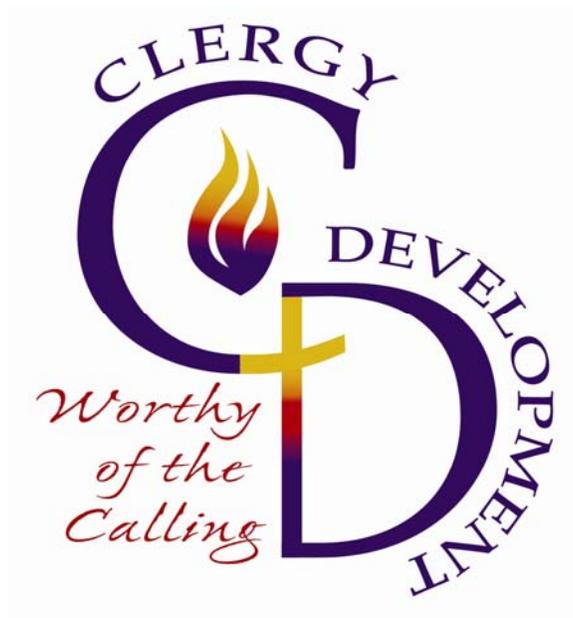

Student Guide

Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World



Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
Kansas City, Missouri
816-333-7000 ext. 2468; 800-306-7651 (USA)
2005

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The **Modular Course of Study** is an outcome-based curriculum designed to implement the educational paradigm defined by the Breckenridge Consultations. Clergy Development is responsible for maintaining and distributing the Modular Course of Study for the Church of the Nazarene.

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Series Foreword

A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, all of the creation—is to worship, love, and serve God. God has made himself known in His deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people, the Church, who embody, celebrate, and declare His name and His ways. The life of God with His people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and continues to be told by the resurrected Christ who lives and reigns as Head of His Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ, through preaching, the sacraments, in oral testimony, and in mission. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom He calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and caring for God's people in a form that is referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the initial actor in this call, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene we believe that God calls and that persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry continue to be amazed that He would call them. They should continue to be humbled and amazed by God's call. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states, "we recognize and hold that the Head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole Story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His or her charge is to "tend the flock of God . . . not under compulsion, but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3, NRSV). The minister fulfills this charge under the supervision of Christ, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). Such ministry can be fulfilled only after a period of careful preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, "preparation" never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the gospel of God (Titus 1:7). A steward is one who is entrusted to care for what belongs to another. A steward may be one who takes care of another person or who manages the property of someone else. All Christians are stewards of the grace of God. But in addition, in a peculiar sense a Christian minister is a steward of the "mystery of God," which is Christ, the Redeemer, the Messiah of God. In all faithfulness, the minister is called to "make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19, NRSV). Like Paul, he or she must faithfully preach "the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:8-10, NRSV).

In fulfilling this commission, there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege (Titus 1:5-9). Good stewards recognize that they are

stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one's charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward's principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a "job." It is ministry—uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ's Church. The person who embraces God's call to the ordained ministry will stand in the company of the apostles, the Early Fathers of the Church, the Reformers of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformers, and many persons around the world today who joyfully serve as stewards of the gospel of God.

Obviously, one who does not recognize, or who understands but rejects, just how complete and inclusive a minister's stewardship must be should not start down the path that leads to ordination. In a peculiar sense, a Christian minister must in all respects model the gospel of God. He or she is to "shun" the love of money. Instead, the minister must "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness." He or she must "fight the good fight of the faith" and "take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called" (1 Tim 6:11-12, NRSV).

Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes that "the minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; 'in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left' (2 Cor 6:6-7)" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1). The minister of Christ "must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching . . . able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:7-9, NASB).

In order to be a good steward of God's Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and His people, the world that He is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the gospel, and Christ's Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus and who made a way of salvation for all gave His very best in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them (Mt 21:33-44; 25:14-30; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:35-40; 19:11-27; 20:9-18).

Preparation—one's education in all its dimensions—for ministry in Christ's Church should be pursued in full light of the responsibility before God and His people that the ministry involves. This requires that one take advantage of the best educational resources at his or her disposal.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes how large is the responsibility associated with the ordained Christian ministry and accepts it fully. Part of the way we recognize our responsibility before God is seen in the requirements we make for ordination and the practice of ministry. We believe that the call to and practice of Christian ministry is a gift, not a right or privilege. We believe that God holds a minister to the highest of religious, moral, personal, and professional standards. We are not reluctant to expect

that those standards be observed from the time of one's call until his or her death. We believe that Christian ministry should first be a form of worship. The practice of ministry is both an offering to God and a service to His Church. By the miracle of grace, the work of the ministry can become a means of grace for God's people (Rom 12: 1-3). One's education for ministry is also a form of worship.

The modules that comprise the Course of Study that may lead a person to candidacy for ordination have been carefully designed to prepare one for the kind of ministry we have described. Their common purpose is to provide a holistic preparation for entrance into the ordained Christian ministry. They reflect the Church's wisdom, experience, and responsibility before God. The modules show how highly the Church of the Nazarene regards the gospel, the people of God, the world for which Christ gave His life, and Christian ministry. Completing the modules will normally take three or four years. But no one should feel pressured to meet this schedule.

The careful study for which the modules call should show that before God and His Church one accepts the stewardly responsibility associated with ordained ministry.

Acknowledgments

Every module is the accumulation of effort by many people. Someone writes the original manuscript, others offer suggestions to strengthen the content and make the material more easily understood, and finally an editor formats the module for publication. This module is no different. Many people have contributed to this module.

Principal Contributor

Dr. Al Truesdale is the principal contributor for this module. Dr. Truesdale received a BA degree from Trevecca Nazarene College (now University), BD degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and PhD degree from Emory University. He has had pastoral experience in North Carolina, Georgia and Massachusetts. He served on the faculty of Eastern Nazarene College, Olivet Nazarene University, and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He served as Academic Dean of Olivet Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He also served as interim Academic Dean and interim President of Eastern Nazarene College.

Dr. Truesdale is a prolific writer, authoring many books and magazine articles. He has also co-authored and co-edited several publications, and contributed chapters to many books. Recent works include: *When You Can't Pray: Finding Hope When You're Not Experiencing God*; and *A Charge to Keep: Telling the Story in a Pluralistic World* (publication pending).

Dr. Truesdale's research interests include: Philosophy of Religion in Modern Novels, World Religions, Bioethics, and the Problem of Evil.

Dr. Truesdale and Esther reside in Seabrook, South Carolina. They have three daughters—Elizabeth, Rebecca and Brenda, and two grandchildren—Suzy and Joshua.

Responder

The responder for this module is Dr. Diane Leclerc. Dr. Leclerc is professor of Historical Theology and Homiletics at Northwest Nazarene University where she has taught since 1998. She is an ordained clergy in the Church of the Nazarene and has pastored two congregations, in Maine and in Idaho. She received the Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Eastern Nazarene College, the Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and both her Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Drew University.

She has published articles in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* and has contributed to two books, including *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*. Her full-length book, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*, won the Wesleyan Theological Society Book of the Year Award in 2002. Leclerc is an active member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Association. She resides in Nampa, Idaho, with her husband and son.

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Syllabus

Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World

Educational Institution, Setting, or Educational Provider:

Location of the Course:

Course Dates:

Name of the Instructor:

Instructor's Address, Telephone, and E-mail Address:

Module Vision Statement:

Christian discipleship and ministry in a world marked by a diversity of world religions is not new for the Church. Many of the early Christians had "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming" (1 Thess 1:9-10, NRSV). But a post-modern pluralistic ideology is new, at least two centuries in the making. The ideology of religious pluralism claims that not only are there many religions, the diversity represents the way things "ought to be." There exists no single religious perception of reality that is universally applicable and binding. No religion can legitimately claim to proclaim the truth for all persons. There is no *metanarrative*, no overarching story. There are many narratives, all of which are "true" to the extent they satisfactorily provide meaning for all persons and communities who participate in them. Religious narratives are as diverse and "true" as there are narrative communities.

Pluralism may, but need not, rest upon the notion that behind the various narratives lies *a single divine reality* variously and legitimately expressed in humankind's many cultures and communities. According to the postmodern ideology of religious pluralism, any religion that claims to have "the narrative" for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought to be seen as oppressive. It spreads injury in the world. It tyrannizes the human conscience and overwhelms human freedom. According to the ideology of religious pluralism, orthodox Christian doctrine as expressed in the New Testament and the Church's creeds is a holdover from the long night of human oppression. Christianity either needs to be made a respectful member of the human community or it needs to be abandoned.

That is part of the atmosphere in which Christianity takes place. Religious pluralism presents its own set of challenges and opportunities.

Paradoxically, religious pluralism exists in a world also marked by resurgent religious fundamentalism and extremism. Where these dominate a society and state, religious pluralism does not exist. Particularly in many Muslim countries, the powers of state are used to prevent religious diversity, and even more so the ideology of religious pluralism.

In its broader sense, *pluralism* refers to more than just “religious pluralism.” We also speak of moral, cultural, and political pluralism. The various “pluralisms” depend on the notion that “meaning” is contextual. “Right” and “wrong” are dependent on one’s own preferences and the “story” by which he or she lives. The “moral” depends upon the values a community cherishes, nurtures and transmits. The traditional notion that moral values must submit to judgment by some universal or transcendent norm is rejected. That old standard reveals an ignorance of how communities and values are formed.

In this module we will concentrate on religious pluralism.

How is one to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world? More specifically, how is one to do this from within a Wesleyan perspective? Those are the questions this module addresses. If one were to be satisfied with ignoring the pluralistic context in which we live, then the content of this module would be unnecessary. But one who would choose this option would thereby limit his or her range of ministry, would deny the power of the gospel, and could not adequately represent the Wesleyan Tradition. To proclaim the gospel in a way that pays attention to the context in which we speak we must take seriously the pluralism that so extensively characterizes our age.

A minister in the Church of the Nazarene cannot adequately serve the church’s mission if he or she chooses not to be cognizant of pluralism’s importance and profile. Our commitment to an informed ministry will not permit it. The ideology of religious pluralism does present a challenge to ministers in the Church of the Nazarene. In our Articles of Faith we affirm orthodox Christian theology. This affirmation puts the Church of the Nazarene at odds with the pluralistic spirit. The denomination rejects the ideology of religious pluralism. It embraces the “scandal of the Cross and Resurrection” that proclaims Jesus Christ to be the definitive revelation of God. We believe that in Jesus Christ the universal reign of God has begun, is advancing by the Spirit, and will be consummated in God’s own time. We make these affirmations in ways that distinctly show the influence of the Wesleyan theological tradition. In the Wesleyan Tradition—when communicating the gospel—we rely upon the persuasive Holy Spirit, not upon any form of intellectual, political, or social coercion.

The purpose of this module is to help prepare Christian ministers in the Church of the Nazarene—the Wesleyan tradition—for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world.

Educational Assumptions

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to any process of Christian education at any level. We will consistently request and expect the Spirit’s presence within and among us.

2. Christian teaching and learning is best done in the context of community (people being and working together). Community is the gift of the Spirit but may be enhanced or hindered by human effort. Communities have common values, stories, practices, and goals. Explicit effort will be invested to enhance community within the class. Group work will take place in every lesson.
3. Every adult student has knowledge and experiences to contribute to the class. We learn not only from the instructor and the reading assignments but also from each other. Each student is valued not only as a learner but also as a teacher. That is one reason that so many exercises in this course are cooperative and collaborative in nature.
4. Journaling is an ideal way to bring theory and practice together as students synthesize the principles and content of the lessons with their own experiences, preferences, and ideas.
5. **A Special Note to the Student**
The resources contained in the Student Guide, including the lesson motivators, are present because the module's author wants to provide a truly representative array of primary sources dealing with religious pluralism. They do not appear because the author necessarily agrees with either the positions expressed or the life-styles of those who wrote the pieces. It should be clear that they are not included as an indication that they agree with historic Christian faith. The student is urged to take seriously the resources as means for understanding postmodernity, religious pluralism, its emergence and so forth. A well-prepared minister is both a well-informed and discriminating learner and teacher.

Outcome Statements

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- CN 22 Ability to articulate the distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology
- CP 19 Ability to think globally and engage cross-culturally for the purpose of mission
- CP 20 Ability to preach evangelistically and to be engaged with and equip others in personal and congregational evangelism
- CX 1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings
- CX 8 Ability to place the ministry context in light of the large schemes of world and national history
- CX 9 Ability to apply historical analysis to the life of a local congregation in order to describe its historical and cultural context
- CX 10 Ability to understand and articulate the biblical, historical, and theological bases for Christian mission

Course Requirements

1. **Class attendance, attention, and participation** are especially important. Students are responsible for all assignments and in-class work. Much of the work in this course is small-group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are thwarted. If

one or two lessons are missed, the learning leader will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If two or more lessons are missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

Small-Group Work. Nothing is more important in this course than small-group work. The class members will be assigned to groups of two to four students each. The group members will serve as study partners for explorations and discussion.

2. Assignments

Journaling: Throughout the life of the module each student will keep a journal—daily entries preferred. Maintaining a journal will make intentional a conversation with the various expressions of pluralism—particularly religious pluralism—the student observes in one’s culture and in the media. The conversation will increase awareness and provide a broader context for knowing how best to communicate the gospel of God in a religiously pluralistic world.

Far more than just recording observed instances of religious pluralism, the journal provides an opportunity for reflecting upon the question, “How ought I be formed in order effectively to communicate the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world?” Answering this question well involves spiritual and character formation, increase in knowledge and wisdom, and theological and intellectual growth. A student should be pressing forward on all these fronts.

Take note not only of instances that demonstrate the ideology of religious pluralism, but also instances that seem to contradict it, e.g., militant fundamentalism whatever the religion.

Keeping a journal provides an opportunity for tuning one’s ears to hear and sharpening one’s eyes to see the pluralistic world in which we live and minister. Regularly raise the questions, “What challenges for the Church does the ideology of religious pluralism present? How should Christ’s Church respond? And how may this be done in ways that express our Wesleyan theological heritage and commitments?”

Students will discuss with other students the questions their observations raise. This will be done at the beginning of each lesson. **Bring your journal to each class session.**

The teacher of the module will on occasion read a section of each student’s journal, and will engage the student in conversation either in writing or verbally.

The journaling experience ensures that the “Be” component of “Be, Know, and Do” is present in the course of study.

Daily Work: This module has regular homework assignments. It is called daily work because even though the class may only meet once a week, the student should be working on the module on a “daily” basis. Sometimes the homework assignments are quite heavy. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class every session, the work is to be handed in. This gives the instructor regular information about the student’s progress in the course. The normal time for homework to be handed in is at the beginning of each class session. **All** assignments are to be completed.

Interviews: During the course of the module each student will interview two-three members of diverse non-Christian religions—preferably persons who serve as religious leaders in their communities. Students should make notes of the interviews and attach or include the notes in their journals.

Before conducting the interviews, a student should spend time becoming acquainted with each of the two-three religions. This can be done either by consulting books or by exploring the Internet.

Questions should inquire regarding why a person is committed to his or her religion. Why does it attract his or her allegiance? What makes the religion fulfilling?

Questions should also attempt to ascertain a person’s assessment of religions other than his or her own. The ideology of religious pluralism can be briefly defined and responses can be solicited.

The interviews provide an opportunity to listen. They are not meant to be efforts to evangelize the person being interviewed. Treat the person with the same courtesy you would expect if the situation were reversed.

If possible, students are urged to visit two or more religious services of the religions about which they are inquiring. The assignment is due the last class session.

A Credo: At the end of the module each student will write a three to five-page *credo*—affirmation—regarding how he or she intends to minister as an orthodox Christian and Wesleyan in a religiously pluralistic world. The assignment is due the last class session.

Course Outline and Schedule

The class will meet for 90 minutes for each lesson of 12 lessons for a total of 18 hours according to the following schedule:

Session Date	Session Time	
		1. The Various Meanings of Pluralism
		2. A Brief History of Religious Pluralism
		3. The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism
		4. The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism
		5. Responses to Religious Pluralism Among Christians
		6. The New Testament and Religious Pluralism
		7. The Wesleyan Way (Order) of Salvation, Part 1
		8. The Wesleyan Way (Order) of Salvation, Part 2
		9. A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 1
		10. A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 2
		11. Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World
		12. Student Accountability

Course Evaluation

The instructor, the course itself, and the student's progress will be evaluated. These evaluations will be made in several ways.

The progress of students will be evaluated with an eye for enhancing the learning experience by:

1. Carefully observing the small-group work, noting the competence of reports, the balance of discussion, the quality of the relationships, the cooperation level, and the achievement of assigned tasks
2. Careful reading of homework assignments
3. Journal checks

A letter grade is not the measure of completion. Completion of the module is based on attendance, participation, completion of all homework, and showing competence in the ability statements.

The evaluation of the course materials and the teacher will be evaluated by frequently asking and discussing the effectiveness and relevance of a certain method, experience, story, lecture, or other activity.

Some evaluation cannot be made during the class itself. Some objectives will not be measurable for years to come. If students encounter the transforming power of God at deeper levels than ever before, learn devotional skills and practice them with discipline, and incorporate the best of this course into their own ministries, the fruit of this educational endeavor could go on for a long time. In truth, that is what we expect.

Additional Information

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

Instructor's Availability

Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration

Participating in the course of study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each course you will be required to listen to lectures, read several books, participate in discussions, write papers, and take exams. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your relationship with God. The course work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge,

your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritually formative work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head to your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work to faithfully spend time daily in your journal. Many people confess that this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling as time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, an ah-ha that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary more helpful. In either case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet, family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences, and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with course material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems that we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available. However, as computers become more and more an integral part of our lives the use of a computer for journaling may take on that special bond.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your

journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your course work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration, weaving together faith development with learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being rather than doing. Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

Suggested Books for the Student's Library

For those students interested in acquiring books for their personal library the following would be recommended as good books for this module topic:

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

McLaren, Brian DA *New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

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Sweet, Leonard, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church*. Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000.

All or most of these books can be purchased as used books at:

<http://www.abebooks.com/>

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- Herrick, James A. *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

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Sermons of John Wesley, <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/>

Lesson 1: The Various Meanings of Pluralism

Due This Lesson

None

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- be able to define and discuss the following meanings of pluralism: political pluralism, philosophical pluralism, cultural pluralism, moral pluralism, and religious pluralism

Homework Assignments

Read Resource 1-4: Immanuel Kant. Prepare 3 questions or important ideas that this reading presented to you. Bring 2 copies—one to turn in to the instructor and one to keep for group discussion.

Read Resource 1-5.

Begin work on the interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus.

Motivator

“If there were only one religion in England there would be danger of despotism, if there were two, they would cut each other’s throats, but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness.”¹

French writer/philosopher Voltaire

“I would insist that pluralism is not simply relativism. It does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments, or secular commitments for that matter. It is, rather, the encounter of commitments. Some critics have persisted in linking pluralism with a kind of valueless relativism, in which all cats are gray, all perspectives equally viable and, as a result, equally unconvincing. Pluralism, they would contend, undermines commitment to one’s own particular faith with its own particular language, watering down particularity in the interests of universality. I consider this view a distortion of the process of pluralism. I would argue that pluralism is the engagement, not the abdication, of differences and particularities. While the encounter with people of other faiths in a pluralist society may lead one to a less myopic view of one’s own faith, pluralism is not premised on a reductive relativism, but on the significance and the engagement of real differences . . . The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. In the world in which we live today, the language of dialogue is a language we will need to learn.”²

Dr. Diane Eck

Pluralism Defined

The basic meaning of 'plural' is 'more than one.' The words 'plurality' and 'pluralism' identify a condition marked by the presence of 'more than one.'

Political Pluralism

Philosophical Pluralism

Cultural Pluralism

Moral Pluralism

Religious Pluralism

First

Diversity/Plurality

- Afro-Caribbean religions
- Baha'i
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Mormonism
- Native American religions
- Neo-Paganism
- Shinto
- Sikhism
- Taoism
- Zoroastrianism

Second

Evaluative not simply descriptive

. . . the belief that multiple religions or secular worldviews are legitimate and valid. Each is true when viewed from within its own culture.³

Small Groups

In your group read the assigned Reading. Then discuss what it has to say and the impact that what it says may have on your ministry. Also, discuss your own personal reaction to the Reading. Each group will be called on to report on their discussion.

Reading 1

In May of 1990 in a suburb of Boston not far from the starting point of the Boston marathon, the Hindu community of New England dedicated a temple to the goddess Lakshmi, pouring the consecrated waters of the Ganges over the temple towers, along with the waters of the Colorado, the Mississippi and the Ohio Rivers. In April of 1993 in Sharon, the Islamic community of New England broke ground for a major new Islamic center to provide an anchor for the nearly 20 mosques in the Islamic Council of New England.

These events are increasingly typical of the religious life of New England. Indeed, the religious landscape of much of America is changing—slowly, but in dramatic ways that test the pluralist foundations of American public life.

The Jain community celebrates the end of its season of fasting with a great feast held under a bright yellow and white striped tent in the backyard of its temple in Norwood, formerly a Swedish Lutheran Church. A young man being ordained as a monk kneels shaven-headed amidst the Cambodian Buddhist community in its temple in Lynn—one of three Cambodian Buddhist temples in the northern suburbs of Boston. Sikhs come to their gurdwara in Milford for the celebration of Vaishaki. African American Muslims gather in Malcolm X Park in Dorchester to celebrate Id Al Adha during the month of the pilgrimage to Makkah. Buddhist dignitaries from a dozen monastic lineages assemble in Cumberland, Rhode Island, where a Korean Zen Master for the first time in history formally transmits his lineage of teaching to three American teachers, one of them a woman. This is New England in the 1990's. The whole world of religious diversity is here.

This new reality is not a New York-California phenomenon of the cosmopolitan coasts of America. This is a Main Street phenomenon. There are Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in Salt Lake City, in Toledo and in Jackson, Mississippi. *Nieman Reports* "God in the Newsroom" Issue Vol. XLVII, No. 2, Summer 1993

http://www.pluralism.org/research/articles/cop.php?from=articles_index

Reading 2

A Baha'i perspective on religious pluralism: "Religious Pluralism," by Seena Fazel

Philosophically, religious pluralism is the theory that the great world religions constitute varying conceptions of, and responses to, the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality. We can approach this theory by comparing it to its two main rivals, exclusivism and inclusivism.

Although we may find instances in Baha'i scripture capable of exclusivist development, exclusivism—the view that one particular tradition alone teaches the truth and constitutes the way to salvation or liberation—is not supported by a reading of the

Baha'i writings in context. A fundamental tenet of Baha'i belief is the common foundation of all the world's revealed religions: "Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin" (WOB, p. 58). With this perspective, the superiority of one religious tradition over another is denied: "One cannot call one World Faith superior to another, as they all come from God." (Shoghi Effendi, Letter 19.11.45)

Inclusivist theologies and religious philosophies state that one particular tradition presents the final truth while other traditions, instead of being regarded as wrong, are seen to reflect aspects of, or to constitute approaches to, that final truth. The Baha'i writings do not portray an inclusivist outlook as the Baha'i Faith does not claim to represent the final truth. As Shoghi Effendi explains, Baha'is "claim no finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified" (WOB, p. 59). Inclusivist trends do exist in the Baha'i writings in that the Revelation of Baha'u'llah marks "the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet" (WOB, p. 163). Man's individual life will "continue indefinitely to progress and develop" but his planetary life has reached "the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society" (ibid). This should be attributed not to "any inherent superiority" (WOB, p. 166) or "superior merit" (WOB, p. 60) of the Baha'i Faith but rather to the fact that the present age is one which is "infinitely more advanced, more receptive, and more insistent to receive an ampler measure of Divine Guidance than has hitherto been vouchsafed to mankind" (ibid). It is the present age, not the religion of the age, that is superior.

Explicit pluralism accepts the more radical position implied by inclusivism: the view that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real of the Ultimate, and that within each salvation is occurring. Thus Baha'u'llah writes: "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God." (Gleanings, p. 217)

Nevertheless there are Baha'i writings which seemingly do not support pluralist thinking, by implying that the different religions will cease to exist in the future as all believers become Baha'is. In the tablet to Queen Victoria, Baha'u'llah declares: "That which the Lord has ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith". (WOB, p. 163) Baha'u'llah is reported to have said to Edward Granville Browne that there would come a time when "all nations should become one in faith" and when "diversity of religion should cease" (qtd in Esslemont, p. 117-8). A tablet of TABdu'l-Baha written in 1906 contains the following passage: "The fourth candle [of unity] is unity in religions (vahdat-i-din) which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendour." (qtd. in WOB, p. 39.) Another passage from TABdu'l-Baha's writings, explaining the nature of the events to come in this Dispensation forecasts the moment that "All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith" (qtd. in WOB, p. 205).

Taken at face value, these statements must be tempered with the condition that any predictions of the future religious development of the world will be largely inaccurate. The expected World Order of Baha'u'llah will not reflect any of our present-day conceptions: "All we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of the promised Dawn that must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity" (WOB, p. 35). <http://bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/pluralism.html>

Reading 3

A contrary Assessment of Religious Pluralism: "The Fraud of Pluralism"

It should be obvious that in the modern world there's no such thing as a pluralistic society. After all, life today is marked by comprehensiveness, pervasiveness and complexity of social cooperation, and those things require common habits, understandings and beliefs. Further, modern modes of production, exchange and regulation depend on standardization. The present day is therefore distinguished by universal all-pervasive centralized institutions that inculcate the qualities of mind and spirit that rationalized organizations need. Children are raised by educational and childcare bureaucracies and by mass-market pop entertainment. Politics and culture have been absorbed by television—whatever isn't in the mass media didn't happen. And the uniformity of outlook in modern professionalized educational, cultural and media bureaucracies is notorious.

These are familiar topics, but their obvious relevance to "pluralism" is ignored. Current discussions of "pluralism," "diversity," "tolerance" and the like make a common point: the things like religion and ethnic culture that are permitted to be plural, diverse or whatever must be given absolutely equal respect. To do otherwise would be an attack on those who identify with such things and find them of fundamental value. Pluralism thus claims to be a recognition of the importance of religion and the like, and of the legitimacy of attachments to it.

The truth, of course, is the opposite. Things that differ can be guaranteed equal status only if the differences don't matter. To guarantee the equality of religions and cultures that differ radically is to insist that religion and culture be made irrelevant to everything of public importance. Since man is a social animal, and since the modern state claims responsibility for all aspects of human well-being, insistence on the equality of all religions and cultures is insistence on their practical abolition. The modern "pluralistic" and "tolerant" society is therefore the supremely unitary, intolerant and inhuman society, in which nothing other than formal public bureaucratic and market institutions are permitted to have any connection to the common concerns of life. Other things can't be social institutions at all but only private practices and tastes in which a man can indulge only to the extent no-one else is affected.

