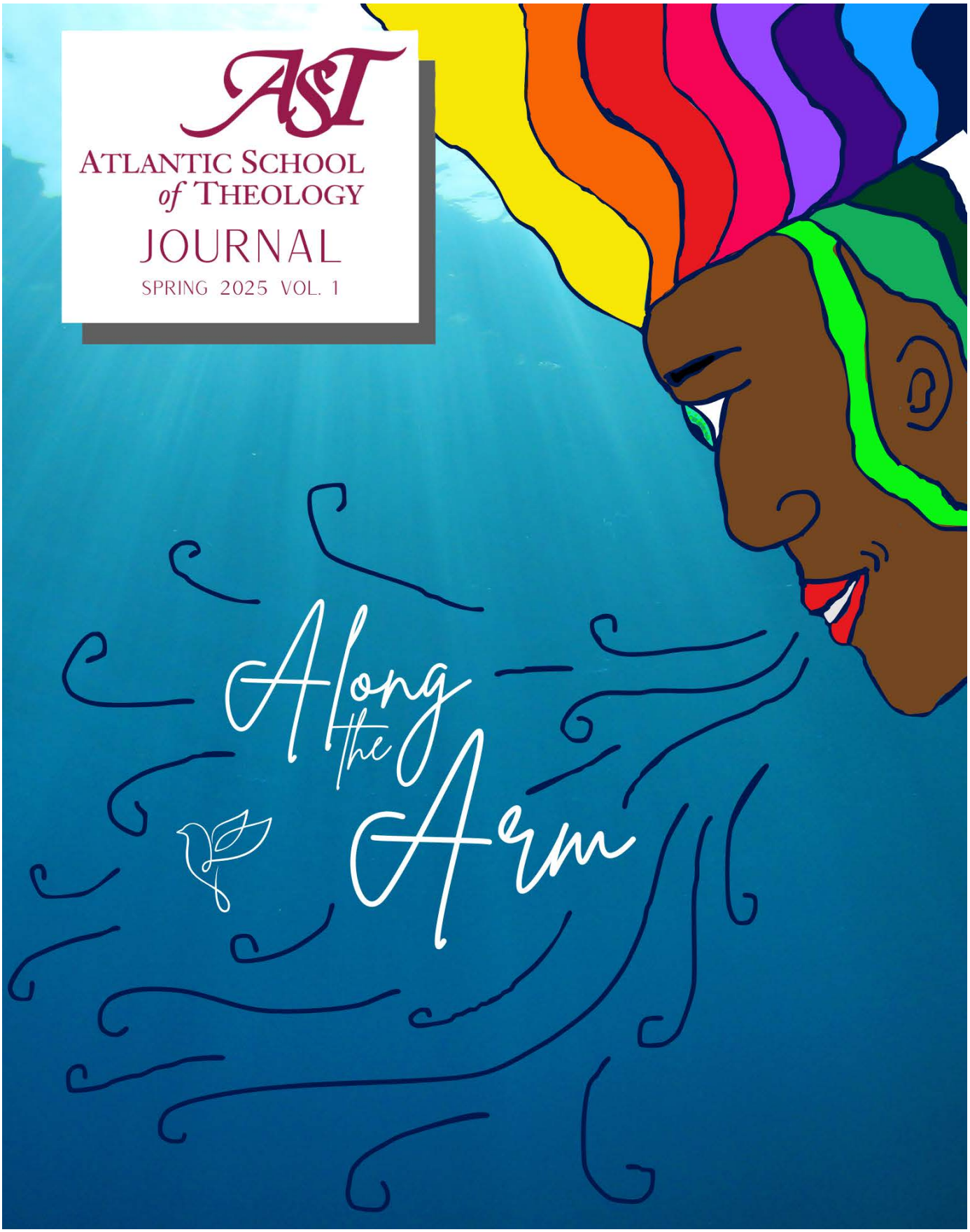
AST
Atlantic School of Theology
JOURNAL
SPRING 2025 VOL. 1
Along the Arm

Along the Arm
The Journal of Atlantic School of Theology
Volume 1 (Spring 2025)

Published by Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 3B5
Canada
www.astheology.ns.ca

Editor: Robert C. Fennell

To support the work of Atlantic School of Theology, please visit
https://www.astheology.ns.ca/home/giving-to-ast/index.html

Table of Contents

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this first volume of *Along the Arm.* Inside you will find highlights of student and faculty research and writing in the past academic year. The student contributions all arise from their excellent achievements; all have been nominated by their respective course professors for inclusion in the journal.

Please feel free to pass along this journal. Thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of our University. We look forward to hearing from you.

Rev. Dr. Rob Fennell
Eastertide 2025

What to do With Cana

A sermon preached at St. Columba Chapel (Jan 2025)

Rev. Dr. Ross Bartlett

Text: John 2:1-11

It's interesting to note how the gospel writers begin their narratives and what those choices might tell us about their intentions in sharing an account of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. For Matthew, Jesus' first acts are preaching and calling disciples. For Mark, he begins with an exorcism. With Luke, it is a return home to preach in the local synagogue. With John? water into wine for a small-town wedding. Seriously? John spends his entire first chapter extoling the significance of Jesus and his pivotal role in the Divine design of creation itself as well as its redemption. And this is the first thing our hero does? Admittedly, were I to change water into wine that would be quite something on a January afternoon in Halifax! But revelation for revelation's sake is not the point. There is a deeper agenda here.

The gospel helps us remember that Jesus was not an austere, lone figure. Like us, he lived in a web of relationships of family and friends. That's why he was at the wedding in the first place. We remember that wedding feasts went on for a week and they really were the high point of many people's lives. In lives that could be difficult and harsh in so many ways, this was potentially the one time when this couple would be the focus of attention. To have the wine run out was terrible luck and made the sort of story that would be remembered for the rest of their lives – in the way that only small towns can remember the misadventures of your youth!

The text is filled with references – theological and literary -- that invite deeper reflection and connections in the gospel. The third day; the wedding banquet; the role of Mary; the reference to "my hour"; the extravagant amount of wine as symbol of divine abundance; Jesus as the true bridegroom at the glorious wedding feast serving the true wine. But the main action of the passage and the source of difficulties for many readers and teachers is the miraculous act of changing water into wine. Our response to that event points to how different we are from the initial readers of John's account.

We are blessed with many wonderful contemporary translations of scripture which are so helpful. However, they can blunt our awareness that the scriptures are profoundly ancient documents that arise from a different world view. The gospel and early Christian traditions are filled with miraculous events. They were accepted as a normal part of life. That's how rational people explained their world. Magic and miracle were as much part of reality as gravity. On the other hand, you and I are descendants of the Enlightenment and inheritors of a scientific or post-scientific world view. That often makes us uncomfortable with miracles. Thus, many resources try to explain away the miracles in favour of "more rational" explanations that seem logical. For instance, consider the various stories of Jesus feeding large multitudes. Of course, we say, Jesus didn't really multiply the loaves and the fishes. We all know that. It doesn't really happen that way. So, what happened? Well, Jesus got this little boy to give up his food, and that provided such a miraculous example of ethics to everyone else that everybody then pulled out of their cloaks the little stash of food that they had brought with them. And when they had pulled it all out, there was enough to feed everybody. Now, if that's your favourite explanation of that story I don't mean offense but consider what has happened. We have replaced the miraculous with a morality tale. It is the morality that has become the miracle. I have nothing against either morality or sharing, but that's not what the gospel writer was talking about – and they were smart enough to know the difference.

It's fine to give an alternative explanation based on a different world view, but I think we want to avoid the impression that we are somehow wiser than the original authors and we know better than they did what occurred in events they record. That also happens when we fall into the trap of claiming that all other miracle accounts in ancient literature were clearly superstition, but Jesus' miracles were real because he was the Son of God. Notice what we do here. The gospels say that the miracles demonstrate Jesus' true status. We change that to claim that only Jesus' miracles are true *because* of Jesus' assumed status. Both assertions can be true, but they are not claiming the same thing.

So, I am inviting us to consider that – in order to genuinely grasp the gospel message -- we must take the signs and miracles seriously as written because Jesus' contemporaries did. We can say that the miraculous has an ambivalent place in the early Christian tradition. Paul, our earliest source, never mentions Jesus' miracles; Jesus the miracle worker is not part of Pauline theology. The gospels are rather different: miracles and the divine nature are closely linked.

Which was consistent with much of the ancient world. The miraculous was neither irrational nor unintelligible. It was part of the understanding of the order of the world.

Our very different world view is revealed in the questions we bring to the text. The modern mind reads of the miraculous and asks, "how was it done?" The ancient mind encountered the miraculous and asked: "who did it?" Thus, for John, the miraculous is always called "a sign". In John's gospel Jesus' actions offer signs. They have only limited significance in themselves. The crucial verse in the reading is: *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, … and revealed his glory,* [in other words his honour, or status with God] *and* [as a result] *his disciples believed in him.* Phrased another way, the story holds no surprise that something happened, because of course the miraculous is possible. The account is a claim about the person who is said to have made it happen.

There are at least two pitfalls to avoid in preaching/teaching this text. These are approaches I've encountered. The first is to trivialize it because it doesn't involve healing a disease or restoring sight or speech or feeding multitudes or raising the dead or something we would consider a "worthwhile miracle". In turn, the expositor shifts it into something about how Jesus enjoyed a good time so all you uptight Christians should just relax. You know, "Jesus and the disciples walk into a bar. He winks at them and says to the bartender, 'Thirteen glasses of water please." Don't do that, please! John takes this extremely seriously. He makes it the first of his signs for a reason. The second pitfall is to argue – as you can find in some commentaries –that somehow Jesus' wine replaces the insufficiency of the Jewish purification rituals. As if Jesus is superseding the previous rather than creating something new within a particular religious context.

The signs in John show us – they don't tell us they show us – what grace looks like. In the Prologue to the gospel John says of Jesus, "from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace" [1:16] Like gallons and gallons of the finest wine. The very best when you were expecting the cheap stuff. In those weeklong wedding celebrations, hosts would start off with the good wine and when guests couldn't distinguish would bring out the boxed Merlot or the gallon jug Chablis. No, this is grace – just when you think it's as wonderful as could be, it becomes even more wondrous.

So, instead of asserting our superiority over the text we might simply accept it. Rather than focusing on the menu enjoy the feast John lays out for us. Your sermon/lesson on this text might ask where your listeners – and you – have experienced this grace? Grace overflowing.

Blessing unimaginable in the circumstances. Celebrate that! Be grateful for it! Revel in it! And, if we're asking John's question we might then say, "Wow, I wonder who did that?"

Let those with ears hear the Spirit's word to the church. Amen.

Enemies to lovers: How gendered debates mirror the narrative and obscure the message of 1 Timothy 2:9-15

Sherry Brown

For BF 1002 Biblical Foundations: New Testament (April 2025)

Introduction

1 Timothy 2:9-15 is arguably one of the most controversial passages in the Christian Bible, let alone the New Testament. Its mysteries are countless: its authorship is debated; its inclusion of the hapax legomenon[1] αὐθεντεῖν has inspired endless debate over the meaning of the term; and whether the letter's seeming prescriptions were meant for a specific time and place or as universal and timeless orders is unclear. Debate rages on, primarily between scholars from the complementarian, conservative, and/or fundamentalist camp and scholars from the egalitarian, liberalist, feminist, and/or womanist camp, about whether the passage necessarily precludes women from church leadership. (I will refer to these two sides either generously or reductively as "complementarian" and "egalitarian," however insufficient both terms are to describe the diversity within each perspective.) However much these points of view seem to differ on the validity or relevance of the passage, they do generally share an understanding of what the nature and content of the passage's theology is saying. Much is to be gained by examining the ways in which these perspectives fit together, and I would argue that the exercise's resulting unification reveals a similarly unifying message put forward by the story this letter tells. The enduring quarrel over 1 Timothy 2:9-15 proves the modern relevance of the text, for the resolution it offers to its readers continues to be debated rather than heeded. The passage is a reminder to both men and women that they are made for partnership with one another, not for the conflict that the letter proves exists not only within the church in Ephesus but among its readers in every generation.

Before delving into the intricacies of 1 Timothy, the unknowability of the Pastoral Epistles must first be acknowledged in order to set the stage for the confusion and assumptions on both sides of the female leadership debate that surround 1 Timothy 2:9-15. *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, edited by Andreas Köstenberger and

[1] Perkins, Larry J. *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 44.

Thomas R. Schreiner, which argues in favour of the complementarian perspective, reflects a common assumption among conservative and fundamentalist Christian groups that the author of the Pastoral Epistles is who he claims to be, rather than the unknown pseudonymous author many scholars claim wrote the letters. Evidence in favour of the latter includes the fact that curriculum in the Greco-Roman education customarily included assignments in which students composed "a text in the name of *persona* of a well-known figure," not as an attempt at forgery "but rather as a learning strategy and an honoring of the influence of that person."[2] Joanna Dewey points out that no references to these letters appear in other documents until the late second century, "considerably later than references to the other Pauline writings," that the writing style is not typical of Paul "but rather a more general Hellenistic literary Greek," and that "the Pastorals are concerned with church offices that had not developed in Paul's time."[3] Debate about when the letters were written "range from the last third of the first century CE to much later in the second century CE."[4] While *Women in the Church* does assume that Paul is 1 Timothy's author, its contributors do acknowledge in great detail that the language used in the letter is incredibly difficult to decipher, identifying the term αὐθεντεῖν (which Henry Scott Baldwin ultimately translates as "exercise authority over") from 1 Tim. 2:12 as a "hapax legomenon," necessitating comparisons from outside the New Testament, and noting that "a precise consensus as to the meaning of the word has not been achieved among well-known lexicographers."[5] There is so much that truly cannot be known with certainty about 1 Timothy, which complicates the ability on both sides of any debate about its contents to truly assert a position. However, a contextual reading of the passage may eliminate some urgency around these two points of unknowability and contention, as they may not be as relevant to the larger question surrounding 1 Tim. 2:9-15 as previously thought.

Conflicts and agreements between egalitarians and complementarians

That question, of course, is this: Does 1 Timothy 2:9-15 really say that women should not hold leadership positions in the church? The side that maintains the egalitarian position may

---

[2] Bourland Huizenga, Annette. *1-2 Timothy Titus.* Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), xlv.
[3] Dewey, Joanna. "1 Timothy," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 444-449 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 444.
[4] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit. xlviii.
[5] Baldwin, Henry Scott. "An Important Word," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 39-51 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 40.

argue that while this passage does mandate the exclusion of women from ministry, the illegitimacy of the letter's origins undermines its authority. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* that "the canon is a record of the 'historical winners,'"[6] that the inclusion of the Pastoral Epistles is not a divinely inspired decision but a reflection of the "gradual development of the concept of 'orthodoxy' in early Christianity," an attempt to "patriarchalize" the church through carefully selected texts.[7] Dewey goes so far as to claim that 1 Cor. 14:34-35 may be an interpolation "made by the author of the Pastorals, to strengthen his case for restricting women's leadership."[8] Claims of this kind, while differing greatly from the typical Biblical infallibility stance of conservatives and fundamentalists, betray a belief that the Bible does object to women holding leadership positions within the church. Complementarians maintain that this is simply "God's ordained pattern"[9] and many egalitarians argue that this position is fuelled by a willingness to "sacrifice the fuller life the women and slaves have found in Christ for respectability among pagans."[10] However, while perspectives may also differ on whether these objections should be applied, and nuanced disagreements remain even within various schools of thought about a host of mysteries within 1 Tim. 2:9-15, hearty agreement about the nature of the passage at least partially unifies opposing sides.

