology in his context was of the propensity to make of Christ an example as a soteriological principle. Luther's repeated insistence on the need to understand Christ first as a savior, and then as example, was at the heart of the Reformation revolution. Yet, a study of early modern theology and philosophy demonstrates the recurring temptation to make Christ the savior by example. The primacy of example exists not only as a soteriological but also as a political and socioeconomic principle. Advertising is without equal as a form of broader social activity by which example is used to manipulate and coerce humans.²⁴ Through soteriological inversion, Luther makes example a pedagogical tool whereby the instructor leads along those who already are in right relationship. Advertising, by contrast, posits a lack that can be filled by buying whatever product is for sale. Christian mission that begins with example fails in fidelity to its roots.

Christologically, we are called to act for the good of the neighbor, oblivious to how our good works are perceived or received. Good works advance the reign of God precisely in their hiddenness. The church is called to act in the face of empire in such a way that we invert the role of example. The call to invert the soteriological priority of example occurs by means of Word and sacrament, through which we receive the Spirit.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Viewed from the perspective of a Trinitarian theology, this apostolic greeting (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2) identifies the Spirit as the gift of grace and peace from the Father and Son. This gift of God, as received through Word and sacrament, is given to us for the purpose of serving in Christ's name to advance the reign of God in the face of empire. Our response is always shaped by grace and peace; grace points to the Spirit empowering us to act, peace points to the Spirit inviting us into a withdrawal which is a covert advance. In sum, the Spirit empowers us by scripting us into the reign of God and its way of working through both presence and absence. Presence points us to the church's vocation as an identifiable voice in the public arena, and absence to the voices of its members in their vocations in the public arena. In both instances, through Word and sacrament the Spirit invites us to imagine how we (both in church and world) can live as

²⁴ See John Hoffmeyer's article in this volume.

an authentic community, marked by differing gifts that unite us precisely as we attend to the mutuality of need.

Empire, too, knows of need but perceives it to be a problem and refuses to receive it as gift. Since problems are to be solved, empire invokes its rationalizing tendency and thereby demands of the church a witness to truth.

Subverting rationalization

Despite the all too common tendency to assume an impenetrable barrier between church and world, the simple truth is that the world is in the church as much as the church is in the world. This coexistence is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing insofar as the world is loved by God and thus is an incubator of those called by God's prevenient grace to love the world. Our coexistence with the world is a curse, however, insofar as we find the worst of the ways of the world to be our very own; and so with Jesus we pray to be in but not of the world. This is especially strategic in cultures obsessed with quantification.

Too often the propensity to quantify bewitches the church. We act as if truth could be determined by taking and counting votes. We let budgets shape our vision in the place of allowing our vision to shape budgets. We imagine that things really are as they seem at first glance. All of this goes on despite a solid dogmatic tradition that enables us to imagine things differently. Prenter notes well Luther's understanding of justification's advance:

Sanctification for Luther does not mean that man [sic] by the aid of God becomes better and better, stronger and stronger, and more pious and more pious, until he of goodness, strength, and piety gets into heaven. But Luther holds that man in his totality comes into the sphere of the Spirit of God and therefore, in a certain sense, day by day becomes more weak, more sinful, and more helpless, so that he more and more comes to rely on Christ alone as his only righteousness and as the one who takes him and uses him as his instrument in his work for our neighbor. Luther has no room for any independently evaluated, divinely supported, and independently growing piety.²⁵

²⁵ Prenter, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 97.

Lutheran theology eschews the possibility of measuring piety; the reign of God does not allow quantification as a mode of evaluation. This logic is well honed in Luther's treatment of a theology of the cross. In the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther struggles to make theologians of glory into theologians of the cross by demonstrating that God's work is hidden under that which does not seem to manifest the power of God²⁶. Lutherans have a formidable resource in a theology of the cross for countering empire's mania for demonstrable improvement. This latter reflects a more general human propensity for quantification, and yet it has a peculiar quality in our current situation.

The presumption of progress as our human end, which infiltrates our collective psyche, was unknown prior to the Enlightenment.²⁷ In fact, even within early modernity, this notion of progress underwent change. Early moderns understood the *telos* (end) of human progress as our coming of age whereas early nineteenth century thinkers understood progress as without end.²⁸ This movement beyond a pre-modern paradigm stands in contrast to the thought of Luther, whose lectures on Genesis presume a regress rather than progress of human beings since the time of creation.²⁹ Yet Luther's identification of regress as the *status quo* does not undermine the idea of God's mission in the world, precisely because of a theology of the cross. Late modernity with its suspicions of Enlightenment optimism may be amenable to a theology of the cross with its critique of progress. Yet, the manner in which this theology is engaged often involves a subtle, yet significant danger in responding to empire.

David Yeago notes that all of Luther's theology, following Augustine, critiques any intent to "use" God.³⁰ God is not subject to our machinations and, in fact, skirts our expectations by being latent in weaknesses and suffering. Yet, it is precisely in this affirmation that temptations lie insofar as we attempt to make a theology of the cross into an instrument of prognostication. We reason that if God is manifest in weakness and failure, then signs of strength and success mark God's absence. This

²⁶ Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 53.

²⁷ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 152.

²⁸ Arendt, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 127.

²⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Work*, vol. 2 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), p. 136.

³⁰ David S. Yeago, "The Catholic Luther," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds), *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 18.

sort of reasoning, however, is precisely the error that a theology of the cross struggles to subvert. The number and qualities that attend it are to be understood as accidental to what is consonant with the reign of God. This observation is of some significance in the changing reality of global Christianity, wherein many churches of the South grow exponentially while churches of the North shrink or struggle to maintain their size. A degenerate theology of the cross will refuse to measure the Spirit at work in growing churches because such a theology quantifies piety, and predicates that piety is inversely proportional to number. By contrast, a Lutheran theology of the cross that critiques empire's propensity for rationalization will look to markers other than number for signs of God's leading. An inverted quantification of piety is no more a reflection of the gospel than is the mania for external markers of piety and success. In the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther railed against such markers by which empire advances its claims.

Conclusion

Empire remains a formidable foe for Christ's church. As a foe, its danger is exponentially heightened by its insidious nature. Empire does not only threaten the world, but the church in the world. Yet we are not people without hope. God is patiently and patently at work in the church in a variety of ways. It is given to us to celebrate that work and its manifold manifestations.

Most significantly, the Spirit's work is seen among those at the margins of empire, including those margins at the center where violent power marginalizes those it abuses. God in Christ is to be seen at these margins, and calls us to attend to the various ways that hope subverts empire's homogenizing machinations. The Spirit, by contrast, respects and reflects the specificity of each location as it advances the reign of God in the face of empire. It is given to us to learn from others, not by mindless emulation of what works for them, but by identifying the One who works with them and with us by granting us hope when empire looms large. This very act of identifying the work of God in the midst of others is the first and most important act of responding to the claims of empire, and consequently the most pressing item on the agenda of the church in a time such as ours. It is given to us to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Theology of the Cross
Instead of Prosperity
Theology

Empire's Export of Prosperity Theology: Its Impact on Africa

Faith K. Lugazia

Introduction

“There will be prayers for healing and exorcism for people enslaved by spiritual powers and for prosperity and success in life.” With such promises, people all over Africa are invited to attend prosperity gospel meetings. Many people are attracted to prosperity theology because it offers them the hope of a prosperous future. It draws them near to God through praying and reading the Word of God. In itself, teaching about prosperity is not bad, because every individual would like to prosper. Also, God wishes for people to prosper. What is to be critiqued is the fact that prosperity is seen mainly in materialistic terms and as such constructs an ideology of self-dependence.

Prosperity theology has been imported from the USA through neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Today, it has also infiltrated mainline churches. For example, some Lutheran pastors emphasize the notion of giving so that in turn God blesses one with many blessings. Moreover, some assume that people fall ill because they have done something wrong, and therefore pray, “If your servant has wronged you, Lord, forgive them.”

In the following, I shall summarize the situation in sub-Saharan Africa with regard to prosperity gospel teachings. The teachings, originating from certain US evangelists, are supportive of empire and implicitly distort the meaning of the incarnate Christ in the church's life and work. Prosperity theology distorts the real meaning of healing, the true purpose of giving, biblical views of prosperity and God's providential plans for us. Furthermore, it victimizes the poor. Therefore, awareness needs to be raised among Africans about the impact of prosperity theology.

What is prosperity theology?

Prosperity theology views “an earthly life of health, wealth and happiness as the divine, inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to His [sic] Commands.”¹ Also referred to as the prosperity message or faith gospel, it is not a distinct movement of churches or cults, but has arisen from within some Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Prosperity gospel teaches that God has met all our needs in Christ’s suffering and death, such that every Christian is now able to share in Christ’s victory over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to be blessed with health and wealth. Because these blessings have already been won by Christ, Christians can obtain these blessings through their faith.²

Kenneth Copeland emphasizes human freedom without boundaries and defines prosperity as “the ability to use the power of God to meet the needs of [hu]mankind.”³ Furthermore, he claims that, “God’s financial prosperity is given to believers so that they might do something about the poverty in the world.”⁴

Some of the main proponents are Kenneth Higgins, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Fredrick Price, Oral Roberts, Marylin Hikey and Benny Hin. Promoters of this theology in Africa are evangelist preachers who have adapted American strategies and “generally cannot be understood in isolation from their American roots.”⁵ The movement has a lay leadership and the ecclesiastical office is based on a person’s charismatic gifts. Modern media technologies are used innovatively (including cable TV, free telephone networks, computerized mailings), as are distinctive symbols, hymns, denominational organizations, networks, rituals, orders of service, the Bible, music, literature, tapes, etc. Its advocates support the values and expansion of US empire, and focuses on the wealthy and on how people became rich. Material gain is promised to those who give. Consequently, poor Africans continue to donate money, as a result of which they grow poorer as the evangelists prosper.

¹ Rob Starner, “Prosperity Theology,” in Stanley M. Burgess (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 292-296.

² Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 39.

³ Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publication, 1974), p. 26.

⁴ Kenneth Copeland, “How You Can Solve the Prosperity Puzzle,” in *Believers Voice of Victory* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, July 1986), p. 4.

⁵ Gifford, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 40.

Why are Africans receptive to the gospel of prosperity?

Prosperity theology came to Africa in the 1980s when the political and economic situation in Africa was at best shaky. Desperate Africans longed for a prophetic voice promising socioeconomic change in situations of political and economic turmoil. But, did Neo-Pentecostalism bring about the much needed socioeconomic changes?

While the end of the Cold War did not bring about a cessation of external intervention in Africa, the nature of this intervention changed. During the 1990s, the neoliberal economic model of privatization and the weakening of state institutions swept across the continent, inaugurating a new era of Western dominated international institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These institutions dictated African financial policy, insisting that governmental revenue be used primarily to service the external debt, to the detriment of African societies.

In the face of the economic structural adjustment programs, the provision of public services rapidly diminished.⁶ In many sub-Saharan countries, health care and education deteriorated, unemployment increased and growing numbers of young people migrated to towns and cities. Only those few who were able to secure their families' health and education through the growing private sector benefited from these changes. David Maxwell's account of the economic situation in Zimbabwe is applicable to many countries in southern Africa: "As poverty increased, so did crime, and law and order could no longer be guaranteed by a retrenched police force. Multinationals and their senior employees increasingly paid for their own protection."⁷

Child labor increased considerably as poor (usually rural) people put their children into the custody of their richer relatives. These children often had to work in exchange for food and accommodation. Orphans and those unable to cope with their hosts' demands often opted for a life on the streets. By the mid-1980s, Tanzania had a high level of unemployment, and because the state no longer provided for education, the level of literacy declined. Once prized exam certificates were increasingly worthless, rather like many African currencies. Without jobs, many youths faced a future of "thumb twiddling." They became a

⁶ David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa. The Contemporary Years since 1960* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 24.

⁷ David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostal and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2006), p. 184.

mere statistic, or worse still, a social problem, and were branded “thugs.” Africans increasingly experienced their states as violent, bankrupt and immoral. At such a time, Africans needed a prophetic voice announcing the in-breaking reign of the kingdom of God and freedom from the realities of poverty and hunger.

Against this background, Africans were introduced to the prosperity gospel, by the Rhema churches.⁸ In the 1960s, Ray McCauley, a white South African and former Roman Catholic, who had studied under Kenneth Higgins in Tulsa, Oklahoma, started the first Rhema Bible Church in Johannesburg.⁹ In the 1970s, the Rhema Bible Church was established in Zimbabwe by Myles Munroe, who taught that God had given domain of the world to human beings, who are responsible for realizing their own dreams. Monroe placed a strong emphasis on black pride and self-actualization. By 2000, the church had spread all over Africa, and was embraced unquestioningly by many, as a way out of economic and social hardship.

Critiquing prosperity theology

Prosperity theology has successfully called people to personal conversion and insists on the experience of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. It has helped to bring to the fore some church doctrines, such as pneumatology, but has failed to strike an appropriate balance. Prosperity theology stresses God’s promise to bless God’s people and that God’s blessings are not restricted to the heavenly realm. Yet, it often allows the “material” aspect of blessing to overshadow the spiritual aspects.

Such teachings negate the meaning of Christ’s work on the cross. As a result, people think they can justify themselves by what they do. Even worse, such teachings have further impoverished those who already poor, because instead of working hard and using their God-given common sense to liberate themselves from abject poverty, they spend much time praying that they might prosper.

⁸ The Rhema Bible Church and School was founded by Kenneth W. Higgins in Oklahoma (USA). The “Word of Faith” message is its central teaching, along with other charismatic teachings. In conjunction with its training center, also located on its Broken Arrow Campus, Rhema churches and centers have spread internationally. Rhema also publishes the “Word of Faith” magazine.

⁹ Allan Anderson, “The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of some New Charismatic Churches” in *Missionalia*, vol. 15, no. 2 (August 1987), p. 74.

Human beings cannot depend on themselves alone; they are not good because of what they achieve. They are redeemed by God's free grace in Jesus Christ and daily need to put their trust in God. Robert Kolb says this well:

To recognize trust as the core of our humanity is to perceive the true form of being human, as God created his human creature. That means that at the core of the human life our own performance, accomplishment, behavior, has no place. For "a human work, no matter how good, is deadly sin because it in actual fact entices us away from "naked trust in the mercy of God' to a trust in self."¹⁰

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, himself a Pentecostal, sees that prosperity in itself is not a bad idea; every Christian believer expects to prosper. However, the type of prosperity gospel imported from the US associates prosperity mainly with material acquisition and financial gain. As Asamoah-Gyadu writes:

There is also a close relationship between giving and blessing in the prosperity hermeneutic. For example, the media programs need large sums of money to keep going, especially when it comes to hosting weekly broadcasts in the electronic media. A number of the prominent TV programs are sponsored by secular business enterprises whose owners share in the mindset that as they give to God, their businesses will also prosper. The offerings are generally driven by the seed-sowing theology popularized by Oral Roberts through his TV ministry, which was available in Ghana until the early 1980s. People give to God, or sometimes directly to the pastors, in anticipation of their own material blessings. Against the backdrop of the theology of the offering as "seed sowing", businesses sponsor Pentecostal/Charismatic media programs not only to take advantage of the wide audiences they reach but also by offering sponsorship, they are sowing seeds of faith through which God will bless their endeavors.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," in *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. XVI, no. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 443-466.

¹¹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Reshaping Sub-Saharan African Christianity," in *Media Development* (2:2005), at www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/publications/media_development/200 (accessed 18 June 2007).

Common teachings of prosperity theology

Prosperity gospel preachers teach that God made us in the same class as God, and believers are “called Christ” because that’s who we are. By being “born again,” the believer becomes “as much an incarnation of God as was Jesus of Nazareth.”¹² Kenneth Copeland teaches that “Adam was not a little like God ... not almost like God ... not subordinate to God even ... you don’t have a God in you. You are one.”¹³ In other words, those who believe in Christ are transformed from being human to being godly. Thus, God created human beings to be like God. Such teachings encourage the followers of prosperity gospel to feel that they have a higher position in this world and have authority over all creation, including those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Like God and Jesus, the powers of evil, Satan and death cannot overcome them because they are immortal. The distinction between Christ and the believer is removed.

Adherents of prosperity theology place much emphasis on monetary gain. They use the term “sowing the seed,” meaning “God will return a multiplication of money to a person who gives money in faith, and with the belief that they will receive a monetary reward.”¹⁴ Adherents thus are encouraged to give all they have in order to get richer in the future.

Copeland uses Mark 4:24 and the three parables of sowing along with the saying that “the measure you give it will be the same measure you get.” The law of prospering is crucial because it teaches techniques of how to prosper. If you sow a little, expect to reap a little. If you selfishly keep your richness for your own comfort, you cannot reap. If you have little and cling to that little, you will always remain poor. The issue at stake here is how a believer is expected to prosper. Copeland’s meaning of sowing and reaping becomes clear in the following:

After believing in the Lord for twelve years, I came home in a pickup truck. At home, I found two Mercedes Benz. One valued \$ 47,000 and the other \$ 58,000 [he does not mention how these cars get there though]. I have given away two to three hundred watches to preachers who do not have watches, today I have a \$ 5,000 gold Rolex. I have over the years given

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_of_Faith (accessed 10 June 2007).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ www.ondctrine.com/10robero.htm (accessed 16 June 2007).

away 14 cars, 5 trucks and 7 airplanes. I have 200 staff. I'm on 200 TV stations, 400 radio stations, and ministers all over the world.¹⁵

The assertion is that the church has suffered from a poverty complex and has failed to appropriate God's promises concerning healing and prosperity.¹⁶ "No wonder the Body of Christ stayed so poor all of those years. Most men [sic] were preaching that God loves poverty."¹⁷ Thus they continue to give reasons for why Christians are not getting wealthy in material terms. Price teaches "you are not operating in God's financial plans;¹⁸ "without obedience you will not prosper;"¹⁹ "ignorance, unbelief, and disobedience ... rob us of the manifestation of the prosperity promises of God."²⁰

According to prosperity theology, from the atonement of Christ come financial prosperity and wealth: "[Y]et for your sakes he became poor, so that you by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Yet in this text, Paul is talking about the spiritual riches we find in Christ. Furthermore, they teach that Jesus and the apostles were rich, and that therefore believers should expect the same financial success. For instance, Kenneth Copeland has argued that the prosperity gospel is validated in 3 John 1:2: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul." Copeland posits that "as the seeds of prosperity are planted in your mind, in your will and in your emotions ... they eventually produce a great financial harvest."²¹

The implication is that poor believers are doing something wrong, which prevents them from receiving God's financial blessings. The poor do not love God enough, do not have sufficient faith, or are not giving enough money to support God's work.²² Wealth is people's due rather than related to unjust structures.

¹⁵ Paul Gifford, "Theology and the Right Wing," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 69.1 (Dec 1989), pp. 34-37.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* (note 14), p. 19.

¹⁷ Jerry Savelle, *Prosperity of the Soul* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1979), p. 17.

¹⁸ F. K. C Price *High Finance: God's Financial Plan* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1984), p. 58.

¹⁹ Savelle, *op. cit.* (note 17), p. 54.

²⁰ Harold Hill, *The Money Book for King's Kids* (Old Tapan: F. H. Revell, 1984), p. 96.

²¹ www.kcm.org/studycenter/finances/pdf/prosper_inside_out.pdf (accessed 25 September 2007).

²² http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=3258 (accessed 4 June 2007).

Effects of prosperity theology

Mike King laments that what his fellow Americans, Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar, are doing is recolonizing Africans today in the name of the gospel:

Much more disturbing than inconveniencing us Westerners is the reality that Benny Hinn is running a stinking prosperity gospel sham on the poor people in Africa. His message is clear—bring an offering to sow a seed of faith... . God wants you to be rich and healthy. This is a crime against humanity. A huge majority of Africans live on \$ 1 per day and are vulnerable to this un-biblical message. This is a new form of colonialism. God have mercy. Benny Hinn isn't the only charlatan pulling off this cruel scheme. Right after we passed the stadium (with thousands of Africans lined up in the rain to get in the stadium a full seven hours before the meeting was scheduled to start) I saw a poster of Dr Creflo Dollar. Check the news story below if you don't believe he is up to no good. Another one of Creflo's billboards said, "Come meet the man whom God has anointed to lead you out of poverty."²³

Prosperity theology's growing influence helps to form capitalist attitudes and activities that will serve the purposes of empire and form workers for its economic interests. Paul Gifford argues that many born-again Christians in Africa make use of US "Bible belt" literature and resources, which in turn also make them vulnerable to agendas of the American religious right.

Furthermore, these teachings have the dangerous effect of diverting attention from the structural causes of Africa's ills. They advocate a born-again Christianity of prosperity which dissuades people from critiquing the present economic order and persuades them instead to try to be among those who benefit. Such teachings leave Africans in poverty because they do not encourage people seriously to analyze the causes of poverty and to seek ways of redressing such; instead, they blame themselves and ask, Why me? Adherents are assured that as individuals they can prosper within the present system. However, the reality is such that many Africans, suffering under unjust structures, are left at the margins and destitute. They believe that they have not given to God

²³ www.drews.voxtropolis.com/2007/05/29 (accessed 24 September 2007).

what God expects of them, or have not settled some matter with God. In other words, their transaction with God has fallen short.

Thus, while prosperity theology calls people to believe in Christ, it impoverishes them even further. The ministers ask for money from the poor to preach the gospel to all nations; in reality, they themselves benefit. People are faithfully giving the little they have, and at the end of the day, they find themselves living with nothing. This is similar to how, under the policies of empire, money is taken from the poor. What poor Africans earn from their crops is taken away in order to service foreign debt. Prices for commodities are determined globally and many wonder exactly how these prices are determined. For example, why does a cup of coffee cost more than one dollar, while a kilo of coffee is priced at less than one dollar on the world market? Why do rich people want to get richer and leave their brothers and sisters in extreme poverty? Churches in America help sell commodities from the developing countries through free trade, but the question remains as to how much money really reaches the farmers?

Instead of being liberated, Africans have become further enslaved. Their thinking has become distorted and enslaved and their responsibility undermined. Thus they are no longer capable of bringing about much needed change in church and society.

Some positive influences of prosperity theology in Africa

The emphasis of prosperity theology is becoming more acceptable to people in mainline churches because it seems to be addressing their material and physical needs through spiritual means. Encounters with the spiritual world, as elemental powers seeking to destroy people or public morality, and performing rituals to seek help from beneficent powers, are important aspects of African religiosity. Prosperity theology has become increasingly popular in Africa because of its openness to the supernatural; its interventionist and oral theological forms resonate with traditional African piety. Africa has been receptive to healing teachings, because for Africans religion is a survival strategy; spirit possession, with an emphasis on direct communication, crisis intervention and religious mediation, are central to religious experiences.²⁴ The ministries of

²⁴ Editor's note: For further information on this subject, see Ingo Wulffhorst (ed.), *Ancestors*,

healing and deliverance have thus become some of the most important expressions of Christianity in African Pentecostalism.

Born-again converts are learning to discipline their bodies, speech and sexuality by being encouraged to adopt a code of individual ethics: not cheating, lying, gossiping, committing adultery, or participating in anything corrupt or unlawful. The ascetic codes adopted by converts to a Neo-Pentecostal community contribute to an all-round betterment. Regular employment, restored family relations, active church membership and giving up alcohol, drugs and prostitution, can result in regular income and improved household economy.

Creating awareness

It is important for African churches to admit that prosperity teachings are a challenge to which they must pay attention. Churches need to create surroundings which help people to reject materialistic ideologies that distort the meaning of the gospel of the liberating and life changing Christ.

