

Theōdidaktos *Taught by God*

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journeys

Sins of the Corporate Church

There are no books entitled *Mennonite Theology* in the manner of Millard J. Erickson's *Christian Theology*. If there were, none would contain a section on our teaching of the *Visible* and *Invisible Church*. That's because we don't believe in such a distinction. However, in recent days I have come to the conclusion that we may be practicing a behaviour in the Church that is not unlike this peculiar belief.

Some time in the fourth century theologians began referring to the Visible Church. By this they meant the typical members of the local church. These were the people you could see attending church and serving in its various functions.

I believe the Invisible Church terminology found its roots in Augustine's language. He referred to the Church as a mixed body, using Jesus' analogy of the wheat and the tares. The Invisible Church, Augustine said, were the true believers who had been regenerated and quickened by the Holy Spirit. Living amongst these true believers were those who pretended to be Christian, those who claimed to love Jesus but whose hearts were far from him. Thus the Church on earth would always be imperfect because it would be filled with some who had poor motives for belonging.

Complicating this further was the belief that no one could tell the fakers and the genuine Christians. Only God who judges all people's hearts could truly know who were the real believers.

Reformed theologians who espouse this belief would dare not say that God has two churches as a result. There is one Church, one holy bride of Christ. The terms "invisible" and "visible" are used to describe two distinct aspects of the one Church; or, to put it another way, the church is considered from two different perspectives. All true believers are members of the Invisible Church; not all persons baptized into the Visible Church are members of the Invisible Church for the very simple fact that they don't really know Christ.

As Evangelical Mennonites we reject the theology of the Invisible and Visible Church. Jesus said, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35). And in other places of the New Testament we read that a believer will be distinguishable by his or her fruit, the product of their lives. We believe that it is by one's life and behaviour that we, the Church, can judge who are genuine believers.

However, what has transpired in this era of the Church on earth is something like Augustine's perception. What we have today is the *Corporate Church* and the *True Church*, neither of which is invisible per se.

Consider that the Corporate Church hires and fires its staff. Consider that at membership meetings the only requirement that one speak up on an issue and vote on it is that you are a member.

Consider that the Corporate Church is concerned about finances, policy and public relations at times more than the gospel. The Corporate Church is filled with members, but not necessarily genuine believers, for at times we find members acting in their self-interests rather than for the good of the body.

How can the True Church of Christ hire and fire its staff when Christ has gifted her members with abilities to help her grow? "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Can the Church of Christ afford to resort to democracy to decide what God has already decided for us?

There may not be any validity to the terms Invisible and Visible Churches. But there are some grounds for suggesting that the Church today is more corporate than Christ-like.

If at membership or committee meetings we debate the role of prayer in making decisions, our churches are being run as corporations with CEOs and board members without regard for the direction of the Holy Spirit. No, not in all cases, but in enough to suggest that we have taken over the Church with our *Robert's Rules of Order* and our elections.

Where is the Holy Spirit in the workings of church government today? Even the word *government* smacks of human meddling in the work of Christ and his Church. Don't get me wrong, we are the Church and we work in it, but under the authority of its head, Jesus Christ.

It's time for repentance. It's time we gave the Church back to Christ and stopped being a corporation. For when the hammer falls and our society takes away the rights of the Corporate Church, the true Church of Christ will still be standing. Will we stand with it? ☹

Darryl G. Klassen



If at membership or committee meetings we debate the role of prayer in making decisions, our churches are being run as corporations with CEOs and board members without regard for the direction of the Holy Spirit.

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Letters to the editor

Anticipates future editions of *Theodidaktos*

My name is Scott Koop and I recently became the lead pastor at Fish Creek Christian Fellowship. I have no problem admitting that I am extremely young for this position, and that I have absolutely no experience as a pastor other than what I seen and experienced as a pastor's kid.

This past spring I graduated from Rocky Mountain College here in Calgary with a degree in Pastoral Leadership and I am amazed and humbled at how God has led me to my current place with Fish Creek.

I believe that God was leading me not only in my decision to attend RMC, but also in bringing me to Fish Creek. I will continue to lean on Him not for strength and wisdom, and to seek His guiding hand each step of the way. I would appreciate your prayers on my behalf.

With all that said, I want to thank all who are involved with *Theodidaktos* as it provides me (a young, inexperienced pastor) with further material to consider as I slowly learn what it means to be a pastor within our tradition.

Though I have grown up within the EMC exclusively, my training was at an interdenominational college. I will be

looking forward to future editions of the journal with great anticipation.

I also wanted to send a particular thank you to Pastor Layton Friesen for his fantastic sermon submitted in the February issue. I was richly blessed through this submission.

Scott Koop
Calgary, Alta.

Other comments

I'm impressed that the EMC has a journal of its own, of this caliber.

Bill Janzen,
MCC Ottawa office

Thank you for letting me know about the last publication of *Theodidaktos*. I've scrolled through earlier issues, and the current issue again reflects an impressive publication that takes church leadership and theology seriously.

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of History and Theology
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Peace Sermons sought



If EMC pastors, ministers, or other leaders presented Peace Sermons in 2007, possibly around Remembrance Day 2007, they are invited to forward them for possible inclusion in a *Peace Sermons by EMCers 2008* CD. Older sermons are also acceptable. The payment is a copy of the CD.

Send them to tsmith@emconf.ca or Terry Smith, 440 Main St., Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5. Sermons should be submitted by August 29, 2008.

Copies of *Peace Sermons by EMCers 2007* are still available.

Education Committee
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Some EMCers write for *Didaskalia*, the journal of Providence College and Seminary.

Subscription information can be found at prov.ca/Didaskalia



Oppenheimer Park: A Look at Romans 8:28

Corey Herlevsen



Corey Herlevsen, B.A., M.Div., is College Counselor as well as Professor of Counseling and Biblical Studies at Steinbach Bible College.

God's purposes in this world will often come about in terrible situations, not because someone "sat back and trusted God's promises" but because someone "joined God's work in the world; became God's hands and feet; became a tangible expression of God's love and God's caring (Tim Geddert, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary).

The Beginning of My Long Jagged Journey with Romans 8:28

In downtown Vancouver, down at the foot of East Hastings, long past the PNE and long past all the pretentious tourist attractions, there is a section of the city known as the lower Eastside. This is where the poor and ragged people hang out, a photo essay example of "the alleys where they hide the truth of cities."¹

To give you an idea of what kind of poverty I'm talking about, consider this. When I began teaching Romans in 2000, the average household income in Vancouver was \$45,180. In the lower Eastside that figure dropped to \$11,251. In Vancouver 25 percent of the people were in low-income housing. In the Eastside that figure rose to 80 percent.

In 1995, the Canadian Council on Social Development reported that,

contrary to popular opinion and expectations, the city of Vancouver had the highest urban poverty rate in Canada for its Aboriginal² population. In the light of (or, maybe better yet, in the darkness of) the article *Mennonite Peacemakers and Aboriginal Neighbours* (*Theodidaktos*, February 2008), it is perhaps needless for me to say that the lower Eastside had (and still has) a high ratio of Aboriginal residents.

Recent studies have shown that up to 40 percent of Vancouver street youth are Aboriginal. Further, 50 percent of Aboriginal youth live in single parent households which survive ("live" is too spirited a word for this linguistic and geographical context) on less than \$10,000 annually.³ Given

Recent studies have shown that up to 40 percent of Vancouver street youth are Aboriginal. Further, 50 percent of Aboriginal youth live in single parent households which survive on less than \$10,000 annually.

these statistics, it shouldn't surprise us (though it should both break our hearts and rebuke our vivacious complacency) to learn that approximately 60 percent of the drug-addicted, sex trade population are Aboriginal women, youth, and children.⁴

Vancouver's lower Eastside has the highest HIV rate in North America and, the reader might remember the horrific case of mass murderer Robert Pickton, the majority of whose victims came from this very demographic. When the City of Vancouver did the background research in preparation for the *Vancouver Agreement*—a plan established in 2000 to address issues surrounding housing, health care, crime reduction and economic development—it was revealed that this section of the city, about three city blocks big, there were an average of 150 paramedic calls *per week*.

The City of Vancouver at that time was paying more than half a million dollars per year in ambulance fees *just to deal with the overdose situations*. One more statistic: Five years after the *Vancouver Agreement* was established and put in place, review of the program's effectiveness revealed that homelessness in the Eastside in fact *increased* by 235 percent between 2002 and 2005. More people were living on the streets than in the overtaxed shelters.⁵

In the middle of the lower Eastside section, just at the foot of East Hastings, is a small place called Oppenheimer Park. It sounds sort of glamorous until you've seen it. When I lived in Vancouver in the 1980s, Oppenheimer was basically a patch of grass and some benches in the middle of the concrete. From a block or two away, it looked like a bit of an oasis in the middle of all the dirty grey concrete. When you get a little closer, however,

1 The phrase comes from Canadian musician and social activist Bruce Cockburn. It is found in his autobiographical take on Psalm 23 entitled "Strange Waters," the closing song on the CD *The Charity of Night*. True North Records, 1996.

2 Regarding vocabulary, I have chosen to consistently use the word *Aboriginal* when referring to Aboriginal Canadians, switching to the word *Native* only when my sources do so.

3 To get a global perspective on what this means, the reader is advised to visit and participate in the exercises found on www.globalrichlist.com. Be aware, however, that this tool only measures raw income and does *not* factor in the multitude of other factors which are used to define "the poverty line" in a given country or region. Poverty lines and standard of living indexes are, of course context specific. \$200,000 might buy you a nice home in Steinbach, but it likely wouldn't buy you a garage in places like Calgary or Vancouver.

4 To research these matters further, the reader is directed to *Metro Vancouver's Vital Signs* at www.vancouverfoundationvitalsigns.ca. The website is operated by the Vancouver Foundation, a philanthropic group which has been working for social justice and equity since 1943. Another area of interest which should be consulted is www.vhc.ca/sis, the website of *Insite – North America's First Legal Supervised Injection Site*. This project was initiated in 2003 as a response to the cluster of issues (poverty, addiction, mental illness, needle sharing and the concomitant spread of both Hepatitis C and HIV). I would also recommend that the reader view the documentary *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (National Film Board, 2002), directed by Nettie Wild.

5 *Raven's Eye: The Aboriginal Newspaper of British Columbia and the Yukon*, September 2006.



I have to admit that it was a bit surreal, walking along and memorizing this nice spiritual thought while surrounded by the wreckage of societal injustice.

They hadn't yet been domesticated, ossified or glazed over with the detritus of sentimentality or over-familiarity.

For the duration of the crusade, my routine was to walk to B.C. Place, memorizing my verse for the day, turning it over and over in my mind. It was my nature then, as it's my nature now, to not be content with just memorizing words or facts. I must inquire into the meaning of the words and facts and puzzle over their relevance and their aptness for the situation(s) to which I am being asked to apply them. I still remember the day, while on my way to the Billy Graham crusade, I was walking down East Hastings, through Oppenheimer Park, and memorizing my verse for the day.

At first glance it seemed simple enough: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 KJV).

I have to admit that it was a bit surreal, walking along and memorizing this nice spiritual thought while surrounded by the wreckage of societal injustice. On that particular evening, my walk led me to a man passed out and sprawled all over the sidewalk, empty bottle still in hand, vomit caked onto his shirt and spilling onto the sidewalk. This was not an uncommon sight for me during the course of any working day so I stopped long enough to establish that he was breathing, then simply stepped over him, passed him by on the other side and continued on to the respectable religious crusade in the fancy building where I was to perform my religious duties.⁷

A few blocks later, as I rolled the memory verse around in my mouth like a lozenge, I remember wondering how this nice verse related to the actual scene right in front of my eyes. I remember actually stopping, looking back and questioning: "All things work

it more closely approximated a war zone. Bodies scattered all over, passed out on benches and on the streets. The ground littered with the spent shells of used needles, syringes, tourniquets, and other paraphernalia.

It has, for years, been an area wherein the homeless, addicted, poverty stricken population could "hang out" without getting hassled or moved along.⁶ For several months in 1984 I worked as a laundry and dry cleaning courier. Though my route took me to several destinations in the urban sprawl that was Vancouver and its suburbs even back then in the days of big hair and shoulder-pads, the major part of my day was spent in the Lower Eastside, and the actual facility of the business I worked for was just a few blocks to the east of Oppenheimer.

Dissonance in My First Formal Ministry

During the week of October 14–21, 1984, just a few months after I had come to faith in Christ, my first "formal" ministry opportunity was to serve as a counselor at the Billy Graham Crusade at the newly constructed, state of the art, B.C. Place stadium. Due to the heavy rush hour traffic, by the time I was done my deliveries for the day it was far more convenient to just leave my car at the shop and walk through the Eastside to B.C. Place.

As part of our Billy Graham worker training we were given several verses to memorize. Because I had so newly come to faith, never having read the Bible before, the verses, both Old Testament and New were still new, spirited/Spirited and radical to me.

6 In a distressing development, Pivot Legal Society Lawyer David Eby, who serves and represents the marginalized population of the Lower Eastside, has reported that five of the key facilities that serve this area—Vancouver's poorest neighborhood and one of the poorest in Canada—are scheduled to be closed down (either permanently or temporarily) or relocated to better facilitate traffic and tourism in the run up to the 2010 Olympics. In his words, "The loss of [these facilities] will be a huge loss to the low-income community in the Downtown Eastside... a population that doesn't have very many friends left in Vancouver." See his blog at <http://daveideby.blogspot.com> for information.

7 Any perceived similarity between my actions and those of a certain Priest and a certain Levite (Luke 10:25–37) is purely intentional. It should be noted, however, that the Priest in the story has a *possible*—though unlikely—excuse. The Torah forbade a Priest to come into contact with a corpse (Leviticus 21:1–4, among several examples, including Ezekiel 44:25–27 which is notable due to its context of pure worship in light of the *Shekinah* Glory returning to the temple post-exile). If he, as a Priest, came into contact with a corpse everything he touched would be unclean and therefore he could not perform any of his duties mediating between God and His people (See Bock, Darryl, *Luke, The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan, 1996, 300). Kenneth Bailey, in his book *Poet and Peasant* points out that the apocryphal work *The Wisdom of Ben Sirach* (which is also known as *Ecclesiasticus* and is still included in the Bibles used by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches) 12:1–7 specifically forbids going to the aid of sinners and ungodly persons. *Sirach* 12:4 says "Give only to the godly and help not a sinner" and verse 5 adds the warning that if one was to help a sinner he "shall receive from the Lord twice as much evil/harm for all the good he has given." So, while it's *conceivable* that the Priest had legitimate reason for not providing assistance, it must be clear that I did not. I simply (and selfishly) wanted to get to the respectable religious event as quickly as possible with no blood, vomit, or other stains on my nice clean clothes.

together for good?" All things? Even this guy passed out back there sprawled all over the sidewalk, vomit on his shirt? Well, that's what I had been taught and that's what this verse seemed to be saying.