Both sides, for example, agree that verse 15 is rendered incoherent when the word "saved" is interpreted as a reference to spiritual salvation, though for reasons tied to their respective positions regarding the legitimacy of the text. Annette Bourland Huizenga argues that this verse proves the author cannot be Paul, "who wrote the complicated argument on salvation by faith found in Romans and Galatians,"[11] and argued unmarried women and virgins were more holy than married women in 1 Cor 7:34.[12] Thomas R. Schreiner, on the complementarian side, agrees that "salvation is not evidenced by childbirth alone" but that "the genuineness of salvation

---

[6] Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*,10. anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 55.
[7] Ibid., 56.
[8] Dewey, Joanna. "1 Timothy," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 444-449. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 447.
[9] Schreiner, Thomas R. "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15" in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 85-120. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 115.
[10] Dewey, op. cit., 452.
[11] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit., xliv.
[12] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit., 29.

is indicated by a woman living a godly life and conforming to her God-ordained role."[13] While Bourland objects to the verse's apparent theology, and Schreiner uses it to further his own complementarian agenda, they both agree that the verse cannot be read as a claim that women can achieve salvation through giving birth, and they also agree that the verse betrays the author's belief that women's primary role is "participating in marital sex with its hoped-for outcome of children."[14] As we can see, points of disagreement are ironically also a good starting place for establishing overlaps between complementarian and egalitarian perspectives when it comes to the Pauline attitude toward female leadership. Importantly, this agreement is also a good place to begin examining how this clash may be a reflection of the conflict depicted in 1 Timothy as well as a factor in its obfuscation. Both perspectives agree that the passage argues in favour of a sexist church structure, and both use this to further their own side of the debate, creating a divide so enormous that it prevents either from seeing that the resolution is right in front of them, plainly presented by the text itself.

Uncovering context

A contextual reading of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 gives us a fresh perspective, unfettered by the almost universal assumption that the passage's author stands against female leadership within the church. This assumption on the part of egalitarians seems to backfire specifically when it comes to the passage's perceived incompatibility with Pauline thought and, indeed, the rest of the New Testament. Many scholars agree that "the rest of the New Testament is unanimous in making no distinction by gender,"[15] pointing out that 1 Timothy's author "has given more direct instructions for women than are found in any other Christian writing of the church's first century,"[16] and that "the Pastorals require a new reading of the authentic Pauline letters, for they have Paul making reference to, modifying, and correcting [his own] utterances."[17] Galatians 3:28 is often cited as proof that "for Paul, the subordination of woman to man was part of the old order of creation but not part of the new creation in Christ,"[18] and scholars point to his clear esteem for his many

[13] Schreiner, op. cit. 120.
[14] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit. 29.
[15] Dewey, op. cit. 447.
[16] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit. l.
[17] Wagener, Ulrike. "Pastoral Epistles: A Tamed Paul – Domesticated Women," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature,* ed. Luise Schottroff and Mare-Theres Wacker, 830-847. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 831.
[18] Dewey, op. cit., 447.

female colleagues, many of whom were church planters and leaders, believing that this evidence renders Timothy's sexism illegitimate and a clear departure from all of Paul's previous statements and demonstrations against a church built on a patriarchal hierarchy. As with the complementarian side, the assumption that the passage is an indictment of female leadership in the church incites rhetoric in favour of their perspective. However, if one permits context to make sense of the passage rather than discredit it, it becomes far clearer.

For a start, while the debate around authorship of the Pastoral Epistles does matter, it perhaps matters less if we simply accept that either the letters were written by Paul himself or they were written by someone who knew Paul's writing intimately[19] and was attempting to write letters that aligned with his theology and brought them into his own time.[20] Rather than using the body of Paul's work to discredit the passage, we can instead employ a hermeneutics of love or analogy of faith and assume that the passage may align with its larger context. In the spirit of this, we can begin to see the immediate textual context surrounding 1 Tim. 2:9-15 as an ecosystem in which the passage operates successfully, feeding into and deriving from its theology. The letter begins with an either real or fictional request of Timothy or "Timothy" in 1:3-7 to remain in Ephesus to combat false teachings out of "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith," which itself is under threat due to the aforementioned false teachings. We already have a sort of circular pattern that the author uses to express that the false teachings conflict with love, and that for this love to flourish the false teachings must be stopped. These few verses are the "why" of the letter, the source of all of its logic, as the entire letter is written in service of the idea that love must be imparted as widely as possible. We know this thanks to a few grammatical hints: the "then" of 2:1, the "for" in 2:5, and the "then" in 2:8. These words let us know that each new idea put forth is a result of, and directly serves, the "aim" of love. The "then" of 2:1 tells us that the author's request that Timothy and other readers of the letter pray for kings is a strategy that serves the "aim." His logic is that praying for kings will allow Christians to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2) and is justified by the fact that God "desires everyone to be saved" (2:4) because Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" (2:6) which in turn is why the author "was appointed a herald and an apostle" (2:7). Historical context tells us that this chain of logic holds up, as kings becoming Christians

[19] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit., xlix.
[20] Dewey, op. cit., 444.

would indeed have increased peace for a fledgling church constantly pressured by and likely under near-constant attack from its surrounding pagan society. The author's line of thinking is therefore, in essence, that the love of Christ is more easily fostered when conflict, in the form of tension with society and false teachings, is reduced or eliminated. This theme is shared by 1 Cor. 14:34-35, which I noted earlier is a suspected interpolation to bolster 1 Timothy's claims about women. In calling for peace, Paul urges women to learn silently in public, to have discussions with their husbands in private rather than in church where it may interrupt discussion. Rather than discredit this verse, I suggest it may be used to better understand this Pauline pattern.

Applying context

This is where our passage begins. The author, having established: his "aim" of spreading love; his belief that God "desires everyone to be saved" which is why Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all;" and his strategy of achieving peace to achieve his aim, now gives instructions to men and women in the church. What he tells them to do tells us that what he is speaking against was happening so much that it required response.[21] From this perspective, we therefore know that men were not praying, that they were acting with anger and judgement, that women were flaunting their wealth and status in church, that they were disrupting the teachers and their own learning by talking, and that they were teaching and exercising power over men. The picture these verses paint is one in which the church is not a peaceful place, and is rather an environment in which men and women alike are combative, hostile, disruptive, and at odds with one another. Bourland Huizenga points out that "amassing wealth – as an individual or nation – contributes to the oppression of the poor and creates social conflict."[22] Not only are individuals experiencing friction, but a class war is being fought within the church, where the equalizing love of God is supposed to reign. Women are not ordered to be silent for the sake of interrupting their spiritual gifts; as in 1 Cor. 14:34-35, they are merely being asked to foster a peaceful environment. Even Schreiner, in arguing in favour of complementarianism, points out that "the submission of all women to all men is not in view"[23] as the emphasis here is simply on submission "while learning," not even submission to a teacher. The following verse, however, presents a point of

[21] Dewey, op. cit., 446.
[22] Bourland Huizenga, op. cit., 15.
[23] Schreiner, op. cit., 99.

contention: Baldwin argues vehemently that while all we know with any degree of certainty about the hapax legomenon[24] αὐθεντεῖν is that the verb is related to the concept of authority,[25] the most likely translation is "exercise authority over" rather than the egalitarian-preferred "dominate."[26] Here we find another opportunity to unify both sides, for when we read the verse with all of the context we have accumulated thus far, we can see that the two terms become one and the same, and the assumption on both sides are identical. "Exercise authority over," when read with the assumption that this is something only a man should do to a woman and not vice versa, is a positive concept negatively exercised in this scenario. However, the term becomes synonymous with the concept of domination when we read it as out of place in Paul's theology, and the egalitarian, peaceful, conflict-free church he clearly established as his vision for the Jesus movement, where no one should be exercising authority over anyone, as the one authority, "the one mediator between God and humankind" is Christ Jesus, according to 1 Tim. 2:5. For Paul, "authority" is only positive when exercised by God, and therefore entirely negative when exercised by anyone else, regardless of gender or even position within the church. In 1 Tim 3:1-13, where women are openly acknowledged to be church leaders (except when the "bishop" is described using culturally appropriate male pronouns used to refer to a person of any gender in the singular form), church offices are described as "noble tasks," indicating a difficult job of servitude. Men and women alike are called to be worthy of this labour, and in keeping with the issues raised in 1 Tim. 1 and 2, to foster a peaceful environment by being "gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money." Men and women alike, throughout 1 Timothy, are asked to lead *by example*, rather than by "exercising authority" over their fellow Christians.

Fittingly, in 2:13 we return to the author's theology, which he imparts upon his readers to strengthen his strategy for achieving his aim of spreading love. He reminds his readers that Eve was created as a partner to Adam, that Eve was complicit in the sin that Adam committed, and that men and women are partners in mutual creation, because he believes his readers need to be reminded of this sacred partnership. The first point seems to establish male leadership through "firstness" only when one assumes that being created first establishes leadership; when read with context in mind, it transforms into a rich reminder that woman came from man. The second point

[24] Perkins, op. cit., 44.
[25] Baldwin, Henry Scott. "An Important Word," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 39-51. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 45.
[26] Perkins, op. cit., 44.

reminds women to be humble and to refrain from blame or demonization; after all, Paul himself points out in Romans 5:15 that "many died by the trespass of one man." In his interpretation of this verse, Augustine noted that "Adam's sin is even more deliberate than Eve's in that he sinned knowingly and deliberately,"[27] and we can assume that at least some women shared this reading and used it to fuel their anger against the angry, argumentative men in their congregation. The third point reminds us that the reverse of the first point is also true, that man and woman create one another, that "provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control," women are safe in the creative, fundamental, and mutual partnership between man and woman. Perkins points out that the sudden switch to the plural "they" is awkward, and that the common belief that "they" refers to either children produced or women in general "runs counter to the theology of salvation expressed in the PE."[28] He is correct in identifying the "they" as awkward, but perhaps this is the point: in order to be clear about the "they" to whom the author was referring, he specifically wrote "woman" and "she" as singular earlier in the sentence and referred to "childbearing" without referring to children directly, therefore clearly tying the plural pronoun to the man and woman upon which the entire sentence is centred. Women are safe in partnership with men, provided both men and women "continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." As we have seen, 1 Timothy 3 further enriches the context surrounding 1 Tim. 2:9-15, as we go straight from this "they" of 2:15 to instructions about what the male and female members of the church referred to in the second chapter should take into account while becoming or selecting those who will set the standards of behaviour among the members of the church.

Conclusion

While not all egalitarian scholars are women and not all complementarian scholars are men, both have firmly and thoroughly established their camps defined by the debate concerning the Bible's position on female leadership in the Christian church. Both have largely concluded that 1 Tim. 2:9-15 is opposed to women holding leadership positions, but in doing so, both sides demonstrate the enduring relevance of this passage. Just as its directives reveal ongoing conflict among men and women in a church in Ephesus roughly two thousand years ago, so do they now

[27] Fiore, Benjamin. *The Pastoral Epistles.* Sacra Pagina Series. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 70.
[28] Perkins, op. cit., 47.

reveal the ongoing struggle that has resulted in interpretations clouded by a shared bias. Verse 14 – "and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" – reminds us of the bond the two share that can either be destructive or creative. Verse 15, a call to love, urges its readers to choose the latter.

Bibliography

Baldwin, Henry Scott. "An Important Word," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 39-51. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Bourland Huizenga, Annette. *1-2 Timothy Titus.* Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.

Dewey, Joanna. "1 Timothy," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 444-449. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Fiore, Benjamin. *The Pastoral Epistles.* Sacra Pagina Series. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007.

Köstenberger, Andreas. "A Complex Sentence," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 53-84. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

New Oxford Annotated Bible, The. New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press, 2010.

Perkins, Larry J. *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text.* Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017.

Schreiner, Thomas R. "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15" in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,* ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R Schreiner, 85-120. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. 10. anniversary ed. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

Wagener, Ulrike. "Pastoral Epistles: A Tamed Paul – Domesticated Women," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature,* ed. Luise Schottroff and Mare-Theres Wacker, 830-847. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

Beyond the Shadows: A Defense of the Nicaean Creed

Dr. David Deane

This essay is in support of the position that the Nicaean Creed (and pro-Nicene theology more generally) should be championed by Christians as central to our shared identity. In seeking to support this position I may be accused of supporting the wetness of water, or the coldness of snow. After all, the council of Nicaea represents the first great ecumenical council of the church. The Creed it produced is axiomatic and is proclaimed[1] in the Anglican, United, and Roman Catholic Churches. It represents the Creedal core that unites all Christian churches, East and West. Therefore, in one sense, its status as the ecumenical core of Christianity does not need to be supported. But I do not mean to support the position that Nicaea should be passively unifying, I mean to support the position that Christians should actively champion Nicaea and its theological culture and use its theological grammar to norm our theology and practices. To do this I do not need, for reasons already mentioned, to make positive claims for Nicaea's ecumenical centrality. Instead, I need to defend the Nicaean Creed against critiques that have undermined it and fuelled its reduction to the level of nominal centrality alone. Specifically, two perspectives have etiolated the status of Nicaea over the last two centuries. These two perspectives are (1) That the Nicaean Creed is part of the distortion of Christianity effected by the Emperor Constantine and therefore it is tarnished and doesn't warrant enthusiastic support[2] and (2) That the Nicaean Creed is influenced by the categories of Greek metaphysics such that it is sullied by a foreign discourse incompatible with the simple truths of Christian doctrine.[3] These two positions, in various ways, haunt the Nicaean Creed and reduce its capacity to be actively

---

[1] In various forms, sometimes with the *filioque* and sometimes without, but even more recent Creedal expressions such as *The Song of Faith*, follow the core shape of Nicaea and its logic.

[2] This position has been encouraged from Jacob Burckhardt's *The Age of Constantine the Great in the 19th century to John Dominic Crossan's God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperOne, 2007). It also has been a staple in post-liberal theological streams influenced by John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), including theologians less specific in their critique of the Creed but who share Yoder's rejection of Constantinianism, such as Stanley Hauerwas and Bill Cavanaugh.

[3] This position was advanced in the 16th century by radicals such as Servetus and Socinus but came to much wider acceptance in the 19th century with Von Harnack's *History of Dogma* and Edwin Hatch's Hibbert Lectures of 1888, published posthumously as *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity. It remains a central tenet of the liberation theology of Leonardo Boff and is defended by biblical scholars such as James Dunn, whose Christology in the Making* holds that such 4th and 5th century developments go far beyond what can be found in the New Testament text itself.

ecumenically unifying for Christians today. They are ghosts that undermine Nicaea's status and its power to norm theology and practices. My goal in this essay is to exorcize these shadows.

Constantine's role

The primary source for Constantine's life is Eusebius of Caesarea, who, with Constantine's death in 337, began his *Life of Constantine*. Eusebius set out to portray Constantine as a saintly figure, the inverse of the hated emperor Diocletian, who began the largest and most devastating persecution of Christians in 303. Eusebius also contrasted him with Licinius, whom he presented as a champion of paganism. Constantine's victory over Licinius thus represented, for Eusebius, the victory of Christianity over paganism. As such, The *Life of Constantine* is as much a work of Christian apology as it is history, arguing to Rome that the great Constantine wanted only the union of the faith with the empire.

Less than three decades after the mass persecution of Christians, such an emphasis on the zealousness of Constantine's faith was prudent, but it also invited a perspective of Constantine's motivation that is (a) unsupported by the evidence and (b) encouraged misreadings of Constantine's involvement at Nicaea. By pushing the idea that Constantine was a passionate Christian who sought to establish Christianity's privileged status within the empire, even going to far as to direct proceedings at the council of Nicaea, Eusebius was striving to defend Christianity from any return to the persecution that preceded Constantine. Eusebius needed imperial support for Christianity after the decades of persecution but by striving to establish this he created a problem for Christianity in a culture very different from 4th century Rome, one in which the empire's embrace of Christianity is an embarrassment.

It should be stressed, however, that even Eusebius never claims that Constantine "pushed" a vision at Nicaea. Despite this his hagiography of Constantine is the closest thing we have to evidence that Constantine had a position on the debates and sought to establish them. This lack of evidence means that those who imply a Constantinian hand at work in the outcome of the council offer no detailed engagement with either the sources or the theological debates around Nicaea. They simply imply, rather than argue, that because Constantine called the council of Nicaea and that the outcome of Nicaea was what the outcome was, Constantine was involved in securing that outcome, Nicaea being part of a problematic shift from a purer Christianity to a more sinister one.