One of the challenges African churches face, in addition to poverty and HIV/AIDS, is ignorance. Out of ignorance, many people assume that everything coming from abroad is better than what they have or know. Africans are attracted to what comes to them from the US, without reflecting about the implications of the message being brought to them. They tend to be ignorant regarding the effects of the deceptive teachings of prosperity gospel.

Africans should not accept gospels other than the gospel revealed to them through Jesus Christ and churches should teach the real meaning of prosperity in the Bible. Jesus teaches that one cannot simultaneously be committed to the values of God and Mammon (*Cf. Mt 6:24*). Prosperity and spiritual well-being are not about abundant possessions. Creating awareness is important in building understanding, influencing opinion and making right decisions

Creating awareness needs to include theological education, also of the laity, in order to help identify false gospels and better to understand the church's teachings. At the same time, African theologians need to focus on the burning issues challenging their churches today, and actu-

ally address them. With this awareness, Africans will be able to reject religious appeals rooted in ideologies imported from the US empire, which are creating a different kind of faith.

The gospels present Jesus as the one who lived among us. Jesus was not caught up in materialism or individualism but shared what he had with those who were poor and marginalized. His crucifixion, death and resurrection brought salvation to all who in faith come to him. At the same time, it was a call to the mission of bringing others to this faith, rather than to a gospel of prosperity.

Our brother in Christ, Martin Luther, in one of his teachings on wealth and health, said that

the Apostle commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy... . This is what makes caring for the [one's own] body a Christian, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire, and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong members may serve the weaker... . This is a truly Christian life.²⁵

In other words, we need to respond to God's grace in Christ by doing works of love and serving others without expecting to be rewarded for doing so. Unlike the cause and effect rule, requiring an opposite (if not equal) reaction for every good action, the kingdom of God as a gift is a one way street. Churches in Africa need to develop a self-reliant theology that will free them from ignorance and inspire Christians who are struggling to live in the present. I join my brother, Ravi Tiwari, who suggested that:

The uniqueness of Christ is not an extraordinary claim made by some ordinary people; it is a witness borne out by individuals and by a community of faith. The salvific experience brings about a complete change (*metanoia*) in a person's total life pattern, so much so that it provides deep courage to pursue any risk. The sheer joy (*kara*) of such personal and communal experience compels a person to share it with anyone who cares or wishes to also in the experience of the ultimate.²⁶

²⁵ Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 365.

²⁶ Ravi Tiwari, "Dialogue in Praxis," in Abraham P. Athyal and Dorothy Yoder Nycce (eds), *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns* (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1998), pp. 88-89.

The Cross, Friendship and Empire

Deanna A. Thompson

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15).

“[The imagination crafted by empire] tempts us to gaze closer and closer at our navels rather than insist that we ask, as people of faith, tough questions about where are headed as nations, as religious bodies, as local and global citizens, as seekers of the spirit, as doers of the word.¹

What has Jesus’ call to friendship to do with empire building in a global context? Our initial response is likely “not much,” for friendship seems an ordinary, interpersonal relationship, maintained at the local level, while empire speaks of relationships of domination on an international scale. Theologians largely neglect friendship as a topic of further thinking, but that is currently not the case with empire. While analyses of its shape and scope differ, growing numbers of scholars (of theology and other disciplines) profess that our global context includes empire building by the USA. Why should North American theologians concern themselves with such a topic? Simply put, Christianity has a history of deep involvement with development and maintenance of empire, as well as a history of making the cross of Christ into swords to defend it. Thus, theology cannot limit itself to the interpersonal sphere, but is called to attend to relationships at the national as well as the international level.

But must the relationship of friendship to empire end there? Perhaps theologians have not thought enough about friendship and its reforming and even revolutionary potential. After all, as theologian Mary Hunt observes, “Everyone has friends, but by reading contemporary theology one would never know it.”² Recently friendship has received a bit more attention, and the import of Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel for Christian

¹ Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

² Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. I.

vocation is being examined more deeply.³ What might it look like for North American Christians to embrace Jesus' command to befriend in his name? Might this vocation have something to say to the context of empire?

While Western theologians are waking up to and engaging current formations of empire, I would argue that we cannot engage empire simply from within our Western theological context. In realizing that it cannot be "theology as usual" given the global dynamics of empire, we also must address the reality that Christianity is rapidly becoming, as Lamin Sanneh and others suggest, a "non-western religion."⁴ The center of gravity has shifted: today the majority of Christians live in the global South. Although this seismic shift has been taking place for decades, most Western theologians remain largely inattentive to Christian voices from elsewhere. Not only are Christians in the global South reimagining Western theological categories and assumptions, but they are also making connections between theology and empire. Asian feminist theologian, Kwok Pui-lan, recently talked about the ways in which "the empire [is writing] back."⁵ The formerly colonized are speaking up and writing back to the imperial forces that dominated them, and this act has theological implications.⁶ Theological reflection on empire by those of us in the West, therefore, must include listening to and learning from our neighbors (our friends?) in the global South. If we do not, our ruminations on empire will likely lead to the navel gazing to which Townes refers in the quote above. Moving forward, I propose thinking about glocal⁷ friendships that might take us on a path toward challenging empire.

³ See in particular Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), and Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazo Press, 2002).

⁴ See, among the many texts he's written, Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (eds.), *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Kwok Pui-lan reports that this phrase derives from Salman Rushdie's claim that "the empire writes back to the center," and influenced the title of a pioneering works on postcolonial literature, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002). See Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), p. 125.

⁶ Kwok Pui-lan, *ibid*, pp. 125-6.

⁷ "Glocal," as defined by Kevin Vanhoozer, "is the point of intersection between the global and the local; "glocalization" describes the way in which people in a certain locale respond to globalization, the way the local goes global. See Kevin Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All? Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity," in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (eds), *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 99.

If I participate in such a globalizing of theology, where theology speaks to empire from both local and global contexts, I cannot, as Ken Vanhoozer cautions, ignore either my own location or the politics and realities of globalization and its effects on Christians throughout the world.⁸ Because the task of theology is to discern ways of carrying on inherited traditions within ever-changing contexts, I want to explore—as an inheritor of the Lutheran tradition—whether and how Martin Luther’s innovative and subversive stance as a theologian of the cross can be utilized in a way that links the interpersonal, the national and the global in order to challenge and destabilize the powers and principalities of empire in our current context. While Luther himself did not consistently challenge the empire of his day,⁹ insights from his cross-centered theology, may offer a way forward. This involves shifting from service to friendship as the model for Christian vocation of life lived under the cross of Christ, and in active, mutual relationship with sisters and brothers around the world, which can call into question all earthly forms of domination.

In what follows, I shall first offer a brief sketch of Luther’s theology of the cross and then examine how this cross-centered theology affects our understanding of being the church and living a Christian vocation. Here I focus particularly on women’s relationships in a Christian context, suggesting a shift from service to friendship as the point of entry into a global notion of relationality. Finally, I shall explore the possibilities for the category of friendship to challenge current formulations of empire. This essay is a call for theologians and lay persons in our part of the world to become more aware, and to be moved to an active, compassionate response to the unjust realities of empire and its effects on brothers and sisters throughout the globe.

Luther’s focus on the cross of Christ

Let us begin with Martin Luther’s resistance against the unjust powers of sixteenth-century Christendom. What Luther introduces into his late

⁸ See Kevin Vanhoozer’s enlightening discussion of three ways not to go “global:” 1) to insist that since the gospel is unchanging, theology calls for an “emptying out” of the local cultural context; 2) to insist that globalization means homogenization, leading to the lowest common denominator theology; or 3) to insist that since various locations are so culturally specific and particular that theology essentially must become ethnography, *ibid.*, pp. 99-108.

⁹ See my chapter on Martin Luther in the forthcoming volume, Kwok Pui-lan, Don Compier, Joerg Rieger, (eds), *Empire and the Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

medieval context is a provocative theology of the cross that challenges the prevailing theology of glory he saw running rampant in the theological and ecclesiastical institutions of his day. When he articulated his cross-centered approach in 1518, at Heidelberg, Luther retold the story of human experience in light of Christ's cross and resurrection. The first part of the story recounts human beings' experience of trying—and always failing—to make themselves righteous before God. This is a failure Luther himself knew all too well. At this point, the distinction between glory theology and cross theology begins to emerge; glory theologians put their faith in the human ability to control life, to become their own saviors—a fiction that ultimately leads to despair. To experience despair over our failure at self-improvement and mastery, Luther explained, is really the experience of God's alien or strange work on our prideful selves. The cross of Christ, Luther insisted, judges and condemns all attempts at self-presumption, leaving the Christian humbled and ready to receive the gift of grace.

At one level, Luther's theology of the cross tells a highly personal and existential tale. At another level, however, his cross-centered approach narrates a public, corporate story. It is an alternative to how a glory theology creates a fictitious universe where ecclesial, theological and monastic institutions come to practice a theology of human power, majesty and achievement. A critical affirmation of a theologian of the cross, then, is that Jesus Christ's death on the cross tells us that appearances ultimately deceive, that reality is actually hidden *sub contrario*, under its opposite. Precisely where God seems least likely to be—in the shameful event of the cross—there God is, hidden in the suffering. Those theologians of glory who controlled much of the church of Luther's time, however, avoided the cross, wanting instead to “reign with Christ.”¹⁰ Thus, for Luther, theologians of glory call good evil and evil good, while a theologian of the cross “calls a thing what it is” (thesis 21), exposing corruption for what it is and demanding reform.

The last part of the story, as Luther tells it in the Heidelberg Disputation, is that through the cross “the tyrants” (sin, death and the devil) are conquered, and because of the resurrection, new life in Christ is possible. Because of the death of the sinner with Christ on the cross, the sinner is justified and “raised up” with Christ (thesis 24). Now, knowing that salvation comes through what Christ did on the cross, Christians are

¹⁰ Hilton C. Oswald (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 11 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), p. 104.

freed up to “be imitators of God,” not as a requirement for righteousness, but as a “stimulant” for loving action in the world (thesis 27). It is precisely this radical notion of Christian freedom that fueled Luther’s vision of reformation within medieval Christendom.

To understand the radical nature of Luther’s stance as a theologian of the cross it is necessary to appreciate the profound link between the cross of Christ and the Christian’s call to live in freedom. For Luther, it is vital to see that first Christ as “gift” nourishes our faith to make us Christians. Only then can Christ be seen as example for how to live in loving service to the neighbor. Luther speaks most clearly about freedom in his treatise, *On the Freedom of the Christian* (1521), where he issues his famous dictum, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”¹¹ For Luther, this claim contains nothing less than “the whole of Christian life.” This declaration of freedom, Luther insists, most certainly springs from the gospel message, for the gospel “teaches freedom in all matters.”¹²

But even as Christians bask in the glow of their freedom before God, they also live in the world, where Luther insists on obedience to temporal authorities. While this stance at times prevented Luther from resisting the imperial powers of his day,¹³ living subject to all others, strangely, also offers its own version of freedom—the freedom from keeping track of the score between us and others. Any scorekeeping ultimately coaxes one back to a theology of glory that encourages and fosters a preoccupation with self over others. Conformity to Christ is experienced by becoming “Christ to one another and [in doing] to our neighbors as Christ does to us.”¹⁴ Through service to our neighbor, our outer, old person conforms to our inner, new person, through receptivity to the wounds and needs of those around us. This leads to Luther’s definition of living authentically: “Here faith is truly active through love; that is, it finds expression in the works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a [person] willingly serves another without hope of reward.”¹⁵ Far from advocating an ethical quietism (for which he is often blamed), Luther envisions what Rowan Williams calls an “active holiness” performed

¹¹ Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 344.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹³ Again I refer you to my article, *op. cit.* (note 9).

¹⁴ Luther, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 364.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

through “the daily dying, daily taking of the cross” which is “precisely this exposure of the self to the devouring needs of others.”¹⁶

Because for Luther a life of faith is also always a sinful life, it must also involve daily renewal. In free service to others, God “lets the cross take form” as we conform to the reality of the gift of righteousness given us by Christ. Freely to embrace the cross of servanthood means that we empty ourselves of the daily temptation to become self-obsessed. Living in the flesh, Luther believes, “we only begin to make some progress in that which shall be perfect in the future life.”¹⁷ Since we are only beginning this pilgrimage, the cross remains our earthly reality. God’s move from cross to resurrection already has been made, but—due to our own brokenness and the that of the world—we continue our cruciform existence, understanding that “to preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free and save it.”¹⁸ It is precisely from this freedom that hope springs: no matter what crosses we bear in this life, we hope in God’s saving power to transform our earthly experiences of the cross into the everlasting reality of the resurrection.

Theology and community of the cross

What does this cross-centered vision of Christian faith and practice mean for us today? In the words of Douglas John Hall, “What is this freedom [really] for?”¹⁹ For Luther, living out this freedom was not merely or even primarily an individual act, but most profoundly, an ecclesial act. Hall states that living out a theology of the cross in the context of the church means nothing other than participating in an *ecclesia crucis*.²⁰ To be the church is to be a cruciform people, a community of the cross. What follows is an attempt to use the theology of the cross and its call freely to serve the neighbor in love as a way of calling the church actively to befriend those whom North American Christians too often neglect.

¹⁶ Rowan Williams, *Christian Spirituality: A Theological History from the New Testament to Luther and St John of the Cross* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), p. 154.

¹⁷ Luther, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 370.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹⁹ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

It is clear that one of Hall's major concerns is how few North American churches actually embrace a theology of the church as the suffering people of God.²¹ Although theologies of glory abound in the North American churches, it can be argued that these bodies of Christ nevertheless still have moments of embodying an *ecclesia crucis*. Amidst a mega-church mentality and the preaching of prosperity gospels, there are instances of churches bearing the suffering of their members and the community. From job transition support groups to starting-over-single sessions for divorced persons, contemporary North American churches attempt to meet the needs of the wounded who pass through their doors. And yet, Hall's critique of North American Christianity as professing a theology of glory wedded to capitalist and consumerist notions of church (such as the emergence of "pasterpreneurs" who work to create niche ministries to attract new clientele) illumines an important reality. It is true, as Hall suggests, that too many versions of Christianity have become virtually indistinguishable from capitalist culture.²² These versions can lead the church far afield from its call to embody the cross in its communal life.

Women's groups/women's friendships as potential sites of resistance

One particular ecclesial phenomenon worth considering in this conversation is the configuration of church-sponsored women's groups. As a woman, a member of a local church and a theologian, I'm interested in the potential for women's groups as sites for education and relationship-building across borders and resistance. While women have historically participated in groups where service to others was paramount, this focus has begun to shift. Whether it is a book study group or a wellness retreat or a mom's night out (I have participated in all of these), service often takes a back seat to more individualized needs. Very possibly, churches are responding to the fact that "younger women want a focus on spirituality, a way of reconnecting with God in the midst of hectic schedules."²³ We

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²³ R. Marie Griffith, "The Generous Side of Christian Faith: The Successes and Challenges of Mainline Women's Group," in Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (eds), *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 95.

live in a frenetic, technology-driven society. Certainly technology brings many positives into our lives, but as theologian Vincent Miller points out, these technological innovations can feed a disconnect between faith and practice.²⁴ Our cravings for an inward focus that helps us balance work and family, or a structure that helps us cultivate and maintain strong female friendships while raising young children, should not go unmet, neither in- nor outside the church. Indeed, such self-supporting groups for women play a vital role, and can be a part of what Robert Wuthnow calls “loose connections” that help sustain many of us caught up in the frenetic contemporary pace.²⁵ In addition to performing a social and spiritual role, might these groups also be configured to encourage relationships that engender a kind of “writing back” against empire, and a paying attention to those who do? Might these groups also create space where relationships are formed across ethnic and national boundaries?

I answer these questions with a tentative “yes.” As Miller suggests, “Our local parishes and congregations still provide potent locations for living a graced life of engaged discipleship.”²⁶ Because relationships with other women in a church setting also root themselves in a relationship with the Trinitarian God, they possess the potential to be qualitatively different experiences for women than participation in a local mom’s group or a community book club. And here is where I return to Martin Luther’s radical notion of freedom to serve the neighbor in love. Here is where the potential for “engaged discipleship” might be imagined as Jesus’ call in John’s Gospel, to live in the world as friends of Christ.

From servant to friend

“Faith finds expression in works of freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done ... without hope of reward.” For many Christian communities, embodying Christ’s love continues through ministries of service, which often have been carried out by the women of the church. We must af-

²⁴ See Miller’s intriguing article, “The iPod, the Cell Phone, and the Church: Discipleship, Consumer Culture, and a Globalized World,” in Peter Laarman (ed.), *Getting the Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), pp. 173-191.

²⁵ Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America’s Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), as cited in Griffith, *op. cit.* (note 23), p. 88.

²⁶ Miller, *op. cit.* (note 24), p. 186.

firm that at its best, Christian service “has been relatively free of works righteousness, guided by a theology which affirms our *freedom to serve one another* purely because of the other’s needs, not because of our need for self-justification before God.”²⁷ And yet, many of the opportunities for contemporary women seem less about service and more about feeding a woman’s sense of faith, identity and the health of her most intimate relationships. While less of a service focus might seem like a turn away from an *ecclesia crucis*, might there be ways, in the current context of empire, for the people of God more fully to embody the *ecclesia crucis*?

Following the shift suggested in John 15 and moving from “servant” to “friend” language could help reframe the call to Christian vocation, to be *ecclesia crucis*, for North American Christian women. There Jesus commends to his disciples a new understanding of their relationship to him: “I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). This often neglected image carries with it a subversive character ripe for further theological thinking. In our glocal context, this image may express God’s relating to humanity in profound and unexpected ways.

What does the Johannine narrative mean by friendship embodied by Jesus? Contrary to the possible temptation to view friendship in provincial and superficial ways,²⁸ Jesus’ friendships were public, loyal, transgressive and they ultimately led him to the cross. We can see these traits in the Johannine depiction of Jesus’ friendship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. This public friendship involves not only eating together but also Jesus’ raising of Lazarus and Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet (Jn 11-12). It is clear that Jesus’ allegiance to these friends leads him to transgress expected boundaries, both in his surprising relationship to Mary (Cf. Jn 12:4-7) and in his destabilizing act of raising Lazarus (Cf. Jn 11:45 ff.). Through these stories and others in John’s Gospel narrative, it is plain to see that Jesus’ acts of friendship eventually lead him to the cross.²⁹ For in addition to befriending those who love him (as with Mary, Martha and Lazarus), it must also be noted that Jesus’ friends included others further afield, such as “tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19). Going further still, Jesus still considers his friend the one who

²⁷ Charles Lutz, “The Suffering of the World: Have Lutherans a Distinctive Service?,” in *Lutheran Forum* 12, no. 2 (1978), p. 7.

²⁸ See a popularized version of superficial friendship as displayed on the Internet site “Facebook,” where members boast of having registered numbers of “friends” in the hundreds.

²⁹ The call for Jesus’ death comes after raising his friend, Lazarus, and also Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet foreshadows the anointing of his body for burial after the crucifixion.

betrays him with a kiss, saying to Judas in the Garden of Gethsemene, “Friend, do what you are here to do” (Mt 26:50). Jesus’ friendships, it is clear, present stark challenges to current cultural configurations of friendship and cannot be separated from the cross itself.

Finally, Jesus’ call no longer to be servants but friends is an inescapably corporate call. Many conversations regarding vocation today tend to focus more on the individual. Rick Warren’s popular book, *Purpose-Driven Life*, begins with the question, What in the world am I here for? A worthwhile question indeed. But if we take Jesus’ call in John’s Gospel to heart, we must see the command to befriend as one that calls us corporately, as a group. Vocation understood in terms of Jesus’ embodiment of friendship insists that we are called to be with others in the body of Christ; even more explicitly, Christians are called to be the church. And far beyond a comfortable familiarity with friends who are very like us, Jesus offers us an image of friendship that extends to all—to those outside our social networks, to our enemies as well as those whom we love. Remaining in Christ’s love not only means living in fellowship with all of Christ’s friends, but also that as Christ’s friends we can never distance ourselves from the cruciform reality of Christ’s life amongst us.

Friendship as a challenge to empire

We return to where we began, wondering whether and how the model of Christian friendship might be used to challenge current configurations of empire. Turning specifically to empire, I find Joerg Rieger’s starting point helpful. Empire involves “massive concentrations of power which permeate all aspects of life and which cannot be controlled by any one actor alone.” In addition, it is crucial to understand that empire takes a variety of different shapes and forms. While we often think of empire building in military terms, Rieger points out that in today’s context, military might is rivaled by “covert expressions of economic and cultural power.”³⁰ Given these dynamics of empire, what can we say and do to make a difference in this context?

The oft-cited empire analysts, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, argue that globalization offers more potential than ever before to say

³⁰ Rieger highlights the current war in Iraq to illustrate his point. The US did not invade Iraq in order to rule the country directly; rather, imperial control of oil through “production sharing agreements” (PSA) will likely prove to be where enduring concentrations of power will lie. See Rieger, *op. cit.* (note 9).

“no” to such imperial concentrations of power.³¹ But not everyone shares their optimism. For instance, womanist ethicist Emilie Townes supports Rieger’s assessment and wonders whether Hardt and Negri’s optimism about the potential for resistance belies the fact that real people struggling under empire “are not abstract actors in an academic public policy debate. They have flesh and blood—they are real. It is in their lives that our commitment to justice and right relationships live and grow. This is where we answer God’s call to faithfulness.”³²

To help us be faithful Christians in the context of empire, I wager that Luther’s cross-centered approach and its call freely to love the neighbor may offer both imagination and courage to move forward. Utilizing a cross theology inherited from Luther, there is the profound and repeated insistence that what Christ accomplished on the cross turns us outward, toward our neighbor, and away from any glory theology that tempts us to stay gazing at our own navels. In a culture where “we’re more often taught to love things and use people,”³³ the vocational call of befriending the neighbor, both locally and globally, means we reject such manifestations of glory theology. Engaging in the work of cultivating friendship, ethicist Paul Waldell argues, shapes our character.³⁴ Thus, as Christian theologians and lay people, including the women populating church groups, we are called into the vocation of friendships that cross national boundaries, particularly moving into the global South where we can learn from our Christian brothers and sisters about their experiences with the concentrations of power that need resisting.

How do we begin to form friendships with those from Africa, Asia and South America? Relying on Luther’s insight, the justification given Christians by Christ’s work on the cross frees us from enslavement to human-made structures that foster sinful behaviors and practices. What this can mean for our global context is that Western Christians become free of traditional missionary models of relating to persons in the global South. As missiologist Tite Tienou suggests, “since people of color now represent the majority of Christians in the world, the perception of Christianity as a Western religion

³¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³² Emilie Townes, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 101.

³³ Elaine Storkey, *The Search for Intimacy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 21, as quoted in Wadell, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 47.

³⁴ Wadell, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 40.

can be corrected.”³⁵ In the framework of a theology of the cross, calling the current context of empire what it is involves continuously examining our Western forms of glory theology that still holds us in their grip. As Western Christian women who want to build friendships with African women, for instance, we must listen to the perspective of Merci Amba Oduyoye who insists that Western women give up the naïve notion that their goodwill can change the plight of African women (one of the glory theologies holding us in its grip). Oduyoye proclaims, “as women who would be sisters, [Western women] have a responsibility to relate to African women in a way that expresses genuine solidarity. On their own, they cannot liberate us.”³⁶ So what might “genuine solidarity” or real friendship look like between Western Christian women and African women? Might it challenge empire?