Around the same time I had read a sermon on this verse. I've long since forgotten who the writer/preacher was, but I clearly remember what he said, "There are no bad things that can happen. All things, even if they look bad, will somehow be made into good things if only we love God. So that means all things are really good things."⁸ Well, that seemed easy enough.

My nascent theologizing provided a religious rationale for behaviour I now consider abominable: *Oh well, I don't know how but this will all somehow work out. Things will fall into place. All I have to do is love God.* So away I went, zippah-dee-do-dah, down some theological yellow brick road to the religious revival.

Still, I must admit that the question of *how* exactly this was going to happen kept coming back like a half-remembered song which gets stuck in our heads and repeats itself in an endless loop, without surcease. I have never been satisfied with simple answers and, as any of my students will gladly testify, I'm allergic to clichés or spiritual bromides.

My nascent theologizing provided a religious rationale for behaviour I now consider abominable.

The answer I had been given on this verse left a bad taste in my mouth. I worried it like my tongue worries a loose tooth. *How* will all things work out? Do we just click our red heels and wish real hard? Or do we, as the people who claim to have a relationship with God and have the temerity to carry the name of Christ, have some responsibility in working things out? If so what is it? How are we to reconcile the nice words of Romans 8:28 with the Danteish scenes so often in front of us? In the words of Alanis Morissette, "let's fast forward to a few years later."⁹

Revisiting the Verse in 1992

In the Spring of 1992, with many years of ministry experience behind me, I had another encounter with Romans 8:28. It was a year before receiving my Master's degree and two years before the first evening course I taught at SBC. I had just finished one of the most influential courses I ever took in eight

years of post-secondary education: *The Old Testament in the New Testament*.

The heart of this course involved translating Romans 9–11 from Greek to English and, taking this a step further, translating from both the Hebrew Bible itself *and* from the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) every phrase in that section where Paul is either quoting from or seems to be alluding to what we call the Old Testament. That work, combined with the reading of Richard Hays seminal study *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*,¹⁰ transformed my ability to understand the place of Romans in canonical context as well as what it is trying to accomplish in its own right.

There is a difference between an *emic* reading strategy and an *etic* reading strategy.¹¹ An *etic* strategy places a structure, and consequently a reading strategy and interpretation on a text which is not only external to the text but also understood and directed at the needs and questions of a culture *other than that to which the text was originally addressed*. An *emic* strategy reads a text according to its internal structure and in terms of what the indigenous culture would likely have understood from the text. I am convinced that the tendency in Romans studies, until very recently,¹² has been to impose an *etic* interpretation or reading strategy on Romans and to assume that the central issue of the letter is how an individual¹³ can be *saved* or *justified by faith*.

It might not be an exaggeration when N.T. Wright suggests, strongly and convincingly, that the phrase "righteousness of God/God's righteousness," which is a dominant phrase in Romans, has been and continues to be misunderstood particularly because Romans continues to be read through the prism of Luther and the theological "battles" he was facing.¹⁴ According to Wright, an *emic* reading of Romans reveals a substantially different focus than the "justification/sanctification/application" triumvirate found in so many Western outlines of the book.

The main purpose of Romans was to engage in a long wrestling match with Hebrew Scripture concerning the issue of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* (*dikaïosuneî theou*)—the covenant faithfulness of God.¹⁵ In light of the Christ event, and the *apparent* rejection of ethnic Israel,

8 At the time I understandably did not think to document the source of this sophism. Tim Geddert's article "Another Look at Romans 8:28" (unpublished paper, MB Biblical Seminary, 1999) makes it clear, however, that I was not the only one to have heard and been influenced by, if not convinced of, this interpretation.

9 Alanis Morissette, "Hands Clean," on the CD *Under Rug Swept* (Maverick Records, 2002).

10 New Haven: Yale, 1989.

11 I am aware that these are social science terms used primarily in the fields of Anthropology and Sociology. In a personal conversation with the author, however, Dr. Tremper Longman III of Westmont College indicated that it is both appropriate and accurate to use them with reference to questions of reading strategy for ancient documents—particularly ancient documents from a vastly different culture, such as the Bible.

12 The "big bang" of an explosive, dramatic, re-reading and "new perspective" in Pauline studies is usually precisely dated to the publication of E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (SCM Press, 1977).

13 Contemporary Western readings of Biblical texts are notoriously individualistic, whereas the texts themselves are very often plural or communal. A classic example is Philippians 1:6. So many sermons, devotionals, Bible studies, etc. stress this, in an inspirational way, as a promise concerning surety of salvation to *individuals*. The problem with individualistic interpretations of this verse is that ἐν ὑμῶν ("in" or "among you") is *plural*.

14 Wright, N.T. *Romans in a Week*. Regent College Audio Series n.d. Tape # 2263B, Part 1.

15 To illustrate, consider that in both 1:17 and 3:21 NIV tips its theological hand by translating the words in question as an objective genitive; "a righteousness *from* God"—that is a righteousness God gives to us a gift and which thus counts before Him. NASB more properly leaves the Greek genitive ambiguous and forces the interpreter to decide whether the righteousness in question is indeed a gift *from* God or if the reference is to an aspect of His character. This is not mere semantics for it influences interpretation immensely both in particular contexts and regarding the book as a whole. For example, is the latter part of 1:17 telling us that "the righteous will live *ek pisteos* [out of] faith imputed to Him as a gift from God" or does it refer to the faithfulness of God? If the latter, a translation suggesting that "We will live because of the Righteous One's faithfulness" would catch the meaning. In canonical context of course, the faithfulness would involve the keeping of the Promise going as far back as Genesis 12:2–3. It seems to me obvious that reading of Romans along this line would lead us away from individualistic interpretations and toward communal interpretations and praxis, which would be more in keeping with its 1st century context. As Elmer Martens says in his book *God's Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), "Modern [contemporary] man starts with the rights of the individual; the Israelite did not" (66–67).

can it really be said that God has been (and hence will continue to be) faithful to His covenant promises? The section of the letter in which our vexing verse occurs runs from 5:1 to 8:39 (suitably, 8:31–39 is a doxology). If Wright is correct, the gist of this section is as follows (emphasis mine):

This worldwide family is the true Israel and, therefore, the true humanity. And, they are the community (by the Spirit) through whom, and *in* whom, God's purpose for the whole human race is fulfilled. They are the medium and the message of God's work in the world. That purpose is ζωή (resurrection life, Kingdom life). This emphasis is particularly clear in 5:17–18, 6:4. They are also the community *through* whom God's purpose for the whole cosmos will be fulfilled. *The renewal and liberation of the world will be fulfilled through this new humanity, this new race of people.*¹⁶

To put it more simply, the community transformed by God receives God's grace but, instead of clinging and hoarding, passes that grace on by working with God to bring about good (which should be thought of in broader terms than individuals or groups, even though it starts at that level). When these two thoughts (the meaning of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ and the role that God's "new humanity" has in displaying it) are brought together, you no longer get the conclusion that the "righteousness" mentioned in Romans 1:16–17 is the thematic statement of the letter. You get the conclusion that Wright explains in a different context:

The Jewish context of Paul's work makes it certain that by "God's righteousness" Paul means, not a status which God imputes, imparts or otherwise bestows upon humans, but God's own righteousness, meaning by that God's faithfulness to the covenant with Israel, the Abrahamic covenant reaffirmed in

The community transformed by God receives God's grace but, instead of clinging and hoarding, passes that grace on by working with God to bring about good.

Deuteronomy and elsewhere. According to this covenant faithfulness, the God of Israel must somehow not only be true to the covenant promises but also remain impartial, with no favourites, and also not only deal properly with evil but rescue the helpless. This God must, in other words, act as the righteous judge in the cosmic law court. Things must be put to rights... The sense of covenant faithfulness and the sense of things being put to rights, held apart within both reformation and enlightenment thought as "theology and ethics", or "salvation and politics", were not far removed in the mind of a Jew like Paul. Just as the Messiah was destined to be Lord of the world, so, and for the same reasons, God's covenant with Israel had always been intended as the means of putting God's world to rights. When, therefore, God's righteousness was unveiled, the effect would be precisely that the world would receive justice: that rich, restorative, much-to-be-longed-for justice of which the Psalmists had spoken with such feeling.¹⁷

Bringing it All Back Home: A Closer Look at the KJV

Bringing all of this back to my experience as a neophyte evangelistic counselor hurrying to the service, in my haste stepping right over a man passed out on the sidewalk, remember Romans 8:28 as I was memorizing it: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (KJV).

You will notice that this is noticeably different from the Romans 8:28 most people carry into church these days. The NIV says, "And we know that in

all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Please note that most newer editions of NIV have not one, but two footnotes that make clear that there are significant translation issues in this verse. Unfortunately the first note leads us to believe that the alternate translation reflected in KJV is a *manuscript* issue rather than a grammatical one. (The NASB translation and first footnote are very similar to NIV.)

The textual apparatus in the Aland, Black, Martini, Metzger and Wikgren edition of the Greek New Testament make it clear that there is a manuscript discrepancy with a few manuscripts of the Alexandrian family reading συνεργει θεός thereby clarifying θεός (God) and not πάντα (all things) as the agent of the συνεργει (working).¹⁸

For our purposes, what is clear and important is that *neither the KJV nor the NIV translators followed the minority reading* and, consequently, the manuscript question is a red herring for the difference in translation currently under discussion. It might be easier if we have these two translations side by side so that we can see the significant differences at a glance:

Romans 8:28 NASB	Romans 8:28 NIV Marginal Reading
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.	And we know that in all things God works together with those who love Him to bring about what is good—with those who are called according to His purpose.

Why such differences in translation? Bear with me for a brief discussion of grammar. The KJV translators have decided that πάντα ("all things") is the *subject* of the verb συνεργει ("work together"), which means that "all things" is the actor, the agent of the work. It must be admitted that this is grammatically possible, but the gist of

¹⁶ Wright, N.T. *Romans in a Week*. Regent College Audio Series n.d. Tape #2263A, Part 2.

¹⁷ Wright. "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," *Center of Theological Enquiry* www.ctinquiry.org/publications/wright.htm. See also his article "Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans," available at www.ntwrightpage.com. For a two-volume book length treatment, see Horsley, Richard A. *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Trinity Press, 1997) and *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium Interpretatio* (Trinity Press, 2000). A third volume which Horsley co-edited with N.A. Silberman is also available: Horsley and Silberman. *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (Grosset/Putnam, 1997).

¹⁸ J.D.G Dunn quotes Metzger to the effect that "the potential theological awkwardness of reading πάντα as the subject would have been sufficient to encourage an Alexandrian editor to remove the awkwardness by inserting θεός". See Dunn, J. D. G. (2002). *Vol. 38A: Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary (480). Similarly, Tim Geddert writes, "The additional words were probably introduced by a scribe who wanted to make sure that the text was read correctly with "God", not "all things" as the subject of the verb." "Another Look," 2. If so, how dismayed that scribe would be to discover how many times the verse has been read and used the other way in sermons, Bible studies, and even as a pastoral trump card to dodge tough questions of theodicy!

the sentence would then be that there is some deep hidden (and with this wording clearly impersonal) force or magic in the universe that somehow transforms the *bad* pieces of life into good—as if all the puzzle pieces are bad and jagged but when you fit them all together, they are somehow transformed into a good picture.

The belief in magic, or the manipulation of impersonal forces to serve one's own ends, is certainly not alien to the Biblical world. It seems to have been a factor in some of the sectarian writings at Qumran—for example, the brontologion known as 4Q318.¹⁹ According to some scholars a similar belief lies behind some of the mysterious texts in Paul's letters.²⁰

It is certainly clear that φάρμακον (witchcraft, magic, sorceries) is clearly mentioned and condemned in Revelation 9:20-21, 18:23, 21:8 and 22:15, among other places.

Coming back to Romans 8:28, it seems obvious to me that *if* (as that preacher suggested to me in the days of yore) we have a blanket promise that πάντα (all things) is somehow going to bring about good in a situation that looks bad, indeed if “there *are* no bad things,” this leaves me completely off the hook. There is no need nor call for me to be involved personally while I walk away from Oppenheimer Park, stepping over a human being in obvious need and skip down a theological yellow brick road to go to my worship service.

Bringing it all Back Home Part 2: A Closer Look at the NIV

On the other hand, the NIV has decided that πάντα (all things) is *not* the subject of the verb συνεργεῖ (work together). Rather, it is, in fact, the *object*. This means that *God* is the subject, the One who does the work. πάντα (all things) is the material that He works on like a potter works with clay (e.g. Jeremiah 18, Romans 9:21).²¹ So just before the doxology and the knotty argument of chapters 9–11, the focus of Romans 8 is not about magic, a vague hope or a fairy tale wish. It is about a determined God working His purposes in the “ordinary mess of real history.”²² *All things* aren't working together somehow by magic—the God of creation and re-creation is doing the working according to His purpose.

But we are not quite out of the woods yet. If the NIV reading in the main text is correct, you may have noticed that we are still left with a bit of a puzzle. In the comparison of verses above, you may have noticed that NIV has shortened the verb συνεργεῖ from *work together* (KJV, NASB) to just *works*. What has happened to the *together* part? According to this reading, God is the *sole* agent of the work, a reading supported by the NASB despite the fact that that rendition does correctly note that συνεργεῖ should be translated “work together.”²³

It's at this point that we again must pay close attention to the footnotes in the more recent editions of NIV.

The first note inaccurately suggests that the discrepancy in translation is due to manuscript issues as discussed above. The second note correctly makes clear that the grammar of the Greek sentence is polyvalent, open to differing translations which would be grammatically possible. If you refer to the translation comparisons above, you will note that the NIV marginal reading uses συνεργεῖ (work together) to further specify and clarify who is the subject and the agent of the work.

As opposed to KJV and NASB, the NIV marginal reading clarifies that the agent of the work is *not* God alone. The work is done by God *working together with His people* (those who are loved and called). This changes things. This puts me (more correctly, us) squarely back on the hook, and, in Oppenheimer Park, makes it impossible for me to claim obedience to God while at the same time stepping over a guy passed out, bottle still in hand, vomit caked onto his shirt and spilling onto the sidewalk.