Those who puzzle over the role of religion, culture or what not in a pluralistic society don't understand the issues. A "pluralistic" society, like every other, has a comprehensive understanding of the world and human life to which it demands assent. Comprehensive campaigns to change how people act, think and feel are therefore a distinctive feature of societies that call themselves pluralistic. "Pluralism" only applies to some things, to the things that it intends to destroy as significant public institutions. It does not include, for example, equal respect for official views and for traditional ethnic attachments, views regarding sex and the sexes, or understandings of the relation between God and society. The latter are simply suppressed, through means that increasingly include direct application of criminal law. <http://www.amnation.com/vfr/archives/000993.html>

Immanuel Kant

(Note: Immanuel Kant's famous definition of "enlightenment" presents the sense of freedom and confidence that characterized the Enlightenment. Students should understand that Kant's statement is at odds with fidelity to orthodox Christian faith. Kant was not opposed to the Christian religion. He simply thought that all of its doctrines and practices should be brought under the governance of reason as the Enlightenment predominantly defined it. In 1793 Kant wrote, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (Harper and Brothers, 1960). In this book Kant presented what the Christian religion, governed by reason, should teach).

An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere Aude!* [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment. Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance (*natura-liter maiorenes*), nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome work for me. The guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have carefully seen to it that the far greatest part of them (including the entire fair sex) regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult. Having first made their domestic livestock dumb, and having carefully made sure that these docile creatures will not take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed, these guardians then show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone. Now this danger is not actually so great, for after falling a few times they would in the end certainly learn to walk; but an example of this kind makes men timid and usually frightens them out of all further attempts.

Thus, it is difficult for any individual man to work himself out of the immaturity that has all but become his nature. He has even become fond of this state and for the time being is actually incapable of using his own understanding, for no one has ever allowed him to attempt it. Rules and formulas, those mechanical aids to the rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural gifts, are the shackles of a permanent immaturity. Whoever threw them off would still make only an uncertain leap over the smallest ditch, since he is unaccustomed to this kind of free movement. Consequently, only a few have succeeded, by cultivating their own minds, in freeing themselves from immaturity and pursuing a secure course.

But that the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable. For even among the entrenched guardians of the great masses a few will always think for themselves, a few who, after having themselves thrown off the yoke of immaturity, will spread the spirit of a rational appreciation for both their own worth and for each person's calling to think for himself. But it should be particularly noted that if a public that was first placed in this yoke by the guardians is suitably aroused by some of those who are altogether incapable of enlightenment, it may force the guardians themselves to remain under

the yoke--so pernicious is it to instill prejudices, for they finally take revenge upon their originators, or on their descendants. Thus a public can only attain enlightenment slowly. Perhaps a revolution can overthrow autocratic despotism and profiteering or power-grabbing oppression, but it can never truly reform a manner of thinking; instead, new prejudices, just like the old ones they replace, will serve as a leash for the great unthinking mass.

Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except freedom; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters. But on all sides I hear: "Do not argue!" The officer says, "Do not argue, drill!" The tax man says, "Do not argue, pay!" The pastor says, "Do not argue, believe!" (Only one ruler in the World says, "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!") In this we have examples of pervasive restrictions on freedom. But which restriction hinders enlightenment and which does not, but instead actually advances it? I reply: The public use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind; the private use of reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted, without otherwise hindering the progress of enlightenment. By the public use of one's own reason I understand the use that anyone as a scholar makes of reason before the entire literate world. I call the private use of reason that which a person may make in a civic post or office that has been entrusted to him. Now in many affairs conducted in the interests of a community, a certain mechanism is required by means of which some of its members must conduct themselves in an entirely passive manner so that through an artificial unanimity the government may guide them toward public ends, or at least prevent them from destroying such ends. Here one certainly must not argue, instead one must obey. However, insofar as this part of the machine also regards himself as a member of the community as a whole, or even of the world community, and as a consequence addresses the public in the role of a scholar, in the proper sense of that term, he can most certainly argue, without thereby harming the affairs for which as a passive member he is partly responsible. Thus it would be disastrous if an officer on duty who was given a command by his superior were to question the appropriateness or utility of the order. He must obey. But as a scholar he cannot be justly constrained from making comments about errors in military service, or from placing them before the public for its judgment. The citizen cannot refuse to pay the taxes imposed on him; indeed, impertinent criticism of such levies, when they should be paid by him, can be punished as a scandal (since it can lead to widespread insubordination). But the same person does not act contrary to civic duty when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts regarding the impropriety or even injustice of such taxes. Likewise a pastor is bound to instruct his catechumens and congregation in accordance with the symbol of the church he serves, for he was appointed on that condition. But as a scholar he has complete freedom, indeed even the calling, to impart to the public all of his carefully considered and well-intentioned thoughts concerning mistaken aspects of that symbol, as well as his suggestions for the better arrangement of religious and church matters. Nothing in this can weigh on his conscience. What he teaches in consequence of his office as a servant of the church he sets out as something with regard to which he has no discretion to teach in accord with his own lights; rather, he offers it under the direction and in the name of another. He will say, "Our church teaches this or that and these are the demonstrations it uses." He thereby extracts for his congregation all practical uses from precepts to which he would not himself subscribe with complete conviction, but whose presentation he can nonetheless undertake, since it is not entirely impossible that truth lies hidden in them, and, in any case, nothing contrary to the very nature of religion is to be found in them. If he believed he could find anything of the latter sort in them, he could not in good

conscience serve in his position; he would have to resign. Thus an appointed teacher's use of his reason for the sake of his congregation is merely private, because, however large the congregation is, this use is always only domestic; in this regard, as a priest, he is not free and cannot be such because he is acting under instructions from someone else. By contrast, the cleric—as a scholar who speaks through his writings to the public as such, i.e., the world—enjoys in this public use of reason an unrestricted freedom to use his own rational capacities and to speak his own mind. For that the (spiritual) guardians of a people should themselves be immature is an absurdity that would insure the perpetuation of absurdities.

But would a society of pastors, perhaps a church assembly or venerable presbytery (as those among the Dutch call themselves), not be justified in binding itself by oath to a certain unalterable symbol in order to secure a constant guardianship over each of its members and through them over the people, and this for all time: I say that this is wholly impossible. Such a contract, whose intention is to preclude forever all further enlightenment of the human race, is absolutely null and void, even if it should be ratified by the supreme power, by parliaments, and by the most solemn peace treaties. One age cannot bind itself, and thus conspire, to place a succeeding one in a condition whereby it would be impossible for the later age to expand its knowledge (particularly where it is so very important), to rid itself of errors, and generally to increase its enlightenment. That would be a crime against human nature, whose essential destiny lies precisely in such progress; subsequent generations are thus completely justified in dismissing such agreements as unauthorized and criminal. The criterion of everything that can be agreed upon as a law by a people lies in this question: Can a people impose such a law on itself? Now it might be possible, in anticipation of a better state of affairs, to introduce a provisional order for a specific, short time, all the while giving all citizens, especially clergy, in their role as scholars, the freedom to comment publicly, i.e., in writing, on the present institution's shortcomings. The provisional order might last until insight into the nature of these matters had become so widespread and obvious that the combined (if not unanimous) voices of the populace could propose to the crown that it take under its protection those congregations that, in accord with their newly gained insight, had organized themselves under altered religious institutions, but without interfering with those wishing to allow matters to remain as before. However, it is absolutely forbidden that they unite into a religious organization that nobody may for the duration of a man's lifetime publicly question, for so doing would deny, render fruitless, and make detrimental to succeeding generations an era in man's progress toward improvement. A man may put off enlightenment with regard to what he ought to know, though only for a short time and for his own person; but to renounce it for himself, or, even more, for subsequent generations, is to violate and trample man's divine rights underfoot. And what a people may not decree for itself may still less be imposed on it by a monarch, for his lawgiving authority rests on his unification of the people's collective will in his own. If he only sees to it that all genuine or purported improvement is consonant with civil order, he can allow his subjects to do what they find necessary to their spiritual well-being, which is not his affair. However, he must prevent anyone from forcibly interfering with another's working as best he can to determine and promote his well-being. It detracts from his own majesty when he interferes in these matters, since the writings in which his subjects attempt to clarify their insights lend value to his conception of governance. This holds whether he acts from his own highest insight--whereby he calls upon himself the reproach, "Caesar non eat supra grammaticos."—as well as, indeed even more, when he despoils his highest authority by supporting the spiritual despotism of some tyrants in his state over his other subjects.

If it is now asked, "Do we presently live in an enlightened age?" the answer is, "No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment." As matters now stand, a great deal is still lacking in order for men as a whole to be, or even to put themselves into a position to be able without external guidance to apply understanding confidently to religious issues. But we do have clear indications that the way is now being opened for men to proceed freely in this direction and that the obstacles to general enlightenment—to their release from their self-imposed immaturity—are gradually diminishing. In this regard, this age is the age of enlightenment, the century of Frederick.

A prince who does not find it beneath him to say that he takes it to be his duty to prescribe nothing, but rather to allow men complete freedom in religious matters—who thereby renounces the arrogant title of tolerance—is himself enlightened and deserves to be praised by a grateful present and by posterity as the first, at least where the government is concerned, to release the human race from immaturity and to leave everyone free to use his own reason in all matters of conscience. Under his rule, venerable pastors, in their role as scholars and without prejudice to their official duties, may freely and openly set out for the world's scrutiny their judgments and views, even where these occasionally differ from the accepted symbol. Still greater freedom is afforded to those who are not restricted by an official post. This spirit of freedom is expanding even where it must struggle against the external obstacles of governments that misunderstand their own function. Such governments are illuminated by the example that the existence of freedom need not give cause for the least concern regarding public order and harmony in the commonwealth. If only they refrain from inventing artifices to keep themselves in it, men will gradually raise themselves from barbarism.

I have focused on religious matters in setting out my main point concerning enlightenment, i.e., man's emergence from self-imposed immaturity, first because our rulers have no interest in assuming the role of their subjects' guardians with respect to the arts and sciences, and secondly because that form of immaturity is both the most pernicious and disgraceful of all. But the manner of thinking of a head of state who favors religious enlightenment goes even further, for he realizes that there is no danger to his legislation in allowing his subjects to use reason publicly and to set before the world their thoughts concerning better formulations of his laws, even if this involves frank criticism of legislation currently in effect. We have before us a shining example, with respect to which no monarch surpasses the one whom we honor.

But only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no dread of shadows, yet who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous army to guarantee public peace, can say what no republic may dare, namely: "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!" Here as elsewhere, when things are considered in broad perspective, a strange, unexpected pattern in human affairs reveals itself, one in which almost everything is paradoxical. A greater degree of civil freedom seems advantageous to a people's spiritual freedom; yet the former established impassable boundaries for the latter; conversely, a lesser degree of civil freedom provides enough room for all fully to expand their abilities. Thus, once nature has removed the hard shell from this kernel for which she has most fondly cared, namely, the inclination to and vocation for free thinking, the kernel gradually reacts on a people's mentality (whereby they become increasingly able to act freely), and it finally even influences the principles of government, which finds that it can profit by treating men, who are now more than machines, in accord with their dignity.

Kant / Königsberg in Prussia, 30 September 1784

A Discussion of Historicism

A Discussion of Historicism by Thomas Albert Howard, taken from his review of "Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought," David N. Myers, Princeton Univ. Press, 2003. The review is found in *Books and Culture* <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2005/001/17.34.html>

The Burden of History

"It seems to me that the historical study of human beliefs," the British philosopher Henry Sidgwick wrote in 1886,

does tend to be connected with a general skepticism as to the validity of the doctrines studied. . . [Skepticism] partly tends to result from the historical study, because of the vast and bewildering variety of conflicting beliefs . . . which this study marshals before us. The student's own most fundamental and cherished convictions seemed forced, as it were, to step down from their secure pedestals, and take their places in the endless line that is marching past. . . Thus to the historian . . . the whole defiling train of beliefs tends to become something from which he sits apart, every portion of which has lost power to hold his own reason in the grip of true conviction.

Sidgwick summed up a sentiment felt by many in the late 19th and early 20th century: the realization that historical study had a corrosive effect on the plausibility of religious belief, that history or, more properly, modern "historicism" introduced a vertiginous relativism into human affairs, toppling with gale-like force religious verities, natural laws, moral absolutes—anything that sought to don the mantle of universalism and rise above the caprice of time, place, and social location. The theologian Ernst Troeltsch would famously define this as "the crisis of historicism."⁴

The 19th century, particularly in Germany, was the age of historicism *par excellence*. From the historical writings of Leopold von Ranke, to Hegel's philosophy of history, to the historical biblical criticism of Ferdinand Christian Baur and David Friedrich Strauss, modern thought appeared to make a fundamental break from the Christian insistence on timeless creedal truths and from the Enlightenment belief in transhistorical human reason. The effects of this break live on today—in aspects of Western jurisprudence, in postmodern theories of interpretation, and in historical study itself. One will find it in the pages of Thomas Kuhn and his disciples, from the lips of Richard Rorty, and from countless, obeisant graduate students in the humanities who have learned that exposing something to be a "historical construct" often pleases instructors and opens career paths. Historicism and its problems—although themselves products of distinct historical circumstances—appear as durable fixtures in the contemporary intellectual landscape.

But powerful countervailing and reactionary tendencies are also afoot. The Enlightenment tradition of universal human rights seems alive and well; today it's arguably the only viable global currency of moral discourse. In the academy, in fact, one often finds that the most thoroughgoing historicists can also be the most zealous defenders of universal human rights. (Emerson's lesson on hobgoblins has apparently been well heeded.⁵)

In modern Christian thought, several strategies of resistance to historicism have proven salient. One strategy might be dubbed that of subtle co-option. The archetypal case here is John Henry Newman, especially in his famous book, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), in which Newman sought to tame the historicizing forces of the 19th century by conceptualizing Christian doctrine as always in a state of providential "development." This line of thinking, many have argued, eventually paved the way for rapprochement between Catholicism and modernity at the Second Vatican Council. Another tactic against historicism comes closer to root-and-branch rejection: the position that the sacred truths of revelation can be known by faith alone, immune from profane historical knowledge. One sees this most prominently in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and, later, in Karl Barth and many of his "neo-orthodox" associates. One recent scholar has even suggested that 20th-century neo-orthodoxy and its extensive influence in modern Christian theology are best understood as an "anti-historical revolution," an attempt to rescue dogma and creedal commitment from the excesses of 19th-century historical criticism and historical theology.⁶

Lesson 2: A Brief History of Religious Pluralism

Due This Lesson

Reading Resource 1-4
Reading Resource 1-5
Questions/Important ideas
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand and be able to discuss the history of religious pluralism from ancient times to its current form as the ideology of religious pluralism
- understand the similarities and difference between religious pluralism in the Greco-Roman world and the ideology of religious pluralism in its current form
- understand why the worship of Yahweh excludes the ideology of religious pluralism
- understand why the Christian faith did not make peace with religious pluralism in the Greco-Roman world
- understand the contributions the Enlightenment and the Modern era have made to the development of religious pluralism
- define and understand the importance of historicism for the development of religious pluralism
- understand the numerous pieces that merged in the modern era to bring the ideology of religious pluralism to maturity

Homework Assignments

Read Resource 2-6.

Read Resource 2-7. Prepare a one-page response paper to this reading giving your reaction—positive and/or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church. Bring 2 copies to class.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

In 1915 the sociologist Horace Kallen, a Jewish immigrant, wrote a much-discussed article in *The Nation*, taking issue with the melting-pot vision of America. He may well be the first to use the term “pluralism” to describe an alternative vision. The article was titled, “Democracy versus the Melting Pot.” In it he argued that the “melting pot” ideal is inherently anti-democratic. It collides with America’s foundational principles. After all, one of the freedoms cherished in America is the freedom to be oneself, without erasing the distinctive features of one’s own culture. Kallen saw America’s plurality and its unity in the image of the symphony, not the melting pot. America is a symphony orchestra, sounding not unison, but in harmony, with all the distinctive tones of our many cultures. He described this as “cultural pluralism.”⁷

Dr. Diane Eck

History Overview

The Ancient Picture

The Greco-Roman World

Christendom

The Enlightenment—Age of Reason

Enlightenment River

- The period of transition from the Middle Ages to early Modernity known as the Renaissance . . . included Humanism, a movement that fostered a rebirth of learning
- The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century that split western Christianity
- The age of exploration that followed the close of the Middle Ages . . . The colossal achievements of Western culture that resulted from the Enlightenment—the formation of capitalism, the industrial revolution, and the advances of modern science
- The ascendancy of nominalism in philosophy
- The astonishing gains in the emerging empirical sciences . . . Copernicus, Galileo, Newton
- The Wars of Religion
- A loss of confidence in “divine providence”

The Importance of Historicism

One of the fruits that grew on the Enlightenment tree is “historicism.” It is “scientific method” of historical analysis—“historical criticism”—for studying cultures, religions, eras, institutions, ideas, and so on. The catalyst for its development was the Renaissance and the 17th-century scientific revolution. In his *New Science* (1725) Giambattista Vico gave to us the *verum factum*—roughly, “Just the facts” principle.

The form of historicism that contributed most to the emergence of the ideology of religious pluralism was “reductionistic”—“nothing but,” or “nothing more than.”

Historicism in this form represents a way of evaluating all claims to ultimacy, whether religious, political, philosophical, or moral. The evaluation is that not only do all institutions, all religious beliefs, all scriptures, and the values they champion, have earthly histories, that is *all they have*.

When applied to the religions of the world, historicism evaporates all claims to ultimacy, universality and finality. It supports the ideology of religious pluralism by undercutting all bases for one religion’s alleged superiority over another.

Additional Contributing Factors

In the late 19th and 20th centuries many additional factors converged to promote the emergence of religious pluralism. These factors include:

- The end of 18th- and 19th-century Western colonialism in Africa and Asia
- First-hand contact between Westerners and other cultures that came about as travel in other countries and cultures accelerated
- The work of the World Parliament of Religions
- A decline of Western confidence in its own moral and cultural superiority spurred by two world wars
- A steady expansion of the study of world religions in the curricula secondary and university education in Europe and North America
- The recent development of Postcolonial Criticism.

Mature Religious Pluralism

1. In the West there occurred an accelerated and indigenous growth of interest in Eastern cultures and religions.
2. A rapid growth of Islam
3. The magnificent success of Japanese economics, followed by that of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.
4. An explosion of writings that exposed people in the West to other regions
5. Although Vatican II (1962-65) did not support the ideology of religious pluralism, it did make place for a positive role to be played by non-Christian religions.
6. The dissemination of information and globalization of cultures ignited by the Internet have probably contributed to religious pluralism more extensively than anyone can measure.

Excerpt from an Essay on Modernity⁸

The Enlightenment" is a periodization term that applies to the mainstream of thought of 18th century Europe. The scientific and intellectual developments of the 17th century fostered the belief in natural laws and universal order and the confidence in reason which spread to influence 18th century society in Europe. These development were typified by the discoveries of Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the rationalism of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Pierre Bayle (1647-1700), the pantheism of Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) that equates god with the forces and natural laws of the universe and the empiricism of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and John Locke (1632-1704). A rational and scientific approach to religious, social, political and economic issues promoted a secular view of the world and a general sense of progress and perfectibility.

The proponents of the Enlightenment were of one mind on certain basic attitudes, and sought to discover and act on universally valid principles governing humanity, nature and society. They attacked spiritual and scientific authority, dogmatism, intolerance, censorship and economic and social constraints. They considered the state the proper and rational instrument of progress. In England, Lockean theories of learning by sense perception were carried forward by David Hume (1711-16). The philosophical view of rational man in harmony with the universe set the climate for the "laissez-faire" economics of Adam Smith (1723-90) and for the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) of the greatest good for the greatest number. Historical writing gained secular detachment in the work of Edward Gibbon (1737-94). In Germany, the universities became centers of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86) set forth a doctrine of rational process; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), whom Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) credited as having placed the young poet in the true path, advanced a natural religion of morality; J G Herder (1744-1803) developed a philosophy of cultural nationalism. The supreme importance of the individual formed the basis of the ethics of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). The movement received strong support of the rising bourgeoisie and vigorous opposition from the high clergy and the nobility.

The strongest claim by the West on modernity is derived from ideas and concepts generally grouped under the category of the Enlightenment. These are ideas that were developed during the half a century preceding the French Revolution, between 1740 and 1789, known in history as the Age of Enlightenment. It was at the time that the idea of progress gained popular acceptance in the West. It was a time when Europeans emerged from a long twilight, from which the past was considered barbaric and dark. This was the age of enlightened thinkers, known as *philosophes*, and enlightened despots.

The idea of the Enlightenment was drawn from earlier sources, carried over from the old philosophy of natural law, which held that right depends on a universal reason, not on local conditions or on the will or perspective of any person or group. It carried over, from the intellectual revolution of the previous century, the ideas of Bacon and Locke, Descartes and Newton, Bayle and Spinoza. It was antagonistic and skeptical toward tradition, confident in the powers of science and places faith firmly in the regularity of nature. Its most serious shortcoming was the assumption that European values derived from European experience were universal truth and that such truth gave license to world dominance: the rest of the world, to escape domination and

exploitation, must adopt Western ways of militarism and exploitation. The modernization of Japan was a perfect example of this trend.

The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment were mostly popularizers, in an age when the great books were not read by the public. They reworded the ideas of past civilizations in ways that held the interest of the growing reading public. These *philosophes* were primarily men of letters, exemplified by Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778), who made fortunes and gained fame with his writings. They differed from intellectuals of the past who were mostly proteges of aristocratic or royal patrons or clerics in the Church.

The emergence of a literate middle class made such freelancers possible. Naturally, as most writers who enjoy popularity write what their audiences like to hear, what economist John Galbraith calls "conventional wisdom", the Enlightenment authors mostly wrote to enhance the political and economic interests of the bourgeoisie. Most of the works produced during this period focused on the catalogue and organization of information, made entertaining with wit and lightness. This was the age of the *salon literati*, of clever one-upmanship and satire, full of innuendos and sly digs, particularly insider jokes understood only by the enlightened few. Voltaire attacked European society by making fun not of the French, but by stereotyping the Persians, the Iroquois and the Chinese.

Frederick the Great of Prussia was regarded as an eminent *philosophe* through his friendship with Voltaire, whose style he emulated, as was Catherine the Great of Russia (1762-96). While Maria Teresa of Austria (1740-80) was not a *philosophe* on account of her piety, her son Joseph, brother of the ill-fated Marie-Antoinette of France (1755-93), worked hard to become one, as a patron of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In England, Bishop Warburton (1698-1779) tried to become one by claiming that the Church of England as a social institution was exactly what pure reason would have invented. Edward Gibbon (1737-94), whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* summarized the millennium following the birth of Christ as "the triumph of barbarism and religion", much as the centuries after the Renaissance are summarized today as the triumph of capitalistic democracy over socialist revolutions as a religious truth. Gibbon was counted as a *philosophe* for his secular outlook.

Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was not considered a *philosophe*. He was fascinated by the supernatural, adhered to the established church, deflated pretentious authors, even declared Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) "bad men" who should be sent to the plantations in America.

The Enlightenment was in essence French, a product of sophisticated Parisian *salons* run by the likes of Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV, lubricated by the liberal flow of French champagne. Denis Diderot (1713-84) was not only a card-carrying *philosophe*, his *Encyclopedie* was described as a "reasoned dictionary" written by a distinguished list of other *philosophes* who went on to enjoy the awesome rank of Encyclopedists. Another group of *philosophes* was the Physiocrats, whom critics derisively called "economists" who concerned themselves with fiscal and monetary reform, with measures to increase the national wealth of France. Among the Physiocrats were Francois Quesnay (1694-1774), physician to Louis XV (1715-74), and Dupont de Nemour (1739-1817), whose descendants became the US industrial/chemical Dupont family.

The three giants of the *philosophes* were Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau. Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu (1533-92), a landed aristocrat, was a defender of his class interest. Among his associates was the Count of Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), who held that French nobility was descended from a superior Germanic race, a view that contributed to the emergence of racism in the West.

In his *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), Montesquieu developed two principal ideas. One was that forms of government varied according to climate and circumstances, for example that despotism was suited more to large empires in hot climates and that democracy only would work in small city-states. Thus democracy is inconsistent with the idea of empire. The other idea was the separation and balance of powers. In France, he believed that power should be divided between the king and a number of "intermediate bodies" - parliaments, provincial estates, organized nobility, chartered towns, and even the church. It was natural for Montesquieu, a judge in parliament, a provincial and a landed nobleman, and reasonable for him to recognize the position of the bourgeoisie of the towns, but as for the Church he observed that while he took no stock in its teachings, he thought it useful as an offset to undue centralization of government. Montesquieu admired the unwritten English constitution as he understood it, not for its democratic qualities but in believing that England carried over, more successfully than any other European country, the feudal liberties of the Middle Ages. To Montesquieu, government should be a mixture of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, a term representing the interests of the bourgeoisie, not the general population and definitely not workers and peasants.

The ideas of Montesquieu were well known to the drafters of the US constitution, who, because the United States at that time had no history of social institutions besides slavery, distorted the meaning of democracy and the separation of powers as defined by Montesquieu to create a political structure peculiarly suited only to US conditions. Those who now claim that the US version of democracy is a heritage of the Enlightenment universally suited for all humankind have been highly selective in their understanding of history.

Strictly speaking, the modern world arrived in the 18th and 19th centuries with the transfer of power from the aristocracy and the absolutist kings (Louis XIV in France and James I in England) to the upper middle classes - the elite bourgeoisie. The upper middle classes were represented by constitutional assemblies, legislatures, and parliaments, which took power away from the kings and aristocrats by violent revolutions or by reform legislation: England (1688, 1830s), the United States (1776), France (1789, 1830, 1848, 1870), Canada (1840s and 1850s), and Germany (1848, 1918). Japan embarked on a deliberate program of "modernization" in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

The shift of power was accompanied by the Industrial Revolution and liberal, or free-enterprise, economic theory (*laissez faire*), the economic counterpart of the middle-class political revolutions. Critiques of this modern, elitist middle-class, democratic, and *laissez-faire* industrial system emerged at various points in the 19th century, most notably in Marxist and other socialist movements. Although these movements of the working people were critical of the upper-middle-class entrepreneurs who led the 18th century and early 19th century "modern" revolutions, Marxists and other socialists remained modern in most of their assumptions. Thorough-going critique of the modern world view and its rational-scientific outlook, its rationally organized economic production system, and its rationally centralized bureaucratic politics did not

emerge until the late 19th century and early 20th century. Such critique came at first only from philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), scientists such as Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and artists and writers. Only in the late 20th century did such postmodern critique become widespread. For most people in the 1980s, in Europe and North America and increasingly around the world, modern ways of life dominated, although intellectuals had been attacking or reinterpreting modern views for some time.

