Perkins School of Theology

Student Journal

2014-2015

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2014-2015

Περὶ ἀρχῶν

Οἶδα μὲν ὡς σχεδίῃσι μακρὸν πλόον ἐκπερόωμεν,
ἢ τυτθαῖς πτερύγεσσι πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα
σπεύδομεν, οἷσιν ὄρωρε νόος Θεότητ᾽ ἀναφαίνειν,
ἣν οὐδ᾽ οὐρανίοισι σέβειν σθένος, ὅσσον ἐοικός, ἢ
μεγάλης θεότητος ὅρους καὶ οἴακα παντός. ἔμπης
δ᾽ (οὐδὲ Θεὸν γὰρ ἀρέσσατο πολλάκι δῶρον
πλειοτέρης ἀπὸ χειρὸς ὅσον φιλίης ὀλίγης τε),
τοὔνεκα θαρσαλέως ῥήξω λόγον.

Γρηγόριος ὁ Ναζιανζηνός

On First Principles

I know that it is upon a flimsy raft that we set out on a great voyage, or upon frail wings we hasten towards the starry heaven. On these the mind stirs itself to proclaim a Divinity which not even heavenly beings have power to worship fittingly, nor can they revere the ordinances of great Divinity and its governances of the universe. Yet (for God is pleased not with a gift from the hand of a wealthy man so much as with the offering of a humble and loving giver), I shall break into confident speech.

Gregory of Nazianzus

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

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Prologue

When we decided to reestablish the *Perkins Student Journal* as a centerpiece of Perkins' academic life, we wanted to showcase the exceptional student scholarship that flourishes within our bustling hallways, scholarship that might otherwise go unrecognized beyond the classroom. We sought submissions that represented the great theological and scholastic diversity celebrated at Perkins. After a lengthy review process during which the Editorial Board considered the many submissions we received, they presented to us the essays and poems contained within the pages of this year's *Journal*.

Though we decided not to prescribe a theme for the submissions, reflection upon the selected submissions revealed a common thread. Each of our authors demonstrates an active engagement with the Christian tradition as it is experienced by members of the Church in diverse manners, exploring the depths of the Christian message while honoring the bounds of the Church's tradition. Like St. Gregory of Nazianzus, our authors break into confident speech borne by the flimsy raft of human knowledge in their journey towards God, who is both the horizon that guides us and the water that carries us there.

Sungmoon Lee's paper offers an excellent entry into the exploration of a Christian tradition whose rich depths often go unplumbed in the United States. By presenting the reader with a new missiological model derived from his experiences as a Korean Christian, he offers a unique voice to the conversation about the vocation of Christian mission. The Church's cry for justice rings out from the slums of 19th-century England, as Carter McCain's relevant study shows. Just as Fr. Robert Dolling spread the Gospel to his parishioners both within and without the Church walls, so we all are called as Christians to perform our common mission in creative and diverse ways. Rachel Rigdon's and Thomas Webster's contribution to Methodist Studies emphasizes the indelible mark left on Methodism by John Wesley's mother, Susanna. The eventual development of hallmark characteristics of Wesleyan piety owed much to the spiritual disciplines in which Susanna trained her son.

Spiritual discipline combines with academic discipline in Rebekah Rochte's exegesis of Judges 17:1-13, wherein an examination of misplaced zeal and religious ambiguity raises questions about our own understanding of the life of faith. We are called to be attentive to the ways in which our own embodiments of a Christian way of life accord—or

not—with the claims of the Gospel. While contemporary theologies often risk slipping into a sort of conceptual idolatry, Ethan Gregory's able study of Queer Theory and The United Methodist Church avoids such a misstep, providing a valuable overview and application of such hermeneutics to the Church. His nuanced perspective respectfully critiques the tradition while also offering an alternative that values the experiences of those who may feel edged out of the mainstream conversation. Kallie Green's essay on the sacred nature of rest in the Abrahamic traditions draws this edition to repose. She reminds us of the blessing of interreligious dialogue and the resulting insights that may inspire us as we step out in faith with God to fulfill our vocations in the Church.

These essays are punctuated by two poems that give creative expression to the theological reflection in which Perkins students engage. Vanessa Sims' "I Just Slipped Away", dedicated to Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner's son, offers a touching tribute that reminds us of the comfort we have in God during times of sadness. Jennifer Logsdon-Kellogg's "The Body of Christ Given" gives voice to those who experience exclusion even at the most sacred of times.

We would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to all those who were involved in the production of this journal. To our peers on the Editorial Board who gave countless hours to reviewing, selecting, and editing student submissions, and to Dr. James Hoon Kung Lee and Tracy Anne Allred for their undying support and assistance throughout the process, we are forever grateful. We are also thankful for the support of various groups and members of the SMU community, including Student Senate, Amanda Rodenborg, Cathy Heckman, and Lynn Rohm. Finally, to all the faculty members here at Perkins who have played an indispensable role in the production of this year's *Journal* specifically, and an indelible role in our theological educations more generally—thank you!

Christopher Rios & Rebekah Rochte

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A Reflection on Korean Christian Legacies and Christian Mission

Sungmoon Lee

Introduction

When missionaries introduce Christianity by employing resources from the recipient peoples' context, the recipients often show two different attitudes towards their own cultures: they either embrace some or all of the religious resources from their own culture, or they reject their culture's religious resources in order to adopt more fully the Christian faith of the missionaries. In the case of Korea, where Scripture is highlighted as the only criterion of Christian faith, resources used in the process of establishing Korean Christianity have rarely come from the Korean context. Korean Christians (especially the first Korean Christians) have generally followed the missionaries' interpretation of Scripture as the reliable criterion of their faith without consideration of Korea's own contributions to the conversation.

Today's Korean churches are indebted to the first Korean Christians who welcomed Christianity by renouncing indigenous faiths such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional Korean religions. Although these traditional faiths have had a noticeable effect on Christianity in Korean, many Korean Christians' attitude towards these faiths was and remains negative. Many contemporary Korean churches choose to follow Christian mission models introduced from extra-cultural missions (e.g. mega-churches from the United States) with little consideration of the missional resources native to Korea. Such neglect of the recipient culture has historically resulted in transmitting a hegemonic Christianity to other contexts; the histories of many Asian churches offer harsh reminders of such insensitive missions. These same churches, though, can use their unique Christian legacies to develop an alternative approach to Christian mission in which missionaries support the recipients as they develop a contextualized Christianity using the cultural resources of the recipient people.

I shall proceed by exploring the contributions of the first complete Korean translation of the Bible to Korean society and Christian mission in the 1900's. Alongside the role of Scripture in Korean Christian mission, I suggest an alternative contextual mission approach: *mission as sharing*. To this end, I introduce Rev. Kyoung Ok Jung's account of his meeting

with Se Jong Lee. Their encounter offers new insights for Christian missions serving people in different contexts who are already exposed to the (Korean) Christian Scripture. The importance of compassion as a distinctive characteristic of Christianity is then drawn out in the distinction between interreligious dialogue and sharing narratives that are so important in mission work.

Tracking the History

The key to broader access of the Christian faith to the common Korean people was the ability to share narratives in the vernacular, whether those of Scripture or of one's personal experience in the faith. A complete Korean-language translation of the Bible was not available until 1911. Around the turn of the 20th century, three different written languages were used in Korea: Chinese, pure Korean (*Un-mun*), and a mixed script.[1] The Chinese language was regarded as the language of the elite, whereas pure Korean was considered the language of the common people, disvalued because of its simplicity. As such, the Chinese Bible was accessible only to the elite of society. Through collaboration between western missionaries and Korean translators, the pure Korean Bible was born, becoming a tool for communicating a foreign culture and religion to a broader population.[2] The Christian Scripture was now available to the common people of Korea. Rev. James Gale, a Presbyterian missionary from Canada, reported the excellence of pure Korean (*Un-mun*) and its usefulness in Christian mission:

> Korea's native script is surely the simplest language in the world. Invented in 1445 A.D., it has come quietly down the dusty ages. Never used, it was looked on with contempt as being so easy. Why, even women could learn it in a month or little more; of what use could such a cheap script be? By one of those mysterious providences it was made ready and kept waiting for the New Testament and other Christian literature... They [the elite] call it *Un-mun*, the 'dirty language,' because it is so simple and easy as compared with proud Chinese picture writing. God surely loves the humble things of life. Tied in the belts of the women are New Testaments in common Korean; in the pack of the mountaineers on their brisk journeying; in the wall-box of the hamlet home; piled up on the shelf of the living room are these books in *Un-mun* telling of *Yesu*

(Jesus), mighty to save.[3]

Since pure Korean was not a recognized language around the early 1900s, unlike Chinese or mixed script, the first Korean Bible's advent played a significant role in establishing the value of the Korean language. The earlier, so-called "Korean Bible" was actually a version written in Chinese characters, and thus, only accessible to the intelligentsia. The common Koreans who could only speak pure Korean had to accept what the elite explained of Scripture. They remained passive recipients of the Gospel. Missionaries working in Korea saw the importance of pure Korean to their mission work. Some proposals written at the conclusion of the annual meeting of the Presbyterian missionaries in Korea (1893) represented their aim:

> The Word of God converts where people are without resources; therefore, it is most important that we make every effort to place a clear translation of the Bible before the people as soon as possible. In all literary work, a pure Korean, free from cynicisms, should be our aim.[4]

Kwang Soo Lee, a progenitor of Korean modern literature, wrote:

> It is Christianity that makes Koreans reconsider that Korean [*Un-mun*] is a language. As the precious Old and New Testaments and Christian hymnals are translated into Korean, the Korean language now gains authority as a language. There are the explanatory literatures of the Chinese books; however, they are not distributed [to many Koreans] and do not deserve to be called translations... Although the Korean Bible is not a perfect translation yet, it is revolutionary as the first literature to contain noble philosophy and thoughts through the pure Korean language.[5]

With its translation, the Korean-language Bible became the longest piece of Korean literature since the language's invention in 1444.[6] This Bible proved to the elite that pure Korean was able to express complicated and noble thoughts without any loss of dignity to Scripture. The first Korean-language Bible thus contributed to the rediscovery of the usefulness of *Un-mun* to the common Korean people, and, in terms of

Christian mission, it became a valuable tool for increasing the accessibility of the Scriptures to all the Korean people.[7]

Context-Familiar Alternatives

With access to the Korean-language Scriptures, the necessity of articulating the Christian faith in dialogue was raised by many Korean Christians. In the 1930s, Rev. Kyoung Ok Jung was appointed as a professor at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul after finishing his Bachelor of Divinity (what is now Master of Divinity) at Garrett Biblical Institute (now Garrett–Evangelical Theological Seminary) and his Master of Theology (Th.M) at Northwestern University in 1931. Jung taught at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul from 1931 until 1945. His passion and intelligence made him known among students and faculty as an outstanding scholar and professor. Jung seriously considered the importance of reflecting contextual characteristics in theology, which he articulated in his book, *Introduction to Christian Theology*:

> It is required to construct theology by respecting the distinctive traditions of Christianity and discerning Christian truth. At the same time, it is equally important to be attentive to the necessity of our society['s traditions] through careful discernment and observation when [theologians] construct our theology…. Christianity belongs to the whole world. Therefore, the mission of doing theology in this era is to construct a contextualized Christianity by reflecting on the scheme of our culture and society.[8]

After six years as a professor, Jung suddenly resigned from his post in 1937 because teaching students for the sake of academic discipline had become routine. He decided to leave the seminary and went to his hometown not for financial, political, or physical reasons, but for his spiritual revitalization. For him, it was meaningless to teach theology without the connection to the spiritual life in the actual world. He did not return to the university for two years.[9]

While Jung lived in the countryside, he met Se Jong Lee, a former farmer. Lee, who had obtained a Korean Bible from a peddler, began reading it and discovered the truth of Christianity as he interpreted it. As Jung introduced western theological concepts and saints who emulated the life of Jesus Christ during their conversations, Lee would answer with his

own theology based on his personal understanding of Scripture. Jung, an expert in Christian theology, was astonished by his conversations with Se Jong Lee, who was living a spiritual life through the Bible. In his book, *Saints in Joseon Dynasty: Finding Hidden Saints*, Jung reflected upon the conversations he shared with Lee. Jung related that he felt the depth of Lee's spirituality because of his absolute obedience and purity.

> Lee does not have any access to theological education nor does he refer to Bible commentaries by any prominent theologians. But he interprets the Bible in his way and receives the Holy Spirit in contemplation… Lee can memorize almost all [the] Scriptures. Although Lee's Bible interpretation somehow tends to show abstract and symbolic aspects, he accepts the Bible in a literal sense. No one can deny his extraordinary spirituality because Lee possesses a strong will to practice spirituality in actual life. Living according to the Bible seems [to be] the top priority of his life.[10]

Kyoung Ok Jung was inspired by Lee's Korean ascetic practice in imitation of Jesus Christ. Even though Jung decided to spend time recharging his own spirit, sharing narratives about imitating the life of Jesus with Se Jong Lee taught him that searching for the truth of Christianity cannot only be done outwardly in formal study; it must also be done inwardly, spiritually, in the imitation of Jesus. Here we see Kyoung Ok Jung's openness to accepting the possibility of a contextualized Christianity whose source is a non-academic indigenous person. He continued to investigate and reveal the Gospel in the Korean context through his conversations with Lee. In his book, *He Lives Like This*, Jung describes Lee as one of pilgrims who enculturated Jesus Christ in Korea.[11]

Mission as Sharing

From the perspective of Christian mission, we can say that Kyoung Ok Jung is a transmitter of Christianity, and Lee is a recipient of the faith by his having accepted the Korean Bible. At first glance, some might classify Lee as an immature Christian insofar as he does not confess a Christian faith similar to that of those Korean Christians who have accepted a non-Korean, non-contextualized Christian model. Even though both Jung and Lee lived in the same Korean context, their different religious backgrounds contributed to Christian mission in Korea by enacting what I call *mission as*

sharing. By sharing their Christian faith in open dialogue with each other, the space was opened wherein the recipient culture's Scriptural insights could contribute to the development of a contextualized Christianity. We also see in Jung's and Lee's interactions that missionaries do not have to presuppose that recipients have no previous exposure to Christianity simply because they do not fit their own definition of an "authentic Christian." As a formally trained theologian and a former farmer with no formal theological training, Jung and Lee together embodied two very different types of Christian understanding and living.

Wilbert R. Shenk writes: "The missionary's role is to bear witness to what it means to be 'in Christ' and live within the new order of the kingdom of God. *Christological openness toward culture* does not begin with judgment but with relationship."[12] In the alternative Christian mission model that I propose, the story of Jesus Christ should be the primary narrative missionaries share with others. How, then, should missionaries share the narrative of Jesus Christ? The report of Rev. Kyoung Ok Jung offers direction. Rather than asking, "What *would* Jesus do in this context?", as missionaries have done in the past, I argue that we should ask, "What *is* Jesus doing in this context?"

Even though some people are unfamiliar with Christianity, we need to be careful about labeling the people living in a mission field as non-Christians, as those who do not fit *our* definition of "authentic Christians." The question "What *would* Jesus do in this context?" opens the door for the imposition of the transmitters' interpretation of Christianity upon the recipients. Approaching mission with the question "What *is* Jesus doing in this context?" reduces this danger. Looking back at the conversations between Kyoung Ok Jung and Se Jong Lee based on the Scriptural narrative of Jesus Christ and their own spiritual narratives of Jesus working in their lives, we see that these two figures were able to share their own narratives and learn from the other. Here opens the opportunity to see how "conversion to Jesus Christ means embracing a new identity."[13]

Their narrative sharing also sheds a light on the differences between mission and interreligious dialogue. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder argue that "each [interreligious] dialogue partner needs to be *a person of full conviction in her or his faith.*"[14] That is to say, interreligious dialogue partners approach the conversation in order to learn a new perspective, but not necessarily to take on the faith of their interlocutor. When we consider Shenk's statement on the role of the missionary, it would seem a mission model in line with interreligious dialogue would not provide enough space for dialogue partners to share the

different narratives of Jesus Christ as experienced by each individual and then appropriate what they learn from the other. If missional dialogue stays at the level of simply acknowledging the diversity in shared faith, there will be no forward motion in developing a contextualized Christianity, which remains the goal of missiological work. Contextualized Christianity requires an openness to sharing one's experiences with Jesus Christ.

A Possible Concern About Syncretism

As an alternative mission approach, I value the *mission of sharing* model because it allows the recipients to participate in the biblical narrative and appreciate Christianity spontaneously. In the process of contextualizing Christianity in a certain culture, some recipients may decide to renounce their traditional religious practices, while others may create a new form of Christianity. Some transmitters of the Gospel, though, may be worried about syncretism, which "saps the vitality of Christian life."[15] What characteristic of Christianity might protect the faith from such syncretism?

I submit "compassion" as a criterion for distinguishing a contextualized Christianity from outright religious syncretism. When it comes to sharing the biblical narratives with recipients of the Gospel, both missionaries and recipients must cooperate to imitate Jesus Christ in their lives. If someone wields the biblical narrative to nurture personal spirituality that is not directed towards his or her neighbor, it cannot be regarded as an effort to construct a contextualized Christianity. If a person engages in sharing the biblical narrative and does truly show compassion towards their neighbor, we can say that he or she is a Christian in her/ his context. It can be difficult for an equal relationship between missionaries and recipients to grow when missionaries assume superiority by taking advantage of the cultural background of the mission field. However, if the missionary acts with compassion in the different missiological context as they share the narrative of Jesus Christ, they will be less likely to take advantage of their position in Christian mission.

Conclusion

There is an old Korean saying: "Reviewing the old and learning the new." It suggests that learning something new can be done not only by receiving new ideas from outside, but also by rediscovering valuable resources from the past. In this vein, I found a positive contribution to Christian mission in the first pure Korean translation of the Bible because it allowed the common people of Korea to access the Christian Scriptures in a language they could understand. Rev. Kyoung Ok Jung's effort to

search for spontaneous Christian spirituality in his conversations with Se Jong Lee also allowed me to suggest an alternative Christian mission model less prone to slip into syncretism: *mission as sharing*.

As Korean churches start engaging in their own transmission of Christianity to other countries, they should look to their own Christian mission legacy. As we have seen, many problems regarding the establishment of Christianity in the recipients' context can occur when the transmitters of Christianity believe that their particular Christian faith is *the* authentic way. It is necessary to investigate a genuine meaning of Scripture through studying biblical contexts, but it is likewise necessary to consider contemporary missiological contexts in which Scripture is read. If there are indigenous Christian resources, they should be equally valued as tools of constructing new forms of Christianity in an act of compassion through *mission as sharing*.

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[1] James S. Gale, *Korea in Transition* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1909), 136.

[2] Deok-Joo Rhie, "Indigenization of the Gospel by 'the first generation Korean Bible': Historico-theological meaning of the centennial year of the first translation of the whole Bible in Korea" in *Canon & Culture* Vol. 4 No. 1 (2010): 106-108. Translated into English by Sungmoon Lee.

[3] Gale, 137-138.

[4] C. C. Vinton, "Presbyterian Mission Work in Korea" in *The Missionary Review of the World* (1983): 671.

[5] Rhie, 109. As cited in Kwang Soo Lee, (1917) "The Blessings of Jesus Religion [Christianity] to Joseon Dynasty" (耶穌教의 朝鮮에 준 恩惠) in *Chong chon (*靑春*)* Vol. 9. Translated into English by Sungmoon Lee.

[6] Deok-Joo Rhie, "Indigenization of the Gospel by 'the first generation Korean Bible'", 109.

[7] Ibid., 114-115.

[8] Deok-Joo Rhie, "The Korean Inculturalized Theology and Spirituality in the Early Period of Korea: Exploring the Theology and Spirituality of Rev. Byeong Heon Choi and Rev. Kyoung Ok Jung" in *Theology and the World* Vol. 53, (2005): 204-205. As cited in Kyoung Ok Jung, *The Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Seoul, Methodist Theological Seminary, 1939), 17. Translated into English by Sungmoon Lee.