In a post-colonial, post-missionary context, friendship can offer a way for Western Christians to move beyond uncritical missionary mentalities and activities that ignore the dynamics of power.³⁷ The Zimbabwean theologian, Isaac M. T. Mwase, argues that world Christianity has yet to figure out “how to have interdependent relationships that are healthy and mutually rewarding.”³⁸ This is where both the orientation toward the neighbor in need that Luther lifts up, and the emphasis on genuine solidarity and mutuality within friendship must enter the equation. Mwase observes,

It is dubious that those healthy relationships will emerge when those who receive the gospel are illiterate and poor in health and when those who convey it do not understand the interdependent nature of world Christianity and of the current world economy.³⁹

He continues, “When Christians sing, ‘We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord’, do their words not declare a solidarity that requires financial and relational interdependence?”⁴⁰

³⁵ Tite Tienou, “Christian Theology in the Era of World Christianity,” in Ott and Netland, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 41.

³⁶ Oduyoye, as quoted in the chapter on her work by Kwok Pui-lan, in Pui-lan, Compier, Rieger, *op. cit.* (note 9).

³⁷ See Joerg Rieger’s helpful analysis of uncritical missiology, in *ibid.*

³⁸ Isaac M. T. Mwase, “Shall They Till with their own Hoes? Baptists in Zimbabwe and New Patterns of Interdependence,” in Sanneh and Carpenter, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 74.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Mwase's challenge to Western Christianity constitutes an example of "writing back to empire." Taking Mwase's words to heart, US Christians should examine not only the current state of support for mission work in areas where earlier missionaries created dependence on Western resources, but must also take note of the gross imbalance in financial support offered by the US to those same regions of the world. While US financial support for Israel, a country of 6 million people, reached USD 3.1 billion in 2000, US support for the entire continent of Africa, with its forty-four countries and almost 800 million people, came in at USD 760 million.⁴¹ Befriending those in and from Africa, then, pushes us into the public arena to question and likely protest the low priority given to much of the global South. But developing friendships with those from these areas of the world need not only be about those living thousands of miles away. Western Christians need not even leave our local settings to develop these friendships.⁴² Rather, we must get out into our local communities and listen and learn how these folks are speaking and writing back to empire.

In this context, the church understood as a community of Jesus' friends cannot be anything other than the *ecclesia crucis*. The "language of trauma," which has been called the common language of African Christianity,⁴³ must be a language we in Western churches and in women's groups hear and through it, are moved to action. If Paul Wadell is right and good friendships do change us—that in coming to know another human being we learn more about ourselves⁴⁴—then forging friendships with those from the global South will alter our sense of ourselves as Western consumers and benefactors of empire. For as Joerg Rieger suggests,

Without understanding how we are shaped by empire all the way down to our deepest desires, we cannot properly identify the theological surplus

⁴¹ Iva E. Carruthers, "The Sheep and the Goats: Black and Christian in a Global Context," in Iva E. Carruthers, Frederick D. Haynes, III, and Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. (eds), *Blow the Trumpet in Zion: Global Vision and Action for the 21st Century Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 16.

⁴² As LWF conference participant Margaret Obaga, a Kenyan, stated during one of our conversations, "You don't have to go to Africa—we're right here!"

⁴³ See Chris Rice's compelling article, "Posttraumatic Christians: Lamentation in Africa," in *The Christian Century* (1 May 2007), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ Wadell, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 69.

[his term for the theological moments that have not been co-opted by imperial politics] that point us beyond the horizons of empire.⁴⁵

Placing the act of befriending within the larger framework of a theology of the cross will prevent us from using the friendships to stay focused on ourselves. Indeed, when Jesus commissions his disciples as friends, he instructs them to “love as I have loved,” and that must be the shape of friendships made under the cross. Western theologians and lay people, such as the women who constitute a powerful part of the church, must challenge the massive concentrations of power that make up this era of empire, for they harm and destroy God’s children. In our global context, being friends of the Friend of the World calls us into friendships with those across the globe. And those friendships, if genuine, will not only leave us changed, but will also lead us into imaginative and courageous challenging of these structures that too often destroy those we are commanded to call friends.

⁴⁵ Rieger, *op. cit.* (note 9).

The Public Vocation of the Church amid Empire

An Ecclesiology of Belonging Through Otherness

Johannes Gerhardus Jacobus Swart

A man who can be rewarded by the social system can be ruled by it.¹

Introduction

This article seeks to contribute to processes of identity formation and politics “that are counter to the assumptions, power dynamics and outcomes operating under empire and can nurture resistance to such, especially in and through local churches.”²

It should be read in the context of various attempts to reject, subvert and cultivate alternatives to the cultural hegemony³ of empire that not only causes people to “accept the role, function and reality of the empire as indispensable, normative and ideal,” but also make them believe and confess that there is no real alternative to empire.⁴ As Groh put it in the early 1970s, “Empire... traffics in the relentless proclivity of societal man [sic] to find contentment in the culture’s values and personal advancement within the society’s political, social, and economic structures.”⁵ In this article, the hegemonic nature of empire will be approached in terms of its predatory and narcissistic tendency to extinguish rather than embrace otherness.

¹ An old political maxim paraphrased by Dennis Groh, in Dennis E. Groh, “Tertullian’s Polemic against Social Co-Optation,” in *Church History* 40, no. 1 (1971), p. 7.

² As formulated in the Lutheran World Federation invitation of 28 March 2007 to participate in the above mentioned theological seminar at Luther Seminary, St Paul.

³ Cultural hegemony refers to the establishment, empowerment and dominance of certain cultural beliefs, values and practices to the submersion and exclusion of others. It comes in the shape and form of everyday practices and shared beliefs that provide the foundation for complex systems of dominance. For a discussion about calling Empire hegemonic amidst many other denunciations, see Gary M. Simpson, “Hope in the Face of Empire: Failed Patriotism, Civil International Publicity, and Patriotic Peacebuilding,” in *Word & World* 25, no. 2 (2005), pp. 128-30.

⁴ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “An Ecumenical Faith Stance against Global Empire for a Liberated Earth Community,” in *Theological Analysis and Action on Global Empire Today* (Manila, 2006), p. 9.

⁵ Groh, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 7.

Underlying this are my own personal experiences as a South African Christian from a Reformed theological background. I grew up as a child of apartheid and lived through processes of transformation in a society and church that have only begun to learn how otherness is a gift rather than a threat to identity formation. As the lead pastor of a white, Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed congregation (the church of apartheid), I was responsible for providing transformational leadership for the congregation to become a multicultural and multilingual congregation in the new South Africa. Thus, this article is embedded in personal experiences of both successes and failures to make otherness a constitutive feature of the church's identity.

The Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) is presented towards the end of this article as the confessional culmination of an argument for an ecclesiology of belonging through otherness. This confession has provided the confessional foundation for the public embodiment of ecclesial identity rooted in otherness. Apartheid was a form of empire that dealt with otherness by absolutizing separateness on the basis of racial categories, leading to hegemonic policies and practices of domination and extinction of the other. From within this context, the Belhar Confession rejects the ways in which otherness typically features within hegemonic agendas of empire. It also affirms a biblical and theological alternative that embraces otherness as a gift from God for the life of the church, for publicly embodying the church's witness in the world and for living faithfully amid social and political realities.

Church and empire

What I shall present here is an ecclesiology, rooted in a communitarian perspective on the life of the Triune God, that represents an alternative vision of belonging in the midst of empire's cultural identity dynamics. Since identity formation through cultural dynamics plays such an important role in establishing empire and cultivating cultural hegemony, insights from social or cultural anthropology inform a hermeneutic for considering the assumptions and power politics of empire. This sheds light on how modern empire takes on many different cultural forms and shapes in today's increasingly globalized world.

I am especially indebted to Arjun Appadurai's insights on the cultural flows and social imaginations in today's globalized world.⁶ In addressing

⁶ See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minne-

the darker sides of globalization, he reflects on “today’s large-scale predatory narcissisms” that shape various forms of predatory identity today.⁷ He defines predatory identity as “those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as we.”⁸ Appadurai talks about this in the context of how today’s globalized world is characterized by anxieties of incompleteness that lead the majority to a “fear of small numbers” (title of his book). I find this concept helpful for interpreting some fundamental and underlying cultural dynamics in empire’s typical identity politics. The characterizations of “we” and “they,” culminating in ever-present possibilities of the extinction of otherness, are always a fundamental part of empire’s hegemonic identity politics. Submerging and excluding otherness are integral to empire’s nature, because otherness threatens empire’s complex systems of dominance. This was clearly the case during the apartheid era in South Africa.

Therefore, I propose an ecclesiology of belonging through otherness as the church’s alternative confessional and ethical identity formation in the midst of empire’s nature and its tendency to cultivate predatory identities. In today’s globalized world, the church faces the choice of either intentionally cultivating habits of ecclesial identity formation and practices of ecclesial politics in the midst of empire, or of being increasingly seduced and co-opted into the cultural realities of empire.

I propose a particular African interpretation of a Trinitarian ecclesiology embedded in relational, social and communal understandings of God’s life. I find an interpretation of Tertullian’s work, *On Baptism*, in the midst of second- to third-century Roman Empire a helpful illustration of such an ecclesiology rooted in the life of God. From this perspective, belonging through otherness becomes formative for ecclesial identity politics, as an alternative to the unbridled, self-referential individualism and homogenizing power politics of empire. In the midst of twentieth-century apartheid empire, the Belhar Confession provides an illustration of the confessional embodiment of such an ecclesiology as counter to empire’s predatory narcissism.”

apolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

An ecclesiology of belonging through otherness

I belong, therefore I am.⁹

Rooted in a social Trinitarianism

Developing an ecclesiology of belonging through otherness takes place against the background of Trinitarian traditions of interpreting the life of God as relational, social and communal. These traditions use social analogies for understanding the dynamics of the life of God.¹⁰ One dominant and influential view within this tradition understands the relational nature of the being of God as *perichoresis*.¹¹

Although a comprehensive discussion of the *perichoresis* tradition is beyond our scope here, at least the groundbreaking work by Jürgen Moltmann¹² should be mentioned, for reviving interest in the communal and relational nature of God,¹³ in relation to the kingdom of God and the church.¹⁴ In perceiving the three persons of the Trinity as forming “their own unity by themselves in the circulation of the divine life,”¹⁵ Moltmann

⁹ The populist version of the John Mbiti aphorism, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,” as a counter for Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990), p. 113.

¹⁰ For an overview of Trinitarian traditions based on either psychological or social analogies, see William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 131-36.

¹¹ It was John of Damascus (675-749 CE) who established the word *perichoresis* as a technical term that describes the mutual interpenetration of the three persons in the Godhood. Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?: An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 219-20. Historically *perichoresis* meant “whirl, rotation, or circulation, the dynamic of going from one to another, walking around, handling around a possession to be shared, like a bottle of wine; encircling, embracing, enclosing.” Gary M. Simpson, “A Reformation is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church,” Luther Seminary, St Paul, 2005.

¹² For an overview “in a nutshell” of the development of Moltmann’s theology of the Trinity, see M. Douglas Meeks, “The Social Trinity and Property,” in Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (eds), *God’s Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 14-15.

¹³ This is sometimes called a *social Trinitarianism* that employs (since the influence of especially Gregory of Nyssa) social images for the Trinity, reflecting the interrelationship of the divine Persons in the Godhood as belonging to one divine nature through their interrelationship. Miroslav Volf, “Being as God is: Trinity and Generosity,” in *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ For the influence of the Cappadocian Fathers on Moltmann, see Nicholas Constatas, “Eschatology and Christology: Moltmann and the Greek Fathers,” in Volf and Welker *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 191.

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 175.

interprets the nature of the Triune God as “divine life in communion,” which means “Father, Son, and Spirit abide and act in perichoretic union in a unique, mutually interpenetrating love that both distinguishes and unites.”¹⁶

Kevin Giles describes this particular understanding of the relational nature of the being of God as “the Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in the Father and the Son.”¹⁷ In this reciprocal relational dynamic, Father, Son and Spirit are a communion of persons existing in one another. Any modalistic, monistic or monarchical logic about the being of God is rejected.¹⁸

This Trinitarian tradition of understanding God’s life as *perichoresis* radically changes the idea of the Trinity as relations of origin (with sending or derivative relationships between the three “persons”). This also provides the opportunity to construct a communal based “Trinitarian model of ecclesiology,” rooted in the immanent Trinity¹⁹ rather than the economic Trinity.²⁰

Miroslav Volf’s work, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, is a contemporary example of using this model of the Trinity for reflecting on ecclesiology,²¹ although it is also important to note the limitation of such an approach as a model for ecclesiology. As Volf reminds us, “our notions of the Triune God are not the Triune God, even if God is accessible to us only in these notions.”²² Yet, we can “describe God through the categories of our own reality,” because “God’s self-revelation comes in a this-worldly fashion.” That makes it possible for us “to convert Trinitar-

¹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, “The Trinity and the Theology of Religions,” in Volf and Welker *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 113.

¹⁷ Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?: An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), p. 220.

¹⁸ For an overview of how this Trinitarian tradition developed and influenced the ecclesiology conversation, see Simpson, *op. cit.* (note 11).

¹⁹ After distinguishing the “model” approach from the “origin” and “ontological” approaches, Kevin Giles classifies approaches based on the immanent Trinity in a communal category (rather than either an ecumenical or egalitarian category). Giles, *op. cit.* (note 17), p. 223.

²⁰ For a short overview of this well-known Karl Rahner “axiom” and its critique (especially via Yves Congar), see Placher, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 138-139.

²¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 191-220. Volf is indebted to Paul, Luther, Kasemann, Moltmann, Pannenberg and contemporary sociologists such as Niklas Luhmann, Franz Kaufmann, Peter Berger and Rodney Stark for his ecclesiology based on a Trinitarian model.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

ian ideas (borrowed from our this-worldly categories) into ecclesiological ideas (grounded in our understanding of the nature of God).²³

The main critique of Moltmann's *perichoretic* understanding of the Trinity as a model for ecclesiology (as in Volf) is whether this contemporary interpretation of a social Trinitarianism really succeeds in breaking out of a predominantly Western understanding of the relationship between person and community. Although the intention is to emphasize the relationship between the different persons for the sake of avoiding a modalistic, monistic or monarchical perspective, Moltmann could never escape the criticism of leaning toward a tritheism that takes the persons rather than the unity of God as the point of departure.²⁴

Similarly, despite Volf's critique of individualism and his aim to do justice to both person and community for the sake of avoiding an uncritical "ecclesial populism," critics such as David Cunningham contend that "Volf's ecclesiology remains unnecessarily secularized and individualistic."

²⁵ The suspicion remains that the underlying philosophical and sociological assumptions of such a relational and egalitarian approach to the life of God is still influenced by Enlightenment categories of "rights" and "democracy" (Godhood as a self-giving democracy) rather than theological categories regarding "the inner life of God."²⁶ Therefore, another critic, Avery Dulles, is of the opinion that Volf's effort represents little more than a modern, individualistic notion of personhood based upon a "kinder, gentler" character by insisting on mutual cooperation.²⁷

The concern is that the divine persons are still considered as having relations, instead of a more revolutionary view of the divine persons as relations. An ecclesiology of belonging, intended to present an alternative to the promotion of an unbridled and self-referential individualism in modern empire, needs emphatically to break through any underlying theological and anthropological assumptions that take the individual as the point of departure for understanding cultural dynamics and relationships.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁴ Paul D. Molnar, "The Function of the Trinity in Moltmann's Ecological Doctrine of Creation," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), pp. 673-97. See also Placher, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 135.

²⁵ David S. Cunningham, "After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity," in *Theology Today* 57, no. 1 (2000), pp. 124-25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Avery Dulles' critique is that this does not actually avoid the pitfalls of tritheism and "seems difficult to reconcile with the *homoousion* of Nicea..." Avery Robert Dulles, "After Our Likeness: The Church as Image of the Trinity," in *First Things* 87 (1998), p. 51.

Constituted through otherness

An ecclesiology of belonging constituted through otherness clearly needs to emphasize beyond doubt the being of the Triune God as relational rather than separate persons who have relationships. The insights of the Eastern Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, present such a possibility.²⁸ Zizioulas' argument for an ontology of otherness as constitutive of the communion of three persons in the Godhead, is in opposition to viewing relationships as a connection between individual persons or the relationships they have with each other. He describes otherness as constitutive of this communion or relationships by saying that

otherness is not moral or psychological but ontological. We cannot tell what each person is; we can only say who he is. Each person in the holy Trinity is different not by way of difference of natural qualities (such qualities are all common to the three persons), but by way of the simple affirmation of being who he is. As a result, finally, otherness is inconceivably apart from relationship. Father, Son and Spirit are all names indicating relationship. No person can be different unless he is related. Communion does not threaten otherness, it generates it.²⁹

Clearly, Zizioulas cannot be criticized for tritheism; relationship is not constituted by bringing individual persons into communion; they cannot be viewed as three persons apart from their relationship constituted by otherness. The communion or relationship is primary, and the three persons realize identity through the otherness that constitutes that relationship.

However, Zizioulas can be critiqued for rooting this in philosophical assumptions of a secular personalism or existentialism,³⁰ because of the distinction he makes between the individual and the person. Zizioulas blames Western theology and philosophy for wrongly identifying individual and person, which results in modalistic or monistic Trinitarian conceptions. For Zizioulas, "person" is by definition a relational concept. This opens him up

²⁸ John D. Zizioulas and Paul McPartland, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London, New York: T & T Clark, 2006). This is a follow-up on John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁰ Lucian Turcescu, "Person' Vs 'Individual', and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa," in *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), pp. 97-109.

for the critique of “attempting to dress his philosophical personalism and existentialism with Cappadocian language and parade it as patristic.”³¹

Belonging as the relational perichoresis constituted by otherness

In light of the above suspicions about the social Trinitarianism of Moltmann and Volf and the communal Trinitarianism of Zizioulas, I would like to introduce another perspective. It builds on the fruitful relational intentions and social or communal directions of both these traditions, while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of individualism or personalism. I propose an African worldview perspective on belonging. This has profound implications for interpreting the Trinity as an African communitarian Trinitarianism (here presented as a Trinitarian belonging) and consequently for an ecclesiology that grounds the being of the church in belonging as the primary ontological category.

For this purpose, A. Okechuckwu Ogbonnaya’s interpretation from an African worldview perspective of the communal and relational nature of God is a primary reference. Against the background of an African cosmology,³² Ogbonnaya develops “communotheism” as a communal understanding of the Trinity.³³ In basing this on Tertullian’s biblical interpretations of the Trinity, Ogbonnaya describes the Trinity as “relation-in-community both in its ontological-equalitarian and functional-temporal-subordinate relations.”³⁴ Therefore, he rejects both monotheism and polytheism, which preclude the intrinsic relationality of God. An understanding of the nature of the Triune God can only be properly entered through the relational and communal nature of God.

In this sense, Ogbonnaya interprets the meaning of Tertullian’s use of *status* (the three persons of the Godhood as having the same status) not as a static concept (as in a modern, Western worldview), but a relational concept as “a definition of belonging” in which belonging is ontological in nature.³⁵ The connection of the three persons is not defined by function but by belonging.³⁶ Therefore, the nature of the three-person relationship

³¹ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu,” in *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004), p. 601.

³² A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), p. xi.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

is constituted through belonging to each other. Ogbonnaya presents this interpretation from an African worldview perspective,³⁷ which he believes was also dominant in ancient North Africa during Tertullian's time. Belonging is perceived as "the key to existence"³⁸ or, as Mark Thomsen puts it, "belonging is fundamentally a cosmic fact."³⁹

Belonging thus becomes the ontological category for the togetherness of the three persons in the Godhood. This not only builds on those Trinitarian traditions that define the being and life of God as relational (Moltmann and Volf) but also on those that identify otherness as constitutive for relationality (Zizioulas). However, even more intentionally, this emphasizes the communal nature of such a relationality that ontologically is constituted by otherness. It cannot be mistaken for a social or communal understanding in which primacy still belongs to the individual, or a view that takes as its point of departure an existentialist philosophy of personhood.

Drawing on the work of Leonardo Boff, Thomas Scirghi shows how this kind of Trinitarian belonging can be developed as the ontological key for a relational ecclesiology that constitutes relationship in terms of relating itself.⁴⁰ Scirghi interprets the *perichoresis* understanding of the Triune communion as an ecclesial political statement that exposes the inherent individualism of modern consumer ideology by insisting that "the ground of all being lies in belonging to one another."⁴¹ Belonging through otherness therefore becomes the basis for understanding the formation and embodiment of the church's identity in the world.

Baptism and resistance in the context of Tertullian's Roman Empire

But we, little fishes, after the example of our Icqus Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹ Mark Thomsen, "Reflections on the Priority of Belonging," in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31, no. 4 (2004), p. 317.

⁴⁰ Thomas J. Scirghi, "The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society," in *Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 3 (2002), p. 333.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water.⁴²

Tertullian's work is strongly characterized by his continuous attempt to lay theological and ecclesial foundations for Christians to withstand the "pull" of a society dominated by the Roman Empire's encouragement of "self-aggrandizement and personal preeminence that were the very essence of human *ambitio* and *gloria*."⁴³ For Tertullian, *ambitio* is desire without proper limits and *gloria* is the *telos* of such an unrestricted *ambitio*. *Gloria* as the goal of unrestricted *ambitio* is the exact opposite of the biblical *doxa* that decenters the self into the glory of God. As such, the essence of *gloria* is self-exaltation to the degree that a desire for *gloria* inevitably ends up in a "willful singularity" that destroys community (with God and the other) for the sake of various expressions of unbridled individualism.⁴⁴

In encouraging Christian resistance to this narcissistic culture of *ambitio* and *gloria*, as promoted in that empire, Tertullian uses language of "stasis and freezing" to counter *ambitio* and *gloria*. This suggests to many that "Tertullian's call for a stasis of secular desires, his emotional ascetism, seems therefore to be a 'political' asceticism aimed at removing the Christian from the attraction of the social order."⁴⁵ On the contrary, what Tertullian alludes to that the "outward expression of faith" (embodiment) should correspond to the "internal reality" (the cultivation of identity formation) of what it means to be Christian. He promotes external habits and practices that flow from internal Christian identity for the sake of visibly subverting social co-optation.⁴⁶

Especially in his work *On Baptism*, Tertullian indicates his views on the formation of this internal Christian identity as publicly embodied in external identity. His baptismal theology is embedded in a broader ecclesial context of communion.⁴⁷ For Tertullian, "the inner source of the church's life" was to return to divine communion as rooted in a

⁴² "Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III: On Baptism," trans. by S Thelwall, at www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-49.htm (accessed 26 September 2007).

⁴³ Groh, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Kilian McDonnell, "Communion Ecclesiology and Baptism in the Spirit: Tertullian and the Early Church," in *Theological Studies* 49 (1988), p. 673.

communal understanding of the life of God.⁴⁸ The communal life of God, expressed in communion, is what constitutes the church's identity. That explains his profound statement on how the church "seals with water [the bath], clothes with the Holy Spirit [imposition of hands], and feeds with the Eucharist [celebration with the local communion]."⁴⁹

As such, Tertullian understood baptism as the law of faith.⁵⁰ *On Baptism* certainly has the character of a *locus theologicus*⁵¹ in which baptism is seen as "constitutive of the deepest nature of the Church."⁵² The Trinitarian formula of baptism not only reflects the Trinitarian nature of God and salvation, but also constitutes the identity of the church:

Not that in the water we obtain the Holy Spirit; but in the water ... we are cleansed, and prepared for the Holy Spirit ... who is about to come upon us, by the washing away of our sins, which faith, sealed in (the name of) the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, obtains... Moreover, after the pledging both of the attestation of faith and the promise of salvation under "three witnesses," there is added, of necessity, mention of the Church; inasmuch as, wherever there are three, (that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) there is the Church, which is the body of three.⁵³

Therefore, for Tertullian baptism marks the church's identity in public, as constituted by the life of God. It reflects not "private piety" but "public official liturgy."⁵⁴ Baptism "makes disciples of us" and determines the church's "public calling."⁵⁵ It forms the character of disciples who find their identity in communion with the Other (through baptism in Christ). Furthermore, they live out an ethical identity of communion that embraces otherness in the midst of empire's extinction of otherness for the sake of self-aggrandizement (for example, martyrdom in the Roman Empire).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 675.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 681.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 687.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 690.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 691.