This is satisfying. Take, for example, John Dominic Crossan, who writes, "It is easy enough to see that the Roman imperial theology was a rival to the Christian theology and that one would have to go. What Constantine did, however, was not to abolish Roman imperial theology but to Christianize it."[4] Here Crossan offers a perspective that speaks to a longing all Christians have to find an original purity, corrupted by sinister forces from without. Christians are aware that through history they we have been involved in horrors and the urge is always to find a point at which "Christianity" or "The Church", was perfect and spotless before being spoiled and set on the terrible trajectory. But there is no actual evidence that Constantine, as Crossan suggests, represents such an inflection point. Even if Boff is correct when he claims that with Constantine "The Church became a great power, a replica of the empire, with its structures of domination, its titles."[5] he can never offer any evidence of Constantine making this happen. Nor can he find a time when there is a Church without such titles or ranks, whether they are the charismatic titles from Pauline letters or the ministerial titles (Bishop, presbyter and deacon) that we find in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Crossan and Boff, like most Christians, want to distance Christianity from the sins that darken our history and oppose such a time with something pure. Constantine as the first political leader who professed to be Christian, seems to offer a convenient point separating the pure time from the sullied. But evidence for Constantine determining the identity of the Church, as with evidence for a "pure" church devoid of the sins too evident in later history, is never offered by Crossan, Burckhardt, or Boff. It is never offered because it does not exist.

If "Constantinianism" is a moving away from the radical teachings of Jesus in favor of security, power, or wealth, then this movement was there from the beginning. Of Jesus 12 disciples we have evidence of at least 2 rejecting Jesus for security or advancement. As such, of Jesus' original followers at least 16.67% had "Constantinian" tendencies. So too, as the New Testament shows, there is the rejection of heretical positions from the very beginning, whether they be the "Judaizers" that Paul condemns or the curious Nicolaitans impugned in Revelation 2:6 and 15. The point is that evidence for (a) a pure idyllic Church before sinister development X is difficult to come by, and (b) The establishment of new practices or tendencies within the

[4] John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperOne, 2007) 164
[5] Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 27.

Church by Constantine is absent. With Christianity becoming decriminalised under Constantine and the massive growth of Christian faith in the first half of the 4th century, the visibility of such moral failure was magnified and the temptations that led to failure increased. This, rightly, is lamented by Christians, but unless there is actual evidence that Constantine did anything to Christians more nefarious than decriminalising them, encouraging them and, over time, becoming one of them, then any suspicion about his heavy hand determining the outcome at Nicaea is unfounded. While nostalgia for a Church persecuted by imperial power is understandable, the loss of such persecution in no way shadows the theology associated with the council of Nicaea.

Where Burckhardt, Crossan and Co. are working on the basis of solid evidence is in their contention that Constantine is motivated by *realpolitik* rather than Christian faith. Constantine's concern is unity in the empire. He has seen Diocletian's attempts to persecute Christianity out of existence fail. There were at least 6 million Christians in Rome by 311.[6] This number was growing so rapidly that by 350 Christians would comprise half the population of the Roman Empire. As such, establishing peace within this group (a group that Constantine was close to joining) was prudent. That Constantine wanted unity between Christians is what the evidence, from the textual sources and the facts of his actions, supports but not that Constantine was motivated by theological commitments. Henry Chadwick is right to note that "Constantine had summoned the council at Nicaea primarily because he wanted peace and unity, not because he was a zealous partisan for one side or the other".[7] While striving for such unity Constantine, as Eusebius wrote "assembled a general council, and invited the speedy attendance of bishops from all quarters, in letters expressive of the honorable estimation in which he held them".[8] He did so because Alexandria, the city built by Alexander (whom Constantine styled himself upon) the city that served as the intellectual engine of the Roman empire, was in flames. The dispute between Arius, Bishop Alexander, and their respective followers, was tearing the Church around the eastern Mediterranean apart. Constantine's response was to write to Arius and Alexander[9] about

---

[6] See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.
[7] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, The Penguin History of the Church (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 132.
[8] Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Commentary on Eusebius' Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 36
[9] Likely in 324, although a minority view (held by Cameron and Hall) dates it in 325.

the "intolerable spirit of mad folly that has overcome the whole of Africa", whose "heedless frivolity had presumed to divide the religion of the people into diverse sects". While he intended to seek the support of the Eastern Church in calming the troubles in Africa, he found the Church of the East similarly divided. He claims that the cause of their division was "of a truly insignificant character, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention"[10]. But fierce contention it was, to such an extent that Constantine's plans to travel through Antioch and Alexandria had to be changed. In the letter he seeks harmony from both sides, asking that Alexander admit that his question which solicited the answer from Arius was misguided and unnecessary[11], and that Arius should admit that his answer was brazen and intemperate[12].

From this, we can see two things. First, that Constantine has no real interest in (or likely understanding of) the debate between both parties, which he saw as "frivolous" and of "truly insignificant character", and second, that Constantine, in writing to both presbyter and bishop as equals,[13] either didn't understand how the Church in the East functioned or had an alternative understanding to the bishops.

While Crossan and others (not least Yoder) see "Constantinianism" as the superimposition of a hierarchical model onto an idyllic, egalitarian church, Constantine, with this letter, did something that no bishop of the East, whether supporting the position associated with Arius or the position associated with Alexander, did - he addressed them both as equals. He did not write to Alexander telling him to establish order and unity in his see and bring these wayward factions to heel. He wrote to the leaders of both sides, the Bishop and the presbyter, in an egalitarian manner that was in direct opposition to the ecclesial norms of the early 4th century.

---

[10] J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, rev. ed. by W.H.C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1987), 286

[11] It seems likely that in response to Arius and other presbyters accusing Alexander of heresy, Alexander had required presbyters in her see to clarify their interpretation to lines in scripture that spoke to the relation between the Father and the Son.

[12] See Cameron and Hall, op. cit., 117

[13] Cameron and Hall have proposed that this letter was not sent directly to Arius and Alexander but to a wider group on the basis of "its plural address and formal phraseology" (see Ibid., 196) but this interpretation, which so transgresses Ockham's Razor, requires us to then suggest why Eusebius would have changed the letter (it is addressed to Alexander and Arius) not least when, just 13 years after the letter, his lies could easily have been exposed. Further the "plural address" argument is based on the letter's use of the word "brethren," which they read as indicating a wide group, but it is just as plausible that, with typical diplomatic skill, Constantine is referring to both Alexander and Arius as his Christian brethren, flattering them with equality to him in Christ in order to encourage them to fulfil his request and settle the dispute. While fascinating, for of these reasons and more the Cameron and Hall position remains a minority one. Leading scholars such as Ayers, Hansen, Drake, Behr, Barnes, and Rubenstein all acknowledge the Cameron and Hall position, while nonetheless engaging the letter as addressed to Arius and Alexander.

Within a year, he would clearly get "up to speed" as he wrote to bishops, inviting them alone to comprise the council. But this sequence of events shows that he was adapting to the Church norms rather than superimposing his own "imperial" patterns upon it. All bishops, even those opposed to Alexander in terms of the theological substance of the issue, were of one mind with Alexander on the subordination of presbyters to their Bishops.[14]

While this letter shows his lack of interest in the theology of the debate, Constantine's actions after the council represents the clearest evidence of his relative indifference to the theological issues at stake. In keeping with the goal of establishing unity, immediately after the council he exiled Arius along with his theology's most ardent champions, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea. But, whether as a result of an evolution in Constantine's theological position, or the fact that the anti-Nicene position was not going away with Constantine deciding that it rather than Nicaea best served the unity of the Church, in 328 he recalled all three.[15] Furthermore, in 335 Constantine exiled the single most significant champion of Nicaea, Athanasius.[16] While Athanasius' exile was not simply on theological grounds,[17] the fact that it signified Constantine's growing opposition to Nicaea is supported by the simultaneous rise of Eusebius of Nicomedia to become Constantine's chief theological adviser.[18] It was Eusebius who finally baptized Constantine on his deathbed in 337.[19]

These facts make the position that the Nicene Creed is so influenced by Constantine that it is tarnished and doesn't warrant enthusiastic support, untenable. Constantine, it is clear, does not favor one side and in no way steamrollers one theological vision at the council in 325. If he does favor a side, an argument that he begins to favor the anti-Nicene "homoian" side from 327 on could be made, based upon his actions and the increased significance of Eusebius of Nicomedia in his court. But there is no evidence whatsoever that Constantine influenced the debate at Nicaea on one side or the other. If Nicaea represents a theology worthy of being enthusiastically supported as a component of Christianity's ecumenical core, then any queasiness

---

[14] See R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (T&T Clark, 1988) 82-84, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 87, and Harold A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 195

[15] Hanson, *op. cit.,* 259

[16] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) 40

[17] Drake, *op. cit.,* 308

[18] Hanson, *op. cit.,* 261-263

[19] Drake, *op. cit.,* 348

about Constantine's role should not shadow it. But does it represent such a theology or is it too influenced by Greek philosophical terminology to be enthusiastically embraced?

The Greek "hijacking" of theology

My goal in the second half of this essay is to show that rather than representing the imposition of an alien metaphysics, the focus on *ousia* offered a helpful and philosophically neutral grammar. After years of confusion, it was used increasingly by both sides in the early 320s in a manner that (a) enabled each side to more clearly identify the position of their opponents and (b) clarify what was at stake in the debate

The controversy began in a storm of phrases, metaphors, and predicates. Arius and his supporters held that their Bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, was promoting heretical models of the relationship between the Father and the Son, rekindling earlier "modalist" heresies such as Sabellianism. But when we read the letters from the early years of the dispute,[20] both from Arius and his supporters and those of Bishop Alexander, there is a clear lack of clarity. In Arius' letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, for example, he attempts to summarize Alexander's position, claiming that Alexander believed the Son coexists with the Father in a manner that is "unbegotten," "always-begotten," and "unbegotten-generated."[21] But these three phrases represent distinct, even contradictory, theological models. "Always begotten" and "unbegotten" are in opposition (either the Son is begotten or he is unbegotten) in what the signify but they are bound together as two phrases that refuse a concrete temporal distinction between the Father and the Son. It is this element that Arius is flagging as heretical in Alexander's teaching. For Arius there was a time in which the Son did not exist and by attributing phrases such as "unbegotten, always begotten, unbegotten generated" to Alexander he is seeking to highlight Alexander's refusal of this temporal distinction between the Father and the Son. This is problematic for Arius, as we can see from his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, because it inevitably leads to the position that the Son is either an "outflow" or an "extension"[22] of the Father. Such a model, seeing the Son as simply an outflow of the Father, suggests that God is monadic, the Son being simply an emanation of

[20] Hanson suggests that the letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia is from between 318 and320, and Williams and Ayers both agree that it represents the early stages of the dispute.
[21] Arius, Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 110.
[22] Ibid.

the Father–a heresy long rejected by the Church. Arius' letters attribute a series of phrases to Alexander and then draw correlations from these phrases linking them to an accepted heresy. The correlations he draws are logically coherent. A phrase such as "light from light" implies emanation. Despite this Alexander does not uphold the position that the Son is simply a piece of the monadic God, broken off, but this gets lost in the storm of phrases that Arius focuses on and disseminates in his correspondence.

Alexander for his part is even more guilty of misrepresentation than Arius. For example, he claims that Arius and his supporters are "denying the divinity of our Savior and proclaiming him to be equal to all"[23] while, in fact, Arius affirmed that the Son, brought into existence by the Father's will before all time and ages, was "fully God, only-begotten, and unchangeable."[24] Again, however, we can see why Alexander is given to such an interpretation. His assumption is that there is a concrete distinction between God alone who is uncreated, and all else, which is created, a distinction between God alone who is sanctifying and all else, which is sanctified. Therefore, if Arius is positing a temporal distinction between the alone unbegotten Father and the Son, then the Son, surely, must be in this second category of begotten/created/sanctified and, therefore, no different from us. Note that such phrases, which mean wholly different things, have similar semantic resonance in that they all refer to the "not God" side of the binary distinction that Alexander is working within. Arius is assuming gradations of divinity; Alexander, in contrast, is not, thus he can not offer a depiction of Arius' position that he or his supporters would recognise as their own.[25]

The result of this focus on phrases and predicates is a series of letters from both Arius and Alexander to bishops across the eastern Church. In these letters, both offer summations of the other's theology that would be seen by the other side as a misrepresentation. Bishops across the eastern Church receive letters from Arius indexing Alexander's position to heresies such as

---

[23] Alexander of Alexandria to Alexander of Byzantium, in S. Fernández and S.F. Eyzaguirre, *Fontes Nicaenae Synodi: The Contemporary Sources for the Study of the Council of Nicaea (304-337)*, Contexts of Ancient and Medieval Anthropology (Brill Schöningh, 2024) 45.

[24] Arius, op. cit., 111.

[25] Both Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia write to Alexander on this point, making clear that their position is not that the Son is a creature like other creatures. There is not existing record of any response from Alexander, but it seems unlikely that could continence that their position did not effectively result in the condemnation of the son to the realm of creatures. As Ayres, Williams, and others have noted, one of the results of Nicaea is the solidification of the primary distinction as Alexander held it, that between creator and creation rather than degrees or gradations of divinity between the two.

Sabellianism, and letters from Alexander indexing the position of Arius and his supporters to heresies such as Valentinianism. Given the rational corollaries of the language separated from its context, those receiving the letters can only agree, on the basis of what the presented phrases imply, that Arius or Alexander is guilty as charged. Because of this, from 318 on, bishops and leaders from across the eastern Church are increasingly animated to oppose the heresy that these accounts clearly highlight for them.

It is against this backdrop that the focus on a distinctive and "renovated"[26] grammar of "*ousia*" emerges, bringing clarity and far greater precision about what is truly at stake in the conflict. Eusebius of Nicomedia and Athanasius, on different sides of the conflict, both depend on the term to clarify the issue. Eusebius holds that the Alexandrian term "*homousia*," (of one substance) irretrievably signifies ontological conflation of the Father and Son, while Athanasius holds that the preferred Eusebian term "homoiousia" (of similar substance) refuses sufficient distinction between the uncreated Godhead and creation as it implies that there are degrees of divinity while positing a soteriologically problematic ontological distinction between the Father and the Son. Amidst a storm of predicates, *homoiousia* delineates a Eusebian position which holds the Son to be of similar but distinct substance from the Father, while being wholly distinct from the rest of creation. *Homoousia*, Alexander and his supporters increasingly come to affirm, safeguards the ontological union of Father and Son, as well as the proper and ultimate distinction between uncreated and created, sanctifying and sanctified. The distinction between the Father and the Son, they note, is incomprehensible, but nonetheless is to be affirmed as it is a distinction revealed in the economy of salvation.

It is instructive to note how, later, Athansius, with the benefit of this terminological grammar can offer a clearer and more faithful analysis of Arius position than Alexander originally did, as he writes in *De Decretis*

> Let us behold what it was that they replied to the blessed Alexander in the beginning, when their heresy was formed. They wrote then saying that, 'He is a creature (*ktisma*), but not as one of the creatures (*tōn ktismatōn*); He is a thing made (*poiēma*), but not as one of the things made *(tōn poiēmatōn*); He

[26] "Renovated" in a sense that the Alexandrian side come to offer *homousia* in a manner distinct from that which they hold to have been rejected by the 3rd century council of Antioch. So too Eusebius of Nicomedia relies on the term *homoiousia* in a form distinct from 3rd century usage when he applies it to refer to the nature of the Son in a manner similar but distinct from the Father.

is an offspring (*gennēma*), but not as one of the offsprings (*tōn gennēmatōn*)[27]

Alexander fails to note that the position of Arius is "homoian", that is, that the Son is not of the same substance as the Father, but, rather, of a similar substance, and because of this, most certainly not of the same substance as us. Athanasius, writing later and equipped with a fuller appreciation of the *homoiousian*/*homoousian* distinction, has a grammar that allows him to understand this and accurately represent the position of Arius and his supporters. Therefore, far from a problematic grammar superimposed onto a Christian imagination, the language of *ousia* offers a grammar that enables each side to express the position of the other in a way that the other side would recognise as their own.