[9] Ibid., 206-208.

[10] Jung, *The Introduction to Christian Theology,* 37. Translated into English by Sungmoon Lee.
[11] Rhie, "Indigenization... of the Gospel by 'the first generation Korean Bible'," 214-217.
[12] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission" in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, edited by Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 123. Emphasis mine.
[13] Wibert R. Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission," 119.
[14] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 151. Emphasis mine.
[15] Shenk, 119.

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Christology from the Slums: Anglo-Catholicism in Late 19th-Century England

Carter McCain

O God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry,
our earthly rulers falter, our people drift and die;
the walls of gold entomb us, the swords of scorn divide,
take not thy thunder from us, but take away our pride.[1]

Introduction

The illness besieging the Anglican Communion today is well-rehearsed, though not well-understood. The symptoms are clear enough: profound disagreements over doctrine and polity call into question what it means to be in communion with one another and threaten the communion that does exist. This situation, though perhaps novel in intensity and scope, is not novel in kind. The remarkable richness of the Anglican tradition presupposes a certain diversity of opinion on sources of theological authority, norms of ecclesiastical life, and modes of liturgical expression. The various "streams" within Anglicanism (however one wishes to enumerate them) have often functioned together, lending the Church an attractive flexibility on issues deemed "non-essential."[2] Allowing for a range of perspectives helps create a fecund, inclusive community in which true dialogue is possible. However, the demarcation of essentials from non-essentials is seldom clear, and the ensuing conflict has been frequently heated, and occasionally violent.

The goal of this paper is to give a cursory account of one historic example of this phenomenon: the Anglo-Catholic "slum priests" of the late 19th century. Very brief attention will first be given to the theology of the Oxford Movement, which undergirded the social and sacramental views of these priests. I will then move to an account of the slum priests themselves. Though there are many such figures worthy of attention, I will focus specifically on the ministry of Father Robert Dolling at Saint Agatha's Mission in Portsmouth, England. I will then assess the impact of the slum priests on the larger Church before offering some concluding thoughts on the importance of Christian unity and diversity.

Incarnation and the *Corpus Christi*

Geoffrey Rowell, in his book *The Vision Glorious*, examines the rise of Anglo-Catholicism.[3] The Oxford, or Tractarian[4], Movement was the catalyst for this push, providing the theological justification for a series of liturgical reforms in the Anglican Church. As Rowell writes, "At the heart of Tractarian spirituality and at the centre of Tractarian theology was the doctrine of the Incarnation issuing in the doctrine of the Divine indwelling."[5] The development of these twin themes of Incarnation and Indwelling would have profound implications for those priests who chose to live and minister in the slums. Three figures exerted especially strong influence in this regard: John Henry Newman, Robert Isaac Wilberforce, and Edward Bouveire Pusey.

Newman connects these themes by arguing that what belongs to the Divine Word by nature belongs to us by grace through participation in Him. The effect of this, says Newman, is that, "He can be worshipped within us as being His temple or shrine."[6] Rowell notes the influence Athanasius and the Greek fathers had on Newman's thought, leading to an emphasis on participation in the divine nature (deification/*theosis*). This participation is the *telos* of creation, realized via the agency of the Holy Spirit. The effect is that the *Logos* can be worshipped not simply in His unique incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, but also in the Church, the Body He creates for Himself through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Another focus of the Oxford Movement was personal piety or holiness, which was viewed as an outflow of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Robert Wilberforce, the son of the famous abolitionist William Wilberforce, outlines three "stages" of Christian regeneration: God's presence in Christ, the unity of all believers in the Body of Christ, and the influence of the *Logos* on the individual person.[7] Christian virtues, thus, have both corporate and individual dimensions. The spiritual growth of the individual is necessarily connected to the growth of the corporate body and vice versa. Any doctrine or practice that seeks the good of one must seek the good of the other. They exist for the sake of each other because they both exist primarily for God's sake.

The Incarnation, then, served as the point of union both between God and humanity, and between the human family and the individual. This insight led to a deepened understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Pusey writes,

> Baptismal regeneration, as connected with the Incarnation of the Blessed Lord, gives a depth to our Christian

> existence, an actualness [sic] to our union with Christ, a reality to our sonship to God, an interest in the presence of our Lord's glorified Body at God's right hand, a joyousness amid the subduing of the flesh, an overwhelmingness to the dignity conferred on human nature, a solemnity to the communion of the saints who are the fullness of Him who filleth all in all, a substantiality to the indwelling of Christ.[8]

The high view of the sacrament of Baptism reveals two themes important for our purposes. First, it affirms present Christian existence as deeply eschatological. We live in the light of realities we can neither see nor yet experience in full, though we wait and work toward them with joyous expectation. Second, there is an intimate connection between the physical and the spiritual. Tangible acts and practices can convey intangible realities; we can be ministers of the things of God because of what God has done in Christ.

The sacrament of the Eucharist elucidates and expands our understanding of these realities as well. It is "the summation of the longing for God in the human heart."[9] For Pusey, it is Christ feeding us spiritually with Himself and, in so doing, uniting us to Him so "as never to loose His hold on us."[10] The sacraments are, therefore, spiritual practices ordained by Christ that work to bring to completion what was started in the Incarnation and Indwelling. In the Incarnation, God united human nature to Himself. In the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God united individual humans to Himself and to each other. In the sacraments, God communicates to us what is needed for these unions to be fully realized.

Donald Gray gives a wonderful summary of this theology as it would be appropriated by the ministry of the slum priests.[11] He writes,

> For the sacramental socialists the pattern was quite clear: they were convinced that the *Corpus Christi*, which is the Church, needs to feed together in fellowship on the *Corpus Christi*, which is the Body and Blood received in the Holy Eucharist, in order that it may fulfil [sic] its role to be the *Corpus Christi*, the loving hands, feet, and eyes of Christ active and incarnate in his Servant Church.[12]

This theology hinges on understanding Jesus' exclamation, "This is my body" (1 Corinthians 11:24), at the Last Supper as a reference both to the

gathered community and to His flesh and blood mystically present in the sacrament. Two factors would lead this call to missional servitude to take on a decidedly political element for the sacramental socialists.[13] First was the way in which the Incarnation established the value of every dimension of human existence. God became (and will forever remain) fully human in Jesus, meaning the embodied and social dimensions of human existence matter to God. Thus Charles Gore can write, "We deny the veracity of the Incarnation in its principle if we deny the Christian spirit the privilege, aye, and the obligation, to concern itself with everything that interests and touches human life."[14] Second, the inseparability of bodies and souls entails that "the belief in spiritual equality leads on to the idea of social equality."[15] It will not do to concern oneself merely with the care of souls when those souls are themselves united to and affected by bodies.

The other dynamic of the Incarnation and Eucharist that molded the ministry of the sacramental socialists was the centrality of sacrifice.[16] The sacrifice of the Incarnation, culminating in the Cross, provided the model: as God has done, now you are to do. The re-presentation of that sacrifice in the Eucharist provided the means: come empty and leave full. The life of the Church provided the mission: pour yourselves out for the sake of making the powerless powerful, filling others as you yourselves have been filled. The Church itself is to be a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of God's inward and invisible grace extended to the world, even to the slums.

Fr. Robert Dolling and the Common Table

The Industrial Revolution, despite the many benefits it produced for the working middle class, was not an unadulterated good. While wages, life expectancy, and living conditions showed overall improvement, many workers lived in poverty. The areas of town in which these workers lived were often quite destitute. This proved an attractive mission ground for many young clergy with "High Church" leanings.[17] Dubbed the "Sub-Tractarians" by Athelstan Riley, they chose to live and work in the "festering" places in which others had no choice but to live.[18]

The advent of well-educated, High Church Ritualists among the working poor was by no means intuitive despite its striking parallels to the Incarnation. Formal religion and sacramental practices, not having been strongly emphasized previously, were not a natural part of the life of most English citizens.[19] However, a few decades later these "Puseyists" had become common and influential enough to be "a figure familiar to the point of stereotype."[20] One such figure was Fr. Robert William Radclyffe

Dolling.

"Father Bob" ministered at St. Agatha's, a mission church in the Landport district of Portsmouth, England.[21] Located southwest of London, Portsmouth was a mariner town, and Fr. Dolling's ministry was often to those working the ships and docks. He wrote an autobiography, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*[22], which served as an explication and defense of his ministry. He understood his mission thusly: "God has sent me to teach these people that they are His children, and that, therefore, they are priceless in His eyes."[23] Service to the poor was "the highest and most Christ-like of all Christian duties."[24] As we shall see, the way he lived out this call engendered both enthusiastic support and pointed criticism.

He started his work at the parish on September 29th, 1885, and was struck by two realities: poverty and sin.[25] Tellingly, he thought the latter largely explicable in terms of the former, noting the way in which poverty made certain choices (e.g. stealing) seem inevitable. This perception was deepened as it was passed on from one generation to the next, but this led Fr. Dolling to a robust hope. He writes, "The soul unquickened, the body alone is depraved, and, therefore, the highest part is still capable of the most beautiful development."[26] It also led him to a model of action that focused more on "prevention" (working to change the environment of the children) than "cure," the latter being much more difficult.[27] This seems a natural extension of the Gospel maxim: "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). This axiom characterizes much of Fr. Dolling's service, though it would not prevent him from quite literally knocking heads together if the behavior crossed certain lines, such as smoking pipes in church.[28]

He speaks of the dignity and hard labor of the working man, noting the failure of the Church of England to encourage and equip those who work six days "to give the seventh for the conversion of souls," despite the zeal he witnessed in them for doing so.[29] Dolling saw that there were not adequate funds to build churches and train clergy for every district, but a well-trained and empowered laity could reach deeper and wider without draining already slim ledgers. The indictment of the Church here is for expecting too little. In answer to the question of how proper habits of mind and heart are to be cultivated, he quotes his sister as saying, "By having ideals for them[,] they soon live up to them."[30] If the horizon of possibilities is narrowed by poverty, it is expanded by expectation. By failing to have high expectations one denigrates the human person, denying their created worth and forgetting their eschatological destiny as full (and useful!) members of the Kingdom of God.

Fr. Dolling lived out this principle by letting "the voice of the parish" largely determine the plan for ministry.[31] This voice took the form not simply of articulated desires, but the perceived needs of the people entrusted to his care. So, for example, he started dancing classes because he recognized that young men and women needed a place in which courtship could be pursued openly and with helpful "moral restraint."[32] He thought the lack of such a forum was a chief cause of sin. It also included making Children's Mass a priority even if, at times, it required leading up to four services per day.[33] This focus on children and education extended even to the formation of an active debating society.[34]

Feelings of guilt and shame are common; among the poor they are quite nearly ubiquitous. They flow from the kinds of choices people forced into poverty often make, and are exacerbated by the perceptions and expectations (right and wrong) of broader society. There is a longing in people to know that they can be and have been forgiven by God and by humanity for their faults, real or perceived. Thus, Fr. Dolling speaks of his "work in the confessional" as one of the primary contacts with people in town.[35] Forgiveness, however, is not the only grace offered by God and the confessional does not represent the culmination of Dolling's ministry. For that we must turn to his account of the "Common Table."

He writes, "Eight long years of that common dining-table cost enormous sums of money, and entailed continuous outpouring of strength and of tact; but I doubt if, in all England, money has been better spent, and strength better expended."[36] This table was the centerpiece—or better, the central practice—of a group house formed by Fr. Dolling and St. Agatha's. He lived there himself, calling it "Our House," and devotes an entire chapter of the book to it. It was a form of radical, communal living structured around a shared rule of life. The house was open to all, and a number of working men lived there. He notes that many potential clergy came because of an "exaggerated" account of the ritual, but quickly left when they realized that many of the altar servers (often working men) knew very little about ritual.[37]

Daily life was structured liturgically: Holy Communion at 7:00, Matins (Morning Prayer) at 7:40, another Celebration of Communion at 8:00, breakfast at 8:30, work or "walking" for the remainder of the morning, dinner at 1:00, exercise in the afternoon, tea at 5:30, church service at 7:30, clubs until 10:00, supper and prayers in individual rooms until 10:15, and then doors were locked for the night at 10:30.[38] Fr. Dolling held to this schedule nearly without exception (though not exercising in the afternoon), but it was flexible for others. In fact, the only events at

which Fr. Dolling says everyone was expected to be present were lunch and dinner, the times of common dining.[39]

He writes of these meals, "It was one of our rules to talk nonsense, as far as possible, at meals, and we generally brought in to dinner and tea one or two little children."[40] These were no humdrum affairs. Life outside of "Our House" presented plenty that was dull and tedious. These meals were moments of joy and levity. Fr. Dolling insists that the men sitting at table were required to be gentlemen, but he defines this in a somewhat non-standard sense: "thinking for others, and treating them with forbearance and tenderness and love, and striving to make them feel at home and at ease."[41] To be a gentleman, then, is to be convinced that everyone belongs and to do one's best to make sure they feel that way. It is to treat everyone as an individual rather than a "machine."[42]

Despite Fr. Dolling's primary focus being on the work of the local parish, he made time to speak to broader, political issues as well. This would be a source of some conflict for him. He notes that it is the duty of the clergy to preach that people are obligated to vote and that "God will hold him responsible for that vote."[43] Even in his autobiographical account of his ministry at St. Agatha's he finds time to write of the crippling debt accumulated by women whose husbands serve in the Navy:

> And believe me, the nation cannot get rid of the responsibility by saying he ought not to have married. It is for your sake that he is separated from his wife and family. It is for your sake that they are in poverty. I don't write these words lightly or inadvisedly [sic]. I have seen, over and over again, homes without food, children without clothes, wives without hope. I have come in more than once just in time to stop the wife earning money by the only method open to her.[44]

He says these households ought to have been "sacred" to England. He pens furiously that "the charity of a nation is strangled by the red tape of an Official Commission," which has kept the money given to it to support these households. In doing so it has revealed itself as a "soulless corporation, bereft of all bowels of compassion."[45] He records that he is thankful he has the opportunity to go and present evidence of this to the authorities, demonstrating his commitment to fighting for justice in the political sphere.

He sees the fight for social justice as part of his vocation as a

minister:

> I know that many people were very displeased with me, because I took what is called an active part in politics. Does a doctor or a lawyer cease to be a politician because he has got clients? Why then should a clergyman, because he has got parishioners?[46]

He does not argue merely for a lack of conflict between ministerial vocation and political involvement, however. He says it is a clergyperson's "bounden duty" to share his opinion on political matters that will aid his parishioners' discernment, though one should not tell them for whom to vote.[47]

Fr. Dolling demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the relation between social justice and governmental institutions. He recognizes the great good of labor unions, but also warns against the dangers of them becoming too large and losing proper perspective.[48] He writes that as long as ministry to the poor is done by officials it cannot be done in a truly Christian way, but acknowledges there are many exceptions to this.[49] On the whole he seems ambivalent about the role of government in pursuing social goods. It is necessary, but must be kept in constant check to avoid de-humanizing and perhaps de-Christianizing tendencies. Its value is purely instrumental, never intrinsic. Thus, the bulk of Dolling's time and energy were devoted to the parish (both in the sense of the church itself and the town in which it was located). He tried, for instance, to organize the local shop assistants to push for reasonable closing time and holidays.[50] He also worked against "the brewers and brothel-keepers," pushing to get the wealthy owners to see what went on at the places from which they were making their money.[51] He even tried to get the brewers to send their wives alone at evening to the public-houses at which their drinks were served; this request was dismissed, of course, as being "utterly preposterous."[52]

What, then, of Socialism? Donald Gray distinguishes Christian Socialism from the Socialist form of governance by noting the former's incarnational focus, producing a type of socialism that is more "ethical" than "political."[53] We see a similar thought in Dolling, who hopes the reader discerns in his opus "a deeper truth than mere Socialism even at its best."[54] This truth, which he calls "the method of Jesus Christ," is that changing a person's circumstances does little unless one succeeds in changing character as well. Even F.D. Maurice, an adamant supporter of the need for social reform, could not unreservedly support Socialism due

to its denial of the right to private property, which the Church considered God-given.[55]

Another source of conflict with ecclesiastical authorities, one that would end up leading to Fr. Dolling's resignation, was the ritual expressions of his sacramental theology. He affirms the Eucharist both as "the Blood of God" and as a true "viaticum,"[56] revealing a remarkably high sacramentology.[57] It was the practices themselves that would draw the ire of authorities, however. These included the use of red cassocks, incense, the Magnificat, Compline (last prayer service for the day), extemporaneous prayer, Vespers (sunset prayer service) of the Blessed Sacrament, and Vespers for the Dead.[58] These services were done with a corresponding emphasis on Christian education, for, "Nothing is more fatal than to introduce any change which people do not thoroughly understand."[59] By Fr. Dolling's account these services were no hindrance to growth; there were 99 communicants on his first Easter and over 500 on his last.[60]

In many ways the frequent and ornate offering of the Eucharist is another form (indeed, the highest form) of the Common Table. Dolling writes, "We condemn as a fundamental error the idea that men were created for the sake of the Sacraments. We believe that the Sacraments were created for the sake of men."[61] This led to an eschewal of merely formal practice in favor of an emphasis on vital ritual and "living faith."[62] It helps explain his emphasis on multiple Eucharistic services and focus on teaching the liturgy to children: this is how people come to feel they belong and learn to drink deeply of grace. Holy pageantry is also important, for, "If there is one place that needs a magnificent and impressive church, it is a slum."[63] A beautiful building and elaborate services give people a sense of the grandeur and enormity of the mystery into which they are being initiated, a mystery that is not other-worldly even though it is not merely of this world.

Fr. Dolling defended these services in a number of ways, going to great lengths in attempting to demonstrate that they were harmonious with the Anglican tradition, did not violate the Prayer Book, and were necessary for the adequate pastoring of his flock.[64] It is outside of the scope of this paper to go into the detailed arguments for and against these practices. Instead, in the interest of discerning Dolling's approach to church practice and ecclesiastical authority, a look at his dealings with the two bishops responsible for oversight of St. Agatha's during the latter half of his tenure will suffice.[65]

The first was Bishop Anthony Wilson Thorold, who became Bishop of Winchester in 1891. He had to field a number of complaints

about Fr. Dolling's ritualism, and himself objected quite strongly to a number of the practices. Opposition to Ritualism was quite pronounced in general at this time.[66] Nevertheless, his approach to Dolling is revealed most clearly by several remarks he makes. He writes that while he cannot "sanction" the book of services in use at St. Agatha's to which he objects, he will "protect" Dolling in the use of it.[67] This extends to defending his ministry to others, writing that Fr. Dolling's ministry, "while disfigured by errors and eccentricities . . . is of a kind which very few other men are capable of accomplishing."[68] This charitable approach to disagreement and measured use of authority is more deeply revealed when Bishop Thorold writes,

> You have never expected nor asked me to say that with all your methods and teaching I can profess sympathy. It is but straightforward for me to add that it is your self-denying life, with the manly, generous activities behind it which God is so manifestly blessing, that makes me more than ready to condone what I and others would with satisfaction find to be eliminated from your public services.[69]

In short, Bishop Thorold never forbid Fr. Dolling from observing those rituals to which he deeply objected both theologically and personally. The fruit of the Spirit in Dolling's ministry and obvious sacrifice on behalf of his parishioners prevented him from doing so. Bishop Thorold passed away in 1895 and was succeeded by Bishop Randall Winton, with whom relations would be less amicable.

Fr. Dolling ends his book with an appendix composed of his correspondence with Bishop Winton that spanned from September 28th, 1895 (the ten year anniversary of Fr. Dolling's start at Saint Agatha's) through the end of that same year.[70] Bishop Winton was quite explicit in his demand that Fr. Dolling stop those services (most notably Masses for the Dead and offering services of Holy Communion at which no or few communicants were present) which he perceived contradicted the Prayer Book and the Anglican tradition. Fr. Dolling responded by offering his resignation, not being able to stop these service with a clean conscience. The bishop, while expressing great sadness over Dolling's intention to resign, did not rescind the demand. Fr. Dolling left St. Agatha's on January 11th, 1896.