⁵³ Ante-Nicene Fathers, *op. cit.* (note 42).

⁵⁴ McDonnell, *op. cit.* (note 47), p. 691.

⁵⁵ Roy Kearsley, "Baptism Then and Now: Does Moltmann Bury Tertullian or Praise Him?," in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (eds), *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 238-42.

Belonging to God and finding the self's identity in what God has done in and through Christ become the mark of identity for a public church in the midst of competing forces and powers. Baptism and ecclesial habits and practices focusing on baptism signify this fundamental belonging to the Other as the primary marker of identity in the midst of other competing cultural powers and forces. If the church embodies this identity, then "water intervenes" and "the king himself, with his entire forces" will be overwhelmed by "the water" (with reference to the Red Sea biblical narrative).⁵⁶ Baptism, rooted in the Trinitarian and communal life of God, becomes the most fundamental and public ecclesial reference for the church's "identity resistance" in the midst of empire. The baptismal formula as confession that the identity (being) of the church is rooted in belonging to the life of the Triune God is simultaneously the ecclesial politics (ethics) that determine the church's witness in the midst of empire.

The Belhar Confession⁵⁷ in the context of the empire of apartheid

We believe... that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.⁵⁸

The Belhar Confession takes its name from the township in Cape Town, South Africa, where the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) gathered (22 September – 6 October 1982) to accept this confession in the midst of apartheid and its effects on the church. The township itself was a "colored" township (in distinction from "black," "white," or "Indian"), as a result of the apartheid regime's policy of separate development under the Group Areas Act, which determined which group could live where. This geographical space defined by apartheid was also reflected in the DRMC as an ecclesial space, with separate churches

⁵⁶ Ante-Nicene Fathers, *op. cit.* (note 42).

⁵⁷ For the text of the Belhar Confession, as well as the accompanying letter and initial theological reflections on the Confession, see G. D. Cloete and D. J. Smit, *A Moment of Truth. The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

⁵⁸ "The Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa," at www.vgksa.org.za/who.asp?id=106&sinid=1 (accessed 19 July 2007).

established within the Dutch Reformed family of churches.⁵⁹ Therefore, Belhar represents both the politically and ecclesially marginalized within apartheid society when it confesses the church's faith in the Triune God as a rejection of this political and ecclesial separateness (apartheid).

The Belhar Confession is formulated within a Trinitarian framework that begins with a Trinitarian confession and ends with a Trinitarian doxology. It starts with the confession of, "We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as He has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end," and it ends with the doxology of, "To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever."⁶⁰ Belhar assumes Trinitarian faith without explicitly elaborating on it. Piet Naudé sums it up by saying that Trinitarianism "begins [underlies] and ends [takes forward] the confession."⁶¹

The particular context to which Belhar speaks explains its more explicit translation of the church's Trinitarian confession into what it means for the unity of the church in a society of division, separation and apartheid. Although it speaks to the ideology of apartheid that absolutizes otherness into separateness according to categories of racial difference, it does so from an ecclesial context that reflects that very same societal context and practice. Therefore, in direct allusion to the Heidelberg Catechism, Belhar understands the Triune God as gathering, protecting and caring for the church. The emphasis is on the church that is suffering because of apartheid empire's co-option of the churches in South Africa. As Naudé puts it, "The unity of the Triune God becomes motivation for and is reflected in the unity of the community of saints."⁶²

Similar to Tertullian's concern about the internal identity of the church having an external embodied identity through baptism, because of its rootedness in the life of God in the midst of the empire, Belhar is primarily concerned about the ecclesial identity of the church as a public witness (confession) reflecting the life of the Triune God in the midst of the apartheid empire. This means that the identity of the church as

⁵⁹ For an overview of this history, see Piet Naudé, "Confessing the One Faith: Theological Resonance between the Creed of Nicea (325 AD) and the Confession of Belhar (1982 AD)," Ecumenical Institute, University of Heidelberg, 2003.

⁶⁰ The Belhar Confession, *op. cit.* (note 57).

⁶¹ Naudé, *op. cit.* (note 59).

⁶² *Ibid.*

a communion of saints “implicitly asserts a contradiction to a view of community where otherness is seen as ground for separation instead of opportunities for mutual service and enrichment in the one visible people of God.”⁶³ An ecclesiology of belonging through otherness—and participating in the life of the Triune God as belonging through otherness—embraces difference in community as constitutive for belonging. It rejects the absolutizing of sameness. As such, otherness and diversity become constitutive for identity; true unity in community is only possible where difference and otherness are allowed to enrich and constitute that identity and belonging.

Belhar illustrates the church’s confession and witness that otherness should not be “embedded in a tyrannical separateness, but in a celebration of difference within a constitutionally guaranteed commitment to unity and equality.”⁶⁴ Within the South African context of apartheid, it serves as an illustration of how to respond to the challenge presented by empire’s hegemonic tendencies. It emphasizes the cultivation of identity-in-community that focuses on the survival of community (as constituted through the gifts of otherness)—rather than on the survival of the fittest within an empire culture that cultivates the formation of predatory identities.

As such, in its confession Belhar reflects the life of the Triune God whose care and protection it seeks and who is the One to be glorified in and through the church’s public witness. It is a contextual example of the public embodiment of ecclesial identity that embraces otherness as constitutive of that identity. In conjunction with the Trinitarian and baptismal foundations of Tertullian in the midst of the second- to third-century Roman Empire, Belhar illustrates an ecclesiology of belonging through otherness as the alternative to empire’s cultural hegemony. The church’s witness of belonging to the Other through baptism, as the primary marker of its identity, is lived out in how the church embraces otherness as the public embodiment of that identity within a particular social and political context. Belonging to the Other and belonging to others are illustrative of one and the same identity that is rooted in the life of God.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Piet Naudé, “It Is Your Duty to Be Human: Anthropology and Ethics in a post-Liberation South Africa,” lecture, University of Chicago, Divinity School, May 2007.

Ecclesial Communion, God's Publicity and Global Citizenship

Gary M. Simpson

Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own sight!
(Isa 5:21)

Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you! (Ps 82:8)

He looked straight into my eyes that night and said it. "America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire."¹ That President Bush had to tender this assurance eyeball to eyeball to the nation and to the world surely indicates that real "empire" merits investigation.

The world remembers the entanglement of Christianity and empire throughout the ages. In our time, that entanglement is located especially in the USA, which is why Christians in the US bear the vocation to look this entanglement in the face. Four burdens present themselves. It is incumbent on us to expose which Christian teachings and practices, whether true or false, fund this entanglement; to exhume aspects of the US national heritage that contribute to the present entanglement; to encourage and accompany the US in national repentance for this entanglement; and to explore a better way to restrain the American temptation toward empire and engage in peace building.

¹The President's 2004 *State of the Union Address*, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/print20040120-7.html (accessed 5 August 2007). Four days after this, Vice President Cheney, in Davos, Switzerland, again disavowed any US ambition to empire and used a territorial definition of empire. See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/print/20040124-1.html (accessed 5 August 2007). The President first stated this disavowal in his now-famous West Point graduation speech on 1 June 2002, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html (accessed August 5, 2007). He again denied empire on 11 November 2002, in a speech at a White House reception for veterans. "We have no territorial ambitions, we don't seek an empire. Our nation is committed to freedom for ourselves and for others," see www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/print/20021111-2.html (accessed 5 August 2007). The West Point speech has become famous, first, as the start of "the Bush Doctrine." Second, four quotations from this speech appear as official epigrams, in *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, which officially contains much of the Bush Doctrine. See www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html (accessed 5 August 2007).

First, I will review the state of the question regarding America as empire. Second, I will explore Lutheran contributions to communion ecclesiology that can prompt US citizens toward a repentant patriotism in the face of American empire. Third, I will examine the recent neoconservative aspirations for American empire in light of the global practice of publicity. Finally, I will propose that the “Responsibility to Protect,” the newly emerging protocol within international humanitarian law, is a prototypical foray in global citizenship.

American empire?

There are many ways in which empire is being discussed today. Michael Walzer notes, “In fact, there hasn’t been anywhere near enough of a debate” about whether or not there is an American empire.² Is there an American empire? On the popular level, Walzer says, “Of course!” However, he worries that “empire”—like “imperial”—is more “a term of denunciation” than “of enlightenment.” He prefers “hegemon” because “empire” “needs extensive qualification if it is to describe anything like what exists, or what is possible, in the world today.”³ Indeed, I use empire precisely to strive for a clear note of denunciation within a wider melody of description, definition and normative direction.

Jean Bethke Elshtain notes that “some will argue that the kinds of interventions I call for . . . amount to imperialism.”⁴ Still, she reprimands people for “invoking the rather unhelpful imperialist tag.” Rather, she thinks that “we should reflect on the nature of interventions” and “simply get past the almost inevitable initial negative reaction to views that call on the United States to exercise robust powers of intervention.” “The doctrine that I will defend here,” she continues, “differs quite significantly from past imperialisms since it involves neither colonization nor the imposition of any permanent structure of proconsuls (as was the practice of the Roman Empire).” She seeks to develop the just war tradition’s criterion of “just cause” under the norm of “equal regard.” However,

² Michael Walzer, “Is There an American Empire?” in *Dissent* (Fall 2003), p. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴ Jean Bethke Elshtain, “International Justice as Equal Regard and the Use of Force,” in Wes Avram (ed.), *Anxious about Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 130.

she completely neglects the just war tradition's criterion of "legitimate authority." This neglect permits someone to drive an empire through the gaping hole that she provides in the just war tradition. Regrettably, her argument retains more than a whiff of permissiveness toward war.

The Canadian Michael Ignatieff has coined the term "empire lite" to describe America.⁵

America's empire is not like empires of times past, built on colonies, conquests and the white man's burden. . . . The old European imperialism justified itself as a mission to civilize, to prepare tribes and so-called lesser breeds in the habits of self-discipline necessary for the exercise of self-rule. Self-rule did not necessarily have to happen soon—the imperial administrators hoped to enjoy the sunset as long as possible—but it was held out as a distant incentive, and the incentive was crucial in co-opting local élites and preventing them from passing into open rebellion.⁶

"The twenty-first-century imperialism is a new invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known."⁷ Because of the grace notes of "an empire lite" "the moral evaluation of empire gets complicated," Ignatieff argues.⁸

So, Elshtain seeks to convince that new expansive interventionism of the US, though "different-from-past-imperialisms," is moral according to the just war tradition. Ignatieff seeks to contain imperial lite overreach and excess. And Walzer seeks not only to contain overreach and excess but also to curb hegemonic abuses with a nod to the community of nations. None of these three, however, supply much more than cosmetic makeovers for the embarrassments of empire. I suggest a different approach, one that seeks to convict and correct America's neoconservative empire by offering a civilizing confidence in a hopeful future for America among the nations. Toward this end the question is how churches of a global Lutheran communion might exercise a public vocation in the face of US empire.

⁵ Michael Ignatieff, "American Empire: The Burden," in *New York Times Magazine* (5 January 2003), p. 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Ecclesial communion in the face of empire

Since the 1990s, the Lutheran World Federation has explored the ecumenical nature and significance of the church as communion. Here we take up and innovate five Lutheran insights—justification by faith alone, cruciform Christology, God as Triune, churchly life as communion and vocation as public church—that underlie and express the church as communion in an age of empire.⁹

God justifies the ungodly by faith alone. Lutherans confess this truth claim because sinners and sufferers finally have no hope under God's reign of law, that most salutary doctrine of life, as Luther called it. Only by mercy does God redeem because God's "law always accuses," as the Lutheran confessors unceasingly noted. In this way, Lutherans characteristically are scrupulous in distinguishing between law and gospel. Of course, while God's accusing spiritual or theological use of law is what drives people into the arms of God's mercy in Christ, God also uses law civilly or politically to prevent sin, evil, mayhem and wickedness and to promote an earthly just peace.¹⁰ Therefore, God's civil use of law remains crucial when considering the significance of ecclesial communion in the face of empire.

Justification is by faith alone, noted the confessors, because to understand the gospel of God's redeeming mercy is to proclaim Jesus Christ "based upon the nature of a promise."¹¹ The Holy Spirit creates the fiduciary relationship between God's promise of redemption in Christ and human reality by creating faith on earth. Through this, we receive already now a foretaste of God's eschatological future of righteousness,

⁹ See Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion. LWF Documentation 42/1997* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997). Especially helpful are Michael Root's exploration of the ecumenical context of "a shared minimal 'communion ecclesiology,'" p. 32, and Christoph Schwöbel's setting forth both the changed situation of churches in society and the changed theological framework in light of recent Trinitarian theology, pp. 228-247. Schwöbel also notes the doctrine of justification but does not explore its implications for relational ontology, which should be done. Also see the significant contributions in Karen Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization. LWF Documentation 50/2004* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

¹⁰ See the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, at <http://elca.org/socialstatements/peace/> (accessed 5 August 2007).

¹¹ See *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article IV, 40-58, in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 84. For a fuller examination of the integration of justification, christology, and Trinity, see Gary M. Simpson, "A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church," in Craig Van Gelder (ed.), *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

life and salvation. Gospel understood through the hermeneutic of promise is a characteristically Lutheran way of considering what is a fiduciary relational ontology. When Lutherans neglect the promise-based gospel, alien ontologies of classical and modern sovereignty creep in and distort the relationality of the Holy Spirit, Christ, God, church and world.

Gospel based upon the nature of a promise frames how Lutherans characteristically confess Jesus Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for instance, confessed Christ precisely according to the Reformation's fiduciary ontology of relationship. He probed the sociality of Christ, leading him to the provocative and fruitful claim that "God is a God who bears."¹² Jesus Christ is God who faithfully, incarnationally and cruciformly bears human beings in their suffering and sin. In the resurrection, ascension and the coming of the promised Spirit the inheritance of Jesus the Son is bequeathed to them. Bonhoeffer drew heavily upon the radical relational and fiduciary Christology of his Lutheran heritage and its scriptural basis in what Luther called "the joyous exchange." For Bonhoeffer, and others like him, this sociality of Christ—which Bonhoeffer calls Jesus' "place-sharing"—also forms the nature of churchly communion. In this time of empire, the Christological implications for communion ecclesiology are best explored in tandem with the recent ecumenical retrieval of Trinitarian theology.

Three aspects of Trinitarian theology are significant: sending, relationality and the scope of God's action. In the face of Western modernism, early to mid twentieth-century theology returned to the doctrine of the Trinity, which much of the modern Western church thought it could do without. This turn at first focused on the sending nature of the Triune, missionary God: God the Father sends Jesus the Son who sends the Holy Spirit who sends the church to the world.

More recently, Trinitarian theology has raised up the relational nature of the Triune God. Emphasizing the sending Trinity alone became too easily indentured to modern Western sovereignty and colonialism, with the world and its different cultures and societies the targets of that sending. The ancient Greek term *perichoresis* has emerged to express the rich, free sharing among the divine persons of the Trinity. *Perichoresis* stipulates the kind of relationality that is the Triune God. *Perichoresis* had its original everyday setting in the mutual sharing of burdens and joys within flourishing neighborhoods of the ancient world. Trinitarian *perichoresis*

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Discipleship," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 90. Also see Gary M. Simpson, "God is a God who Bears: Bonhoeffer for a Flat World," in *Word & World* 26 (Fall 2006), pp. 419-428.

is the true correlate of the bearing and bequeathing sociality of Christ and the kind of promising theology by which Bonhoeffer lived.

The sending God is none other than the perichoretic God. This unity of *perichoresis* and sending alters the understanding of God's missionary nature and liberates mission from its colonialist captivity. We can now combine Triune sending and *perichoresis* with the third aspect of God's Triune character, the traditionally differentiated scope of God's action in creating, redeeming and consummating. Lutherans characteristically distinguish between God's left-hand ruling of the world as God's work of creation on the one hand, and God's right-hand work of redemption and consummation, on the other. The scope of God's Triune agency must take center stage whenever we consider the vocation of churchly communion as public church in this time of empire.

The church is the creature of the Word, Luther reminds us.¹³ By creature of the Word, Luther was usually stressing that the church is created by God's Word of law and promise rather than the church being authoritative over God's Word, as was common in late medieval Christianity. Luther also notes a second way that the church is a creature of the Word. Through the Word the Holy Spirit creates the church by communicating to the church the very form of life that is God's Word. And this form of life finds its earthly root in the fiduciary and cruciform sociality of the bearing and bequeathing Jesus, who exists perichoretically with the Father and the Holy Spirit. God's Word communicates this perichoretic communion as churchly communion.

Bonhoeffer therefore stressed that "bearing" is central to being a Christian:

So Christians become bearers of sin and guilt for other people. Christians would be broken by the weight if they were not themselves carried by him who bore all sins. Instead, by the power of Christ's suffering they can overcome the sins they must bear by forgiving them. A Christian becomes a burden-bearer—bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). As Christ bears our burdens, so we are to bear the burden of our sisters and brothers. [...] The burden of a sister

¹³ Among the numerous places that Luther makes this point see, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520), Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 107; "The Misuse of the Mass" (1521), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 144-145; "On the Councils and the Church" (1539), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 41, p. 150.

or brother, which I have to bear, is not only his or her external fate, manner, and temperament; rather, it is in the deepest sense his or her sin. I cannot bear it except by forgiving it, by the power of Christ's cross, which I have come to share. In this way Jesus' call to bear the cross places all who follow him in the community of forgiveness of sins. Forgiving sins is the Christ-suffering required of his disciples. It is required of all Christians.¹⁴

Less than a year before his imprisonment by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer wrote, "This spirit of fellowship and Christian brotherhood will carry me through the darkest hours."¹⁵ He practiced churchly communion as the alternative both to the individualistic bourgeois Protestant church that he knew, in which there was no mutual bearing, and to the Roman Catholic Church of his day, whose hierarchy was far too overbearing, though he did admire its more communal features.

Bonhoeffer took cues for life together as church from how Luther had woven together practical reflections on Christ, sacraments and church:

Christ with all saints, by his love, takes upon himself our form [Phil 2:7], fights with us against sin, death, and all evil. This enkindles in us such love that we take on his form, rely upon his righteousness, life, and blessedness. And through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. O this is a great sacrament, says St. Paul, that Christ and the church are one flesh and bone. Again through this same love, we are to be changed and to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own; we are to take upon ourselves their form and their necessity, and all the good that is within our power we are to make theirs, that they may profit from it. That is real fellowship, and that is the true significance of this sacrament.¹⁶

For Bonhoeffer ecclesial communion is a core reality for the vocation of public church. "[T]he church-community itself knows now that the world's

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp. 91, 88. Also see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 27-47.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Letter to Bishop George Bell on June 1, 1942," in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940-1945: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 16 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 311.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (1519), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 58.

suffering seeks a bearer. So in following Christ, this suffering falls upon it, and it bears the suffering while being borne by Christ.”¹⁷ This means first of all, as Bonhoeffer notes, bearing the guilt of the nation by leading it both in repentance and in bold public action elicited by repentance.¹⁸

In this time of US empire, being church as communion implies bearing the letters of lament and critique from wherever the “empire writes back.”¹⁹ Indeed, being church as communion entails bearing both the suffering that is incurred throughout the empire and the sin and guilt that is perpetrated by the empire. It is important then that the church as communion face the implications of US empire in our time

Repentance and the failed patriotism of the neoconservative empire

Definitions of empire were attached to territory when that was the prime way to expand a nation’s economic wealth and political power. Now, however, access to economic resources, markets and cultural capital is the path to wealth, power and prestige. The neoconservative movement, which has deeply influenced the current Bush’s administration, seeks an ever-expanding unipolar world, marked by growing American primacy and full spectrum dominance.²⁰

The neoconservative movement promotes both a vision of international order as empire and a set of practices of statecraft as empire. This vision aims to shape the future by controlling the international order and the form of US internationalism. Paul Wolfowitz notes, “In a world

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 90.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 275-297.

¹⁹ The phrase is Salman Rushdie’s. See Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 125ff.

²⁰ For prominent neoconservative thinking, see Robert Kagan and William Kristol (eds), *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2000); *Statement of Principles* (3 June 1997), Project for the New American Century, at www.newamericancentury.org/ (accessed August 5, 2007); Thomas Donnelly, “Brave New World: An Enduring Pax Americana,” *National Security Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute, 1 April 2003, at www.aei.org/publications/pubID.16710/pub_detail.asp (accessed 5 August 2007). I offer a fuller analysis of the neoconservative empire, of the development and dogma of “the Bush Doctrine,” and of the Iraq War, in Gary M. Simpson, “God against Empire: Implicit Imperialism, Deliberative Democracy and Global Civil Society,” in *Consensus: A Canadian Lutheran Journal of Theology*, vol. 29.2 (2004), pp. 9-60.

where American primacy seems so overwhelming ... [t]he ultimate test of foreign policy is how successfully it shapes the future."²¹ During the last quarter century "the world [has] indeed been transformed in America's image," they assert (5). Neoconservatives seek both to strengthen and to extend this transformation. This will happen by "above all, preserving and reinforcing America's benevolent global hegemony" (6). Under self-discipline, they never use the word "empire" in public, which is what makes them even more successful sponsors of it.

The neoconservative vision denounces "a return to normal times" and deplores the notion that America would ever again be "a normal nation" (9-12). They do not envision America being a mere "savior of last resort" for world peace or a "reluctant sheriff" enforcing justice (15-16), which would signify an America far too weak and wimpy. Instead, they compare American power and prestige to that exercised when "Rome dominated the Mediterranean world" (6). Their America obeys a new calling with a preferred future. The "United States would instead conceive of itself as at once a European power, an Asian power, a Middle Eastern power and, of course, a Western hemisphere power" (15-16). Above all, the neoconservative movement pursues a "unipolar era" (6). "A multipolar world ... would be far more dangerous" than the unipolar world of American "benevolent global hegemony."²² "Benevolent global hegemony" means "full spectrum dominance."

Neoconservative statecraft is deeply rooted in an aristocratic mode of life centered in four integrated practices: first, displaying unshakeable confidence in the aristocrat's own superior virtue; second, maximizing the aristocrat's own will by minimizing the rule of law; third, observing "linguistic discipline" to accomplish its ends; and fourth, exercising "resolve" in all things.

²¹ Paul Wolfowitz, "Statesmanship in the New Century," in Kagan and Kristol, *ibid.*, pp. 312, 314. Page numbers in the text that follows are from Kagan and Kristol. *Present Dangers* may be the best single collection of pre 9/11 neoconservative internationalist thinking. G. John Ikenberry has concisely articulated seven elements that form their "new grand strategy." See G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," in *Foreign Affairs* 81.5 (Sept-Oct, 2002), pp. 44ff.