Further, as used by Eusebius and Athanasius, the term "substance" or even "being" can not be thought of as embedded within a distinct theological culture, Greek or otherwise. This is because, as used by Eusebius and Athanasius, it is a term of distinction without substantial semantic content. What I mean is, for both Athanasius and Eusebius, the *ousia* of the unbegotten is not knowable in any sense – all sides can agree on this. There is no sense in which the term *ousia* when applied to God has any imaginable "content". Nothing could possibly come to mind when we try to think of the substance that is the substance of God. It has no distinct referent, no more than the word "stuff". It serves only as a term of distinction. God the Father is. Therefore there is, however incomprehensible and entirely unimaginable, an *ousia* or "stuff" that is the Father's *ousia* or stuff. Is the Son's *ousia* this *ousia*, is it, instead, the same *ousia* as the rest of creation, or is it a third *ousia*, neither one nor the other (albeit infinitely more similar to the ousia of the Father)? This is the question the council of Nicaea is called to settle. It does not require any speculation about this incomprehensible *ousia* in itself and all sides explicitly prohibit such speculation. It simply asks if the stuff (incomprehensible as it is) of the Father and the stuff of the Son is the same stuff. As such, while *ousia* terminology was condemned at Antioch in the 260s as part of the condemnation of Paul of Samosata,[28] its reimagining in the 420s by both sides

[27] Athanasius, *De Decretis* section 3, as cited in David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 234

[28] It is difficult to be certain how Paul of Samosata was using the term *homousia* and therefore precisely why the term become so tarnished by his use. Paul held that the Son was not born, or incarnated as God, but become one with God by being indwelled by the divine Logos at his baptism. This was likely the sense of the term "homoousia" in Paul's usage. For him the *Logos*, being *homousion* with the Father, was bound to the creature Jesus during the course of Jesus' life. For whatever reason, this condemnation seems to explain why the embrace of ousia language in a *positive* sense (Arian condemnation of Alexander as homousian in a negative sense predated this) was gradual. As

(in distinctive ways) was the Rosetta stone that enabled understanding of each other's position and the clarification of what, precisely, was at stake. It was not the hijacking of Christian debate by Greek philosophical categories. On the contrary, it was the utilisation of signifiers whose direct semiotic content was empty, signs that pointed to nothing imaginable, but which nonetheless allowed for a distinction between the positions offered, as well as a clarification of what was at stake.

What was at stake was nothing less than the Christian theology of salvation. Athanasius' fixation on *homoousia*, as his writings post 325 make clear, was because his participatory model of salvation (which he, and Nicaea agree is the Christian model of salvation) demanded it. We are saved through ontological union with God, for Athanasius. The binding of God to humanity in and as the man Jesus ontologically unites the person with that which is proper to God, but not to us, things such as eternal life. As Athanasius writes in the *Orationes contra Arianos*,

> For if the works of the Word's Godhead had not taken place through the body, humanity would not have been deified…But now that the Word has become human and has appropriated what pertains to the flesh…we, no longer being merely human, but as proper to the Word, may participate in eternal life.[29]

We are bound to Christ in the incarnation, but only if Christ is of one substance with the Father are we thereby bound to the fullness of God. Otherwise, we are bound to the Word, which is of like substance with God but, being a third thing, is not true God. So too, the last do not become first unless the God who is first becomes last. Not a God similar to the God who is first, but the true God. The poor are blessed because this God, the true God, became poor in and as the man Jesus. This self-giving of God is, for Athanasius, real to the extent that to see and serve this true God, revealed and made present in Christ, is to see and serve the poor and lowly. *Homoousia* is consistent with the Christian grammar of salvation as without it, salvation is the gift from a distant deity, rather than the ontological union with a saving God. Without *homoousia* salvation is a divine decree, under which an ontological alien humanity is granted "something". With *homoousia* salvation is an ontological union with true God because true God in and as the Word bound Himself to humanity. Eternal life, then, is not a gift from a distant deity. The gift is God

---

Hanson rightly notes, this condemnation from the council of Antioch embarrassed Athanasius throughout his life as he never wanted to reject the council of Antioch's condemnation of the phrase but remained adamant about its coherence in his own usage. See Hanson, *op. cit.,* 102-103.

[29] As cited in Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 143-44.

Himself, and as He is eternal life, humanity is bound to eternal life, which is proper to Him. One model is deontological and non-relational, the other is ontological and relational. Nicaea insists on *homousia* because it affirms that the ontological and relational model is the Christian model. The poor and lowly and can only be truly filled up (Lk. 1:53) by the gift of very God Himself and this is the scandalous truth that Nicaea, in insisting upon the grammar of *homoousia*, insists upon.

In this essay, I have aimed to show that if this is worthy of celebration, which I think it is, such celebration should not be tarnished by either of the two shadows that have haunted Christian celebration of Nicaea for too long. While Christians may lament the temptations and failures that are evident among Christians after Constantine, the evidence clearly shows that Constantine is largely disinterested in the theological issues that Nicaea engages. Hence the Creed is not shadowed by his oversight and, as I have shown, the theological disputes are relevant to him only in so much as unity is served by their resolution. Further, in this essay, I have argued that the use of the grammar of *ousia* in no way represents the overwhelming of Christian doctrine by an alien philosophical lexicon. As I have shown, *ousia*, as it comes to be used by both sides as the conflict wears on, serves as a term of distinction without concrete content and thereby enables a helpful clarification of the issues at stake. Because of this, the ecumenical centrality of Nicaea should never be threatened by either the claims that Constantine's role shadows the theological outcome, nor that it represented the subordination of Christian truths to an arid and alien philosophical lexicon.

Bibliography

Anatolios, Khaled. *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Barnes, Timothy D. *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Boff, Leonardo. *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*. Translated by John W. Diercksmeier. New York: Crossroad, 1985.

Cameron, Averil, and Stuart G. Hall. *Commentary on Eusebius' Life of Constantine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. The Penguin History of the Church. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

Crossan, John Dominic. *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.

Drake, Harold A. *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Fernández, S., and S.F. Eyzaguirre. *Fontes Nicaenae Synodi: The Contemporary Sources for the Study of the Council of Nicaea (304-337)*. Contexts of Ancient and Medieval Anthropology. Brill Schöningh, 2024.

Gwynn, David M. *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Hanson, R.P.C. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.

Radde-Gallwitz, Andrew, ed. *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*. The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Stevenson, J., ed. *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*. Revised by W.H.C. Frend. London: SPCK, 1987.

Seminar Presentation: The Doctrine of Creation

Elizabeth Guillaume-Koene

For ST 3102 United Church Doctrine (April 2025)

As I was thinking about this presentation and what aspect of the Doctrine of Creation I would focus on, I received our weekly Regional Newsletter. In this Newsletter was an invitation for churches to become involved in the denomination's Earth week activities.

Since 2020 the United Church of Canada has partnered with other faith groups under one banner: "Together for the Love of Creation." Together for the Love of Creation works to mobilize faith communities for education, reflection, action and advocacy for climate justice while remaining theologically grounded and centered on Indigenous self-determination and youth empowerment.

The UCC's moderator, Rev. Carmen Lansdowne, appears on a promotional video encouraging churches to act during Earth Week, setting the goal of having at least 100 communities throughout Canada engaged in visible, "deep, bold, and daring action" One of the suggestions for faith communities is to have an Earth Sunday service on April 27. The resources for an service like this included a service outline: "More than Care for Creation" written by Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington, a UCC minister and eco-theologian.

The faith community I serve has decided to have an Earth Sunday service and so I spent some time with the service outline provided. I was inspired by the example service and am looking forward to leading the service. Rev. Dr. Hetherington gives a sample sermon as well. As I read it, I wondered how what she says fits in with the doctrine of the UCC as we've been learning about this semester. So, I decided to use it as the basis for my presentation on the doctrine of creation.

During the next little while, I will give a summary of Rev. Dr. Hetherington's sermon and talk about three aspects in light of UCC Doctrine. The affirmation that God's creation is good, second, the misdirection of the church over the years based on an interpretation of Genesis 1, and third, her call for complete transformation.

Rev. Dr. Hetherington starts out her sermon affirming that God's creation is good. She then identifies that this good creation is under threat. She acknowledges that the UCC has been

talking for years about the climate crisis and the need to "care for creation." Despite this the world continues to warm and she identifies the need for a complete transformation of our relationship with the natural world and how we live on the planet.

She identifies that one, significantly influential interpretation of the creation story from Genesis 1 has been flawed and ultimately harmful to the world. This is the interpretation that humans are superior and separate from creation and that the earth was created for humans and we are free to use it how we want. She offers other interpretations using:

- The Psalms
    - how David writes and sings about God's creation
    - How Psalms like 19, 104, 148 speak of creation worshipping God
- The book of Job - God says to Job that the creation is not about him but about God and what God is up to
- Story from Mark 4:37-41 when the wind and rains obey Jesus

She calls us to stop using the language of dominion over, and even the language of "care of creation" and "wise stewardship" as this language is not effective to address the crisis we are in as it still sees humans as outside the natural world. She calls us to see humans as part of an incredibly complex earth system and to hear the call from God to full transformation of how we see ourselves and how we live on this planet.

Let's take a closer look at a few aspects of her sermon in light of the UCC's doctrine.

Rev. Dr. Hetherington starts her sermon with the declaration that creation is good. This is not difficult to defend. God the creator, mentions "it was good" seven times in the creation story of Genesis one. This concept is continued throughout the scriptures. All four of the subordinate documents of the UCC name God as creator and sustainer of the world, although it is not until 2006 "A Song of Faith" that we hear more about creation.

Article 4 of the Twenty Articles of Doctrine says: "We believe that God is the creator, upholder, and governor of all things." Beyond just naming God as creator, article 2 asserts the belief that God has also "revealed Himself in nature…" echoing Psalm 19 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the word of his hands." (verse 1).

The 1940 Statement of Faith names and acknowledges God as "Creator and Upholder of all things" (1. God). The New Creed goes further as it states a belief in "God who has created and is creating."

The Song of Faith names God as Creator (line 19) but also spends a significant amount of words to go deeper into what creation is and means to God and humans. Altogether it mentions "creator" and "creation" fourteen times, with more allusions to God's creative activity. "A Song" also directly names creation as good (line 44).

Although Hetherington spends only a line declaring creation good, it is the basis of the rest of the sermon and the fact that gives purpose to the rest of her thoughts and ideas.

The UCC has identified the existence of a climate crisis since 1977 when it sets its first goal to awaken the UCC to the climate crisis, generate educational process and develop the capacity to respond (video). The crisis has continued and gotten worse over the years since and still the UCC has continued to work towards an improved relationship with creation.

Hetherington urges the church to go farther, identifying the root of the misdirection the church has taken as it reads about God's good creation in Genesis 1. This is the second aspect of her sermon I will take a closer look at in light of UCC Doctrine.

Hetherington is not the first or only person to point out the link between the church's interpretation in Genesis 1 and how humans, especially in the western hemisphere have treated creation. For many years it was assumed that the world was created for humans and for human's use. Humans were the superior creation and given the right to exert dominion over the rest of creation, using it for the benefit of humankind.

Although the 20 articles of 1925 and the 1940 statement of faith do not directly state this idea, it does seem to be implied within its articles. In the 20 articles conversation about regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification and Christian Service and final Triumph the focus is on humans alone. Article 20 states:

"We believe that it is our duty, as disciples and servants of Christ, to further the extension of HIs Kingdom, to do good to all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's Day…" and it goes on, but never mentions anything about creation and any duty humans might have toward creation.

Even the original 1968 New Creed did not have anything about the call on the church to care for creation. It was not until 1995 that the line "to live with respect in Creation" was added. The journey to get that line added also speaks to Heatherington's claim of the misinterpretation.

The original request from the Toronto Conference to General Council was to add a line in *A New Creed* that would "recognize the Christian calling to care for the earth" (142 or 602), but

after consultation, that was seen as “too anthropocentric, failing to acknowledge the interrelationality of humankind and the earth.” Instead, the line “to live with respect in Creation” was added.

Hetherington goes farther in her discussion of the interpretation of Genesis 1 and wonders, quoting Phyllis Tribble, that perhaps it was not just a misinterpretation but an error in the text. Although understanding that scripture has potential errors is not against UCC Doctrine, I do not believe Heatherington's statement is the most faithful to how the UCC understands scripture and its doctrine.

Over the years the UCC has declined to significantly change the previous statements of faith, understanding them to speak to specific purposes for a specific time. The last sentences of the Introduction to the 1940 Statement of Faith reads: “But Christians of each new generation are called to state it afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs. This we have attempted to do for the people of The United Church, and always aware that no statement of ours can express the whole truth of God.”

In the same way, one scripture passage cannot express the whole truth of God. The UCC has moved away from literal interpretations of the scriptures toward an interpretation that takes into consideration the knowledge we gain about the world through science. (need reference) It is important to interpret one scripture passage in light of the rest of the Bible and our understanding of how the world works. (eco-theologies influence from text book 139 or 602?). Would it be an error in the text or simply the understanding the community of faith had at the time when that passage was written?

At the same time, the distance in culture, time, language between when it was written and now, make it difficult to know exactly how the original authors understood the words we often translate “dominion over” or “rule over.” Perhaps we are missing a nuance to the Hebrew word and so our own understanding of the story is mis-directed. In light of the rest of scripture (see above examples) we can understand Genesis 1 in a more holistic way.

A Song of Faith is the attempt of the UCC to do just this, to put words to our faith in a way that reflects our time and situation. In this document we see creation and its need for healing take a much larger role in the life of faith.

Here are some examples of this found throughout the Song:

- Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery, of living things, diverse and interdependent, of complex patterns of growth and evolution, of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls, we sing of God the Creator (32-36)
- All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related (line 40)
- We are all touched by this brokenness (67)
- the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth that threatens our home, the earth; (75-76)
- God reconciles, and calls us to repent the part we have played in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other (85-87)
- to work with God for the healing of the world (91)
- We sing of the Spirit … transforming us and the world (112, 115)
- for we are called to be a blessing to the earth (218)
- In grateful response to God's abundant love, we bear in mind our integral connection to the earth and one another, we participate in God's work of healing and mending creation (245-248)
- Divine creation does not cease until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration with the common ground of all being (299-301)

A Song of Faith supports Hetherington's push to see our relationship with the earth as interconnected, “neither separate from nor superior to the rest of God’s creation.” We can now read Genesis 1:28-30 in light of the rest of scripture all that we know about creation, without seeing it as a textual error.

The third, and last, aspect of Hetherington's sermon I will engage with is her declaration that: “God calls us to full transformation of how we live today.” For her, the language of “care for creation”, “stewardship of the Earth” and “rule over” are insufficient for what we are called to do. This transformation of how we live today will bring the healing the earth so desperately needs.

In the four subordinate doctrines of the UCC, the word: “Transformation” is not found until the Song of Faith. However, kernels of this idea can be found in the first three.

In the 20 articles, Article 8 speaks of the Holy Spirit who moves in hearts to obey the call of the gospel. Article 9 (Regeneration - being made new creatures), 10 (Repentance), 11

(justification), 12 (sanctification) all speak of the transformation that happens in the life of the believer. Article 20 also then speaks of the duty humans have toward the “further extension of His (God's) Kingdom.”

The 1940 Statement of Faith article 11 speaks of the Christian life - of repentance and the call to life in the Kingdom of God - where the will of God is done.

The New Creed states that God has come in Jesus to reconcile and make new.

This all speaks to the idea of transformation. That living as Christians changes us and the Holy Spirit helps us to live in a way that furthers God's way in our world.

The Song of Faith then goes into more detail about what this looks like, including what this looks like in our relationship with creation.

“God transforms, and calls us to protect the vulnerable, to pray for deliverance from evil, to work with God for the healing of the world, that all might have abundant life.” (88-92)

“We sing of the Spirit, who speaks our prayers of deepest longing and enfolds our concerns and confessions, transforming us and the world.” (112-115)

“We celebrate him (Jesus) as, … the transformation of our lives.” (194, 197)

“We sing of God’s good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ, creation’s mending. We sing of God’s mission.” (219-230)

Heatherington's call to transformation is consistent with the UCC's understanding of what it means to live out our faith in the world today. Her examples of what transformation touches is also helpful. She lists: “how much we consume, what we eat, how we get around, how we build community,” as the beginning point of our call for transformation.

The UCC has been speaking about the danger of climate change for decades. In 1992 the report to General Council, “One earth Community” addressed the crisis and outlined 12 ethical principles to guide action, in 2000 the “Energy in the One Earth Community” report called for the reduction of fossil fuels and development of renewable sources of energy in the life of the church and in the life of the denomination as a whole. In 2015 the General Council decided to move investments from fossil fuel companies to renewable energy sources. Throughout these

years, the UCC has been urging transformation in this area for both communities of faith and individuals. (149 of 602). Heatherington adds her voice to this call for transformation.

In conclusion, Rev. Dr. Jessica Heatherington's sermon, "More than Creation Care" is in line with the United Church of Canada's doctrine as laid out in the four subordinate standards. Her Earth Day service and sermon are a valuable tool as the United Church lives out its faith in the world. And her call to transformation is challenging and essential as we experience the effects of climate change today.