Assessing the Movement

How ought we to assess the success of the ministry at St. Agatha's and of the slum priests in general? Reed argues that if the number of people involved is the primary metric, the Ritualist movement was only marginally successful.[71] On the whole they were no more fruitful in this regard than other types of churches, and the makeup of the congregations were similar demographically. Though St. Agatha's showed tremendous growth, it was one of the exceptions. He concludes, "The Ritualists' evangelistic theory was simply incorrect: the few working-class men and women who attended Anglo-Catholic churches were not initially attracted by the ceremony"; it was, instead, the creation of clubs and guilds by these churches that can explain the measure of growth that did occur among the poor.[72] However, correct evangelistic theory and sheer numbers are not the only relevant measures of success.

Quoting Archibald Tait, Reed argues that the success of Dolling and others can be attributed to an "anxious love to save souls" and "a genuine concern for their welfare."[73] Fr. Dolling's friend and fellow clergyman at St. Agatha's, C.E. Osborne, echoes this sentiment:

> But the greatest thing about him was his intensely vital personality, and the strength of its influence for righteousness. To be near him was to feel alive, to be again buoyant, joyous, young in heart. Dulness [sic], conventionality, hardness of mind and of feeling could not exist within the range of his potent influence. He was a unique force, with power to free, arouse, dilate the minds and sympathies of those who came in contact with him.[74]

This success was an influence that was "deep but restricted"; Dolling and others engendered fierce loyalty and profound transformation among a relatively small group of people.[75] The opposition to the rituals was common at first, but as the movement showed signs of continued vitality this began to soften. The popular line became similar to what we saw in Bishop Thorold's treatment of Fr. Dolling: "it was worth putting up with the Ritualists' excesses for the sake of their good works."[76] Reed concludes that it was primarily the saintliness of the person that led to the success of slum churches.[77] As Dolling was by almost all accounts exceptional in this regard, St. Agatha's thrived under his care.

We should not limit the effect or success of the Ritualist movement or the Sacramental Socialists to an assessment of the local parishes

themselves. Rowell writes, "If the Oxford Movement may be said to have changed the pattern of Anglican worship it was in these urban parishes that the changes both began and were pressed to extremes."[78] I will conclude this section with a brief survey of some of the changes in Anglican practice that have clear precedent in the ministry of the slum priests in general and Fr. Dolling in particular.

A committee formed in 1918 to examine the worship of the Church and make recommendations for revision concluded that the blame for people's alienation from public worship lies,

> . . . in the lack of religious education, in the failure to use the gifts of the laity, and in those perverted conceptions of life among all classes which it is the duty of the Church to correct, and those social and industrial wrongs which it is the duty of the nation to redress.[79]

The addressing of these concerns took several forms. There was an increased emphasis on the Eucharistic elements being a real offering of the people, the fruit of their labor received and sanctified by God.[80] In the 1920's the League of the Kingdom of God, one of several Christian Socialist groups, emphasized both the centrality of the Eucharist in worship and a need for the Church to reclaim its prophetic office via a re-appropriation of the "lost social traditions of Christendom."[81] There was an increased emphasis on holding Christians to a higher standard of living, on expecting a non-worldly way of living in the world.[82] Together these reveal that the association between sacrament and social action rooted in a theology of the Incarnation proved compelling even to those working outside of the slums.

Additionally, the Liturgical Movement in the 1920's would take up and expand on aspects of the *Corpus Christi*. Special attention was given to the way in which inclusion in the mystical Body of Christ means that liturgy is something to be lived, something that both expresses and establishes the "supernatural fraternity" of the Christian community.[83] This focus on the two-fold sense of the Body of Christ present in the Eucharistic feast would eventually lead to the establishment of the Parish Communion.[84] This includes an understanding of the Eucharist as the central liturgical act, the expressed expectation that the faithful gather as often as possible (typically weekly) in order to partake, and the undertaking of reasonable liturgical reforms to make this as accessible to the people as possible. Two such reforms were adjusting the time of the

service to make it easy for people to attend while fasting and providing adequate time for people to truly rest on the Sabbath.[85] Parish breakfast also became more common as the practice of approaching Communion fasting became normative.[86] This served to reclaim the ancient connection between the Eucharist and the agape feast.[87] One might think of this as Fr. Dolling's "Common Table" writ large. All told, the eccentric practices of this collection of High Church activists had profound effects for Anglicans of all persuasions, even though many of the most "extreme" rituals were never officially adopted or endorsed.

Conclusion - Toward Christian Unity

We see articulated in the Oxford Movement a theology of Incarnation and Indwelling that stresses Christian unity as a metaphysical reality to be acknowledged, a visible reality to be established and deepened via shared ritual practice, and an eschatological reality to be actively sought in prayer and service. There is credence given, no doubt, to the fellowship of all humanity as created in the image of God and united to God via the Son's assumption of human nature. Yet special emphasis is rightly placed on the Christian community as constituting the Body of Christ via the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As such, there is a unique relationship between the mind of Christ and the collective mind of the Church. It is this relationship that allowed the Church gathered in Jerusalem to say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." (Acts 15:28). There is no mention of infallibility, but the presence of a strong sense of proper authority cannot be denied.

Yet the reality is that councils "may err, and sometimes have erred," as Canon XXI of the original version of *The Thirty Nine Articles* attests. How, then, ought we to behave in cases where the mind of the Church is split or the dictates of personal conscience run contrary to the ecclesial consensus? The interaction of Fr. Dolling with his bishops suggests a model at once both charitable and radical. He sought to conform himself to the tradition as best he understood it, making his case to those placed in authority over him by God.[88] When those authorities gave him license, he took it. When they did not, he lived in accordance with his conscience by resigning. He refused to push ahead in an attempt to get his way, offering implicit testimony that the Pauline imperative, "wait for one another," applies to more than eating and drinking.[89] As his letters show, he saw obedience and respect as important even when he was convinced his superior was in error. He refused to disobey either God or man, instead opting to sacrifice his own position and privilege in a display of profoundly

Christ-like humility. He expresses great joy that none of his parishioners left when he did, celebrating that none of them would be so fickle. The unity of the Body was maintained and, if his legacy is as positive as I have suggested, he was vindicated.

Tie in a living tether the prince and priest and thrall,
bind all our lives together, smite us and save us all;
in ire and exultation aflame with faith, and free,
lift up a living nation, a single sword to thee.[90]

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[1] First stanza of the G.K. Chesterton hymn "O God of Earth and Altar," 1906.

[2] This has led many to describe Anglicanism as a *Via Media* between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, though the applicability of this term is oft-disputed.

[3] Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[4] This title derives from a series of theological publications for which the movement was responsible, collectively named *Tracts for the Times.*

[5] Rowell, 14.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 15.

[8] Ibid., 17.

[9] Ibid., 20.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Donald Gray, *Earth and Altar: The Evolution of the Parish Communion in the Church of England to 1945* (Norwich: Canterbury Press Norwich, 1986).

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] We will return later to the sense in which the word "political' is intended here.

[14] Ibid., 128.

[15] Ibid., 73.

[16] Ibid., 220.

[17] Ibid., 88.

[18] Ibid., 109.
[19] Rowell, 119.
[20] John Shelton Reed, "'Ritualism Rampant in East London': Anglo-Catholicism and the Urban Poor," *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1988): 375.
[21] Reed, 376.
[22] Robert R. Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*. (1897; London: Forgotten Books, 2012).
[23] Ibid., 12.
[24] Ibid., 126.
[25] Ibid., 17.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Ibid., 49.
[28] Ibid., 19.
[29] Ibid., 22.
[30] Ibid., 38.
[31] Ibid., 24.
[32] Ibid., 42-44.
[33] Ibid., 51.
[34] Ibid., 61.
[35] Ibid., 70.
[36] Ibid., 73.
[37] Ibid., 89.
[38] Ibid., 95-96.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 98.
[42] Ibid., 101. On page 126 he will offer a similar critique of attempts to reform the workhouse system. There is an importance in doing things in a way that is individualizing and human rather than institutional and mechanistic.
[43] Ibid., 127.
[44] Ibid., 109.
[45] Ibid., 110.
[46] Ibid., 128.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 130.
[49] Ibid., 126.
[50] Ibid., 131.
[51] Ibid., 136-140.
[52] Ibid. This did not stop Dolling, however, from being totally baffled at

their unwillingness.

[53] Gray, 124.

[54] Dolling, 198.

[55] Gray, 81.

[56] Latin for, roughly, "provisions for the journey," referring to Last Rites as a promise of eternal life to strengthen the soul for its journey to God. The Roman Catholic practice was to have Reserve Sacrament on hand for this purpose, and Dolling notes the same practice here.

[57] Dolling, 121-122.

[58] Ibid., 145.

[59] Ibid., 211.

[60] Ibid., 215.

[61] Ibid., 173.

[62] Rowell, 137-138.

[63] Dolling, 229.

[64] cf. Ibid., 144 and 153.

[65] Bishop Harold Browne was Fr. Dolling's bishop during the first half of his tenure at St. Agatha's. Though they differed over matters of ritual, Bishop Browne gave him tremendous license and Dolling says there was never any bad will between them (Dolling, 146). Browne was, however, deeply critical of Christian Socialism (Rowell, 139).

[66] Rowell, 132.

[67] Dolling, 159.

[68] Ibid., 160.

[69] Ibid., 162.

[70] Ibid., 241-272.

[71] Reed, 390-392.

[72] Ibid., 393.

[73] Ibid., 398.

[74] C.E. Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling* (London: Edward Arnold, 1903), ix.

[75] Reed, 401.

[76] Ibid., 402.

[77] Ibid., 399.

[78] Rowell, 116.

[79] Gray, 41.

[80] Ibid., 132.

[81] Ibid., 134.

[82] Ibid., 143.

[83] Ibid., 194.

[84] Ibid., 117.
[85] Ibid., 169.
[86] Ibid., 225.
[87] 1 Corinthians 11 is evidence of this practice.
[88] This comes out even more clearly in Osborne's biography of Dolling cited above.
[89] 1 Corinthians 11:33.
[90] Final stanza of Chesterton, "O God of Earth and Altar."

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His Mother's Child: On Susanna Wesley's Great Influence Upon Her Son, John Wesley

Rachel Rigdon and Thomas Webster

Introduction

The impact of the lives and theological positions of John and Charles Wesley on the development of early Methodism is unmistakable. Wesleyan theology sought to reform the Anglican Church of its day through its emphasis on the vital balance between works of piety and works of mercy that served as the Christian response to the gracious "love of God… shed abroad in our hearts."[1] Though the theology of Charles Wesley, and certainly the poetry in which much of that theology is expressed, is of great significance for the Wesleyan and Methodist movements, it is with the sources of John Wesley's theology that this essay is mainly concerned.

Albert Outler notes in the preface to his edited volume titled *John Wesley* that Wesley's theology "is more fruitfully understood in terms of his own background and context than in the light of the evolution of the Methodist movement after his death."[2] Outler's focus on John Wesley's background and context could be more clearly refined to be a focus on the theological sources that influenced Wesley's own theology of piety and mercy. An argument of considerable import, this attention to *source*, and the focus in kind of other Wesleyan scholars, does little, however, to consider John Wesley's formative years in the Epworth rectory and the subsequent relation with his mother as a contributive source to his future theological task and religious life. Following a review of literature pertinent to the study of Susanna Wesley in Methodist History, this essay argues specifically that his mother, who embodied a theologically-rich fusion of Puritanical pietism and Anglican orthodoxy, and her relationship with her "Jackie" should be understood as a prime source in the development of John Wesley's practical theology of piety and mercy.

Susanna Wesley in the Literature

Scholarship regarding the Wesley family has been of interest to church historians for over a century. Most notably, Adam Clarke's nineteenth-century text, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family: Collected Principally from Original Documents,* did considerable foundational work in this field. Unlike other Wesley collections of its time, Clarke's focus on the entirety of the family rather than just the works of John or Charles is of

import for later Wesleyan scholarship. For such a collection to persist over multiple editions implies that the writings and endeavors of the Wesley family were more than just a historical curiosity to the late Hanoverian mind. It can be clearly discerned that the impact of the rectory family structure and life on the important figures of John and Charles was of great significance.

Though the study of Wesleyan history in the twentieth century flourished under Outler and his students, the impact of Clarke's more holistic inclusion of family discourse on works like G. Elsie Harrison's 1938 *Son to Susanna: The Private Life of John Wesley* seems to have been negligible on the works of Outler and his students.[3] Outler mentions Wesley's parents and his years spent in their household over nine lines in the introduction to his greater *John Wesley* volume. Richard Heitzenrater manages to meagerly include Susanna Wesley's role in the theological formation of her children as he notes that "the children were given careful training in piety and learning."[4] Such learning "combined faith and good works in a fashion that reflected the orthodox doctrinal perspective and Puritan ethical inclinations of Samuel and Susanna Wesley" before the boys were sent to London around age ten for a more formal education.[5] And, though in his second chapter he does give the slightest nod to Epworth when speaking of John's "admiration and love for the history of the church," Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. offers only slightly more than Heitzenrater in the first chapter of his text, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*.[6] Paul Wesley Chilcote's edited work, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women,* positively and briefly discusses Susanna Wesley over less than a page in regard to her son's conviction that "no one, including a woman, ought to be prohibited from doing God's work in obedience to the inner calling of her conscience."[7] With the exception of three words in Yrigoyen, these most prominent sources relegate mentions of Wesley's time under the tutelage of his mother while in his father's parish to introductions and opening chapters. Furthermore, Outler's inclusion of seven Wesley letters in a discussion of Wesley's self-identity fails to include correspondences with any women at all, let alone between John and his mother. Finally, Chilcote's collection of Methodist women's autobiographies only mentions the then recently published Wallace, Jr. edition of *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) in an introductory endnote.

Led in part by the 1987 republication of Abel Stevens' 1866 *Women of Methodism*, the closing decades of the twentieth century saw a modest advance in interest regarding Susanna Wesley and her role in the growth

of Methodism.[8] Biographical portraits of the Wesleyan matriarch written by Arnold A. Dallimore, John A. Newton, and Samuel J. Rogal do well in their discussions of the multifaceted and nuanced impact of Susanna Wesley's life on English and Wesleyan history, offering deep insight into her person and character.[9] A substantive, shorter length biography written by Mary Greetham advances the idea that Susanna Wesley was, for John Wesley, "the ideal woman" as she argues that "it was not to his scholarly father he wrote for advice but his down-to-earth, eminently sensible mother."[10] Other shorter length books, essays, and articles chronicle the life of Susanna Wesley with varied success. Of the more successful shorter works, David Butler's 1998 article in *Epworth Review* deftly employs Clarke's work to argue for Susanna Wesley's deep influence on John; Deidre Brower's *Susanna Wesley: Practical Theologian* is an accessible text that offers important insights into the life and thoughts of Susanna Wesley in a concise manner; and Charles Wallace, Jr. offers a more technical discussion of Susanna Wesley's education and its impact on her personal and religious endeavors in his essay, "'Some Stated Employment of Your Mind': Reading, Writing, and Religion in the Life of Susanna Wesley."[11] These three shorter works all help to focus the argument of the present essay.

By far, the most important work in Susanna Wesley scholarship within Methodist history is Charles Wallace, Jr.'s 1997 edited volume of Susanna Wesley's works titled *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*.[12] This text highlights the sheer volume of her written material while more fully elucidating the biographical portraits provided by other authors. Wallace, Jr. not only succeeds in providing primary source material for a study of Susanna Wesley; his collection reframes her as a dynamic theologian whose facile pen produced journal entries, letters, and extended works whose foci ranged from theological and educational treatises to family news and introspective writings.

Susanna Wesley as Theological and Spiritual Source

Born in 1703, John Wesley was the second of three boys born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. His father, an Anglican priest, experienced a gradual conversion from the Dissenting tradition to the Church of England prior to wedding Susanna Wesley in 1690. It was, however, his mother who had the most impact on the education and religious structuring of the household. In her childrearing, Susanna Wesley instilled in the Wesley children—all ten: seven daughters and three sons—a disciplined attention to scriptural and religious education, attendance upon their prayers, and a

practical education focused on literacy and writing. As Butler writes, "It was hard work belonging to a Puritan family turned High-Anglican!"[13] Susanna Wesley's methodology for such household discipline is outlined in many instances throughout her manuscripts and letters as well as in Clarke's *Memoirs*.[14]

Samuel J. Rogal, writing of Susanna Wesley's spiritual and intellectual influence on the children, argues that, though the Wesley children "did not emerge from the nursery of Epworth rectory as spiritual and intellectual clones of their mother, [her] mere presence and dominance during their formative years affected all of them to certain degrees."[15] For the children to emerge as spiritual clones of their mother was never the intent of her educational method. In one of her most famous letters to John, she writes that the "hope to save the souls of [her] children" was her "principal intention, however unskillfully or unsuccessfully managed."[16] Understanding her work as a mother and household educator to carry salvific import, Susanna Wesley taught her children, "as soon as they could speak, the Lord's prayer, which they were made to say at rising and bed-time constantly."[17] Such discipline to prayer combined with the conscious delineation of the Sabbath from other days reveals Susanna Wesley's own education and spiritual discipline in a Nonconformist family. Even following her conversion to the Church of England, Susanna Wesley's journal entries and encouragements to correspondents to engage in earnest prayer elucidate a continued commitment to the power and importance of prayer in the life of the individual. In one such journal entry, she wrote,

> Philosophy and morality are not sufficient to restrain us from those sins that our constitution of body, circumstances of life or evil custom strongly dispose us to…This is only to be effected by the power of religion, which will direct us to a serious application to God in fervent prayer, upon which we shall feel a disengagement from the impressions sensual objects were wont to make on our minds, and an inward strength and disposition to resist them.[18]

Her conversion did, however, further increase the depth of religious literature in which her children became steeped. John's knowledge-base began in the rectory and was built upon by his professors and tutors. John now away at school, Susanna Wesley's continued counsel took the form of correspondences with her son.

Though she did write a few treatises of substantive length,

much of Susanna Wesley's communication with her "Jacky" seamlessly discussed family and community matters along with issues of religion and the church.[19] In a letter to John dated February 23, 1725, Susanna Wesley implored him to "enter upon a serious examination" of himself that he might have the "reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ." [20] For Susanna Wesley, such salvation manifested itself as "faith and repentance… the conditions of the gospel covenant" on the part of sinful humanity.[21] Her encouragement throughout his discernment process for holy orders reflected both her personal life as the child and wife of clergymen, and her personal understanding of the importance of the faithful life of the ordained. Despite her admitted disagreement with her husband regarding the matter, she spared no words, writing her son to prepare for diaconal orders quickly, for it would induce him "to greater application in the study of practical divinity…the best study for candidates for orders."[22] The ease with which she engaged her Oxford son continued alongside her reminders that he attend to spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture, and readings well through his early adulthood.

Indeed, as late as the final eighteen months of Susanna Wesley's life, her correspondences with John continued from her quarters at the newly acquired Foundry in London. Her pastoral commitment to the members of the society there, as well as the continued spiritual and temporal care showed for her sons in the extant final letters, is clear and inspiring. Moreover, it is evident that her theological resolve had not diminished with age. Encouraging the advancement of her sons' Arminian principles over the abhorrent growth of Calvinism, she wrote for Charles to "Proclaim [God's] universal love and free grace to all men" that he may continue in the power of the Lord and be preserved from yielding place to those bold blasphemers [the Calvinist Predestinarians, specifically Whitefield]."[23] The anonymous publication of her *Some Remarks on a Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield* later that same year again proves her theological acumen, as it worked to encourage and strengthen the Arminian position of an embattled John Wesley. More than the recitation of popular arguments, her *Remarks* offered important rejoinders to Calvinist predestinarianism and further nuanced arguments made by her son with a fierce practical piety. Especially pointed is her critique of the practice of preaching to the damned.[24] And, though it cannot be proven that John's sermon "Free Grace" was directly influenced by correspondence or audience with his mother, his argument for the uselessness of preaching to the elect and to the damned is precisely the argument from the study of *practical divinity* of which his mother spoke fourteen years prior in her letter regarding

orders.[25] Given the great extent of their relationship, it is difficult to doubt that conversation took place in correspondence and in person preceding and following the publication of this sermon.