²² Kagan and Kristol, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 24. In international political philosophy William Wohlforth developed the warrants for a unipolar world, see "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, 24.1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41. Kagan and Kristol cite him favorably (p. 22). Thomas Donnelly calls Wohlforth's hegemonic theory "groundbreaking," see Thomas Donnelly, "Brave New World: An Enduring Pax Americana," *National Security Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute, 1 April 2003, at www.aei.org/publications/pubID.16710/pub_detail.asp (accessed 5 August 2007). For Francis Fukuyama's own account of the neoconservative vision, which he has now belatedly abandoned, see Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Neoconservative “statesmanship” betrays an aristocratic ethos. It deems America the most virtuous nation on the earth. William Bennett puts it simply. “Today, America sits at the summit. [We] elicit awe and admiration from every nation” (304). Aristocracy has always practiced a culture of exceptionalism and assumption based in benevolence (289-290). Here rests the soul of aristocracy.²³

“Who, then, will rule the ruler?” is the classic Western question. Aristocrats respond, “law’ is embodied in the person of the ruler.”²⁴ Neoconservatives respond, America has demonstrated and deserves to be “the man” of the world. We live autonomously; we set the agenda; we declare as “doctrine” “you are either for us or against us.” Paul Wolfowitz says it bluntly. “Thus, foreign policy decisions cannot be subject to the kind of ‘rule of law’ that we want for our domestic political process” (334). “Rule of law domestically, but not internationally. Neoconservatives desire an America that follows international rule of law only when it is expedient. But contrary to this, America’s founders set its statecraft on a different footing from aristocracy—to become a nation “of laws and not of men.”²⁵

Linguistic discipline is crucial to neoconservative “statesmanship” (41). This was learned in 1992, when Paul Wolfowitz wrote in the Pentagon draft of the neoconservative grand strategy that America seeks “primacy and predominance,” and will “maintain mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global scale.”²⁶ Now, neoconservatives claim that America conducts itself by seamlessly blending its national interest with universal moral principles such as: liberty, democracy and free-market capitalism. The rhetoric is mesmerizing and difficult to criticize because of how abstractly and speciously these principles are continuously repeated.

²³ For an authoritative account of the entwinement of aristocracy and benevolence and of the persistency of aristocracy in the founding of the US, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

²⁴ See Plutarch, “To an Uneducated Ruler,” in *Moralia*, vol. 10, trans. H. Fowler, in *Loeb Classic Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), par. 780ff.

²⁵ John Adams inscribed this crucial anti-aristocratic criterion in the opening clause of the original draft of the Massachusetts’ Constitution (1779), which became a national model. It now stands as the culminating clause of Part One, see www.mass.gov/legis/const.htm (accessed 5 August 2007). For the complex relation of America’s founders to aristocracy, see Gordon S. Wood’s critical theory of aristocracy, in Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 10-28, 245-274.

²⁶ Max Boot, “Doctrine of the ‘Big Enchilada,’” in *The Washington Post*, 14 October 2004, at www.newamericancentury.org/iraq-101402.htm (accessed 5 August 2007).

The neoconservative movement turned what exploded on 9/11 as a national security crisis into a national identity crisis—at least since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The security crisis is not over, of course. Even worse, the national identity crisis will not abate soon. The neoconservative movement above all desired the Iraq War to demonstrate the power and prestige of American empire and to bring in a new era of Pax Americana.

An American patriotism of empire is not new. It comes from an identity that longs for empire as the way to achieve security. The British invasion that started the War of 1812 led John Quincy Adams, the Secretary of State under President James Monroe, to develop the “Monroe Doctrine.” Adams’ principle was to achieve security through expansion. Adams built his grand strategy for implementing this expansionist principle around three foreign policy practices: preemption-prevention, unilateralism and hegemony-empire.²⁷ President Andrew Jackson executed Adams’ expansionist empire by the preemptive-preventive practice of “dispossessing” Native American Indians. Subsequent US presidents would all, to varying degrees, execute Adams’ expansionist grand strategy of empire through preemptive-preventive, unilateralist, hegemonic practices.

John Lewis Gaddis draws three conclusions. First, Adams’ expansionist strategy of empire is “surprisingly relevant.” Second, overall President Bush “whether intentionally or not, has been drawing upon a set of traditions that go back” to Adams; the Bush Doctrine therefore “reflects a return to an old position, not the emergence of a new one.” This is what makes the Bush Doctrine neoconservative. It conserves this old expansionist tradition of empire. It is neo because it is now unapologetically both fully global and fully full spectrum dominance, and it does so by politically and militarily dominating access to economic markets. Third, Adams’ three expansionist practices of empire are and should remain America’s

²⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 37-38. Gaddis draws a distinction between preemption and prevention—preemption means “military action undertaken to forestall an imminent attack from a hostile state;” prevention means “starting a war to keep such a state from building the capability to attack,” p. 123. However, he notes that in the nineteenth century this distinction seems “to blur.” He uses “preemption” to cover the blur. Michael Walzer gives the modern classic account of the distinction between preemption and prevention and why just war tradition judges “preventive wars” to be unjust. See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977, 2000), pp. 74-85. Gaddis also argues that the Monroe Doctrine does not so much inaugurate a practice of isolationism, “a misnomer;” but rather a practice of unilateralism, p. 24. While he uses “hegemony” in most of his account, toward the end he himself argues for an expanding “empire of liberty,” pp. 106-113. Gaddis notes how “surprisingly relevant” Adams’ expansionist grand strategy is, p. 16.

“default [practices]: when in doubt, fall back on these.”²⁸ Soon after 9/11, the President fell back precisely on this expansionism and he did so again on 20 January 2005. “The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.”²⁹

Yet, Adams’ expansionist tradition is but one American tradition. Most Americans would turn instead to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Franklin Delano Roosevelt, among others. What exploded at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 as a national security crisis became ironically a hopeful opportunity for FDR. He repelled the tradition and practices of an expansionist American empire as failed patriotism. Instead, he led America in a more civic internationalist direction.³⁰

Hope in the face of war always begins and ends with repentance; so does hope in the face of empire, especially with the empire writing back its poetic lament and prophetic critique. “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” When this first of the “Ninety-five Theses” exploded off Martin Luther’s pen, few recognized how piercing and pervasive repentance is. Luther argued that its scope went beyond the private lives of individuals, families and friendships and encompassed ecclesial, socioeconomic and political life as well. When he considered the question of war against the Turks using the just war tradition, he noted that Christians, even when there are only a few, should lead the way in continual national repentance and repentant prayer. Whether the war is just or unjust, whether it is won or lost, repentance is necessary. Accountability to God is paramount. Without repentance, a nation can lose its soul, so to speak. Of course, the specifics of repentance will vary and this is where global churchly communion comes in. Because the church is part of a global communion Christians have ready access to the empire writing back. Pastors have an obligation to preach, teach and exhort such public lament and repentant prayer, notes Luther.³¹ When

²⁸ Gaddis, *ibid.*, pp. 16, 31, 26, 31. See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050118-4.html> (accessed 5 August 2007).

²⁹ See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/print/20050120-1.html (accessed 5 August 2007); See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050118-4.html (accessed 5 August 2007).

³⁰ For the FDR story, see Gaddis, *op. cit.* (note 27), pp. 35-67.

³¹ For Luther’s understanding of how political accountability to God gets mediated through this-worldly media, see Gary M. Simpson, “Toward a Lutheran ‘Delight in the Law of the Lord’:

the church as communion reads the empire writing back, it begins to bear the empire's afflictions along a journey of repentance.

In American history, President Abraham Lincoln picked up on the same biblical theme of repentance in the face of war. Already as a member of the US Congress, Lincoln implored "good citizens and patriots" to undergo "genuine repentance" and "to confess their [political] sins and transgressions" as a national practice of truth.³² This was on 12 January 1848, twenty months after President James Polk had declared war on Mexico. Shortly after Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, he issued a "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day":

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon³³

Only through national repentance could America begin "to bind up the nation's wounds;" "to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations;" and to do so "with malice toward none; with charity for all."³⁴

International publicity, global citizenship and the "Responsibility to Protect"

Reinhold Niebuhr claimed that the structure of nations and empires is built on two pillars: power and prestige. That nations and empires need power, no matter what the international order, is self-evident. Less self-evident, noted Niebuhr, is the necessity of prestige.³⁵ Prestige or "soft

Church and State in the Context of Civil Society," in John Stumme & Robert Tuttle (eds), *Church and State: Lutheran Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 37-44.

³² Abraham Lincoln, "Speech in United States House of Representatives: The War with Mexico," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953, 1990), pp. 432, 433, 431.

³³ Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day," in *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955, 1990), p. 155.

³⁴ President Lincoln's memorable Second Inaugural Address of 4 March 1865, less than six weeks before he was assassinated, see www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=38&page=transcript (accessed 5 August 2007).

³⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York: Charles Scribner's,

power,” as its known today, “is not just a matter of ephemeral popularity; it is a means of obtaining outcomes.”³⁶ There is no doubt that both power and prestige are necessary for nations to be effective states. Tragically, however, with this two-pillar approach, Niebuhr was not able critically to distinguish a nation from an empire, or to offer a critique of empire beyond his exhortation that it be humble rather than arrogant.

A critical theory of empire comes about only when a third basic pillar is added to the international order of nations. That pillar is publicity—not in the sense of public relations within the economic market place but rather in the strong sense of transparency, accessibility and accountability to wider publics, to other nations and to the rapidly emerging publics of global civil society.³⁷

The principles, practices and processes of publicity, both within nations and within an international order, comport most closely with repentant patriotism. The vigilance of nations, of international institutions and especially of global civil society contribute to the effectiveness of international publicity. It is publicity that makes for national and international truth and reconciliation processes, for instance.

Without international publicity, the power of strong nations remains unfettered and prone toward empire. Without international publicity, the prestige or soft power of nations too easily becomes a mere tool for the ethos of beneficent aristocracy and the power of empire. Without international publicity, even diplomacy can be used as merely a kinder, gentler form of “real” military power. When publicity becomes the coin of the international order, powerful nations become civic internationalists; this opens the way for a global citizenship saturated with just peace-building practices.³⁸ Civic international nations abide by the international rule of

1959), pp. 8-32, 66-88. See especially Joseph Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge: Foreign Affairs, 2004).

³⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “The Decline of America’s Soft Power,” in *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2004).

³⁷ The term “publicity” or “international publicity” is an emerging state-of-the-art term within the field of international relations and international conflict resolution. For the historical emergence of the principle and practices of publicity, including Luther’s theological analysis, see Gary M. Simpson, *War, Peace, and God: Rethinking the Just War Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). For the notion of civil society, see Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). For a political philosophical account of publicity, see “publicity,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/publicity/> (accessed 5 August 2007).

³⁸ See especially Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998). I add three additional practices—prayer, public repentance and international publicity—to Stassen’s ten.

law and thereby expand its scope and effectiveness. Civic international nations strengthen international institutions by mending them, not weakening or ending them. Under the vigilance of international publicity, nations proliferate international treaties and agreements that move beyond emergency benevolence by establishing stakeholder systems of economic life, which empower emerging nations, peoples and environments. Under international publicity, stakeholder systems also of course meet the more proximate interests of powerful nations.

One example of how this international publicity can be enacted is through the Responsibility to Protect (2001, International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty).³⁹ Its basic theme is that sovereign states have a responsibility to protect those within its borders from avoidable catastrophes, but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states. It recognizes a moral basis inherent in the very concept of national sovereignty; at a minimum, sovereignty means protecting one's own population from harm. Failing to do so violates the moral ground of sovereignty. Second, this embodies the principle and practices of international publicity and implements them as a kind of international republic in these kinds of "conscience-shocking situations crying out for action."⁴⁰ Third, it identified three core responsibilities: to protect, to react and to rebuild. To prevent means addressing both the root causes and the precipitating causes that put populations at risk. To react means responding to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures, which may include coercive measures like sanctions and international prosecution and, in extreme cases, military intervention. To rebuild applies particularly after military intervention by providing full assistance with recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation and to address the causes of the harm that the intervention was designed to halt or avert.

³⁹ Also see, The World Council of Churches, "Vulnerable populations at risk. Statement on the Responsibility to Protect," The Ninth Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006, at www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-state-ments-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/responsibility-to-protect.html (accessed 20 September 2007).

⁴⁰ See the "Synopsis," in The International Commission of Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (December 2001), at www.iciss.ca/report-en.asp (accessed 5 August 2007); United Nations, *2005 World Summit Outcome: Fact Sheet*, High Level Plenary Meeting, 14-16 September 2005, at www.un.org/summit2005/presskit/fact_sheet.pdf (accessed 5 August 2007).

All three responsibilities fill out the classic natural law obligation, “Do no harm” with the positive obligation, “Do good.” These responsibilities flow out of the just war tradition especially when it is self-consciously placed within the wider arc of just peacemaking. Prevention is the single most important dimension of the Responsibility to Protect. For this reason two of its core principles are that military force protection cannot become the principal objective and that maximum coordination with humanitarian organizations is paramount. When dealing with protection, the Responsibility to Protect specifically cites just war tradition criteria of just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, last resort, probability of success and proportionality of means. The overriding goal is peace with justice.

Conclusion

After discussing many things during a January 2005 interview, First Lady Laura Bush concluded, “But I also have this sense of our country, the big ship America, that might veer a little bit one way or the other way, but is very stable.” While this response is in many ways quite sensible, it does not capture the historic American conflict between an expansionist empire and the hope for the US as a global citizen among the nations. The church as communion might very well write back, “Dear Mrs. Bush, hope resides in repentant patriotism, in God-pleasing international publicity and in patriotic peace building. Indeed, we hope the ship veers more than a little.” Would that God might grant such hope to the church as communion.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Fundamentalism, Democracy and Empire

Some Fundamental Lutheran Problems with Fundamentalism¹

Wanda Deifelt

When the word fundamentalism appears in any form of written, oral, or visual media, it generally evokes negative reactions. Often associated with fanaticism, fundamentalism is known for religious commitment taken to the extreme. It is frequently stated that fundamentalists are people who resort to violence and simply cannot appeal to reason or democratic ideas. It is assumed that fundamentalism is found in other religions, not Christianity—and even less so, among Lutherans. Some of us would like to believe that the Lutheran heritage brought Christianity into modernity, in coming to terms with critical thinking by means of an educated approach to the world. This is not the case. Fundamentalist, charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal tendencies—although nuanced—are alive and thriving in Lutheran circles as well.²

The Fundamentalism Project identified resemblances among different kinds of fundamentalisms around the world.³ Fundamentalism affirms

¹ A portion of this article was published under the title “Fundamentalism: Controversies over what is Fundamental in Christianity,” in *Theologies and Cultures*, vol. 2, no. 2 (December 2005), pp. 15-30.

² There will be some overlapping of these terms in this article. Fundamentalism refers to the religious interpretations and practices based on believers’ self-understanding of correctness or righteousness, used to reclaim the truth of a particular religious tradition. Neo-Pentecostal (or Neo-Pentecostalism) is a neologism created by sociologists of religion to describe the religious configurations that originated within the Pentecostal churches but can no longer be identified with them. The traditional Pentecostal movement is characterized by baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, whereas Neo-Pentecostals emphasize prosperity theology and the use of mass media. Charismatic refers to the type of worship and ministry focused on praise and spiritual renewal. Charismatic churches are frequently non-denominational and place less emphasis on traditional liturgy.

³ The American Academy of Arts and Sciences funded a multiyear project that brought scholars from around the world to study fundamentalism. The result is five volumes containing almost 8,000 pages of material. Marty Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed. The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Fundamentalisms and Society. The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); *Fundamentalisms and the State. The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); *Accounting for Fundamentalisms. The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *Fundamentalisms Comprehended. The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). The list of similarities is found in Marty Marty and R. Scott Appleby, “Conclusion: An Interim Report on a Hypothetical Family,” in vol. 1, pp. 814-842.

religious idealism as the basis for personal and communal identity, and operates under an insider/outsider dichotomy in which those who do not belong to the insider group cannot understand its language. Those in opposition are demonized because they persecute the righteous believers. Religious truth is viewed as revealed and unified, and historical events are interpreted in light of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. Fundamentalism takes its cues from a sacred text, which is above criticism. However, adherents are selective as to which parts of the tradition or text they choose to enforce. Fundamentalism also has common organizational characteristics: its membership considers itself elected (or chosen), the leadership is charismatic, often authoritarian and generally male. It establishes sharp group boundaries and has mandated behavioral requirements. To the outsiders, fundamentalists are reactionary. To the insiders, a modern cultural hegemony is understood as a threat, and any distribution of power needs to be overturned. These characteristics do not apply only to other religions. They apply also to Christianity and, to some extent, to segments of Lutheranism.

I argue here that contemporary Christian fundamentalism has less to do with the fundamentals of Christian faith than with certain social, cultural and political dynamics. It functions as ideological underpinning for the political expansion and economic hegemony of empire. Fundamentalism is not only about the meaning that the faith offers or ethical guidelines for religious practice. It is not primarily about showing why and how one's own beliefs are correct, but about proving that others are wrong. I develop my argument using the notion of power as a catalyst for self-expression, perception and visibility.⁴ I contend that at the foundations of fundamentalism is an anti-dialogical approach that is contrary to fundamental Christian teachings in general and to Lutheran teachings and hermeneutics in particular. I critique the selective use of biblical passages to uphold certain values and mores and to establish a language of salvation and damnation with personal, social and cosmic repercussions.

⁴ The notion of power employed here is borrowed from Michel Foucault, who sees power as intentional and non-subjective, a general matrix of relations of force at any time, in a given society. Domination is not the essence of power. It is multidirectional, operating from top down and vice versa. Power also plays a directly productive role. Although relationships of power are imminent to institutions, power and institutions are not identical. Yet, Foucault's account of power is not intended as a theory. For him, the aim "is to move less toward a theory of power than toward an analytics of power: that is, toward a definition of a specific domain formed by power relations and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 82.

Christian fundamentalism

Fundamentalism has its origin in early twentieth-century Protestantism in the USA. Several pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915, entitled “The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth,” authored by leading evangelical church leaders, were circulated among clergy and seminarians. In 1920, Curtis Lee Laws, an editor and Baptist pastor, appropriated the term “fundamentalist” as a designation for those who were ready “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.”⁵ It was a response to the loss of influence that traditional revivalism had experienced earlier and an attempt to address the liberalizing theological trends characteristic of the period. By emphasizing the “fundamentals” of the Christian tradition, they wanted to distinguish themselves from the “liberal” Protestants who, in their view, were distorting the Christian faith.

Although fundamentalism was an early twentieth-century American Protestant movement, the ideas and strategies proposed by its defenders became widely known a century later. Grant Wacker points out that these beliefs spring from an antagonism towards modernity.⁶ Such aversion leads to attempts to recover and publicly institutionalize ideas and practices of the past that modern life denies or deems as outdated. Thus, for instance, changing one’s place in the social order is ruled out, since cultural patterns are part of the order of creation and prescribed by the sacred texts. Fundamentalists become leery of the secular state when its emphasis on education, democratic reforms and economic progress takes priority over preserving the spiritual dimension of life.

Wacker accurately points out that the starting point of fundamentalism in the US was deeply related to power struggles, as the Protestant majority sensed that it was losing terrain. A growing awareness of world religions, the teaching of human evolution in schools and the rise of biblical criticism are often mentioned as catalysts. Wacker goes further in describing the social and political environment of the time:

Drawn primarily from ranks of “old stock whites,” fundamentalists felt displaced by the waves of non-Protestant immigrants from southern and

⁵ Information available, at <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/fund.html> (accessed 29 August 2007).

⁶ Grant Wacker, *The Rise of Fundamentalism*, at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/fundam.htm> (accessed 29 August 2007). Wacker establishes a distinction between two types of fundamentalism: generic (as a worldwide phenomenon) and historical (specific to US Protestant culture).

eastern Europe flooding America's cities. They believed they had been betrayed by American statesmen who led the nation into an unresolved war with Germany, the cradle of destructive biblical criticism. They deplored the teaching of evolution in public schools, which they paid for with their taxes, and resented the elitism of professional educators who seemed often to scorn the values of traditional Christian families.⁷

Christian fundamentalism presents itself as a return to the “good old values” that represent civilization itself. It defends the maintenance of time-honored social distinctions and cultural patterns both as natural and divinely ordained. The order of creation is invoked to justify social arrangements such as the stratified roles for women and men, parents and children, clergy and laity. To challenge this order is to question the order of creation. In addition, there is no distinction between religion and state.

[T]hat the state should operate according to one set of publicly shared principles, while individuals should operate according to multiple sets of privately shared principles, is morally pernicious and ends up harming everyone, believers and nonbelievers alike. Religious truths are no different from the truths of medical science or aeronautical engineering: if they hold for anyone they hold for everyone.⁸

Such reasoning supports the use of religious values and teachings in the public and political arenas.

Thus, it is possible for Christian fundamentalists to impose a literal interpretation of the Bible as part of the school curriculum, deeming as secondary, irrelevant, or dangerous any teaching that challenges the Scriptures. Religious texts are perceived as infallible and historically accurate. In addition, these texts present a worldview to be upheld by everyone. If modern scholarship points out contradictions or inaccuracies, fundamentalists assume a sense of embattled hostility. As summarized by Karen Armstrong, “fundamentalists have no time for democracy, pluralism, religious tolerance, peacemaking, free speech, or the separation of church and state.”⁹

As faith convictions are translated into religious practices, they not only orient the spiritual life of believers but also affect polity. Of course,

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Random House, 2000), p. ix.

this is true of any faith, which is why religions play such an important role in politics. Religious values can be invoked to support or challenge social arrangements. It is not surprising, therefore, that a journal such as the *Economist*, a prominent advocate for free market economics and neoliberal policies, dedicates space to address issues of religion. In a special report on the American South, it shows the importance that fundamentalism has had and continues to enjoy, in spite of the rise of powerful civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King:

During slavery and segregation most southern churches blessed the existing order. Now they are sorry they did. This about-face was traumatic for many, but easy to justify scripturally. Attempts to find biblical backing for separate lunch counters always required a bit of reading between the lines, whereas “Love thy neighbor as thyself” is unambiguous. So as the South has become less racist, it has lost none of its religiosity. Nearly half of the southerners believe the Bible is the literal word of God—twice the proportion in the north-east or the West. Such beliefs have political consequences. Southerners vote for politicians they judge devout. Their faith lends passion to national debates about abortion, homosexuality and bioethics. It affects foreign policy: some 56% of the southerners think God gave Israel to the Jews.¹⁰

Fundamentalism started in the US as a reaction to what was considered a secularist, modernist hegemony. Its theological representatives feared that faith would no longer play a decisive role in world events if religion were reduced to a personal or private matter. By the twenty-first century, this fear was proven wrong. More than ever, perhaps due to fundamentalism itself, religion plays a decisive role in matters such as economics and world politics. In addition, if fundamentalism was originally a movement against modernity, it has since developed a symbiotic relationship with it. Even if some fundamentalist ideas are inherently conservative and represent values wedded to the past, fundamentalists have taken essentially modern approaches to communicate their ideas and implement their practices. Interestingly, today fundamentalism bridges a pre-modern rhetoric with an ultra-modern usage of media, bypassing the democratic

¹⁰ “Doing it by the book: A special report on the American South,” in *The Economist* (3 March 2007), p. 6.

principles of modernity. A closer analysis of fundamentalist practices in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, will attest to that.