One way to understand Western modernity is to look at countervailing social, political and religious manifestations. As anthropologists, sociologists and historians have studied the "traditional village societies" that survived in a few remote areas of Europe and in non-Western cultures, they have learned much about the nature of the modern Western world view. The very name "traditional society" focuses on what is perhaps the most important single aspect. "Modern" means "now" - a world view focusing on the now, on the latest, on the newest and the most dominant. A traditional society takes "handed down" things (Latin *tradita*) as its starting point and modifies them slowly even as it tries to be faithful to the inherited ideas and customs. A modern world view implicitly assumes the superiority of the latest and newest as liberating and expansive, and almost invariably scorns the old-fashioned as constrictive and oppressive. The confrontation of the non-Western world with the ascending West that turned out to be aggressively intrusive, and the rationalization of victimization as a deserved fate of not being modern, has affected the development of the non-Western world, particularly the ancient cultures found in China, India and the Middle East. It forced these cultures to reject age-old values that had evolved from centuries of struggle toward harmony to adopt the new barbarism of domination, militarism and racism to survive.

The Tower of Babel: Modernity built the tower— now postmodernity must face the challenge of condemning the “unsafe structure.”⁹

By Michael Horton

Our Time is the epithet David Wells attaches to modernity and its postmodern successor. Princeton philosopher Diogenes Allen declared, “A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages.”¹⁰ It is a shift that shapes every intellectual discipline as well as the practice of law, medicine, politics, and religion in our culture. This article will serve as a basic introduction to a topic that has become paramount in every university discipline at the present time: the collapse of the modern world-view and its much-hailed successor: postmodernism.

Theologian Thomas Oden argues that “modernity” began with the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989,¹¹ while art philosopher Charles Jencks decided to be even more specific: It ended at 3:32 p. m. on July 15, 1972, “when the Pruitt-Ingoe housing development in St. Louis (a prize-winning version of Le Corbusier’s “machine for modern living”) was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it housed.”¹² Obviously a lot of people have their own opinions about when the shoe dropped, but most agree that it was fairly recently.

In both of these attempts at fixing a time-line, however, we have a window on the character of this period we call “modernity.” Why did Oden, for instance, choose the storming of the Bastille as the beginning of the period? The French Revolution was one of a number of revolutions that sought to remake the world from scratch. Universal reason, progress, and planning would eventually create the perfect society in spite of the great costs in terms of genocide as a means to arriving at the gates of Utopia. Not only economically exhausted, but spiritually weary, the Soviet empire collapsed under its own weight. It is true that the United States “spent” the Soviet government out of business, but the spiritual and philosophical issues underlying the collapse are far more significant. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it marked the end of the naive optimism toward ideological movements. Perhaps Utopia would have to wait after all.

But Jencks also gives us a vista from which to view the identity of “modernity.” From the architectural side of things he reminds us of the silliness of it all. Taking itself far too seriously, ideology, art, politics, religion, education—everything—was drafted into service to the Great Idea. Humility has not been a major characteristic of this era, as human beings have come to believe that they can control the earthly environment and their own destiny, collectively and individually, through technology, politics, military power, and science. That is why Jencks saw the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis as a marker.

A “machine for living,” this highly-rationalized and carefully-crafted environment actually ended up being uninhabitable. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, everyone from scientists to artists tended to view the world in mechanical terms, so that even one’s home could be considered a “machine” that “fixes” social ills. The building’s

demolition, like the collapse of the Berlin Wall, marked the end of the “engineered society.” Or did it?

That is the question. Many would argue that modernity has not really ended and that it has actually accelerated, so that even those who decry modernity the most and wear the label “postmodern” proudly, are often actually hyper-modern in their outlook. This seems to make a great deal of sense when, for instance, so-called “postmodernists” fail to realize that the label itself assumes the idea of progress, one of modernity’s cherished dogmas that has come under sharp fire by postmodern academics.

But what is it? What is modernity and why is there such a reaction to it? Where is the church in all of this and how does our faith relate to this massive upheaval in human thought during our own lifetime? Let’s begin with the first question: Defining modernity.

Some people think in more visual than conceptual terms (a postmodern influence), so one way of looking at the modern worldview is to picture Rockefeller Center, city projects, and tract homes. Each in its own way reveals the modern spirit. Modern architecture tends to accent order. Driving down some of the major streets in Washington, D. C., one can see these towers of modernity dominating on either side. Modernity created these large business-like buildings with little embellishments for a reason. Unlike an old Victorian town square in the Midwest or a Bavarian village, there is no distinct local style. One could be in New York, Nairobi, Singapore, or Sao Paulo and have to look at one’s travel itinerary to remember where one is in the morning at the modern hotel. While many styles throughout history have been primarily regional and distinctive, the modern style is global, and it is part of a culture that is obsessed with doing business, making money, selling things, and engineering the New World. The buildings say that.

Tract homes say that, too. Organized, well-planned communities are part of the modern world-view. Mobility has already uprooted us from our ancestral places, so our new “communities” are also landmarks of the modern world-view. Each home is basically the same as the next, convenience being more important than charm.

Others, perhaps less visual, may think of modernity in sociological terms. Having already mentioned mobility and rapid transportation (which already makes one feel somewhat rootless), there is also the technological revolution. Neil Postman’s *Technopoly* has explored this with such fascinating detail and entertaining prose that every reader of this article should pick up a copy at the next available opportunity. We all assume that technology is a friend, Postman says, for two reasons.

First, technology is a friend. It makes life easier, cleaner, and longer. Can anyone ask more of a friend? Second, because of its lengthy, intimate, and inevitable relationship with culture, technology does not invite a close examination of its own consequences. It is the kind of friend that asks for trust and obedience, which most people are inclined to give because its gifts are truly bountiful. But, of course, there is a dark side to this friend. Its gifts are not without a heavy costIt creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living. Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy.¹³

Expressing the dissatisfaction with modernity is Sting's "If I Ever Lose My Faith In You":

You could say I lost my faith in science and progress.
You could say I lost my belief in the holy church.
You could say I lost my sense of direction.
I never saw no miracle of science
That didn't go from a blessing to a curse.
I never saw no military solution
That didn't always end up with something worse...

It is the confidence in the machine, in organized labor, management, and distribution; in science, technology, social and material progress; in consumerism and marketing and in the strength of economic systems to liberate the human spirit (whether capitalism or communism). This is a large aspect of what is called "modernity." Let us look at some of the most obvious features from a more philosophical perspective.

Modernity arose with the triumph of the Enlightenment. The Renaissance and the Reformation had previously unleashed powerful forces toward liberty, civil rights, the freedom of the secular spheres to operate independently of the church, and had given birth to the rise of modern science, education, and universal literacy. However, the Protestant Reformers were just as insistent as the Roman Church on the importance of authority. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) meant that the Church could never have the last word, but that the final place for hearing the voice of God was in the pages of Holy Writ. Carefully interpreting the sacred text, the church was supposed to appeal to gifted teachers to instruct the faithful (and all of them, not just the devoted monks and clergy) in the great truths of the Faith. Individualism was not tolerated, as the Reformers criticized the many sects of their day for their disregard of the institutional church. However, much changed when Rene Descartes (1596-1650) put forward his famous formula, *Cogito ergo sum*—"I think. Therefore, I am."

Foundationalism

Devoted to rationalism, Descartes insisted upon absolute philosophical certainty. There must be a way of knowing things beyond any doubt, Descartes insisted, and therefore he sought a foundation for grounding all human knowledge. That foundation was universal reason. Like Plato, Descartes believed that instead of the world shaping the mind, the mind shaped the world. In other words, when I observe a "dog," I attribute characteristics of "dogness" that I already have formed in my mind. Immanuel Kant followed Descartes in this watershed, but was, in his words, "awakened from my dogmatic slumbers" in rationalism by the British empiricist David Hume (1711-76). Hume insisted that the only universal foundation for knowledge was empirical observation. While Descartes and Kant were busy with their rational "ideas" of "dogness," Hume wanted to study the dog without any presuppositions—starting from scratch, if you will, building his idea of "dogness" from the dog itself instead of the other way around. Kant's later work, therefore, blended rationalism and empiricism. For instance, he argued that there were two realms of knowledge: the "noumenal" and the "phenomenal." To the former class belongs faith, since he believed that it could not be rationally or empirically demonstrated. Much of philosophy and especially science, however, belong to the phenomenal realm, since they rested on evidence or deductions that had something to do with reason or observation.

Kant went on believing in God and some aspects of his pietistic upbringing simply because he could not conceive of the possibility of morality apart from such a presupposition. If we must live as if God exists, then he most likely does, said Kant. But from then on, faith would be regarded as outside the realm of rational inquiry. It would become a synonym for “blind leap.” In fact, Lessing spoke of his own wrestling with the question of faith and reason in terms of a “ditch” that was widening before him. Hume at least had the temerity to suggest that there was no such thing as this “noumenal” business. “Knowledge”—if that word means anything at all—cannot include mystical leaps or a priori judgments. It must be based on empirical observation, and if in our universal experience we know that resurrections simply do not occur, then it would be foolish to make room in our thought for such a preposterous possibility of that having happened in first-century Palestine. He was rigorously consistent, except when he applied his own empiricism to his own beliefs. Christianity could not be true—not because its historical truth-claims had been falsified—but because miracles simply do not happen. In other words, it was a presupposition, an *a priori* assumption: the very thing Hume abhorred.

To simplify, there are two major effects of this shift: First, Enlightenment rationalists and empiricists both claimed the possibility of absolute certainty. Either by deduction (rationalism) or by induction (empiricism), the knower could attain certitude. This gave modern men and women a tremendous confidence—indeed, arrogance—in their powers to rebuild the world from scratch on a universal foundation of knowledge. Even religion, now, could be explained in terms of the “universal ideas” that are common to them all. The result was the modern university’s “religion department,” where Christianity, Buddhism, and fern worship are all studied “comparatively” in order to find the common threads. Those common threads, of course, are simply part of the universal reason that underlies foundationalism. Postmodernism, as we will see, is doing us a favor by dismantling this approach by calling into question that possibility of some grand explanation above these other explanations. Christians believe that biblical revelation is the grand explanation (in postmodern parlance, the “metanarrative”), not merely the best religious expression of natural religion.

Second, foundationalism made the individual self central. The rationalist, born out of “I think, therefore, I am,” made the knower the center of the universe. My own individual mind is competent to form ideas of what the world is like. Like an ice-cube tray, my ideas could provide a secure grid for understanding everything—apart from revelation or the church. The empiricist at least turned the focus from the subjective knower thinking and chasing its tail in one’s own mind to the observable world outside. Gravity is a reality apart from the mind. It is not merely an “idea” the mind imposes on reality, but the nature of reality itself, and the only way we can come to know that reality is by adjusting our ideas to suit the nature of the case. Nevertheless, it was still the knower who was central, and revelation, tradition and community were simply not factors in the modern experiment.

One can see how this led to related ideas that have been remaking our civilization for the last three centuries. First, there is the notion of “progress.”

Progress

The roots of this modern idea actually reach back into the Middle Ages. Joachim of Fiore, an imaginative monk, wrote a commentary on *The Revelation* that enjoyed widespread popularity—except among the clergy, and for good reason. It was heretical. The Age of the Father (Old Testament) was superseded by the Age of the

Son (New Testament), and at any moment the Age of the Spirit would dawn. In this age, there would be no need for the Bible, sacraments, or the church, and Joachim's Gnostic bent becomes obvious here. The Anabaptists picked up on this influence at the time of the Reformation, challenging the Reformers for "chaining" the Holy Spirit to a book, water, bread and wine, and an institution called "the church." Instead, they insisted that they themselves represented the Age of the Spirit and were prophets of the New World.

Petrarch, a Renaissance mystic, also picked up on this idea and predicted the soon arrival of this age when all of the world's religions would be united. One can see the idea of progress in this scheme. Of course, much of modernity is simply a bastardization of Christianity. After all, the Christian view of history makes the idea of progress possible. In Eastern Religion, history is cyclical, anchored in reincarnation. But in biblical religion, it is linear—always looking forward. Eve looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise of a Messiah, as did the patriarchs and prophets. Even after Christ's advent and ascension, we are still looking forward to the Second Coming, final resurrection, the restoration of creation, and eternal life with God. The triumph of evil lies in the future: this is a Christian hope. But modernity hijacked the idea, and instead of waiting for God to act, it decided to usher in the Consummation by substituting redemption with progress.

The plot thickens with the arrival of G. F. W. Hegel (1770-1831), who pushed Joachim of Fiore's vision of an Age of the Spirit to the limits. Although still claiming to be a Christian who was making the faith relevant to an increasingly skeptical modern age, Hegel's idea of God was "the Absolute." The evolution and progress of history was God! It was the Spirit triumphing over matter, good winning out over evil. And the way history made its route toward Utopia was in a zig-zag pattern, from thesis, to antithesis (its opposite) and finally synthesis.

To adopt this confidence in progress, one has to presuppose that human nature is basically good, and this the moderns did without difficulty. Evil structures and institutions are to blame, and Rousseau's "noble savage" is captured in Gauguin's famous paintings of Tahitian natives. Rousseau once wrote, "Savage man, when he has dined, is at peace with nature, and the friend of his fellow creatures The case is quite different with man in the state of society Nature made man happy and good, and society depraves him and makes him miserable."¹⁴ It is this world-view that gave birth to twins who, in spite of their Cain-and-Abel rivalry, were both deeply shaped by this outlook: Marxism and Capitalism. Economic structures would liberate the human spirit and bring progress until finally evil would be vanquished. Whether the proletariat or the "Invisible Hand of the Marketplace," modernity would achieve Utopia. A devotee to Hegel and a great admirer of the Anabaptists, Karl Marx (1818-1883) believed that history was moving toward the abolition of church and state. Of course, this would first have to be achieved by its very opposite: totalitarianism, but this fit perfectly within a Hegelian framework. Even capitalism, Marx believed, was a positive development toward the ultimate end of communism. Opposites attract. When the "prophets" are filled with "holy zeal," even genocide may be necessary to achieve the proper ends. It was not Stalin, but Rousseau, who declared, "Mankind will have to be forced to be free." Order will not just "happen," and the modern age is obsessed with order, from totalitarian regimes to the planning of communities of tract homes. The enlightened prophets always know best, and however much they rebelled against the tyranny of the church and wars of religion, far more bloodshed and anguish followed on the heels of their apocalyptic dreams.

It was this basic orientation that inspired the prophets of the modern world in Europe and America. In the United States, pragmatism was promulgated by William James (1842-1910). In a modern world, where the machine is the key paradigm, whatever works is the test of truth. John Dewey (1859-1952), father of modern education, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), father of psychology, and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), father of sociology, developed entirely new disciplines based on the modern world-view and its spirit of independence from religion and authority. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) seemed to provide modernity with the proof for its experiment in progress with his Hegelian version of biological evolution. These disciplines would provide certainty at last and serve humanity in the goal of universal knowledge and progress. Where theology once provided the "big picture," a unified way of viewing distinct disciplines, fragmentation began to take place in understanding the world and the self. Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern liberal theology, attempted to reconcile Christianity with modernity, but in the process left the church with nothing to say that was not being said (almost always sooner) by everybody else. Truth is found by looking within, Schleiermacher argued, in the feelings rather than in revelation.

Individualism

With the self (i.e., the "knower") at the center of the universe, modernity attacked authority, institutions, tradition, and community and instead set up its own authoritarianism, centralized bureaucracies, marketplace whims, and individualist tastes.

Unfortunately, much of the orthodox Christian response to all of this has been to either conform in the interest of "relevance," or to simply react and bury one's head in the sand as if the Enlightenment had never happened. Whatever his failures in terms of coming fully to an orthodox position, Karl Barth (1886-1968), himself a liberal who became disenchanted with modernity, launched the most unrelenting barrage of artillery against modern liberalism since the triumph of modernity itself. Alexander Pope had declared, "The proper study of Man is Man." But Barth recoiled at this idea he had once happily embraced. Humanity is not at the center, Barth insisted; God is at the center, and we do not learn the truth about him, about ourselves, or about redemption, from either deducing things from our rational "ideas" or by observation of the natural world. Christianity does not simply echo the best in the world's religions, united by "universal reason" or "universal experience": It totally contradicts reason and experience. We don't find God, Barth demanded, but God finds us.

We can understand the over-reaction, but it was an over-reaction. While Barth was correct to insist upon the God-centered character of revelation and redemption, Romans 1 and 2 especially seem to point us in the direction of recognizing that even unbelievers can have true knowledge of God apart from biblical revelation. The problem is that they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The last thing Barth should have done, in this writer's opinion, is to have attacked modernity by standing on its foundation, established by Kant. Barth accepted the idea that faith was opposed to reason and in this acceptance of a key tenet of the Enlightenment, he could not refute the most fundamental problem between Christianity and the modern world.

Individualism, pragmatism, order, progress—all built on the supposedly universal foundation of reason and experience: These became the warp and woof of modern existence that reigned unchallenged until recently.

Even as they were building the Tower of Babel, many of its architects were aware that something was missing. Marx declared, "All that is solid melts into the air" in the modern world, and Nietzsche spoke of a "weightless" existence following the "death of God." Yeats poetically announced, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Barth remarked,

The new thing in Nietzsche was the man of "azure isolation," six thousand feet above time and man; the man to whom a fellow-creature drinking at the same well is quite dreadful and insufferable; the man who is utterly inaccessible to others, having no friends and despising women; the man who is at home only with eagles and strong winds; . . . the man beyond good and evil, who can only exist as a consuming fire.¹⁵

More than anything else, the Enlightenment was an adolescent's rebellion against his parents' religion. Colin Gunton observes, "The distinctive shape of modernity's disengagement from the world is derived from its rebellion against Christian theology. In that sense, there is something new under the sun. Modern disengagement is disengagement from the God of Christendom."¹⁶ This is why Vaclav Havel warned that the foundation of the West is exactly the same as that of the East, and our future is their present: "I believe that with the loss of God, man has lost a kind of absolute and universal system of coordinates, to which he could always relate everything, chiefly himself. His world and his personality gradually began to break up into separate, incoherent fragments corresponding to different, relative, coordinates." This makes the breakdown in a coherent theological system within evangelical Christianity (the part of Christendom that at least claims to still be clinging to the historic faith) all the more serious.

Lesson 3: The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism

Due This Lesson

Reading Resource 2-5
Response paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand the characteristics of modernity
- understand why modernity's trust in reason fostered a suspicion of religion in all its forms
- understand why many modern thinkers dismissed religion as a retardant to human progress, and thereby relegated it to the margins of life
- understand how modernity could in some ways undercut the claims of any religion to be the "true" one

Homework Assignments

Read Resource 3-3. Write a one-page response paper giving your reaction—positive and or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

The following story appeared in *The Washington Times* on December 8, 2002. "Suit Seeks to Allow Wiccan's Invocation," written by Mary Shaffrey.

The Virginia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is suing the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors for refusing to allow a Wiccan leader to give the invocation at the start of its meetings.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Richmond and says the Board of Supervisors is violating the constitutional ban on state-sponsored religion by denying Wiccan priestess Cynthia Simpson the opportunity to offer an invocation.

The lawsuit also says the board's policy violates the constitutional guarantee of equal protection. "They are supposed to be making laws, not theological judgments," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, which has joined in the suit with the ACLU. "They do not believe Wicca to be a religion like Christianity, but government officials cannot be making these decisions."

The board regularly opens its meetings with a voluntary invocation by a leader of a Judeo-Christian denomination. Earlier this year, Miss Simpson asked the board of supervisors to allow her to give an invocation. She was denied. "Chesterfield's nonsectarian invocations are traditionally made to a divinity that is consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition," wrote Chesterfield County Attorney Steven Micas in a letter to Miss Simpson denying her request.

A Profile of Modernity

Modernity is often spoken of as “the Enlightenment Project,” so named by philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1929-). It was the human intellectual quest to unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit, and to create a better world

The characteristics of modernity, as Neo sees them are:¹⁷

1. Conquest and control
2. The age of the machine
3. An age of analysis
4. An age of secular science
5. An age that aspired to absolute objectivity
6. A critical age
7. An age of the modern nation-states and organization
8. An age of individualism
9. An age of Protestantism and institutional religion
10. An age of consumerism

Modernity's Contribution to the Emergence of Religious Pluralism

1. In the centers of greatest philosophical, political, economic, cultural, scientific and intellectual power, religion in all its forms was more and more reduced to the "inconsequential" margins of human life.
2. Many moderns believed that through the use of the newly acquired tools of historical analysis, the truth about all religions, their founders, their *cultus*, and their scriptures had been exposed.
3. Wherever this conclusion holds, the power of any religion to claim that it is the "true" religion above all others has been broken.
4. Characteristically, then, to the extent that religion has any public role at all, it should produce good citizens that can contribute to the peace of the realm.
5. This being true, the public square is certainly no place for religions to debate their superiority.

The Tower of Babel: Modernity Built the Tower— Now Postmodernity Must Face the Challenge of Condemning the “Unsafe Structure.”¹⁸

By Michael Horton

Postmodernism

It is against this backdrop that a tidal wave of criticism has broken on the shores of the once-cheerful beaches of “enlightenment.” After two world wars “to end all wars,” existentialism began to turn on modernity with a vengeance. Confidence was lost in the project, and no longer was Utopia seen as an attainable goal. Perhaps suicide is the best way out, Sartre declared.

But those who have opted for less terminal solutions include Jacques Derrida and a host of “postmodern deconstructionists” who have wed Marxist ideas to existentialist despair. Ironic, isn’t it? That architects of modernity—Marx, Freud, James, Dewey, et. al.—would be regarded as offering solutions to the problems they helped to create is a sign of our bankruptcy. Where does our culture go for answers? Derrida, Lyotard and other deconstructionists have argued that we are all involved in “language games,” and that Nietzsche was correct in his assertion that all human intercourse is part of the “will to power.” Language, we are told, is an instrument of cleverly disguised oppression, and this has been most fully exploited by academics interested in advancing various forms of Marxist ideology—Liberation Theology, feminism, etc. Words do not really mean anything in themselves, but in reading between the lines we can at least anticipate the next move of our opponent. Called the “hermeneutic of suspicion,” deconstructionism maintains that there are no norms for meaning and human language.

The idea of progress, too, has taken some serious hits in recent decades. However, the idea that evil institutions are responsible for corruption rather than sinful human nature and the possibility of engineering a good society through pragmatism and ideology dies hard. It is difficult to determine whether “postmodernism” is actually “modernism” at warp speed. Whether you are a student taking upper-division philosophy or a homemaker trying to figure out why the ground seems to be moving right underneath you while you are trying to raise your kids, this topic is terribly relevant. In order to be disciples of our Lord, we must be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Before we can “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5), we must first have thoughts and attempt to understand other thoughts out there that present themselves as rivals. This is not easy to do, of course, but neither is any other aspect of our discipleship. Conversion does not give us an instantly renewed mind any more than it provides us with an instant victory over our sinful affections or actions. Our marriage to Christ, like an ancient marriage between princes of allied nations, is a declaration of war on all that would oppose the peace, liberty and advancement of Christ[Otilde]s kingdom. May we be given the grace and the resolve to “gird up the loins of [our] minds” (1 Pt 1:13, KJV), in this age of unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

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Part II

Where Now? Suggestions for the Way Forward

Culture wars have set cultural conservatives against cultural liberals, those who support “Judeo-Christian” principles against “secular humanists.” However, as these articles have attempted to show, the convulsions are much deeper beneath the crust of politics, morality and entertainment. By ignoring these deeper issues, the tectonic plates beneath our civilization continue to shift while we chase the ambulances and try to rescue victims here and there.

Before proceeding, it is essential that we understand that however valiantly we may be engaged in “culture wars,” we are certainly not offering any serious challenge to secularism. If, as we have seen, secularism is really worldliness and that form of worldliness that we call “modernity,” then contemporary Christians conservatives as well as liberals are almost equally culpable. Contrary to popular sentiments, recent evangelical efforts at combatting secularism are not having any long-term success in pulling the culture out of its determined course toward a new dark ages. We may think that our conservative activism is an attack on secularism, but evangelical Christianity is as captivated by modernity as liberal Protestantism. Let me offer some examples.

Relativism and Fragmentation

If modernity is architecturally illustrated by a ten-story granite federal building, a government housing project and tract homes, postmodernism is architecturally symbolized in the average shopping mall. Instead of order, unity and planned conformity, the mall celebrates conflicting styles. One store looks nothing like the one next to it, in contrast to the old malls built in the ‘60s and ‘70s, where only the sign distinguished the department stores in a mall. As Peter Fuller put it, “The west front of Wells Cathedral, the Parthenon pediment, the plastic and neon signs of Caesar’s palace, Las Vegas, even the hidden intricacies of a Mies van der Rohe curtain wall: all are equally ‘interesting.’”¹⁹

But is this not the approach that many evangelical Christians take to truth as well? What happens, for instance, when questions about worship style are raised? Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” and Kendrick’s “Shine, Jesus, Shine!” are both equally ‘interesting.’ One may attend a successful Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, Roman Catholic, mainline liberal, conservative evangelical, charismatic or non-charismatic service and find the same sermon and “worship experience.” That is not because the Spirit has breathed some new unity into his fragmented body, but is itself a part of the fragmentation of the age. In other words, there are no doctrinal or liturgical distinctives anymore precisely because few of these churches take such things seriously. It is not the unity of the Spirit, but the unity of the marketplace, that has determined the homogeneity of these groups. They are all patterning their preaching, worship and outreach to the consumer trends. When it comes to morality, some of these leaders will happily employ Allan Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*, apparently unaware that the author’s arguments against the “dumbing down” of the nation in the interest of peace, harmony and “sensitivity” is precisely the same trend one observes in these successful churches today.

Human-Centered Orientation & Belief in Human Nature

Here, Karl Barth's criticisms of Protestant liberalism sound like the criticisms we often make of contemporary evangelicalism. The tendency of the human heart is toward Pelagianism—the ancient heresy of self-salvation. We believe in ourselves and in our potential to “pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.” Eighty-six percent of America's evangelical Protestants believe that in salvation, “God helps those who help themselves,” and seventy-seven percent of evangelicals believe that humans are, by nature, basically good. This means that the great majority of evangelical Christians in this country are, in ancient terms, Pelagian, and in modern terms, secular. The irony of the evangelical attack on “secular humanism” was indelibly stamped on my mind when Robert Schuller suggested to me that we work together in confronting a common enemy: secular humanism. This from the man who said that the Reformation erred because it was God-centered rather than human-centered.