Further, and this is where the implications get serious, it makes it impossible for me (us) to be obedient to God while being content with the current sociological conditions in which 50 percent of the Manitoban prison population is Native while Natives compromise only three percent of the total Canadian population.²⁴ It makes it impossible to be content with conditions wherein 46 percent of non-Native offenders are let off with a warning while that number drops to 15 percent when the offender is Native.

The average Native male is three times more likely to end up in jail as to graduate from high school. In fact, only five percent of Natives graduate from high school and 40 percent don't make it as far as Grade 9. Not only that, but young Native Canadians are five times more likely to intentionally kill themselves than their peers in the general population.²⁵

Another social problem area is sexism. In Canada, as of the last census, women were, on the average, paid one-third less than men for equal work. In other words, if a man makes a dollar, an equally qualified, and competent, woman will be paid only 70 cents. There are only three professions in which this dynamic is reversed and women earn more than men: modelling, stripping/exotic dancing, and the sex trade (escort services, massage parlours,

19 A brontologion (*brontos* = “thunder,” *logion* = “word/saying”) is a word or revelation derived from the sound of thunder. It seems clear that within the Qumran community there were mediums who interpreted both the sound of the thunder and the location of the sky from which it came and made decisions based on what “word” they heard. See Eisenman, Robert and Michael Wise. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*. (Element, 1992), particularly chapter 8, “Divination, Magic and Miscellaneous.”

20 For example, Clinton Arnold suggests that Paul is likely battling a superstitious syncretistic group in Colossae who believe in forces both personal and impersonal which directly affect their destiny. The “battle” is evident in behind texts like 2:18 and 2:20. To pursue this idea further, see Arnold, Clinton. *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Baker, 1996). Another example is the possibility that 1 Corinthians 13:1 refers to the gongs and cymbals involved in the pagan Greek worship of Cybele: “If I don't flesh it out with love of God and neighbour, I might as well be worshipping Cybele.”

21 I am convinced that a careful reading of both these texts will show that the reference is to nations/people groups not to individuals and to eschatological purposes not individual circumstances. Dunn writes that, “In context [9:21] this means that he can choose either Jews or Gentiles, not that his predestination is arbitrary,” *Romans* 481. Further discussion on this point is, obviously, outside the scope of this paper.

22 “God at Work in the Ordinary Mess of History” is the title of an informative and provocative evening lecture delivered by Eugene Peterson at Regent College in August 1998. It is available as part of the *Regent College Audio Series*.

23 This seeming contradiction is explained by the fact that NASB uses συνεργεῖ (work together) to refer to πάντα (all things) instead of using it to refer to τῶν θεῶν (God).

24 Ferguson, Will. *Why I Hate Canadians* (Douglas and McIntyre, 1997), 120.

25 *Ibid*. Please note that the statistic regarding suicide is referring to intentional overt acts and not to passive forms of suicide such as “suicide by cop” or even promiscuous deliberately unprotected sex—let alone accidental suicide by means of overdose, etc. Further, note that these statistics are from 1997, although I have not seen any studies which show any marked improvement in these statistics or the conditions which cause them.

prostitution).²⁶

The main question is now in focus: When the theological and sociological stakes are as high as the examples given, how can we decide between these readings? An accurate and reliable guide can often be found by the way these words and sentence structure is used elsewhere in Scripture, particularly by the same writer, so the verse itself gives us a clue as does the rest of Romans.

Research into how this word *συνεργει* (work together), both the noun and the verb forms, is used elsewhere in the New Testament reveals that, “The only way that *συνεργει* is used in the New Testament is when more than one party is “working together...The word is not about making *things* work together, it is about two parties working together.”²⁷ It is well worth noting that the noun form *συνεργος* is used exactly as Geddert describes *within this very letter* (Romans 16:3, 16:9)!

The conclusion is inescapable. Unless we take undue linguistic liberties, Romans 8:28 is *not* about God fitting all things together for our personal benefit, making a pretty picture out of what looks to us like jagged puzzle pieces. Much less is it about “all things” serendipitously working themselves out for the good of some. It is about God working together *with His people* to bring good in the middle of all situations—good, bad, ugly, and indifferent. Further, this verse is not primarily a promise to us that our particular individual circumstances will improve.

The context, especially the doxology, leads in a different direction:

In the context here, where Paul has in view the eschatological climax which God has purposed for “all things,” the *ἀγαθόν* will have an eschatological reference (cf. 14:16): the Christian is not dependent on the Micawberish hope that something will “turn up”; his confidence rests rather on the outworking of God’s purpose *through* all the contradiction and frustration of the present to its intended end.²⁸

So What?

The point of what might seem like just another Bible scholar prattling on with textual minutiae and nit-picking is actually very street level—even if that street is lower East Hastings, the street with the highest HIV rate in North America, arguably the most dangerous stretch of street in Canada.

Christian ethics, the way you and I treat not only each other but *also* the community around us (especially “the least of these”), is anticipation and modeling, in the present, of the coming Kingdom and that future rule. How we respond reflects on the character of the Father we claim to belong to and represent in the world.

Although it is often seen and done this way, this can not be a passive, defensive thing with us huddling behind the walls of our churches and other Christian fortresses, perhaps darting out now and again on a hit and run preaching or service mission. It’s portrayed consistently in the New Testament as an active process of going out and representing God in the dark world.

While we (i.e., those who love God and are called according to God’s purposes) *may* at times also be the beneficiaries of “God and others” working together, this verse is not primarily about the benefits we receive from God’s action on our behalf.²⁹ Contrary to popular religion, the *κλητοι* (calling/election) of God is not “just” for salvation, nor is it just for “blessing” and privilege. The “calling” of God entails the joyous responsibility of joining in on His work and being part of the accomplishing of His purpose.

Romans 8:28, then, is a rebuke which needs to be taken back to the streets to once again beg to differ with injustice and oppression.

Anabaptist theologian John Toews sums up this line of thinking: “*Those who love God*, a phrase usually combined with *and keep His commandments*, is a characteristic description of pious people in Judaism...God’s purpose and election are two sides of the same coin.”³⁰ When we live a life of subversive worship,³¹ it’s not that we are trying to avoid this or that behaviour or sin in order to look good or even in order to *be* good. It is nothing less than the beginning of our taking dominion. We begin to reclaim the Oppenheimer parks of this world and, more importantly, the shattered image-bearers therein. His kingdom begins to come and His will is being done among us (and within us) as it is in Heaven.³²

Robert Jewett puts it this way: “When humans are transformed, the earth itself will be restored as well. Responsibility for the soil will replace exploitation of the soil. Destruction of the forests and the waterways of the earth will be replaced by transformation, as the entire world begins to reflect its intended glory with the rightwising [sic] of humans.”³³

Romans 8:28, then, is a rebuke which needs to be freed from the inside of the sympathy cards where we’ve long since tucked it away and forgotten about it, and taken back to the streets to once again beg to differ with injustice and oppression in any of their protean forms. ☹

26 Wurtzel, Elizabeth. *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* (Doubleday, 1999).

27 Geddert, “Another Look,” 2.

28 Dunn, *Romans*, 480.

29 Geddert, “Another Look,” 3. As Eugene Peterson notes, “The great weakness of North American spirituality is that it’s all about *us*: fulfilling our potential, getting in on the blessings of God, expanding our influence, finding our gifts getting a handle on principles by which we can get an edge over the competition.” *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Eerdmans, 2005), 335.

30 Toews, John E. *Romans*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Herald Press, 2004), 226. Readers are asked to also take note of the fact that on page 226, and in his discussion on chapter 9, Toews concurs that the language of “calling” and “predestination” have to do not with individuals but with nations/people groups. The importance of this for understanding these chapters, the letter as a whole, and the doctrine of election can hardly be overestimated.

31 What Romans 12:1–2 calls *την λογικην λατρειαν ὑμων* (“your spiritual worship” or “your reasonable religion/act of service”). The phrase is intended to explain what has gone before. It is good to be aware also that the phrase “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” in 12:1 contains a word play indicating that this renewal is precisely the reverse of the “darkened mind” spoken of in Romans 1:28.

32 In a memorable line Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmatt paraphrase a portion of Colossians 1 to say, “Because we are not subservient to the Empire but subjects of the Kingdom of God’s beloved Son, we have the audacity to say to the darkness, *‘we beg to differ.’*” I believe that this idea and phraseology captures Paul’s intent in Romans quite accurately as well. See Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia Keesmatt, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (IVP, 2004) and Wright, N.T. “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire” (as noted above).

33 Jewett, *Romans*, 98.

My Life as a Mennocostal: A Personal and Theological Narrative



Martin William Mittelstadt

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As a follower of Jesus Christ, my path reflects the primary source of my ecclesial journey: my childhood on a Pentecostal pew, in a Pentecostal home, in a Pentecostal pastorate, and now in a Pentecostal university. At the same time, I am more and more aware of the impact of other Christian traditions upon my faith. In fact, in recent years I began intentional exploration of this multi-faceted dynamic.

I know that I am not alone in this. A journey of diverse encounter seems inevitable in our highly connected and complex world. I am also convinced that exploration is, in fact, a good thing. I strive to learn and live the Christian faith not only as a member of my particular tradition but of the church universal filled with many ethnicities and traditions from around the world.

In this essay, I desire to facilitate such an encounter. I wish to initiate intentional discussion of the inter-Christian theology, values, praxis and witness of two traditions within Christianity, specifically, the convergence of Mennonites and Pentecostals.¹

First, in classic Pentecostal and Mennonite form, I begin not with propositional data but with my own personal narrative.² As I reflect upon my Pentecostal journey, I

recount the profound impact of the Mennonite tradition in the shaping of my faith. In doing so, I demonstrate that my narrative need not be a surprise. Second, and on the heels of my personal narrative, I share an unforeseen theological discovery that launches intentional pursuit of such convergence. Finally, I establish specific commonalities ranging from ethos to hermeneutics, from Christology to the nature of the Christian life. I

trust such openness may lead to further dialogue, community, and cooperation between our shared traditions.³

Personal Narrative

I begin with select examples of my encounter with Mennonites. I grew up in a blended-extended family with aunts, uncles, and cousins from Mennonite, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. I not only enjoyed listening to adult discussion of tongues, baptism/membership, and peace but also debated with my cousins about the superiority of our own traditions. Of course, I would be remiss not to include *Tante Gretel's* German Mennonite creations—*kommst borscht, kielke, wareneki, plumi moos, and rollkuchen*.

Beyond my family connections, I cherish childhood adventures at the annual VBS at the neighborhood Mennonite church, Crestview Fellowship, part of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. As a typical Pentecostal teenager, I attended my quota of Pentecostal youth camps and conventions. At a summer camp before my senior year in high school, I met a special young lady named Evelyn Doerksen, a fourth-generation

Pentecostal from Niverville, Manitoba, in the heart of the Mennonite belt.⁴ While dating Evelyn, I became more familiar with the region and grew increasingly curious about Mennonite faith and culture.

After completion of my undergrad degree at a Pentecostal college, I enrolled at Winnipeg Theological Seminary (now Providence Seminary), affectionately described by students as a non-denominational seminary in the Mennonite tradition. Years later, following my doctoral residency at Marquette University in Milwaukee, I returned to southern Manitoba to pastor a Pentecostal church in Morden/Winkler.

Along the way, I built many friendships with Mennonite students, pastors, and locals. While ministering in Morden, a door opened to teach a number of courses at the now defunct Winkler Bible Institute (no connection!). Because of the increasing collegiality among various ministers and churches, I also taught a number of distance education courses for Canadian Mennonite University.

Finally, I share of my first trip to Messiah College. I attended the recent conference on the integration of faith

Men•no•cos•tal \me-ne,kos-tē\
n: a blending of Mennonite and Pentecostal

1 To facilitate such discussion, I recommend Richard Foster's *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

2 Early in my academic career, exegetical and theological inquiry trumped all personal experience. Today, Pentecostals and Mennonites certainly benefit from emerging methodological approaches that include theology as autobiography.

3 Historically Pentecostals have frowned upon ecumenism. While criticisms against Pentecostals include arrogance and elitism, Pentecostal insiders tend to be worried about compromise. This seems to be true of Mennonites as well. However, note the new dialogue between Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) and Mennonite Church USA.

4 Niverville is approximately 30 miles south of Winnipeg. Some 7,000 DGR Mennonites migrated to southern Manitoba in the 1870s. According to a 1991 census, 66,000 Manitobans identify themselves as Mennonite (John J. Friesen, "Mennonites" in *The Encyclopedia of Manitoba* [Great Plains Publications: Winnipeg, 2007], 446). As numbers continue to increase across this belt, I offer a conservative estimate that Mennonite churches in this belt outnumber all other churches three to one.

and Christian scholarship hosted by and based upon the work of Rhonda and Douglas Jacobsen.⁵ As I sat through sessions with sizable Anabaptist majorities, I remember being flooded with memories of my roots in southern Manitoba. The conference fostered further desire to wrestle with my Pentecostal identity in light of Mennonite theology and encounter.

Evelyn and I have now been married for 22 years. We continue to enjoy fellowship with Mennonite relatives and friends. With family and friends named Doerksen, Toews, Wiebe, Sawatsky, Friesen, Neufeld, Loepky, Klassen, and Peters, it was only a matter of time until I would intentionally embrace the journey. I remain a passionate Pentecostal, but I also find that my faith resonates more and more with Mennonites. Whereas twenty years ago I might try to convert a Mennonite to Pentecostalism, today I reflect the blending of the two. If I could coin a word for this blending, it might be *Mennocostal*. While not in the dictionary, I assure you it's a word; I am one.

Theological Narrative

During my seminary years, professors introduced me to the writings of an author who would later change my life. Years after reading *The Politics of Jesus* by John Howard Yoder, I rediscovered this volume and felt compelled to read Yoder more extensively.⁶ Following Yoder's death in 1997, I started to follow the various attempts to locate his theological impact upon contemporary Christianity. While reading one such theological biography, I stumbled upon

an obscure quote by Yoder:

Within or beside apostate churches, He raises up in every age new movements of protest, witness, and fellowship. These "free churches" are marked by the duress which gave them birth: socially unbalanced, theologically unbalanced, poor, strangely structured, given to false starts and exaggeration—and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

He continues:

Pentecostalism is in our century the closest parallel to what Anabaptism was in the sixteenth: expanding so vigorously that it bursts the bonds of its own thinking about church order, living from the multiple gifts of the spirit in the total church while holding leaders in great respect, unembarrassed by the language of the layman and the aesthetic tastes of the poor, mobile, zealously single-minded. We can easily note the flaws in Pentecostal theology, organization, or even ethics:—very similar, by the way, to the faults of the early Quakers and Anabaptists, or of the apostolic churches—but meanwhile they are out being the Church.⁷

This statement proved to be eye opening and led to my intentional pursuit of the convergence between the Pentecostal and Mennonite traditions.