Fundamentalism in Latin America

In Latin America, fundamentalism has a different connotation than in the US, but its spread is certainly in many ways related to the expansion of US empire. Christian fundamentalism is used to maintain the Pax Americana in the same manner as Christianity was used to maintain the Pax Romana. The fundamentalist revival in early twentieth-century American Protestantism affirmed not only the correctness of Christian beliefs, but also the need to spread the message of conversion around the globe. Evangelical proselytism, especially through televised media, offered Christians in Latin America an answer to the identity questions of the poor, displaced and migrants. Whereas in the US fundamentalism was a response from an educated and proselytizing type of Protestantism, in Latin America fundamentalism prospered among the less educated and loosely Roman Catholic population. The breeding ground was urbanization, modernity and unequal development.

The weakening of traditional controls, the sense of confusion and helplessness in the anonymity of city life, the shock of new social values accompanying the adaptation to industrial work, the absence of familiar community loyalties and of the encompassing paternalistic character of rural employment: all these conditions led to an acute crisis of personal identity for the migrants. Under such conditions the exchange of old religious values for new ones was likely to occur.¹¹

The processes of urbanization resulted in social disruption. The majority of the population (almost seventy percent), who in the early twentieth century lived in rural areas, now were living in the cities. Such social and economic dislocation, leading to misery and exploitation, needed to be addressed, including from a religious perspective. The Christendom theology of Roman Catholicism (nearly eighty percent of the population) stood for maintaining the *status quo*. Traditionally, it had not developed

¹¹ Pablo A. Deiros, "Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America," in Marty and Appleby, vol. 1, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 155.

any activities for the poor, besides charity, which led to a dwindling appeal of traditional Catholicism. In addition, the new urban dweller, forced to adjust to new living and working conditions, felt personally disorientated and without pastoral support.

Liberation theology, along with Christian base communities, echoed the Second Vatican Council in its defense of a popular, democratic and more contextual church. These were significant efforts not only to retain membership, but also to promote an alternative to the hierarchical ecclesial model. In the 1970s and 1980s, military regimes in Brazil, Argentina and El Salvador, for instance, closely monitored these grassroots Christian communities, suspecting their involvement with Marxist ideology. However, neither liberation theology nor the Christian base communities significantly affected mainline Roman Catholicism. Not surprisingly, nondenominational fundamentalist missions grew significantly in the second half of the twentieth century:

The limited number of priests, coupled with the impression that some of them appeared more interested in secular than religious pursuits, created opportunities for pastoral work by evangelical pastors. The lack of sufficient Catholic priests to serve the burgeoning population was increased by the fact that they, unlike evangelical pastors, are expected to spend long years in theological study. This experience also has alienated them culturally from their people. In contrast, poor people have been attracted by the evangelical's daily work among the people, their constant emphasis on the social benefits of strict morality, and the way conversion can transform neighborhood misfits into upright community leaders.¹²

Mainline Protestantism, such as Lutheranism, was always in a minority in Latin America. Whether through missionary initiative or immigration, this type of Protestantism found its place only among a small part of the population. Whereas through their missionary efforts some Protestant denominations, such as Methodists and Presbyterians, targeted urban settings, Lutherans (particularly in Brazil) were primarily confined to rural areas, due to the history of immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Protestants never enjoyed as much visibility or political influence as Roman Catholicism. Thus, evangelical proselytism, with its fundamentalist ideas, appears as a new force. The influx of televangelism and its prosperity

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

theology—with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart as the first generation—unleashed the proliferation of Neo-Pentecostal churches, currently the fastest growing religious groups in Latin America.¹³

Prosperity and success are interpreted as external evidence of God's favor. For the millions living outside that realm, suffering is then perceived as God's punishment and can be overcome by means of merit-making efforts (which include attending worship, prayer sessions and making financial donations). Theologically, this approach taps into the values of Roman Catholic Christendom, in which the church is central for salvation and for polity, but it takes on a new connotation: the ability of each individual to advance socially. Thus, it bypasses the Reformation core of justification by faith. The emphasis is on the individual's capacity to negotiate benefits with God rather than on life in community and concern for the well-being of others.

Emotional exaltation and messianic expectations are combined in local expressions of fundamentalism. Through mass media and mega church events, Neo-Pentecostal churches in Brazil, such as self-proclaimed bishop Edir Macedo's *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), offer miraculous healing as proof of faith. Healing is a sign that God responds to people's prayers. The pastor preaches immediate conversion and sets an ascetic way of life as a model of faithful living. The charismatic leader commands an enthusiastic group of followers and makes use of a highly effective system of communication, including dance, drama and lively music.

For Lutherans, this theology seems far removed from the core of Christian faith, rooted in justification by faith and emphasizing life in communion through Word and sacrament. The cross and its consequent theology, which enables Christians to name suffering and move into hopeful solidarity, are visibly absent. A theology of glory replaces the cross and is supported by merit-making efforts to attain God's favor (interpreted as success and prosperity). The cross symbolizes obedience to moral guidelines, subjection to church hierarchy, or the way to resurrection (a means to a theology of praise). Theological illiteracy prevents Christians from recognizing how key aspects of Christianity are missing or blown out of proportion in fundamentalist or charismatic theologies. But that

¹³ "Christianity reborn," in *The Economist* (23 December 2006), p. 49. "Renewalists [charismatic, fundamental, or Pentecostal] make up around fifty percent of the population in Brazil and Kenya. And in Latin America Pentecostalism has shattered the Roman Catholic Church's monopoly. In Brazil—the world's largest Catholic country and one whose national identity is intertwined with the church—about a seventh of the population is now Pentecostal and a third is 'charismatic.' In Guatemala Pentecostalism is sweeping all before it."

does not prevent these religious expressions from growing. The reasons for their growth are not primarily theological but sociological.

In order to guarantee its success, fundamentalism cannot simply rely on its institutional power or doctrinal purity. As Michel Foucault points out, power plays a directly productive role.

When disciplinary technologies establish links between these institutional settings, then disciplinary technology is truly effective [...] it is not in a position of exteriority to other types of relationships. Although relationships of power are imminent to institutions, power and institutions are not identical.¹⁴

Issues of power and control are evident in fundamentalist rhetoric: the power of salvation or damnation impacts how one lives one's life in the present. This coercive power has the capacity to control people's actions, particularly as the identification with the religious groups offers (or requires) public visibility. Whereas Lutherans, for instance, were content in affirming Luther's two kingdom theory, maintaining a (healthy) distinction between realms (spiritual and earthly, ecclesial and secular, etc), fundamentalism collapses these two spheres and urges that the secular becomes a religious domain, that the eschatological reality is already fulfilled by means of prosperity (or in the saying of Edir Macedo, "Stop suffering. It is in your hands!").

If in a massive US based missionary effort, fundamentalism was geared toward saving the souls of people around the world, the Latin American version of fundamentalism is focused on offering believers concrete results. The eschatological anticipation is translated into a theology of prosperity. Whereas in the US fundamentalism was an educated elite's response to the loss of power and privilege, in Latin America fundamentalism represents expectations for a better life, giving hope for health, housing, employment, etc. Both Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism have to acknowledge that they do not offer convincing answers to the plight of the majority of the population. A prosperity theology allows for that dream.

Conversion and discipline, regular worship attendance, generous offerings and an exemplary Christian life (according to scriptural precepts)

¹⁴ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 185.

yield concrete results for the followers of the movement. The rituals of power are, in fact, displays of enthusiasm, exorcism and a combination of syncretistic practices (ranging from blessed salt to be placed on the television set in order to achieve a miracle to special laundry soap a woman should use when washing her husband's clothes to assure his fidelity). These rituals do not belong to fundamentalism. Yet, they are employed as mechanisms of power or control, and they fit into the overall cosmic battles between good and evil. Religion also needs to give results here and now, and not merely in heaven.

Fundamentalism argues that the Christian faith offers a secure basis for practicing a righteous way of living. These values should be guidelines for everybody and the state should implement them. This requires that fundamentalists have a strong public voice. The impetus for the public witness of one's Christian faith is carried into party politics, and party politics serves as a means of divulging and implementing the beliefs of the religious movement. This is a fair description of the Brazilian situation, where thirty-five percent of the representatives to Congress were voted into office due to their evangelical affiliations.¹⁵ As a basic right of all citizens, political participation is not at the core of such a stance. Rather, it is a matter of how religion can exert its power in the public arena by using the political machinery and, in turn, how public offices can serve the power interests of the religion. The separation of church and state is minimized and the value of democracy overlooked. The distinction between the chosen—or those who made the choice—and the rest enables those elected (i.e., chosen) to exert authority over others.¹⁶ At the foundation of this authoritarianism lies a particular reading of the Scriptures.

The conflict of interpretation

One of the features of twentieth-century theology was the realization that truth cannot be identified objectively. Believers are not distanced from what they are interpreting because they stand in a relationship of

¹⁵ The fact that fundamentalist groups, in particular the Neo-Pentecostal church *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, own several major television and radio networks gives them the visibility and power to maneuver the population. See www.freelists.org/archives/radiolive/12-2004/msg00037.html (accessed 29 August 2007).

¹⁶ Martin E. Marty, "Fundamentals of Fundamentalism," in Lawrence Kaplan (ed.), *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), pp. 15-23.

faith. The objectivity of interpretation, although sought, can never be fully achieved. Realizing one's subjectivity and partiality thus prevents one from becoming a self-proclaimed master of truth and justice.¹⁷ To acknowledge partiality is to recognize the impossibility of universal claims, as if one could be outside of partisan interest. This humbleness leads one to be open to dialogue, criticism and correction.

Fundamentalism is adamantly opposed to this. To recognize partiality or the impossibility of truth is perceived as relativism. Such relativism obfuscates the universality of divine truth and the imperative of its proclamation to the whole world. Relativism gives in to the powers of this world, when in fact the divine truth demands the opposite, namely that an antagonistic relation be established between believers and their contexts. In addition, fundamentalism is based on the need to proclaim and convince others of the truth conveyed by the faith. It invokes powers from above to establish and maintain powers below.

These two apparently opposing stances—absolutism and relativism—seem to be in an epistemological battle. Vitor Westhelle writes,

we often find ourselves polarized between a radical commitment to certainty (be it in a faith, in scriptures, in a political system, in science and so forth), on the one hand, and the eroding sense of any foundation that leads to nihilism, on the other, the apocalyptic being the impossibility to hold the middle.¹⁸

Is there any possibility for a negotiated solution or mediation between these two positions? Is it possible to be at the same time faithful and maintain an openness to doubt?

In her book, *Metaphorical Theology*, Sallie McFague affirms that Protestantism inaugurates literalism because it gets rid of medieval hermeneutic's claim that "the text was self-explanatory."¹⁹ The emphasis on *sola scriptura* as the source of authority removed the allegorical or typological, the moral or tropological and the eschatological or anagogical meanings. Luther witnessed many abuses in biblical inter-

¹⁷ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *op. cit.* (note 14), pp. 184-204.

¹⁸ Vitor Westhelle, "Symptoms of the End of Western Hegemony," in *Theologies and Cultures*, vol. 2, no. 2 (December 2005), pp. 45-46.

¹⁹ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 5.

pretation through the customary distinction between the literal and spiritual sense. For McFague, however, the abandonment of the four hermeneutical levels in the Reformation opened the gates for biblical literalism. Thomas Aquinas had defined the *quadriga* (the four senses) and conceived them as complementary.²⁰ Luther was adamant that the literal sense should prevail. But did he imply literalism? A comparison between current fundamentalist readings and Luther's own hermeneutics will prove otherwise.

Bruce Lawrence establishes that fundamentalism relies on the affirmation of religious authority as absolute and unquestionable.²¹ A complete acceptance of the teachings and practices of the movement admits no criticism. It demands that the creeds and practices safeguarded by the religion are publicly recognized and accepted. The source of such authority is derived from the sacred text, the Bible. Biblical teachings must be defended and enforced, also legally. A literal interpretation of the Bible, as practiced by fundamentalism, not only disregards biblical criticism but perceives it as a threat to the integrity and continuity of the movement. Stated this way, it seems plausible that the Reformation simply substituted the authority of the ecclesial *magisterium* for the letter of the Scripture. But that is not the case

For fundamentalists, the infallibility of the Bible refers not only to matters of faith and morals, but is also understood as a literal historical record. Furthermore, it is not the authority of the Bible as a whole but the weight of certain passages that seems to be the point of contention. Particular verses of Scripture serve as proof-texts for fundamentalists. That is, verses are recited in the middle of the flow of everyday life or in the midst of a discussion or debate and used to justify certain beliefs and practices.²² The use of the Bible as the indisputable authority prevents any type of challenging or questioning of the authority of the leader who invokes scriptural power. There is confusion between the interpreter and the text being interpreted, between the authority of the Scripture and the authority of the religious leader.

²⁰ A rhyme that circulated widely in the medieval period put the system into popular form: "The letter shows us what God and our fathers did; The allegory shows us where our faith is hid; The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; The analogy shows us where we end our strife."

²¹ Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

²² Richard T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism. Christian, Islamic and Jewish Movements* (Lanham: AltaMira, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 39.

By pointing out internal contradictions, textual discrepancies and historical stratification within Scriptures biblical criticism undermines the foundation of fundamentalism. It removes its source of religious authority. Theological content, such as the creation of the world, the virgin birth, physical resurrection, atonement by the sacrificial death of Christ and the second coming of Christ are deemed unquestionable by Christian fundamentalism, even if the history of tradition regarding these subjects has always been controversial. Although Christians in general confess these theological truths as central to the life of faith, fundamentalists assign them a dimension of certainty, as proofs of faith. Fundamentalism accepts no such questioning because it operates with certainty and doubt is a weakness that cannot be admitted. Simply to pose a question is to undermine the religious authority's power, independent of the response one might give to the question.

One of the key markers identifying fundamentalism is the in- and outsider language. It is strange or impossible to communicate with those who have not been chosen, are undeserving, or simply unwilling to comply with the fundamentalist truth. Such persons are seen as enemies who attack those who are righteous. The Manicheistic language employed by fundamentalism allows no space for doubt or simultaneity (as in *simul iustus et peccator*). There is only good and bad. The principles of good are divine, referring to the soul and salvation. Everything that is evil relates to Satan, sin and the body. It is not only possible, but ultimately necessary, to wage war against the powers of evil:

Our civil norms do not prohibit us from annihilating them militarily and physically, precisely because the victims of annihilation do not share these norms and hence are outside the realm protected by our norms.²³

Fundamentalism reduces faith to certainty, to effective results in the form of healing, prosperity, or political and military success. It confuses divine power with the power of this world. Fundamentalism becomes idolatrous when the divine is reduced to the temporal, the infinite to finite issues, and faith itself to deeds. The Christian notions of utter dependence on God, justification by God's grace and salvation by faith

²³ Claus Offe, "Modern 'Barbarity': a Micro-State of Nature?," in Agnes Heller, Sonja Puntischer Riekmann and Ference Fehér (eds), *Biopolitics. The Politics of the Body, Race and Nature* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), p. 21. The principle of the just, holy war employed by fundamentalism follows the same rationale as any other war, as this quote referring to barbarism shows.

become blurred in fundamentalism. It presupposes that human beings are actually capable of achieving moral perfection, and such moral standards are expected of all believers. Faith, however, needs to have an element of doubt and uncertainty. In fundamentalism, the content of faith is no longer love, justice and peace. Rather, the reign of God is reduced to a heavenly reward for righteous living in this life. To other Christians, including Lutherans, this teaching is opposed to the message of love and mercy contained in the Bible itself.

This is the key of Luther's hermeneutics. For Luther, the importance of the Bible lies in its use and not in its mere possession. It is the living Word when it is the object of study and when there is a living out of the Word of God. But that does not apply in fundamentalism. By affirming that neither the tradition of the church, nor its Councils, but the Bible alone has authority, Luther was not advocating an arbitrary reading of biblical texts. The Bible is the good news when it conveys the *evangel*, the gospel, and proclaims Christ. Thus, the principle of *sola scriptura* must be employed under the guidance of another principle, *solus Christus*.

Sallie McFague is correct in affirming that Luther concentrated on the literal sense of the texts instead of their allegorical interpretation (which in his opinion could lead to many misinterpretations). He placed emphasis on translating texts from the original biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) into the vernacular. The authority of the Scripture, however, does not justify arbitrary biblical interpretation. Luther opposed the monopoly of the ecclesiastical authority (*magisterium*) and wanted all Christians to be able to read the Bible in order to become people taught by God (*theodidacti*). Thus, this entails the wider community of readers discussing the text.

Luther's method had little in common with literalism or fundamentalism. His approach was to pay attention to the meaning of the text. This meaning cannot be reduced to the letter of the Scripture, but carries within it spiritual, parenetic (ethical exhortation), or eschatological overtones. Even if Luther emphasized the literal sense, he never absolutized the letter of the Scripture. The whole Bible was to preach Jesus Christ, who operates as a canon within the canon (a criterion for evaluation of all texts). The evangelical center of the Scripture, the Good News, is the message of Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*). It is the good news of the grace of God (*sola gratia*) in Jesus Christ, received in faith (*sola fide*). The centrality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Word of God. This also became the criterion to evaluate other biblical

passages, to interpret the Bible: *was Christum treibt*. With this perspective, Luther also gained freedom in relation to biblical texts.

It is obvious that Lutheran hermeneutics and fundamentalism are not on the same page. Ultimately, however, the question is not only one of accurate or inaccurate interpretation of Scripture. This problem could potentially be solved through dialogue if one believed in the legitimacy of such critical community. The issue is not only one of conflicting interpretations, but of the epistemological ground from whence fundamentalist interpretations spring. It is not sufficient to present counterarguments based on critical reasoning, contextual reflection, or historical data to dismantle a literalistic reading of the Bible. The foundations of fundamentalism cannot be challenged from the perspective of modernity. Modern frameworks that presuppose critique, discernment and agency are unacceptable for those who do not share these notions. How can one be dialogical with those who are openly against dialogue?

Paul Tillich once posed the question, “Must the encounter of faith with faith lead either to a tolerance without criteria or to an intolerance without self-criticism?”²⁴ The encounter with the faith of fundamentalism needs to be met with criticism, considering matters of interpreting and deviating from the Christian message. If this criticism uses the language of modernity, however, it will miss the point. The criticism of fundamentalism needs to draw from what is fundamental in Christianity. It needs to define the criteria of what is essential and what is secondary in Christian teachings. There is a conflict of interpretations, but this conflict will not be resolved with an anti-dialogical approach. Ultimately, the controversy resides in what is fundamental in Christianity.

For Lutherans, the dialogue with fundamentalists cannot emphasize the advances of Enlightenment or academic research. It must focus on what is central in the Christian faith: the scandal of the cross; the affirmation of human dependence on God’s grace; the incapacity of humans to attain righteousness by their own means; the sin of trying to overcome vulnerability by erecting structures of power; the eschatological anticipation that can only be a foretaste, experienced in Word and sacrament; the ethical commitment to love God and neighbor; and active life in the body of Christ.

Although fundamentalists employ theological discourse as the ideological justification for human structures of power, it is precisely the

²⁴ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 143.

in-depth analysis of this discourse (and its inherent contradictions) that allows conversation. This includes pointing out that Luther's *sola scriptura* was a tool for empowering the community of believers, not for arbitrary leadership. Among fundamentalists, although the Bible is source of authority, it is not always read carefully. What will also be revealed are the shortcomings of the Lutheran heritage in addressing the poignant challenges of our time and our lack of convincing theological answers to the struggles of everyday life.

Tolerance and Democracy Instead of Fundamentalism and Empire

Guillermo Hansen

The globalizing and unsettling forces of capitalism, technology, climate change, mass media and popular culture chart a reality marked by fleetness, disorientation and rapid social change. Empire is the name that we give to the global network of hierarchies and divisions that promise and attempt to maintain order through new mechanisms of control and conflict—a specific regime of global relations.¹ Empire refers neither to a single country, nor to a unified political system, but to a global network of sovereignty that rests on dominant nation-states, supranational institutions and major capitalist corporations.

Yet, in spite of empire's attempt to order and control planetary life, millions of people are reacting and resisting in different ways. Most are pursuing personal solutions to systemic problems, thus confirming that “biopower,” (regulating social life through control over individuals' bodies and thinking), is the essence of imperial domination. Others, small numbers affiliated with religious, leftist and ecological organizations, attempt to resist empire by postulating an outside utopic realm of moral purity, from which an epic redemption will flow.² Finally, far greater and growing numbers identify themselves with religious fundamentalist views that are usually functional to or absorbed by empire or, in some cases, embody anti-systemic resistance—by peaceful and/or violent means.

The phenomenon of fundamentalism is particularly significant because here we witness a multilayered crisis. If today, under empire, the global economy is tending toward the production of social life itself, in which the economic, political and cultural increasingly overlap, then it can be argued that fundamentalism is one of the main symptoms of empire's dysfunctional

¹ I follow Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's concept of Empire, as developed in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xii, 23.

² See *ibid.*, p. 46.

character. It is more than a religious superstition;³ it is a rallying point for all those who feel distressed by the peculiar way in which empire seeks to regulate the mesh of economic, political and cultural life. This is often referred to as the “materialist” and “secular” dis-values of late modernity. Certainly not all forms of fundamentalism react equally to all these dimensions, but since they are religious movements, the cultural aspects deserve careful attention—especially how religious symbols seek today to influence the political and institutional configurations of the emerging world.

This article focuses on democracy as a genuine alternative to the logic of empire and the different forms of fundamentalism. Although fundamentalisms are avowedly not keen on democracy, it is also true that the economic and political forces of empire are steadily driving existing (liberal) democracies into “states of exception.” This poses a peculiar menace to democratic principles. Democracy as a political system and culture, resting on values such as freedom, equality, social justice and the rule of civil law, is likely to be the real casualty of the struggle between fundamentalisms and globalization.

Yet, there may also be new opportunities for democracy, emerging from inside empire, that is, from the underside of the hierarchies of domination, through the creation of new global circuits of cooperation and collaboration. Here new kinds of relationships and power are locally and globally linking people, who have a common desire to exercise democracy as an affirmation of life in its multiple expressions, across religious, ethnic, cultural, gender and class divides. In this form of active resistance, a fourth strategy in the face of empire, tolerance, becomes a key instrument in the search for democratic solutions to systemic problems.

While as moral beings we are always faced with ethical choices, today there is increased urgency to reach wide consensus over the values and metaphors that will determine our lives. Freedom and equality have been focal desiderata of modernity, yet the historicist and progressive myths, through which these values have been nurtured, are on the wane. Since values are always embedded in mythical narratives, we need to understand the ways of knowledge and cultural mutations linked with sociopolitical and systemic changes. Today, as societies and consciousness become more pluralistic, tolerance is not only a desirable moral virtue but a necessary systemic quality. Combined with freedom and equality, tolerance makes participatory democracy the best arrangement for shaping our collective

³ From *super stare*, to stand over something that is a vestige from the past.

and global fate. In this regard, religions are again poised to play a critical role—either for or against tolerance, democracy and peace.

How then does our Lutheran heritage and its core theological metaphors contribute to what confronts us in public life, with its new networks of power? Can this meaningfully orient us for dealing with these matters? In sum, can Lutheran theology be a beacon for democracy, tolerance and pluralism against fundamentalisms? I suggest that Lutheranism may be able to contribute significantly, if its theological metaphors for salvation also cut across the “order of creation.” In this sense, justification by faith and the cross, understood in terms of God’s threefold-multidimensional action (two kingdoms), may evoke a theological space for relating to values such as difference, plurality, tolerance and acknowledging the other within a democratic institutional framework. This can ground a robust Lutheran public theology which inspires strategies to face the subtle power of empire and the enchanting choruses of fundamentalism.