The discipline of morning prayers, scripture, and Anglican catechesis instilled while in the Epworth rectory echoed in John Wesley's later exhortations for members of Methodist societies to attend to what he terms "means of grace." In his 1746 sermon under the same name, Wesley defines these means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby [God] might convey to [humanity] preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[26] He continues in his sermon to emphasize the primacy of prayer as a means of grace followed by "searching the Scriptures," and reception of the sacrament.[27] Yrigoyen, Jr. notes three more means by which Wesley recognized "God works to nurture holiness"—fasting, Christian Conference, and public worship.[28] Though Outler and Heitzenrater's introductory words to this sermon in their 1991 volume of Wesley's *Sermons* primarily characterize this discourse as a response to latent Moravian influence among "a sizeable group of Methodists in 1746," the development of the deep need for these outward disciplines in this sermon, with a heightened emphasis on prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, and attendance to Sacrament, is the product of a profoundly pietistic, Anglican seed planted and cultivated for nearly a decade during his childhood.[29]

Clarke notes that "as [the children] grew bigger, [to the twice-daily Lord's prayers] were added a short prayer for their parents, and some collects, a short catechism, and some portion of Scripture, as their memories could bear."[30] Over time, the discipline established through his mother's conquering instruction and fostered in correspondences exhorting critical self-reflection began to manifest itself in deep retreats of introspection, as well as John Wesley's own personal journaling.[31] Heitzenrater credits John Wesley's interests in mysticism spurred by William Law with the "increased level of self-examination [which] resulted in a degree of spiritual pulse-keeping."[32] Yet, though Heitzenrater is certainly right to credit Law with fueling John Wesley's mystic interests, the influence of Susanna Wesley's educational methodology on John Wesley's personal attempts to subdue his self-will in the pursuit of religion—that which "is nothing else than doing the will of God, and not our own"—must not be forgotten.[33] Chronologically, Susanna Wesley's educational methodology is received and recorded by John Wesley in the months prior to his reception of *Theologica Germanica* from Law.[34] And, as mentioned earlier, Susanna Wesley was already imploring John to engage in rigorous self-examination

well before her correspondence regarding her methodology. With self-examination encouraged by both Susanna Wesley and mystic writers, it should not be forgotten that the methodology presented to John through his readings of Law and other mystics proved ultimately distasteful. Outler notes that, though "dropped from all editions after 1765," Wesley initially denounced the mystic writers.[35] He wrote that the mystics were those "whom I declare in my cool judgment and in the presence of the Most High God, I believe to be the one great anti-Christ."[36] Such a critique was never leveled against his mother, her correspondences, or theological dialogues.

Furthermore, Susanna Wesley found it especially necessary that she be able to spend individual time with each child so that she may see more directly to that child's wellbeing and "principal concerns."[37] Her specific attention to each child is continually evidenced throughout her later correspondences with her sons while they were away at school and in the priesthood. Dallimore argues that such communication also contained content "manifestly above the understanding of young boys, but showed them [that] there was an advanced learning available in life."[38] These correspondences worked to challenge the sons to further their educational endeavors, building upon the catechetical and pietistic foundations laid by Susanna Wesley, as well as upon the linguistic and literary foundations provided by their father Samuel.

Additionally, Susanna Wesley's influence can be seen in John Wesley's attention to Christian Conferencing and the multitude of individuals in the societies with whom he was engaged in spiritual formation. Though interpreted by her husband as a "conventicle" gathered in defiance of the Act of Toleration (1689), a notable episode of Christian Conferencing in the Wesley household during John's childhood saw his mother invite neighbors to the rectory for evening prayers in 1711-1712. Chastising Susanna for the potentially illicit activity, Samuel Wesley wrote strongly from London to Epworth only to be received by and replied to with an equally strong letter from Susanna. She ended her letter, writing,

> If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, … send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, who you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.[39]

Echoing his mother's individual attention to the concerns and well-being of her children, as well as the spiritual nourishment of her husband's parishioners, John Wesley's class structure within Methodism argued that spiritual growth cannot be accomplished in complete isolation and that the growth patterns of different individuals required different levels of stimulation, pruning, and care. Even when the gathering society, class, or band could not be led by John or Charles, the leadership of a lay preacher or other Anglican clergyman with whom Wesley was in constant and close contact provided the attention to personal growth originally fostered by Susanna Wesley's interactions with her children at home and through correspondence.

In the leadership of Methodist societies and classes, the influence of Susanna Wesley is also deeply felt. It was the words of Susanna Wesley that led John to accept the lay preaching of Thomas Maxfield as one who was called by God to preach.[40] Chilcote notes that much of John's appreciation for the positive role "of women in the life of the church can be traced to his formative years in the Epworth rectory."[41] Heitzenrater notes that, as a young boy, John was the only son in the rectory until the birth of his brother Charles. During his early childhood, John witnessed his mother's concern for the literacy of his sisters as well as his own. Indeed, Heitzenrater notes that "one of [Susanna Wesley's] household 'by-laws' stipulated 'that no girl be taught to work till she can read very well." [42] Failing to do so, Wesley argued, "is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard, and never to be well understood."[43] Susanna Wesley's passion for the education and capabilities of women leaves little wonder as to John's later sanctioning of women's leadership in Methodist activities despite the general transgression of contemporary social and religious conventions that was the preaching woman.[44] It would be difficult to doubt the heavy influence of his mother, her pastoral sensibilities, and her astute theological observations on such a correspondence.

Conclusion

Despite the relative silence given to Susanna Wesley's influence, John Wesley's relationship with his mother deeply impacted his personal pietistic practices and later the structure, theology, and governance of the Wesleyan Methodist societies. Indispensable from the canon of theological source material from which John Wesley developed his gospel of piety and mercy, the complex juxtaposition of High-Anglican doctrinal tradition and Puritanical pietism embodied in Susanna Wesley intensely shaped John's childhood and further adult ministry. Susanna Wesley's concentrated

structure of the spiritual and intellectual education of her children in the Epworth rectory continued in letters to her sons while they were away at school. The relationship she fostered with her son John during his time at Oxford and following his ordination influenced both his sermons and pastoral work. Ultimately, this relationship affected even his desire for the experience of assurance along with later expositions on the relationship between faith and works.[45]

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[1] Romans 5:5 (KJV).

[2] Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1980), vii.

[3] G. Elsie Harrison, *Son to Susanna: The Private Life of John Wesley* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938).

[4] Outler, *John Wesley*, 6; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 31.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Yrigoyen's "slightest nod" follows the quoted sentence as he lists the Epworth rectory among other influences on John's study of church tradition. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 26; 12.

[7] Paul Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 18.

[8] Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism; Its Three Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck; with Sketches of Their Female Associates... in the Early History of the Denomination* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

[9] Arnold A. Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1992).; John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002).; Samuel J. Rogal, *Susanna Annesley Wesley (l669-1742): a Biography of Strength and Love (the Mother of John and Charles Wesley)* (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Pr, 2001).

[10] Mary Greetham, *Susanna Wesley Mother of Methodism* (United Kingdom: Foundery Press, 1988), 18.

[11] David Butler, "'Look for the Mother to Find the Son': The Influence of Susanna Wesley on Her Son John," *Epworth Review* 21, no. 4 (1998), 90-100.; Deidre Brower. *Susanna Wesley: Practical Theologian* (Shearsby:

The Wesley Fellowship, 2001).; Charles Wallave, Jr., "'Some Stated Employment of Your Mind': Reading, Writing, and Religion in the Life of Susanna Wesley,d *Church History* 47, no. 3 (1989), 354-366.

[12] Charles Wallace, Jr., ed., *Susanna Wesley: the Complete Writings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1997).

[13] Butler, 92.

[14] References to Clarke in this essay are Butler's quotations of the original.

[15] Rogal, 146.

[16] It does seem foolish for one to agree with Susanna's characterization of her work as *unskillful* or *unsuccessful*. Susanna A. Wesley as quoted in Wallace, Jr., 367.

[17] Clarke as quoted in Butler, 91.

[18] Susanna A. Wesley as quoted in Wallace, Jr., *Susanna Wesley*, 324.

[19] Wallace, Jr., 31.

[20] Susanna A. Wesley as quoted in Wallace, Jr., Ibid. 106.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 106-107.

[23] This comes from the close of a greater letter to Charles in which she discussed the practical divinity of the need for full individual conviction of sin and the ever-malignant politics within the growing Methodist movement between Moravian, Calvinist, and Arminian camps. Ibid., 190.

[24] Ibid., 469.

[25] John Wesley, ford University Press, USA, 1980), *John Wesley's Sermons: an Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 52.

[26] John Wesley, e of a greater letter*Sermons*, 160.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Yrigoyen, Jr., *Holiness*, 41, 46, 50, 52, respectively.

[29] An Introductory Comment," Outler, *Sermons*, 157.

[30] Clarke as quoted in Butler, 91.

[31] Susanna speaks of the necessity of the conquest of the child's will in her letter to John regarding her educational method. Susanna A. Wesley as quoted in Wallace, Jr., 369-373.

[32] Yrigoyen, Jr., 52-53.

[33] Susanna A. Wesley as quoted in Wallace, Jr., *Susanna Wesley*, 370.

[34] Susanna dated her letter regarding her educational method July 24, 1732. Heitzenrater's brief discussion of Law's interaction with John and its subsequent influence on the "exacter" diary places this interaction in the latter half of 1732. Wesley himself discussed his encounter with

Mr. Law's writings *Christian Perfection and Serious Call* in 1727 as inspiring the resolve to be "all devoted to God in body, soul and spirit," but nowhere in Outler's 1980 edited volume of his works is his mention of the medieval mystics rather favorable. The *Theologica Germanica* is not mentioned explicitly at all. Ibid, 369.; Heitzenrater, 52.; John Wesley as quoted in Outler, *John Wesley*, 79.

[35] Albert C. Outler. "Note 18." *John Wesley*, 63.

[36] John Wesley as quoted in Outler, Ibid., 63.

[37] Clarke as quoted in Butler, 92.

[38] Dallimore, 89.

[39] Heitzenrater, 32.

[40] Heitzenrater tells of this episode:

> Henry Moore later reported the story that upon discovering that Maxfield was preaching, John protested this irregularity to his mother Susanna (who was living in the Foundery at the time): "Thomas Maxfield has turned Preacher, I find." Susanna's response, while not countenancing lay preaching in general, was, "Take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself." Moore reports that Wesley "bowed before the force of truth, and could only say, 'It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.'" Ibid., 115.

[41] Chilcote, 18.

[42] Heitzenrater, 28.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Wesley's interaction with Sarah Crosby, a former class leader at the Foundery, is telling as to the conflict between these conventions and the desire for inclusion of women in the ministry of the movement. She had begun a class meeting, which continued to grow without the oversight of a preacher. In response to her dilemma, John wrote:

> (1) Pray in private or public as much as you can. (2) Even in public you may properly enough intermix short exhortations with prayer. But keep as far from what is called preaching as you can. Therefore never take a text; never speak in a continued discourse without some break, about four to five minutes. Tell the people, 'We shall have another prayer-meeting at such a time and place.' (Ibid., 264.)

[45] Further scholarship could be done here with special attention paid to John's later development of the relationship between faith, works, and sanctification in regards to a section of correspondence between Susanna and John in which Susanna writes:

> By *faith*, I do not mean an assent only to the truths of the gospel concerning him, but such an assent as influences our practice; as makes us heartily and thankfully accept him for our God and Saviour upon his own conditions. No faith below this can be saving…. (Clarke as quoted in Butler, 93.)

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"I Just Slipped Away the Other Day"

Vanessa Sims

I just slipped away the other day
I am not sick and I am not in pain
If you need me, just call my name

I know that I slipped away the other day
So please do not live your life in sadness and tears
God shared me with you for some beautiful years

I am sorry that I slipped away the other day
Only God knows the reasons why
I will wrap my arms around you when I see you cry

I know that I slipped away the other day
Reflect on our memories and cherish our love
Know that I will be smiling at you from up above

I just slipped away the other day
You did not know I was here for only a brief stay
Take comfort in knowing, we will meet again one bright sunny day

Written for Rev. Dr. David Paul Moessner and Rev. Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner while they mourned the loss of their beloved son David Stevenson-Moessner, age 26, killed in a car accident on January 10, 2015. According to the Moessners, the words were written in the very way their son David would have comforted them in love and farewell.

Righteous Idolatry:
An Exegesis of Judges 17:1-13

Rebekah Rochte

Introduction

The establishment of a shrine in the house of Micah in Judges 17:1-13 draws the reader into the muddied religious practices in which the Israelites engaged during the time of the Judges. Despite the frequent invocation of Yahweh, the story demonstrates just how far the Israelites have strayed from their God. Even when the Israelites, exemplified here by Micah and his mother, try to connect to the Yahwist religious tradition, they do so in a manner entirely inappropriate to true worship. As the text zooms in on this specific example of the oft-echoed lament of Israel's faithlessness, the account takes on a pitifully poignant ring as one considers how far the Israelites have fallen into religious ambiguity. When interpreted through a Deuteronomistic lens, the artfully woven narrative presents an ironic glimpse of how what was "right in their own eyes" was truly "evil in the sight of the LORD."[1]

Historical Context

The narrative is set during the time of the Judges, which dates roughly between 1326 and 1092 BCE during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.[2] During this period, the Israelites lived in a polytheistic context, having failed to drive the Canaanites out of their territories completely.[3] Although Yahweh is the God with whom the Israelites have covenanted, they frequently turn instead to the myriad gods of their Canaanite neighbors.[4] Furthermore, archaeological studies indicate that early Israelite religion was more akin to other West Semitic traditions rather than the centralized Jerusalem-based cult that arose during the monarchy.[5] Although the book of Judges theologically interprets the Israelites' oppression by various Canaanite kings as the consequence of their faithlessness, it also reflects the chaotic sociopolitical reality of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages as urbanism collapsed then slowly began to rebuild, new ethnic groups such as the Sea Peoples entered the land, and international political machines swept through the Levantine corridor.[6]

Although the narrative may reflect elements of historical Israelite religion, its placement within the Deuteronomistic History influences the text's interpretation. At least four editorial stages are apparent for the book

of Judges overall, but there is much debate regarding when the narratives forming the double conclusion in chapters 17-21 were added and redacted.[7] Martin Noth does not consider Judges 17-21 part of the Deuteronomist's (Dtr) work during the 7th century BCE, but rather a later revision.[8] Other scholars including Timeo Veijola, Walter Gross, E. Aydeet Mueller, and Robert G. Boling argue that Dtr substantially shaped Judges 17-21, and that these chapters are essential to the Deuteronomistic History both as the conclusion of the book of Judges and as a bridge between a period of apostasy and the monarchy.[9] Whether Judges 17 itself was part of the Deuteronomic redaction in the 7th century or the exilic Deuteronomistic revision of the 6th century, the hand of the Deuteronomistic school skillfully and indispensably wove the narrative into the Deuteronomistic History.[10]

Whether the original audience was experiencing pre-exilic reforms or post-exilic regrouping, the story of the danger of inappropriate expressions of Yahwism in the double conclusion would have had a direct impact. The majority of commentators argue that the framing refrain begun in 17:6 and repeated throughout the conclusions reflects a monarchic concern leading towards establishment of the monarchy in Samuel. However, the key part of the refrain as found in 17:6 is that "all the people did what was right in their own eyes."[11] The passage is not so much concerned with the call for a monarchy as with the dreadful effects of Israel's unfaithfulness.[12] Distinctiveness and strict adherence characterize the Yahwistic tradition supported by both the 8th/7th-centuries BCE reformers and those reestablishing Yahwism in its post-Exile Deuteronomistic form. Although Micah's story may be a fairly accurate depiction of the socio-religious realties of the period in which the narrative is set, the purpose of the account is not merely to be descriptive. Its placement within the context of Israel's cyclical faithlessness reflects the realties with which the reformers and the post-exilic peoples were themselves contending. Shall they allow their form of Yahwism to become contaminated by other traditions, or shall they uphold the Deuteronomistic ideal?

Literary Context

Much of the scholarship glosses over Judges 17:1-13, neatly packaging it as a prologue to the foundation myth of the Danite cultic center told in Judges 18:1-31.[13] However, 17:1-13 is a vital piece of the overall narrative of Judges, capitalizing on its connections with other stories in Judges as well as its placement within the overall canon for its significance. The story does not follow the chronology of the book of Judges, but rather shifts its storytelling technique from broad strokes about

the Israelites as a whole to individual pictures that exemplify the religious and moral chaos that reigned by the end of the Judges period.[14]

Due to the composition and redaction that took place during either the 7th or 6th century BCE, Judges 17:1-13 is intended to be read in light its canonical placement within the Deuteronomistic History and within the Deuteronomistic theological strain. Although the Deuteronomistic ideal of centralized monotheism had not yet been developed at the time in which Micah's story is set, the narrative invites interpretation through the Deuteronomistic lens based on the detailed description of Micah's religious activity, the refrain in 17:6, and the connection with the pattern of Israel doing what is "evil in the sight of the LORD." Without this lens, 17:1-31 is an interesting account of early Israelite religious practices; with the lens, the text becomes a powerful statement about Israel's declining religious and moral state. Because of the double conclusion's role as a shocking summation of the sorry state of affairs by the end of the Judges period, it seems to be assumed that the reader, both then and now, will be familiar with the Deuteronomistic religious tradition and therefore find the idolatry and attempts at divine manipulation appalling.

The narrative marks a definitive break with the cyclical pattern that has been slowly disintegrating throughout the book of Judges.[15] No judge arises, for there is no oppression by an outside king. The oppression, rather, is internal, stemming from the religious ambiguity that characterizes Israel's inability to remain faithful to Yahweh. On the other hand, it is possible to relate Micah's religious activity, which was "right in his own eyes," to the actions of the Israelites that were deemed "evil in the sight of the LORD." Despite the foregoing history of consequences for faithlessness and the disastrous results of Gideon's own experimentation with a personal cultic object (8:27), Micah similarly engages in idolatry. Micah's offense, however, is more severe, for he does so *in the name of Yahweh*. Micah's apostasy in the guise of Yahweh-worship emphasizes just how low the Israelites have sunk into religious ambiguity.

Formal Analysis

The prose narrative of 17:1-13 is part of the larger story of the tribe of Dan's migration and establishment of a cultic center (17:1-18:31). In this sense, the passage in its entirety could be viewed as the rising action leading towards the interaction between the Levite, Micah, and the Danites in 18:3-6 and 15-26. However, consideration of 17:1-13 as a discrete unit yields a cohesive narrative structure.