From Stride to Soul: The Holistic Benefits of Walking a Pilgrimage

Monica Henry

For RM 1000 Research Methods (Dec 2024)

As the rugged trail begins a steady incline and the heat of the sun sets on your skin, each drop of sweat reminds you that a pilgrimage does not come without trial. Dating back as early as the fourth century Christians, and non-Christians alike, have journeyed to holy places as pilgrims. This ancient practice of walking to sacred locations continues to increase in popularity despite the obvious challenges. A pilgrimage, for many, is not just engagement in physical movement but has the potential of increasing one's awareness to the spiritual life. Pilgrims often find themselves in moments of solitude and reflection that creates a space for mindfulness and connection with the divine. The marriage of challenges and joys found in a pilgrimage enables its remarkable ability to be a microcosm of life and this small-scale representation draws individuals from all over the world to reap the benefits. Pilgrimages offer profound advantages for holistic wellness, not only in the nourishment of mind and body but also has the extraordinary ability to awaken the soul.

Stemming back as early as the 4th century, pilgrimages have been walked by individuals in nearly all major world religions. From the commands of God in the Torah to the pilgrims of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible, pilgrimages are a way to reverence the life of Jesus and his followers.[1]The Camino de Santiago is among the most popular pilgrimages in contemporary times. The Camino has existed for over 1000 years and continues to be traversed by not only Christians but also by those of diverse backgrounds, and its origins lie in the devotion of the Apostle St. James and his followers. After his execution for public ministry, St. James' followers transported his body to Northern Galicia. Here, the discovery of his remains led to the creation of the shrine that marks the beginning of the Camino de Santiago.[2]The act of walking, for weeks or months, continues to have a universal appeal for a physical manifestation of an inner quest.

---

[1] Abdul Basit, "Pilgrimage in World Religions," *The Review of Religions*, June 11, 2021 https://www.reviewofreligions.org/23807/pilgrimage-in-world-religions/.

[2] Mac's Adventure, "Camino Guide to the Camino de Santiago," accessed December 1, 2024 https://www.macsadventure.com/us/blog/camino-guide-to-the-camino-de-santiago/.

Walking a pilgrimage offers profound physiological benefits, as it combines sustained physical activity throughout the meaningful journey. “Some have examined walking as a spiritual practice, while acknowledging that the body plays a crucial role, but without reporting the actual measured changes in physical exertion.”[3] Kinesiologist Dr. M. Brennan Harris noted this issue within studies on pilgrimages and decided to explore the physical stresses and adaptions associated with walking a pilgrimage.[4]Despite different variables such as terrain, walking pace, pack weight, and fitness level, Dr. Harris draws attention to physical implications that all pilgrims experience. The basis of physical benefits comes from the human response to exercise such as “increase in dopamine, serotonin, epinephrine, and norepinephrine.”[5]The releasing of hormones is due to the long duration and regularity of a pilgrimage, with the average person walking approximately four to five hours, covering about 23km a day.[6]Studies show that a pilgrim nearly doubles his/her daily calorie loss and needs to increase their daily calorie intake, to makeup for the substantial movement.[7]While a pilgrimage holds many physical benefits, Dr. Harris strongly exhorts pilgrims to prepare for the inevitable challenges, through intentional training and conditioning. He suggests the best way to prepare is in low- to moderate- intensity walks, lasting four or five hours a day for 30 days, and to do so with the same equipment one expects to use on the pilgrimage.[8]The interconnectedness of physiological and psychological well-being is undeniable, as the physical act of walking fosters mental clarity, emotional release, and resilience.

Pilgrimages offer significant mental health benefits such as stress reduction, introspection, and emotional awareness. Exercises like walking, are a form of controlled stress that helps one's body learn how to handle and recover from stressful situations. It stimulates a part of the brain known as the hippocampus, which is associated with memory, learning, and emotions, that produce neurotransmitters known to fight off mental illnesses.[9]In the experience of physical exertion and stress, the brain is forced to succumb to the circumstances and develop

---

[3] Brennan, M. Harris. “The Physiological Effects of Walking a Pilgrimage,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage 7*, no. 1 (2019): 85
[4] William & Mary, “Melinda Harris.” Accessed December 2, 2024 https://www.wm.edu/as/kinesiology/faculty/harris_m.php.
[5] Brennan, op. cit., 87.
[6] Ibid., 87.
[7] Ibid., 87.
[8] Ibid., 92.
[9] Micheli Romao, “Can Exercise Help Build Strong Mental Resilience?” *Vhi Healthcare Blog, April 23, 2024, https://www1.vhi.ie/blog/articles/can-exercise-help-build-strong-mental-resilience*.

resilience rather than forfeiting. The rise of mental illnesses within contemporary society, presents a common need amongst many to look beyond "quick fixes" and address the root causes of mental disorders. The act of walking and immersing oneself into nature, are two of the most beneficial activities humans can do for their mental health, yet many pass on the opportunity.[10]The Camino de Santiago is known for its diverse landscapes and majestic peaks that allow for an easy and natural stress reliever. It is through the rhythm of consistent walking and exposure to nature, that reduces levels of cortisol (stress hormones) in the body and helps combat symptoms of anxiety and depression.[11]

In a society dominated by technology, a break from these devices for an extended period have shown to improve mental clarity, reduce stress levels, and improve human connection.[12] Aligning with the spirit of simplicity, reflection, and connection, many pilgrims choose to minimize or completely restrict their use of technology while on a pilgrimage. This fast encourages mindfulness that helps pilgrims fully engage with the physical and emotional aspects of their journey, including meeting new people. Pilgrimages such as the Camino are "known for its strong sense of community and camaraderie among walkers."[13]It is in sharing a common goal that many feel a sense of connection and friendship that provide emotional support in the sufferings and joys along the way. The practice of setting aside modern conveniences and embracing the simplicity of walking in fellowship or solitude, have the power to transcend the human mind to things beyond the created world, and presents an opportunity for personal growth. Although modern society tends to dismiss hard things, the pain and suffering paired with walking a pilgrimage provides room for self-discovery and personal growth, that the comfort of our daily lives cannot.[14]The social benefits of venturing on a pilgrimage offer a microcosm experience of the spiritual life, where humans are companions on a journey, enduring challenges, and triumphs with a common goal.

---

[10] "The Camino and Mental Health: 7 Potential Benefits," Uwalk, accessed December 2, 2024, https://uwalk.ie/blog/the-camino-and-mental-health-7-potential-benefits/.
[11] Romao, op. cit.
[12] The Anxiety Coaches Podcast, "The Power of Media Fasting: How to Reclaim Your Calm," *The Anxiety Coaches Podcast Blog*, accessed December 2, 2024, https://www.theanxietycoachespodcast.com/blog/the-power-of-media.
[13] "The Camino and Mental Health," Accessed December 2, 2024.
[14] Ibid.

"The Christian life is aptly described as a pilgrimage […]. Along the way, we experience trials, discomforts, disciplines, camaraderie, conflicts, highs, and lows."[15]The physical journey of a pilgrimage images the path of life in which humans embark on, with a destination and purpose in mind. After the initial excitement of a pilgrimage fades away, the reality of walking approximately 23km a day quickly becomes monotonous, exhaustive, and familiar. It is precisely the challenges experienced on a pilgrimage, that reflects daily life which is often uneventful and unexciting. Pilgrims are forced to look beyond their circumstances, that may be less than agreeable, and search for an inner peace that encourages them along the way. Many believe that to find freedom and peace means "we have to get rid of those restrictions and limitations,"[16]of ones present circumstances.

Catholic priest, Father Jacques Philippe, presents a paradoxical law of human life that "one cannot become truly free unless one accepts not always being free."[17]When a pilgrim experiences his/her limitations through exhaustion and feels the weight of their pack setting in on their shoulders, the pilgrim must be willing to "accept, peacefully and willfully, plenty of things that seem to contradict [their] freedom."[18]The physical act of carrying a backpack and feeling spiritually burdened are deeply connected on a pilgrimage. "There are numerous reports of the many items left behind as pilgrims previously overburdened with stuff shed unnecessary items."[19] This occurs when one faces and acknowledges his/her limits and quickly realizes that the pain of carrying the extra weight is no longer worth it. It is truly about the change in perspective that one can reap the spiritual benefits of a pilgrimage. Two-timing Camino pilgrim, Cheri Powell, speaks on an experience that enlightened her soul: "The dark, rainy, miserable morning I experienced turned into a sunny day that brightened my spirits as I viewed a glorious array of wildflowers blooming along the path. Such is the effect of perspective."[20]It is in the change of perspective that suffering has the powerful ability to become one of the greatest joys in the Christian life. The transcendence of everyday concerns during a pilgrimage allows

---

[15] Chris R. Armstrong, "Pilgrimage and the Christian Life: A Lenten Meditation," *Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, March 6, 2019 https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/03/49915/#:~:text=First%2C%20the%20Christian%20life%20is,God%20and%20enjoying%20him%20forever.
[16] Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom* (Scepter Publishers, 2007), 16.
[17] Ibid., 28.
[18] Ibid., 29.
[19] Brennan, op. cit., 88.
[20] Cheri Powell, "The Ultimate Spiritual Travel: A Pilgrimage," *CaminoWays.com*, August 5, 2013 https://caminoways.com/the-ultimate-spiritual-travel-a-pilgrimage.

individuals to reorient their priorities by integrating newfound insights to their lives. The spiritual and relational dynamics of a pilgrimage echo life's broader purpose; to strive for a common goal (namely heaven), in communion with others.

Conducted in a recent survey, 45% of pilgrims said they walked the Camino for "religious and other" reasons, 30% said they walked for purely religious reasons, and 24% said they had no religious reason for walking.[21]While the reason for the increase of pilgrims may only be due to wellness and mindfulness trends, humans ultimately seek meaning and connection. In the recent event of COVID-19, many experienced loss and trauma that took a toll on their holistic well-being. This isolated and uncertain time prompted many to seek deeper spiritual and human connections, making pilgrimages an appealing option for those that were affected. Tim Williamson, from a UK travel company says, "lockdown has shown us that community is important; people want space but miss human connection. Pilgrimages tick many of these boxes."[22]The pandemic forced individuals to slow down and enjoy the simple pleasures of life; an ethos also embodied in a pilgrimage. With the post-pandemic priorities focusing on mental health and wellness, a pilgrimage is an accessible way to reconnect with nature and experience spiritual renewal. "As we emerge from lockdown, pilgrimage is more relevant than ever, allowing us to take stock and consider our path."[23]

Pilgrimages embody a profound journey for the body, mind, and soul, offering a holistic intersection of physical suffering, mental clarity, community, and spiritual renewal. Each facet of a pilgrimage includes joys and sufferings all aiming towards a destination, that allows for a microcosmic experience of life itself. It is not only a cheap way to travel or physical exercise, but a pilgrim receives nourishment to their whole beings, which allow them to prioritize what is meaningful. "It is not possible to separate the spiritual, psychological, and physical aspects of a pilgrimage, as the overall journey is experienced in the body."[24]A pilgrimage is not merely an experience confined by its duration: it is meant to inspire transformation to the whole person, that influences life beyond the pilgrimage itself. It is through shedding unnecessary burdens, joy

---

[21] Follow the Camino, "Camino Statistics: How Many People Walked the Camino in 2021?" *Follow the Camino* (blog), accessed December 3, 2024 https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/camino-statistics-how-many-people-walked-the-camino-in-2021.
[22] Kerry Walker, "Pilgrimages could be the next post- COVID Travel Trend," National Geographic, July 21, 2021 https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/could-pilgrimages-be-the-next-post-covid-travel-trend.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Brennan, op. cit., 93.

in the simplicity, resilience in the struggle, and an encounter with the divine, that the pilgrim is equipped to return to daily life with a renewed purpose.“To live in the world as a pilgrim is to hold things, and places, and even people lightly- enjoying them all in God, not as gods.”[25]

Bibliography

Armstrong, Chris R. “Pilgrimage and the Christian Life: A Lenten Meditation.” *Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute,* March 6, 2019. https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/03/49915/#:~:text=First%2C%20the%20Christian%20life%20is,God%20and%20enjoying%20him%20forever.

Basit, Abdul. “Pilgrimage in World Religions.” *The Review of Religions*. June 11, 2021. https://www.reviewofreligions.org/23807/pilgrimage-in-world-religions/.

Follow the Camino. “Camino Statistics: How Many People Walked the Camino in 2021?” *Follow the Camino* (blog). Accessed December 3, 2024. https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/camino-statistics-how-many-people-walked-the-camino-in-2021.

Harris, M. Brennan. "The Physiological Effects of Walking Pilgrimage," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage 7*, no. 1 (2019): 85-93.

Mac’s Adventure. “Camino Guide to the Camino de Santiago.” Accessed December 2, 2024. https://www.macsadventure.com/us/blog/camino-guide-to-the-camino-de-santiago/.

Philippe, Jacques. *Interior Freedom*. Scepter, 2007.

Powell, Cheri. “The Ultimate Spiritual Travel: A Pilgrimage,” *CaminoWays.com.*August 5, 2013. https://caminoways.com/the-ultimate-spiritual-travel-a-pilgrimage.

Romao, Micheli. “Can Exercise Help Build Strong Mental Resilience?” *Vhi Healthcare Blog*. April 23, 2024. https://www1.vhi.ie/blog/articles/can-exercise-help-build-strong-mental-resilience.

The Anxiety Coaches Podcast, “The Power of Media Fasting: How to Reclaim Your Calm,” *The Anxiety Coaches Podcast Blog.* Accessed December 2, 2024. https://www.theanxietycoachespodcast.com/blog/the-power-of-media-fasting-how-to-

[25] Armstrong, “Pilgrimage and the Christian Life: A Lenten Meditation,” 2019.

reclaim-your-calm/#:~:text=Benefits%20of%20Media%20Fasting&text=By%20engaging%20in%20a%20media,Improved%20mood%20and%20emotional%20balance.

"The Camino and Mental Health: 7 Potential Benefits." *Uwalk.* Accessed December 2, 2024. https://uwalk.ie/blog/the-camino-and-mental-health-7-potential-benefits/.

Walker, Kerry. "Pilgrimages could be the next post- COVID Travel Trend." *National Geographic*. July 21, 2021. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/could-pilgrimages-be-the-next-post-covid-travel-trend.

William & Mary. "Melinda Harris." Accessed December 2, 2024. https://www.wm.edu/as/kinesiology/faculty/harris_m.php.

Online Communion and the Doctrine of The United Church of Canada

Eva Ruth Mathiesen

For ST 3102 United Church Doctrine (Apr 2025)

The Permissibility of Online Communion

In 2015 the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee was asked by the General Secretary and Executive of General Council to advise on whether celebration of communion to an extended online community was "theologically appropriate" and, if so, under what circumstances. The question was asked in the context of convening a meeting of the 41st General Council which would, as required by *The Manual* of The United Church of Canada, begin with communion. However, the Committee recognized that the issue was also relevant to the "changing congregational life" of the broader Church and responded in that context. Following extensive consultation and deliberation, the Committee concluded that virtual communion was permissible and appropriate in the context of online worship, but left the final decision of whether to authorize the practice to the individual congregations on the basis that "the implications of online worship . . . are not so critically significant . . . to the integrity of worship within the United Church that the authority of the session can be limited."[1]

While the response of the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee was based primarily on church polity, it is nonetheless deeply rooted in the doctrine of the United Church and the theology of communion. This essay will explore the Committee's recommendation (subsequently accepted by the Executive of the General Council and re-affirmed in 2020) in the light of Church doctrine, particularly that of the doctrine of Holy Communion as articulated in three of the four subordinate standards of The United Church of Canada (UCC). As well, given the advent of COVID some five years later and the pandemic which resulted in the closure of most churches to in person worship for an extended period, I will argue that the decision to allow online communion – and indeed the technology that made it possible - was both prophetic and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

---

[1] The United Church of Canada [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee], "Online Communion," in *Digest of the Minutes of the Executive and the Sub-Executive of the General Council*, March 21-23, 2015, 169-173. https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/UCC-169-173-TICIF5-Online-Communion.pdf

In 2015 the Committee could not have been aware of the magnitude of their recommendation. Based on their report, it appears they envisioned online communion as being primarily offered to elderly shut-ins and others who were physically unable to attend church in person, or in situations such as the online meeting of the General Council. When required, they wrote, "online communion experiences [should] take place with others physically present" and preferably with an elder or other church member in attendance to administer the elements. Even the members of the General Council, whose online meeting had prompted the Committee's work, were advised to "gather in clusters for the celebration of communion, rather than join in isolation."[2] It does not appear that they envisioned a time when in person gathering of the community was impossible for the majority. Nonetheless, by 2020 that scenario was becoming a reality, and online worship became the norm in many churches.