From this human-centered orientation, we see the flowering of a human-centered diet in preaching and Christian discourse. For instance, the average Christian bookstore is dominated by books on the horizontal dimension of life: “Christian” tips on self-esteem, recovery, child-rearing, personal fitness, happiness, success and political victory. Replacing theology with ethics and Christ with moralism was once the thing that liberals did best. Even evangelism—the place where one might expect a thoroughly God-centered, Christ-centered message—is often couched in human-centered language: “Here's what God will do for you if you say ‘yes.’ “ I am expecting one day in the not so distant future to hear an evangelist promise, “Try God. And if you're not completely satisfied, simply return the unused portion for a full refund.” Everything, from the Law to the Gospel, is “sold” for its usefulness to the “buyer,” not because the Law is the expression of God's personal character and the Gospel the expression of his saving intention.

The “Me Generation” is now in power, in Washington, DC, where rebellion against authority and tradition have now taken on a more respectable aura than the campus revolutions of the '60s. The evangelical activists have emphasized this '60s-rooted rebellion, but what they fail to realize it seems is the fact that the evangelical movement itself is a massive rebellion against authority (creeds, confessions, the institutional church, church discipline, etc.) and tradition (theology, liturgy and classic hymns). While James Dobson might remind us of the disastrous effects of Stanford's radical student cheer, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civilization has got to go,” the same tradition of our western religious inheritance in the ancient church and the Reformation is being cheerfully thrown out of the conservative evangelical churches. And why? For the same reason the radicals disdained the rest of western culture: **It is old.** It is “irrelevant,” “impractical,” “constraining” and “confining.” It does not allow us to “express ourselves” in freedom. The same sentiments that lead liberals to abandon “traditional values” leads conservatives to abandon “traditional worship.” Recently I was reading through some church growth literature and under the section on “values,” a number of the megachurches stated that, at the top of the list, “We value individualism and personal expression. We don't want to tie people down to doctrines, rituals and rules.”

The “therapeutic revolution,” as Philip Reiff called it, transformed the mainline churches into Freudian or Jungian citadels, but now evangelicals are pop-psychology's greatest admirers, and this just at the time *Newsweek* announces the passing of the latest trend in banality in a cover story, “The Cult of Self-Esteem.” Liberalism—or, more broadly, secularism—is always carried out with the best of intentions by

spiritually-motivated people. In Germany, liberalism was championed by those (mostly pietists) who sought to make Christianity relevant by recasting it in modern terms. It was called "evangelism" and "apologetics," but it was secularism just the same. Modernity's narcissistic self-preoccupation is alive and well in the evangelical community. If the evangelical activists can lament the ascendancy of the "Me Generation" in Washington, surely the rest of us can also lament the ascendancy of the "Me Generation" in the leadership of the evangelical movement.

The Power of Pragmatism

William James, the father of America's unique philosophical contribution, pragmatism, belongs to "modernity," and yet "postmodern" philosophers such as Richard Rorty have revived him for their project. Once again, "postmodern" may simply mean "modernity" at warp speed. Peter Fuller writes, "Postmodernism knows no commitments: it takes up what one of its leading exponents, Charles Jencks, once called a 'situational position,' in which 'no code is inherently better than any other.'" ²⁰ That is why the College de France's report on French education summarized the problem thusly: "We live in the age of feelings. Today there is no more truth or falsehood, no stereotype or innovation, no beauty or ugliness, but only an infinite array of pleasures, all different and all equal."²¹ William James himself said that the test of a truth is "its cash-value in experiential terms."

But before we get too high-and-mighty, we must realize that this is the prevailing sentiment in the churches, whether conservative evangelical or liberal Protestant. The charismatic movement is not founded on a revolutionary exegesis of relevant biblical passages; it is simply in step with modernity and postmodern intensification of pragmatic sentimentalism. Even in conservative circles one gets the impression that churches are "all different and all equal." Whether one is a Roman Catholic "evangelical" or a Baptist or Pentecostal "evangelical," all that matters is the feeling, the experience, of being "born again." This is not a new Age of the Spirit; it is the Spirit of the Age.

The church growth movement is impervious to criticism on theological grounds because it justifies everything on the basis of "whatever works." If an evangelist is successful or if a movement (the Vineyard, Promise Keepers, whatever) is "working" and its publicity can reflect that, what more do we need? Modernity has turned us into creatures of the marketplace, where consumer trends dictate our surroundings, and this is as true for the churches these days as it is for shampoo and automobiles.

Progress over Providence

Ziggy Marley, the Reggae singer, asks Americans, "*Tomorrow people, where is your past? Tomorrow people, how long will you last? A people with no past have no future.*" Ever since the Enlightenment, the tendency has been to look backward in disgust and forward in anticipation. Do evangelicals reflect this influence of modernity?

In biblical religion, God is guiding history to its appointed end, but the danger is to confuse divine providence with human progress. The many advances of modernity, technological, scientific and economic, have given the mistaken impression that we are advanced beyond our ancestors in wisdom and truth. But the existence of microwaves does not guarantee that the people operating them are not adolescents in the realm of true wisdom and knowledge. We are barraged with information, and this gives us the illusion that we are better-informed, but even as technology gives us this

ability we are losing our intellectual, moral and spiritual ability to distinguish worthless information from genuine knowledge.

Gnosis over Scripture

In our last issue of *ModernReformation*, we focused on Gnosticism and its revival in this postmodern era. In its denial of place, tradition, authority, time and history, modernity has predisposed us sociologically for this heresy. At the same time as it was reacting against the sterile intellectualism of the Enlightenment, nineteenth century Romanticism was the precursor to postmodernism. As Roger Lundin observes, "Long before Wordsworth, Blake, or Emerson began to tout the virtues of imaginative inwardness, Protestant radicals had eagerly championed the Christ who dwells exclusively in the human heart."²² But now it is the evangelicals, not the Protestant liberals, who make this their cardinal doctrine. Schleiermacher, the father of modern liberalism, urged people to "turn from everything usually reckoned religion [i.e., doctrine, liturgy, Word and sacraments], and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions, as all utterances and acts of inspired men direct."²³ But now this sentiment would characterize the average evangelical sermon, praise song or conversation.

What surprise, then, it would be to most evangelical brothers and sisters to learn that this "super-spirituality" is actually an effect of "modernity" and the secularization of the church! Religion in this age is something that is concerned with what happens within, not with what happened outside of our hearts, in real history. Nor is an external Word superior to the inner light, the direct experience, the personal relationship with God.

In short, if evangelicals are going to really challenge secularism, they are going to have to repent of their own accommodations to modernity in the form of the church growth movement, the recovery movement, and the movement-mentality in general. Christ founded a church, not a movement, and the very idea of "movement" has its origin in modernity. Having said this, what are we to do after we have recognized our worldliness? In the remainder of this article I want to suggest some positive ways forward.

A New Openness to the Supernatural

The eclectic smorgasbord of spirituality and superstition that the Apostle Paul saw in Athens is very much part and parcel of our postmodern condition. Nevertheless, at least people—including academics—are now actually showing some interest in religious explanations that were once regarded as inadmissible in the court of human inquiry.

"Blind watch-maker" deism may work when the universe is viewed as a machine which, once built and started, runs under its own power. But that world-view has passed. Scientists now see the cosmos as always changing, constantly in flux, and that dynamic character appears chaotic. Instead of being like a machine, it is like a modern symphony, where at certain points the orchestra seems to be out of control. But in reality each musician is closely following the notes printed on the page, composed by one artist and directed by another. In other words, science is demonstrating every day the impossibility of the odds that such observable "randomness" and "chaos" could actually be unchecked without the slightest accident destroying us all in a variety of ways. That is why Einstein said, "I do not believe that

God plays dice with the universe." If there is a God, he is directly involved in every detail of our existence: That is the great news that science offers to believers in this present day. Deism is simply not an option, at least in theory, and that is very good news.

Common Sense Realism

The only philosophical school during the Enlightenment that opposed "foundationalism" (the belief in one universal basis for truth, whether rationalism or empiricism) was Thomas Reid's Scottish Common Sense philosophy. We do not need absolute philosophical certainty, Reid said, in order to come to reasonable conclusions. Although we all operate with certain presuppositions about the way things are, experience teaches us that we are constantly reassessing those assumptions in the light of reality. There is a real world independent of the mind, Reid insisted, and it exists whether we understand it or not. Thus, he retained objectivity while allowing for the subjective aspects in arriving at knowledge that experience requires and postmodernism now holds so dear.

Because of its non-foundationalism (i.e., it does not require absolute certainty and makes room for presuppositions, which are re-evaluated in the light of experience), I am convinced that this is the epistemological way out. Postmodernism, for all of its diversity, is united in its repudiation of "foundations" and "certainty." But that does not necessarily lead to relativism. Even Reid acknowledged that we must settle for more modest successes. One of the most influential philosophers of our time, Willard V. O. Quine, compares knowledge to a spider's web. "A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions re-adjustments in the interior of the field."²⁴ Similarly, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, itself responsible for a revolution of sorts in the academic community, argues that science advances not simply by accumulating facts, but by constructing paradigms—that is, "big picture" ways of viewing the whole collection of puzzle-pieces. Is this not pure relativism? Not necessarily, since one piece that does not fit can cause us to radically alter our paradigm or "big picture." This is all that Christians need in order to make their case. One historical fact—the Resurrection of Christ—upsets the entire world-view of modern and postmodern men and women. As long as one event, one piece of information of enormous magnitude can be always allowed to overthrow a reigning world-view, Christianity has enough epistemological room in which to make its case.

As Nancey Murray McClendon puts it, "The criterion of truth is coherence."²⁵ Does it hold together? Although we might prefer a correspondence theory of truth to a coherence theory of truth, postmodern epistemology does leave the crack in the door open far enough for us to demonstrate that non-Christian ways of thinking do not hold together; they do not conform to the coherence theory of truth, but are internally contradictory. Having accomplished this, however, what are we to put in its place? Presuppositional apologetics (Gordon Clark and especially Cornelius Van Til and his successors) is at its best in exposing the incoherence of non-Christian thought. However, we need something sturdier to put in its place than, "Now that you know that you are operating with circular reason, why not accept our circle instead of yours?" After all, to the question, "How do I know that the Bible is the Word of God?" the presuppositionalist answers, "Because it says that it is the Word of God." A recovery of Common Sense Realism, which once reigned in American Reformed and Presbyterian circles, would allow us to meet the challenges of postmodernism while at the same time resisting the naive pure "foundationalism" that has no credibility in any reputable faculty.

A New Openness to Tradition

Postmodernism also respects the idea of tradition that modernity has been consistently assailing. To be sure, we obtain knowledge from tracking satellites and testing experiments in a lab, but we operate every day with assumptions about the way everything fits together. Everyone has a working hypothesis, a world-view, that is more or less thought-through. Unlike extreme empiricists, we must acknowledge that there is no such thing as a theory-independent "fact," but unlike the rationalists, we should realize that the facts we observe are not merely inventions of the mind, but are somehow descriptive of the way things really are out there. As long as we acknowledge our presuppositions and test them by common sense rules of analysis, we do not have to become relativists. As philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, described his purpose, "[It] is to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false."²⁶ Colin Gunton even compares this favorably to Calvin's notion of "certainty."²⁷ If Christianity can be demonstrated to be true, it must be at least conceivably possible for it to be false. One is not a fool to embrace the Resurrection without knowing all the facts, but is certainly foolish to embrace it in clear opposition to facts.

The truth-claims of Christianity are historical rather than scientific, and this means that the way one tests the Resurrection claim, for instance, is not with a microscope and repeatable experiments, but the same way a historian or lawyer would investigate the claims of any past event. Nevertheless, there are some parallels that may help us think through our witness in this age. John Polkinghorne, a leading Cambridge physicist who has written a good deal on the relation of science and Christianity, writes, "Science has not been immune from the acid attack of the hermeneutics of suspicion, so characteristic of the thought of the last hundred years. Yet it is from the sidelines that these sceptical voices are raised. Very few of those actually engaged in scientific work doubt that they are learning about the actual pattern and process of the physical world."²⁸ What is called for, says Polkinghorne, is the realization that both science and religion require the existence of facts and the interpretation of those facts:

Because we can only approach reality from some initial point of view, experience and interpretation are inevitably intertwined. We cannot escape from the hermeneutical circle. In Paul Ricoeur's words: "We must understand in order to believe but we must believe in order to understand. The scientist commits himself to belief in the rationality of the world in order to discover what form that rationality takes. . . . The possibility of error is a necessary element of any belief bearing on reality . . . To withhold belief on the grounds of such a hazard is to break off all contact with reality."²⁹

Conclusion

The postmodern person is a disenchanting modernist. He or she is convinced that human reason and cleverness cannot achieve universal happiness and is cynical toward political or ideological grand-standing. There is no hope in utopian movements, either liberal or conservative; communitarian or democratic. Fragmentation is prized over a rational, ordered world-view. And yet, we must ask these people whether they have merely exchanged their own "universal foundations" (like fragmentation) for the older ones (rational order). They know what's wrong with modern ideas, but they have few of their own except by negation. Far from a coherent world-view, postmodernism has been described by Tyron Inbody as "intellectual velcro dragged across culture." "In its extreme form," Inbody writes, "it has been described as a

'supercalifragilisticexpialodoxic' totalizing negation of modernism, breathlessly presented as a rejection of everything from Plato onward." For postmodernism, knowledge is inherently local, provisional, and confessional . . . These two ways of doing theology, modern and postmodern, distinguish between concern for rationality and concern for transformation...Reality is interpretation 'all the way down.' ³⁰

They are against universal systems, utopian progress, and absolutes, but they do not quite know yet what to substitute. There are myriads of proposals, but no single direction—perhaps that is required in a system that glorifies fragmentation and contradiction. And yet, as Inbody noted, there is a new openness to an emphasis on confessional, communal interpretations of reality (and, thus, of Scripture) that avoid the modern arrogance of individual theologians and philosophers reinventing theology from scratch.

We must, it seems to me, do two things in this moment: (1) As Marx said every intellectual had to pass through the "fiery brook" of Feuerbach's dialectical materialism, today every intellectual must take seriously the challenges to modern ways of thinking and reassess our presentation and defense of Christianity in the light of those challenges; (2) Without "jumping on the bandwagon" of academic fads, we must exploit the new opportunities afforded by the collapse of the materialistic and rationalistic world-view. Since the Enlightenment was itself a decisive attack on Christian orthodoxy, we should not defend modernity against postmodernism simply because the former is familiar and comfortable. Hyper-rationalism is no kinder to faith than hyper-irrationalism, and both offer their own distinct challenges and opportunities. We do not have to take sides in order to exploit opportunities.

Our confessional Christianity allows us, in a certain sense, to remain somewhat aloof and judge both philosophies from a transcendent perspective. Our own classical doctrines give us a fresh opportunity to explore their relevance in a new intellectual environment. And for all of the "hoopla" over "the sacred," meaning everything from telepathy to Mormonism, the collapse of materialism has opened up fresh possibilities for discussions about God and the supernatural. The anti-supernatural world-view that has dominated western culture has now given way to an almost irrational and superstitious outlook, but this can be exploited. As Princeton's Diogenes Allen remarked, "The philosophical and scientific bases for excluding the possibility of God have collapsed . . . Hume's and Kant's quite sophisticated objections have been found to fail . . . The conviction that we live in a self-contained universe can no longer be supported by a philosophic consensus. In a postmodern world Christianity is intellectually relevant."³¹

Each period of church history calls for different theological approaches. The early church expanded not by sophisticated academic systems, but by evangelism and by the church simply being the church. Nevertheless, it ended up creating a massive intellectual tradition. Its successive battles with heresy created a reservoir of wisdom from which to draw, since, at the end of the day, "there is nothing new under the sun." Contemporary innovations are usually revivals of ancient heresies. Similarly, the Reformation was not a period of calm, sophisticated academic reflection, but of revolutionary proclamation. Like the early church period, the Reformation was subversive—not in the sense of overthrowing kingdoms—but in the sense of undermining unbelief and bringing spiritual crisis as the Word brought God and man into confrontation. But like the middle-ages following the early church, the post-Reformation period of Protestant orthodoxy was a period of systematization. The theology of the Reformers and their descendents did not differ, but the method was

different because the moment called for a “paradigm shift” rather than the systematic restructuring of the new paradigm.

We are, I believe, on the verge of another paradigm shift in theology, a period similar to that of the early church and the Reformation. Leaving the evangelicals to one side for a moment, let us consider our own Reformed and Lutheran defenders of orthodoxy. Most orthodox Protestants—I mean the ones who still believe in the creeds and confessions—seem oblivious to the fact that we have gone through the Enlightenment and now are encountering a massive rejection of the Enlightenment. We cannot simply be “premodern,” as if nothing has happened in intellectual history for the last three centuries.

Our best orthodox theologians grappled with their own time and place, but we largely do not. We are acting as if the Enlightenment won and the best that we can do is gather together our eight orthodox folks and hope for better days. The systematic theologies that came out of the post-Reformation period all the way down to the Muellers, Hodges and Berkhofs, is our greatest wealth of theological reflection and should become more, not less, important in seminaries. B. B. Warfield and his Old Princeton cohorts went into the jaws of death (liberal German universities) in order to understand modernity with a view to confronting it with the Christian truth claims. Nevertheless, something more is needed. If we are in one of those periods of “paradigm shifts,” then our age parallels the Reformation period itself, not the period of systematization that followed it. It is not merely a period of building and buttressing the edifice of orthodoxy, but of fresh proclamation. Like the old European cathedrals lying in rubble after World War II, “Christendom” is over.

Perhaps God is calling us, therefore, to do exactly what the apostles and church fathers, together with Martin Luther and John Calvin did in their respective ages: Not simply to get the facts straight and defend the particulars of a system (as important as that is), but to bring God and this age into a critical confrontation that will have massive paradigmatic effects. In other words, we need to “think big,” and view the world as our audience, instead of “thinking small,” with the orthodox as our audience.

Men and women who find theology boring may find it so because they are encountering it as an objective study rather than as a living encounter. Sadly, both liberals and fundamentalists have made theology boring. “Theology,” writes Duke professor Stanley Hauwerwas, “is a ghetto activity as insulated and uninteresting as the Saturday religion pages of the local paper. God knows, it is hard to make God boring, but American Christians, aided and abetted by theologians, have accomplished that feat. Accordingly, theology is seldom read by Christians and non-Christians alike because it is so damned dull.”³²

Perhaps our appropriate rejection of Barth’s view of Scripture, election and universal salvation has barred us from appreciating his emphasis on “encounter.” Here the existentialists remind us of one of Scripture’s own central themes. The Bible is not simply a text-book of propositions (although it is that); it is also a record of God’s saving encounter with his people. I say it is a record of God’s saving encounter with his people and not the other way around, because Scripture is divine revelation and not merely human reflections on God and religious experience. Theology is not really at odds with a “living encounter,” but in the minds of most the antithesis between the two is one of the greatest obstacles to gaining interest in theology. Think of Luther’s famous remark that a theologian must be someone who has experienced damnation. In other words, God’s Word speaks to us in our situation, in our despair and guilt and

unrighteousness. It addresses us in a particular context. Similarly, Calvin criticized Cardinal Sadoletto (and implicitly the Roman curia) for having a “lazy theology” because the Cardinal had never experienced the depth of his own depravity and guilt. There should be greater attention to the relationship between theology and experience, with the orthodox taking the latter more seriously and the rest immersing themselves in serious theological classics.

We should engage in theological reflection as an objective study and we need more, not less, of that. But we who affirm that premise also need a recovery of the existential aspect. Liberation theologians, including its European inventors (viz., Moltmann, Metz), sought to recover the situational and existential importance of the Christian faith for the everyday lives of suffering people. But, in the tradition of Hegel, their “salvation” was entirely earth-bound and secular. It was a political, economic, and social liberation, and sin was understood primarily if not exclusively in institutional terms. What liberation theology sought, however, is on the mark: a connection of Scripture with the real world and while they were making that connection, orthodox theologians were often simply engaged in damage control and defensive measures. It is partly for this reason that a new generation of evangelical theologians has become enamoured with non-evangelical theologies.

We must sail between the Scylla and Charybdis of conservative paranoia and modernist fashion. In our day, a fresh proclamation of the biblical truths of Creation, Divine Sovereignty and Transcendence, Providence, Incarnation, Redemption, Justification, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Second Coming of Christ and the Consummation will take on new significance, providing a mine from which to draw for a culture looking for transcendent answers. In Christianity, God reveals his name, his identity, and his redemptive plan through the Living and Written Word. On this score, the insights of Yale theologian George Lindbeck, a leading postliberal theologian, are relevant. He urges us to recover our familiarity with Scripture and its language:

Pietists were wary of any use except that of legitimating and evoking a particular kind of religious experience; legalists and social activists looked only for directives for personal or collective behavior . . . The leaders of the Enlightenment . . . were not believers, but they were biblically literate and biblically cultured. Conversely, Bible-believing fundamentalists sometimes know remarkably little of the content of scripture . . . When I first arrived at Yale, even those who came from nonreligious backgrounds knew the Bible better than most of those now who come from churchgoing families . . . Playing fast and loose with the Bible needed a liberal audience in the days of Norman Vincent Peale, but now, as the case of Robert Schuller indicates, professed conservatives eat it up . . . Now we are in a postmodern age. Authors steeped in the Bible are diminishing in number, and one cannot help but wonder about the future of the western literary tradition . . . With the loss of the knowledge of the Bible, public discourse is impoverished.³³

While liberals and conservatives chase after modern fads, think of the amazing power Christian orthodoxy might have in the postmodern context: At a time when high culture has lost its faith in humanity, the Gospel question makes a difference. In some circles of evangelical theology, it is just now time to get in step with modernity, with its passion for finding the common threat in all religions, its human-centered focus, its emphasis on experience over doctrine, and its theological relativism. Representing this flank, Clark Pinnock cheers, “We are finally making peace with the culture of modernity.”³⁴ Once again, evangelicals who want to be “relevant” simply end up showing up late to these things, just as “the culture of modernity” is collapsing and

being subject to sustained attacks. Well has Peter Berger complained, "The theological novelties that have dominated the Protestant scene in the last two decades all seem basically to take up where the older liberalism left off."³⁵ Intellectuals are wondering where evil comes from and how to understand it, with secular psychologists asking, "Whatever became of sin?" and national secular periodicals running cover stories on the subject of sin and grace. Ironically, those who will be most relevant in this age will most likely be those who have something to say about these classic questions that were the heart of the Reformation debate.

No religious expression will be given the time of day right now unless it connects with the real world and makes a difference in people's lives. Therefore, it is not only the explanation of the doctrine of justification, for instance, but its proclamation in the pulpit and its application to such areas as Christian liberty and one's vocation in the world, the problem of evil and suffering, and the fear of death, will be just as necessary. After every doctrinal presentation, we must ask ourselves the question every postmodern hearer is thinking: "So what? What difference does it make?" That is why the Heidelberg Catechism, after each series of questions on a particular doctrine, asks, "How does this comfort you?" And this is actually a biblical approach, where the indicative is never separated from the imperative, the theological from the practical, the propositional from the situational, as it has been in modern theology and thought in general. Orthodox ministers must overcome their justified fear of "application-oriented" sermons and begin to apply saving truth to life here and now, just as pietistic evangelicals need to rediscover the theology and the text of Scripture, so they will have something to apply. This is no time for caving in to the Tower of Babel just as it is crumbling, but a time to recover "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints." God grant us his Spirit to meet the challenges and opportunities before us.

For Further Reading:

If one had to choose four books from the evangelical perspective, explaining the particulars of postmodernism, I would highly recommend the following:

- Roger Lundin's *The Culture of Interpretation* (Eerdmans)
- Gene Veith's *Postmodern Times* (Crossway)
- Thomas Oden's *After Modernity...What?* (Zondervan)
- David Wells' *God In The Wasteland* (Eerdmans)

Michael Horton is the Editor in Chief of *Modern Reformation*, and a CAPO fellow. Used with permission.
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Lesson 4: The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

Due This Lesson

Reading of Resource 3-3
Response paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- know why we speak of “postmodernity”
- understand and be able to discuss the “crisis of modernity” that gave rise to postmodernity
- understand the chief characteristics of postmodernity as they relate to religious pluralism
- understand the role of “the loss of metanarrative” in the ideology of religious pluralism
- understand why “postmodernity” is more favorable to the role of religion in human life than was “modernity”
- begin to understand why Wesleyan theology is well positioned for Christian mission and service in a postmodern age

Homework Assignments

Read Resource 4-5. Write a one/two-page response paper giving your reaction—positive and/or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

Prince Albert of England organized the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 in Hyde Park. His public speech on the opening day voiced the modern confidence in human progress through the use of reason. “Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which indeed all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind.” Prince Albert’s words identified the achievements of the 19th century as the zenith of human reason and progress.³⁶

Definition

It would be good if we could begin with a universally agreed upon definition of postmodernity. For numerous reasons, no such definition exists. Kenan Osborne observes, “ ‘Postmodern’ remains a fairly undefined word. It seems that Federico de Osnis first used it in a Spanish essay around 1934.”³⁷ One reason for the absence of a universally agreed upon definition is that the contours of postmodernity are still emerging.

Suggestions regarding the beginning of postmodernity have also been forthcoming. In a *Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee said the modern historical period ended somewhere between 1850 and 1918. Others suggest 1966 when Robert Venturi published his architectural manifesto. Or maybe postmodern began on July 15, 1972, when a high rise residential structure for the poor was demolished in St. Louis, on the grounds that it was uninhabitable. The point is that rather than having to decide which claim is the correct one, we should see each suggestion as but an important marker in the emergence of postmodernity.

Postmodernity was born because of *severe crises* in modernity that broke out along broad fronts . . . postmoderns believe that modernity claimed entirely too much for itself—for reason, for the limits of knowledge and for what is worth knowing, for the objectivity of reason, for the rational organization of society, the autonomous self, and so forth.

Paul Tillich said that “reason” should have claimed occupancy for only one room in the house of knowledge and meaning, and should have left space for other “residents.” Religion, the wisdom of traditional cultures, emotions, aesthetics, and communal knowledge should have had plenty of living space as well.

Sources of the "Crisis" in Modernity

The "crises" that jolted modernity has many sources. One was the growing recognition of humankind's ability to abuse the very "reason" that was supposed to have been an impartial liberator.

Another source of the crisis was the occurrence of two world wars in half a century that shook confidence in reason and progress.

The sciences were supposed to be "objective," free of subjectivity, and our pioneer guide to the promised land. We now know that while they can be enormously beneficial, the sciences can just as easily be pressed into the hire of greed, national interests, and Wall Street. Original sin is barred by no human door.

"Objective reason" as touted by the Enlightenment proved to be "a myth." History and postmodern thinkers have exploded it. "Objectivity" closely examined, will usually, if not always, reveal the "subjectivity" of the person or culture doing the reasoning.