Fig. 1: Broad View of 17:1-13

1. Introduction of Micah (17:1-2)
    a. Setting in Ephraim (17:1)
    b. Micah admits that he stole his mother's 1,100 pieces of silver (17:2a)
    c. Micah's mother blesses him for returning the silver (17:2b)
2. The Shrine and the Sojourner (17:3-9)

Shrine

    a. Micah's mother consecrates the silver toYahweh (17:3a)
    b. Micah's mother has an idol make out of some of the silver and has it placed in Micah's household shrine (17:3b-5a)
    c. Micah installs his son as a priest (17:5b)
    d. "All the people did what was right in their own eyes" (17:6)

Sojourner

    e. Introduction of the wandering Levite and his origins (17:7-8a)
    f. The Levite comes to Micah's house (17:8b-9)
3. An Invitation and an Agreement (17:10-11)
    a. Micah asks the Levite to stay, offering payment and kinship (17:10)
    b. The Levite agrees to stay and becomes like kin (17:11)
4. Installation of the Levite (17:12)
5. Expectation of Blessing (17:13)

Arranged thus, the narrative follows the rise of Micah's shrine, moving from a state of misfortune to a state of prosperity. The narrative begins *in media res*; Micah's admittance to stealing the silver and returning it to his mother read like the conclusion to another story. His mother blesses him in the name of Yahweh, reversing the curse she had uttered previously. The return of the silver facilitates the series of complications in 17:3-9 that centers on the religious ambiguity of Micah's shrine. Although Micah's mother consecrates the silver to Yahweh, she uses it to make an idol. The idol is placed, along with other cult objects, in the shrine, and Micah installs one of his own sons at the priest. The incongruence of such actions is explained by admitting that "all people did what was right in their

own eyes" (17:6). The climax of the narrative is the Levite's acceptance of Micah's offer of a job and a place in the family (17:10-11). Without the Levite, Micah's shrine would remain a makeshift alternative; with the Levite's presence, the shrine becomes a more legitimate worship center, drawing on the prestige of the clan specifically designated for the religious profession. As the story concludes, Micah installs the Levite as his new priest and declares that Yahweh shall surely bless him for it (17:12-13).

The presence of the editorial gloss in 17:6 at a hinge point allows the text to be further divided into two narrative blocks.[16] The text can be subdivided into accounts of the *establishment* of Micah's shrine (17:1-5) and the *enhancement* of that shrine (17:7-13). The phrase's location in 17:6 brackets the double conclusion together with 21:25, but in the context of the passage at hand, it serves two purposes: (1) it explains the preceding action in 17:1-5; and (2) it serves as the lens through which readers should view the actions of Micah and the Levite. The two narrative blocks are arranged similarly, including the introduction of a new character, the installation of a priest, and the fulfillment of blessings. They build upon each other, driving towards the installation of a newer, more legitimate priest and establishing a kin relationship between Micah and the priest.

Fig. 2: Two Narrative Blocks of 17:1-13

I. Establishing the Shrine
   1. Introduction of Micah (17:1-2a)
   2. Invocation of blessing and explanation of purpose (17:2b-3)
   3. Dedication of an idol (17:4)
   4. Installation of a priest and establishment of a shrine (17:5)
   5. Narrator's Justification (17:6) [Hinge]

II. Enhancing the Shrine
   1. Introduction of the Levite (17:7-9)
   2. Negotiation (17:10)
   3. Agreement and establishment of a new relationship (17:11)
   4. Installation of a better priest and confirmation of a shrine (17:12)
   5. Expectation of fulfillment of blessing (17:13)

Overall, the text tracks the movement from a state of misfortune (stolen silver, an uttered curse) to a state of prosperity (a legitimate

priest, an established shine, expectation of Yahweh's blessing). Micah's mother's blessing in 17:2 seems to be fulfilled in 17:13. Micah seems to have successfully established his household shrine, including among its attributes a brand new idol and a Levite who by virtue of his priestly lineage will connect the shrine to a long-standing tradition. Ironically, Micah's state of affairs does not remain so positive, for the expected blessing of 17:13 is unfulfilled when the Levite leaves with the Danites, who also steal the cult objects (18:20). The establishment of Micah's shrine is but a pit stop in the larger narrative of the establishment of the shrine at Dan. In the context of the passage, however, the threat of a curse is momentarily transformed into blessing as Micah meets with success in the establishment of his household shrine.

Detailed Analysis

I. *Introduction of Micah* (17:1-2)

a. Setting in Ephraim (17:1)

The narrative introduces Micah as a man from the hill country of Ephraim. Located to the west of the Jordan River and notably encompassing the cultic sites of Bethel and Shiloh, the territory of Ephraim was the "heartland of Israel."[17] The designation later came to be used by the Northern Kingdom of Israel, probably due to the territory's central location and cultic significance. The hill country of Ephraim is associated with several important events and people; for example, it is where Ehud rallied his troops to defeat the Moabites (3:27), where Deborah sat as a judge (4:5), and was the homeland of the minor judge Tola (10:1).[18] Although Ephraim is associated with the best of the best, the Ephraimites encountered previously in Judges are consistently late to the party and engage in conflict with the other Israelite tribes.[19] Furthermore, the Ephraimites did not succeed in driving all the Canaanites out of their region.[20] The Canaanite presence and religious practices may have influenced Micah as he constructed his own cultic center.

b. The Curse of the Stolen Silver (17:2a)

The text provides no account of how or why the silver had been taken, but Micah appears to be driven to return the embezzled goods by his mother's curse. As with his later justification for hiring the Levite as his priest, Micah is primarily motivated by his desire for wellbeing and prosperity. People of that time believed that their lives were influenced by divine powers, both good and bad. Blessings and curses could therefore bring about benefaction or evil.[21] Curses posed a real threat, and were not to be taken lightly. Presumably, Micah's mother uttered the curse in

the hearing of others, at least within earshot of Micah himself, likely to facilitate the return of the silver.[22]

c. A Mother's Blessing (17:2b)

Upon the return of the silver, Micah's mother blesses him in the name of Yahweh. Blessings were understood in terms of benefit, but also carried a connotation of relationship. To bless someone meant to offer them goodwill and to establish a positive relationship between the two parties.[23] Blessing, particularly the blessing of children, is a significant theme in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible.[24] Micah's mother's blessing (a) counteracts the curse she had previously uttered; (b) reestablishes a positive relationship between herself and her son, as well as invokes a beneficial relationship between her son and Yahweh; (c) frames the remainder of the narrative and sets the tone for Micah's success in establishing a household shrine; and (d) specifically invokes the name of Yahweh, which makes the subsequent commissioning of an idol more ironic since Yahwism is aniconic.[25]

II. *The Shrine and the Sojourner* (17:3-9)

a-b. Consecrated Silver for an Idol for the Shrine (17:3-5a)

Rather than punishing Micah for stealing the silver, his mother rewards him with a contribution to Micah's collection of cultic objects. Micah also adds to his collection an *ephod* (despite the disastrous result of Gideon's venture with an *ephod* in 8:27) and *tĕrāpîm*, household gods that had a protective function and promoted good fortune.[26] The trouble is, their seemingly pious acts are tainted because idols are specifically prohibited in Yahwistic tradition.

Despite the ancient Near Eastern prevalence of idols as symbols of a deity's "indwelling presence," Israelite Yahwistic tradition abhorred the use of icons.[27] Two terms used to describe Micah's idol in particular, *pesel* and *massēkâ*, refer to hewn and molten images, respectively.[28] Despite their negative connotation, the use of idols is prevalent in the biblical literature; prohibitions were not enforced until the 8th century BCE, and the practice was not eradicated until well after the Babylonian Exile. It is possible that Micah and his mother understood the idol to be representative of Yahweh and therefore a legitimate means of worship. Nevertheless, the Deuteronomistic editors did not distinguish between worshipping images and worshipping other gods; to worship Yahweh through an idol is just as offensive.[29]

Contrary to how most commentators interpret the passage, Susan Niditch suggests that "the narrator of Judges 17-18 is aware of the

iconoclastic bent of the tradition," but understands that the Deuteronomistic religious ideals had not yet become "uniform or orthodox."[30] There is certainly a precedent for creating shrines in Israelite culture, and household cultic objects were not rare. Archaeology of the Levant reveals that household shrines were a prevalent part of popular piety during the time of the Judges in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. These shrines did not have a special name; most were simply called a *bêt*, "house," or a *bāmāh*, "high place."[31] In the biblical tradition, too, there are many examples of individuals building altars and shrines.[32]

The idol is installed in a *bêṯ ʾᵉlōhîm*, "house of gods." Although the *ʾᵉlōhîm* here could refer singularly to Yahweh, as it does in other places in the Hebrew Bible, the ambiguity of the phrase employed here highlights the incongruity of Micah's sense of piety. Calling Micah's shrine a "house of gods" is rather fitting, as it is interpreted as a house of idolatry, replete with contraband cultic objects, *tĕrāpîm*, and an idol. Barry G. Webb remarks on the irony of the phrase, connecting it with the Israelites' overall religious ambiguity:

> [T]he ambiguity of *bêt ʾelōhîm* is not a problem to be solved, for it captures and completes the satirical irony of the entire passage: Micah's 'house of God' is in fact a 'house of gods,' but neither Micah nor his mother seems to be able to tell the difference. The body of the book has shown us the nation of Israel vacillating between faithfulness to Yahweh and going after other gods, but at least able to know they were doing so (as, e.g., in 10:15-16). The present passage shows us that, at the domestic and village level, even this ability has been lost.[33]

What casts Micah's shrine in a negative light, therefore, is the syncretic nature of the worship that takes place there. Micah's supposed devotion to Yahweh does not escape the snare that has entangled the Israelites since the beginning; he, too, incorporates Canaanite practices into his piety.[34] Perhaps it is unfair to hold Micah to the Deuteronomistic standard since it had not yet been established in Micah's time. However, the text's canonical location and redaction history demand that Micah's actions be interpreted in light of the aniconic monotheistic ideal. Micah might not be worshipping other gods explicitly, but his use of Canaanite practices is just as vile according to the iconoclastic Deuteronomistic lens.

c. Installation of a Priest (17:5b)

Having collected the cultic paraphernalia in his shrine, Micah continues the show of piety by installing one of his sons as the priest. The action is described using idiomatic language: "and he filled the hand of one of his sons."[35] Micah's performance of this ritual action attempts to add an aura of legitimacy to the shrine, but one must question whether or not Micah is doing so legally. It almost seems like a mockery of genuine Yahwistic piety, which causes Webb to scathingly remark, "So the priest that Micah appointed was just as makeshift and irregular as everything else in his shrine."[36] That said, one might be sympathetic to Micah's attempts to establish a Yahwistic(-ish) shrine; rather than simply letting the idols collect dust, he is doing all he can to make it legitimate.

d. "What was right in their own eyes" (17:6)

Niditch contrasts with other scholars in her opinion on the editorial gloss in 17:6, remarking that it is *not* a judgment-laden indictment, but rather a neutral comment that things were done differently "in those days."[37] Whether neutral or negative, the editor was viewing the text from the perspective of the Deuteronomistic tradition, and the religious activity portrayed here is at odds with the Deuteronomistic ideal of centralized monotheism. Though it is tempting to read the pericope as entirely negative, there is a bit of sympathy reserved for Micah and his mother. It is evident that they know of Yahweh and worship him; the issue is that the way in which they do so is not appropriate. Trent C. Butler remarks, "Micah and his mother do everything explicitly in the name of Yahweh… but they do these things in religious forms alien to the Yahwism taught in the Torah and the prophets."[38] Micah and his mother are aware of Israelite cultic practices, including worship of Yahweh, cultic objects like the *ephod* and *tĕrāpîm*, and the benefit of having a Levite priest. However, those practices are adapted into something abhorrent in ideal Yahwism.[39]

e. Introduction of the Levite and His Opportune Arrival (17:7-9)

Levites play a central role in the double conclusion. This Levite, whom we later discover is Jonathan son of Gershom son of Moses, enters the story as an opportunistic wanderer searching for a place to earn his living as a priest.[40] The repetition of the Levite's origins and intention in 17:7-10 is significant: three times he mentions that he originates from Bethlehem in Judah, twice that he is a Levite, and twice that he is seeking a place. His eventual departure in 18:20 therefore comes as no surprise.[41] One must question his wandering: although commentators remark that wandering Levites were not uncommon, it seems incongruous that a Deuteronomistic-influenced piety would accept priests serving at local

shrines rather than in public cultic centers.[42] Even if wandering Levites were a social reality in that time, the selling of religious services and easily swayed allegiance could be another indication of the Israelites' flawed piety. However shady the young Levite may be, however, his status as a Levite is too desirable a lure for Micah to resist.

III. *An Invitation and an Agreement* (17:10-11)

Seeing a mutually beneficial opportunity, Micah immediately enjoins the Levite to stay with him with an enticing offer of silver, clothing, and a living.[43] The Levite agrees to Micah's invitation and hires on as the priest. Kinship language is used as a reverential title ("father") and as a mark of household belonging ("son"). Interestingly, the language gets reversed as the priest, who should be like a "father," becomes more like the "son" in yet another perversion of religious custom. As a "son," the Levite is held in high regard, but Micah is the one who is ultimately in charge.[44] Indeed, in this transaction where religious service is a commodity, there is a risk of abuse as boundaries are crossed and proper relationships are overturned.[45]

IV. *Installation of the Levite* (17:12)

Just as he had previously installed his natural son a priest in 17:5b, Micah installs the Levite. There is no mention of what happens to Micah's son, but he is apparently brushed aside in favor of the legitimacy and prestige offered by the presence of the Levite. Of note is the continued use of kinship language: the Levite is "in the house of Micah," which could refer to the shrine (cf. 17:4-5), but likely refers to Micah's household. The Levite is, in effect, another collectible for Micah's shrine. However, his status as a Levite is essential, and his presence is the lynchpin in Micah's scheme.

V. *Expectation of Blessing* (17:13)

At last, Micah's "theology of divine manipulation" comes to fruition as he rejoices over the Levite's presence in his household and boldly declares, "Now I know the LORD will prosper me, since the Levite has become my priest" (17:13).[46] Based on Micah's characterization as a self-serving man who manipulates religious elements for his own gain, it is not surprising that he would draw such a conclusion. After all, he has collected not only cultic objects and a sacred space in which to keep them, but now a Levite has entered Micah's household. By connecting his personal shrine to the broader Israelite religious tradition, Micah checks

off the last box and anticipates the prosperity that will surely come for upholding such a tradition. Dennis T. Olson remarks that "religion has been reduced to a privatized manipulation of God for personal gain."[47] Looking forward, it becomes evident that Micah's confident expectation of blessing is misplaced. When Micah reenters the story in 18:22-26, he can only protest as the Danites steal the cultic paraphernalia and the Levite priest. The shrine he has so carefully furnished and the blessing he so eagerly sought amount to nothing in the end.

Synthesis

Micah is but one example of the ways in which the Israelites "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." Having witnessed the downward spiral of Israel's faithlessness to Yahweh, the tale of Micah's questionable religious practices comes as no surprise. What is stunning, however, is the blatant misappropriation of Yahwistic practices. Before, when the Israelites turn from Yahweh completely, the consequence is simple: God sells them into oppression, the Israelites repent and are delivered, and their relationship is restored. Now, however, faithlessness has a veneer of piety. Micah likely understands his actions as genuinely in Yahweh's honor; however, Yahweh is not interested in a Canaanite version of religion. Yahweh demands faithfulness to him alone, rejecting the use of idols.

Micah's actions reflect a period of religious ambiguity as he syncretizes worship of Yahweh with the cultic practices of the surrounding Canaanites. He is clearly aware of the customs of the Yahweh tradition, including the installment of Levites as priests and paraphernalia such as the *ephod* and *tĕrāpîm*. However, he misunderstands the purpose of such means of religious expression. Yaira Amit remarks that Israelites like Micah probably viewed such syncretic religious behavior as legitimate means of worship and blessing. Amit adds, "Precisely the fact that all of the parties acted in innocence and with the intention of doing what is right in the eyes of God rather than out of wickedness or contempt, reveals the distorted values of the period."[48] Although Micah's innocence is debatable, he is certainly an ambiguous character. His drive to establish a religious center is admirable; that he does so in the name of Yahweh is remarkable given the context of Israelite apostasy. Unfortunately, his enthusiasm for cultic expression bleeds into a misplaced zeal for prestige that leads him to create a mockery of genuine worship of God.

Reflection

The two conclusions to the book of Judges not only evoke horror

at the breech of covenant and ethics, but also serve as a sobering mirror for the life of the Church today. We tend to avoid the book of Judges because of its inconveniently bloody and difficult stories, and the double conclusion is utterly horrific. Yet, the stories serve as mirrors that help us reflect upon our own misjudgments as we live and worship as a community of faith. Micah in particular is not only representative of the religious ambiguity of the Israelites during the time of the Judges; he is also an archetypal figure whom we find in our own midst. Perhaps there is some sympathy reserved for him—he tries to worship God the best way he knows. Yet, Micah's attempt to privatize and manipulate God should indeed strike us as entirely inappropriate. When Micah's shrine ceased to be about God, it became a badge of his *own* prestige, nothing more than a veneer of piety. We as a faithful community, too, must examine ourselves and consider how we sometimes find ourselves kindred spirits with the likes of manipulative Micah and the sell-out Levite.

How many times have Christians, too, gotten caught up in doing what we *think* is acceptable in God's eyes, only to discover (if we ever do) how wrongheaded we have been? How often have we paid lip-service to the God of love, but failed to uphold the heart of our faith as exemplified by Jesus' commandment to love God and love people?[49] How often have we caused Christ to cry out again, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?"[50] From the deadly Crusades to the Inquisition to hateful demonstrations against those marginalized by society, the Church's history is full of examples of Christians inappropriately expressing their religion and perpetuating wickedness in the name of God. Stories like Micah's remind us that we, too, live in a contentious time as we try to negotiate between what seems right in our own eyes and living into the Kingdom which we so earnestly claim to desire.

Judges 17:1-13 is an invitation for us to examine our own practices and intentions. The refrain first cited in 17:6 is not a mere explanation glossing over an unfortunate past. It stands as a challenge: are we capable of distinguishing between what seems right in our own eyes and what is evil in the sight of the Lord? Moreover, are we willing to set our own ambitions aside in favor of the abundant life God offers to us all? Surely the life of faith is not about a cultic checklist, but rather (to quote another Micah), "To seek justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God."[51]

[1] The quoted refrains are first found in Judges 17:6 and 3:7, respectively. All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

[2] Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 10-12. Robert G. Boling and Richard D. Nelson, on the other hand, date the period to ca. 1200-1020 (Robert G. Boling and Richard D. Nelson, "Introduction to the Book of Judges," *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (ed. Harold Attridge; New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 346). Dating for the period of the Judges largely depends upon when one chooses to date other significant Biblical events, as well as the scant references made in non-Biblical sources.

[3] Judges 1:19-36; 3:1-6.

[4] Judges 2:11-22.

[5] Among many other volumes, the contributors to the anthology *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah,* edited by Francesca Starvrakopoulou and John Barton (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), offer an excellent introduction to the many nuances that archaeological excavations offer to biblical interpretations. While the text is primarily focused on the monarchic period, it refers back to the pre-monarchic period as well.

[6] Judges 2:11-22 offers a theological response to the oppression, as well as the repeated statement that God "sold" them into the hands of their oppressors. For more information about the LBA/EIA transformations, see resources such as Lemche, N. P., *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Na'aman, N., *Canaan in the Second Millennium BCE: Collected Essays*, vol. 2 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2005); and Golden, J. M., *Ancient Canaan and Israel: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004).

[7] Boling and Nelson, 347. The final chapters of the book of Judges step out of the chronological account to highlight particular episodes with theological or historical significance.

[8] Webb, 21. This suggestion is supported by a helpful editorial gloss in 18:30, which mentions that the descendants of the Levite served at the Danite shrine until the time of the Exile. Because of Judges 17's tight association with Judges 18, they could conceivably be dated to the same redaction period.

[9] Ibid., 26. Veijola cites 17:5, 7b, and 13 as specific examples of Dtr's work on the passage.

[10] Ibid., 27. Webb cites Boling's argument in *Judges* (New York: Doubleday, 1975) that Judges 17 should be considered part of the

former Deuteronomic revision; however, Boling's introduction to the HarperCollins Study Bible suggests the opposite, that it was part of the framework added along with 1:1-2:5 and 18-21 during the exile (Boling and Nelson, "Introduction to the Book of Judges," 347).