Whereas twenty years ago I might try to convert a Mennonite to Pentecostalism, today I reflect the blending of the two. If I could coin a word for this blending, it might be *Mennocostal*.

I searched the scholarly literature but found few comparative analyses.⁸ On the contrary, from the Mennonite standpoint, note the subtitle of Mark Thiessen Nation's theological biography on Yoder published 40 years after the statement above: *Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*.

Similarly, William Klassen echoes Nation: "Yoder opened up the world of the Anabaptists...to the ecumenical world."⁹ But there remains little or no interaction with Pentecostals; Pentecostals remain on the sidelines. While I am excited about Anabaptist, Evangelical, and Catholic exchange, the time is right for intentional conversation between Mennonites and Pentecostals.

In light of the Yoder citation above, German sociologist Max Weber provides a helpful point of departure. Weber argues that movements tend to begin with a spontaneous charismatic impulse until in the second generation the charismatic elements become routinized, generally falling short of first generation freedom and spontaneity. Movements inevitably journey toward institutionalization in an attempt to establish doctrinal and pastoral boundaries, only to suffer further routinization of the charisma.¹⁰

Both Pentecostals and Mennonites struggle with this tension. On the Mennonite front, Nation again summarizes Yoder's lament concerning the current status of the Mennonite tradition: "By and large the Mennonite Church is often more concerned to defend its ethnic identity and retain its own children than it is to be a 'believer's church' or to embrace the Anabaptist agenda of mission and social change."¹¹ The late Rodney Sawatsky echoes this Weberian tension:

Our challenge is not to decry institutionalizing as inherently less Anabaptist or less Christian; rather, it is to keep our institutions and our leaders faithful to their ever evolving mission in the second or twenty-second generation. The Holy Spirit surely is not limited to the first generation. The charisma ever leads us into new truth. Today we need a theology for the second generation, with much less said about restituting the first, which is impossible anyway.¹²

Such statements surely ring true for contemporary Pentecostals. Now entering only the second century of

5 Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, eds., *Scholarship & Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

6 Originally published in 1972, see the revised edition entitled *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

7 John Howard Yoder, "Marginalia" *Concern for Christian Renewal* 15 (1967): 78, quoted by Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 45–6.

8 See Mathew S. Clark, "Pentecostalism's Anabaptist Roots: Hermeneutical Implications" in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler* (eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies. JPTS 24. London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 194–211. Clark traces Pentecostal origins to the nineteenth Holiness movement, launched by John Wesley. Clark links Wesley's inspiration to the Anabaptists thereby providing a bridge to Pentecostalism (195).

9 William Klassen, "John Howard Yoder and the Ecumenical Church," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 16 (Spring 1998), 77–81.

10 This weberian sense also occurs in Rodney Sawatsky, "Leadership, Authority and Power," *Mennonite Quarterly* 71 (1997), 441.

11 Nation, *Yoder*, 50.

12 Sawatsky, "Leadership," 442.

existence, Pentecostals also crave the fervor and passion of the first generation: "Give me that old time religion," "every generation needs their own Pentecost," and "we are only one generation away from extinction." Swiss Pentecostal theologian Walter Hollenweger captures this tension as Pentecostals long for charismatic freedom in the midst of increasing institutionalization. The answer is

not the book, but the parable,
not the thesis, but the testimony,
not the dissertation, but the dance,
not concepts, but banquets,
not a system of thinking, but stories and songs,
not definitions, but descriptions,
not arguments, but transformed lives.¹³

For Mennonites and Pentecostals, this kind of tension encourages serious reflection. I believe we can learn from each other. But before going any further, a brief synopsis of the core theology and praxis of these traditions is in order.

Pentecostal and Mennonite Convergence

Historically, Mennonites trace their roots beyond the Reformation that began under the leadership of Martin Luther and John Calvin. However, the trumpet calls of the Reformers that "the Just Shall Live by Faith" would not suffice. According to Anabaptists, the direct ancestors of the Mennonites, the Reformers fall short in their Reformation. First, unlike the magisterial Reformers (and Roman Catholics), Anabaptists argue that the Church be comprised only of believers entering by believer's baptism.

This baptismal position reflects Anabaptist priority to the Scriptures above the authority of civil government whenever the two come into conflict. The Scriptures provide the community with answers to questions of faith and life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, whereas the Reformers do not emphasize the teachings of Jesus as paradigmatic, Anabaptist theology insists upon a daily call to love not only a neighbour but also an enemy. This constitutes the core distinction of Jesus' radical call to discipleship with non-violence.

In short, like the Anabaptists, Pentecostals might be summarized as a "radical, Jesus-centered, martyr movement."¹⁴ Pentecostals emerge as a reactionary movement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

While scholars continue to debate the origin of the movement, sociologist Michael Wilkinson provides a compelling argument for the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles under the leadership of African-American preacher William Seymour.

Wilkinson coins the notion of Pentecostal "Azusa-ization," a process whereby Pentecostals look for their identity in relation to this event.¹⁵ In other words, regardless of the multiple possibilities for the origins of the movement, Pentecostals consistently find a model by way of Azusa.

Pentecostals embrace Azusa's post-conversion encounter with the Holy Spirit (specifically Spirit baptism and the gifts of the Spirit). Jesus, the consummate man of the Spirit, serves not only as an example, but also pours out this same Spirit upon

Like the Anabaptists, Pentecostals might be summarized as a "radical, Jesus-centered, martyr movement."

the church. New and fresh life of the Spirit coupled with strong restoration impulses serves as the foundation for radical Christianity driven by a passion for evangelism at any cost.¹⁶ While the historical journeys of these respective movements evolve separately, I turn now to their similar impulses.

1) Counter-cultural Movements

Mennonite historians and theologians offer innumerable illustrations of the counter-cultural nature of their tradition. Menno Simons writes: "The entire evangelical Scriptures teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world."¹⁷ So also Johann Loserth: "More radically than any other party for church reformation the Anabaptist strove to follow the footsteps of the church of the first century and to renew unadulterated original Christianity."¹⁸

Similarly, the early Pentecostals took pride in their counter-cultural mission. Their mandate based upon strong links to the Holiness movement and an intense eschatological urgency produces an unwavering passion for the lost. As people of the Spirit, early Pentecostals often labeled "holy rollers" and "chandelier swingers" certainly found themselves on the fringes of the established church and society—a people "in the world but not of the world."

These counter-cultural visions contrast with the Evangelical propensity toward assimilation. Unlike Pentecostals and Mennonites, Evangelicals desire to be the dominant culture. I noticed this particularly as I moved stateside. Evangelical proclamation often fuses the good news of Jesus with an American Dream, thereby producing a political Christianity fueled by overzealous nationalism. Christianity often looks more like a commercial for a *gospel Americana* than a radical community of Jesus followers.

13 Walter Hollenweger, "Pentecostals: Article, Research Centers, Bibliographies and Selected Literature" http://www.epcra.ch/articles_pdf/Pentecostals.PDF (p. 7).

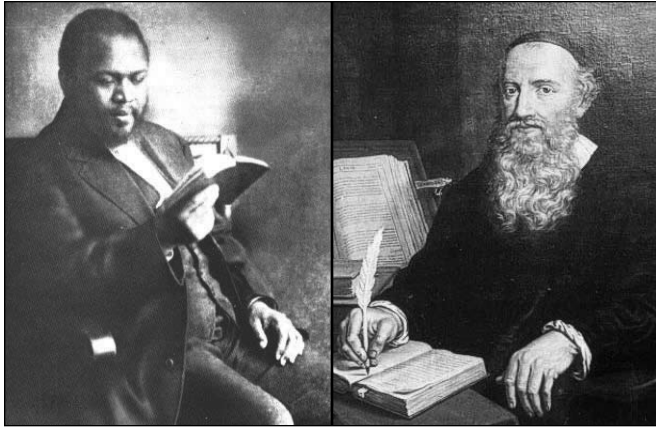
14 See Clark, "Pentecostalism's Anabaptist Roots," 204. Unlike Anabaptist history, Clark refers to a Pentecostal martyr motif as "sacrificial, urgent witnessing, missionary." This resonates with my findings in *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (JPTS 26. London: T & T Clark, 2004) and "Spirit and Suffering in Contemporary Pentecostalism: The Lukan Epic Continues" in *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent* (ed. Steven Studebaker. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

15 Michael Wilkinson, "Religion and Global Flows" in *Religion, Globalization and Culture* (ed. Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman; Boston: Brill Academic, 2007), 375–389. This view certainly reflects the emergence of North American Pentecostalism.

16 Since both traditions are far from homogenous, I am aware of the danger of such narrow definitions. I proceed with the premise that our traditional identities may be benefit mutually through analysis of our similarities. Again, I want to highlight the shared loss felt by Pentecostals and Mennonites due to an uneasy relationship with Evangelicals. Pentecostals are hardly Evangelicals plus the Spirit and Mennonites are certainly more than pacifist Evangelicals.

17 Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956) 679.

18 Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision (Text, 1944)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved 13 March 2008. <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A534.html>



William Joseph Seymour, an initiator of the Pentecostal movement, and Menno Simons, Anabaptist religious leader whose followers became known as Mennonites.

From the first generation to the current generation, Pentecostals continue passionate pursuit and extension of first century Christianity. This restitution of the New Testament church also resonates with Mennonites.

Yoder laments this ever-increasing seduction. In contrast to Christianity, Yoder traces Christendom to the alliance of church and state under the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine, thereby creating the official (or unofficial) religion of the West.¹⁹ The tumultuous history of Christianity reflects the ongoing attraction of Constantinianism.

Following in the steps of the sixteenth century Reformers, contemporary Evangelicals find the lure of Constantinian power tempting.²⁰ While there remains much to appreciate within Evangelicalism, Pentecostals and Mennonites must guard against such patriotic and nationalistic proclivities.

In spite of counter-cultural origins, Pentecostals and Mennonites are not immune to this temptation.²¹

2) Pentecostal and Mennonite Primitivism

Grant Wacker writes: “The genius of the pentecostal movement lay in its ability to hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in productive tension,” namely primitivism and pragmatism.²² For Wacker, primitivism does not refer to a primitive faith or praxis but rather a return to an original plan, to first and fundamental ideals.²³ Pentecostals strive not only to capture “lightning in a bottle” but to keep it there decade after decade.²⁴

The notion of primitivism resonates with Pentecostal attraction to Acts, a constant desire to recreate and continue the apostolic church. William Seymour, presumably chief editor of the Azusa Street Paper *The Apostolic Faith*, introduces the inaugural newsletter in September 1906 with the headline, “PENTECOST HAS COME” and follows with a lead article entitled, “Los Angeles Being Visited by a Revival of Bible Salvation and Pentecost as Recorded in the Book of Acts.”

Approximately seventy years later, the refrain remains the same. In the *Pentecostal Testimony*, the official organ of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Dr. Karel Marek entitles his article “Acts Chapter 29” with a subtitle: “In case you hadn’t noticed recently there are only 28 chapters recorded in the Book of Acts in your Bible.”²⁵

His opening paragraph begins with a vintage Pentecostal exhortation: “I’ve frequently heard of churches with a desire to ‘write’ Acts chapter 29. Is it not the dream of every preacher? Is this not what the world needs to see?”²⁶ From the first generation to the current generation, Pentecostals continue passionate pursuit and extension of first century Christianity.

This restitution of the New Testament church also resonates with Mennonites. According to Franklin H. Littell, Anabaptists see the Early Church as the age of heroes and strive to gather and disciple a true church based upon the apostolic pattern. Littell envisions continuity in order “to relive in studied fashion” the New Testament in all of its phases.²⁷ More poignantly, C. Henry

19 See Yoder, *Politics*, 17, 234. For excellent resources and analysis of the complex notion of Constantinianism and Christendom, see Craig A. Carter’s *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). I recommend chapter 6 entitled “The Heresy of Constantinianism.” Also J. Shuman, “Pentecost and the End of Patriotism: A Call for the Restoration of Pacifism among Pentecostal Christians,” *JPT* 9 (1996): 53–69. I should also point out that Clark (“Pentecostalism’s Anabaptist Roots”) suggests a primitivistic motif in Wesley based upon a desire to return to a pre-Constantinian church (196).

20 I recommend Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) and Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

21 Russell Spittler first suggests “the evangelization of the Assemblies of God” (“A Celebration of Sovereignty,” *Agora* 5 [summer 1981]: 13–14) aptly cited by Gary B. McGee, “More Than Evangelical: The Challenge of the Evolving Identity of the Assemblies of God” in *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (eds., David A. Roozen and James Nieman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 35–44. McGee also points to the two way nature of this encounter. While Pentecostals continue in the process of “evangelicalization,” Evangelicals (and broader Christianity) are also experiencing a parallel “pentecostalization” (41). On the Mennonite side, see Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way: Conversations about Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980); Bruce Guenther, “Living With the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism Among Mennonites in Canada” in *Aspects of Evangelical Experience* (ed. George Rawlyk. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997) pps 223–240; David L. Weaver-Zercher “A Modest (Though Not Particularly Humble) Claim for Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition” in Jacobsen & Jacobsen, *Scholarship*, pp. 103–117.

22 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 10.

23 *Ibid*, 12.

24 *Ibid*, 10. Wacker cites Wheaton College sociologist James Mathisen (Personal Conversation, March 1993). Mathisen suggests this idea is central to most religious movements and Wacker utilizes it for Pentecostal identity.

25 Karel Marek, “Acts 29” *Pentecostal Testimony* 70 (1989): 24–25.

26 *Ibid*.

27 Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Hartford: American Society of Church History, 1952), 50.

Smith asserts “the whole movement was an attempt to reproduce as literally as possible the primitive apostolic church in its original purity and simplicity and restore Christianity.”²⁸

At the same time, as Roland Bainton notes, “If there is no accommodation [to culture], Christianity is unintelligible and cannot spread.”²⁹ Indeed, Pentecostals and Mennonites must wrestle with the tension between primitivism and acculturation. While proponents of both traditions strive to live as disciples and pilgrims, as strangers in the values of the world, the temptation to forego this ethos looms large with the ensuing result: “If there is too much accommodation it will spread, but not longer be Christianity.”³⁰ When healthy, these traditions find the foundation for their respective counter-cultural and primitivistic worldviews in their reading of the Scriptures.