I propose three insights that structure Lutheranism’s intersection with the present challenges: justification by faith and the upholding of inclusiveness; God’s threefold-multidimensional action (i.e., two kingdoms) of creating and sustaining democratic arrangements; and the cross as the critical “weapon” (and a critique of weapons) against the “glory” of empire, totalitarianism, fundamentalism and war. The challenge is to articulate these dimensions without falling into moralizing or legalistic solutions to deep structural, cultural and social disputes. This implies placing our theology within the present cultural and religious debate and consistent with the methodology of the cross: a theology done from the bowels of empire, revealing its true face behind its allegedly “benevolent” mask.

From republic to empire

Symptoms of transition

It is tempting to fall into the vice of binary thought when approaching the relationship between fundamentalism, tolerance and democracy. Media, news, reports and discourses can lead to the conclusion that today democracy—broadly defined⁴—is at peril primarily because of

⁴ Democracy understood as a set of institutional and legal principles and practices such as: the rule of law and equal access to justice; division of powers; guarantees of human and civil rights that are upheld and independently monitored; free and fair elections involving a genuine compe-

the “external” and “evil” forces of religious fundamentalism (especially Islamic). Samuel Huntington’s highly influential theory of the clash of civilizations, for example, has given academic veneer to a political paradigm that compartmentalizes inner dimensions of the contemporary world-system into antagonist camps. This creates a false impression and consciousness. The real danger for “democracy” may lie not only with those who express grievances against the hypocrisy of “democratic” countries, but also with those who in the name of democratic values support intolerant and vigilante practices. Inherent to the different forms of fundamentalism is establishing regimes of intolerance, which challenge the system and culture of democracy. “Democracies” around the world are increasingly sliding toward a “state of exception,” where freedom is curtailed in the name of freedom, as Latin American dictatorships once curtailed democracy in the name of democracy.⁵

It is essential to have a systemic view of the present globalized world system to situate the dynamics linking fundamentalism with the contemporary neoconservative “states of exception.” Fundamentalisms are symptoms marking the passage to a new state of affairs.⁶ They embody a refusal of some or all aspects of modernity, democracy and secularity, which are conceived, rightly or wrongly, as weapons of “liberal,” foreign or Western hegemony.⁷ They are late- or postmodern in a double sense: in that chronologically they follow and oppose modernity, while cultur-

tion of ideas, permitting consensual, non-violent changes of government; freedom of speech, press and media; healthy, autonomous civil society institutions and networks, independent of the state; accountability of authority and transparency of decisions; entrenched property and economic rights; social justice and basic security; an ethos of dialogue, questioning, trust, and moral awareness; widespread, free access to the information needed to discuss, scrutinize, make choices about and uphold all these components of a democratic society. Behind these principles lay certain core values such as the political equality of all citizens; open deliberation before decision making so that all can voice their interests and concerns; a high degree of citizen participation in the processes of democracy, that respects and encourages the different views of others; a pluralism of institutions and the independence of critical voices that maintain the long-term health and openness of democratic societies.

⁵ In *Stato di eccezione*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben shows how Western democracies become invested with the need of turning emergency into the foundation of their existence. The military and the economic “state of emergency” often merge into one, employing war metaphors as main currency in public speeches. He states that “The principle according to which necessity defines a singular situation in which the law loses its *vis obligandi* [...] is inverted into that according to which necessity constitutes, so to speak, the ultimate foundation and the very source of the law.” Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), p. 37.

⁶ See Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, (note 1), pp. 137ff.

⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 149.

ally they ride on the waves generated by the falling walls of modern (and Western) philosophical theories which placed religion in an interdict.⁸

Late-modern fundamentalism requires us to look at the long-term economic, political, cultural and epistemological dynamics characterizing empire. Thereby we can understand why democracy and tolerance have such urgency today. Inspired by chaos theory, the social scientist, Immanuel Wallerstein,⁹ maintains that an existing system that can no longer function adequately within its defined parameters faces a bifurcation where a “choice” is pressed upon it. Neither of the present antagonistic camps will prevail; the system as a whole will change. In effect, every system can be said to be “alive.” The “liveliness” is seen in its processes. If a system survives, it pursues its historical life within the framework and constraints of its constitutive structures. It obeys a cyclical dynamic, as well as secular, linear trend (s). When the expansion of secular trends jeopardizes the equilibrium enacted by the cyclical process, the crisis cannot be solved within the system as such; a bifurcation is imminent.

Thus today, institutions and social arrangements face a new set of possibilities: either a radicalization of democratic principles and practices, or falling into new hierarchical and intolerant forms of tutelage. The outcome will depend on the many decisions or actions taken in times of rapid change. History does not have a moral vector; it does not necessarily lead to greater tolerance, liberty or equality.

We therefore find ourselves in a crucible of uncertainties. This period is of extraordinary importance because the intellectual, moral and political decisions made will have exponential effects. For this reason fundamentalism cannot be dismissed as a romantic reversal of history, destined to fail because history always “progresses.” Actually, it is one of the possible outcomes of late modernity. In times where interdictions against religion are falling, the religious dimension may be destined to play a critical role in either democracy’s demise or its flourishing.¹⁰ Do Lutheranism’s core metaphors have any role to play in this new cultural,

⁸ This notion is developed by yet another Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, in “La huella de la huella,” Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *La religión* (Madrid: PPC, 1996), pp. 111f.

⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-System Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Uncertainties of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ It is ironic that modern democracy, whose roots can partially be traced to a reaction against religious intolerance (Locke *et al.*), may today require the mystique and conviction given by religion.

political and social scenario, that is, in constructing an alternative, more humane global network?

The “longue durée”:¹¹ Tolerance, intolerance and violence

A systemic analysis of empire posits neither nation-states, political regimes, religious bodies, nor geo-cultural zones, but rather the dynamic network, cutting across and undergirding all of the above and providing a structural unity. A world system is thus spatial/temporal, cutting across political and cultural units and creating an integrated zone of activity with institutions that obey certain systemic rules. The modern world system has origins in European expansion beginning in the sixteenth century. It is not bound by a unitary political structure, although after World War II, democracy became the desirable political regime. Its unifying factor is not a political regime or culture, but the division of labor resulting from the relentless pursuit of gain.¹² The accumulation of capital, which splits the system along a core and different degrees of periphery, determines the nature of this division.¹³

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the political history of the modern world system became the subject of a debate about the line dividing the included from the excluded, as well as about the tenor, extent and limits of tolerance. This debate occurred “within the framework of a geo-culture that proclaimed the inclusion of all as the definition of the good society.”¹⁴ This geoculture was liberalism, which proved to be a formidable ideological force acquiring a solid hegemony in Europe around 1848. Not only did it establish the juridical and institutional foundations to be emulated by most countries in the world, but it was also elastic enough to absorb anti-systemic movements arising within it. Within nation-states, attempts by groups to achieve inclusion as full citizens were the central

¹¹ Term used by Fernand Braudel.

¹² See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), pp. 43ff.

¹³ The core, the “comfort zone,” does not necessarily have to coincide with nations or states, but with the dominant sectors of the production process cutting across them. However, since monopolies need the patronage of strong states, there is a geographical consequence of the core periphery relationship. It is also the case that the same country or nation may present a mix of core and peripheral conditions. Usually, core products and services are monopolies or *quasi* monopolies, while peripheral products and services are truly “competitive,” that is, abundant and diverse. Thus, when there is exchange for core products and services felt as critical and crucial for the advancement of the well-being of populations, an unequal or asymmetrical situation develops.

¹⁴ Wallerstein, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 60.

focus of radical movements. First came industrial workers, who once organized in unions and syndicates sought political power. After decades of struggle, a compromise emerged: the welfare state. Then, beginning in the 1960s, those excluded from full participation and decision making—certain racial/ethnic groups, women, sexual minorities and oppressed minorities in colonies—voiced their anti-systemic claims. All these movements were more or less successful in achieving full citizenship and/or independence, but failed fully to redress systemic dynamics of exclusion.

The 1960s marked the end of the supremacy of liberalism, thereby dislocating the geoculture that had kept the political institutions intact.¹⁵ Decolonization, women's movements, youth culture and labor, vindication of difference and minorities, concern for the environment—these have unhinged the underpinnings of the capitalist world economy and exposed it to the full force of political and cultural shocks from which it had been sheltered.¹⁶ During the same time, fundamentalist trends gained ascendancy again in different places in the world.¹⁷ Cultural transformations soon led to new self-esteem and political demands, which in turn put new pressures on the system through the expansion of linear trends. The result is that in the last fifty years there has been a growing squeeze on the average rate of profits; costs of production has been rising while the margin of surplus is narrowing. Capitalist production had to face rising labor costs, increasing costs for infrastructure and raw materials and taxation.

Capitalist endeavors always attempt to maintain oligopolistic conditions. For example, the present neoliberal phase in Latin America was enacted by dispossessing the “enclosing the commons.”¹⁸ The “Washington Consensus” gave new impetus to institutions such as the International

¹⁵ This corresponds to what Eric Hobsbawm calls the end of the “golden age.” See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: a History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

¹⁶ See Wallerstein, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 77; Hobsbawm, *ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁷ In the case of Islamic fundamentalism, the 1967 Israeli-Arab war signals a turning point. See Basam Tibi, “The Worldview of Sunni Arab Fundamentalism: Attitudes toward Modern Science and Technology,” in Martin Marty and Scott Appelby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family and Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 81.

¹⁸ A Marxist notion developed by David Harvey to refer to the reversal of common property rights and the commodification of cultural forms, histories, intellectual creativity, the environment, genetic information, public works, health and education. Capitalism resolved its cyclical crisis by expanding its secular trends; but in the new era of globalization the possibility of overflowing towards an “other” (land, population, and market) decreases. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 137ff.

Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the World Economic Forum. These in turn pushed for a type of globalization which opened up all frontiers to the free flow of goods and capital, but not of people and/or labor.¹⁹ In the midst of this, 9/11 served to legitimate the more conservative sectors within some core states by giving them new political clout. These events weakened links with the more moderate center and thus undid cultural and social transformations dating from the 1960s. Most dramatically, neoliberalism was replaced by neoconservatism—a religiously sanctioned force that culturally and politically is at war with the freedoms and social advancements of the previous four decades.²⁰

Far from bringing order and restoring equilibrium to the system, these reactions have accelerated the cycle of crisis, leading to a general global state of war. The secular trends are moving toward blocking the unrestrained continuation of an endless accumulation of capital, the engine of capitalist development. On the horizon are indications of great social turmoil, in response to 1) the very fluctuations of the system itself; 2) the declining legitimacy of state structures; and 3) the cultural crisis of prevailing symbolic systems. As Eric Hobsbawm asserts, “The world of the third millennium will [...] almost certainly continue to be one of violent politics and violent political changes. The only thing uncertain about them is where they will lead.”²¹

What will dominate in the upcoming arrangement? Should we speak of a system or multi systems? What values will be paramount? One thing is certain: the present world system, ideologically dominated by a center-liberal outlook, has now achieved its full maturity. It will do anything possible to ameliorate the crisis, even adopting conservative discourse(s) to suit the demands of electorates, who are determined to behave in customary ways in the pursuit of short-term benefits. Precisely because the fluctuations and uncertainties are becoming more acute, the demand for security will be stronger—and so, too, the violence.²² “States

¹⁹ See Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1999); Zygmunt Bauman, *La globalización: consecuencias humanas* (Buenos Aires: FCE, 1999).

²⁰ See Harvey, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 184.

²¹ Hobsbawm, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 460.

²² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri link this form of security to the contemporary strategies of biopower: “Security requires rather actively and constantly shaping the environment through military and/or police activity. Only an active shaped world is a secure world. This notion of security is a form of biopower, then, in the sense that it is charged with the task of producing and transforming social life ...” In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 20.

of exception” are erected as paradigms for political rule, where all citizens are placed under permanent suspicion and surveillance (the “Patriot Act” in the US is an example). Moreover, as stated in the (in)famous ideological blueprint of the Bush administration, Project for the New American Century,²³ military strength and control of foreign territories become necessary steps in the larger project of spreading “appropriate” codes of conduct to the rest of the world.²⁴ This violence exercised in the pursuit of “security”—doubtful ends combined with immoral means—has received strong popular backing and ideological support from a growing social and cultural force—evangelical fundamentalism, the backbone of neoconservative hegemonic military power.²⁵ In this fashion, liberty is curtailed in the name of security, which in turn exacerbates inequality.

Fundamentalism promises a safer and more fulfilling world by submitting to new heteronomous codes and arrangements. Rather than through a direct attack on the economic and political basis of empire, this occurs indirectly by questioning the cultural and moral dynamics of empire: rejecting the priority of universal rights and civil law, refusing gender equality, dismissing the separation of religion and government and a general rebuff of democratic values. Neoconservatives in the US receive the backing of Christian evangelical fundamentalists who are thoroughly supportive of the system, while Islamic fundamentalists are anti-systemic. But both Christian fundamentalist system supporting neoconservatism and Islamic anti-systemic fundamentalism have a common pattern: they either lower tolerance or openly practice intolerance, threatening the very nature of democracy. Both have an inbuilt tendency toward intolerance and the negation of the other.

From plurality towards a postmodern unum

Different strands of fundamentalism are commonly marked by militancy, exclusivism, a “fight against the world” attitude and a profound distaste for (philosophical) relativism and (ideological) pluralism. Setting boundaries,

²³ The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) is an American neoconservative think tank, based in Washington, D.C., cofounded as “a non-profit educational organization” by William Kristol and Robert Kagan in early 1997.

²⁴ See Harvey, *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 184f.

²⁵ See Walter Mead, “God’s Country,” in *Foreign Affairs* 85/5 (Sept.-Oct. 2006), pp. 24-43.

identifying enemies, proselytizing, creating and strengthening intermediate institutions are common strategies. Common moral positions include patriarchal models of family and opposition to abortion and same sex relationships. Although counter-modern or anti-secularization attitudes seem to galvanize their focus, most evangelicals, for instance, are not opposed to capitalism, bureaucratic organization, mass communication technologies, or higher education. They are not simply antimodern, but rather critical of those aspects of modernity that they perceive to be threatening to their core beliefs, social organization and ideology, such as cultural developments leading to a pluralization of consciousness and views.²⁶

As a strategy facing pluralization and secularity, fundamentalisms share a highly cognitive doctrinal religiosity marked by an objectivistic, dogmatic, legalistic and dissonant style. The claim to “objectivity” revamps a hermeneutical circle, unaffected by human experience, interests and location. In a sense, they simply continue the “epistemological objectivism” of the West, as if reality were composed of foundational blocks of a certain order. To uphold “the truth” means to respect this structure and order. As the anthropologist Anthony Wallace asserts, there is a predisposition to be infatuated with a worldview that promises order, for this is perceived as diminishing stress. It is associated with every satisfaction derived from life and with the maintenance and reproduction of life itself.²⁷ Consequently, any element that produces disturbances in this worldview automatically implies a disturbance in the rules of behavior. The cognitive and the moral are, at this point, indistinguishable. Multiple cultural choices become a terrain in order to simplify reality according to a divine norm.

Yet (late) modernity has brought to the fore the complexity of reality, which requires multiple metaphors and views.²⁸ Any monolithic conceptual

²⁶ Cf. Peter Berger, *Una Gloria lejana: la búsqueda de la fe en época de incredulidad* (Barcelona: Herder, 1994), p. 93.

²⁷ See Anthony Wallace, *Revitalizations and Mazeways: Essays on Culture Change*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 182.

²⁸ Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 78. Integristism as fundamentalism expresses thus a cognitive strategy which tries to homogenize what is radically plural. Against this background they can be considered as a form of super-stition (*super stare*), to the extent that they intend to recreate conceptions of nature, society, culture and self which are thought or imagined as having once wide currency. Although to a certain extent they share many of the traces of religious revitalization movements (Wallace), that is, the deliberate, organized and conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture and social environment, they are epistemologically unable to produce what these movements successfully do: a widespread reduction and/or redirection of stress. Therefore it would be more adequate to consider fundamentalisms as truncated revitalization movements, for they are constantly tempted to idealize a past in face of the perils of the present.

system soon proves to be inconsistent, unable to establish congruence with diverse metaphors and symbols. In the end, fundamentalisms are not only incapable of surmounting dissonance, but they become spawning terrain for new ones. This generates additional cognitive dissonance which at best may be able to offer a “solution” for individuals within empire, but not to the injustices brought by it.

In sum, different fundamentalisms appear to share a common, intercultural strategy that is linked to the social, cultural and economic conditions set in motion by globalization and late modernity. Facing this dislocation, they aim to influence societies and cultures by encouraging stances to secure or avoid uncertainty, sanction power distance, stress the collective rather than the individual and give prominence to the masculine rather than the feminine.²⁹ In these strategies, matters pertaining to sexuality, family and above all, the role of women stand out.³⁰ These issues not only enforce patriarchal property rights and the male monopoly of the labor market, but also communal reproduction where women are perceived to be the most reliable agents in the transmission of culture and religion. Because modern economic pressures invariably change family patterns and gender roles, “womb” and “school” appear as the institutional battlefronts of fundamentalist reaction. “Womb” signifies the power to control reproduction and perpetuate the patriarchal model of family; “school” represents the entrance gate into the public sphere.

Tolerance as a critical and democratic tool

Because of cognitive, social and cultural uncertainties, fundamentalisms (directly or indirectly) support political regimes that curb tolerant

²⁹ Cf. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 14ff.

³⁰ See Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 64ff. In the case of Roman Catholic integrism, this cognitive objectivism, distaste for pluralism and legalistic outlook is illustrated by its militant opposition to issues ranging from the introduction of sexual education in schools and the distribution of condoms in state hospitals, to gay rights (civil union) and the decriminalization of abortion. The war metaphor acquires new currency, as denoted by the statements of integrist ideologues when referring to feminism, one of the disturbing “dissonances” in late modernity. According to Adolfo Castañeda, director of *Vida Humana Internacional* and a consultant for the integrist circles in Latin America, we are facing a “cultural subversion,” where “‘gender perspectives’ represent one of the most dangerous ideological weapons mustered to destroy life and family, and therefore, society.” That such views exist in the pluralistic setting of late modernity must not alarm us; what is cause for alarm is their active pursuit of political means to enforce their vision of a *Catolicismo integral*.

practices and democratic demands. Often this takes the form of an open protest against globalization and its discontents, thus coinciding with other forms of protest stemming from the left.³¹ But these strategies for change seeks to reinforce rigid cultural and institutional values. They severely question not only the shortcomings of actual democracies under empire, but also the core values that inform and sustain democratic practices in its many forms. When globalization, democracy and secularization are lumped together as a threat, when pluralism and epistemological uncertainties are seen as uniformly eroding the very fabric of human society, then violence and intolerance appear as suitable weapons in an already violent and increasingly intolerant environment.

In effect, uncertainty, pluralism, relativity, radical difference, liquid boundaries, diffuse hierarchy, soft epistemology—i.e., cultural characteristics of late modernity—represent for fundamentalism a dreadful and demonic horizon that must be avoided and fought against at all costs. While these factors appear to be easier to digest for some, fundamentalist movements—especially Islamic and evangelicals outside the US—seem to provide a consoling response to those who lose out or are subordinated, excluded and/or threatened by global cultural and economic trends.³² When differences of culture, ethnicity and religion coincide with class and/or geopolitical subordination, the terrain appears particularly fertile for fundamentalism. This monumental systemic challenge calls for new understandings of democracy and tolerance and redress of economic and social inequalities.

We cannot forget, as Hardt and Negri have noted, that these reactions are symptoms signaling a passage to a new social, political and economic arrangement. The tragedy is that fundamentalism purports to be a cure, encouraging its supporters to pursue strategies that curb democratic practices. Plurality, diversity and tolerance are seen as contributing to materialism, consumerism and the West's cultural "decadence."

Is it possible to separate the waning forces of empire from the values associated with democratic practices? Is "democracy" indissolubly tied to the cultural and political history of the West? Can the value and

³¹ Cf. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 235f.

³² Cf. William H. McNeill, "Fundamentalisms and the World of the 1990s," in Marty and Appelby, *op. cit.* (note 17), pp. 558ff. One problem of his account is that he does not pay enough attention to the systemic dimension of fundamentalism, and the class component of it. Rather, he sees it mostly as a strategy that minimizes friction in the transition from rural to urban life.

practice of tolerance be proven to be an equally effective way to redress social, cultural and economic grievances?

Tolerance has been defined in many ways depending on the social, political and cultural valuations of diversity, otherness and difference. It is not an absolute reality, but signifies different points on a continuum, different possibilities and strategies that move from more passive to more proactive understandings.³³ For example, when a moral good such as peace is set as a socially desirable goal, then tolerance may come as a resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of that ultimate goal. Tolerance is therefore instrumental in the pursuit of another moral good. This attitude may come very close to one where tolerance results from its lack of moral weight, as when a relaxed benignity stems from sheer indifference towards differences. A third possibility poses tolerance as the appropriate attitude that must follow the recognition that others have the same universal rights as we do, similar to stoic and Kantian philosophy. Tolerance, thus, is associated with the realization of universal sameness,³⁴ and becomes something that must be endured, ignored or made dependent upon a homogenizing identity.

Two other attitudes regarding tolerance are possible as proactive responses to the challenging globalized scenario. Here difference and plurality acquire a moral quality of their own, and the idea of tolerance mutates from negative or condescending forbearance to active love. The first is an attitude of curiosity toward the other that leads to respect and the willingness to learn. Here tolerance is subsumed under an openness towards that which is different, and assumes that our own stories, traditions and being are by themselves incomplete. The second embraces tolerance as sheer and unwavering acceptance of the other, as an expression of the largeness and diversity of human nature in God's evolving plan.

From certain points of view, this second attitude constitutes the ideal to which humanity is called—a veritable state of grace and love. But in a pluralistic and globalized world, this is likely to be limited to small numbers who are inspired by mythic narratives. It is impossible

³³ In what follows I pursue Walzer's suggestions, although with certain modifications. See Walzer, *op. cit.* (note 30), pp. 10ff.

³⁴ History shows different political arrangements to cope with difference and otherness—multinational empires, millet system, consociates nations, nation-states, immigrant societies, etc. But in these regimes, tolerance has always been an instrumental and external achievement, something necessary in order to enforce other ends and goods—the rule by the few, peace as controlled violence, assimilation, economic exploitation, etc. Yet, the fragility of these regimes of tolerance was the latent or overt intolerant principle inbuilt within them, an intolerance that precisely made of “tolerance” a necessity of instrumental value.

for tolerance to have the same subjective meaning for all participants in society. Moreover, a psychologically normal and sane society is one in which habitually people strongly disagree; general and homogeneous agreement is rare outside the sphere of instinctive human qualities.³⁵ But the main objection against unqualified acceptance is that it does not leave much room for a critical appraisal of the other that can squarely face the constant conflict of values and interests that marks human reality.

A Lutheran anthropology has taught us to be critical of utopianism that purports to uphold lofty ideals without recognizing the conflict with other values, interests and concerns. Life always presses difficult choices to be made in the larger and often conflictual arena of political life. Therefore tolerance, as a moral practice, can be said to occur properly when we are open to communicate and interact with people whose beliefs we do not necessarily adopt and whose practices we do not imitate—when we coexist with an otherness that remains different, alien and strange. This is tolerance as critical openness, recognizing our ongoing incompleteness and relative truth. Yet it is also a critical openness since it attempts to balance the moral weight of otherness with other values—such as freedom, peace, equality and integrity. It entails not only recognizing that the other, with their truth, will perhaps never come closer to ours, or vice versa, but also that in exercising our choices as moral beings we will often collide with other choices, interests and values.