[11] Depending on which round of Deuteronomistic revisions one wants to place the compilation and editing of Judges 17-21, one could argue for days on end about the pro-monarchic thrust woven throughout the tales of woe and despair. Although this is a significant theme in the book of Judges' overall role as a bridge between two periods in the Deuteronomistic History, it is not at all the point of the refrain in the context of Judges 17:1-13. If anything, "there was no king in Israel" is only important in the sense that there was no king like Hezekiah or Josiah to enforce Deuteronomistic reforms that touted centralized monotheism.

[12] E. Aydeet Mueller compellingly argues in *The Micah Story: A Morality Tale in the Book of Judges* (New York: Peter Lang: 2001) that Judges 17 is a morality narrative composed by a moral teacher who lived during the monarchy. While her argument does emphasize the monarchic part of the refrain in 17:6, she asserts that the narrative is about religious morality rather than political necessity.

[13] Although scholars, notably Susan Niditch ("Judges," in *Oxford Bible Commentary* (Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 188), lean towards this description, others argue in favor of such explanations as a polemic against Danite sanctuary or an apologetic to explanation of Assyria's destruction of the Danite shrine (e.g. Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 374-75).

[14] Webb, 35.

[15] Roy L. Heller notes this pattern in *Conversations with Scripture: The Book of Judges* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2011), describing how the pattern loses pieces every time a new judge arises. By the end, there are no judges at all, and the pattern seems to completely disappear. J. Clinton McCann similarly comments on the downward spiral that has been occurring most noticeably since Gideon (McCann, *Judges* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 117).

[16] Webb, 421. Webb remarks that "the editorial comments at 17:6 and 18:1 occur at nodal points in the development of the plot: points of discontinuity, at which one episode reaches a point of rest and a further development is initiated from a different direction."

[17] Siegfried Herrmann, "Ephraim (Person)," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 2:552.

[18] Webb, 423; Butler, 377. Butler notes that the territory and tribe of Ephraim remains significant later on as figures such as Samuel, Solomon, Jeroboam I, and Ahijah rise and fall.

[19] The Ephraimites complain about being left out of the action by both Gideon and Jephthah (8:1; 12:1). Although Gideon is able to placate them, Jephthah does not succeed and ends up in the middle of dissention between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites (12:4-6).

[20] Judges 1:29; Joshua 16:10.

[21] William J. Urbock, "Blessings and Curses," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:756.

[22] C. A. Faraone, B. Garnand, and C. López-Ruiz, "Micah's Mother (Judg. 17:1– 4) and a Curse from Carthage (KAI 89): Canaanite Precedents for Greek and Latin Curses against Thieves?" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (2005) 64:176. The authors compare this to the curses against thieves in Greco-Roman culture.

[23] Kent Harold Richards, "Bless/Blessing," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:754.

[24] Ibid. Examples include but are not limited to Genesis 24:60; 27:1-40; 48:1-49:28; Deuteronomy 33:1-29.

[25] Despite the great power attributed to them, blessings and curses were not inexorable. Webb similarly considers the role of blessing in 17:1-13 (Webb, 424).

[26] Ibid., 378.

[27] Niditch, "Judges," 188.

[28] Edward M. Curtis, "Idol, Idolatry," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:378. Mueller argues that the phrase highlights a tight connection between the text and Deuteronomy 27:15 (the phrase only appears in these two places and in Nahum 1:14) (78).

[29] Curtis, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:379.

[30] Niditch, "Judges," 181-82.

[31] William G. Dever, "Temples and Sanctuaries in Syria-Palestine," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:376.

[32] For example, Jacob built a number of shrines in holy places (e.g. Genesis 28:18-22; 32:30, 35:14-15), and Laban owned *tĕrāpîm* (Genesis 31:19). Admittedly, there is a difference between a memorial site and a cultic center, but Micah's establishment of a place of worship is not unique.

[33] Webb, 426.

[34] Judges 3:11-15 describes the cyclical pattern of unfaithfulness, which is repeated is some fashion throughout the majority of the text.

[35] The same phrase is used to describe the consecration of Aaron and other

priests elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Exodus 28:41, Leviticus 21:10, Numbers 3:3, I Kings 13:33).

[36] Webb, 425.

[37] Niditch, "Judges," 180.

[38] Butler, 380.

[39] A fun note that highlights this shift away from genuine Yahwism is the wordplay with Micah's name. In 17:1 and 17:4, he is called *Micayahu*, drawing on the tradition of including the name of Yahweh in a personal name as a blessing or prophetic coloration. After he establishes the mockery of a shrine, however, in 17:5 and every instance thereafter he is *Micah*, minus the allusion to Yahweh's name.

[40] Judges 18:30. A transmissional ambiguity in the Hebrew text leaves a flying *nun*, casting doubt on the actual name. Though not as prestigious as the Kohathite line through Aaron, the Levite's lineage is tied to the ancient priesthood (see Merlin D. Rehm, "Levites and Priests," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:298-99). Of further note, the NRSV translation indicates that the Levite intentionally comes to Micah's house, but other translations make his arrival seem more like happenstance.

[41] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010), 235.

[42] Rehm, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 4:301; McCann, 122; Webb, 26, 420. These commentators note that although Levites-for-hire were scarce due to their typical association with major cultic centers, the depiction could be reflective of a period of religious upheaval, such as the reign of Jeroboam I in the 10th century BCE, when Levites were frequently replaced by non-Levite priests, or during the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah in the 8th/7th centuries BCE, whose centralization efforts put many Levites out of a job. Although that picture does not quite mesh with the context in which the narrative is placed, it is reflective of an attitude during the time in which the narrative was edited and transmitted. The wandering, however, "normal" it may have been at some point in Israelite history, is ultimately condemned as a sign of Israel's apostasy.

[43] Butler, 388 argues that the salary wasn't *really* that great, but other commentators beg to differ.

[44] This situation is reminiscent of the challenges faced by Christian priests and rulers during the Investiture Controversy of the 11th and 12th centuries CE, as well as the birth of the Anglican Church under King Henry VIII. As with Micah and the Levite, the religious leaders were not always the ones who had the final say in religious matters.

[45] McCann, 122.

[46] Dennis T. Olson, "Judges," *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 2:870.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Trans. Jonathan Chipman; Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 382. Cited in Webb, *The Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 385.
[49] Matthew 22:36-40.
[50] Luke 23:34.
[51] Micah 6:8.

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Queer Theory and The UMC: Towards Deconstructed Transformation

Ethan Gregory

Introduction

I remember it vividly: the final Thursday morning plenary session of the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. It seemed like the session lasted for hours as person after person spoke at the microphone, debating back and forth on the "issue of homosexuality." A knot in the pit of my stomach grew with each speaker. From the still seemingly pre-modern, or non–historical-critical, group of delegates from Africa, we heard literalistic interpretations of scripture, citing that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) persons should be stoned, for their "practice" was an abomination. From conservative pastors of large mega churches in the South we heard statistics about how they were proudly anti-gay, and how their churches were growing by leaps and bounds each Sunday. We also heard impassioned responses from younger delegates about how a majority of our generation is absolutely affirming and really does not care what a person's sexuality may be, since we do not see sexuality as a choice, but rather as a part of one's being.

From my aisle seat as a delegate, I was only a few feet away from Rev.'s Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter, pastors of two of our denomination's top five churches by worship attendance. As the debate began to come to a close, these well-respected leaders in The UMC presented middle ground legislation simply stating the reality that our denomination is not of one mind on this issue. This statement was intended to be substituted for our denomination's currently discriminatory language, which states, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching,"[1] implying that homosexuality is a choice and something to be "practiced." Unfortunately, even this legislation failed. The results were 60 - 40—a clear indication of the reality that our church has been and continues to be in disagreement regarding the humanity, or "practice," of LGBTQ persons.

Since General Conference in 2012, many other events have taken place regarding the marriage of LGBTQ persons within The UMC. The biggest event involved a pastor from Pennsylvania, Frank Schaefer, who presided at the wedding of his gay son. He was brought up on charges,

a church trial occurred, and his credentials were taken away; however, through an appeals process, they were recently given back. There have been other trials, and there continue to be blogs and discussions among United Methodist lay and clergy almost weekly regarding the rights and humanity of LGBTQ persons—LGBTQ people are crying out for justice.

With the aforementioned statement on the incompatibility of the "practice of homosexuality" having been added to *The Book of Discipline* in 1972, United Methodists have failed to respond to the major needs of LGBTQ persons over the last 40 years. Historically, the biggest turning point for gay rights was in 1969 with the Stonewall riots. Then, in the 1980's, the AIDS epidemic reached a climax and demanded a response of activism.[2] The UMC, having failed to respond in these moments of violence and injustice, is just now at what seems like the turning point, or climax, where we might finally be able to engage in works of justice. Beyond marriage and ordination for LGBTQ individuals there is much work to be done.

United Methodists and Wesleyans have always been a scholarly people. The Methodist Movement began at the University of Oxford, which is why, if things are to change for LGBTQ persons in The UMC, it must have the backing and support of the Academy. Queer theory happens to be the realm in which the discussion of sexuality and gender resides within the Academy. This paper will explain the development of queer theory as it relates to biblical studies, with the hope of creating a useful tool for change within The UMC.

In the first section, I will briefly identify the development of queer theory, or rather theories. The next section will explore how queer theory has developed in relation to religious and theological studies. The third section will explore queer biblical scholarship as an evolution of feminist biblical scholarship. The fourth section will apply queer biblical scholarship to the interpretation of the David and Jonathan narrative found in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Queer Theory/Theories

The academic discipline of queer theory developed in 1990 at a conference hosted by Theresa de Lauretis, where the first papers to employ queer theory were shared and discussed. In a special edition of *Differences*, de Lauretis compiled these papers to share with other scholars and prompt further discussion. She wrote of the underlying assumption regarding homosexuality[3] held by herself and the other scholars who presented: "Homosexuality is no longer to be seen as marginal with

regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or by homology."[4] This was the first conference of its kind, and it took seriously the legitimacy of the existence of various expressions of sexuality, particularly the sexualities of gay and lesbian persons. De Lauretis writes, "The work of the conference was intended to articulate the terms in which lesbian and gay sexualities may be understood and imagined as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization, counteracting dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture."[5] Up until the early 1990's, gay and lesbian sexuality and the scholarship that stemmed from it had been pushed to the margins, consistently forced to conform to the norm of heterosexual homogeneity. De Lauretis and others were the first to resist this homogenization.

In her introduction to the special edition of *Differences*, de Lauretis describes how the terms of queer theory have transitioned and changed over time. The first term for variant sexuality was homosexual, which later transitioned to gay. However, as the discussion broadened from just gay men to include women, the discourse changed to "lesbian and gay." From lesbian and gay, the formerly derogatory term "queer" re-emerged to infer something much broader than lesbian and gay.[6] Although, as Jonathan Kemp notes in his article "A Queer Age: Or, Discourse Has a History," de Lauretis would later abandon the term "queer," claiming it had been mainstreamed by the various institutions it was meant to attack."[7]

The use of the title "queer" did not go far enough for some scholars. In her article "Outlaw Readings: Beyond Queer Readings," Sally O'Driscoll suggests the use of the term "outlaw" as opposed to "queer," saying, "I am suggesting that a new set of terms be defined to mark differences between theories that have different but interrelated goals: gay theory, lesbian theory, transgender theory (as many categories as necessary)…and outlaw theory to describe the concept of sexual transgression."[8] For O'Driscoll, "queer" condenses too much into one theory, combining both theory relating to various sexual and gender identities and theory regarding sexual variance. She highlights the need for every sexual identity to have its own theory, with the addition of an "outlaw theory" in reference to the sexually variant.

O'Driscoll's critique of queer theory was unpopular, and over the next several years other scholars developed queer theory further. Some maintained its relation to sexual identity while others distanced it from simply referring to scholarship on sexuality, using it as a tool for deconstructing the "normal."

Laurel C. Schneider says of queer theory in her article "Queer Theory," published in the *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, "[Queer theory] is critical theory concerned principally with cultural deployments of power through social constructions of sexuality and gender."[9] Schneider acknowledges the use of queer theory and its deconstruction of the norm, yet maintains its link with sexuality. She does this by inferring the normalized binaries among gender and sexuality: male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. These binaries reinforce the power of those with the dominant gender and sexuality. For Schneider, queer theory deconstructs these societal constructions of power and dominance. Schneider, as a biblical scholar, utilizes queer theory as a hermeneutical and deconstruction tool in relation to the biblical texts. She writes, "What queer theory principally provides is an intellectual framework for treating sexuality as a meaningful site of difference that could illuminate texts and traditions in helpful if sometimes unsettling ways."[10] For Schneider, the power structures illuminated and deconstructed by her use of queer theory have been in place for millennia, causing this unsettling deconstruction. Such a use of queer theory among biblical texts will be discussed in more depth later in this paper.

The application of queer theory has been utilized across a wide array of disciplines. Cathy Cohen in her, "Death and Rebirth of a Movement: Queering Critical Ethnic Studies," discusses queer theory and its practical application for stopping the violence directed towards queer identified youth, especially youth of color. In her article she tells the stories of Derrion Albert, Carl Walker-Hoover, and Sakia Gunn. Each of these youths was bullied, beaten, and/or committed suicide because of the expression and pressures of their queer identities. Cohen writes of these individuals, "[Derrion], Carl, Sakia, and other young folks of color operate in the world as queer subjects, the targets of racial normalizing projects intent on pathologizing across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality."[11] Cohen highlights the intersectionality almost always present with queer identities, which in her context intersects with race. Cohen's utilization of queer theory draws attention to the normalization of violence associated with being identified as queer and, particularly, a young person of color. Her work highlights the importance of queer theory in contemporary society.

Jonathan Kemp, with similar conclusions as Cohen, writes, "Queer, if it names anything, names a critical impulse that can never, must never, settle."[12] In other words, for Kemp, queer theory must never cease its work of deconstructing the normalized. Queer theory's ability to

deconstruct is endless, though outside of gender and sexuality discussions, queer theory loses any definition aside from going against the normal.

Annamarie Jagose highlights this expansion of queer theory and its endlessly deconstructive nature in *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. Jagose writes, "Given the extent of its commitment to denaturalization, queer itself can have neither a foundational logic nor a consistent set of characteristics."[13] Jagose's definition of queer theory alludes to David Halperin who wrote in 1995, "There is nothing in particular to which [queer theory] necessarily refers."[14] Queer theory is universally against the normal and cannot be defined, which is why queer theory gets into trouble. There is no end point—there is always a normal to deconstruct.

In this short historical survey of the development of queer theory, the Academy first reclaimed the word "queer" to refer to that theory legitimizing the identity of lesbian and gay persons, whose sexuality stands next to heterosexual homogeneity rather than at odds with it. However, queer theory did not stop here; it evolved to refer simply to the deconstruction of the normal. As noted in this section, queer theory has seen use across various social sciences. In the next section, I shall explore queer theory's use and development in religious and theological studies.

Queer Theory in Religious and Theological Studies

Since the beginning of our movement as a people called Methodists, our theology has always been queer, as it has sought to deconstruct systems of power and privilege, beginning with the Church of England. Wesley's unique understanding of salvation as a process, as opposed to a moment, and the expectation of Christian perfection were unique and non-normative within the Church of England, and even within Arminian theology. Throughout his entire life, Wesley was open to changing, or rather deconstructing, his theological positions, as evidenced in his sermons. Today, queer theory is developing much like Wesley's own theology did. It is never settled and there is always room to question and deconstruct. This section highlights queer theory's development and use within the subsets of biblical studies, Christology, liberation theology, and the newly developing queer theology.

Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone write in the introduction to their edited volume, *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship,* of the many ways they hope to introduce queer theory into the realm of biblical studies. They write, "We hope to indicate the desirability not only of 'troubling' the boundaries between biblical scholarship and queer theory but also of 'troubling' boundaries between different rubrics

used currently in the analysis of biblical literature: sexuality, gender, class, race, nation and border, history, culture, literature, film, music, etc."[15] Their use of the word "troubling" is an obvious play on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, one of the very first works in the field of queer theory. The word "troubling" also infers the deconstructive nature of queer theory, and as Hornsby and Stone note, they are not limiting queer theory from touching any current "rubric" or lens within biblical studies.

In their introduction, Hornsby and Stone highlight the power of queer theory. Hornsby writes,

> I am reminded of this saying, that creation comes from chaos, as I read the essays in this volume; and this is why: queerness is chaos…And if creation (cosmos) continues to resist easy categorization and is, as we know it, blurry, messy, unstable, and dynamic, what distinguishes creation (and heteronormativity) from the chaos, from the queer... The origin and the evolution of the normative are enveloped within the queer.[16]

Hornsby is alluding to the creation narrative in Genesis, in which that primordial chaos is the very matter out of which God creates. Hornsby reminds us that when queer theory is let loose, the normative and the non-normative become one amongst the chaos.

In addition to being used in biblical studies, queer theory has made its way into theological discourse. In Mark D. Jordan's "God's Body," queer theory is applied Christologically to deconstruct our seeming inability to see Jesus not only as divine, but as a full human being. Jordan's main topic for the article is, "Whoever Jesus was 'in reality,' the most important fact about him is that he was good and perhaps the best way for God to become human. The question follows: If Jesus' body was God's body, how do we begin to tell truths about it?"[17] Jordan's Christological focus is inherently incarnational, asking what it means for God to have become human in the person of Jesus. In the article Jordan asks why most representations of Christ, particularly those of him on the cross, always have the genitals covered. These common representations conjure many questions about both Jesus' gender and sexuality. Jordan notes that, with this ambiguity, persons may wish to speculate regarding Jesus' sexuality; however, he notes, "The point here is precisely not to inaugurate a quest for the historical Jesus' sexuality. The point is to notice the consequences of how Christian traditions have distinguished Jesus' sex from Jesus'

gender."[18] Even though Jordan never explicitly uses the term "queer theory," it is certainly employed in this article to deconstruct the covering of Jesus' genitals—for if Jesus was fully human, he would likely have male genitals, and to cover this up is to ignore the fullness of Jesus' humanity.

Moving from the specifically Christological component of systematic theology to a much broader theological focus, Marcella Althaus-Reid claims in her article, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology," that indecent theology is an extension of liberation theology, with an awareness and attentiveness to the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Her indecent theology, which builds from liberation theology, involves a significant focus on non-normality and nonconformity. She beautifully writes of liberation theology's ability to problematize the normal:

> The disturbing of normality in liberation theology needs to be considered as the foundation of a praxis by which we not only unveil the constructed normality of the processes of ideological formation in a theo-social reflection, but a praxis also by which we engage in a creative liberative theological work. This is a praxis which understands that God is always a category of the possible, that God is not God's own limit, and that the path of theology is not continuity but nonconformity.[19]

Liberation theology acknowledges the inherent nonconformist aspect to the Christian tradition: the Son of God born in a manger, Jesus' life and ministry occurring at the margins, and the kingdom of God in opposition to the Roman Empire are all examples of this nonconformity. Althaus-Reid notes the need for "indecenting" because liberation theology is stuck in binary terms, in the heteronormative paradigm.

Althaus-Reid defines "indecenting" as "[a] term that reminds us that liberation theology's first act of love was that of troubling the status quo."[20] The influence of queer theory upon "indecent theology" is evident from this definition. Althaus-Reid writes, "The option for the poor is in itself an option for coming out, in the sense that cultures of poverty and a Christianity from the poor claim recognition for what they are, not mere adaptations of some central theological model."[21] Liberation and Indecent theology are inherently queer, as they have a "preferential option" for deconstructing the norm and legitimizing and giving voice to those at the margins. Althaus-Reid's work broadens liberation theology outside of the

heterosexual norm: "We are talking about the diversity that exists in sexual identity."[22]

Althaus-Reid does not stop with "indecenting"; this is only the beginning influence of queer theory upon her theological work. In her article, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," she develops what is boldly called a "Queer Theology." In her interpretation, "Queer Theology [is] a radical form of the 'love-talk of theology,' that is, a theology which introduces a profound questioning into the ways of love in our lives as individuals and as society, and the things love can do in our world."[23] "Queer Theology" acknowledges that love is at the heart of the Christian tradition, and in true queer fashion it deconstructs the normalized understanding of love by insisting that it must actually be done from the margins. She writes, "[Queer Theology] is a theology from the margins which wants to remain at the margins."[24] In other words, "Queer Theology" is not an assimilationist theology; it is a radical theology that does not strive for acceptance. Althaus-Reid writes, "Terrible is the fate of theologies from the margin when they want to be accepted by the centre! Queer Theology strives, instead, for differentiation and plurality."[25] In "Queer Theology," deconstruction is a tool that creates diversity and a multitude of norms, rather than making the norm more inclusive or accepting.