3) Interpretation of the Scriptures

According to Charismatic Catholic Peter Hocken, “Pentecostalism represents a protest for Spirit against a powerless and largely cerebral Protestantism, in which attachment to the Word was not evidently accompanied by the vitality of the Spirit.”³¹ This statement rings true for Pentecostals and Mennonites. Their hermeneutical approaches animate their respective pursuit of primitivism. While both traditions embrace with Evangelicals the call to conversion, Mennonites and Pentecostals share

Pentecostals and Mennonites may not share the same transformational language, but they walk by way of a shared biblical methodology.

a unique methodological approach based upon a similar reading to the Scriptures.

Interpretative method among Mennonites furthers the developments founded by the Reformers. Mennonites lament the establishment of any church unable to produce spiritual and moral development of its followers. Instead, they cultivate an alternative actualization of Christianity beyond mere regeneration, holiness, and love primarily as a matter of intellect and doctrinal belief.

Speaking about the Scriptures, Kenneth Davis asserts: Anabaptists “were not primarily concerned about theories of inspiration and inerrancy. Rather they accepted it as an authentic reflection of Jesus and asked what it would mean to obey it.”³² The Mennonite refrain *Nachfolge Christi* calls for a radical discipleship, namely, a faith that mirrors the life of Christ. In the words of Hans Deck, “No man can know Christ unless he follows after him in life.”³³ Similarly, Yoder insists “the Christian life is not a matter of rules, definable once for all and for

everyone, but of constantly living under the leading of God. The Bible’s prohibitions show us the minimum, not the maximum level of obedience.”³⁴ Rigorous exegesis does not merely posture the believer for intellectual assent to the gospel but also for a transformed life.

Pentecostals and Mennonites may not share the same transformational language, but they walk by way of a shared biblical methodology. Consider Pentecostal theologian Terry L. Cross:

While Pentecostals may share many theological tenets in common with other Christians, we have experienced God in ways others do not confess. Rather than viewing theology as a description of our distinctives, we need to understand the all-encompassing difference which our experience of God through His Spirit... We may be evangelical in that we hold to the common truths of the faith handed down for generations, but we are not just evangelicals who speak in tongues! We are a people invaded by the Spirit, knocked off our horses as was Saul (Acts 9); therefore, we cannot think, live, or write as if this experience of the living God were peripheral.³⁵

Cross remarks elsewhere:

Theology, therefore, can no longer be left out in the deep freeze of the intellectual life, pretending that emotions and experience have no impact on its work. Theology is a deeply passionate and experiential way of knowing; certainly Pentecostals carry no shame in this.³⁶

At the beginning of this new century, Pentecostals may now be experiencing their most positive turning point for a sustainable interpretative method due to the recent migration of literary/narrative criticism from the humanities into biblical studies. In fact, possibly more than any other contemporary tradition, Pentecostals may now articulate a technical exegetical method utilized informally since the origin of the movement at the turn of the twentieth century.

Pentecostals have long been aware that the power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed through orality—in witnessing, telling, and hearing the stories of God’s mighty love and actions—otherwise not possible through mere theological argument.³⁷ Accordingly, Pentecostals like Mennonites counterbalance a propositional theology and

28 C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Third edition, revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn. Newton, Mennonite Publication Office, 1950), 21.

29 Roland H. Bainton, “The Enduring Witness,” *Mennonite Life* 9 (April 1954) 89.

30 Ibid.

31 Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the Twentieth Century Outpouring of the Spirit* (Guildford, Surrey, U.K.: Eagle, 1994), 156. See also Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

32 Kenneth R. Davis, “The Origins of Anabaptism: Ascetic and Charismatic Elements Exemplifying Continuity and Discontinuity”, in *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism* (ed. M. Liehard; Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 37.

33 See Nation, *Yoder*, 26.

34 Yoder, “The Respectable Worldliness,” *Christian Living* (January 1995): 48.

35 Terry L. Cross, “The Rich Feast of Theology,” *JPT* 16 (2000), 33–34.

36 Cross, “A Proposal to Break the Ice: What Can Pentecostal Theology Offer Evangelical Theology?” *JPT* 18 (2002): 44–73.

37 Consider the following correspondence between Michael Dowd and Assemblies of God scholar Jerry Camery-Hoggart (Personal letter, July 23, 1985) cited in Dowd, “Contours of a Narrative Pentecostal Theology and Practice” (*Society for Pentecostal Studies Seminar Paper*, 1985), 16: “Pentecostals have been doing narrative theology for years although without the added dimension of critical self-reflection. Hence there is a critical need for hermeneutical theorizing along these lines. And narrative theology as it is developing outside of Pentecostalism may often provide helpful vocabulary and criteria of evaluation as we become self-conscious about what we have for so long done naturally...With the discovery of narrative theology we are suddenly on the cutting edge of the contemporary theological scene” (July 23, 1985).

hermeneutic with one that is more experiential, imaginative, story-based and Spirit-led.

While Pentecostals continue to draw insight from historical-critical approaches, these tools offer only pre-interpretive work. Pentecostals find the charge of the Christian story and of individual biblical stories not primarily in dissection, but in their ability to grab attention, capture the imagination, and so draw in and change the reader.

By drawing upon the emerging narrative methodologies, Pentecostals proclaim that propositional truth cannot report the whole truth. Narrative approaches to scripture create expectations for future encounters with God helping the believing community transform God's "Great Story" into "our story."³⁸

Finally, the apparent triumph of literary analysis does not leave Pentecostals immune to challenges from other academic or ecclesial communities. Pentecostal Paul Elbert, for example, in his dialogue with members of the Evangelical Theological Society, observes that:

Historicity, not narrative theology and pneumatology, has dominated Evangelical scholarship in Acts. And this is, of course a proper and important enterprise. But if it becomes an exclusive vision, the interpretation of Paul (dispensational and otherwise) can unduly overshadow the Christian tradition, description, and practice as portrayed by Luke.³⁹

In a footnote to this quotation Elbert makes a bold observation concerning the practical implications for Evangelical conclusions: "We believe that the events of Acts happened, we just don't want them to happen to us." While conservative Evangelicals fight

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alongside Pentecostals in defense of the historical reliability of the Lukan narratives, as Pentecostals read the Scriptures, the expectation persists that these same events ought to occur among contemporary Christians. In sum, as counter-cultural primitivists, both Pentecostals and Mennonites demand transformation based upon the rigorous teachings of the Scriptures.

4) Interpretation—Who is Jesus?

The narrative based theology of Mennonites and Pentecostals leads naturally to Christology, the foundation of all Christian theology. Pentecostals and Mennonites, however, differ from other traditions by their care to correlate Jesus' death and resurrection with his life and teaching. For example, whereas Evangelicals declare the necessity of confession to Jesus as Saviour, they do not place the same emphasis upon Jesus' stated ideals and the embodiment of his life.⁴⁰ Yoder captures this distinction:

Jesus was not just a moralist whose teachings had some political implications; he was not primarily a teacher of spirituality whose public ministry was unfortunately seen in a political light; he was not just a sacrificial lamb preparing for his immolation, or a God-Man whose divine status calls us to disregard his humanity. Jesus was, in his divinely mandated

prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships. His baptism is the inauguration and his cross is the culmination of that new regime in which his disciples are called to share.⁴¹

So also J. Denny Weaver stress on the ethical implications of the Jesus story: "narrative identifies Jesus in a way which makes discipleship an inherent dimension of identifying with Jesus."⁴² Yoder continues, "Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to 'be like Jesus.'"⁴³

Similarly, Pentecostals look to Jesus not only as the sacrificial saviour, but as the consummate miracle worker, healer, and exorcist. Early Pentecostals confessed Jesus as "Savior, Baptizer, Healer and Soon Coming King," the subject of their faith and the master to be followed and obeyed.⁴⁴

Thus Pentecostals seeking a model for the life of the Spirit begin with the life of Jesus, the paradigmatic man of the Spirit. As Luke describes the Spirit-led apostles in the book of Acts, so also contemporary Pentecostals seek power not from within themselves but from the Spirit of God, the same Spirit Jesus himself receives from the Father and now pours out upon his followers (Acts 2:33).

In short, the life of the Spirit mirrors the life of Jesus (Acts 1:1). As Pentecostals desire to continue Jesus' signs and wonders, the kingdom of God is manifest and God's love poured out through human agency. Note this passion as expressed by way of hymnody among the early Pentecostals. The following favourites reflect the normativity of Jesus' life:

To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus! My desire—to be like Him!

All thru life's journey from earth to glory, My desire—to be like Him.

38 See John Goldingay, "Biblical Story and the Way It Shapes Our Story," *JEPTA* 17 (1997): 6.

39 Paul Elbert, "Pentecostal/Charismatic Themes in Luke-Acts at the Evangelical Theological Society: The Battle of Interpretative Method" *JPT* 12.2 (2004): 207.

40 See Chris K. Huebner, "Mennonites and Narrative Theology: The Case of John Howard Yoder," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 16 (Spring 1998): 15–38.

41 Yoder, *Politics*, 52. He cites the contrary position of Reinhold Niebuhr: "The Good News of the Gospel is not the law that we ought to love one another. The good news... is that there is a resource of divine mercy." Yoder follows with a summary of such a position: "Jesus did not come to teach a way of life; most of his guidance is not original. His role is that of Savior, and for us to need a Savior presupposes that we do not live according to his stated ideal" (18).

42 J. Denny Weaver, "Narrative Theology in an Anabaptist-Mennonite Context," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 12 (1994): 172–73.

43 Yoder, *Politics*, 131.

44 Aimee Semple McPherson founded the (International) Church of the Foursquare Gospel upon these cardinal doctrines descriptive of Jesus. Pentecostal bodies such as the Church of God in Christ and Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) hold to a fivefold gospel that includes Jesus as Sanctifier.

And

*Breathe on Me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,*

*That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.*⁴⁵

The words of these songs assert that the meaning of the incarnation is lost if a fusion of Jesus' life and teaching is not normative. Again, while Jesus as Lord and Saviour was and is the most precious insight of the Reformation, for Mennonites and Pentecostals he is more. Jesus' life and teaching serves as the model for the transformation of the individual believer and society.

5) Nationalism and Pacifism

To the surprise of no one, Mennonite ideals point clearly to the rejection of nationalism. As noted above, a primary distinctive of Mennonite identity refuses the nationalistic pursuits of the Magisterial Reformers.

Yoder represents such a position with his refutation of the Constantinian

shift that results in a fusion of the church with the ruling political regime of the day. So while the sixteenth century Reformers called for radical challenges to Roman Catholicism, they failed to disengage themselves from the predominant nationalism of the time. Instead, the Reformers remained entangled in the various quests for power through rising nation states.

According to the Anabaptists, the complexities of Reformation nationalism resulted in the marginalization of Jesus' call to radical discipleship. Mennonites contrast the inability of the Reformers to separate church and state with an alternative church that resists the temptation to run the world, to make history turn out right, but live faithfully as a witness in and to the world.⁴⁶

While the earliest Pentecostals rejected nationalism based primarily upon their pacifist ideals, a number of leading figures addressed the

underlying issue of allegiance to a nation. When referring passionately to Scriptures such as Matthew 22:21 and Philippians 3:20, early leaders associated nationalism with abomination, prostitution, and fanaticism.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the strong restoration impulse of early Pentecostals made allegiance to a nation superfluous. Hymns like *This World is not My Home* and *I'll Fly Away* express the incompatibility of eschatological urgency and allegiance to nation.

However, as the years pass, many Pentecostals begin to entertain nationalist tendencies. According to numerous scholars, such Pentecostal leanings may be linked to a hasty marriage to Evangelicalism. Several Pentecostal denominations joined the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals in 1940.⁴⁸

The nationalist tendencies of Evangelicals certainly influence Pentecostals with increasing escalation. Consider the words of early NAE president Harold John Ockenga at the first constitutional convention:

I believe that the United States of America has been assigned a destiny comparable to that of ancient Israel which was favored, preserved, endowed, guided, and used by God. Historically, God has prepared this nation... as no government except Israel has ever been... and with an enlightenment in the minds of the average citizen which is the climax of social development.⁴⁹

The cumulative effects of a waning eschatological urgency, the lure of acceptance by the Evangelical communities, and the loss of pacifist roots make an overzealous nationalism attractive. Today, while the vision of Pentecostals varies only slightly from their forefathers, loyalty to a nation rests upon the individual conscience of the believer. However, while the church speaks officially of citizenship in heaven, an underlying current of nationalistic fervor continues to increase.⁵⁰

The shared pacifist heritage of Mennonites and Pentecostals flows out of a rejection of nationalism. While the rich pacifist heritage of Mennonites is well known, many are often surprised to learn of the pacifist roots of Pentecostals (including Pentecostals).⁵¹



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45 Words by Edwin Hatch and Thomas Chisholm (1897) respectively. Other favourites include: "Oh To Be Like Thee", "I Want to Be Like Jesus" by Thomas Chisholm.

46 A. James Reimer, "Mennonites, Christ and Culture: The Yoder Legacy" *Conrad Grebel Review* 12 (1994): 13.

47 See James Bennett, "Nationalism" in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (ed. Stanley Burgess; New York: Routledge, 2006), 327.

48 On the pros and cons of Pentecostal alliances with Evangelicals see Cecil M. Robeck, "National Association of Evangelicals" in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (ed. Stanley M. Burgess. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 922-925.

49 Edith Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 2 (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 30. Blumhofer cites from this letter by Ben Hardin "United We Stand: NAE Constitutional Convention Report" from the Herbert J. Taylor papers at the Billy Graham Center Archives (see Blumhofer, 210 n. 35 and 215 n.53).

50 Note the similar tone of Yoder, "if we were to make sense of North American Mennonitism, it would have to become more Anabaptist, more radical, more self-critical, less main stream Evangelical, less institution centered" (in Nation, Yoder, 20).

51 I suggest the temptation and unfortunate reality of Pentecostal amnesia. Pentecostals tend to focus upon the current work of the Spirit. The events of yesterday constitute old news.

52 Murray Dempster, "Pacifism in Pentecostalism: The Case of the Assemblies of God" in *Proclaim Peace: Christian Pacifism from Unexpected Quarters* (ed. T. F. Schabach and R. T. Hughes. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 35.

Pacifism remains the primary distinctive of the Anabaptist vision. The ethic of love and nonresistance invites complete abandonment of all warfare, strife, violence, and the taking of human life. As people of the book, Mennonites look again to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus conquers principalities and powers and launches the new kingdom of God, but not according to the majority expectations of his day. Jesus incarnates the paradigmatic message of peace, love, and nonresistance.