While many Christian denominations decided to abstain from communion when it could not be celebrated in person, the United Church chose to affirm the 2015 finding of the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee that online communion is permissible, but still with the caveat that in person communion is preferable. "Without question", the 2020 statement reads, "it is always preferable to be able to receive the sacrament of communion in the context of the public worship of the community of faith rather than alone." Nonetheless, the statement makes it clear that when in person gathering is not possible, "we can still be a gathered community virtually, and within that gathered community, meeting together online, the celebration of communion is appropriate . . .".[3]

The emphasis on being physically present with others is grounded in the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee's belief that communion is "fundamentally a remembrance of the incarnational action of God in the life of Jesus and is meant to be celebrated in the gathered community", and that "it is a fundamental characteristic of the communion meal . . . that the elements are [offered and] received, not taken".[4] In other words, communion is not intended to be a personal experience of the divine, but one that is shared by and with the gathered community. Nonetheless, the Committee recognized that there were circumstances in

[2] Ibid., 172.
[3] The United Church of Canada, "Online Communion in the United Church of Canada," Statement by the Committee on Theology and Faith and the Executive Minister, Theological Leadership, April 6, 2020. https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/online_communion_in_united_church.pdf
[4] The United Church of Canada [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee], "Online Communion," 172.

which it was not possible to be physically together, and in those cases "the desire for participation in communion should take priority".[5] No one who wishes to participate in communion should be denied because they are unable to be physically present with the community or to the elements.

The Doctrine of Communion (or the Lord's Supper)

Neither the 2015 report nor the 2020 statement by The United Church of Canada refer directly to doctrine, but the emphasis on the gathering of the community, and the celebration of communion within that community, leads directly to the doctrine of communion as articulated in the subordinate standards. Article 2.3.16.2 of the Twenty Articles of Doctrine states in part:

> The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of communion with Christ and with his people, in which bread and wine are given and received in thankful remembrance of Him and His sacrifice on the Cross; and they who in faith receive the same do, after a spiritual manner, partake of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to their comfort, nourishment, and growth in grace.[6]

There are a number of points of doctrine contained within the article – that communion is both with Christ and all of his people, that it is done in remembrance of Christ and his sacrifice, that the material elements symbolize the body and blood of Christ, and that they provide spiritual nourishment for his people that enables them to grow in grace. But implicit in this article – and the focus of this essay - is the notion of community and the gathering of that community. This – what it means to be in communion with Christ and each other by sharing the bread and wine together in memory of Christ's last supper with his disciples – was the central question the authors of the 2015 report had to consider. Did it require physical proximity, or could the community gather spiritually?

The 1940 Statement of Faith uses the word "fellowship" to convey the idea of community amongst Christians. Article 2.4.10 (X. The Sacraments) reads:

> We believe that the Lord's Supper perpetuates the fellowship between Christ and His disciples sealed in the upper room, that at His table He is always present and His people are nourished, confirmed and renewed. The giving and receiving of bread and wine

[5] Ibid., 172.
[6] The United Church of Canada, "Twenty Articles," in *The Manual, 2025,* 20.

> accompanied by His own words signifies the gracious self-giving of Christ as suffering and living Lord in such wise that His faithful people live in Him and He in them.
> So we acknowledge . . . the Lord's Supper as His appointed means of maintaining the fellowship in health and strength, and as the act of worship in which the whole soul of man goes out to God and God's grace comes freely to man.[7]

While emphasizing the significance of fellowship, the Article also makes explicit the presence of the living Christ at the table, something that is not stated in the earlier standard. However, the meaning is the same: to partake of the bread and wine (or juice) is to enter into union with Christ and all of his people and thereby to receive God's grace.

The 2006 Song of Faith addresses the sacrament of communion in more lyrical terms, and while it speaks of community and relationships, it also recognizes solitary worship: "Through word, music, art, and sacrament, / In community and in solitude, / God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world."[8] Rather than being delineated in a single article, the doctrine of communion is woven throughout the Song and addressed in terms of symbolism and experience: "The open table speaks of the shining promise / of barriers broken and creation healed. / In the communion meal, wine poured out and bread broken, / we remember Jesus".[9] And, "We taste the mystery of God's great love for us, / and are renewed in faith and hope".[10] As William Kervin puts it, "its poetic and lyrical style shifts the mode of discourse from the definitive towards the evocative, from systemics to theopoetics". It is perhaps what Kerwin means by "sacramentality", in which the emphasis is on sacramental living rather than on the orthodox understanding of the sacraments themselves.[11]

In 2022, the United Church offered a resource to assist churches in exploring the theology of online communion. Entitled "One Bread, One Body: Celebrating Holy Communion Within Online Worship," the document was non-prescriptive in that it did not address the "how" of offering online communion. Rather, it reiterated the finding of the 2015 report and posed a series of questions developed to foster discussion within the Church, including, "What does it mean to

---

[7] The United Church of Canada, "A Statement of Faith," in *The Manual, 2025,* 24.
[8] The United Church of Canada, "A Song of Faith", in *The Manual*, 2025, lines 121-123.
[9] Ibid., lines 280-283.
[10] Ibid., lines 288-289.
[11] William S. Kervin, "Sacraments and Sacramentality," in *The Theology of the United Church of Canada*, ed. Don Schweitzer, Robert C. Fennell and Michael Bourgeois (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2019), 244.

be gathered as the body of Christ"?[12] The intent, as stated in the Introduction, was "to discern together what we have learned about our worship and where God's Spirit is leading us."[13] The document was notably even-handed in presenting both sides of a question. With respect to gathering as the Body of Christ, for example, it noted that God "overcomes our separation in time and space through the Holy Spirit" and therefore "broadened our understanding of worship to include those who cannot or do not attend worship in the sanctuary". But it also noted that as followers of Christ, "we are called to an embodied faith, worship, and community life."[14] Where that discussion leads is up to the local churches, but the United Church as a whole believes that online communion as part of a worship service is both permissible and appropriate and is not in conflict with any statements of doctrine contained in the subordinate standards.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

But it is not enough to say that online worship with or without communion does not conflict with doctrine. Rather, I would argue that it was the work of the Holy Spirit that allowed the members of the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee to see beyond the somewhat narrow question posed by the General Council in 2015 and to discern a new direction for God's church, one that allows all members of the Body of Christ to gather together regardless of circumstance or distance. It is a core belief of the United Church that God is present and active in the world today – a belief articulated in all four of the subordinate standards – and that God makes all things possible. It is not beyond belief that God, who has created and continues to create, created the technology and the circumstances that made virtual communion possible, including the ability for God's people to be in community without being physically present to each other. As the Song of Faith reminds us, God the Spirit is "creatively and redemptively active in the world" and it is the Spirit that "challenges us to celebrate the holy / not only in what is familiar, / but also in that which seems foreign".[15] Surely this can include online communion.

That God is indeed present in the online celebration of communion is a position taken by a number of theologians. Robert Fennell, for example, points to what he calls "the ubiquity of

[12] The United Church of Canada [Sacramental Theology Task Group], "One Bread, One Body: Celebrating Holy Communion within Online Worship," May 31, 2022, 5.
[13] Ibid., 3.
[14] Ibid., 5.
[15] The United Church of Canada, "A Song of Faith", in *The Manual*, 2025, lines 108 and 109-111.

Christ", the doctrine that the Risen Christ is present everywhere in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Both dictate that nothing is beyond the power of God. "Who are we to believe", Fennell writes, that Jesus cannot be present, cannot bind believers together even at distance, cannot impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit, cannot bless and nurture and feed his separated flock"?[16]

In Summary

In this essay I have provided an overview of the circumstances that led to The United Church of Canada's finding that online communion is permissible and appropriate within an online service of worship, and I have explored that finding in the context of the doctrine of communion. I have also argued that the decision to allow online communion was inspired by the Holy Spirit working within the members of the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee to allow all of God's people to join the Body of Christ. Finally, I have argued that the presence of God, in the persons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, binds the community together as one body, whether separated or apart.

Bibliography

Fennell, Robert. "'Filling my soul at a time of despair': Can Communion Truly Happen Online?" *creedalandlovingit* (20 October 2020). https://creedalandlovingit.wordpress.com/2020/10/20/filling-my-soul-at-a-time-of-despair-can-communion-truly-happen-online/

Kervin, William S. "Sacraments and Sacramentality," in The Theology of the United Church of Canada, edited by Don Schweitzer, Robert C. Fennell and Michael Bourgeois. Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2019.

The United Church of Canada [Sacramental Theology Task Group]. "One Bread, One Body: Celebrating Holy Communion within Online Worship". May 31, 2022.

[16] Robert Fennell, "'Filling my soul at a time of despair,': Can Communion Truly Happen Online"? *creedalandlovingit*, October 20, 2020. https://creedalandlovingit.wordpress.com/2020/10/20/filling-my-soul-at-a-time-of-despair-can-communion-truly-happen-online/

The United Church of Canada. "A Song of Faith" in *The Manual, 2025*. 26-33. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2025. https://united-church.ca/media/8153

The United Church of Canada. "A Statement of Faith, 1940" in *The Manual, 2025*. 21-25. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2025. https://united-church.ca/media/8153

The United Church of Canada. "Twenty Articles of Doctrine" in *The Manual, 2025*. 17-20. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2025. https://united-church.ca/media/8153

The United Church of Canada [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee]. "Online Communion." Excerpt from *Digest of the Minutes of the Executive and the Sub-Executive of the General Council*. March 21-23, 2015. https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/UCC-169-173-TICIF5-Online-Communion.pdf

The United Church of Canada. "*Online Communion in The United Church of Canada*." Statement by the Committee on Theology and Faith and the Executive Minister, Theological Leadership. April 6, 2020. https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/online_communion_in_united_church.pdf

Review of Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*

Jacqui Moraal

For SME 4000 Supervised Ministry Experience (Oct 2024)

How to Think Theologically, by Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, seeks to make theological reflection as natural as our morning routines and reflexive as driving a car.[1] Stone and Duke claim that all Christians are theologians, [2] and God calls us to live into our faith by aligning both our personal and communal decision making through theological reflection.[3] By exercising our theological muscles, decisions we make, both deliberate and reactionary, are more reflective of our theology and our faith.[4] This may prove much easier said than done. There is a plethora of heavy lifting required if we are to achieve the high calling of theological reflection using the muscle memory mentioned in the book.

Stone and Duke invite us to consider theological reflection based on our embedded and deliberative theology. Embedded theology emerges from our lived experiences and refers to first order theology. [5] Second order theology, such as deliberative theology, is that first flexing of our theological reflection muscle. It is just the beginning. As we learn to interpret, correlate, and assess our faith, with practice, we develop a deep theological base for reflection.[6] Theological analysis and theological construction are tools that help us to consider the bible, the human condition, and Christian vocation.[7] These building blocks continue to tone our reflective theology process and provide the groundwork for more strenuous and difficult theological workouts.

Stone and Duke provide a series of exercises to continue to hone our developing theological reflection strength, providing both solid foundations and risky leaps of faith.[8] Our

[1] Howard W. Stone and James O. *Duke, How to Think Theologically Fourth Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023) 163.
[2] Ibid., xv.
[3] Ibid., 19
[4] Ibid., 163.
[5] Ibid., 3-4.
[6] Ibid., 38-39.
[7] Ibid.,79.
[8] Ibid., 150.

first challenge is to do a deep dive into the gospel, how the gospel reaches people, and the effect of the gospel on those who receive it.[9] If we do the work, we gain a profound understanding of our faith in Christ, Christ's teaching, and our salvation. As a bonus we are better able to share our faith with others in theologically meaningful ways.

This leads into the next exercise routine encompassing, what is sin, what is salvation and what is the means of salvation?[10] The challenge of scaling this hurdle lies in the ability to deftly tackle and connect all three questions into a cohesive theological reflection. If a theologian is successful the final quest remains. In our Christian vocation what are we called to do, why are we doing it, and what is the best course of action?[11] Being indecisive or afraid to tackle the tough stuff in unacceptable. "We have to decide"[12] and it is better together.[13]

"Theology is an individual task and a corporate enterprise."[14] Stone and Duke, provide case studies that are reflective of the experience of congregational ministry which makes the learning relatable and transferable. One specific offering that is beneficial for the church community is the theological reflection practices found in Chapter 7, "Vocation". Congregational committees, Official Boards, and other groups make decisions on behalf of the church community, and it would be beneficial if they could be on the same team, theologically speaking. Stone and Duke encourage church communities to engage in discussion surrounding their theological reasons for decisions.[15] Of particular interest are the theological reflection questions related to selecting a course of action. First, what is the real reason for this decision? Second, what are the Christian reasons? Third, are these reasons sufficient to warrant this choice?[16]

The value of assessing decisions using this theological reflection method is threefold. By first establishing the underlying motives, members involved in the decision making can overcome their blind spots and identify their biases. Secondly, the opportunity to determine correlation with a Christian viewpoint can lead to course corrections or provide confidence that they are on the right track. Finally, other options, not initially considered, may emerge that provide better outcomes. Having a clear process, doing the work, and getting results that all

[9] Ibid., 84.
[10] Ibid., 100.
[11] Ibid., 124.
[12] Ibid., 150.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 151.
[15] Ibid.,126.
[16] Ibid.,127.

members can confidently support is lifegiving to church community and the individual calls of vocation within the process. Theological reflection is a mental and spiritual workout and having a how to book like *How to Think Theologically* increases the chances of being successful.

Sermon for the United Church Formation Community

Julee Pauling

Texts: Psalm 36:5-10, Luke 11:33-36 (Jan 2025)

Opening Prayer

May we hear these words, O God, in our minds and in our hearts, in our hands and in our feet. And may my reflections on them, and our collective reflections on what is offered, be acceptable to you, for and above all. In faithfulness to the one who sends us, Amen.

Being the one to volunteer to go first, or to lead, sometimes seems like a good idea—at least it might at the time. But then, as the day approaches, one inevitably starts to wonder if there might have been a better time, or a better leader. A better person, a better thinker, a better speaker… all those ways in which we diminish our power and dim our giftedness by God, as we let our creatureliness run away with us.

I say this as someone who doesn't like to let an awkward silence sit, whether mine or someone else's. I like to get the show on the road, the ball rolling dutifully along it. Whether that's my first-born-child personality, or a feature of having been a child of divorce looking always for ways to smooth the waters for her parents, I've been someone who simultaneously likes to "fix things" or "just let's get going," even when I'd rather just watch someone else do it better…

Alas.

Our readings today were chosen from the Revised Common Lectionary, but from two different lists. The Psalm is from the weekly lectionary, the reading for this coming Second Sunday After Epiphany: it is a praising tribute conveying the uplifted awe and reverence of the Psalmist. God is beheld as an endless sky, a mighty mountain, a river of delights, and an ever-flowing fountain of life, from which shines light itself. It is a picture of wonderment, order, and righteousness together with God's abundant and abiding love.

The gospel text from Luke comes from the daily RCL for this day, heralded with the apt phrase, The Light of The Body. You know, the one about the bushel. It starts out sounding like practical wisdom, what by nature every reasonable and well-intentioned person would do once

they turn on a lamp: put it up where people can see it. Where it may be of use to all who enter; perhaps to the many, those who might see it from afar. But, quickly, it sidesteps to the realm of metaphor: this is not just a light, but an eye—MY eye. The eye of MY body.

This eye, compared to a lamp, builds a layer of meaning onto both the idea of the lamp and the eye. A lamp is held up for persons to see; an eye is by which they see. A lamp lights up a room; an eye similarly is understood in the text to light up the body, and by its light one can detect the relative health or un-health of that body. Something like a portal. What do you perceive, and how do you perceive it? This tells us something about the perceiver. Half full? Half empty? Suspicious? Abundant? Cynical? Visionary?