Characteristics of Postmodernity as They Affect Religious Pluralism

1. The first thing that marks postmodernity is a resurgence of religion, often in novel or “unconventional” forms.

Much of the resurgence of religion is occurring outside the established religious institutions.

In recent decades the world has also witnessed a wave of fundamentalism within the established faiths. These include Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist fundamentalism.

2. A second feature of postmodernity that intersects with religious pluralism is its dismissal of the notion of complete objectivity.

Even though many modern thinkers dismissed the notion of “religious truth,” they replaced it with another “truth,” a modern vision of how human life should be understood, organized, and lived.

Also . . . has been a growing change in our understanding of “knowledge.” In place of our confidence in “objectivity” has come a recognition that “knowing” is inescapably “located.”

3. The third feature of postmodernity that has implications for religious pluralism is its emphasis upon holism and community.

Postmodernity, by contrast, views persons in holistic terms, as constituted by their relation to other persons, communities, themselves, and the environment.

Postmodern Implications for Pluralism

1. The first lesson is that one must simply come to grips with the postmodern assessment of the many religious stories or narratives in the world.

The conclusion is that only uninformed persons would at this juncture in history be so crude as to boast that his or her religion “ought” to be the narrative for all persons everywhere.

The Holy Spirit is the only one who might persuade a person to joyously join the dance of God’s grace as manifest in Christ.

2. “When it comes to other religions, the challenge in modernity was to prove that we’re right and they’re wrong. But I think we have a different challenge in postmodernity. The question isn’t so much whether we’re right but whether we’re good. And it strikes me that goodness, not just rightness, is what Jesus said the real issue was.”³⁸

3. A third implication is that the various narratives must listen to each other.

Why listen? We listen to hear—to hear the meaning one’s religious narrative offers them and their culture, to hear how the gracious God may already be active far beyond our expectations and limitations, and not as a clever device for tricking persons into uninvited proselytism.

4. A fourth implication derives from the postmodern marker known as holism. An adequate appreciation for the various religions must include the whole context from within which they view communities, persons, and nature in relationship to the sacred.

A New Religious America: Managing Religious Diversity in A Democracy: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia³⁹

Keynote Address delivered By Professor Dr. Diana L. Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies, Harvard University, USA, at MAAS International Conference on Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from August 20-21 2002.

(A note to the student: Dr. Diana Eck is a prominent American spokesperson for religious pluralism. Her keynote address to the International Conference on Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2002, is an excellent statement of religious pluralism as understood by those for whom the classical claims regarding the Lordship of Jesus Christ would be completely unacceptable. Dr. Eck's address is offered for understanding, and not because it is recommended for endorsement. The document is important for instruction).

It is a great pleasure and honor to be here at this gathering this morning to address the question of Religious Diversity and Religious Tolerance in a Democratic Society. There could be no more important question in our world today than the question of how we negotiate our religious differences in a world in which all of us now live together in greater proximity than ever before.

As we think about the movements that have reshaped the world in which we live in the past half-century, even in the past decade, there are many key words that come to mind. There is the term "globalization" which has many meanings, both positive and negative. Globalization has made all of us more acutely aware of the ways in which our currencies, our economies, our political fortunes, our attempts at waging war and our attempts at building peace are all inter-linked. "Interdependence" is another key term, and is a concomitant of globalization. It is not possible to "go it alone" in the kind of world in which we live, for there is no such thing as "alone." As religious communities and as nations our futures are inextricably linked.

Along with the globalization of world systems has come the movement of people as refugees and as economic and political migrants. The demography of our world has changed, and our way of looking at a world of religious, cultural, and ethnic difference must now begin to catch up with those changes. One of my colleagues at Harvard has described the post-cold war world as one that will be marked by rigid adherence to civilizational identities, and ultimately a "clash of civilizations." Some people believe that his dire predictions of a clash of Islam and the West has been borne out in the events of September 11 and their global aftermath. Some may make a persuasive case for this view, but to my mind it is missing the critical analysis of the changing demography of our world. It is missing the critical analysis of the global currents of culture and religion that have come with this new geo-religious reality.

Just where, we must ask, are the so-called Confucian, Islamic, and Hindu worlds that will be the forces with which the so-called West must reckon? They are everywhere,

today. It is precisely the interpenetration and proximity of great civilizations and cultures that will be the hallmark of the twenty-first century. The map of the world in which we live cannot be color coded as to its Christian, Muslim, Hindu identity, but each part of the world is marbled with the colors and textures of the whole. People of different religious traditions live together all over the world—as majorities in one place, as minorities in another.

This is a fact you have long known in your distinctive ways in Malaysia. It is a fact we are grappling with in new ways in the United States. America has become, over the past forty years, a truly multi-religious society. The new demography of America has come largely since the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationalities Act, which eliminated many of the discriminatory quotas that had characterized American immigration policy for decades. New immigrants have come to American shores from all over the world and have become citizens. They have brought with them not only their luggage and economic aspirations, but their *Qur'ans* and *Bhagavad Gitas*, their images of Krishna and Murugan, their incense to light before the Bodhisattvas on their Buddhist altars. It is important to recognize just how much these past forty years have changed America. The 2000 census reveals that eleven percent of us are now foreign-born, with the majority coming from Asia and Latin America.

So, speaking as an American today in 2002, I would like to make clear to all of you that the “Islamic world” is not somewhere else other than America. No indeed, the United States is part of the Muslim world. Chicago with its seventy mosques and half a million Muslims is part of the Muslim world. Washington D.C. where the Islamic Society of North America will gather ten thousand strong for their annual convention in just ten days time is part of the Muslim world. That fact is important for America; and it is important for the rest of the Muslim world in which American Muslims now participate. This morning I was able to open my email here in Kuala Lumpur and read an invitation from the Islamic Center of Long Island in New York. It was for a “Religious Solidarity Day” of reflections, remembrance, prayer and unity to be held at the mosque at the one-year anniversary of the attacks of September 11. Dr. Faroque Khan wrote:

As spokesperson for Islamic Center of Long Island in New York I often get asked questions like: 1) Where are the moderate Muslim voices? 2) Are you with us or against us? 3) What have you done for America since “9/11”? 4) Does your Mosque fund terrorists overseas? Well, if you like answers to these and other similar questions, meet first hand the victims of 911, hear from the mother of a 23 year old who gave his life rescuing others at WTC. Learn about the impact of Patriot act and secret detentions and most importantly see first hand how a vibrant Muslim community in NY worked hand in hand with Christian/Jewish and other groups after 911 to make NY a better place for all, we invite you to a very special memorial program at ICLI on Sunday Sept 8th from 10 am to 1 p.m. as per the attached program.

Three things interest us about this announcement: First, the obvious involvement of the Muslim community in Long Island civic life. Second, the ability of this community to provide space for what will surely be some sharp criticism of the “Patriot Act” and the “secret detentions” following 9/11, a critical dissent that is a sure sign of a participatory community. Third, the involvement of the community in interfaith outreach, especially in relation to Christian and Jewish neighbors. All this bespeaks a confident, participatory Muslim community, even in the most difficult of times.

And what about Buddhism? I have often said that Los Angeles, with its multitude of Buddhist communities spanning the whole of Asia, is the most complex Buddhist city in the world. Its Chinese temples, its Korean and Japanese temples, its Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao temples, its Tibetan communities—all these partakes of the cultures and religious ways of all of Asia. But the Buddhism of Los Angeles also includes the entire spectrum of “new Buddhists,” the native born Americans who, by the millions, practice meditation and have built hundreds of meditation centers with Tibetan, Zen, Korean Zen, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Thai teaching lineages.

And Hinduism? Cities like Pittsburgh, Nashville, Atlanta, and Houston have splendid Hindu temples and have seen the magnificence of temple consecration rites most of these new immigrants had never witnessed in India. They are part of whatever one might mean by the “Hindu world,” as are the multitudes of Hindus here in Malaysia and they are facing the challenging task of passing on some form of the Hindu tradition to their children and grandchildren, the second and third generation. In the fall of 2000 at the time of the visit of the Indian Prime Minister, a Hindu opened a joint session of the U.S. Congress with the daily invocation. He was a priest from the new Siva-Vishnu Temple in Cleveland, Ohio. And there are also Sikhs who have built gurdwaras from New Jersey to California and have taken seriously the promise of religious freedom, litigating for their right to wear a turban on a hard-hat job or on the Los Angeles police force. And there are Jains who have trained their children in a curriculum of non-violence and insist that school cafeterias have clearly marked vegetarian options; Jains who offered prayers for peace in the Ohio state legislature in the days following the catastrophes of September 11.

In America, we are still in the process of understanding the new religious reality that is ours. Our newfound complexity links us as Americans to virtually every part of the world through the traditions and experiences of our newest citizens. This complexity requires that we appropriate anew the fundamental freedoms assured by our Constitution: the free-exercise of religion and, along with it, the non-establishment of religion. To be sure, religious diversity is a concomitant of religious freedom. And religious diversity requires a very strong civic tolerance for people who may differ from one another in profound ways. Beyond tolerance, I would argue, freedom of religion requires the energetic engagement of people of different faiths in creating a common society, for the foundation of democracy is participation.

Pilgrimage to Pluralism

I speak to you today about the United States, not because America has the answers, but because America has struggled with these issues of religious difference, religious tolerance, and democracy from the very beginning. The Pilgrims and Puritans who sailed the seas from Europe to establish communities in a new world wanted to be free to practice their religious faith. At first, they were not thinking about a wider ethic of religious freedom when they clung to the shores of the Atlantic and created new communities. They were thinking about survival. History reminds us that they did not, for the most part, consider the Native peoples they encountered in America as people of another religious way of life, but as heathen who had no religion at all. And history reminds us that as the decades brought more and more settlers from America to Europe, our Christian ancestors did not, in fact, create widely tolerant communities. The Puritans envisioned a society, a Biblical Commonwealth, decisively shaped by their own form of Christianity. They were concerned primarily with religious freedom for themselves and did not see religious freedom as a foundation for common life with people who differed from them. In seventeenth century Puritan Boston, for example,

Solomon Franco, a Sephardic Jewish merchant, was “warned out” of town. An anti-Catholic law was enacted stating “that no Jesuit or ecclesiasticall person ordained by the authoritie of the pope shall henceforth come within our jurisdiction. . . .” The Puritan establishment of Boston put four Quakers to death on the gallows on Boston Common. Dissenters like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchison had to flee the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of their non-conformist religious beliefs, settling in what is now Rhode Island.

During the long argument that produced a nation out of thirteen colonies, there were those who wanted to establish a state religion in the new world and those who urged tolerance and freedom for all religions. The principle of religious freedom eventually won the day and was written into the Bill of Rights: that there shall be no establishment of any given religion, no sect of Christianity, not even Christianity itself, and that there shall be no infringement of the free exercise of religion. The most critical lesson was this: The freedom we seek for ourselves, we must also cherish for everyone, even those with whom we disagree.

It is significant that the founders and framers of the Constitution were, to be sure, people of faith. The likes of Jefferson and Madison actually argued their case for a secular Constitution on religious grounds. Our freedom is grounded in the God-given freedom of the mind to think and to choose. Standing for religious freedom—even freedom from any form of religion—is grounded in the very freedom ordained by God. A state that would enforce uniformity of religion is against the very principles of God’s sovereignty and ultimacy. God did not propagate truth by coercion, so why should we?

Such a vision of religious freedom was not part of the heritage of most European newcomers to America. In England and France there had been state established and supported religion. And there had been a ghastly legacy of bloody wars in the name of religion. The new American democracy turned away from that legacy toward the separation of church and state, and the free-exercise of religion.

Interestingly, religion in the new country became stronger precisely because the churches no longer had support from public tax coffers; they had to compete with one another in the free market of Christian ideas in order to thrive, and one of the consequences of this unprecedented approach to religious freedom was the proliferation of churches. When the Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville traveled around America in the 1820s, he discovered, to his surprise, that severing the ties between church and state seemed to make religion stronger, rather than weaker. Unlike France, where the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom seemed to march in opposite directions, in America they seemed “intimately united” and “reigned in common over the same country.” Churches needed to win the support of parishioners in order to survive, and the spirit of voluntarism inspired a lively and intense competition in religion and the creation of a multitude of “denominations” that have become a distinctive feature of American religion. Toqueville wrote, “There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America; and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth.” He called religion the “first of political institutions,” astutely discerning that while the churches were not supported by the government and were not directly involved in politics as such, they were nonetheless extremely influential in the political sphere.

The history of making this unprecedented vision of religious tolerance and religious freedom into a firm foundation for a complex society is actually a very rocky one. If you want to know just how rocky this pilgrimage to pluralism has been, look at our nineteenth-century history. Ask the Catholics and Jews, whose history in the U.S. has included bitter periods of anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism. Ask how the Chinese were received, who built makeshift temples on the west coast and in the Rocky mountains in the 1850s and 1860s, or ask how it went for the Sikhs who were called "ragheads," and who built their first places of worship in California in the 1910s. Ask the Japanese Buddhists who were imprisoned in America's own concentration camps during World War II. Ask the Native peoples of America, who did not win the clear right to practice their religious life-ways until the passage of the Native American Religious Freedom Act in 1968. Ask the Muslim and Sikh Americans who have felt the sting of a backlash in the months following 9/11. But through all this, the principle of the non-establishment and free-exercise of religion been a constant corrective to the excesses of intolerance.

The United States motto, E Pluribus Unum, "Out of Many, One," has been easy to put on our coins, but difficult to implement in our society. How are our diversity and our oneness related? There have been many voices in this debate, but let me give you a sense of three approaches, three ways of handling "difference." First, there have been exclusivist voices: the oneness of the unum, of the nation, requires the exclusion of those who are different. The manyness of difference poses a threat to oneness. Second, there are strong assimilationist or inclusivist voices, which insists that the nation's oneness requires the many to shed their differences and become assimilated into the normative culture. Third, there are pluralist voices who see the nation's oneness as shaped by the encounter of the many, the engagement of the many. We hear all three voices in our history, and we can discern all three in today's arguments over the new immigration and American multiculturalism.

Exclusivism: Go Home!

On August 13, 1993, the Cultural Affairs Officer of the Police Department called Pirun Sen, one of the leaders of the small Cambodian Buddhist community that had recently settled in Portland, Maine. "I am sorry to bother you so early in the morning. . . Vandals broke into the temple house last night. I think when they discovered all of the Buddhist things in it they decided to mess it up a bit. Can you meet me in twenty minutes?" With a heavy heart, Pirun Sen rushed to the temple and met the police at the small gray house they had dedicated as the Watt Samaki Buddhist Center. The windows of the blue sedan parked in the yard were smashed; the door had been hacked open with an axe; the contents of the Buddha hall were strewn around the yard. When he ventured inside, Pirun Sen saw the worst devastation of all: the words "Dirty Asian, Chink, Go Home" written across the wall. He closed his eyes, frightened and sickened by what he saw.

This is exclusivism, demanding that difference be destroyed, that those who are different go home. Wherever home may be, it's not here. When vandals broke into the newly constructed Hindu-Jain Temple in Pittsburgh and smashed the white marble images of the Hindu deities, they wrote the word "Leave!" across the main altar. That is the simple message of exclusivism: what is foreign should leave. Today's immigrants confront both the graffiti and the violence of xenophobia and hatred in the many rude and raw ways that force us to take a look at our long history of dealing with difference by excluding it. "Why don't you go back to where you came from!" shouted a North Carolina grade-school student at a Muslim classmate, wearing her

headscarf, in the weeks following September 11. The little girl turned to him and said, calmly, "I came from Connecticut."

The narrative of exclusion has long been part of the American story. With the new intensity of mid-nineteenth century immigration, "Leave!" was the cry of what came to be called Nativist movements—those who claimed the old Protestant Anglo-Saxon core population as "native" and looked on newcomers, especially Catholics and Jews, with suspicion. The Nativist accusation was that it was difficult to be a good American and a good Catholic at the same time because the very freedom of mind and speech on which democracy depends was, in their view, usurped by the Church and the Papacy. This characterization took a long time to die. Not really until John F. Kennedy addressed the question specifically during his 1960 campaign, and not really until he was elected President, did it begin to dissipate.

Jews also experienced the exclusions of America, especially social exclusion. In 1877, Joseph Seligman, a successful Jewish banker and a friend of the late Abraham Lincoln, was not permitted to register as a guest at the Grand Union Hotel in Sarasota Springs, New York, a form of exclusion that would be repeated thousands of times for over one hundred years. In these decades of the late nineteenth century, Jews were accused of not assimilating to American culture and keeping themselves separate and aloof, but were simultaneously refused admission to schools and universities, clubs, hotels and resorts.

The exclusionist agenda had many targets, but Asians were the group most directly and specifically named and attacked. "Asian exclusion" became embodied in a series of immigration acts, defining in increasingly restrictive terms which immigrants could enter the U.S. and which groups could qualify for citizenship. We know that a sense of "identity" is often shaped by the categorization of the "other," and in terms of American national identity in the nineteenth century, the clearest "other" apart from the African American population was Asian.

The Chinese exclusion act was passed in 1882. In arguing in favor of the act, John Franklin Miller, a senator from California, insisted that the Chinese culture is wholly "other"—unchanging, wholly immutable. The anti-Chinese movement was not cast in explicitly religious terms, but deep cultural and civilizational terms. The two civilizations of East and West, he argued, have now met on the west coast of America. They are "radically antagonistic, and as impossible of amalgamation as are the two great races who have produced them. Like the mixing of oil and water, neither will absorb the other." In sum, he argues, since the Chinese will never adapt to American culture, they must be kept out.

Today the sheer prejudice of groups like the Asiatic Exclusion League seems astonishing. Today, American citizens of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese origin are elected to public offices, conduct our greatest symphonies, and lead our universities. Voices of exclusion remain and sometimes become visible in the graffiti of intolerance, but as we assess prospects for the future, exclusion cannot be viable. The exclusion of "difference" however defined is not consonant with a democracy based on freedom of conscience and religion.

Assimilation: The Melting Pot of Difference

A second attitude toward difference in America is summed up in the word "assimilation." The most vivid image here is the melting pot, the crucible where

differences dissolve into the common pot, adding their flavors, but losing their form. Newcomers shed difference in order to blend in. This is what we might call an “inclusivist” point of view: people are welcomed to come—and be like “us.”

This is the “melting pot” image of America. It was a Jewish writer, Israel Zangwill, who first popularized the “melting pot” image of America in his play entitled “The Melting Pot,” which opened in 1908 at the crest of America’s most massive era of immigration. The play’s hero, David, an immigrant from Russia, puts it this way as he surveys the immigrants at Ellis Island: “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand good folk, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like those, brothers, for these are the fires of God you’ve come to—these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American!”

Here, becoming American in this view means shedding difference. One of the sites of early twentieth century assimilation was American industry, and Henry Ford’s plant in Detroit had a “Ford English School Melting Pot.” A cartoon of the period displayed its ethos in vivid visual form. Immigrants in their national costumes were depicted on the “wheel of change.” As the wheel turned, all the costumed Europeans in national dress were dipped into the melting pot and rose again as new Americans, wearing house-dresses and business suits, and carrying American flags. In today’s terms, such assimilation would mean that the Sikhs building a gurdwara in Southern California should get rid of the golden domes of India in favor of the predominant architectural style of southern California. Muslims women should forego distinctive Islamic dress, and the Muslim policeman in Newark should shave his beard to fit in with the rest of the clean-shaven police force.

As an approach to this widening diversity, the assimilationist assumes that immigrants will come and blend in, contributing to the cultural mix, but ultimately relinquishing the most distinctive aspects of their home culture to take on American culture. Of course, moving from one part of the world to another as an immigrant inevitably involves some forms of assimilation. In fact, everyone is changed in the “melting pot” of assimilation.

But religious differences do not melt so easily. And the melting pot has never been an adequate image to describe some of the deepest dimensions of America’s encounter with difference. The unum of the one cannot and does not, in fact, mean uniformity and sameness.

Pluralism: The Symphony of Difference

There have also been strong pluralist voices in thinking about difference, and some of the most visionary have come from minority groups. Early in the debate over Chinese exclusion, the Black abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass called America “composite nation” destined to become “the most perfect national illustration of the unity and dignity of the human family that the world has ever seen.” To fulfill this vision, he insisted that the U.S. draw upon the distinctive gifts and energies of people from every nation, including the Chinese. And as for religion, “We should welcome men of every shade of religious opinion, as among the best means of checking the arrogance and intolerance which are the almost inevitable concomitants of general

conformity. Religious liberty always flourishes best amid the clash and competition of rival religious creeds.”

All will be “molded” into Americans not by uniformity, but by observing the same law, supporting the same government, enjoying the same liberty, and vibrating with the same national enthusiasm. Douglass did not use the term “pluralism,” but his vision of a “composite nation” strikes me as a pluralist vision in which differences, including religious differences, become the building blocks of a new community.

In 1915, a Jewish immigrant, the sociologist Horace Kallen, wrote a much-discussed article in *The Nation*, taking issue with the melting-pot vision of America. He may well be the first to use the term “pluralism” to describe an alternative vision. The article was titled, “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” and in it he argued that the “melting pot” ideal is inherently anti-democratic. It collides with America’s foundational principles. After all, one of the freedoms cherished in America is the freedom to be oneself, without erasing the distinctive features of one’s own culture. Kallen saw America’s plurality and its unity in the image of the symphony, not the melting pot. America is a symphony orchestra, sounding not unison, but in harmony, with all the distinctive tones of our many cultures. He described this as “cultural pluralism.”

In Kallen’s view, there are many things that immigrants to America can and do change—their style of dress, their politics, their religious affiliation, their economic status. But whatever else may change, “they cannot change their grandfathers.” Cultural pluralism preserves the inalienable right to the “ancestral endowment” of selfhood imparted by one’s parents and grandparents. One has a right to be different, not just in dress and public presentation, but in religion and creed, united only by participation in the common covenants of citizenship. American civilization is “a multiplicity in unity, an orchestration of mankind.” In the final paragraphs of his 1915 article, Kallen develops the orchestra image:

As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization, with this difference: a musical symphony is written before it is played; in the symphony of civilization the playing is the writing, so that there is nothing so fixed and inevitable about its progressions as in music, so that within the limits set by nature they may vary at will, and the range and variety of the harmonies may become wider and richer and more beautiful. But the question is, do the dominant classes in America want such a society?

I find this an appealing image—the symphony of society, each retaining its difference, each sounding together, with an ear to the music of the whole. We know, of course, that disharmony and even cacophony is part of the noise of diversity. How do we create a society together out of all this diversity?

There is, after all, something we “play” together: a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, and a way of living with our deepest differences that is premised on these common covenants. Learning how to do that requires our patience with the disharmonies of practice and the dissonance of dissenters.

The symphony image needs some modification, however, as Kallen himself seemed to realize. A symphony is usually written in its entirety before it is played, and no society or nation has such a script. The work of cultural pluralism requires revisiting and reclaiming the energy and vision of democracy in every generation and with every new arrival. Perhaps we need to stretch our imagination to something more akin to jazz, for in jazz "the playing is the writing." And because it is not all written out, it requires even more astute attention to the music of each instrument, it requires collaboration and invention among the players. Learning to hear the musical lines of our neighbors, their individual and magnificent interpretations of the themes of America's common covenants, is the test of cultural pluralism. Our challenge today is whether it will be jazz or simply noise, whether it will be a symphony or cacophony, whether we can continue to play together through dissonant moments.

As the United States becomes more and more religiously, culturally, and racially diverse, we have no choice but to practice the scales of pluralism. When I think of American diversity, I often think of New Hampshire Avenue in the outskirts of Washington, D.C., where a Cambodian Buddhist monastery, a Ukrainian Orthodox Church, a Muslim community center, a Disciples of Christ Church, a Synagogue and a Gujarati Hindu temple sit virtually side by side in the same neighborhood. This is diversity, to be sure. But it will require the efforts and the practice of everyone to create a truly pluralist society in which people from all these backgrounds consider themselves neighbors in a common enterprise. Pluralism is not a given, but requires our practice, our creative work, not alone, but together.

The diversity of New Hampshire Avenue is not simply a curiosity for a Sunday drive. What it represents has profound implications for every aspect of American public life. What is happening to America as all of us begin to renegotiate the "we" of "we the people?" That "we" in the United States is increasingly complex, not only culturally and racially, but also religiously. What will this mean for American electoral politics, for the continuing interpretation of "church-state" issues by the Supreme Court, for American public education and the controversies of school boards, for hospitals and health care programs with an increasingly diverse patient population, and for colleges and universities with an increasingly multireligious student body?

Today, throughout the world, old multireligious societies are in danger of fragmenting under the pressures of politicizing religious movements. New multireligious societies in Europe and North America are questioning whether pluralism has perhaps gone too far. Complex identities are being simplified and minted into smaller and smaller coins and religious markers of identity are often presumed to be the most divisive of all differences. It is a dangerous time for religiously plural societies, and yet it is a time in which boldly practicing the scales of pluralism is more important than ever.

After September 11

On the morning of September 11, 2001 when hijacked planes exploded into the towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a new era began for us all, in every part of the world. The meaning of that new era is not yet clear, but let me recount something of my observations from the point of view of an American scholar of religion. First, it is important to know that within hours of the attack a group of national Muslim organizations had joined together in a joint statement condemning the violence as both Muslims and Americans. Months later many Americans were still asking why Muslims had not raised their voices, but the truth is they did, and repeatedly, but they were not heard and reported widely enough.

Second, within hours of the attack an unprecedented rash of xenophobic incidents began—from low level harassment, ethnic slurs, broken windows, and threatening calls, to arson, beatings, and murders. Third, while the roster of hate crimes was growing, so were prodigious efforts at local and national outreach across religious boundaries—interfaith services and interfaith education programs.

One thing became certain: the challenge of relations between and among people of different religious and cultural traditions, both in the United States and around the world moved closer to the top of the agenda and became more urgent than ever before.

We must be frank about the fraying of the American social fabric. Our wake-up call was not only the violence and destruction of the hijacked planes. We also found reciprocal violence in our midst: the firebombing of a mosque in Denton, Texas; the storming of a mosque by an angry crowd in Bridgeview, Illinois; the shooting at worshippers approaching a mosque in Seattle. An angry man drove his car through the plate-glass door of the new mosque in Cleveland, Ohio. In Alexandria, Virginia someone hurled bricks wrapped with hate-messages through the windows of an Islamic bookstore, shattering the glass. Rifle-fire pierced the stained glass dome of the mosque in Parrysburg, a suburb of Toledo. The rash of scatter-shot incidents included Hindu temples attacked in suburban Chicago and in Matawan, New Jersey, a Gujarati-owned convenience fire-bombed in Somerset, Massachusetts, and an Iraqi pizzeria burned down in Plymouth, home of the Pilgrims.