Openness, a pluralistic epistemology and a critical acceptance of the other, delineate a sound psychological, affective and cognitive approach for practicing tolerance today. But critical openness requires that tolerance must not restrict itself to behaviors and attitudes. It must express itself in an institutional and political form. Otherwise, tolerance may only breed its own demise. Values and moral goods, encoded in the symbolic language of religious (or secular) narratives, must be made effective in social and political arrangements.

Narratives and theological construal: Steps towards a public Lutheran theology

Tolerance, therefore, is a multileveled compound of cognitive, social, institutional and psychological factors. But three dimensions must be

³⁵ See Carl Jung (ed.), *Man and his Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1975), p. 46.

addressed for the sake of a tolerant and democratic culture and social arrangement:

- As the Dutch anthropologist, Geert Hofstede, has shown, power, distance and tolerance are key dimensions structuring any society and culture through dynamics acquired in the family, school and workplace.³⁶ We cannot ignore the psychological and symbolic ground that nurtures certain views of tolerance. Background theories, social experiences, religious symbols and mythical narratives set the parameters for an axiological universe (mythical-ethical core) where tolerance and respect are paramount. Here the theme of justification is key for an attitude of inclusion in the face of the exclusion generated by fundamentalism and empire.
- In order for this to flourish, a receptive environment is necessary. A democratic horizon and regime are needed to sustain a new biopolitical network. While the patterns of genuine democracy are created in the collaborative and respectful cooperative practices from below, overarching institutional guarantees are also necessary. Building up a citizenship of service is the fundamental bulwark against empire's subtleties and fundamentalist militancy. The theme of the cross provides a crucial key for a political direction and social critique.
- Finally, the grievances and sufferings that may breed intolerant reactions must be redressed. Speaking about tolerance, therefore, implies a new world system where the services and resources involved in reproducing and expanding life are more or less equally shared and fairly exchanged. In other words, tolerance calls for new cooperative and communicative networks of labor and production. Empire in its present form must be destroyed but without falling into the fundamentalist temptation. Theologically, this involves a convergence of the cross as a critique of the empire and power, justification as a declaration of inclusiveness and the multilayered action of God in creation to provide clear direction for responsible citizenship in the world.

The first level refers to the psychological and epistemological openness that is communicated through mythical narratives and/or hermeneu-

³⁶ See Hofstede, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp. 23ff.

tics—either sacred or secular. Here the psychological lives of individuals and communities are formed. Thoughts, feelings, intention and adaptive practices are drawn from the range of belief systems in a given culture. In late modernity, religious symbols, narratives and myths are acquiring renewed vitality and interest. This places theology and ethics in a new light, for values never appear in a vacuum, independent from narratives.

We know what the human is by telling a story. A story interweaves the challenges and value conflicts that are a part of the human condition. Most of these stories have deeply religious roots—either because they refer to a reality that lies beyond the obvious one, or because they appear as eruptions or gifts coming from an unconscious and transcendental level. These stories are effective to the extent that the primary caretakers not only socialize the young in this atmosphere, but are also committed to realizing the values and prospects grafted into the myth.

Theological reflection here offers critical clues for interpreting these myths and symbols, thereby enhancing their formative powers. Notions regarding the nature of the divine, time, space, will, body, mind, animals, plants, land and the human condition, directly affect the way people situate themselves in face of otherness, plurality and difference. Thus one of the foremost challenges is to qualify and/or deconstruct theistic God symbols inherited from the Axial Age (800 BCE–200 BCE), allowing instead for a vision of transcendence that can accommodate the integrity and difference of other beliefs and conceptions of the sacred.³⁷ Again, it is not a matter of simple and uncritical acceptance, a sort of “postmodern” embrace of everything in order to hold nothing. Instead, a critical openness is possible because of the non-exclusivist clues provided by the specific convictions of one’s mythical symbolization. Values pointing toward openness and tolerance can and must be found within the integrity of one’s own narrative. This theological endeavor will be measured by its ability to reconstruct a language of freedom, equality and tolerance after deconstructing texts that once served to legitimate oppressive dominion.

The doctrine of justification by faith, Paul’s interpretation of Jesus’ gospel as it reaches people in the margins (*Cf.* 1 Cor 1:26-29), is a key component in the Lutheran mythical narrative. The doctrine, as formulated by Paul and afterwards, is a critical and central guide to understanding the biblical message regarding the relationships between

³⁷ *Cf.* Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 6f.

humans, creation and God. It radically redraws the boundaries of God's domain in order to include those who hitherto were considered far from it: gentiles, slaves, women, urban poor, artisans and people of doubtful religious orthodoxy. This inclusiveness is basic to all other doctrines and statements regarding Christian life. It leads to a gracious appraisal of the life of every person and creature.

In the same vein, Luther employed the language of justification to indicate what God has done for all through Christ: making us equal participants in the justice revealed in Jesus. In this case, "sinners" were included, which in the medieval scholastic practice of distinguishing between clergy and laity meant practically all of those who lived in the *saeculum*. Luther could forcefully stress justification because this was central to a radical reconception of God and God's intimate involvement with creation in general and sinners in particular. Luther's formulation of the theology of the cross, which stands at the center of his understanding of the Trinity, is what gives such power to the notion of justification in relation to the graciousness of life. In both cases, the language of justification expresses a strategy of inclusion of the destitute, the marginal and the excluded, not into the logic of what exists, but into a new redistributive community of social, spiritual and material goods.³⁸ This communicated the hidden character of God's rule, and subverted the retributive traditions where God is powerfully present in the world and to whom all creatures must submit.

In their respective ways, both Paul and Luther sought to translate into their contexts the normative dimension of Jesus' message about a merciful Father and a generous kingdom, as well as his ministry of trespassing the multiple frontiers that put human beings in an interdict, thereby robbing God of God's glory. In effect, justification encodes the multiple forms in which Jesus' ministry interweaves divine righteousness, social justice and mercy, clashing with Roman commercialization, Herodian urbanization, priestly codification and imperial monetization. His wandering among the *ptochoi* with the empowering message of the kingdom reveals the different dislocations that the empire exploited for its own benefit. The existence of so many who were excluded indicated the inherent limits and cruelty of the "honor" and social net constituted by the overlapping of pyramidal schemes of patronage proper to the Augustan era.

³⁸ See this concept developed in Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods" (1519), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 45 ff.

Jesus' proclamation of a kingdom for the nobodies and undesirables touched on the most pressing issues of the time: debt, bread, shame and impurity. Exorcisms and the healing of bodies and spirits broke the spell that bound and burdened colonial and undesirable people. When Jesus broke bread, he adopted the degraded position of women: he served, he was the hostess. With this practice, he witnessed to the righteousness God willed for creation, and communicated an egalitarian and unbrokered sharing of God's goodness and mercy. In the same vein, Jesus' crossing of different frontiers allowed individuals and groups into an immediate physical and spiritual contact with God's justice, and thus unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. As the gospel traditions emphasize, Jesus crossed the traditional boundaries of family, honor and dishonor, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, sick and healthy, pure and impure, rural and urban, poor and rich. Bearing witness to the Father's mercy and coming reign, Jesus embodies a new space: the space of the Spirit. His body, his presence, becomes the locus for a new narrative that is not only about God, but also about how God crosses over into the bodies and minds of those who never expected to be considered as somebodies. To draw frontiers is an act of disenfranchising power; to trespass is an act of divine imagination and love.³⁹

The plots of Jesus' parables have either a good or a tragic ending. Reversals are a standard feature. In its tragic mode, this reversal signifies an exclusion of those who think that inclusion is their lot due to their righteousness. In the humorous plot, those marginalized and outcast, who had never expected to be invited, paid in full, welcomed home, or rescued, are surprised by their sudden good fortune. Jesus' parables comprise a skillful social and cultural commentary on insiders and outsiders, subverting the code that establishes the boundaries of God's companionship.⁴⁰ Outsiders were synonymous with "sinners", that is, lepers, the maimed, the blind, gentiles, Samaritans, petty tax officials, single women, destitute fishermen and misfits of every sort.

Luther himself points in this direction as he relates the reality of justification to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). In this story, with its vivid bodily references, Luther saw the nature of God's saving activity in Christ portrayed as a God who becomes our neighbor,

³⁹ See Guillermo Hansen, "On Boundaries and Bridges: Lutheran Communion and Catholicity," in Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*. LWF Documentation 47/2001 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2001), pp. 87f.

⁴⁰ See Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 192.

a God who crosses frontiers. The wounded man is reborn through the gracious help of the Samaritan (Christ). The wounded man represents humanity under the curse of the law. To be justified and to be healed are practically synonymous. Luther comments that the Christian “has begun to be justified and healed (*sanari*), like the man who was half dead (*semivivus*).”⁴¹ In the end, what this parable tells us is that in God’s domain, help or salvation comes only to those who have no reason to expect it, and who cannot resist it when it is offered.⁴² It is an act of sheer, unexpected, gracious inclusiveness. From the point of view of what Luther called an existence cursed by the law, salvation comes from that quarter from which one does not and cannot expect it.

In brief, intrinsic to the concept of justification is this tension between in- and outsiders, identity and universality, staying and crossing, local and global, particular and universal. For those who have been touched by God’s mercy, justification implies not only to be present at the many boundaries that divide humanity, but also to discern which ones need to be crossed, which ones need to be dismantled and which one’s need simply to be named and made visible. The gospel narratives about “crossing over” are a vindication of bodies that have been broken by debt, torture, enclosures, despair and abandonment—by the curse of the law. This is the particular sensitivity associated with God’s crossing movements, in which Christians participate in and out of the same love that once crossed over to them. This is why nobody is really an insider: to live by grace is the recognition that, to different degrees, we are all part of a *koinonia* of outsiders.

As any doctrine, the principle of justification is a regulative principle embedded in a cultural-linguistic grid that encourages certain attitudes, behaviors and relationships.⁴³ Reversal, inclusion, new circuits of power and affirmation, an assertion of the different that does not fit under the law, sensitivity towards the impure and shamed—these constitute basic attitudinal components encoded under justification by faith. To discern these is a sort of alchemy. It is an urgent task because empha-

⁴¹ Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 27 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 227; WA II:495. Luther shows a continuity of this image as we can see in writings from 1516 through 1546.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴³ Following Robert Jenson, we can say that the doctrine of justification functions as a “meta-linguistic” device to regulate that every speech on God and salvation must proceed in such a manner that salvation is understood not as a badge, a medal or a price, but as the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in the person of the Son.

sizing an absolute Law or an absolute One has served as the foundation for sovereignty and dominion, forcing heterogeneous multitudes into a suffocating *unum*: One God, one People, One Leader.⁴⁴ This level is thus a key in the conformation of a spiritual and psychological openness to otherness that would be the basis for any challenge to hegemonic and intolerant views. Yet to create this climate, other variables must come into play, that is, key grievances must be institutionally and socially addressed—as mentioned below.⁴⁵

The virtue of tolerance requires not only particular religious and moral sensitivities (as derived from justification), but also a political regime or arrangement that guarantees minimal conditions, precisely because of the crisis generated by diversity. Moral and religious sensitivities are neither independent of certain narratives nor uncoupled from the political realm. This is the second level referred to above, which points to democracy as both a cultural horizon for the expression of the multitude, as well as a political and institutional arrangement that locates sovereignty in the hands of the people.

After the Cold War, the concept of democracy has been set adrift from its rigid moorings, thus providing new opportunities for its reconception.⁴⁶ In effect, the forces of globalization have posed formidable challenges, and there are strong differences regarding the compatibility and future of democracy in late modernity. Social democratic arguments claim that democracy is debilitated or threatened by globalization, especially by its economic forces and fundamentalist reactions. The reassertion of the sovereignty of nation-states, therefore, seems the best strategy in the present global system. Liberal cosmopolitan arguments stress that the forces of globalization, while not always beneficial at first, release

⁴⁴ Cf. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 329.

⁴⁵ Of course, we are not only socialized through religious narratives. School (state) and Hollywood also possess an incredible formative power. Religious views are constantly intertwined with other narratives, “background theories” and experiences, which in turn slowly modify, or manipulate, the prospective tolerant dimensions found in religious stories. These contextual aspects can never be dismissed; pluralized scenarios already constitute a powerful enticement for reviewing any sort of exclusivism and intolerance. But while for some this is a blessing in disguise since it catalyzes values and behaviors seen as central to one’s own religious outlook—as can be freedom, integrity, self-esteem, choice, diversity—for others, this same scenario is simply harrowing, cognitively and psychologically impossible to bear, thus encouraging an epic account that places the stressful conscience in the path of either a militant, apocalyptic or messianic release. In this fashion, intolerant attitudes are one of the possibilities that a confusing and pluralized semiotic context may elicit, seeking a sort of totalitarian order that promises to reduce stress by negating differences.

⁴⁶ See Hardt and Neri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 232.

the democratic potential of people precisely by promoting freedom from the rule of nation-states. Neoconservative ideologues stress that only intervention by the coalition of the willing—led by the US—can foster democratic forces and institutions. Traditionalists, on the other hand, contest both the leading role of the US and the compatibility of democracy with the cultural values of non-Westerners.⁴⁷

None of these views, however, seems sufficient for confronting the new demands for tolerance, justice, peace and democracy. Democracy is confronted with a leap of scale, where the local appears more intensively related to the global, superseding the boundaries of traditional nation-states. The present grievances against political, ecological and economic aspects, including the current state of war, are symptoms of a crisis within the present world system and a rebellion against the formal mechanisms of sovereignty and its failing system of representational decision-making processes.

Lutheranism came only rather late to valuing democracy positively. Luther was certainly no democrat, and neither were most Lutherans—especially in Germany—until well into the second half of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ But this anti-democratic stance has more to do with a patriarchal and hierarchical sociopolitical ideology than with the message of justification and the cross. Not only theologies of glory, but also ideologies of glory need to be criticized; cross and justification also entail a gospel which transversely impinges upon power and authority. This is precisely what a theology of the cross does. It should not be limited, as in classical Lutheranism, to an anthropological and soteriological dimension, but it is also a sociopolitical event that reveals, or makes visible, the use and abuse of power by empire. Jesus' cross was not an event marginal to the empire. But neither is only its underside—as in Gustavo Gutiérrez' sense. Rather, it expresses its very core, the center of empire itself, the manifestation of its raw power, of its mercilessness, its debauchery and its arrogance.

Imperial sovereignty does not exist without the negation of an "other" who refuses to be a willing participant in the spoils of exploitative machinery. The cross is a profound "No" to the "Yes" with which we tend to ordinary life. It is a verdict denouncing something that is fundamentally

⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, pp. 233-237.

⁴⁸ See John Stumme, "Lutero no era democrata," in J. Severino Croatto et al., *Democracia: una opción evangélica* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1983), pp. 19-35.

wrong with how the world is structured.⁴⁹ In other words, Golgotha is the mirror image of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, the distorted reflection of the Octavian imperial realized eschatology, the unmasking of Rome as the benefactor of all humanity.⁵⁰ The cross signals the end of empire in a dual sense: as the end of its hidden goal, violence, as well as the end of its legitimacy through God's reversal of values in which God justifies the victim of the public, legal and official imperial power—Jesus.⁵¹

This understanding of the cross is what distinguishes as well as galvanizes the dialectic of law and gospel. This cross, in turn, is the key for a contemporary Lutheran appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the theory of God's multidimensional action in creation (the so-called doctrine of the two kingdoms). In this vein, the very dynamic of the Trinitarian concept of God and the twofold or multiple ruling of the Triune God encourages a public and political theology firmly anchored through the cross in the world of the victims. Its thorough deconstruction of a power that stems from above postulates that another form of power is possible, a power that is enacted by breaching frontiers and vindicating the right of the powerless to live. Yet, part of the same Lutheran articulation is of a cautionary tone that protects the irreducible nature of the gospel from the necessary temporal realizations that always include a certain degree of coercion and even violence. In this eon we cannot live only from the mediations furnished by the gospel, but at the same time we cannot exercise a power that is not congruent with the drive of this same gospel. Far from falling into new dualisms, this Lutheran caution is the basis for the critique not only of any form of (fundamentalist) enthusiasm, but also of any form of imperial power which always attempts to hide the violence of its law under a putative *evangelium* of peace, "democracy," progress, or God's will.

The theology of the cross calls things as they really are,⁵² without falling into a legalism or an utopian idealization. For this theology to be publicly relevant, its metaphors must be woven with kindred values

⁴⁹ Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth Of Christianity: Discovering what Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 258.

⁵⁰ See Helmut Koester, "Jesus the Victim," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111/1 (1992), pp. 3-15.

⁵¹ See John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in its Jewish Context," in *Neotestamentica* 37/1 (2003), pp. 29-57.

⁵² See thesis 21, Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 53.

from other traditions. The Roussonian concept of *volonté générale*, Montesquieu's and Locke's division of powers, Kant's *sapere aude!*, Madison's constitutional check and balances, Marx's concept of social democracy, Lenin's critique of imperialism, Foucault's microphysics of power—all coalesce in a postmodern notion of radical democracy that grows as the living alternative of the multitude through the network spawned by empire. This form of democracy, which challenges the monarchial principle of empire (as in US military force), and its aristocratic principle (the G-8), emerges from within the imperial logic of late modernity. It is a new form of sovereignty based on communication, relationships and different forms of life that nonetheless are able to find and discover what they have in common. For that reason, democratic demands—although always imbued with particular and therefore selfish interests—can be seen as the means through which the living God providentially holds God's creation in view of its final fulfillment. After all, this form of swarming communication—and not an hierarchical *Ordnung*—better reflects the dynamism proper to a Trinitarian God.

This Trinitarian understanding, mediated by Jesus' cross and God's justification, provides a positive valuation of the new realities set off by the new democratic networks. They communicate middle axioms where participation, tolerance and peace appear as central values for political practice. Democratic participation and tolerance thus ground the minimal conditions for a lasting peace; a peace that is not merely the absence of violence and war, but the basic precondition for reason, imagination, desire, emotions, feelings and affections. Without tolerance, without participation, but above all, without peace, no cooperation, communication, forms of life and social relationships can emerge from the incredible potential of the swarming multitude. These are the "weapons" that signal the democratic critique of arms, launching a critique of the massive means of destruction at disposal of the core powers, as well as of the equally disturbing weapons of the dispossessed, namely, the immolation of their own bodies.

As Reinhold Niebuhr once asserted, the human capacity for justice makes of democracy something possible; but its inclination to injustice makes of democracy something necessary.⁵³ The same can be said regarding tolerance. Therefore democracy should be measured both

⁵³ Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

by its capability to voice the grievances of a particular group as well as the ability to connect different kinds of groups (economic, political, human rights, education, ecology, health). These grievances give rise to a multitude through which the future of democracy is at stake. This requires a renewed democratic ethic, one which bridges ideas, hopes and affection, allowing an emotional yet also rational identification with a network of differentiated democratic power.

With this we reach a third level as to how we redress global and local grievances that are economic, social and ecological in nature—different forms of intolerance that also generate intolerant reactions. If the imperial world system cannot become more egalitarian, then the appeal of fundamentalist minorities will certainly be strengthened. Grievances and suffering bring us to the bedrock of human existence; this is the source of “local knowledge” that signals the inadequacies of ideological, social and economic systems.⁵⁴ Grievances, therefore, voice the “insurrection of subjugated knowledge” against hegemonic ideologies—which also include the different forms of fundamentalisms.⁵⁵ Of course, suffering is never without interpretation, but our bodies make of it a mediated immediacy, thus enclosing a negative universality that challenges programs and systems thriving on elusive promises and concrete duress.

Deprivation and poverty may breed anger, indignation and antagonism, but revolt arises only on the basis of “wealth”—a surplus of intelligence, vision, experience, knowledge and desire that is generated by a shift in social practices and cultural patterns. Herein lies, precisely, the inadequacy of the intolerant strategies and weapons of both empire and fundamentalisms. They recoil from the most fundamental “weapon” of all, a proactive tolerance that comes with love. Without this love, neither justice nor peace can permeate the increasing webs connecting us all on this fragile planet. It is not that fundamentalists are incapable of loving, but that they are blind to the political dimension of love. If both the forces that create economic disparities, as well as many of the fundamentalist reactions, make of violent behavior and intolerance prime weapons, then violence can only grow exponentially until it destroys us all.

This is why fundamentalism is a symptom of the disruptive forces of an unfair globalization, but not its cure. It is one of the powerful fluctua-

⁵⁴ Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Crisis of Hermeneutics and Christian Theology,” in Sheila Greeve Davaney (ed.), *Theology at the End of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 135.

⁵⁵ See Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. 80f.

tions indicating a possible bifurcation. But so are the powerful cultural and political experiences disclosing a common bio-political desire that rests on a proactive exercise of tolerance as an affirmation of life in its multiple expressions. For that to happen, the fight for democracy must always be tied to a relentless pursuit of fairness and the eradication of poverty, which can only be reached through a serious reorientation of the disparities generated by capitalism and its global division of labor. For only when the grievances of the majority are duly heard and redressed and when we are ready to look at the grim face of asymmetrical power, will we be able to walk in the full promise and creative force of tolerance and democratic affirmation. And in the midst of its humming, also be able to discern the Triune and promising activity of our Triune God.

Contributors

Charles AMJAD-ALI teaches at Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Karen L. BLOOMQUIST directs the Department for Theology and Studies, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland.

Wanda DEIFELT teaches at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, USA.

Guillermo HANSEN teaches at ISEDET, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

John HOFFMEYER teaches at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

Michael HOY pastors Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, St Louis, Missouri, USA.

Allen JORGENSEN teaches at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Faith K. LUGAZIA is a doctoral student at Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Cynthia MOE-LOBEDA teaches at Seattle University, Seattle, Washington, USA.

Jack NELSON-PALLMEYER teaches at St Thomas University, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Cheryl M. PETERSON teaches at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Mary PHILIP is a doctoral student at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Gary M. SIMPSON teaches at Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

William R. STREHLOW is a retired ELCA pastor, Geneva, Switzerland.

Johannes Gerhardus Jacobus SWART is a doctoral student at Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Deanna THOMPSON teaches at Hamline University, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

The church has often been complicit with the dynamics of empire. Nonetheless, it also needs to critique and embody alternatives to it, especially in and through communities of faith. Here, theologians take up the daunting challenge of developing constructive theological responses, grounded in the Triune God, which have the potential to counter, transform and nurture long-term resistance to empire today.

“This book took shape in discussions at an LWF seminar convened at Luther Seminary, but it is part of discussions occurring among Christians all over the world as they seek to give public evangelical witness to Jesus Christ in the midst of empire. The call to faithfulness in these pages is filled with insight, struggle and hope.”

Richard H. Bliese, President, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.

“Standing in the tradition of courageous contextual Lutheran theology (e.g., the Confessing Church and status confessionis), writers here offer deep ecclesiological insights into ecumenical processes for nurturing resistance to today’s expressions of totalitarianism.”

Ulrich Duchrow, Kairos Europa, Heidelberg, Germany.

“Essential reading for the call to resist the USA’s insatiable quest for domination under the guise of freeing the world. An extraordinarily important book.”

Norma Cook Everist, Professor of Church and Ministry,
Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, USA.

The editor, the Rev. Dr Karen L. Bloomquist, is Director of the Department for Theology and Studies, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland.

The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, representing 66.7 million Christians.



**LUTHERAN
UNIVERSITY PRESS**

ISBN 1-932688-33-1

5 1800 >



9 781932 688337