As evidenced in these examples, queer theory has experienced much development across the disciplines of religious and theological studies. Furthermore, with the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, it seems queer theory will continue to develop and deconstruct, as this is what it seeks to do. Queer theory has yet to make its way into Wesleyan theology, but it will be only a matter of time before theologians begin to deconstruct their way to perfection. In the next section, I will focus on its development within biblical studies, particularly as an evolution of feminist biblical studies.

Out of Feminist Biblical Studies

The development of queer biblical studies as an evolution of feminist biblical studies has taken place over the last decade and is still in the early stages of emerging as its own biblical hermeneutic. To understand this evolution we must first understand the feminist biblical hermeneutics of the early twenty-first century before moving into what may be called a lesbian hermeneutic and, eventually, a queer hermeneutic.

Esther Fuchs identifies two approaches to feminist biblical hermeneutics in her article, "Biblical Feminism: Knowledge, Theory and Politics in the Study of Women in the Hebrew Bible." She calls these

approaches "centripetal" and "centrifugal": "The first approach preserves disciplinary distinctions; the second is interdisciplinary—refusing the distinctions of traditional methodologies and creating a feminist discourse that transcends these boundaries."[26] The centripetal approach works exclusively within the discipline of biblical studies, attending to the established norms of the discipline, while the centrifugal approach moves beyond the traditional and the normal. Fuchs argues that both approaches are necessary within feminist biblical hermeneutics as it continues to evolve.

After distinguishing between the two necessary approaches for feminist biblical hermeneutics, Fuchs then defines their shared epistemology. Paraphrasing Teresa de Lauretis, Fuchs writes, "Feminist epistemology is not only a critique of ideology, that is, a questioning of the cultural inscriptions of gender hierarchies—it is as well a critique of conventional norms and procedures in any given discipline and field of study."[27] This epistemological framework broadens the scope by focusing on gender rather than solely on women. Fuchs highlights feminism's former focus on a "Hermeneutic of Resistance" when she writes, "This approach sought to 'depatriarchalize' the Hebrew Bible and was focused on stories about women."[28] Fuchs then contrasts this early feminist approach to that of contemporary, postmodern feminism. She writes, "Postmodern feminism is both a critique of hegemony, power and privilege as enacted through discourse and knowledge systems, as well as a self-critical process of destabilizing identity categories."[29] The move to a queer hermeneutic in postmodern feminism begins to emerge through the "critique of hegemony," which itself is a deconstruction of the norm—the work of queer theory.

Susanne Scholz, in her article "'Stirring Up Vital Energies': Feminist Biblical Studies in North America," writes about this same shift—from depatriarchalizing to the postmodern work of deconstructing hegemony—in feminist biblical studies. In her final section, Scholz highlights the challenges facing feminist biblical hermeneutics into the twenty-first century. She identifies, "Yet another challenge—probably the most intellectually productive—pushes feminist studies toward investigations of "otherness" of all sorts, such as queer, ethnicity and race, and postcolonial studies."[30] In acknowledging this challenge, Scholz highlights feminist biblical scholarship's need to incorporate queer theory in its work. She notes the places where this is already happening: "Publications such as the *Queer Bible Commentary* and other anthologies and monographs on queer-biblical interpretations have urged

feminist biblical scholars to open up to GLBTQ issues… The goal of LGBTQ exegesis is to disrupt 'sex-gender-sexuality norms and academic conventions…and to expand feminist research beyond the analysis of 'woman' or 'women."[31] "LGBTQ Exegesis" assists feminist exegesis in considering the full spectrum of gender and sexuality.

Deryn Guest has helped in the evolution of queer biblical scholarship. In her work, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics*, she develops one of the first major stepping-stones from feminist to queer biblical hermeneutics. Guest writes as a self-identified lesbian who has faced discrimination in the secular world and in the Academy for her sexual orientation. She explains: "A lesbian-identified approach to scripture is grounded in these lived realities and is committed to changing the way scriptural texts are used to maintain the climate of oppression."[32] As Guest notes, a lesbian hermeneutic has four major commitments, which are not employed linearly but rather are intertwined with one another: "Resistance: commitment to a hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion; Rupture: commitment to the disruption of sex-gender binaries; Reclamation: commitment to strategies of appropriation; Re-engagement: commitment to making a difference."[33] Guest admits that her lesbian hermeneutic is closely related to a queer hermeneutic; however, they are not the same. She writes in her conclusion, "The relationship between a lesbian-identified hermeneutic and a queer reading, which I believe to be one of critical friendship, also needs to be further developed."[34]

Guest's lesbian hermeneutic in 2005 was simply a starting place, and helps us begin to illustrate the difference between lesbian and queer hermeneutics. Her work in 2012, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies,* takes seriously the need for the relationship between lesbian and queer hermeneutics. The book begins much more broadly than her previous work by looking at feminism in general. She notes the shift, as Fuchs and Scholz have done, from women's studies to gender studies. She highlights the problems arising from this shift: "Among the range of issues provoked by the shift to Gender Studies, three concerns become very clear: The potential dilution/taming of feminism, the erasure of women, and the loss of autonomy for Women's Studies."[35] The broader worry among this shift is that the work of feminism will be viewed as for nothing if its study moves to include the entire spectrum of gender. Despite this worry, it is time for feminism to make this shift. As Guest notes, "To date, [feminist biblical scholarship] has been conducted almost entirely within a heterocentric frame of reference."[36] The shift to gender studies among feminism is needed to erase this heterocentrism.

This is where a queer hermeneutic arises that helps create change and transformation—in the work of deconstructing normalized systems of dominance and power, particularly relating to gender and sexuality, though not by any means limited to those aspects. Guest points out, "A number of voices justifiably challenge queer theory's ability to create social transformation."[37] This is a fair challenge, as noted previously, for once queer theory is released, it is hard to stop it from deconstructing. Yet, certainly in this time the work of deconstruction is needed. The goal is plurality, not singularity, as the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid shows. The normal does not have to become *a* new thing, but rather must become *many* new things to allow for the vastness in the voices of humanity.

Guest notes the importance of this transformation as it takes place within biblical scholarship. She reminds us, "Too often the Bible is taken hostage by conservative groups and wielded as an authoritative weapon; a genderqueer critic is aware of this and therefore aware of the political import of their work in demonstrating how the Bible is not the easy purveyor of family values that it is often thought to be."[38] We need queer biblical hermeneutics, not simply to allow for the various voices within the Academy, but so that the Bible might be reclaimed as a collection telling the story of all of humanity, ceasing to be used as a weapon by those in constructed positions of power.

Within The United Methodist Church these conservative groups about which Guest speaks have ruled the day. Their hermeneutic has remained the lens through which The UMC officially speaks of homosexuality in our *Book of Discipline*. It is puzzling, though, since for over 50 years we have been a people who allow for the ordination and full inclusion of women within the life of the Church. To do so seems to require at least some use of a feminist hermeneutic. And as we have seen, once a feminist interpretation is employed, there is no stopping a queer interpretation from emerging. With that in mind, the next section will employ such a queer biblical hermeneutic as we examine this history of interpretation of a particular text within the Hebrew Bible.

A Queer Approach to David and Jonathan

The (love) story of David and Jonathan in 1 and 2 Samuel has been a beloved text for gay and lesbian audiences, interpreted in a variety of ways through a queer lens, while also being consistently defended as a heterosexual relationship within conservative circles. One cannot help but notice a deep relationship between the characters of David and Jonathan throughout the books of Samuel. 1 Samuel 18:1 reads, "When David had

finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." From the time the two are introduced the text reveals that Jonathan loved David; the two make a covenant together, and Jonathan strips, giving his robe to David (1 Samuel 18:3-4, NRSV). As the story develops, so does Jonathan and David's relationship. Saul, Jonathan's father, finds out about the relationship, saying to Jonathan, "Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?" (1 Samuel 20:30). When Saul and Jonathan die in battle, the relationship is confirmed as mutual. David tears his clothes in mourning, saying, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26, NRSV).

If one is not convinced of David and Jonathan's romantic relationship from these first two instances, this last instance at Jonathan's death certainly confirms such suspicions. Interpreters and scholars have argued that the word "love" in these examples could be a political form of love, as was traditional in the ancient Near East, but this is uncertain.[39] The easily identifiable imagery alluding to a same-sex relationship between David and Jonathan has allowed many gay and lesbian readers to use this text as support for same-sex relationships. "Within contemporary gay culture, David and Jonathan have been established as a proverbial royal couple; an inspiring example for a future acceptance and tolerance of gays in the Western world."[40]

The use of David and Jonathan as an example of gay relationships has, of course, prompted conservative pushback. One conservative scholar, Markus Zehnder, writes in his article, "Observations on the Relationship Between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality": "There has emerged, in addition, a different approach, leading to a fourth group of interpreters; the adherents of a so-called queer reading, who take their own homosexual self-identification or experiences as the starting point of their reading and interpreting of biblical texts."[41] It appears that Zehnder and others of the same opinion are not thinking of queer scripture readings as legitimate interpretations, labeling the queer reading a "so-called" interpretation, and think that LGBTQ persons like being identified solely through their genitals.[42] Zehnder seems to have no clue that queer readings begin with the assumption that gender and sexuality are fluid, with the goal of deconstructing the normal. The "queer reading" Zehnder is describing is not even queer; it is a gay or lesbian reading, which is a constructive interpretation rather than a deconstructive one.

Along with misunderstanding a queer interpretation of David and Jonathan, Zehnder makes an incorrect assumption about the relevance of Leviticus. He writes, "Finally, we also need to address at least in passing the debate on the relevance of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 for an assessment of the relationship of David and Jonathan."[43] However, Ken Stone, in his chapter on 1 and 2 Samuel from the *Queer Bible Commentary*, notes the Leviticus verses "will not answer our questions about David and Jonathan; for the author of 1 and 2 Samuel does not elsewhere assume the validity of all of the sexual regulations found in Leviticus."[44] In light of Stone's comments, Zehnder's argument against reading David and Jonathan's relationship as gay deconstructs itself, labeling it a queer response in the proper sense.

Along with gay and homophobic readings of the David and Jonathan story, there have also been recent queer interpretations. Yaron Peleg develops one such interpretation in his article, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender." Peleg writes, "My intention is to read this text not only as a story that justifies David's rise to power by emphasizing his masculinity, but also a text which disqualifies Jonathan politically by emphasizing his femininity."[45] Peleg's goal is to deconstruct Jonathan's gender, seeing him as a genderqueer, particularly feminine character, rather than constructing a (seemingly obvious) gay relationship between him and David. In true queer fashion, Peleg's interpretation also deconstructs the power dynamics present within the narrative. Peleg describes his methodology: "In order to justify the termination of the Kish dynasty, the text sexualizes the relations between Jonathan and David, it then destabilizes these relations, and finally reverses them to portray Jonathan as David's 'female bride.' By describing him as passive and effeminate, the text does not suggest that Jonathan is 'homosexual' but rather that he is a 'woman', and, as such, unqualified for kingship."[46] For Peleg, David and Jonathan's relationship is that of a husband and wife. Jonathan was next in line for the kingship, being the closest descendent of Saul; however, in assuming a feminine identity, Jonathan was no longer eligible to assume leadership. Peleg's queer interpretation of the David and Jonathan narrative deconstructs the normalized way in which Jonathan would have assumed power, while also deconstructing his assumed gender within the text.

In the *Queer Bible Commentary*, Ken Stone offers a milder queer interpretation of the David and Jonathan story than that of Peleg. Stone examines the various possibilities of relationships between men and women and men and men when the narrative was written. He suggests a non-sexual relationship between the two, writing, "Thus it is quite

possible that David's lament over Jonathan actually testifies to a world in which the lives of most people were characterized by, on the one hand, ongoing sexual relations with persons of the opposite sex; and, on the other hand, affectionate and emotionally intimate relations and companionship with persons of the same sex which, however, did not necessarily entail sexual intercourse."[47] Stone allows for the relationship between David and Jonathan to be one of deep intimacy, but does not concede their relationship to be sexual. Instead, Stone assumes a normalized intimacy between men at the time the story was constructed. This queer interpretation does not deconstruct the text, but rather deconstructs our present day understanding of intimate relationships between persons of the same gender.

Stone ends his commentary on Jonathan and David's relationship noting, "In the end, then, it is neither necessary nor possible to reach a single, definitive conclusion about the nature of the relationship between David and Jonathan."[48] There is, of course, no one correct queer interpretation of this narrative, or any narrative for that matter; the interpretation would not be queer without room for plurality. As noted above, it is also perfectly appropriate to read David and Jonathan's story through simply a gay lens, and despite what Zehnder and conservative scholars would say, this is an equally valid social location. However, it is only through a queer hermeneutic that a multitude of interpretations is not only welcome, but also expected.

Conclusion

Though queer theory is little more than twenty years old, it is still evolving and making its way into mainstream scholarship. Heteronormativity is still very much the norm in the Church as in the Academy. There are many systems of power in need of deconstruction—this is the work of queer theory and there is almost no stopping it. Even the experts in the field, such as Marcella Althaus-Reid and Deryn Guest, are still figuring out what to make of queer theory, its use, and its association with other disciplines. Queer theory, with its pluralistic nature, has the potential to influence numerous disciplines, even those outside the realm of gender and sexuality or religion and theology.

So where does this leave The United Methodist Church? Certainly, there is deconstructing that needs to happen. But where does the deconstructing stop? Do we employ queer theory only until discriminatory language is removed, or until LGBTQ persons can be married in our churches by our ministers, or until those called to ordination can answer that call? Will we only utilize queer theory's methods to deconstruct certain

biblical passages for the literalists among us? Shall we allow queer theory to deconstruct even further? Perhaps we are right to agree with Althaus-Reid that moving to the center is not the goal. Embracing diversity is the goal, and this in a way that allows us to remain a "United" church, even in the midst of disagreement.

Queer theory has the potential to become an intrinsic part of our theology and our praxis. It's non-normative nature is such that it cannot help but prompt us to imagine the first queer-theorist: Jesus the Christ, the one born in a stable, the one who ate with sinners, the one who lived, moved, and had being at the margins of society, and the one who preached a message proclaiming the kingdom of God—a kingdom which is breaking in at the margins of our normalized structures of empire, power, capitalism, and consumerism.

Queer theory has much to offer the church. The acknowledgment of gender and sexual fluidity, marriage equality, and ordination are just the beginning. Queer theory is here to stay; it has deconstructed its way into existence and there is no way for us to construct it back out.

However, just as a lesbian hermeneutic was the stepping stone between a feminist hermeneutic and a queer hermeneutic for Deryn Guest, changes to the *Discipline* incorporating LGBTQ persons fully into the life of the church will be the stepping stone for unleashing the full potential of queer theory upon our theology and practice. With this assurance and this academic tool in hand, and in light of the recent legalization of same-gender marriage across the United States, I look forward to sitting at General Conference 2016 in hopes of seeing The United Methodist Church move towards transformation.

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[1] *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church: 2012*. (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), ¶161. F.

[2] Laurel C. Schneider, "Queer Theory," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A.K.M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 207.

[3] The term "homosexuality" was first termed in 1869 by a Swiss doctor, Karoly Maria Benkert; it was not used widely in English until the late 1890s. It is considered a derogatory term today, as it reduces a person to their genitals. Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 72.

[4] Theresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities (An Introduction)," in *Differences*, 3, 2, ed. Theresa de Lauretis. (1991), iii.
[5] Ibid., iii.
[6] Ibid., iv.
[7] Jonathan Kemp, "A Queer Age: Or, Discourse Has a History," in *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 6, 1 (2009), 3.
[8] Sally O'Driscoll, "Outlaw Readings: Beyond Queer Readings," in *Signs*, 22,1 (1996), 35.
[9] Schneider, "Queer Theory," 206.
[10] Ibid., 212.
[11] Cathy Cohen, "Death and Rebirth of a Movement: Queering Critical Ethnic Studies," in *Social Justice* 37, 4 (2011), 128.
[12] Kemp, 22.
[13] Jagose, 96.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, "Already Queer: A Preface," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Atlanta, 2011), x.
[16] Ibid., xi.
[17] Mark D. Jordan, "God's Body," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Laughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 281.
[18] Ibid., 286.
[19] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology," in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 22.
[20] Ibid., 25.
[21] Ibid., 27.
[22] Ibid., 35.
[23] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," in *Feminist Theology*, 15,3 (2007), 303.
[24] Ibid., 304.
[25] Ibid., 304.
[26] Esther Fuchs, "Biblical Feminisms: Knowledge, Theory and Politics in the Study of Women in the Hebrew Bible," in *Biblical Interpretation* 16:3 (2008), 207.
[27] Ibid., 209.
[28] Ibid., 211.

[29] Ibid., 217.
[30] Susanne Scholz, "Stirring Up Vital Energies': Feminist Biblical Studies in North America," in *The Bible and Women. An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History: The Twentieth Century (Volume 10)*, ed. Elisabeth Schüsler Fiorenza (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 64.
[31] Ibid., 67-68.
[32] Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 110.
[33] Ibid., 110.
[34] Ibid., 269.
[35] Deryn Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2012), 31.
[36] Ibid., 79.
[37] Ibid., 70.
[38] Ibid., 115.
[39] Ken Stone, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, et. al. (London: SCM, 2006), 206.
[40] Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," in *Journal for the Study of Old Testament*, 30, 2 (2005), 172.
[41] Markus Zehnder, "Observations on the Relationship Between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 69:1 (Spring 2007), 129.
[42] It is clear Zehnder does not understand the second hermeneutical principle: Readers, grounded in social locations, create biblical meanings (Susanne Scholz). Zehnder implies gay and lesbian identity is a choice and does not acknowledge that, just as he, a straight white male, begins his biblical interpretation from his position of privilege, LGBTQ persons have no choice but to begin their interpretation from their own social location as well.
[43] Zehnder, "Observations on the relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality," 134.
[44] Stone, 207.
[45] Peleg, 172.
[46] Ibid., 172.
[47] Stone, 208.
[48] Ibid., 208.

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"The Body of Christ Given — "

Jennifer Logsdon-Kellogg

"The body of Christ given—"
"I can't eat the bread."
hands closed. arms crossed.
Weirdo.
The bread of life?
Not. For Me.

"Can you give me a blessing instead?"
Is this not the international sign
Meaning 'bless me'?
Apparently not.

Confused Silence.
Rejection based on ignorance is still
. . . rejection.

"I can't eat the bread.
Can you give me a blessing, instead?"

The true bread.
The living bread. The bread
for the life of the universe. Eat this bread, savor it—
and **Jesus** will happen to you.
This sweet round Hawaiian loaf from heaven
taken, blessed, broken and given to all—

"I can't eat the bread."
to all but me.
"Can you give me a blessing . . . instead?"

"Well we have these crackers . . ."
On the same plate with the bread crumbs
that may as well be poison
To dip in the cup with Hawaiian bread
floating.

"Take this bread."
"Amen." So be it.
Maybe it won't hurt too long. 3 days? 4?
But I do want Jesus.
"The cup of blessing."
"Amen." *Omigod the cracker's moldy.*
Can't spit Jesus out.

Kneel at the rail and choke
--on tears.