Sikhs were also attacked, their turbans making them ready targets of those who, in their ignorance, saw them as cousins of Osama bin Laden. The watchdog group called the Sikh Media-watch and Resources Taskforce (SMART) received reports of over two hundred incidents: a Sikh attacked with a baseball bat in Queens, shot with a paint-ball gun in New Jersey, beaten unconscious in Seattle, and assaulted at a stop light in San Diego. In Mesa, Arizona, Balbir Singh Sodhi, was shot and killed as he was planting flowers around his Chevron station and convenience store. The history of prejudice and stereotype demonstrates that religious insignia and institutions often becomes key markers of “difference,” the most visible targets for bigotry and violence.

The documentary register of acts of violence is, of course, much easier to assemble than the register of new initiatives of cooperation and understanding. Yet assembling the evidence of new patterns of interreligious encounter and relationship is also important in discerning how the “we” is being reconfigured in multireligious America and in assessing our prospects for the future.

In the months since September 11, it is important to realize that the instances of interfaith outreach have outweighed the incidents of hate-crimes a thousand to one. The immediate xenophobic backlash revealed the ragged edges of America’s complicated encounter with difference. But it also revealed something more foundational and finally, I believe, more heartening about American society. As a civil society “we the people” will not condone indiscriminate violence against neighbors of any faith or culture. And so it was, across America, in the wake of September 11. While one misguided would be patriot shot and killed Balbir Singh Sodhi, thousands poured out to the gas station he had owned and to the civic arena where his memorial service took place to say, with one voice, “This is not who we are!” By January 2002, the family of this Sikh man had received more than 10,000 letters and messages of support.

Similarly, in Denton, Texas a circle of interfaith leaders assembled immediately at the mosque for prayer and protection. The Palestinian bookstore owner in Alexandria, Virginia, stunned by the shattered glass and its message of hatred, soon discovered hundreds of supportive neighbors he did not know who sent him dozens of bouquets of flowers and hundreds of cards expressing their sorrow at what had happened. In Toledo, as Cherrefe Kadri, the woman who is the president of the Islamic community told it, "That small hole in the dome created such a huge outpouring of support for our Islamic community. A Christian radio station contacted me wanting to do something," she said. "They called out on the airwaves for people to come together at our center to hold hands, to ring our mosque, to pray for our protection. We expected 300 people, and thought that would be enough to circle the mosque, but 2000 people showed up to hold hands around the mosque. I was amazed!" Last week in Seattle, the Idriss Mosque that had experienced rifle-fire and harassment immediately after September 11 held a barbecue to thank the hundreds of neighbors who had organized a round-the-clock vigil to protect the mosque.

Not surprisingly, the interfaith networks and councils that had grown in America during the 1990s sprung into action with immediate civic leadership, and cities that had never had an interfaith civic council formed one. Virtually all of the community services in cities and towns across America involved leaders from a wide spectrum of religious communities. At the National Cathedral in Washington, Muzammil Siddiqi, leader of the Islamic Society of North America, was among those offering prayers. The Episcopal Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon said, "Those of us who are gathered here - Muslim, Jew, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu—say to this nation and to the world that love is stronger than hate." At an interfaith service in the Bay Area, the Governor of California, Gray Davis, put it clearly: "Our enemies have failed to divide us. We are one people. We are Americans. We don't care if you were born in the Mission District or the Middle East."

These efforts continue. Let me offer a few more local examples from the section of our Pluralism Project website (<http://www.pluralism.org>) called "In the News": In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Association for Interfaith Relations hosted four panels of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist participants in response to September 11. At Wayne State University in Detroit, women students organized a "Scarves for Solidarity" movement to wear headscarves in support of Muslim women students. On May 18, 2002, a four hundred citizens of Pittsburgh joined in a Celebrating Diversity walk, with Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders. On June 6, 2002, an interfaith group in Kansas City brought people from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh faiths together for a prayer gathering to remember September 11. On June 8, 2002, Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Columbus, Ohio announced plans to build a Habitat for Humanity house together this coming fall. On July 22, 2002, members of a Jewish congregation participated in Muslim prayers for the first time, hosted by Islamic Community in Southern Florida in a joint "Festival for Peace."

Education and outreach, fundamental to building relationships in a pluralist society, has been another positive prognostic of this period. As American bombers were leaving an airforce base in Missouri to fly non-stop to Afghanistan, mosques all over America were holding open-houses, inviting neighbors in to learn more about Islam, even in the face of a wave of Islamophobia. The Islamic Society of Boston in Cambridge published an open letter to their neighbors, saying: "We utterly condemn the use of terror to further any political or religious cause. As Muslims, we abhor the killing of innocent civilians. Our holy book, the *Qur'an*, teaches: 'If anyone kills an

innocent person, it is as if he has killed all of humanity. And if anyone saves a life, it is as if he has saved all of humanity' (Ch. 5, verse 32). The letter announced a community open house to be held the following Sunday. It closed, "God willing, we can lend one another strength to find hope in these uncertain times." More than seven hundred people came to the open house, many of them visiting a mosque for the first time.

The story was the same across the country. In Austin, Texas, for example, hundreds showed up for the Sunday afternoon open house. A woman interviewed by the Austin American-Statesman put the matter plainly and succinctly for all of us when she said, "The time of not getting to know each other is over."

I take her words as a concise statement of America's task ahead: "The time of not getting to know each other is over." Getting to know each other is often not easy. As a leader of one of our Muslim organizations put it, "Never have I felt so harassed, and never have I felt so embraced." Harassed, yes, because he was stopped the first time he tried to board a plane. Embraced because when he finally got a flight to Washington DC it was to meet with other Muslim leaders and President Bush at the White House.

In this process of getting to know each other, the outreach of America's Muslim communities, even in this difficult time, was very important. The word *iftar* entered the common American lexicon for the first time as Muslim communities across the country invited friends and colleagues to share the fast-breaking meal with them at the end of each day of Ramadan. The mayor of Columbus, Ohio attended an *iftar* in one of the Islamic centers. Professors, classmates, and administrators in universities, including my own, were invited to evening prayers and an *iftar* meal by the Islamic Society. There was an *iftar* at the State Department for government employees, and for the first time in history, the White House hosted an *iftar* banquet for Muslims.

Pluralism Defined

Let me close, then, with a few words about pluralism. Pluralism is not an ideology, but rather the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences.

First, I would argue, that "pluralism" is not just another word for diversity. It goes beyond mere plurality or diversity to active engagement with that plurality. Religious diversity is an observable fact of American life today—from Flushing, New York where Sikhs and Jews worship across the street from one another, to San Diego, California where the Islamic Center and the Lutheran Church are next door neighbors. The makings of pluralism are surely here, but without any real engagement with one another, this might prove to be just a striking example of diversity. One can study this diversity, complain about there being too much diversity, or even celebrate diversity. But the diversity alone is not pluralism. Pluralism is not a given, but must be created. Pluralism requires participation, and attunement to life and energies of one another. In the world into which we now move, sheer diversity without this real engagement will be increasingly difficult and dangerous.

Second, I would propose that pluralism goes beyond mere tolerance to the active attempt to understand the other, like the step taken by Milwaukee's Christians and Muslims when they signed that covenant pledging themselves to the process of mutual understanding. Although tolerance is no doubt a step forward from intolerance, it does

not require new neighbors to know anything about one another. Tolerance comes from a position of strength. I can tolerate many minorities if I am in power, but if I myself am a member of a small minority, what does tolerance mean?

Today, with the free exercise of such a panoply of religious traditions in our nation and in our neighborhoods, a truly pluralist society will need to move beyond tolerance toward constructive understanding. Beginning to root out the stereotype and prejudice that form the fault-lines of fracture is critical for a multi-religious society. Tolerance can create a climate of restraint, but not a climate of understanding. Tolerance is far too fragile a foundation for a religiously complex society, and in the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Third, I would insist that pluralism is not simply relativism. It does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments, or secular commitments for that matter. It is, rather, the encounter of commitments. Some critics have persisted in linking pluralism with a kind of valueless relativism, in which all cats are gray, all perspectives equally viable and, as a result, equally unconvincing. Pluralism, they would contend, undermines commitment to one's own particular faith with its own particular language, watering down particularity in the interests of universality. I consider this view a distortion of the process of pluralism. I would argue that pluralism is the engagement, not the abdication, of differences and particularities. While the encounter with people of other faiths in a pluralist society may lead one to a less myopic view of one's own faith, pluralism is not premised on a reductive relativism, but on the significance and the engagement of real differences. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. In the world in which we live today, the language of dialogue is a language we will need to learn

In the late 1950s, the Catholic thinker John Courtney Murray described America's civic pluralism as the vigorous engagement of people of different religious beliefs around the "common table" of discussion and debate. He wrote, "By pluralism here I mean the coexistence within the one political community of groups who hold divergent and incompatible views with regard to religious questions. . . . Pluralism therefore implies disagreement and dissension within a community. There is no small political problem here. If society is to be at all a rational process, some set of principles must motivate the general participation of all religious groups, despite their dissensions, in the oneness of the community. On the other hand, these common principles must not hinder the maintenance by each group of its own different identity."

Murray sees the engagement of difference in a pluralistic society as modeled, not on the structure of warfare, but on the structure of dialogue. Vigorous engagement, even argument, around the "common table" is vital to the very heart of a democratic society.

I would also contend that it is vital to health of religious faith, so that we appropriate our faith not by habit or heritage alone, but make it our own within the context of dialogue and engagement with people of other faiths. Such dialogue is not aimed at achieving agreement, but achieving relationship. Whether in the public school, the city council, or the interfaith council, commitments are not left at the door. The "common table" of civic life grows and its shape is re-figured with each new group of participants, each new seat added

Today, the United States has joined multi-religious countries throughout the world in struggling to appropriate a positive, constructive, and creative pluralism. The

challenge and the unparalleled opportunity we all face is to build societies, indeed nations, of many peoples with many cherished religious and cultural traditions. Beyond this, the challenge we all face is to build a world-wide culture of pluralism in which our differences become the source of our vibrancy and strength. We may not succeed, and we may find the world ever more deeply divided by our differences. But if we can succeed, this legacy of nations like the United States and Malaysia will be the greatest form of lasting leadership we can offer the world.

Lesson 5: Responses to Religious Pluralism Among Christians

Due This Lesson

Reading Resource 4-5
Response paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand and be able to discuss the five major responses to religious pluralism among Christians

Homework Assignments

Read Acts 14:1-20; 17:16-34; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 1:18-30; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians. Write a 1-2 page response paper stating how these scriptures speak to pluralism.

Read Resource 5-5.

Continue working on your interviews.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator and Resource 5-5.

Motivator

Dr. Truesdale writes, "Each time Dr. Ron Benefiel and I conduct the Nazarene Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Seminar, "The Theological Development of the Minister," the seminar members, Dr. Benefiel and I attend Sabbath (Shabbat) service at Beth Shalom Congregation, a Conservative Jewish Synagogue in Kansas City, MO. Alan Cohen is the Senior Rabbi. The "contemporary" service begins with joyous singing, accompanied by guitars, tambourines, a violin, and drums. Talented musicians lead the music. As the service proceeds, the liturgy—heavy with Torah readings—repeatedly refers to the holiness of God and to God's command that his people live righteously before him. Over and over one hears reference in the liturgy to the love and grace of God. As the Torah Scroll is taken throughout the congregation, the congregants move to the aisles so that they can touch the Torah either with their prayer shawls or their scriptures.

Pluralism

Each religion has its own independent legitimacy.

No religion can legitimately sit in evaluative judgment upon another.

Scholars who embrace the pluralist assessment of religious pluralism include D.Z. Philips, John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter and Stanley Samartha.

Two forms:

First:

- While there is only one absolute reality, God, God has many faces.
- The various religions are so many different paths to, and accounts of, God.
- Mahatma Gandhi embraced this form of pluralism. The chief representative among Christians is John Hick.

Second:

- A true pluralism must abandon any prior concept of a single "God." The wide differences among the religions are definitive and they should not be glossed over.
- A true pluralism gives up on the idea of a "God with many faces," and just accepts religious diversity without trying to "fix it."

Inclusivism

The *inclusivist* response to religious pluralism affirms that there is only one God, the God to whom the Old and New Testaments bear witness.

All other claims to deity are false.

Inclusivists reject the notion that the autonomy of all the religions should be recognized.

The question inclusivists seek to answer is, "How does Christ relate to other world religions?" The answer takes two forms.

1. Cautious Inclusivism

- Clark H. Pinnock, systematic theologian, and John Sanders represent the first form.
- While affirming an orthodox Christology, they believe that the prevenient grace of God is at work in all persons . . . works to bring all persons to salvation.
- If through another religion a person responds positively to prevenient grace, he or she *may* be "saved" without ever hearing the gospel, and without ever explicitly confessing faith in Christ.
- This form of inclusivism stresses that while the Holy Spirit may "use" another religion, non-Christian religions are not by themselves independent pathways to God.

2. Less Cautious Inclusivism

- Is represented in the work of Karl Rahner.
 - Jesus Christ to be the one in whom the Father has acted to create and redeem the world.
 - Christianity to be the absolute religion
 - while it is true that only through Jesus Christ is salvation made possible and offered to all, God reaches persons under diverse circumstances and at different times
 - status of one who is faithful to his or her historic religious vision prior to hearing the gospel?—"anonymous Christians"

Particularism—Exclusivism

Some of the best known particularists are Karl Barth, Hendrik Kraemer, John Piper, Ronald Nash, R.C. Sproul and Carl F. H. Henry.

Particularists maintain that only through Jesus Christ can persons know God and come to salvation.

Particularists reject the inclusivist belief that we can affirm Jesus Christ to be the only redeemer and still make some place for the positive role of non-Christian religions. Inclusivists who do this, particularists say, compromise the radical singularity and finality of Jesus Christ.

Additional texts . . . are: Ex 20:3-6; 2 Chr 13:9; Is 37:18-19; 40; Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Acts 26:17-18; and Col 1:13.

Particularists reject the idea that through prevenient grace as assisted by a non-Christian religion, persons can experience God's saving grace . . . only persons who in this life hear the gospel and explicitly place their trust in Jesus Christ will be redeemed. All others are lost.

A Moderating Position and An Evolutionary Assessment

A Moderating Position

A response that . . . by Harold Netland. Other evangelicals who hold this position include J. I. Packer, John Stott, Chris Wright and Millard Erickson.

According to this position, inclusivism and exclusivism go beyond what the New Testament states . . . We should not speculate regarding how God will choose to deal with those who have not heard the gospel . . . salvation is by God's grace alone.

An Evolutionary Assessment of Religious Pluralism

Not currently prominent among Christians.

Representatives of the evolutionary position include R.C. Zaehner, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Ninian Smart and Steven Constantine This position depends upon an evolutionary view of man, of cultures and of religions.

All religions are undergoing evolutionary changes that will take them higher than they are now.

But we know the process is moving on a path that leads away from isolation and toward increasing dialogue and harmony. One day the process will deliver a harmonized world religion.

The Grace of God

The following story shows how the prevenient grace of God works in a person's life, drawing them to salvation even when a stranger to the Christian faith.

The Dick Staub Interview: Mary Poplin Calls Claremont Her "Calcutta."
After seeking God through telepathic spoon bending exercises, this professor found God, and with the help of Mother Teresa, her "calling." Posted 12/10/2003 *Christianity Today*, Week of December 8.

Mary Poplin is a professor of education and Dean of the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University. After attending a Methodist church as a child, Poplin began searching other spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, even telepathic attempts to bend spoons. She began teaching at Claremont, where a Christian friend encouraged her spiritual journey. Eventually in 1993, she became a Christian. Poplin then sought to integrate her faith with her teaching and academic career following a trip to work with Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Charity in 1996. She is now working on a book to tell her story.

- A. You were raised in a Christian home and experimented with Zen. You were into anything except what was familiar. What was it about Christianity that was a non-starter for you?
- A. I was working in the area of liberation, education of the poor, education of people of color, and so I just accepted that what I'd been told—Christianity was terrible for women. It never occurred to me to look around the world and see where women were the freest and note that those were countries dominated by Christianity. But I didn't think that way.
- A. What moved you towards a different and more compelling view of Christianity?
- A. One of the main reasons was a graduate student who I knew. He lived his life differently. First of all, he prayed for me for eight years. And he would say irritating things like, "If you ever want to do anything with your spiritual life, I'd like to help you." That was irritating because I thought I was doing plenty with my spiritual life. You know, I was bending spoons.

And the other, more distressing thing is, he would ask me questions like, "Do you believe in evil?" And I would realize that I couldn't answer the question consistently.

He worked at our university as a professor for a year on a sabbatical, and when he left I had a dream. I still felt empty and confused, and in the dream I was in a long line of people suspended in the air. The line seemed eternal on both ends. Jesus was standing greeting us in line.

When I looked at Jesus, I knew immediately what I was seeing. I couldn't even look at him, but for a second. I fell down to his feet and started weeping, and the only way I can describe the feeling I had in the dream is that I could sense every cell in my body, and I felt total shame in every cell. Then Jesus grabbed my

shoulders and I felt total peace, like I had never felt in my life. I woke up and I was crying.

So I go to the phone and I call this gentleman. He had never told me he was a Christian. But I called him and said, "I think I need to talk to you about my spiritual life." And he said, "Let's meet for dinner." At dinner, he said to me, "Why do you think you have to do something with your spiritual life now?" And out of my mouth came something I'd never thought about. I said to him, "I have some black thing in my chest. And I don't know what it is." He just nodded, and I told him the dream. I said, "What do I do?" And he said, "Do you have a Bible?" He made sure I had one before we split up that night. He said to me, "You could read five Psalms a day and one book of Proverbs." And I thought, well okay, I'm going to do it. I mean, I'm really going to do it this time. And then he said, since Jesus was the one in your dream, you might even read the New Testament. And that's how casual he was about that.

I began to read them, and we began to meet in a town between our cities about once a week. That was November to January.

In January my mother wanted to go to North Carolina to where she had grown up. We went to this little Methodist church, not because she was religious, she just wanted to see her friends.

When we got there, I was really moved to just go up to the altar and give my life to the Lord. It wasn't even an altar call. It was a communion call. The guy said, you don't have to be a member of any church to take communion. You just have to believe that Jesus Christ lived, that he died for your sins, and you have to want him in your life. And when he said that, I was so powerfully moved that I actually thought, even if a tornado rips through this building, I'm going to get that communion.

I took the communion, and I didn't even listen to the guy. I knelt down and I said, "Please come and get me. Please come and get me. Please come and get me." And when I took the communion and I said that, I felt free. I felt like tons of things had been lifted off of me. And I began to have an insatiable desire to read the Bible.

Romans 1 says God is obvious to everyone and people's minds who deny him become darkened. And though they think themselves wise they're actually foolish. That was me. But the Scriptures began to heal my mind so I could actually think again.

Lesson 6: New Testament and Religious Pluralism

Due This Lesson

Response paper
Reading 5-5
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- be able to discuss how the writers of the New Testament responded to religious pluralism as it characterized first century Greco-Roman society
- understand and be able to discuss the challenge the New Testament proclamation of Christ presented to Greco-Roman religious pluralism
- have a clear understanding of the gospel the first century Church proclaimed
- begin to see how orthodox Christian faith, based on the New testament, responds to the charge that the gospel of Jesus Christ is “oppressive” with reference to other religions.

Homework Assignments

Interview one layperson and one clergyperson and ask them to describe how the grace of God brought them to salvation. Write a one-page paper.

Read John Wesley’s sermon, “Free Grace,” Resource 6-5. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-128.stm>
Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Read John Wesley’s sermon, “Justification by Faith,” Resource 6-6. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-005.stm>
Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

The following statement comes from *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick, an influential book in the debate over religious pluralism. The book denies the incarnation of God in Christ that the New Testament affirms, and hence sets the stage for a form of pluralism the New Testament will not permit:

“The Christians of the early church lived in a world in which supernatural causation was accepted without question, and divine or spiritual visitants were not unexpected. Such assumptions, however, have become foreign to our situation. In the Western world, both popular culture and the culture of the intelligentsia has come to be dominated by the human and natural sciences to such an extent that supernatural causation or intervention in the affairs of this world has become, for the majority of people, simply incredible.”⁴⁰

Small Groups

In your group discuss each of the passages.

What do each of these passages reveal about pluralism in the first century?

What can we learn that will help us today?

Acts 14: 1-20

Acts 17: 16-34

Romans 5

1 Corinthians 1: 18-30

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Colossians

The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

New Testament Writers' Response

From Matthew to Revelation, the authors of the New Testament, each in his own distinctive way, declared that the God who created the heavens and the earth has acted decisively and finally in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, is being realized, and will be consummated. In Christ all the promises of God to Israel, to all humankind, and to the creation, are being fulfilled. He is God's "YES!" (2 Cor 1:15-22). Christ is in his person the story of God. From one end of the New Testament to the other, Christ alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is affirmed to be the *apocalypse*, the revelation, of God.

The Universality of the Gospel

"God's relationship to and purpose for the nations, and all creation is exclusively determined by and through God's cosmic-eschatological-healing in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."⁴¹

The New Testament contradicts the historicist and postmodern assertions that humans create all religious narratives.

The Gospel is First a Declaration About God and His Deeds

For Wesleyans, as well as for many other Christians, the gospel of God achieves nothing less than *new creation*. It transforms all dimensions of human life, both personal and social.

The gospel of God is good news for us because it is good news about God.

Those who set out to bear witness to the gospel of God must make sure they tell it properly. We begin with God, with the story of his being *for us* and *with us*, and *for* and *with* the creation. We begin with his purposes, his promises, and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We begin with the deeds of God because if we don't we may, in the current pluralist atmosphere, be tempted to reduce the gospel to one religious story among many.

Christian ministers are to be "reporters," not "authors."

The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

Who is This God?

He is the God to whom the Old Testament bears witness—Yahweh. He is the One God by whose word the world and all therein exist.

The God who promises, who is faithful to himself, has now fulfilled his promises, not through another prophet, but through his Son, the only begotten of the Father.

Douglas Harink says, "the new creation is in the *first* place Jesus Christ himself. In the *second* place it is the cosmos delivered from enslaving powers through the crucifixion. *Third*, it is disciples of Christ participating in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism into the Church, and living in the Spirit through loyalty of one Christian to another."⁴²

The End of Non-Christian religions

Even if non-Christian religions have in some way served to make men mindful of God (Acts 14:8:18), they will yield to the King of king and Lord of lords.

"What occurs in the history of Jesus Christ is unsurpassed and unsurpassable; there is no reality, no historical or mythical figure, no system, framework, idea, or anything else that transcends the reality of Jesus Christ, for, in the strongest possible sense, God's action and the history of Jesus Christ are both one and singular."⁴³

Confronting the Charge that Orthodox Christian Faith is Oppressive

"Totalizing"—claiming to know what should be true for all persons.

There are ways of proclaiming him [Jesus] that misrepresent and shame the gospel, turning it in what to many sounds like "bad news." Persons everywhere ought, in the defense of justice, human dignity and decency, to oppose all forms of proclamation that are exploitative, entrapping, coercive, and demeaning. The Apostle Paul did (2 Cor 4:1-6) and so should we. Persons must hear the gospel as healing, not as abuse.

Three Foundational Theological Convictions

- God is the holy and transcendent God. On him everything in heaven and on earth relies. He is the Creator (Rev 4:11) who makes all things new. God, not human or demonic powers, rules the world. God is sovereign. He guides the course of history toward its final triumph over evil.
- The book of Revelation is a message of hope. The final victory is a matter of hope and expectation. Christian hope is grounded upon the decisive victory that has already been won through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the Lamb that was slain, yet he now lives and shares with God in ruling the universe.
- Worship, obedience and honor are the appropriate ways to respond to God and to the Lamb.

John Wesley, "FREE GRACE," Sermon 128

Text from the 1872 edition
Preached at Bristol, in the year 1740

TO THE READER

Nothing but the strongest conviction, not only that what is here advanced is "the truth as it is in Jesus," but also that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world, could have induced me openly to oppose the sentiments of those whom I esteem for their work's sake: At whose feet may I be found in the day of the Lord Jesus!

Should any believe it his duty to reply hereto, I have only one request to make—Let whatsoever you do, be done inherently, in love, and in the spirit of meekness. Let your very disputing show that you have "put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, gentleness, longsuffering; "that even according to this time it may be said, "See how these Christians love one another!"

ADVERTISEMENT

Whereas a pamphlet entitled, "Free Grace Indeed," has been published against this Sermon; this is to inform the publisher, that I cannot answer his tract till he appears to be more in earnest. For I dare not speak of "the deep things of God" in the spirit of a prize-fighter or a stage-player.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Romans, 8: 32

How freely does God love the world! While we were yet sinners, "Christ died for the ungodly." While we were "dead in our sin," God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." And how freely with him does he "give us all things!" Verily, FREE GRACE is all in all!

The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL.

- I. It is free in all to whom it is given.
- II. The doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God.
- III. Predestination destroys the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity.
- IV. This uncomfortable doctrine also destroys our zeal for good works.
- V. Furthermore, the doctrine of predestination has a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation.
- VI. And at the same time, makes that Revelation contradict itself.
- VII. Predestination is a doctrine full of blasphemy.

I.

First. It is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in anywise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God; they are the streams only, not the fountain. They are

the fruits of free grace, and not the root. They are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all; that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and "with him freely giveth us all things.

But it is free for ALL, as well as IN ALL. To this some have answered, "No: It is free only for those whom God hath ordained to life; and they are but a little flock. The greater part of God hath ordained to death; and it is not free for them. Them God hateth; and, therefore, before they were born, decreed they should die eternally. And this he absolutely decreed; because so was his good pleasure; because it was his sovereign will. Accordingly, they are born for this—to be destroyed body and soul in hell. And they grow up under the irrevocable curse of God, without any possibility of redemption; for what grace God gives, he gives only for this, to increase, not prevent, their damnation."

1. This is that decree of predestination. But methinks I hear one say, "This is not the predestination which I hold: I hold only the election of grace. What I believe is not more than this—that God, before the foundation of the world, did elect a certain number of men to be justified, sanctified, and glorified. Now, all these will be saved, and none else; for the rest of mankind God leaves to themselves: So they follow the imaginations of their own hearts, which are only evil continually, and, waxing worse and worse, are at length justly punished with everlasting destruction."

2. Is this all the predestination which you hold? Consider; perhaps this is not all. Do not you believe God ordained them to this very thing? If so, you believe the whole degree; you hold predestination in the full sense which has been above described. But it may be you think you do not. Do not you then believe, God hardens the hearts of them that perish: Do not you believe, he (literally) hardened Pharaoh's heart; and that for this end he raised him up, or created him? Why, this amounts to just the same thing. If you believe Pharaoh, or any one man upon earth, was created for this end—to be damned—you hold all that has been said of predestination. And there is no need you should add, that God seconds his degree, which is supposed unchangeable and irresistible, by hardening the hearts of those vessels of wrath whom that decree had before fitted for destruction.