Luke's gospel here pits light against darkness, pairing light with health, and darkness with un-healthiness. These tropes of light and darkness bring up well-worn but much objectionable grounds for racist tropes and racialized imagery throughout Christian history, imagery that has justified the oppression and injury of whole peoples, immeasurably. I do not want to raise them here without acknowledging that associating light shades of skin tone with righteousness, parallel to dark tones with sin, has been a terrible source of racial inequality. The harm these notions have done is a terrible sin which cannot be understated.

In not dissimilar vein, the association of the function of sight with moral clarity and likewise of blindness with reprobation is another evil sustained over time. This is not how, I believe, the Scriptures were meant to be used.

However, is there a way we can still treat of the image and its message, while acknowledging that justifications of racism and ableism are wrong?

The NIV translation on Bible Gateway offers an editor's footnote. I didn't check it against the Greek—though perhaps Dr. MacLachlan can tell us—it claims that the words for "health" and "unhealthy" may be translated as "generous" and "stingy," respectively.

Generous and stingy.

If your eye is *generous*, your whole body is full of light—let us say, full of a quality of God—but, if it is *stingy*, your body is full of darkness… And let us change out "darkness" for the quality of being indiscernible, unlike God in discernability or effect.

And if your whole body is full of generosity, it will be as when a lamp put up high gives out all its rays… so let us imagine a powerful lamp, or sun, in generous tones, bringing into full

relief that on which it shines, that which is created by God, seen for what it is meant to be, what it is for. Such a thing is generous, indeed, and all creatures shown as having that dignity within.

I also liked the rendering of "stingy," for in these days of economic woe and brandishing of blunt instruments, we recall the contrast with God that tight-fistedness raises. Hoarding resources, refusing cooperation and sharing, refusing aid and shelter, turning away from pleas for relief from suffering, particularly among the racialized and oppressed, ghettoized and dehumanized. Pretending not to hear or to be aware of the oppression of oh so many for the exorbitant gains of the few. Indeed, the peoples' governments enabling the amassing of a few's coercive power.

I think what scares me most is that the headlines are mostly staying on the surface level. You have to go looking for the informed analysis, those who are perhaps not paid on the level as the major media outlets but who point out who is arming, who is building and growing their nuclear warheads, who is aligning with whom, how much is done with pomp and circumstance and what is on the QT. And while many in our governments are putting their hands over their ears, shutting their eyes, shutting down, or doubling down, the spectres of looming global disaster are growing by the minute.

I think the stingy will not be saved, nor will they be spared, in such a world. That which they stockpiled and hoarded—well beyond reason, never mind generosity or neighbourliness—will not protect them from the mean and ugly world which they ushered in, and which then will swallow them, too.

So, what are we to do? Are we, as church leaders, yelling into the void? Who is listening? Who is capable of seeing the lamps we are putting in the windows? Are we even doing that much?

You see, I think we are in a bit of a race. It's becoming a race to position ourselves to prepare for next rapid bit of crumbling infrastructure that is unravelling with the world order. And though there certainly were problems with the world order that has been, I am wary of anyone who thinks that what replaces it will be measureably better than what was, at least, in the aggregate. Perhaps that is fine? Perhaps that is the world? The Kingdom of God that both is and is not yet?

This is why I treasure the reading from the 36th Psalm. What is my lamp but to remember God's steadfast love, the love revealed to us in the incarnation of Jesus, the Son. The way of

gentleness and hospitality, of charity and tending. The foolishness and mysterious splendour revealed in the death and then the Resurrection, which upended those who thought they were dominant, the ruling class. Death on a cross. Triumph. The regeneration of order and meaning that promises the cycle of creation, destruction, and recreation that is all part of God's self-revelation… An eternal fountain flowing from which we might drink, briefly, might for a micromoment contemplate the Source, the great deep, the nothing's-impossible-all-embracing wings of God, the house of endless rooms, the everflowing fountain of life that might be apprehended and sipped by the upright.

We cannot lose hope because we cannot, for a moment, afford to take our eyes off the lamp. We cannot for a moment stop being the lightkeepers, the lamplighters, the lampbearers.

God calls us out from the cellars, out from under the bushels, generously and unabashedly, against all stinginess. Let not our hearts be mean with our gifts. Let us not be tepid to light the way to the fountain.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Illuminating Faith: Pope John Paul II and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*

Aidan Powell

For RM 1000 Research Methods (Dec 2024)

Across the Christian tradition, prayer is a profound means of encountering God's light and love. Few prayers possess the timeless ability to draw hearts closer to Christ as profoundly as the Rosary. The Rosary is a rhythmic and mediative prayer made up of twenty 'mysteries' (significant events or moments in the life of Jesus and Mary). In the 2002 Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (*RVM*), Pope Saint John Paul II (JPII) reflected on the Rosary as a prayer of contemplation with Mary of Christ. His lifelong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary influenced his vision of the Rosary as both Marian and Christological. By adding the Luminous Mysteries, JPII honoured Mary's role in leading the faithful to Christ while affirming the Rosary as a powerful instrument for Christian contemplation. Although some controversy arose within the Church over this addition, John Paul II emphasized that the Luminous Mysteries were an invitation, not a mandate.[1] He encouraged believers to embrace the mysteries of Christ's life to deepen their spiritual connection and gain a fuller understanding of His public ministry, guiding them to model their lives on His teachings. The Luminous Mysteries allow for contemplation on significant moments in Jesus' life that bridge His early years, captured in the Joyful Mysteries, with his Passion, Death, and Resurrection in the Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries. John Paul II believed that broadening the Rosary's focus would enhance this Christ-centered devotion and encompass the Gospel message. The Luminous Mysteries – the Baptism in the Jordan, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist – highlight pivotal moments that reveal Jesus as the "light of the world."[2] These Gospel passages emphasize Christ's divinity and salvific mission, offering believers profound insights into His message of redemption. Through these additions, John Paul II invited the faithful to see the Rosary not only as a Marian prayer but as "a way to contemplate

[1] Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (The Holy See, 2002), 3. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html

[2] Ibid., 19; John Paul is referencing the Gospel of John chapter 9 verse 5: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

the face of Christ" more deeply.[3] By moving from a solely reflective meditation on Jesus' life to a more intimate and transformative encounter with the Lord, the Luminous mysteries serve to highlight Christ's mission. In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, John Paul II seeks to illuminate the richness of the Rosary as a cherished devotion and a relevant means to encounter and conform to Christ in the modern world.

JPII's devotion to Mary and the Rosary influenced *RVM*. Through his personal experience, JPII wrote about how Mary draws the faithful to the contemplation of her Son through the recitation of the Rosary. In the beginning paragraphs of *RVM*, JPII expressed his experience with the Rosary: "From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my spiritual life… The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty."[4] At the onset of his papacy, JPII gave thanks to the Lord for the gift of His mother Mary, under whose protection JPII placed his Petrine ministry.[5] Inspired by this relationship, he felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary at the turn of the new millennium. *RVM* is "an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother."[6] Mary lived her life with her eyes fixed on her Son Jesus. As Peter J. Casarella notes, she lived "only in Christ and for Christ."[7] Therefore, the memories of Jesus impressed Mary's heart and were always with her. They lead Mary to reflect on the various moments of her life at her son's side: "She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."[8] JPII reflected that through the recitation of the Rosary, we ponder the life of Christ with Mary. With the Rosary, JPII says that Christians "*sit at the school of Mary* and [are] led to contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love."[9] Without this contemplation the Rosary would lose its meaning and purpose. As Pope Paul VI taught, "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ."[10] To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Jesus. Building on the relationship between

---

[3] Ibid., 43.
[4] Ibid., 2.
[5] Ibid., 2.
[6] Ibid., 3.
[7] Peter J. Casarella, "Contemplating Christ through the Eyes of Mary: The Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae and the New Mysteries of Light," *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 2 (September 2005): 172.
[8] Luke 2:19
[9] John Paul II, op. cit., 1.
[10] Ibid., 12; Christ warns about the danger of empty prayers in Matthew 6:7: "In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words."

Mary and Jesus, JPII then offered the Luminous Mysteries as a fuller encounter with the Gospel message through meditation on Jesus' public ministry.

JPII wrote about the Rosary remaining a powerful Christological prayer through its incorporation of the Gospel. He wrote that the Rosary is simple yet profound and remains a prayer of great significance that encourages growth in holiness. He also anticipated some Christians who may fear the Rosary to be "'unecumenical' because of its distinctly Marian character."[11] He affirmed that although the Rosary venerates the Mother of Jesus, a devotion to the Rosary directs one to Christ. JPII recalled a message from the Second Vatican Council: "When the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified."[12] Therefore, JPII stated that the Rosary is an aid not a hindrance to ecumenism. The Rosary proclaims the Gospel message of Good News known and loved by all Christians. In "the sobriety of its elements, it has all the *depth of the Gospel message in its entirety*, of which it can be said to be a compendium."[13] As such, JPII saw it fitting to make the Rosary more fully a compendium of the Gospel by adding the Luminous Mysteries. These Luminous Mysteries provide a mediation on Jesus' public ministry. They follow the reflection on Jesus' Incarnation and hidden life (The Joyful Mysteries) and precede the reflection on His suffering and Passion (The Sorrowful Mysteries) and His Resurrection and Ascension (The Glorious Mysteries). JPII expressed how these new mysteries have no prejudice to any essential aspect of the prayer's traditional format. He wrote that the Luminous Mysteries are meant to give "fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary's place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory."[14] Through the Rosary, Jesus "takes on concrete shape… for in this prayer we praise the name of Jesus and meet Christ face-to-face."[15]

---

[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Ibid., 4; The cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church increased following the Council of Ephesus in 431. The Council honored Mary under the title Theotokos (Greek for God-bearer). This increased the "veneration and love," "invocation and imitation" of Mary "according to her own prophetic words: 'All generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me' [Luke 1:48]." Lumen Gentium exhorted theologians, preachers, and the faithful "to abstain zealously both from all gross exaggerations as well as from petty narrow-mindedness in considering… the duties and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which always look to Christ, the source of truth, sanctity and piety." Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, (The Holy See, 1964), 66. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html
[13] John Paul II, op. cit., 1.
[14] Ibid., 19.
[15] Casarella, op. cit., 162.

This Christ-centered focus becomes even more evident through the themes of the Lumnious Mysteries which highlight Jesus' divinity and mission.

JPII explained that the Luminous Mysteries highlight Jesus' divinity and public message and mission of redemption. Through the contemplation on Jesus' public ministry, we see "a mystery of light: 'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"[16] JPII noted that the entire mystery of Christ is a mystery of light, but this truth emerges most prominently during His public ministry. In Jesus' public ministry, He proclaims and reveals who He is. JPII proposed the following five significant Gospel moments or luminous mysteries to contemplate during this stage of Jesus' life: 1) The Baptism in the Jordan, 2) The Wedding of Cana, 3) The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, 4) The Transfiguration, and 5) The Institution of the Eucharist. In the course of these mysteries Jesus is declared the beloved Son of the Father, announces the coming of the Kingdom, and bears witness to the Kingdom in His works and proclamation.[17] JPII wrote that these moments are mysteries in Jesus' life that "not only belong to 'yesterday'; *they are also part of the 'today' of salvation*."[18] Just as Mary's contemplation is a remembering so too do we remember the life of Jesus in the now through the Rosary. JPII wrote about the significance of understanding the word remembrance: "We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*Zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation."[19] The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in the saviour of Jesus Christ. As such, the events of Jesus' life are not outdated but a present reality to all who believe in Him. Through the Rosary, "we repeat the name of Jesus – the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (cf. *Acts* 4:12)."[20] By engaging with the Rosary, one understands better the mysteries of faith and enhances their relationship with God. This combination makes the Rosary "a vital practice in the life of the believer."[21] This transformative aspect of the Rosary leads to a discussion of its enduring relevance.

---

[16] John Paul II, op. cit., 19; John 9:5.
[17] Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez, "Shining a Light on the New Mysteries: The Pope's New "Luminous Mysteries" for the Rosary Have Special Significance in These Dark Times of Terrorism and War." *U.S. Catholic* 68, No. 10 (October 1, 2003): 31
[18] John Paul II, op. cit., 13.
[19] Ibid., 13.
[20] Ibid., 33.
[21] Aidan R. Powell, *Annotated Bibliography: John Paul II and the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary* (Annotated Bibliography, Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, NS, 2024), 3.

By contemplating the life of Christ, we find our calling. "Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man*."[22] JPII then quoted the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light."[23] In other words, the true meaning of humanity can only be understood through the mystery of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, "by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."[24] Today, many are confused and lost in a world that continues to face new challenges such as climate change, global inequality, increasing mental health rates, pandemics, secularism, materialism, and wars. Therefore, as JPII wrote, "Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us. The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer."[25] JPII further encouraged the faithful to pray the Rosary as a petition for peace: "By focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary… makes us peacemakers in the world. By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ's invitation to "pray ceaselessly" (*Lk* 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult 'battle' for peace can be won."[26] Jesus is the light of the world who calls His faithful to make His presence known. The Rosary offers a reflection on Christ's light that casts out the darkness. Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez notes that Jesus teaches Christians "not [to] run from the darkness, but rather enter into the turmoil of our present world and, guided by the Spirit, change it."[27] Today, Mary, spouse of the Holy Spirit, continues the maternal care Jesus entrusted to her. In the person of the beloved disciple, Jesus entrusted "all the sons and daughters of the Church" to the maternal concern of His mother Mary: "'Woman, behold your son!' (*Jn*19:26)."[28] This reflection on the transformative aspect of the Rosary underscores its significance as a pathway to Christ for all believers.

---

[22] John Paul II, op. cit., 25.
[23] Ibid., 25; Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium Et Spes* (The Holy See, 1965), 22. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html
[24] Ibid., 22.
[25] John Paul II, op. cit., 17.
[26] Ibid., 40.
[27] Cavazos-Gonzalez, op. cit., 31.
[28] John Paul II, op. cit. 7.

Through *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope John Paul II invited the faithful to rediscover the Rosary as a prayer of profound contemplation. His Marian devotion shaped his reflection and the introduction of the Luminous Mysteries. Through this addition, JPII hoped to enrich the Christological focus and enable believers to meditate more fully on the life, mission, and revelation of Jesus Christ. JPII introduced these mysteries as an invitation, not a mandate, by encouraging believers to meditate on Jesus' public ministry as a bridge between His Incarnation and Passion. The Luminous Mysteries help make the Rosary a true "compendium of the Gospel" and showcase Jesus as the "light of the world."[29] These mysteries include The Baptism in the Jordan, the Wedding at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist. JPII states that "the Rosary is 'a treasure to be rediscovered' encouraging all to 'confidently take up the Rosary once again.'"[30] The Rosary continues to unite Christians across generations in their pursuit of holiness by transforming hearts, providing peace, and guiding the faithful to encounter Christ. As a prayer to Christ through Mary, the Rosary illuminates the person of Jesus Christ as the path of salvation in the modern world.

Bibliography

Casarella, Peter J. 2005. "Contemplating Christ through the Eyes of Mary: The Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae and the New Mysteries of Light." *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2): 161–73.

Cavazos-Gonzalez, Gilberto. *Shining a Light on the New Mysteries: The Pope's New "Luminous Mysteries" for the Rosary Have Special Significance in These Dark Times of Terrorism and War*. *U.S. Catholic*. Vol. 68. Claretian Publications, 2003.

Emmerich, Anne Catherine. *Mysteries of the Rosary: Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries*. Edited and arranged by Ryan Grant. TAN Books, 2019.

Pope John Paul II. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. The Holy See, 2002. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html.

[29] Ibid., 1; John 9:5.
[30] Powell, op. cit., 4; John Paul II, op. cit., 43.

Pope Paul VI. *Lumen Gentium*. The Holy See, 1964. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium Et Spes.* The Holy See, 1965. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

Powell, Aidan R. *Annotated Bibliography: John Paul II and the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary.* Annotated Bibliography, Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, NS, 2024.

Review of Hanna Reichel, After Method: Queer Grace, Conceptual Design, and the Possibility of Theology

Barbara Pritchard

For GTR 6000 Graduate Theory and Methods (Dec 2024)

Introduction

Hanna Reichel, a practising Christian, is a renowned Barth scholar and a constructive theologian. She is on faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary and contributes regularly to English and German language theological publications. This book, *After Method*, is published by Westminster John Knox Press as another in its catalogue of works covering a wide range of religious topics. Reichel describes the book as an attempt to reconcile the question of theology over the many contexts it finds itself in. This review will include an outline of the book's contents followed by an evaluation.