"Do you want to be well?"
I want to be *fed*. From
One body
One loaf.
In union: communion.
To share with my church
The true bread from heaven.

Without causing a spectacle in the
communion line—
and still getting glutened anyway.

"I can't eat *this* bread.
Can you give me a blessing instead?
. . . Use different bread?"

"But it's messy . . ."
"But we've always . . ."
"But it's expensive . . ."

Water into wine
Five loaves for five thousand
153 fish—
Jesus feeds abundantly.

"Love each other as I have loved
you," Jesus said.

"I AM the bread."

Reflection on "The Body of Christ Given—"

Celiac disease is an autoimmune condition that causes your immune system to go to war against wheat, barley, and rye. A few crumbs of bread, like one might get via communion by intinction from a cup that has already had gluten-filled bread dipped in it, could cause short-term misery as well as long-term physical damage for someone with celiac. The poem reflects my raw experience--feelings of deep rejection from my own church at the communion table. The point of communion is union. For people to be treated as "other" when they physically cannot eat the bread of unity is a theological problem, not simply a logistical one. The shared loaf is important.

The poem is meant to prompt questions: Whom is Jesus drawing to himself, to the table, to the church? In what ways are we unintentionally closing doors to those whom Jesus loves?

Sabbath Rest in the Abrahamic Traditions

Kallie Green

Introduction

This paper stems from interreligious dialogue. The beauty of interreligious dialogue is that it allows for greater connectedness with others and a deepening of one's own religious understanding and faith. I experienced this when I had the opportunity to worship with and interview a few Jewish individuals from Congregation Beth Torah of Richardson, Texas, about their religion and practices. While there were many fruitful insights from our conversation, our discussion about Sabbath was particularly intriguing. Sabbath and rest are often talked about within my own Christian tradition, but rarely lived out in a tangible way. Knowing that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a common beginning, I wanted to explore further how each of these traditions evolved in their contexts, and how that affected their understanding and observance of the Sabbath and rest.

While portraying the rich depth and variety of beliefs of each of these traditions is beyond the scope of this essay, I have attempted to identify some common and contrasting elements of their understanding of "rest" and the importance it holds in each tradition. Sources that proved useful included personal interviews, Abraham Joshua Heschel's book, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man,* Christopher D. Ringwald's book, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath*, and other selected authors from each of the three traditions.

Judaism

> *Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.*
>
> *Torah, Exodus 20:8-11*[1]

Judaism is deeply rooted in tradition and ritual, and observing Shabbat is a regular and important part of that tradition. When I interviewed Earl Bills, an active member of Congregation Beth Torah in Richardson, Texas, he suggested that people see Judaism as a religion full of "do's" and "don'ts." Although this may be the outside appearance of the Jewish religion, Earl shared that the Jewish community does not consider the rules to be a burden, but rather a system that teaches about living in a community characterized by a sense of equality because no one is above the law.

Shabbat is not only a matter of law, but is also significant because it connects to the earth's creation, i.e. when God created and "rested" on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3). Additionally, Moses refers to the holy Sabbath and the need for rest in Exodus 16:22-30, even before it is instituted as law in Exodus 20:8-11, suggesting that the Sabbath may have been an oral tradition before it was instituted in the law.[2] For most modern Westerners, taking an entire day to rest may seem outlandish and unproductive, but as Jewish author, Abraham Joshua Heschel, opines, not even the unlearned and crude can remain insensitive to the beauty of the Sabbath.[3] Heschel's book *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* gives a compelling account of the significance and mystery of the Sabbath with vivid stories and theological interpretations. Nevertheless, as compelling as the act of observing the Sabbath is, it is equally as challenging. Barbara Brown Taylor, a Christian writer, observes that it takes a couple of years to adapt into observing the Sabbath faithfully and that for most Americans it feels, at first, like a day that is dying, with the time left in their life ticking away and being lost.[4] Yet, as Taylor observes, over time the Sabbath experience yields to a holiness that cannot be deemed a waste of time, but provides a fullness of time not experienced elsewhere in life.[5]

This emphasis on holy time is an important aspect of the Sabbath. Sabbath is a "holy time," not a "holy place," or a "holy image." Heschel argues that the Bible is all about time, that it places emphasis on generations and history, and not on space, geography, or belonging.[6] What we notice is that Judaism as a religion aims to sanctify time. It recognizes that time is not a linear homogenous passage of empty shells. Thus, when God created the earth, not only did God rest on the seventh day, but God also blessed it, making it a holy day.[7] This became the Sabbath day, the day that calls for turning away from the results of creation and towards the mystery of creation.[8] It is the day that dictates the rhythm of the other six days, and it is only within this context that the sanctity of the Sabbath can be understood.

The Sabbath is not merely an act of rest, but an act of holistic worship. Sabbaths are the "great cathedrals" of Judaism that no one can

destroy.[9] Heschel describes the Sabbath as a "palace in time" that is built of joy, soul, and reticence. He goes on to say that perfect rest is an art.[10] Just as the mystery of God is often depicted by describing what it is not, so in the same way, the "splendor of the [Sabbath] day is expressed in abstentions."[11] This means that instead of exclusively relying on rituals and clumsy deeds, glory is expressed "in the presence of eternity" by the silence of abstaining from noisy acts.[12] It is not only a day for the soul, because the body also plays an integral role in the day. By resting and enjoying the Sabbath, the body also partakes of the blessing that is the Sabbath, for the soul cannot celebrate alone.[13] The Sabbath cannot become a "fairy tale" or abstraction because it is a law that must be observed. Observing the Sabbath law incorporates the soul and body by creating a consistent physical outlet for the soul and body to worship wherever Jews may be.[14] As Heschel remarks, "It is for the law to clear the path; it is for the soul to sense the spirit."[15]

The Sabbath is not only an act of worship, but also an act of resistance to the world. The Sabbath is something that Jews observe irrespective of their location. It is a day that calls for all people to rest, including non-Jewish guests, employees, and even slaves. In doing this, it interrupts the flow and hierarchy of the socioeconomic systems of nations.[16] For one day a week, all are equal. Taylor argues that the Sabbath commandement was given to a people (and not a person), because it is in resting together that people are "equipped to resist together."[17] This resistance comes from within, from living a different rhythm.[18] Protesting the constant movement and economic domination taking place in society will not happen through the instigation of those heavily invested in its revenue.[19] However, it can occur when people take the time to worship a God who requires them to rest from creating and working on the seventh day.

The Sabbath is also an experience of the divine. Elizabeth Stein discussed her experience of the divine through the Sabbath during our interview. She converted to Judaism earlier in her life when she got married, and is now another active member of Congregation Beth Torah. When asked what she thought about "heaven," as a Jew, without hesitation she responded that she does not preoccupy herself with what comes after her time on this earth because it cannot be known. For her, "heaven" is sitting down for a meal with friends and family at the beginning of Shabbat—an experience of the divine. Her framework recognizes the opposite of poverty as justice, and her job to strive for that justice. Earl similarly explained that his six-days-a-week job was to work on the unfinished parts of creation, but on the seventh day, just as God stood back to rest and enjoy

creation, so does he. Taylor (from the perspective of a Christian observing Sabbath) discerns that after many years of observing Sabbath, it was no longer a spiritual discipline or an idea, but an experience of divine love "that swamps both body and soul."[20]

In his book, *A Day Apart*, Christopher Ringwald recounts how a Conservative Jewish family, the Kligermans, observes the Sabbath in their context and lives. The Kligermans are a family with three young children whose week "tilts" towards observing the Sabbath. The wife makes desserts during the week, and cleans Thursday night and Friday morning. The husband stays up most of Thursday night getting ready and preparing a special meal for their Shabbat dinner (adding that he sometimes does not make it to bed). They place timers on the lights in the house, even going as far as putting tape on the automatic light switch on the refrigerator, since they are not allowed to turn them on or off during the Shabbat. On account of tradition they begin their Shabbat 18 minutes before sundown and end 42 minutes after sundown on Saturday in order not to accidentally violate the Shabbat (making it 25 hours long). They then walk to the Synagogue for worship, which may feel chaotic to an outsider as prayers continue while people, enter, talk, and greet each other. After the service, they return home for their kosher meal. Their Shabbat is not particularly silent or calm with the kids, yet this does not disrupt the peace of the Shabbat, this "moment of eternity." This is the beginning to a typical Shabbat for the Kligermans.[21]

Shabbat is a very holy day. It is filled with rituals and traditions that gravitate towards the holy nature of the day. While many onlookers may look at Sabbath with awe and even jealousy at taking a whole day off, the reality is this rest takes work. The Kligermans and other Jewish families have to orient their week toward the Shabbat and preparing for it. Chores must be done beforehand; work must not only be placed to the side, but be put out of the mind. This happens every week—not just when it seems convenient. However, this special emphasis, the anticipation for what is to come, is part of what makes the time so holy and important.

Sabbath has a central role within Judaism, in the practice, beliefs, and values. It is a law, but also a holy day and time, an act of worship and resistance, and an experience of the divine.

Islam

> *O you who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday [the Day of Assembly], hasten earnestly to the remembrance of Allah, and leave off business [and traffic]: that is best for you if you but knew. And when the Prayer is finished then you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allah, and remember Allah frequently that you may prosper.*
>
> *Quran, Sura 62:9-10*[22]

The understanding of Sabbath for Islam contrasts deeply with that of Judaism. Islam does not have a day of rest despite sharing some similar origins and history as Judaism, but it does have an emphasis on time and on worship.[23] Islam, like Judaism, is a religion based on law, and scholars within both religions are allowed to disagree on interpretation of the law.[24] Their essential doctrines are also very similar. [25] However, they are also different religions, and one of these differences is in the observance of their holy days. For Muslims, Friday is their holy day. Unlike Judaism, Friday is not a day of rest in the way that Saturday is the Sabbath for Jews.[26] As one Muslim put it, the day is suited for good works and family, but "ideally you should be doing that anyway."[27]

Lazarus-Yafeh argues that the reason there is no complete day of rest in Islam is closely connected to the fact that the Muslim faith is oriented towards a mercantile civilization, while the Jewish faith is more oriented towards an agricultural civilization.[28] For the Meccans, whose main occupation was the long distance transit-trade, taking a day of rest would have been a serious impediment and not a blessing. Likewise, Bedouin members had no need of such a day because they did not do regular work.[29] The proper time for public worship was at noon on Friday, between the time when people gathered at the market and before they dispersed for their homes, and it has remained this way up to the present day.[30]

While there are very practical reasons for not observing a Sabbath and for having Friday as the day of prayer, there may also be a theological element to these customs.[31] The Quran says: "Verily, we created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and no weariness touched us" (Sura L. v. 38).[32] Some have interpreted this as being "an explicit rejection of the physical conception, as it were, of God in Judaism"[33] This acknowledges that, while the origin and purpose of the Friday prayer is related to the Sabbath, it also has its own distinct history and practices.

The main element of prayer for Muslims, whether it is Friday prayer, weekday prayer, or festivals, is the "prescribed and repeated movements of the body" as opposed to the verbal expression that is found in Judaism and Christianity.[34] The noonday prayer is differentiated from weekday prayer in that it is said collectively after listening to a sermon given by an Imam.[35]

In his book, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath,* Christopher D. Ringwald narrates some of the distinctions he observed when he shadowed Azra Haqqie, a Muslim, as she left work at lunch time on a Friday to attend noon prayer.[36] On a typical Friday, she would get to the mosque for prayers and be back at work within one hour and fifteen minutes, during her lunch break. Upon arriving at the mosque, she stores her shoes and then goes to an overflow room that would allow her to leave quickly. She sits in the back with other women behind a rope. At 12:30pm, the call to prayer is made. Everyone rises and then sits to listen to the sermon. The sermon by the Imam is an account of Muhammad and peoples' conversions by peace and not force. After 25 minutes, they form lines from the north wall to the south wall, with their shoulders touching. They then proceed through the movements and prayer. At times it is silent, and only the swishing of the fabric of peoples' clothes can be heard. When Haqqie and the others return to work from the mosque, they are supposed to return with a "renewed consciousness of God."[37]

While Islam does not have a Sabbath or the concept of worship that accompanies the Sabbath, there is still a permeating concept of worship in the everyday lives of Muslims. Abdul-Rauf gives a narrow meaning of worship as "leading a moral life in keeping with human dignity, and in accordance with the divine teachings revealed by Almighty Allah through his noble messenger."[38] Worship is not limited to time spent in prayer or in a mosque. Muslims are engaged in worshiping Allah when they are conscious of the presence of their "Creator and sustainer," and when they, in "all their struggles, endeavor to fulfill the divine will according to the guidance of Allah."[39]

There is a consistent emphasis on moderation within Islam. There is a balance of time spent in the mosque and in prayer, and time spent working. Muslims are actually prohibited from performing prayers during certain times of the day outside of regular prayer times.[40] However, the five times of prayer during the day are very important. Aminah Beverly McCloud explains that praying five times throughout the day is an obligation, even if it means getting up before dawn and then going back to bed. It is an obligation that marks the start of the day for Muslims.

Sometimes a person cannot help but miss a prayer time, and a mental note is made that the prayer needs to be made up. Even so, the missing prayer still causes discomfort.[41]

A further core practice of Islam is Ramadan. While it cannot be equated to the Sabbath, it is worth mentioning here because it bears a few similarities. During the time of Ramadan, Muslims are to restrain themselves from worldly and particularly sensuous thoughts.[42] Ramadan is both a personal and communal time of worship; in addition to fasting during the day, families also spend quality time together in the evening, reading the Quran, and eating after sundown.[43] While the practice itself is very different, there are some similarities with the Sabbath. For instance, both Muslim and Jewish families have to prepare beforehand for their respective practices of fasting and eating, and thus end up spending more time together.

Islam does not have a Sabbath, but it does share with Judaism a strong emphasis on ritual, worship, and time. Christianity shares some of the Jewish understanding of Sabbath, but often without the same emphasis on ritual and abstinence that Islam and Judaism both have.

Christianity

> *Then he [Jesus] said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."*
>
> *New Testament, Mark 2:27-28 (NRSV)*

Christianity shares in its heritage the same historical interpretation of the Sabbath as Judaism, but in the years since Christ, this interpretation has taken many forms. Sabbath represents not merely a "cyclical order of nature," but instead "an order of creation caught up in the dynamic movement of salvation history."[44] Sabbath looks to our history, but also to the future.[45] The coming of Christ changed the understanding of the Sabbath, though early Christians did not uniformly agree as to how it was to be understood.[46] Christ declares himself Lord of the Sabbath and heals on the Sabbath.[47] The early church therefore eventually came to regard some of the religious laws, including those about the Sabbath, to be no longer binding. "Keeping Sabbath" became a matter of holding fast to faith instead of observing rituals.[48] While some churches, especially those with more gentiles, tended to worship on the eighth day instead of on the seventh day, Sunday did not become the official "day of rest" until Constantine's edict of 321.[49] It was not until the sixth century that labor

was actually prohibited on Sunday—though that law was primarily for humanitarian reasons.[50] Since that time, there have been various historical periods and cultures that have adopted a very strict legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath.[51] For instance, during the Reformation there were places in which breaking the Sabbath was equivalent to treason, and was punishable even by death.[52]

While there are extremes on both sides, most Christians in North America today do not observe the Sabbath. Throughout my childhood, Sunday was a day when fewer activities were scheduled, primarily because there were multiple things going on at church or because there was homework and other chores to catch up on before Monday. Ringwald recounts that during his own childhood, Sundays were days that were reserved for cultural activities.[53]

However, there are families and individuals that have chosen a more formal observance of Sunday as a Sabbath for various reasons. For example, Taylor recounts being a parish priest who was always so busy that she had no time to stop and notice the things she was quickly driving past. Even on her days off, she continued to work, though with a sense of guilt. Then during one Lent, she decided to obey the fourth commandment and began observing the Sabbath. She found this to be such a fruitful endeavor that she continued to do so. It meant that her Sundays were free of the compulsion to work and attempt to accomplish more things. On Sundays, she did not worship the clock; instead, she worshiped God. There was still never enough time to get everything done, but she finally understood there never would be.[54]

John Buchanan came to a similar revelation in his own life when he began ministry.[55] He was busy as a student and pastor, and was trying to work seven days a week. Finally, a church member told him that nobody expected him in church on Saturday and he should go home. He did, and has done so ever since. He acknowledges that there was a lesson on grace in learning that the sun did not depend on him to rise. He now looks at Sabbath in this way: work is not finished until it is enjoyed in rest.

Robert Sherman argues that practicing Sabbath rest is not "a spiritual exercise in a temporal vacuum, but rather an eschatological gift that actually anchors our time."[56] It helps us become aware of time, and of the reality that the time is not originally or finally ours, but God's.[57] In the Sabbath, we can enjoy the fullness of God's eternal blessing here and now. We are not only given permission to say "no" to endless work and activities, but are called to use the time to enjoy the work that God has done, to understand the story of redemption, and to share in the blessing of communion with our community.

Conclusion

Rest takes many different forms in these three different traditions. The Jewish week revolves around the Sabbath; the Muslim week takes intentional time every day for prayer, and in community on Friday; the Christian church fosters a special sense of community and partaking in God's blessings on Sundays.

Important aspects of doing any of these well (within all three traditions) are the preparation, the ritual, the follow through, and the intention. Christians have a tendency to set aside an hour or two here or there, but those who set apart an entire day are in the minority. I have learned from the Jewish tradition that keeping Sabbath is about intentionally creating space in their lives for God and for family. I also learned that observing that rest requires extra work during the week. It is recognizing a holy time that is not shift-able or adjustable, because it is what God declared. Sabbath is about recognizing the eternity of God. For all three traditions, these are moments when we worship God, not in space, but in time.

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[1] Christopher D. Ringwald, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

[2] Pinchas Kahn, "The Expanding Perspective of the Sabbath," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2004), 240.

[3] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), 20.

[4] Barbara Brown Taylor, "Sabbath Resistance," *Christian Century* 122, no. 11 (May 31, 2005), 35.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Heschel, 6.

[7] Gen. 2:3.

[8] Heschel, 10.

[9] Ibid., 8.

[10] Ibid., 14.

[11] Ibid., 15.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 19.

[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Ibid., 17.

[16] Taylor, "Sabbath resistance," 35.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 35.
[21] Ringwald, 4-7.
[22] Ibid., 1.
[23] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some differences between Judaism and Islam as two religions of law," *Religion* 14, no. 2 (April 1, 1984), 175.
[24] Ibid., 176.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 185.
[27] Ringwald, 4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Shelomo Dov Goitein, "Origin and nature of the Muslim Friday worship," *Muslim World* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 1959), 193.
[30] Goitein, 191.
[31] Lazarus-Yafeh, 185-186.
[32] Ibid., 186.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, "Ritual, symbol and participation in the quest for interfaith collaboration: a Muslim's point of view," *Dialogue & Alliance* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 1992), 72.
[36] Ringwald, 1-4.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Abdul-Rauf, 70.
[39] Ibid, 71.
[40] Ibid., 75.
[41] Aminah Beverly McCloud, "Worship in Islam: What Muslims Want Jewish and Christian Liturgists to Know," *Proceedings Of The North American Academy For Liturgy* (August 2010), 29.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 30.
[44] Robert Sherman, "Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest," *Interpretation: A Journal Of Bible & Theology* 59, no. 1 (January 2005), 41.
[45] Ibid., 41.
[46] Ibid., 42.
[47] Ibid., 42.
[48] Ibid., 43.
[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 44.
[51] Ibid.
[52] "Religion and Recreational Activity," *Parks & Recreation* 39, no. 10 (October 2004), 77.
[53] Ringwald, 8.
[54] Barbara Brown Taylor, "Remember the Sabbath," *Christian Century* 116, no. 14 (May 5, 1999), 510.
[55] John M. Buchanan,"Sabbath-keeping." *Christian Century* 118, no. 21 (July 18, 2001), 3.
[56] Sherman, 50.
[57] Ibid.

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