3. Well, but it may be you do not believe even this; you do not hold any decree of reprobation; you do not think God decrees any man to be damned, not hardens, irresistibly fits him, for damnation; you only say, "God eternally decreed, that all being dead in sin, he would say to some of the dry bones, Live, and to others he would not; that, consequently, these should be made alive, and those abide in death—these should glorify God by their salvation, and those by their destruction."

4. Is not this what you mean by the election of grace? If it be, I would ask one or two questions: Are any who are not thus elected saved? Or were any, from the foundation of the world? Is it possible any man should be saved unless he be thus elected? If you say, "No," you are but where you was; you are not got one hair's breadth farther; you still believe, that, in consequence of an unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, the greater part of mankind abide in death, without any possibility of redemption; inasmuch as none can save them but God, and he will not save them. You believe he hath absolutely decreed not to save them; and what is this but decreeing to damn them? It is, in effect, neither more nor less; it comes to the same thing; for if you are dead, and altogether unable to make yourself alive, then, if God has absolutely

decreed he will make only others alive, and not you, he hath absolutely decreed your everlasting death; you are absolutely consigned to damnation. So then, though you use softer words than some, you mean the self-same thing; and God's decree concerning the election of grace, according to your account of it, amounts to neither more nor less than what others call God's decree of reprobation.

5. Call it therefore by whatever name you please, election, preterition, predestination, or reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this—by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned; it being impossible that any of the former should be damned. or that any of the latter should be saved.

6. But if this be so, then is all preaching vain? It is needless to them that are elected; for they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be saved. Therefore, the end of preaching—to save should—is void with regard to them; and it is useless to them that are not elected, for they cannot possibly be saved: They, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be damned. The end of preaching is therefore void with regard to them likewise; so that in either case our preaching is vain, as you hearing is also vain.

II.

This then, is a plain proof that the doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God, because it makes void the ordinance of God; and God is not divided against himself.

A Second is, that it directly tends to destroy that holiness which is the end of all the ordinances of God. I do not say, none who hold it are holy; (for God is of tender mercy to those who are unavoidably entangled in errors of any kind;) but that the doctrine itself—that every man is either elected or not elected from eternity, and that the one must inevitably be saved, and the other inevitably damned—has a manifest tendency to destroy holiness in general; for it wholly takes away those first motives to follow after it, so frequently proposed in Scripture, the hope of future reward and fear of punishment, the hope of heaven and fear of hell. That these shall go away into everlasting punishment, and those into life eternal, is not motive to him to struggle for life who believes his lot is cast already; it is not reasonable for him so to do, if he thinks he is unalterably adjudged either to life or death. You will say, "But he knows not whether it is life or death." What then?—this helps not the matter; for if a sick man knows that he must unavoidably die, or unavoidably recover, though he knows not which, it is unreasonable for him to take any physic at all. He might justly say, (and so I have heard some speak, both in bodily sickness and in spiritual) "If I am ordained to life, I shall live; if to death, I shall live; so I need not trouble myself about it." So directly does this doctrine tend to shut the very gate of holiness in general—to hinder unholy men from ever approaching thereto, or striving to enter in thereat.

1. As directly does this doctrine tend to destroy several particular branches of holiness. Such are meekness and love—love, I mean, of our enemies—of the evil and unthankful. I say not, that none who hold it have meekness and love (for as is the power of God, so is his mercy;) but that it naturally tends to inspire, or increase, a sharpness or eagerness of temper, which is quite contrary to the meekness of Christ; as then especially appears, when they are opposed on this head. And it as naturally inspires contempt or coldness towards those whom we suppose outcast from God. "O but," you say, "I suppose no particular man a reprobate." You mean you would not if

you could help it: But you cannot help sometimes applying your general doctrine to particular persons: The enemy of souls will apply it for you. You know how often he has done so. But you rejected the thought with abhorrence. True; as soon as you could; but how did it sour and sharpen your spirit in the mean time! You well know it was not the spirit of love which you then felt towards that poor sinner, whom you supposed or suspected, whether you would or no, to have been hated of God from eternity.

III.

Thirdly. This doctrine tends to destroy the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity. This is evident as to all those who believe themselves to be reprobated, or who only suspect or fear it. All the great and precious promises are lost to them; they afford them no ray of comfort: For they are not the elect of God; therefore they have neither lot nor portion in them. This is an effectual bar to their finding any comfort or happiness, even in that religion whose ways are designed to be "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace."

1. And as to you who believe yourselves the elect of God, what is your happiness? I hope, not a notion, a speculative belief, a bare opinion of any kind; but a feeling possession of God in your heart, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, or, the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God. This, otherwise termed "the full assurance of faith: is the true ground of a Christian's happiness. And it does indeed imply a full assurance that all your past sins are forgiven, and that you are *now* a child of God. But it does not necessarily imply a full assurance of our future perseverance. I do not say this is never joined to it, but that it is not necessarily implied therein; for many have the one who have not the other.

2. Now, this witness of the Spirit experience shows to be much obstructed by this doctrine; and not only in those who, believing themselves reprobated, by this belief thrust it far from them, but even in them that have tasted of that good gift, who yet have soon lost it again, and fallen back into doubts, and fears, and darkness—horrible darkness, that might be felt! And I appeal to any of you who hold this doctrine, to say, between God and your own hearts, whether you have not often a return of doubts and fears concerning your election or perseverance! If you ask, "Who has not?" I answer, Very few of those that hold this doctrine; but many, very many, of those that hold it not, in all parts of the earth—many of these have enjoyed the uninterrupted witness of his Spirit, the continual light of his countenance, from the moment wherein they first believed, for many months or years, to this day.

3. That assurance of faith which these enjoy excludes all doubt and fear, it excludes all kinds of doubt and fear concerning their future perseverance; though it is not properly, as was said before, an assurance of what is future, but only of what *now* is. And this needs not for its support a speculative belief, that whoever is once ordained to life must live; for it is wrought from hour to hour, by the mighty power of God, "by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them." And therefore that doctrine is not of God, because it tends to obstruct, if not destroy, this great work of the Holy Ghost, whence flows the chief comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity.

4. Again: How uncomfortable a thought is this, that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offense or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings! How peculiarly uncomfortable must it be to those who have put

on Christ! To those who, being filled with bowels of mercy, tenderness, and compassion, could even “wish themselves accursed for their brethren’s sake!”

IV.

Fourthly. This uncomfortable doctrine directly tends to destroy our zeal for good works. And this it does, First, as it naturally tends (according to what was observed before) to destroy our love to the greater part of mankind, namely, the evil and unthankful. For whatever lessens our love, must go far lessen our desire to do them good. This it does, Secondly, as it cuts off one of the strongest motives to all acts of bodily mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and the like—viz., the hope of saving their souls from death. For what avails it to relieve their temporal wants, who are just dropping into eternal fire? “Well; but run and snatch them as brands out of the fire: Nay, this you suppose impossible. They were appointed thereunto, you say, from eternity, before they had done either good or evil. you believe it is the will of God they should die. And “who hath resisted his will?” But you say you do not know whether these are elected or not. What then? If you know they are the one or the other—that they are either elected or not elected—all your labour is void and vain. In either case, your advice, reproof, or exhortation is as needless and useless as our preaching. It is needless to them that are elected; for they will infallibly be saved without it. It is useless to them that are not elected; for with or without it they will infallibly be damned; therefore you cannot consistently with your principles take any pains about their salvation. Consequently, those principles directly tend to destroy your zeal for good works; for all good works; but particularly for the greatest of all, the saving of souls from death.

V.

But, Fifthly, this doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works, but hath also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation. The point which the wisest of the modern unbelievers most industriously labour to prove, is, that the Christian Revelation is not necessary. They well know, could they once show this, the conclusion would be too plain to be denied, “If it be not necessary, it is not true,” Now, this fundamental point you give up. For supposing that eternal, unchangeable decree, one part of mankind must be saved, though the Christian Revelation were not in being, and the other part of mankind must be damned, notwithstanding that Revelation. And what would an infidel desire more? You allow him all he asks. In making the gospel thus unnecessary to all sorts of men, you give up the whole Christian cause. “O tell it not in Gath! Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice; lest the sons of unbelief triumph!”

VI.

And as this doctrine manifestly and directly tends to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, so it does the same thing, by plain consequence, in making that Revelation contradict itself. For it is grounded on such an interpretation of some texts (more or fewer it matters not) as flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture. For instance: The assertors of this doctrine interpret that text of Scripture, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” as implying that God in a literal sense hated Esau, and all the reprobated, from eternity.

Now, what can possibly be a more flat contradiction than this, not only to the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, but also to all those particular texts which expressly declare, "God is love?" Again: They infer from that text, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," (Romans 4:15) that God is love only to some men, viz., the elect, and that he hath mercy for those only; flatly contrary to which is the whole tenor of Scripture, as is that express declaration in particular, "The Lord is loving unto every man; and his mercy is over all his works." (Psalm 114:9) Again: They infer from that and the like texts, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;: that he showeth mercy only to those to whom he had respect from all eternity. Nay, but who replieth against God now? You now contradict the whole oracles of God, which declare throughout, "God is no respecter of persons:" (Acts 10:34) "There is no respect of persons with him." (Rom. 2:11) Again: from that text, "The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her," unto Rebecca, "The elder shall serve the younger;" you infer, that our being predestinated, or elect, no way depends on the foreknowledge of God. Flatly contrary to this are all the scriptures; and those in particular, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God; " (1 Peter 1:2) "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." (Rom. 8:29)

1. And "the same Lord over all is rich" in mercy "to all that call upon him:" (Romans 10:12) But you say, "No; he is such only to those for whom Christ died. And those are not all, but only a few, whom God hath chosen out of the world; for he died not for all, but only for those who were 'chosen in him before the foundation of the world.'" (Eph. 1:4) Flatly contrary to your interpretation of these scriptures, also, is the whole tenor of the New Testament; as are in particular those texts: "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died," (Rom. 14:15)—a clear proof that Christ died, not only for those that are saved, but also for them that perish: He is "the Saviour of the world;" (John 4:42) He is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world;" (John 1:29) "He is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world;" (1 John 2:2) "He," the living God, "is the Savior of all men;" (1 Timothy 4:10) "He gave himself a ransom for all;" (1 Tim. 2:6) "He tasted death for every man." (Heb. 2:9)

2. If you ask, "Why then are not all men saved?" the whole law and the testimony answer, First, Not because of any decree of God; not because it is his pleasure they should die; for, "As I live," saith the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." (Ezek. 18:3, 32) Whatever be the cause of their perishing, it cannot be his will, if the oracles of God are true; for they declare, "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" (2 Pet. 3:9) "He willeth that all men should be saved." And they, Secondly, declare what is the cause why all men are not saved, namely, that they will not be saved: So our Lord expressly, "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." (John 5:40) "The power of the Lord is present to heal" them, but they will not be healed. "They reject the counsel," the merciful counsel, "of God against themselves," as did their stiff-necked forefathers. And therefore are they without excuse; because God would save them, but they will not be saved: This is the condemnation, "How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37)

VII.

Thus manifestly does this doctrine tend to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, by making it contradict itself; by giving such an interpretation of some texts, as flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture—an abundant proof that it is not of God. But neither is this all: For, Seventhly, it is a doctrine full of blasphemy; of such blasphemy as I should dread to mention, but that the honour of our gracious God, and the cause of his truth, will not suffer me to be silent. In the cause of God, then, and from a sincere concern for the glory of his great name, I will mention a few of the horrible blasphemies contained in this horrible doctrine. But first, I must warn every one of you that hears, as ye will answer it at the great day, not to charge me (as some have done) with blaspheming, because I mention the blasphemy of others. And the more you are grieve with them that do thus blaspheme, see that ye “confirm your love towards them: the more, and that your heart’s desire, and continual prayer to God, be, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!”

1. This premised, let it be observed, that this doctrine represents our blessed Lord, “Jesus Christ the righteous,” “the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth,” as an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity. For it cannot be denied, that he everywhere speaks as if he was willing that all men should be saved. Therefore, to say he was not willing that all men should be saved, is to represent him as a mere hypocrite and dissembler. It cannot be denied that the gracious words which came out of his mouth are full of invitations to all sinners. To say, then, he did not intend to save all sinners, is to represent him as a gross deceiver of the people. You cannot deny that he says, “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.” If, then, you say he calls those that cannot come; those whom he knows to be unable to come; those whom he can make able to come, but will not; how is it possible to describe greater insincerity? You represent him as mocking his helpless creatures, by offering what he never intends to give. You describe him as saying one thing, and meaning another; as pretending the love which his had not. Him, in “whose mouth was no guile,” you make full of deceit, void of common sincerity; -- then especially, when, drawing nigh the city, He wept over it, and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often *would* I have gathered thy children together—and *ye would not*,” *EthelEsa* -- *kai ouk EthelEsate*. Now, if you say, *they would*, but *he would not*, you represent him (which who could hear?) as weeping crocodiles’ tears; weeping over the prey which himself had doomed to destruction!

2. Such blasphemy this, as one would think might make the ears of a Christian to tingle! But there is yet more behind; for just as it honours the Son, so doth this doctrine honour the Father. It destroys all his attributes at once: It overturns both his justice, mercy, and truth; yea, it represents the most holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust. More *false*; because the devil, liar as he is, hath never said, “He willeth all men to be saved:” More *unjust*; because the devil cannot, if he would, be guilty of such injustice as you ascribe to God, when you say that God condemned millions of souls to everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, for continuing in sin, which, for want of that *grace he will not* give them, they cannot avoid: And more *cruel*; because that unhappy spirit “seeketh rest and findeth none;” so that his own restless misery is a kind of temptation to him to tempt others. But God resteth in his high and holy place; so that to suppose him, of his own mere motion, of his pure will and pleasure, happy as he is, to doom his creatures, whether they will or no, to endless misery, is to impute such cruelty to him

as we cannot impute even to the great enemy of God and man. It is to represent the high God (he that hath ears to hear let him hear!) as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil!

3. This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never proved this; whatever its true meaning be. This cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, "What is its true meaning then?" If I say, "I know not," you have gained nothing; for there are many scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense, than to say it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it mean besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the world is unjust. No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works; that is, whatever it prove beside, no scripture can prove predestination.

4. This is the blasphemy for which (however I love the persons who assert it) I abhor the doctrine of predestination, a doctrine, upon the supposition of which, if one could possibly suppose it for a moment, (call it election, reprobation, or what you please, for all comes to the same thing) one might say to our adversary, the devil, "Thou fool, why dost thou roar about any longer? Thy lying in wait for souls is as needless and useless as our preaching. Hearest thou not, that God hath taken thy work out of thy hands; and that he doeth it much more effectually? Thou, with all thy principalities and powers, canst only so assault that we may resist thee; but He can irresistibly destroy both body and soul in hell! Thou canst only entice; but his unchangeable decrees, to leave thousands of souls in death, compels them to continue in sin, till they drop into everlasting burnings. Thou temptest; He forceth us to be damned; for we cannot resist his will. Thou fool, why goest thou about any longer, seeking whom thou mayest devour? Hearest thou not that God is the devouring lion, the destroyer of souls, the murderer of men? Moloch caused only children to pass through the fire: and that fire was soon quenched; or, the corruptible body being consumed, its torment was at an end; but God, thou are told, by his eternal decree, fixed before they had done good or evil, causes, not only children of a span long, but the parents also, to pass through the fire of hell, the 'fire which never shall be quenched; and the body which is cast thereinto, being now incorruptible and immortal, will be ever consuming and never consumed, but 'the smoke of their torment,' because it is God's good pleasure, 'ascendeth up for ever and ever.' "

5. O how would the enemy of God and man rejoice to hear these things were so! How would he cry aloud and spare not! How would he lift up his voice and say, "To your tents, O Israel! Flee from the face of this God, or ye shall utterly perish! But whither will ye flee? Into heaven? He is there, Down to hell? He is there also. Ye cannot flee from an omnipresent, almighty tyrant. And whether ye flee or stay, I call heaven, his throne, and earth, his footstool, to witness against you, ye shall perish, ye shall die eternally. Sing, O hell, and rejoice, ye that are under the earth! For God, even the mighty God, hath spoken, and devoted to death thousands of souls, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof! Here, O death, is they sting! They shall not, cannot escape; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Here, O grave is thy victory. Nations yet unborn, or ever they have done good or evil are doomed never to see the light of life, but thou shalt gnaw upon them for ever and ever! Let all those morning

stars sing together, who fell with Lucifer, son of the morning! Let all the sons of hell shout for joy! For the decree is past, and who shall disannul it?"

6. Yea, the decree is past; and so it was before the foundation of the world. But what decree? Even this: "I will set before the sons of men 'life and death, blessing, cursing.' And the soul that chooseth life shall live, as the soul that chooseth death shall die." This decree whereby "whom God did foreknow, he did predestinate," was indeed from everlasting; this, whereby all who suffer Christ to make them alive are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God," now standeth fast, even as the moon, and as the faithful witnesses in heaven; and when heaven and earth shall pass away, yet this shall not pass away; for it is as unchangeable and eternal as is the being of God that gave it. This decree yields the strongest encouragement to abound in all good works and in all holiness; and it is a well-spring of joy, of happiness also, to our great and endless comfort. This is worthy of God; it is every way consistent with all the perfections of his nature. It gives us the noblest view both of his justice, mercy, and truth. To this agrees the whole scope of the Christian Revelation, as well as all the parts thereof. To this Moses and all the Prophets bear witness, and our blessed Lord and all his Apostles. Thus Moses, in the name of his Lord: "I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live." Thus Ezekiel: "choose life, that thou and thy seed may live;" Thus Ezekiel: (To cite one Prophet for all) "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: The son shall not bear" eternally, "the iniquity of the father. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (18:20) Thus our blessed Lord: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." (John 7:37) Thus his great Apostle, St. Paul: (Acts 17:30) "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent; -- "all men everywhere;" every man in every place, without any exception either of place or person. Thus St. James: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." (James 1:5) Thus St. Peter: (2 Pet. 3:9) "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And thus St. John: " If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1, 2)

7. O hear ye this, ye that forget God! Ye cannot charge your death upon him! "'Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?' saith the Lord God." (Ezek. 18:23ff.) "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions where by ye have transgressed, -- for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. -- Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11)

Acknowledgements

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John Wesley, "JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH," Sermon 5

Text from the 1872 edition

"To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Romans 4:5

1. How a sinner may be justified before God, the Lord and Judge of all, is a question of no common importance to every child of man. It contains the foundation of all our hope, inasmuch as while we are at enmity with God, there can be no true peace, no solid joy, either in time or in eternity. What peace can there be, while our own heart condemns us; and much more, He that is "greater than our heart, and knoweth all things?" What solid joy, either in this world or that to come, while "the wrath of God abideth on us?"

2. And yet how little hath this important question been understood! What confused notions have many had concerning it! Indeed, not only confused, but often utterly false; contrary to the truth, as light to darkness; notions absolutely inconsistent with the oracles of God, and with the whole analogy of faith. And hence, erring concerning the very foundation, they could not possibly build thereon; at least, not "gold, silver, or precious stones," which would endure when tried as by fire; but only "hay and stubble," neither acceptable to God, nor profitable to man.

3. In order to justice, in far as in me lies, to the vast importance of the subject, to save those that seek the truth in sincerity from "vain jangling and strife of words," to clear the confusedness of thought into which so many have already been led thereby, and to give them true and just conceptions of this great mystery of godliness, I shall endeavour to show,

First. What is the general ground of this whole doctrine of justification.

Secondly. What justification is.

Thirdly. Who they are that are justified. And,

Fourthly. On what terms they are justified.

I.

I am, First, to show, what is the general ground of this whole doctrine of justification.

1. In the image of God was man made, holy as he that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an "image of his own eternity," an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled. He "loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength."

2. To man thus upright and perfect, God gave a perfect law, to which he required full and perfect obedience. He required full obedience in every point, and this to be performed without any intermission, from the moment man became a living soul, till the time of his trial should be ended. No allowance was made for any falling short: As,

indeed, there was no need of any; man being altogether equal to the task assigned, and thoroughly furnished for every good word and work.

3. To the entire law of love which was written in his heart, (against which, perhaps, he could not sin directly,) it seemed good to the sovereign wisdom of God to superadd one positive law: "Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree that groweth in the midst of the garden;" annexing that penalty thereto, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

4. Such, then, was the state of man in Paradise. By the free, unmerited love of God, he was holy and happy: He knew, loved, enjoyed God, which is, in substance, life everlasting. And in this life of love, he was to continue for ever, if he continued to obey God in all things; but, if he disobeyed him in any, he was to forfeit all. "In that day," said God, "thou shalt surely die."

5. Man did disobey God. He "ate of the tree, of which God commanded him, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it." And in that day he was condemned by the righteous judgment of God. Then also the sentence whereof he was warned before, began to take place upon him. For the moment he tasted that fruit, he died. His soul died, was separated from God; separate from whom the soul has no more life than the body has when separate from the soul. His body, likewise, became corruptible and mortal; so that death then took hold on this also. And being already dead in spirit, dead to God, dead in sin, he hastened on to death everlasting; to the destruction both of body and soul, in the fire never to be quenched

6. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. And so death passed upon all men," as being contained in him who was the common father and representative of us all. Thus, "through the offence of one," all are dead, dead to God, dead in sin, dwelling in a corruptible, mortal body, shortly to be dissolved, and under the sentence of death eternal. For as, "by one man's disobedience," all "were made sinners;" so, by that offence of one, "judgment came upon all men to condemnation." (Romans v. 12, &c.)

7. In this state we were, even all mankind, when "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but have everlasting life." In the fullness of time he was made Man, another common Head of mankind, a second general Parent and Representative of the whole human race. And as such it was that "he bore our griefs," "the Lord laying upon him the iniquities of us all." Then was he "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." "He made his soul an offering for sin:" He poured out his blood for the transgressors: He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," that by his stripes we might be healed: And by that one oblation of himself, once offered, he hath redeemed me and all mankind; having thereby "made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

8. In consideration of this, that the Son of God hath "tasted death for every man," God hath now "reconciled the world to himself, not imputing to them their" former "trespasses." And thus, "as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification." So that, for the sake of his well-beloved Son, of what he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition, (which himself also enables us to perform,) both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to reinstate us

in his favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal.

9. This, therefore, is the general ground of the whole doctrine of justification. By the sin of the first Adam, who was not only the father, but likewise the representative, of us all, we all fell short of the favour of God; we all became children of wrath; or, as the Apostle expresses it, "judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Even so, by the sacrifice for sin made by the Second Adam, as the Representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world, that he hath given them a new covenant; the plain condition whereof being once fulfilled, "there is no more condemnation" for us, but "we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ."

II.

1. But what is it to be "justified?" What is "justification?" This was the Second thing which I proposed to show. And it is evident, from what has been already observed, that it is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is "sanctification;" which is, indeed, in some degree, the immediate fruit of justification, but, nevertheless, is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God does for us through his Son; the other, what he works in us by his Spirit. So that, although some rare instances may be found, wherein the term "justified" or "justification" is used in so wide a sense as to include "sanctification" also; yet, in general use, they are sufficiently distinguished from each other, both by St. Paul and the other inspired writers.

2. Neither is that far-fetched conceit, that justification is the clearing us from accusation, particularly that of Satan, easily provable from any clear text of holy writ. In the whole scriptural account of this matter, as above laid down, neither that accuser nor his accusation appears to be at all taken in. It can not indeed be denied, that he is the "accuser" of men, emphatically so called. But it does in nowise appear, that the great Apostle hath any reference to this, more or less, in all he hath written touching justification, either to the Romans or the Galatians.

3. It is also far easier to take for granted, than to prove from any clear scripture testimony, that justification is the clearing us from the accusation brought against us by the law: At least if this forced, unnatural way of speaking mean either more or less than this, that, whereas we have transgressed the law of God, and thereby deserved the damnation of hell, God does not inflict on those who are justified the punishment which they had deserved.

4. Least of all does justification imply, that God is deceived in those whom he justifies; that he thinks them to be what, in fact, they are not; that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are. It does by no means imply, that God judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things; that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous. Surely no. The judgment of the all-wise God is always according to truth. Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom, to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so. He can no more, in this manner, confound me with Christ, than with David or Abraham. Let any man to whom God hath given understanding, weigh this without prejudice; and he cannot but perceive, that such a notion of justification is neither reconcilable to reason nor Scripture.

5. The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, hereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he "showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past." This is the easy, natural account of it given by St. Paul, throughout this whole epistle. So he explains it himself, more particularly in this and in the following chapter. Thus, in the next verses but one to the text, "Blessed are they," saith he, "whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." To him that is justified or forgiven, God "will not impute sin" to his condemnation. He will not condemn him on that account, either in this world or in that which is to come. His sins, all his past sins, in thought, word, and deed, are covered, are blotted out, shall not be remembered or mentioned against him, any more than if they had not been. God will not inflict on that sinner what he deserved to suffer, because the Son of his love hath suffered for him. And from the time we are "accepted through the Beloved," "reconciled to God through his blood," he loves, and blesses, and watches over us for good, even as if we had never sinned.

Indeed the Apostle in one place seems to extend the meaning of the word much farther, where he says, "Not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law, shall be justified." Here he appears to refer our justification to the sentence of the great day. And so our Lord himself unquestionably doth, when he says, "By thy words thou shalt be justified;" proving hereby, that "for every idle word men shall speak, they shall give an account in the day of judgment." But perhaps we can hardly produce another instance of St. Paul's using the word in that distant sense. In the general tenor of his writings, it is evident he doth not; and least of all in the text before us, which undeniably speaks, not of those who have already "finished their course," but of those who are now just "setting out," just beginning to "run the race which is set before them."

III.

1. But this is the third thing which was to be considered, namely, Who are they that are justified? And the Apostle tells us expressly, the ungodly: "He (that is, God) justifieth the ungodly;" the ungodly of every kind and degree; and none but the ungodly. As "they that are righteous need no repentance," so they need no forgiveness. It is only sinners that have any occasion for pardon: It is sin alone which admits of being forgiven. Forgiveness, therefore, has an immediate reference to sin, and, in this respect, to nothing else. It is our "unrighteousness" to which the pardoning God is "merciful:" It is our "iniquity" which he "remembereth no more."