Early Pentecostals embrace pacifism in conjunction with primitivism, “a moral sign of a restored New Testament apostolic church.”⁵² Participation in war runs contrary to the teaching of Jesus and Spirit-led evangelism. Azusa Street participant Frank Bartleman insists: “Converting men by the power of the Gospel and later killing these same converts, across some imaginary boundary line is unthinkable.”⁵³

The Assemblies of God adopted a pacifist position in 1917 three years after the founding of the fellowship

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in 1914, only to shift its position to individual conscience in 1967.⁵⁴ According to Joel Shuman, the 1967 decision was a “grievous error” and “inconsistent with the theological vision of the tradition.”⁵⁵ Murray Dempster also points to a growing militarism among contemporary American Pentecostals.⁵⁶

But all may not be lost, for the minority voices of pacifism continue to beseech adherents. While Pentecostals have all but abandoned pacifism, the revised statement retains a small window of opportunity. Pacifists continue to issue a prophetic call for a community of radical Pentecostals to return to their pacifist heritage.⁵⁷

In sum, my experience with numerous Mennonites also points to an undercurrent of nationalism and loss of pacifism not unlike the Pentecostals.⁵⁸ In a world of increasing nationalism, whether in a time of war or peace, the challenge of Christians scattered among the nations of the world, is to live as the one body of Christ and to pledge allegiance not to one nation under God, but to one church under God, members united to Christ, and each other through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals and Mennonites must continue to provide rigorous theological instruction that reaches the ecclesial mass of their respective traditions. Furthermore, intentional dialogue between Mennonites and Pentecostals should inspire not only ongoing passion for their respective heritages, but also enlarge the conversation in other Christian circles.

Outlook—Prophetic and Postmodernism

I am optimistic concerning the future of the Mennonite and

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Pentecostal traditions. The emergence of postmodernism, while frightening for some, furnishes unquestionable opportunities. Christians searching for an authentic living faith should find Pentecostal and Mennonite passion for following Jesus attractive. Charismatic encounter with the Spirit alongside prophetic peace and social justice finds continuity with the living Jesus as a tangible embodiment of his journey.

Tradition, when healthy, facilitates authentic community through shared purpose and experience. Given a new generation of Christians longing for connection to ancient faith, primitivistic impulses should provide a link not only between the apostolic church and contemporary communities but also their respective histories. Pentecostals and Mennonites suffering from historical amnesia may identify with a great cloud of witnesses, their stories of the past, thereby identifying with a truly inter-generational Christian community.

These same factors also place Mennonites and Pentecostals in a solid position for significant societal impact. When evangelistic efforts move beyond a cerebral internalized gospel and moral rhetoric, the living Jesus stands not only as the centre of a creed, but also the model for a transformed life and society.

Finally, as the life and teaching of Jesus proves central to our respective traditions, so also our common vision and witness should reflect the kind of love for one another envisioned by Jesus. Our churches and our world deserve the prophetic voices of all Mennocostals! ☹

53 Frank Bartleman, *Christian Citizenship* (Los Angeles: Author, 1922).

54 For a historical trajectory of pacifism in the Assemblies of God (and other Pentecostal bodies), see Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism: The Origins, Development and Rejection of Pacific Belief Among the Pentecostals* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989) and Paul Alexander, *Peace, Power and Pentecost: Nonviolence, Nationalism and Militarism in American Pentecostalism* (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007).

55 Shuman, “Pentecost and the End of Patriotism,” 70–71.

56 Murray Dempster, “Reassessing the Moral Rhetoric of Early American Pentecostal Pacifism,” *Crux* 26.1 (March 1990): 33.

57 See Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship (www.pcpf.org) and my own personal account, “Finding Peace: A Personal and Vocational Narrative” in *Pentecostals, Peace and Justice: Reclaiming our Authentic Heritage for 21st Century Faithfulness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

58 I recall the following responses to pacifism with several Mennonite friends: “Oh, we don’t talk about it much” or “We are not defined by it anymore.” This resonates with a passionate appeal given by plenary speaker Ronald Sider at the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Convention 2006 in Winnipeg. In a session entitled “Rethinking Pacifism in a Dangerous World,” Sider implored delegates and guests to renew their commitment to pacifism (see *The Messenger*, Sept. 20, 2006, 4–6, www.emconf.ca/Messenger).

Power: Pastoring on Dangerous Ground



David Funk

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This article is based on a presentation given at the EMC Ministerial Meeting in July 2007.

Power as a fact in ministry and my experience of it.

I've been pastoring at Abbeydale for almost two years. Within our church family there are those who insist on calling me Pastor David, or Pastor Funk. I remember clearly how odd it felt to be called that at first. It felt like there was an implied difference in spiritual status between me the pastor, and the person talking to me.

I also remember what it was like for the first time to have someone actively "lobbying" me, wanting to get me to support their agenda, so that they could have the pastor's stamp of approval.

I have no problem with the title *pastor*, or with being asked to support and help along with some programs and agendas in the church, but this sense of an implied difference in status felt and still feels wrong. That was what got me started in thinking about power in ministry.

Power is a fact in ministry. It is always a factor in all our relationships, and it is always being used in one way or another. This is especially true for those of us who are in any positions of leadership—pastors, deacons, elders, board chairs, etc.

One doesn't have to spend much time in the Body of Christ to become aware that power is something that is also prone to abuse. The misuse of power is a constant danger and temptation. The abuse of power, sometimes by entirely well-meaning people, can destroy the very people for whom Jesus shed his blood.

Method

In preparing this, I read sections of the New Testament while asking questions about power—specifically, I read Mark, Luke, John, 1–2 Corinthians, and Revelation. As I read these I asked two questions: The first question is *What?* What sort of power

is evident? What is it given for, and what is its nature? The second question is *How?* How is this power to be used? After this I read several other resources on power in the church.

The abuse of power, sometimes by entirely well-meaning people, can destroy the very people for whom Jesus shed his blood.

What: What power is given, what is it given for, and what is its nature?

When we ask the *What* question, we find three things. First, power is given from God. It is a gift, having its source in God and not in humans. Even Jesus did not have power in and of himself to do the work the Father had given him to do. Luke 5:17 says that Jesus healed *because* the power of the Lord was present for him to heal. In the gospel of John, Jesus makes it clear over and over again that he can only do what he is doing because he and the Father are one.

There are other kinds of power operative in the New Testament and in our own lives. But these kinds of power are not what the writers of the New Testament are primarily concerned about, and when they speak of them they use somewhat less than flattering terms.

Second, when we ask the *What* question, we find that God's power has a very specific purpose: To advance the mission of God. In the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus read from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah that, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the



oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

It is for this all encompassing mission that God gives power. Throughout the New Testament, and especially the gospels, we find that God gives power and authority over unclean spirits, over sickness, and to forgive sins. The power of God is also at work in our own lives through the Holy Spirit, transforming us and conforming us to the image of his Son.

The end result, the *telos*, of this mission is the defeat of death and of sin and the devil, and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth in which all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

Third, when we ask what the nature of this power is, we find that it is thoroughly subversive and

counterintuitive. It is a power that is most clearly seen not in anything about him that people found impressive, but in his cross—his execution by the Roman authorities (1 Corinthians 1:18).

It is a power that becomes most evident in and through our weakness (2 Corinthians 4:7). The power that God gives looks like foolishness and is a stumbling block to those “not being saved” (1 Corinthians 1:23–24). And finally, this power is not about control. It is about servanthood. There is no element of coercion in the power that God gives to advance his mission.

It is possible for God’s saints to wield power that does not match these characteristics. But when we do, it is not God’s power we are operating with. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. So, in summary, power is given from God, to advance the mission of God, and is counterintuitive and subversive in nature.

How: The ways and means of power

The above is the *what* of power. When we turn our attention to the question of “How is power to be used?” the ways and means of power, we find something odd and doubly odd because it is so consistent. We find that God’s power to advance God’s mission is given as, and only as, Jesus’ disciples live in faith towards God and servanthood towards others. Remove either of those two ingredients, and the power that is at work is no longer God’s power. The gospel shorthand for this kind of life is “the way of the cross.”

It is the way of the cross that is at the very centre of our call to follow Jesus. In *The Politics of Jesus*, John Howard Yoder points out that:

In the New Testament there is no *general* concept of living like Jesus. Never are we exhorted to celibacy on the basis of Jesus’ celibacy, or to poverty on the basis of Jesus’ poverty, or to a style of teaching on the basis of Jesus’ style of teaching. There is thus but one realm in which the concept of imitation holds—but there it holds in every strand of the New Testament literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of

the absence of parallels in other realms. This is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to “be like Jesus.”¹

This is the Way of the Cross, and God’s power to advance God’s mission is given as, and only as, we follow that way.

The way is important. Means are important. Eugene Peterson said,

It is the *Jesus way*, wedded to the *Jesus Truth* that brings about the *Jesus life*. We cannot proclaim the *Jesus truth* but then do it any old way we like. Across the centuries, the consensus in the church has been that if the nature of the means has been compromised and is in contradiction to the nature of the end, the end is desecrated, poisoned, and becomes a thing of horror.²

In New Testament thought, *how* power is used—what I am calling the ways and means of power—is at least as important as the question of *what* power in the church is or *to whom* it is given.

In New Testament thought, how power is used—what I am calling the ways and means of power—is at least as important as the question of what power in the church is or to whom it is given.

John the evangelist took great pains in the formation of his gospel to ensure that we understand this from the beginning. In the brilliant poem which opens the gospel, he writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

There can be no one higher or more powerful than this Word who is God. And then just a few verses down, in part of the same poem, we read:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. *And the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The power that God gives to advance his mission as we follow Jesus on the way of the cross is a downward moving, relational power, not an impersonal power that simply gets things done. Nor is it a power that has anything to do with self-exaltation or rank.

Paul makes it clear in Philippians that central to who Jesus was, and central to the attitude we ourselves are to have, is the fact that He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.

How power is used, the ways and means of power is highlighted throughout the New Testament whenever we are called to imitate Jesus and follow him on the way of the cross. And that is often. Spend a little time in two passages in the gospel of Luke in order to focus this in our minds. In Luke we are forced very early to come to grips with the importance of ways and means in the life of discipleship generally, and in the use of power specifically.

Jesus has just been baptized by his cousin John, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice was heard saying, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” This was a high point in Jesus’ life, a moment of glory. And immediately Jesus was led *by the Spirit* into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

At this point in Luke’s gospel, one thing that is clear is that Jesus is the long awaited Messianic King. In the first chapter, Mary and Zechariah sing of how Jesus is the one who has been given the throne of David and who will reign for all time. He is the one through whom God is going to bring about his upside-down kingdom, where the rulers are pulled down from their thrones and the humble are lifted up. And it is evident in what God says to Jesus at his baptism; the words God speaks of him are from Psalm 2, which is all about God’s King.

1 J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, rev. ed., 131.

2 Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 4, 7. See also p. 15: “ways and means that are removed or abstracted from Jesus and the Scriptures that give witness to him amount sooner or later to a betrayal of Jesus.”

In the desert, the Devil never tempts Jesus to not perform his mission. He never tempts Jesus to abdicate his role as king or to give up his power. What he does is he tempts Jesus with ways and means of using his power that are not congruent with Who he is or the mission God has for him.

In the first temptation, to turn the stones to bread, the devil holds before him the option of being the welfare king, the king who would rise to power because he could promise his people a continual supply of their basic needs.

In the second temptation, to worship the devil and thus be given all the authority and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world, He was tempted to become king by wielding immense governmental, military, and national might.

The third temptation was to throw himself down from the highest point of the temple, an allusion to Malachi where it is promised that the messenger of the covenant will come suddenly to his temple to purify the sons of Levi. Here Jesus is being tempted to become king by being “the religious reformer, heavenly messenger, appearing unheralded from above to set things right.”³

Each of these ways of gaining and using power are common sense ways that power is gained and used in the world. They are second nature to us. Jesus rejects them all. And by doing so, he locks himself into the one remaining way. What is that way? It is the way of the cross.

Commenting on this passage, N.T. Wright says,

Jesus is indeed to become the world's true lord, but the path to that status, and the mode of it when it arrives, is humble service, not a devilish seeking after status and power... His status as God's son commits him, not to showy prestige, but to the strange path of humility, service, and finally death.⁴

It is as we follow that same strange path that God's power to advance his mission is given to us. It is impossible to know the Jesus truth or experience the Jesus life apart from following the Jesus way.

That was the first passage, and there is one more. Hidden in the midst of

As it was with Jesus, so it is with us. If anyone wants to follow after Him, we also must follow that strange path by living every day as if we'd been sentenced to death by crucifixion. We are to bear the social and political cost of allegiance to God and His kingdom.

this gospel, and highlighting the need for the disciples to accompany Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem and the cross, there is a small tractate on power. One could almost imagine it having circulated independent before inclusion in the gospels, perhaps with a title something like “a treatise on the use of power by followers of the crucified lord.” This is Luke 9. The entire chapter has implications for our study on power, but for today we will focus only on verses 18–50.

Luke 9

In verses 18–27 Peter realizes who Jesus actually is: The Christ of God. When Peter says to Jesus, “You are the Christ of God,” he is talking about deliverance of Israel from tyranny; finally, the end of the long, long exile, and the beginning of the kingdom without end. He is talking about power.

It is no accident that immediately after Peter identifies Jesus as the powerful Christ of God, Jesus instructs them on how exactly he will be this Christ. The means by which He will be the Christ of God, and will accomplish deliverance and bring an end to the exile, include suffering many things, and being rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and being killed, and then being raised up on the third day. That is *how* Jesus is the powerful Christ.

As it was with Jesus, so it is with us. He turns immediately to us, and tells us that if anyone wants to follow after Him, we also must follow that strange path by living every day as if we'd been sentenced to death by crucifixion. We are to bear the social and political cost of allegiance to God and His kingdom.

We are to consider ourselves dead to the world. *The power and salvation of God will be shown not through triumphalism*

or by any convenient means, but through a cross-shattered Christ, and through us, his cross-shattered community.

After this, Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain, where they see the kingdom of God come with power, and Jesus transfigured together with Moses and Elijah. After this, they go down off the mountain to find the other disciples in the midst of a crowd, trying but failing to cast out a demon from a boy. And Jesus is frustrated: “Oh faithless and perverse generation—how long will I stay with you and put up with you?”

Jesus is frustrated with the disciples, not the father of the boy or the crowd. Why is he so frustrated? If we look at 9:1 we must ask, which demons were the disciples given power over? Every demon! The disciples had been given the capacity to do the very thing they have now proved themselves to be incapable of doing. So the problem in their dealing with this tormented boy is not that they haven't been given the power; the problem is that they are faithless and perverse.

I think the disciples couldn't cast out this demon because they were not relying on God for the power—they did not have faith. They are trying to do God's work on their own steam, and they've turned God's mission into something that is about their own egos, their own success. It was about what *they* could do. And as a result, they could do nothing of real value for the Kingdom.