Explanation

With a background in Systematic and Constructive Theology, two contrasting theological methods, Hanna Reichel is aware of the possibly fatal effects of doing theology badly. Their purpose in this book is to explore the idea of what a better theological method could entail, and what the ethics would be of doing theology *after method*. Reichel supports their arguments with evidence drawn from their work as a community organizer in the barrios of Gran Buenos Aires, as well as from their theological studies in Germany and their academic work at Princeton University. They reference not only scripture and Christian tradition, but other theologians and philosophers as well.

Part I of the book is entitled "How (not) to get along (*primus usus legis*)." In Chapter 1, Reichel gives an explanation of the impasse between Systematic Theology and Constructive Theology, which is due to their conflicting approaches. Chapter 2 explores the relative solidarity of the two methods with each other, stemming from the constraints they face in their respective contexts. The title of Part II is "How (not) to lose hope (*secundus usus legis*)." In Chapter 3,

Reichel explores the failure of each method to achieve "good theology," which leads to the realization that method cannot save theology.

In Chapter 4 Reichel examines theological realism and the "queer" implications of taking both sin and grace seriously. This leads to Chapter 5 and a discussion of the difference between law and gospel, followed by a brief introduction to design theory which Reichel intends to make a centrepiece of the discussion. Part III is entitled "How (not) to do better (*tertius usus legis*)." This section begins with Chapter 6 where Reichel continues to explore design theory as a possible approach to the problem of method. In particular, Reichel examines the queer concept of cruising as a way for method to avoid such pitfalls as self-justification. Chapter 7 continues with more design theory, considering a queer use that might recycle traditional doctrines into more loving instruments. Reichel concludes with Chapter 8 in which they suggest a pragmatic, user-oriented method *after method* which will act as an instrument of grace conveying the benefits of Christ.

Evaluation

After Method is a deep and broad exploration of a complex issue, covering not only traditional theological methods, but also such diverse topics as queer theory and conceptual design. Reichel's structuring of the work around Systematic Theology's "three uses of the law" is an attempt to control these disparate elements. As they describe it, the first use of the law (civil, political) is reflected in the descriptions of Systematic Theology and Constructive Theology trying to do theology responsibly. Theology has real, often harmful effects in the world and those effects need to be addressed. Reichel illustrates the second use (pedagogy, theology) through the recognition by both approaches of the impossibility of method helping with "good theology." The third use (for the believer) turns away from the despair of the situation with the recognition that method itself can be a guide in the pursuit of "better theology." Despite Reichel's initial description of this three part structure, it is not clear that
it is actually helpful. Many of the points presented in the book span the different sections, appearing and reappearing sporadically. While the complexity of the subject matter may call for this unsettled approach, and while the unsettled approach may be Reichel's way of illustrating that complexity, it can lead to a mild disorientation on the reader's part.

Reichel's familiarity with Systematic and Constructive Theology allows for detailed and convincing arguments regarding the mutual illegibility of the two methods. The subsequent discussion of the solidarity between the two is thought provoking and presented in such a way as to invite the reader further into an exploration of the two seemingly unrelated areas of queer theory and conceptual design. In order to ease this move forward from a traditional to a more unusual approach, Reichel draws on an imaginative use of language demonstrating her unquestionable ability to write.

To illustrate, Reichel's writing style changes deftly from topic to topic: in the sections examining Systematic Theology, they use dense and complex academic language with a highly specialized vocabulary, untranslated Latin terms and many references to other theologians and philosophers. These passages are difficult to work through, some sentences requiring several readings before they can be parsed properly. Again, Reichel seems to be illustrating the difficulty of the subject matter here, and this becomes evident as the book progresses. Thus, in the passages describing queer theory and conceptual design, Reichel's style becomes looser and even humorous at times, reflecting the "messiness" inherent in queerness. The reader has to move from a systematic approach to a more exotic, possibly foreign way of understanding theology, viewing things from outside a traditional environment. In another interesting linguistic exercise, Reichel makes creative use of the title and section headers. Many of these hint at connections with the world of the theatre, illustrating Reichel's encouragement of *play*fulness in addressing the crisis of method. (Is the hidden pun intended?) Instead of formal descriptors of chapter and section content, the titles use deliberate misquotes from Hamlet, "Though this be crisis, yet there is method in't," as well as subordinate titles in the style of Victorian melodrama, "Cruising, or: The end of redemption and the beginning of ethics." Reichel seems to be subtly pointing out the drama and even tragedy of the situation, alluding to Kevin Garcia's declaration that "Bad Theology Kills" (2).

In addition, the weaving together of complex academic writing with non-scholastic titles and humorous references points to the situation between Systematic and Constructive Theology: they are disjunct, but share a solidarity in their recognition of the crisis of method. This is an interesting approach on Reichel's part but is not immediately obvious to a reader working their way through the complexities of the text. Despite the effectiveness of this change in styles in mirroring the content of the book, it again can make the reader feel a little dizzy.

One of the strengths of *After Method* is Reichel's enthusiasm for a queer view of Christ and its implications: "The Un/Just Messiah . . . has never ceased to disappoint our assumptions, scandalize our understanding, or mess with our categories" (125). This seems obvious when Reichel points it out: God's grace is supposed to be beyond our comprehension, but we so often try to limit it by excluding others. Ideas of indecent honesty and the obscenity of reality speak to a more clear-eyed view of the world, a view which we again so often try to put boundaries around. Reichel's ability to bring these things into focus exposes the strangeness of Christianity and its doctrines of Incarnation and Grace, a strangeness we are no longer aware of.

Another strength of the book is Reichel's discussion of conceptual design and its application to theology. The suggestion that theologians examine the practical uses and effects of their methods seems only reasonable in light of the damage some methods cause. Again, it seems obvious when Reichel points this out. But even here they counsel against viewing design as something that will save theology, instead seeing it as another tool to help do theology "better."

Conclusion

The central but impossible task of theology is to speak about God. *After Method* is Hanna Reichel's impressive attempt not only to explain the complexities of the situation, but also to point toward a promising way of approaching it. Reichel's theoretical reasoning is supported by scriptural and religious references, which indicate a faith-based experience. This is reassuring given the complicated theological nature of the work. Their obvious familiarity with and commitment to Systematic and Constructive theology as well as queer theory, gives credence to their conclusion: there are weaknesses in the approaches which cannot be ignored, but their strengths cannot be ignored either. Reichel invites us not to dismiss them, but to see them as having a different use. They are not an end in themselves, but instruments that can be used with the help of design theory in the fight against the "tyranny of method."

The Holy Spirit in Creation and Renewal

Rebecca Whiting

For ST 2204 The Holy Spirit in International Perspective (Dec 2024)

In the face of our ecologically unstable world, it is time to reexamine how Christian tradition and theology can speak to us in our current context. In the following paper, I will demonstrate that through human ecological violence, the Holy Spirit is experiencing suffering due to Her immanence in creation; however, the Spirit will bring forth renewal through that very embodiment in the world. This paper will begin by identifying the immanent and transcendent nature of the Holy Spirit within the context of creation. Then, we will explore a theology of dominion and human actions, which has led to the suffering of the Spirit. From there, the discussion will be broadened to all identities of the Trinity. From this broadening, new theological consequences will be come apparent as the suffering of Christ is repeated through the suffering of the Spirit in creation. Finally, we will recall how the suffering and resurrection of Christ led to renewal and redemption. From this, we can extend the imminent suffering of the Spirit today to hope for renewal and redemption.

The Holy Spirit is both immanent and transcendent, beyond the created order and yet participating in creation. Moltmann states, "'Nature' is the present, immanent side of creation; creation is the transcendent side of nature. What I mean is that every natural creature contains an immanent transcendence and transcendence is immanent in every natural creature."[1] This distinction between nature and creation is clarifying in our discussions about the Holy Spirit, and yet She is both transcendent and imminent. One might argue an imminent Spirit in the world would be pantheistic, but "The reciprocal indwelling of Spirit and earth is neither an absorption of the one into the other nor a confusion of the two… Insofar as the Spirit abides in and with all living things, Spirit and earth are inseparable and yet at the same time distinguishable."[2] Thus, the dual transcendent and imminent nature of the Spirit means that She is beyond the created

[1] Jürgen Moltmann, "The Scope of Renewal in the Spirit," *The Ecumenical Review* 42, no. 2 (April 1990): 98–106.
[2] Mark I Wallace, "The Green Face of God: Christianity in an Age of Ecocide," *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 3 (2000): 310–31, 319.

order, and yet She chooses to be a participant in creation. However, this participation goes deeper than a simple presence:

> an earth-based understanding of the Spirit will not domesticate the Spirit by locating her activity simply alongside nature; rather, nature itself in all its variety will be construed as the primary mode of being for the Spirit's work in the world. Now the earth's waters and winds and birds and fires will not be regarded only as symbols of the Spirit but rather as sharing in her very being as the Spirit is enfleshed and embodied through natural organisms and processes.[3]

As the Spirit is embodied within the world, we can change our worldview from one where the Spirt is present alongside, to one where the world is a part of Her very being. This understanding demands a new level of respect for our world, which in turn is respecting God. The Spirit in creation is well respected by Indigenous peoples, for whom "There is an awareness that the Spirit moves through all of life. The Great Spirit is in fact the "cosmic order." Aboriginal North American spirituality draws this cosmic order together with human life in a very experiential way. Our view of the creation and the creator is thus an attempt to unify the worldview of human beings who are interdependent."[4] Interdependent positioning of ourselves within creation is key to the respect of creation and the Spirit, but we as humans have strayed from this interdependence in our theology and actions.

In contrast to interdependent relationships in creation, human behaviour has practiced a mindset of dominion, which in turn has led to the suffering of creation and the Spirit. This assumption of dominion has inherent Christian roots, as "the promulgation of particular theological teachings has led to the ravaging of earth communities — for example, the idea in the Genesis creation story that God, a heavenly being far removed from our planet, created human beings as God's viceregents to exercise 'dominion' over the earth."[5] This perceived dominion has been used to exploit the earth as we extract resources for our use at the cost of ecological stability and other forms of life.

---

[3] Ibid., 316.
[4] Stan McKay, "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation," in *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom*, ed. Roger S Gottlieb (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 519–22, 521.
[5] Wallace, op. cit., 313.

Some might argue that we need to reframe the definition of 'dominion'. In a royal context, dominion "means that humans are to be God's representatives, carrying out the divine will that other creatures should flourish."[6] Additionally, some scholars have explored how the idea of dominion over an unpredictable and unsafe natural world gave humans a sense of control.[7] With this reframing, some might call for a shift to a theology of stewardship. Within this model "is the belief that the Earth and all of its resources belong ultimately to God. With overwhelming generosity God entrusts these good things to human beings, gifting us with their use… the human vocation is to take care of them in the name of their Owner."[8] While this theology improves our relationship to creation, it may be insufficient as it still engages in a non-interdependent mode of relationship: "Lacking a deep ecological sensibility, it establishes a vertical top-down relationship, giving human beings responsible mastery over other creatures but not roles alongside them or open to their giving."[9] In this way, moving from dominion to stewardship is an improvement on human relationship to creation, but mutual interdependence is an even greater step towards reconciled relationship.

In the midst of our current context, where dominion is still practiced by individuals and corporations alike, the imminence of the Holy Spirit suggests that She is suffering alongside creation: "Insofar as the Earth Spirit lives with us in and through the created world, then God as Spirit suffers loss and pain whenever the biotic order is despoiled through human arrogance. Because God as Spirit is enfleshed within creation, God experiences within the core of her deepest self the agony and suffering of an earth under siege."[10] This theological understanding has important implications for Christians, for careless or purposeful harm done to the Earth is actually harm done to the Spirit.

Additionally, we must remain mindful that the Holy Spirit is one with the Trinity, and thus acts of creation must be appropriated to all identities of the economic Trinity, who is outwardly participating in the created order. This Trinitarian presence in creation is affirmed in the words of Basil of Caesarea: "Know the depths of God: creation receives the revelation of mysteries through the Spirit. He gives life along with God who enlivens all things, and with the

---

[6] Elizabeth A Johnson, "The Community of Creation," in *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (Bloomsbury, 2014), 260–305, 263.
[7] Ibid., 263.
[8] Ibid., 265-66.
[9] Ibid., 266.
[10] Wallace, op. cit., 315.

Son, the Life-giver."[11] All identities of the Trinity are participants in creation and life-giving, and none should be forgotten or held to lesser importance within the Trinity. With the specific lens of the Trinity within creation, Wallace describes the three identities as such:

> As creator, God is manifested in the ebb and flow of the seasons whose plantings and harvests are a constant reminder of earth's original blessings. As redeemer, God is revealed in the complex interactions of organisms and the earth in mutual sustenance — an economy of interdependence best symbolized by Jesus' reconciling work of the cross. And as sustainer, God shows Godself through breathing the breath of life into all members of the life-web, a living testimony to the Divine's compassion for all things.[12]

The Triune nature of God in creation is essential to discuss here because it leads to an important theological consequence. As we speak about the suffering of the Spirit through Her embodiment in creation, we must turn to the account of suffering through Jesus Christ.

Jesus's suffering, resurrection, and reconciling work of the cross reminds us that we already have experienced God's suffering at the hands of humanity: "In the cross, God splits Godself by incorporating the godless death of Jesus into the inner life of the Godhead… becoming a willing victim of death itself. As Jesus' death on the cross brought death and loss into Godself so the Spirit's suffering from persistent environmental trauma engenders chronic agony in the Godhead."[13] Through this lens we can theologically ground our understanding of the Spirit willingly suffering at the hands of human ecological violence. We are reminded that the choice of embodiment by God in our world means that God is willfully accepting loss and pain.

Despite this willing suffering, we know that Christ's story does not end in death and defeat. From Christ's resurrection, we can have hope that the Spirit in Her suffering can also bring about resurrection. This embodied, imminent theology gives us hope for renewal and redemption by the Spirit:

> With the raising of Christ from the dead and the elimination of death which took place in him the eschatological process begins of renewing the creation of all things transient and mortal… With the rebirth of Christ from the dead into eternal life we also look for the rebirth of the whole cosmos. Nothing God has created is lost. Everything returns in

[11] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 24:56, ed. Bogdan Bucur, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 94-95.
[12] Wallace, op. cit., 317-18.
[13] Ibid., 321.

transfigured form. We therefore expect the triumph over human violence and cosmic chaos from the Spirit that renews creation.[14]

Therefore, in this time where we despair in the face of the ecological effects of human action, we can find hope in the redeeming, transforming power of God. The suffering of God the Spirit is not the final word, and we can be vivified by the renewal of Christ, with the expectation of renewal by the Spirit. Moltmann states, "At present we are living in a winter of creation and await the springtime of creation's renewal."[15] It is with great hope and anticipation of renewal that we can move away from despair, and instead be re-animated with the transforming power of our faith.

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated that through human ecological violence, the Holy Spirit is experiencing suffering due to Her imminence in creation; however, the Spirit will bring forth renewal through that very embodiment in the world. The immanent and transcendent natures of the Spirit were named initially. This led us to understand that the suffering of creation meant the suffering of the Spirit. Much of this suffering occurs due to a mindset of dominion by humans, upheld by Christian theology, which instead must shift to one of interdependence. Our exploration then expanded to include the Trintiy, which led to a recalling of the way God willfully suffered on the cross. This suffering continues today through the pain of the Spirit who is imminent in creation. However, through this theological lens we remember that God's resurrecting power led to renewal and redemption in Christ, and so we too can hope for renewal and redemption of creation through the Holy Spirit.

Bibliography

Basil of Caesarea. *On the Holy Spirit.* Edited by Bogdan Bucur. Translated by Stephen Hildebrand. New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. "The Community of Creation." In *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, 260–305. Bloomsbury, 2014.

[14] Jürgen Moltmann, op. cit., 105.
[15] Ibid., 100.

McKay, Stan. “An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation.” In *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom*, edited by Roger S Gottlieb, 519–22. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Moltmann, Jürgen. “The Scope of Renewal in the Spirit.” *The Ecumenical Review* 42, no. 2 (April 1990): 98–106.

Wallace, Mark I. “The Green Face of God: Christianity in an Age of Ecocide.” *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 3 (2000): 310–31.