Jesus calls this faithless and perverse. *God's power for advancing God's mission is given to us only as we have faith and depend on him. It is removed when our involvement in God's mission becomes ego driven.*

While everybody is still amazed at the greatness of God shown in Jesus' casting out of the demon, Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.” And the disciples had no idea what he was talking about. The

³ Yoder, 27.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 44.

juxtaposition of this display of Jesus' power and his reference to his suffering is intentional.

Jesus is saying that the mission of God is to redeem the world *through* suffering, not just *from* suffering, which is what the disciples were expecting and couldn't understand.

Just after this, the disciples start arguing about who will be the greatest. Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great." Social and ecclesial ladder climbing is incompatible with being in on God's mission.

The ones who are in on God's mission are those who are most adept at getting *off* that ladder so that they can welcome "the least of these" as equals. Because when we do that we actually welcome Jesus and the Father himself. And, presumably, the Power to advance God's mission will be given to those who share God's preferential love for the least of these instead of engaging in social/ecclesial ladder climbing.

Just after this, John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us. Jesus says, in effect, "Take it easy! Just because this guy is succeeding where you failed is no reason to stop him. Whoever is not against you is for you." *Here we see that God's power to advance God's mission is not at all connected to one's title or office.*

It doesn't matter how many honorifics one has before one's name—apostle, deacon, elder, pastor, and right honourable doctor reverend—if we're not in line with God's priorities, we don't have power from him. On the contrary, a nobody in the Kingdom of God—one who is not an apostle, not even one of the disciples—will be given power to advance the Kingdom of God if their hearts are in line with God's priorities.

The disciples fail every test that they encounter in this chapter. They show irrefutable evidence that they don't understand what Jesus is about as the Christ of God. And these are the self-same disciples God uses to great effect in his mission later on in Acts.

Temptations of power:

- ***To use power to create uniformity instead of unity***
 - ***To wield power by loving conditionally***
 - ***To think and act as if the church were an organization to be controlled by those in authority/with power***
 - ***To create God's church in our own image***
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We all fail in these and other ways in relation to our use of power, but when we do God does not discard us as useless. He keeps on working with us, just as Jesus continues working with his disciples after he sets his face like flint towards Jerusalem and the cross.

Pastoring on dangerous ground: the Danger of Power

Many of you who are reading this now are leaders in the church. In leadership, there is power, regardless of the ways and means in which it is used. When we follow the way of the cross, it is God's power that is manifest through us.

When we do not follow the way of the cross, we still exercise power, because we have positions of leadership in the church. The question is this: Whose power is this? What kind of power do we then exercise?

I'd like to name the power that we exercise when we do not follow the way of the cross: The name I would give this power is *demonic*! Demonic, not because of all kinds of supernatural manifestations, but demonic because it accomplishes the work of the enemy and pleases him very much indeed.

The devil tempted Jesus to use his power in inappropriate ways in the desert. As he tempted the leader, so he tempts us, the followers. When we choose one of his ways instead of the Jesus way, it is demonic.

I will mention four temptations of power. It should be noted that the destructiveness of any of these alternate ways of using power is *not* dependent on the ill will of the person wielding the power.

What are some of the temptations of power that the devil throws at us?

To use power to create uniformity instead of unity

If we wield power as leaders to ensure that there is no room in our churches for people who disagree with us on issues, we are misusing our power and authority. We have forgotten that difference of opinion within our communities of faith is first and foremost a sign of God's mercy.

In our congregation, we have quite a few people who are members but do not agree with the peace position. Now, it is my conviction that the way of peace is very close to the heart of the gospel, and I believe I can make a compelling case for this from Scripture. However, if I were to use my power as their pastor to force them to conform to this belief, or else to expel them from the community by means overt or subtle, the power I would be using would not be God's, and it would have nothing to do with God's mission. It would be a community-destroying, and thus a diabolical, power.

Of course, there are cases where members of our communities have chosen a certain way of life or come to certain doctrinal convictions that are obviously contrary to the way, truth, and life of Jesus. In those cases, it is our duty to allow them to experience the consequences of their choice. The danger is that we confuse what is central to the way, truth, and life of Jesus with issues more peripheral.

The danger is that we make what is not clearly central to life in Christ central to belonging to our particular community of faith. Unity is imperative. Uniformity is an abomination.

To wield power by loving conditionally

We are tempted to wield power by loving people conditionally. We try to get people to be the way we want them to be by withholding our love saying, in effect, "I will not love you or give you my support as a leader unless you support this, or do this, or don't do that." This is a huge temptation for us. Conditional love is the biggest source of problems between pastor and congregation.⁵

⁵ Kenneth Alan Moe, *The Pastor's Survival Manual*, The Alban Institute.

To think and act as if the church were an organization to be controlled by those in authority/with power.

We forget that the church is an organism, a body in which all believers are participants, and in which all believers live, discern and serve in mutual submission. This happens when we who are leaders imagine ourselves to be accountable to God alone, instead of acknowledging that we have been called simultaneously by God and his church, and are therefore accountable simultaneously to both God and the congregation that has called us.

To create God's church in our own image.

In his small book called *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that,

He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.⁶

6 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc, 1954), 27.

7 Ibid., 27–28.

He also writes that,

"God hates visionary dreaming [stick that on your shelf of leadership resources!]; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly... He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together.⁷

When we start using our power to trim the edges of the church to make her match our ideal, we sin against God and her, and God's people within her bleed from the cuts we inflict in our efforts at creating beauty. All the while, we may be so blinded by our vision of beauty (or truth, or justice, or holiness) that the people God has entrusted to our care are bleeding, sometimes to death, right in front of us.

Conclusion:

Power is given from God to advance the mission of God, as and only as we follow the way of the Cross. If we follow a different way, it is a different power that we wield. ☹

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Feature Sermon

Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Darryl Klassen



Darryl Klassen is senior pastor of Kleefeld EMC, where this sermon was presented on April 20, 2008.

"Take what you can get, and don't give anything back!" From what I remember of *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, this was some sort of motto that Captain Jack and his first mate lived by. It wasn't the pirate code *per se*, but a rule of life.

Unfortunately, it sounds a lot like the culture code of our North American lifestyle. Take what you can get and don't just give it away. Think about that for a second. When you are downtown in Winnipeg and a panhandler begs for a loonie, what do you think? *I earned this money and I am not going to just give it to some bum who is going to spend it on*

booze or Lysol. We work, we earn our money, and it galls us to think that some people just sit there with their hands out.

Take what you can get and don't give anything back. For those of a non-religious background and mindset this is the code of life. But it is a code that will lead to stagnation of the soul.

Consider the laws of nature in this regard. A body of water that has no fresh inflow and no apparent outsource will eventually become a cesspool of disease. The water is no good for drinking or irrigation. It's only use is to become a haven for unusual creatures

that grow in that malaise. But a lake with a constant inflow and outflow stays fresh and is home to fish and birds and quaint little cottages. The law of nature suggests that which receives and gives will be beautiful and useful.

The law of God concurs. It is a biblical truth that when those who receive with gratitude understand the gift they will turn and give to others. This is a law, not so much in the commandment sense, but in how life works best. If you want to get the best out of life then you must conform to the pattern that God has laid out for us. Hoarding and guarding our possession

leads to stagnation spiritually and holistically.

We find this truth in the history lessons of Israel in Deuteronomy 8. This is the theological foundation for learning to be gracious receivers and gracious givers.

Remembering to thank God

The book of Deuteronomy is a record of God's law spoken again to the people of Israel. That's what the title means: *second law* or a second telling of the law. Israel had heard the Law before, but now they stood on the brink of entering the Promised Land. After 40 years of wandering in the desert God was going to bring his people into the land. In preparation Moses reminded them of God's commandments.

You have to imagine the thoughts going through Moses' mind. He might have said, "Just before we crossed the Red Sea you guys began complaining and pining for the comforts of Egypt. Then we crossed the Sea in a great miracle and no sooner had the waters returned you were complaining about water and food and wishing you were dead.

"Bread from heaven rained down on us but you worried that it might not come tomorrow. Then when I went up the mountain to receive God's law, I return to find you worshipping a golden calf.

"Listen, God has been forgiving and gracious, but now as we stand in a new place, we must think about how far we have been brought by God and how much he has given us. If we forget, there is a terrible cost we can ill afford."

Here in chapter 8 of Deuteronomy we have a call to remember these things. Moses was very concerned that they enter the Promised Land with thankful hearts. Note his repeated warnings: (v. 1) "Be careful," (v. 2) "Remember," (v. 6) "observe," (v. 11) "Be careful and do not forget," (v. 18) "Remember," and (vv. 19-20) "if you forget."

Above all, Moses was trying to engrain in their minds who was the source of all their blessings. "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day" (10-11).

Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (NIV)

¹⁰When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵He led you through the vast and

dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

A grateful heart will not forget the source of these good things. Gratitude is an expression of modesty. In Hebrew, the word for *gratitude* is the same word for *confession*. To offer thanks is to confess dependence, to admit that others have the ability to benefit you, that they have made your life better by their efforts.

Perhaps you have wondered why we say a prayer of blessing before each meal we eat. I know some believers who see it as legalistic and mere tradition and so have abandoned the practice. God knows I'm thankful, they say. And yet if we think about it and are sincere in our custom, we will recognize that it breeds a habit of thankfulness in us.

People who thank God before each meal are practicing gratitude and are opening the door to gladness in their lives. Some faith traditions pray before

and after the meal...I suppose they are thankful they survived the experience.

Jeff Jacoby wrote,

If you never give a moment's thought to the fact that your health is good, that your children are well-fed, that your home is comfortable, if you assume that the good things in your life are normal and to be expected, you diminish the happiness they can bring you. By contrast, if you train yourself to reflect on how much worse off you could be, if you develop the custom of counting your blessings and being grateful for them, you will fill your life with cheer.

There is wisdom in these words. The secret to happiness is gratitude. Complaining leads to unhappiness while grateful people tend to be happier people. Moses wanted more than happiness for his people; he wanted them to praise God for full bellies, for fertile land, and for the peace to till that land. Remember to thank God, the source of all good things.

The secret to happiness is gratitude. Complaining leads to unhappiness while grateful people tend to be happier people. Moses wanted more than happiness for his people; he wanted them to praise God.

Reasons we might forget God

What were the dangers that loomed so large in Moses' mind? Why did he think they would forget to thank God for all the good things they received? There were three distinct dangers mentioned in this passage, dangers that are more than relevant for us as well.

a) **Prosperity** – Moses recognized that prosperity was a major threat to a grateful heart. "Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build

fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud" (12-14a).

Do you find that counting your blessings becomes harder when there are too many to count? The smaller blessings get overwhelmed by the bigger and more numerous blessings of life. It is very difficult to acknowledge our blessings when there are so many that they are overflowing into landfills regarded as worthless junk.

We did some spring cleaning when the kids had Spring Break and cleaned out a lot of stuff. Closets were purged of the unnecessaries. We had bags of clothes for MCC and bags of garbage for the landfill. There was even a 27-inch TV that had sat outside all winter because it had died. Take a trip to the dump and I am sure you will see piles of blessings that no one wanted anymore.

As we possess more and more we may become immune to gratitude, but there is another side effect: A busyness that chokes our time. The more stuff we have, the less time we have for God and others. Abundance makes us busier people with little time for church or fellowship. You would think we had more leisure time than any of the previous generations, yet we can't find time to connect with old friends.

Prosperity can cloud our gratitude and steal our time. Moses was afraid that his people would fall into this pit of satisfaction and spiritual contentment.

b) Pride – Prosperity can lead to pride. The two are so connected they are really one, but I wanted to deal briefly with pride on its own. As it continues in v. 14, "...then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Pride emerging out of prosperity will cause us to forget what God has done for us. With Israel it blinded them to the miracle of the Exodus, to the trek across an unforgiving wilderness, and to the provision of God to do such a thing. God gave them manna, Moses says in v. 16, to humble them, to show them that God would provide in times of want and in times of plenty.

Something about having enough and more than enough brings out a

Giving is one very important way to maintain a heart of gratitude. Giving back to the Lord is recognition of his provision. It is worship in every sense.

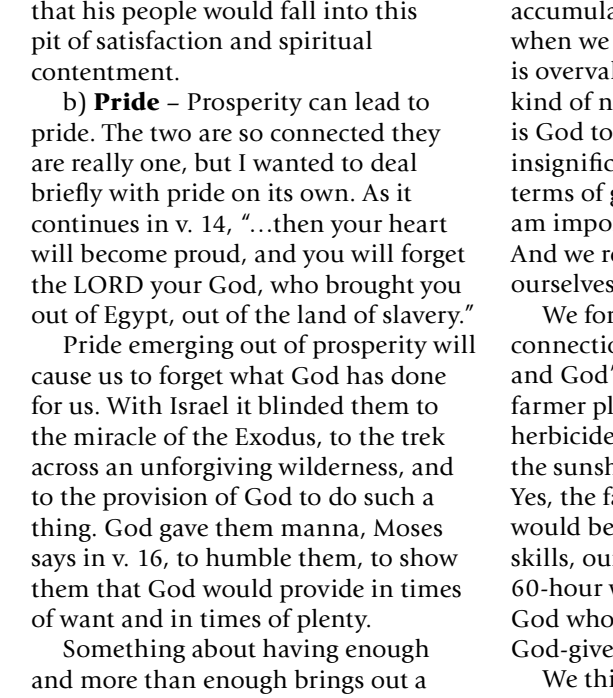
feeling of self-reliance. With that feeling we also adopt a sense of spiritual satisfaction. We have plenty of food to eat, possessions all around us, a happy family...we must be doing well in our walk of faith. Numbness to our constant need to keep walking with the Lord sets in and we forget that God is still the source of all these good things.

c) Personal Accomplishment – It is no surprise that pride is closely connected to the feeling of personal accomplishment. Moses perceived that they would say, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me" (17).

What defines us in society? Our work, what we do, what we earn and what we have. It is a pride that is based not in what a person is, but what a person has. The stuff that we accumulate defines our worth and when we have a lot of it, our worth is overvalued. When we live in this kind of narcissist egomania, where is God to be found? God becomes insignificant and a distant thought in terms of gratitude. This pride says: "I am important," "I count," and "I am!" And we replace the great *I AM* with ourselves.

We forget that there is a deep connection between our hard work and God's abundant provision. The farmer plants the seed and sprays the herbicides, but God sends the rain and the sunshine and makes the seed grow. Yes, the farmer harvests, but there would be no harvest without God. Our skills, our product, our overtime, our 60-hour weeks are nothing without God who provides the market for those God-given qualities.

We think prosperity is something



that we have accomplished. We take credit for our wealth, our success, our market strategies and our insights. This is blindness for it is God who gives us the ability to work, to earn and to succeed.

As Moses said, "But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today" (18).

One might conclude that God was ultimately afraid of being forgotten in the abundance and wealth of the land. And that would be a fair but one-sided understanding. The other side of this coin is that God wanted the people to prosper and succeed and know joy, and if they lost their sense of gratitude, they would become miserable. He is concerned about our joy, folks!

Rationale for giving

On this theological foundation we find a basis for giving. For giving is one very important way to maintain a heart of gratitude. Giving back to the Lord is recognition of his provision. It is worship in every sense.

What does giving to the Lord look like?

For David and his people it was

presenting an offering to the LORD for building a place of worship. When the people had sacrificed and brought precious items, gold, silver and other useful things, he offered a prayer of thanks to God. We find this prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11–14:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

That last verse is really profound. Who are we that we should be able to give as generously as this? It is a humble confession that God is the source and we can only give to God what he has given to us.

Yes, what the people gave in offerings went into a temple that they would benefit from. Yes, it was a physical token of a spiritual blessing. But in their hearts it was a humble sacrifice of praise.

What else does giving to the Lord look like?

When the people of God were in need, the Apostle Paul went to the Corinthian church for an offering. He knew that this was a church that was exceptional in its spiritual giftedness, but he challenged them further. He said, "But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7).

He added that he was not commanding them to do this, but appealed to their love for Christ. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Paul appeals to the example of Jesus as our motivation to give, in this case to brothers and sisters in need, but in other cases, perhaps to those who are proclaiming Jesus. If we become poor through our giving it would be a pale imitation of our wonderful Lord.

Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). That is a tough command for North Americans and for Kleefelders today.

Tony Campolo tells of being invited to speak at a ladies meeting. There were 300 women there. Before he spoke the president of the organization read a letter from a missionary. It was a very moving letter.

In the letter the missionary expressed a need for \$4,000 to take care of an emergency that had cropped up. So the president of the organization said, "We need to pray that God will provide the resources to meet the need of this missionary. Brother Campolo, will you please pray for us?"

Tony Campolo, who is very outspoken, said, "No." Startled, she said, "I beg your pardon."

He said, "No, I won't pray for that." He said, "I believe that God has already provided the resources and that all we need to do is give. Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to step up to this table and give every bit of cash I have in my pocket. And if all of you will do the same thing, I think God has already provided the resources."

The president of the organization chuckled a little bit and said, "Well, I guess we get the point. He is trying to teach us that we all need to give sacrificially."

He said, "No, that is not what I am trying to teach you. I'm trying to teach

you that God has already provided for this missionary. All we need to do is give it. Here, I'm going to put down all of my money I have with me." (He wrote, "I only had \$15 in my pocket so I wasn't too worried about that.")

So he put down his \$15 and then looked at the president of the organization. Reluctantly, she opened her purse and took out all of her money, which was about \$40, and put it on the table. One by one the rest of the ladies filed by and put their money on the table, too. When the money was counted they had collected more than \$4,000.

Tony Campolo said, "Now, here's the lesson. God always supplies for our needs, and he supplied for this missionary, too. The only problem was we were keeping it for ourselves. Now let's pray and thank God for His provision."

The law of nature shows us that when there is an inflow it is beneficial to have an outflow. God has given us all that we possess including our lives. How does it flow out of our selves?

You have been to McDonalds more times than you care to remember. Usually it is your children who notice those accursed golden arches. You used to be able to eat for five dollars as a family there. Okay, that was in the 70s. So you have taken your kids there, and handed over a pile of money that you earned for Rotten Ronnie's famous horse burgers. At least the fries are exceptional.

Those fries you scarf down like air because they are so good. Then you spy your son's fries. He's young enough that you distract him with that imaginary pink poodle just outside the window. He catches what you have done and says with steely eyes, "Dad, don't take my fries!"

His fries? His fries? Who earned the money for the meal? Who drove the car to get to Rotten Ronnie's? Who ordered the meal? Who paid for it? *His* fries?

You have had this experience, haven't you? But how often do we refuse to give God some of our fries? Isn't he the provider of all our French fries?

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! ☺

Paul appeals to the example of Jesus as our motivation to give, in this case to brothers and sisters in need, but in other cases, perhaps to those who are proclaiming Jesus. If we become poor through our giving it would be a pale imitation of our wonderful Lord.

Book Review



***The Case for the Real Jesus*, Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2007), 309 pp., \$16.49, ISBN 9780310240617.** Reviewed by Andrew Unger (Stony Brook Fellowship) who has studied at Providence College (two years) and University of Manitoba (B.A., B.Ed.). He is a high school teacher.

There's an evangelical T-shirt floating on a clothesline somewhere that brazenly proclaimed *you will not mock my God*, the message, seemingly, that an all-powerful and omniscient God needs defending of some sort.

This is an unfortunate shirt, but it's even more unfortunate as a thesis for a journalistic text. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but be reminded of this shirt as I read Lee Strobel's latest book, *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Strobel's book often comes across as the apologetic equivalent of that simplistic T-shirt. The issues Strobel tackles are very real and the scholars he interviews are often compelling, but these appealing facets of the book are largely overshadowed by Strobel's inadequate presentation of the material.

Strobel begins his book by presenting a summary of a number of new (and not-so-new) arguments about the historicity of Jesus, liberal theories that challenge the traditional beliefs held by many Christians. Did Christ actually resurrect from the dead? Was the Bible tampered with by people over the centuries? Can we trust the Bible as an historical document? Was the story of Christ based on ancient mystery religions that predate Christianity? Are the Gnostic gospels as reliable as the canonical gospels in the New Testament?

These questions, and the others he explores in the book, are worthwhile issues to examine because Strobel is absolutely correct, they do have vast implications on theology. However, Strobel's book lacks the depth to answer these questions satisfactorily. Strobel claims in the introduction to the book that he is going to get to the bottom of these contentious challenges to traditional belief, "grant(ing) them the full weight and open(ing) (himself) to the possibility that they could legitimately undermine the traditional understanding of Christ" (Strobel, 15). But by the end of the book, I had to ask myself, "Where is this weight?" because

Strobel doesn't present the evidence and then let his readers draw their own conclusions. Instead, he treats his readers with kid gloves, making conclusions for them.

it seemed sorely lacking.

Perhaps Strobel is trying to cover too many issues for the constraints of one book, sacrificing quality for quantity and never delving into any one issue. It's also clear that Strobel's target audience is lay rather than academic, but even so, I think he underestimates the capacity of people, scholars or not, to delve into controversial issues of faith. Many of these issues are so crucial and integral to Christian faith that a much more thorough exploration is needed than the one Strobel provides.

Strobel undoubtedly knows more than he lets on in the book. It's not his investigative process that is the problem, necessarily, but rather his presentation of material to his readers. In order to be convinced by Strobel's investigation, one has to first be convinced in Strobel himself, and he does attempt to relay his credentials and methods in his introduction.

For many thoughtful Christians, though, this "trust me" attitude may be unsatisfactory. He leads his readers through a familiar pattern of investigation. First, he summarizes the controversial liberal challenge. Secondly, he seeks out a conservative scholar, proclaims his credentials, and then discusses the topic with him. Finally, using ample superlatives, Strobel concludes that he has been thoroughly and utterly convinced by the scholar. It is clear from the outset of each chapter what the conclusion will be as he has personally selected each of the

scholars to interview, and thus knows the outcome ahead of time. This isn't to say that the scholars he interviews don't make convincing or credible arguments—that is not the issue.

The issue is that he does this without ever fully or fairly presenting the other side of the debate, which he is likely very familiar with. Instead, to convey the controversial or liberal point of view he usually relies on his own paraphrases, both to set up the debate and to provide counter-arguments.

Readers interested in truly examining both sides of these issues would do better to consult *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* by Marcus Borg, a liberal, and N.T. Wright, a conservative. This book succeeds in exploring opposing sides on the historicity of Jesus because, unlike Strobel's book, it allows scholars on both sides of the debate to speak for themselves and readers to draw their own conclusions.

One of Strobel's interviewees, Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, insightfully warns that "we have to stop treating the Bible with kid gloves" (p. 98). Unfortunately, Strobel doesn't follow that advice in this book, and instead treats his readers with kid gloves, making conclusions for them.

He doesn't present the evidence and then let his readers draw their own conclusions. Instead, he tells us, "My interview with Wallace provided strong affirmation that my confidence in the New Testament text was abundantly warranted" (p. 98). That's a nice thought, and it's likely sincere, but it won't be convincing to many readers. Later he says "the case for the disciples encountering what they believed to be the risen Jesus did, indeed, seem strong" (p. 119). The book is so filled with such statements that it begins to reverse the intended effect, and readers may come to wonder whether these liberal positions aren't actually stronger than Strobel lets on. And that is where his book becomes very problematic.

Strobel's readers may begin to ask whether the case for orthodox Christian doctrine is so weak that one has to resort to the tactics of underlining points, drawing hasty conclusions, and straw-man arguments. If the case for the historic Jesus is strong, for example, what is the fear of talking directly to scholars who argue against it?

I highly doubt that these are the type of questions that Strobel had intended to raise at the conclusion of his book; but, nonetheless, given his scanty exploration, these questions will inevitably pop up among some readers, and that is unfortunate. Strobel often leads the witness, providing evidence and quotes from scholars that support the defense of orthodox Christianity, while at the same time claiming to

their convictions.

To any thinking person, there should always be more questions than answers. It is arrogant, delusional, and in some ways even idolatrous to suggest that human beings can ever be intelligent enough to fully understand God. This is a common delusion of the modern age.

And this is where the role of Christian apologetics is highly unsatisfactory because it often undermines the role of faith and mystery. While most people claim their own beliefs are logically satisfying to them, they don't, however, actually base their beliefs on intellectual arguments alone.

Every religion and belief system has apologists who make arguments that their beliefs are solid, reliable, unique,

makes, and is unlikely to be concluded by books like *The Case for the Real Jesus*. At best, apologetics, when done well, may do no harm, and may help to balance the wave of misinformation that exists in the world. Apologetics done poorly, and in this category I would place Strobel's book, may also have the potential to harm.

So, does Strobel's work have any value? I believe it does, but marginal. It introduces Christians to a whole host of scholars that are worthy of study: Ehrman, Wright, Wallace, and others—scholars that I, myself, look forward to exploring in greater detail.

The book also has the potential to provide good fodder for discussion and thought, something that needs encouragement in some evangelical circles. It may also provide reassurance

to people with doubts about these issues, and for some this is a valuable service.

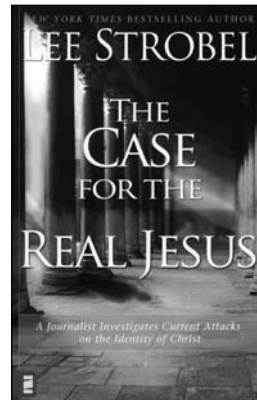
Others, though, will need to turn to some of the scholars he interviews, and the bibliographies he provides, for more rewarding scholarship. But for an entertaining, but shallow, summary of these issues, this book is a good place to turn, and on that level, I can recommend it.

But I would strongly suggest that readers not come to Strobel's book, or even books by other more scholarly apologists, with the expectation that it will satisfy their need for truth. Paul reminds us about the limitations of our knowledge: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:13 KJV).

The uniqueness of the Christian faith, as Paul describes in his letter, is not knowledge, but, rather, love. "And though I have prophecy, and understand all mysteries and knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2 KJV).

And reminded of that, I must say that though I did not find Strobel's book intellectually satisfying, perhaps I shouldn't be so eager to be satisfied in that realm alone—and I can thank Lee Strobel for unintentionally, but very clearly, reminding me of this. ☹

The book may provide reassurance to people with doubts about these issues, and for some this is a valuable service. Others, though, will need to turn to some of the scholars he interviews, and the bibliographies he provides, for more rewarding scholarship.



be making a hard-nosed attack to see whether traditional views could withstand such an onslaught.

"Is this the best that conservative and evangelical scholarship has to offer?" a reader may ask. Far from it. Conservative Christians interested in these issues would do better to read N.T. Wright, Daniel B. Wallace, and others.

So, while Strobel himself is a trained journalist and lawyer, he more or less takes the role of an apologist, rather than these professions he's trained in. He should be clear about this from the outset, but isn't.

This brings the T-shirt back to mind. Does God really need to be defended, to be apologized for, and to be propped-up by our incredulous debates and arguments? Ultimately, belief is a choice and many people simply find the evidence to believe what they already believe to be true. This is a matter of faith. No one, liberal or conservative, atheist, agnostic or theist, can claim to be truly looking at the evidence in a neutral and unbiased way and, thus, no one can honestly claim to be completely convinced, on a historic and intellectual level, of the absolute empirical truth of

and historically true. They make a case for the historic Muhammad or Buddha or Joseph Smith, and their followers feel just as convinced as Christians that their beliefs are true.

If it was truly based on factual, empirical exploration, then we wouldn't see such a wide variance of religious beliefs among all spectrums of education levels and intelligence. Certainly some positions are more plausible, logical, and sound than others, but, deep down, I suspect many people of all religions, and those without a religion, know that these apologetic arguments are not fully satisfactory as the sole basis of faith.

The arguments of apologists, at least those of skilled ones, seem to cancel each other, and thus people are left to make faith decisions based on something other than historical and intellectual evidence. The question is not who or what are you going to intellectually affirm, but rather who or what are you going to put your faith in?

Every human being has personal, subjective reasons for their choice of faith, but it's a choice that everyone

The Final Word

So to all of those who cry, "Well, what about water baptism? Why all the fuss about the Lord's Supper? They are after all just outward signs! They're nothing but water, bread, and wine! Why fight about them?" They have not in their whole lives learned enough to know why the signs were instituted by Christ, what they seek to achieve or toward what they should finally be directed, namely to gather a church, to commit oneself publicly to live according to the Word of Christ in faith and brotherly love, and because of sin to subject oneself to fraternal admonition and the Christian ban, and to do all of this with a sacramental oath before the Christian church and all her members, assembled partly in body and completely in spirit, testifying publicly in the power of God, Father and Holy Spirit, or in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ (which is all the same power), and yielding oneself to her in hand-pledged fidelity.

– Balthasar Hubmaier, 1527
(Martyred March 10, 1528)

"On Fraternal Admonition,"
Balthasar Hubmaier: *Theologian of Anabaptism*
(Pipkin and Yoder, eds., Herald Press, 1989), p. 384

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