2. This seems not to be at all considered by those who so vehemently contend that a man must be sanctified, that is, holy, before he can be justified; especially by such of them as affirm, that universal holiness or obedience must precede justification. (Unless they mean that justification at the last day, which is wholly out of the present question.) So far from it, that the very supposition is not only flatly impossible, (for where there is no love of God, there is no holiness, and there is no love of God but from a sense of his loving us,) but also grossly, intrinsically absurd, contradictory to itself. For it is not a saint but a sinner that is forgiven, and under the notion of a sinner. God justifieth not the godly, but the ungodly; not those that are holy already, but the unholy. Upon what condition he doeth this, will be considered quickly: but whatever it is, it cannot be holiness. To assert this, is to say the Lamb of God takes away only those sins which were taken away before.

3. Does then the good Shepherd seek and save only those that are found already? No: He seeks and saves that which is lost. He pardons those who need his pardoning mercy. He saves from the guilt of sin, (and, at the same time, from the power,) sinners of every kind, of every degree: men who, till then, were altogether ungodly; in whom the love of the Father was not; and, consequently, in whom dwelt no good thing, no good or truly Christian temper—but all such as were evil and abominable—pride, anger, love of the world—the genuine fruits of that “carnal mind” which is “enmity against God.”

4. These who are sick, the burden of whose sins is intolerable, are they that need a Physician; these who are guilty, who groan under the wrath of God, are they that need a pardon. These who are “condemned already,” not only by God, but also by their own conscience, as by a thousand witnesses, of all their ungodliness, both in thought, and word, and work, cry aloud for Him that “justifieth the ungodly,” through the redemption that is in Jesus—the ungodly, and “him that worketh not;” that worketh not, before he is justified, anything that is good, that is truly virtuous or holy, but only evil continually. For his heart is necessarily, essentially evil, till the love of God is shed abroad therein. And while the tree is corrupt, so are the fruits; “for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.”

5. If it be objected, “Nay, but a man, before he is justified, may feed the hungry, or clothe the naked; and these are good works;” the answer is easy: He may do these, even before he is justified; and these are, in one sense, “good works;” they are “good and profitable to men.” But it does not follow, that they are, strictly speaking, good in themselves, or good in the sight of God. All truly “good works” (to use the words of our Church) “follow after justification;” and they are therefore good and “acceptable to God in Christ,” because they “spring out of a true and living faith.” By a parity of reason, all “works done before justification are not good,” in the Christian sense, “forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ;” (though from some kind of faith in God they may spring;) “yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not” (how strange soever it may appear to some) “but they have the nature of sin.”

6. Perhaps those who doubt of this have not duly considered the weighty reason which is here assigned, why no works done before justification can be truly and properly good. The argument plainly runs thus—No works are good, which are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done. But no works done before justification are done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done: Therefore, no works done before justification are good.

The first proposition is self-evident; and the second, that no works done before justification are done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, will appear equally plain and undeniable, if we only consider, God hath willed and commanded that “all our works” should “be done in charity;” (*en agapE*) in love, in that love to God which produces love to all mankind. But none of our works can be done in this love, while the love of the Father (of God as our Father) is not in us; and this love can not be in us till we receive the “Spirit of Adoption, crying in our hearts, Abba, Father.” If, therefore, God doth not “justify the ungodly,” and him that (in this sense) “worketh not,” then hath Christ died in vain; then, notwithstanding his death, can no flesh living be justified.

IV.

1. But on what terms, then, is he justified who is altogether "ungodly," and till that time "worketh not?" On one alone; which is faith: He "believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly." And "he that believeth is not condemned;" yea, he is "passed from death unto life." "For the righteousness (or mercy) of God is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: Whom God hath set forth for a propitiation, through faith in his blood; that he might be just, and" (consistently with his justice) "the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus:" "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law;" without previous obedience to the moral law, which, indeed, he could not, till now, perform. That it is the moral law, and that alone, which is here intended, appears evidently from the words that follow: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law. What law do we establish by faith? Not the ritual law: Not the ceremonial law of Moses. In nowise; but the great, unchangeable law of love, the holy love of God and of our neighbour."

2. Faith in general is a divine, supernatural "*elegchos*," "evidence" or "conviction," "of things not seen," not discoverable by our bodily senses, as being either past, future, or spiritual. Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself;" but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for "my" sins, that he loved "me," and gave himself for "me." And at what time soever a sinner thus believes, be it in early childhood, in the strength of his years, or when he is old and hoary-haired, God justifieth that ungodly one: God, for the sake of his Son, pardoneth and absolveth him, who had in him, till then, no good thing. Repentance, indeed, God had given him before; but that repentance was neither more nor less than a deep sense of the want of all good, and the presence of all evil. And whatever good he hath, or doeth, from that hour when he first believes in God through Christ, faith does not "find," but "bring." This is the fruit of faith. First the tree is good, and then the fruit is good also.

3. I cannot describe the nature of this faith better than in the words of our own Church: "The only instrument of salvation" (whereof justification is one branch) "is faith; that is, a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us again into His favour, for the merits of Christ's death and passion. --But here we must take heed that we do not halt with God, through an inconstant, wavering faith: Peter, coming to Christ upon the water, because he fainted in faith, was in danger of drowning; so we, if we begin to waver or doubt, it is to be feared that we shall sink as Peter did, not into the water, but into the bottomless pit of hell fire." ("Second Sermon on the Passion")

"Therefore, have a sure and constant faith, not only that the death of Christ is available for all the world, but that he hath made a full and sufficient sacrifice for "thee," a perfect cleansing of "thy" sins, so that thou mayest say, with the Apostle, he loved "thee," and gave himself for "thee." For this is to make Christ "thine own," and to apply his merits unto "thyself." ("Sermon on the Sacrament, First Part")

4. By affirming that this faith is the term or "condition of justification," I mean, First, that there is no justification without it. "He that believeth not is condemned already;" and so long as he believeth not, that condemnation cannot be removed, but "the wrath of God abideth on him." As "there is no other name given under heaven," than that of Jesus of Nazareth, no other merit whereby a condemned sinner can ever be

saved from the guilt of sin; so there is no other way of obtaining a share in his merit, than "by faith in his name." So that as long as we are without this faith, we are "strangers to the covenant of promise," we are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world." Whatsoever virtues (so called) a man may have—I speak of those unto whom the gospel is preached; for "what have I to do to judge them that are without?" whatsoever good works (so accounted) he may do, it profiteth not; he is still a "child of wrath," still under the curse, till he believes in Jesus.

5. Faith, therefore, is the "necessary" condition of justification; yea, and the "only necessary" condition thereof. This is the Second point carefully to be observed; that, the very moment God giveth faith (for "it is the gift of God") to the "ungodly" that "worketh not," that "faith is counted to him for righteousness." He hath no righteousness at all, antecedent to this, not so much as negative righteousness, or innocence. But "faith is imputed to him for righteousness," the very moment that he believeth. Not that God (as was observed before) thinketh him to be what he is not. But as "he made Christ to be sin for us," that is, treated him as a sinner, punishing him for our sins; so he counteth us righteous, from the time we believe in him: That is, he doth not punish us for our sins; yea, treats us as though we are guiltless and righteous.

6. Surely the difficulty of assenting to this proposition, that "faith is the "only condition" of justification," must arise from not understanding it. We mean thereby thus much, that it is the only thing without which none is justified; the only thing that is immediately, indispensably, absolutely requisite in order to pardon. As, on the one hand, though a man should have every thing else without faith, yet he cannot be justified; so, on the other, though he be supposed to want everything else, yet if he hath faith, he cannot but be justified. For suppose a sinner of any kind or degree, in a full sense of his total ungodliness, of his utter inability to think, speak, or do good, and his absolute meetness for hell-fire; suppose, I say, this sinner, helpless and hopeless, casts himself wholly on the mercy of God in Christ, (which indeed he cannot do but by the grace of God,) who can doubt but he is forgiven in that moment? Who will affirm that any more is "indispensably required" before that sinner can be justified?

Now, if there ever was one such instance from the beginning of the world, (and have there not been, and are there not, ten thousand times ten thousand?) it plainly follows, that faith is, in the above sense, the sole condition of justification.

7. It does not become poor, guilty, sinful worms, who receive whatsoever blessings they enjoy, (from the least drop of water that cools our tongue, to the immense riches of glory in eternity,) of grace, of mere favour, and not of debt, to ask of God the reasons of his conduct. It is not meet for us to call Him in question "who giveth account to none of his ways;" to demand, "Why didst thou make faith the condition, the only condition, of justification? Wherefore didst thou decree, "He that believeth," and he only, "shall be saved?" This is the very point on which St. Paul so strongly insists in the ninth chapter of this Epistle, viz., That the terms of pardon and acceptance must depend, not on us, but "on him that calleth us;" that there is no "unrighteousness with God," in fixing his own terms, not according to ours, but his own good pleasure; who may justly say, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;" namely, on him who believeth in Jesus. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth," to choose the condition on which he shall find acceptance; "but of God that showeth mercy;" that accepteth none at all, but of his own free love, his unmerited goodness. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy," viz.,

on those who believe on the Son of his love; "and whom he will," that is, those who believe not, "he hardeneth," leaves at last to the hardness of their hearts.

8. One reason, however, we may humbly conceive, of God's fixing this condition of justification, "If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved," was to "hide pride from man." Pride had already destroyed the very angels of God, had cast down "a third part of the stars of heaven." It was likewise in great measure owing to this, when the tempter said, "Ye shall be as gods," that Adam fell from his own steadfastness, and brought sin and death into the world. It was therefore an instance of wisdom worthy of God, to appoint such a condition of reconciliation for him and all his posterity as might effectually humble, might abase them to the dust. And such is faith. It is peculiarly fitted for this end: For he that cometh unto God by this faith, must fix his eye singly on his own wickedness, on his guilt and helplessness, without having the least regard to any supposed good in himself, to any virtue or righteousness whatsoever. He must come as a "mere sinner," inwardly and outwardly, self-destroyed and self-condemned, bringing nothing to God but ungodliness only, pleading nothing of his own but sin and misery. Thus it is, and thus alone, when his "mouth is stopped," and he stands utterly "guilty before" God, that he can "look unto Jesus," as the whole and sole "Propitiation for his sins." Thus only can he be "found in him," and receive the "righteousness which is of God by faith."

9. Thou ungodly one, who hearest or readest these words! thou vile, helpless, miserable sinner! I charge thee before God, the Judge of all, go straight unto him, with all thy ungodliness. Take heed thou destroy not thy own soul by pleading thy righteousness, more or less. Go as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell; and thou shalt then find favour in his sight, and know that he justifieth the ungodly. As such thou shalt be brought unto the "blood of sprinkling," as an undone, helpless, damned sinner. Thus "look unto Jesus!" There is "the Lamb of God," who "taketh away thy sins!" Plead thou no works, no righteousness of thine own! No humility, contrition, sincerity! In nowise. That were, in very deed, to deny the Lord that bought thee. No: Plead thou, singly, the blood of the covenant, the ransom paid for thy proud, stubborn, sinful soul. Who art thou, that now seest and feelest both thine inward and outward ungodliness? Thou art the man! I want thee for my Lord! I challenge "thee" for a child of God by faith! The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell, art just fit to advance his glory; the glory of his free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. O come quickly! Believe in the Lord Jesus; and thou, even thou, art reconciled to God.

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Lesson 7: The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Prevenient Grace, the Gift of Faith, Justification

Due This Lesson

Interview paper
Reading and response to Resource 6-5
Reading and response to Resource 6-6
Journaling

Learner Objectives

- By the end of this lesson, participants will
- understand and be able to discuss the theological foundations of the Wesleyan way of salvation

Homework Assignments

Read John Wesley's sermon, "Christian Perfection," Sermon 40, Resource 7-6. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-040.stm> Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Read John Wesley's sermon, "Circumcision of the Heart," Sermon 17, Resource 7-7. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-017.stm> Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

"The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the image of God is what John Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity."⁴⁴

"John Wesley is convinced that God's Spirit is at work everywhere in the world extending God's prevenient graciousness among all peoples."⁴⁵

Prevenient Grace

The doctrine of prevenient grace in the Wesleyan tradition is one of its strongest features. The doctrine is by no means unique to Wesleyans, but Wesleyan theology does provide special nuances.

In the Wesleyan Tradition we use the phrase “prevenient grace” to describe the initial movements—efforts—of God to achieve the redemption of his creation. Prevenient grace is the “grace that goes before” to prepare persons to hear and receive the gospel.

Prevenient grace *names* the active presence of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion as he seeks to draw all persons to repentance, and to “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5).

Prevenient grace is “initial restored revelation.” Before the human “evangelist” or “witness” appears on the scene, the gracious God has already been there. He is already at work.

Wesleyans reject the notion some doctrinal traditions embrace, to the effect that we should distinguish between God as Creator and God as Redeemer. The notion is that while God creates and sustains *all persons*, as Redeemer he is *highly selective*.

We believe there is a “continuity of grace” between the orders of creation and redemption.

We believe that wherever God is present he is there as both Creator and Redeemer. Acts of creation and redemption are gracious work of God.

The New Testament declares that the Son in whom God has revealed himself as Redeemer is also the one through whom the Father created and sustains the world.

Prevenient Grace—New Creation

One will not get very far into Wesleyan theology until he or she encounters the relationship between creation, redemption and new creation, and not until he or she understands how comprehensive is Wesley's soteriology. For him, as it was for the Apostle Paul (Rom 8: 18-25), the gospel will not have achieved its goal until there is "a general deliverance of creation."⁴⁶

The gracious relationship between creation and redemption is therefore at the heart of Wesleyan theology. "The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the *image of God* is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity."

Wesleyans therefore believe that according to the Father's creative-redemptive purposes revealed in Jesus Christ (Eph 1: 3-10), all persons are the object of "re-creation." To exclude anyone from the plan of redemption would be to remove from that person God's creative and re-creative presence.

In the Wesleyan tradition, confidence in the gospel is partly anchored in our certainty that long before a person actually hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit is already working to draw them to Christ, to condition them to "hear" the gospel and be converted.

Justification

There are two great branches of salvation:

- Justification—what God does for us through his Son
- Sanctification—what God works in us by his Spirit on the basis of Christ's atonement

Broadly understood, sanctification includes regeneration, the "immediate fruit of justification."⁴⁷ The breadth of God's saving work in us can be stated with one hyphenated word: "justification-regeneration-sanctification."⁴⁸ Transformation of the whole person is God's intention, and justification provides the foundation.

Major Dimensions of Justification

Repentance

- The relationship between repentance, and hearing, and believing—receiving—the gospel, is intense in the New Testament.
- The most common New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*—a “change of mind” and “regret/remorse.”
- More completely, it means an “about face.” By the power of the Holy Spirit a repentant sinner, broken in heart by his transgressions, confesses his sins against God and against others.
- Repentance is an act of faith the Spirit makes possible.

Reconciliation

- Reconciliation—Justification—with the Father comes through faith in his obedient and faithful Son
- Justification is the manifestation and work of the *righteousness* of God. This means that the God who is holy love freely *gives* what he commands—reconciliation.
- Justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of guilt, and our reconciliation with God.
- Through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father reconciles all who will abandon their own “righteousness” and radically rely upon his grace.

Adoption

- Justification “begins the process of restoring the image of God in us, for our lives are realigned for a purpose: not only to receive from God, but [also] to share what we have received with others.”⁴⁹

The Spirit's Gift of Faith

Pardon is applied to the penitent sinner through the *faith* the Spirit gives. Faith, says Wesley, is "the ear of the soul, whereby a sinner hears the voice which alone wakes the dead, 'son, thy sins are forgiven thee'."⁵⁰

The truth is that the will is "not free." If it were, then the doctrine of original sin would have to be abandoned. Active response to the offer of salvation can occur only if the Holy Spirit makes that possible. The offer of faith and the ability to receive and exercise it are God's deed alone. *While the human response is a real and critical one*, it is a response enabled by the Spirit of God alone.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

JOHN WESLEY, SERMON FORTY

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Phil. 3:12.

1. There is scarce any expression in Holy Writ which has given more offence than this. The word *perfect* is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And whosoever *preaches perfection* (as the phrase is,) that is, asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen man or a publican.

2. And hence some have advised, wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions, "because they have given so great offence." But are they not found in the oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any Messenger of God lay them aside, even though all men should be offended? We have not so learned Christ; neither may we thus give place to the devil. Whatsoever God hath Spoken that will we speak, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear; knowing that then alone can any Minister of Christ be "pure from the blood of all men," when he hath "not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God." [Acts 20:26, 27]

3. We may not, therefore, lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God, and not of man. But we may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand or to the left, from the mark of the prize of their high calling. And this is the more needful to be done because in the verse already repeated the Apostle speaks of himself as not perfect: "Not," saith he, "as though I were already perfect." And yet immediately after, in the fifteenth verse, he speaks of himself, yea and many others, as perfect. "Let us," saith he, "as many as be perfect, be thus minded." [Phil. 3:15]

4. In order, therefore, to remove the difficulty arising from this seeming contradiction, as well as to give light to them who are pressing forward to the mark, and that those who are lame be not turned out of the way, I shall endeavor to show, First, in what sense Christians *are not*; and, Secondly, in what sense they *are, perfect*.

I. 1. In the first place I shall endeavor to show in what sense Christians are *not perfect*. And both from experience and Scripture it appears, First, that they are not perfect in knowledge: they are not *so* perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance. They know, it may be, in common with other men, many things relating to the present world; and they know, with regard to the world to come, the general truths which God hath revealed. They know, likewise, (what the natural man receiveth not, for these things are spiritually discerned,) "what manner of love" it is wherewith "the Father" hath loved them, "that they should be called the sons of God." [1 John 3:1] They know the mighty working of his Spirit in their hearts; [Eph. 3:16] and the wisdom of his providence, directing all their paths, [Prov. 3:6] and causing all things to work together for their good. [Rom. 8:28] Yea, they know in every circumstance of life what the Lord requireth of them, and how to keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. [Acts 24:16]

2. But innumerable are the things which they know not. Touching the Almighty himself, they cannot search him out to perfection. "Lo, these are but a part of his ways; but the thunder of his power who can understand?" [Job 26:14] They cannot

understand, I will not say, how "there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one;" [1 John 5:7] or how the eternal Son of God "took upon himself the form of a servant;" [Phil. 2:7]—but not any one attribute, not any one circumstance of the divine nature. [2 Pet. 1:4] Neither is it for them to know the times and seasons [Acts 1:7] when God will work his great works upon the earth; no, not even those which he hath in part revealed by his servants and Prophets since the world began. [see Amos 3:7] Much less do they know when God, having "accomplished the number of his elect, will hasten his kingdom;" when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." [2 Pet. 3:10]

3. They know not the reasons even of many of his present dispensations with the sons of men; but are constrained to rest here—Though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat." [Ps. 97:2] Yea, often with regard to his dealings with themselves, doth their Lord say unto them, "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." [John 13:7] And how little do they know of what is ever before them, of even the visible works of his hands!—How "he spreadeth the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing?" [Job 26:7] how he unites all the parts of this vast machine by a secret chain which cannot be broken? So great is the ignorance, so very little the knowledge, of even the best of men!

4. No one, then, is so perfect in this life, as to be free from ignorance. Nor, Secondly, from mistake; which indeed is almost an unavoidable consequence of it; seeing those who "know but in part" [1 Cor. 13:12] are ever liable to err touching the things which they know not. It is true, the children of God do not mistake as to the things essential to salvation: They do not "put darkness for light, or light for darkness;" [Isa. 5:20] neither "seek death in the error of their life." [Wisdom 1:12] For they are "taught of God," and the way which he teaches them, the way of holiness, is so plain, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." [Isa. 35:8] But in things unessential to salvation they do err, and that frequently. The best and wisest of men are frequently mistaken even with regard to facts; believing those things not to have been which really were, or those to have been done which were not. Or, suppose they are not mistaken as to the fact itself, they may be with regard to its circumstances; believing them, or many of them, to have been quite different from what in truth, they were. And hence cannot but arise many farther mistakes. Hence they may believe either past or present actions which were or are evil, to be good; and such as were or are good, to be evil. Hence also they may judge not according to truth with regard to the characters of men; and that, not only by supposing good men to be better, or wicked men to be worse, than they are, but by believing them to have been or to be good men who were or are very wicked; or perhaps those to have been or to be wicked men, who were or are holy and unprovable.

5. Nay, with regard to the Holy Scriptures themselves, as careful as they are to avoid it, the best of men are liable to mistake, and do mistake day by day; especially with respect to those parts thereof which less immediately relate to practice. Hence even the children of God are not agreed as to the interpretation of many places in holy writ: Nor is their difference of opinion any proof that they are not the children of God on either side; but it is a proof that we are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than to be omniscient.

6. If it be objected to what has been observed under this and the preceding head, that St. John, speaking to his brethren in the faith says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy

One, and ye know all things:" (1 John 2:20:) The answer is plain: "Ye know all things that are needful for your souls' health." [cf. 3 John 2] That the Apostle never designed to extend this farther, that he could not speak it in an absolute sense, is clear, First from hence—that otherwise he would describe the disciple as "above his Master;" seeing Christ himself, as man, knew not all things: "Of that hour," saith he, "knoweth no man; no, not the Son, but the Father only." [Mark 13:32] It is clear, Secondly, from the Apostle's own words that follow: "These things have I written unto you concerning them that deceive you;" [cf. 1 John 3:7] as well as from his frequently repeated caution, "Let no man deceive you;" [see Mark 13:5; Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3] which had been altogether needless, had not those very persons who had that unction from the Holy One [1 John 2:20] been liable, not to ignorance only, but to mistake also.

7. Even Christians, therefore, are not *so* perfect as to be free either from ignorance or error: We may, Thirdly, add, nor from infirmities. Only let us take care to understand this word aright: Only let us not give that soft title to known sins, as the manner of some is. So, one man tells us, "Every man has his infirmity, and mine is drunkenness;" Another has the infirmity of uncleanness; another of taking God's holy name in vain; and yet another has the infirmity of calling his brother, "Thou fool," [Matt. 5:22] or returning "railing for railing." [1 Pet. 3:9] It is plain that all you who thus speak, if ye repent not, shall, with your infirmities, go quick into hell! But I mean hereby, not only those which are properly termed *bodily infirmities*, but all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such are the weakness or slowness of understanding, dulness or confusedness of apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such (to mention no more of this kind) is the want of a ready or of a retentive memory. Such in another kind, are those which are commonly, in some measure, consequent upon these; namely, slowness of speech, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behaviour. These are the infirmities which are found in the best of men, in a larger or smaller proportion. And from these none can hope to be perfectly freed till the spirit returns to God that gave it. [Eccles. 12:7]

8. Nor can we expect, till then, to be wholly free from temptation. Such perfection belongeth not to this life. It is true, there are those who, being given up to work all uncleanness with greediness, [Eph. 4:19] scarce perceive the temptations which they resist not, and so seem to be without temptation. There are also many whom the wise enemy of souls, seeing to be fast asleep in the dead form of godliness, will not tempt to gross sin, lest they should awake before they drop into everlasting burnings. I know there are also children of God who, being now justified freely, [Rom. 5:1] having found redemption in the blood of Christ, [Eph. 1:7] for the present feel no temptation. God hath said to their enemies, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my children no harm." [see 1 Chron. 16:22] And for this season, it may be for weeks or months, he causeth them to "ride on high places;" [Deut. 32:13] he beareth them as on eagles' wings, [Exod. 19:4] above all the fiery darts of the wicked one. [Eph. 6:16] But this state will not last always; as we may learn from that single consideration—that the Son of God himself, in the days of his flesh, was tempted even to the end of his life. [Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 6:7] Therefore, so let his servant expect to be; for "it is enough that he be as his Master." [Luke 6:40]

9. Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the

same thing. Thus every one that is perfect is holy, and every one that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe, that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no *perfection of degrees*, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to "grow in grace," [2 Pet. 3:18] and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour. [see Phil. 1:9]

II. 1. In what sense, then, are Christians perfect? This is what I shall endeavor, in the Second place, to show. But it should be premised, that there are several stages in Christian life, as in natural; some of the children of God being but new-born babes; others having attained to more maturity. And accordingly St. John, in his first Epistle, (1 John 2:12, &c.,) applies himself severally to those he terms little children, those he styles young men, and those whom he entitles fathers. "I write unto you, little children," saith the Apostle, "because your sins are forgiven you:" Because thus far you have attained—being "justified freely," you "have peace with God, through Jesus Christ." [Rom. 5:1] "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one;" or (as he afterwards addeth,) "because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you." [1 John 2:13, 14] Ye have quenched the fiery darts of the wicked one, [Eph. 6:16] the doubts and fears wherewith he disturbed your first peace; and the witness of God, that your sins are forgiven, now abideth in your heart. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning." [1 John 2:13] Ye have known both the Father and the Son and the Spirit of Christ, in your inmost soul. Ye are "perfect men, being grown up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." [Eph. 4:13]

2. It is of these chiefly I speak in the latter part of this discourse: For these only are properly Christians. But even babes in Christ are in such a sense perfect, or born of God, (an expression taken also in divers senses,) as, First, not to commit sin. If any doubt of this privilege of the sons of God, the question is not to be decided by abstract reasonings, which may be drawn out into an endless length, and leave the point just as it was before. Neither is it to be determined by the experience of this or that particular person. Many may suppose they do not commit sin, when they do; but this proves nothing either way. To the law and to the testimony we appeal. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." [Rom. 3:4] By his Word will we abide, and that alone. Hereby we ought to be judged.

3. Now the Word of God plainly declares, that even those who are justified, who are born again in the lowest sense, "do not continue in sin;" that they cannot "live any longer therein;" (Rom. 6:1, 2;) that they are "planted together in the likeness of the death" of Christ; (Rom. 6:5;) that their "old man is crucified with him," the body of sin being destroyed, so that henceforth they do not serve sin; that being dead with Christ, they are free from sin; (Rom. 6:6, 7;) that they are "dead unto sin, and alive unto God;" (Rom. 6:11;) that "sin hath no more dominion over them," who are "not under the law, but under grace;" but that these, "being free from sin, are become the servants of righteousness." (Rom. 6:14, 18)

4. The very least which can be implied in these words, is, that the persons spoken of therein, namely, all real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin. And the same freedom, which St. Paul here expresses in such variety of phrases, St. Peter expresses in that one: (1 Pet. 4:1, 2;) "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin—that he no longer should live to the desires of men, but to the will of God." For this *ceasing from sin*, if it be interpreted in the lowest sense, as

regarding only the outward behaviour, must denote the ceasing from the outward act, from any outward transgression of the law.

5 . But most express are the well-known words of St. John, in the third chapter of his First Epistle, verse 8, &c.: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin because he is born of God." [1 John 3:8, 9] And those in the fifth: (1 John 5:18:) "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

6. Indeed it is said this means only, He sinneth not *wilfully*; or he doth not commit sin *habitually*; or, *not as other men do*; or, *not as he did before*. But by whom is this said? By St. John? No. There is no such word in the text; nor in the whole chapter; nor in all his Epistle; nor in any part of his writings whatsoever. Why then, the best way to answer a bold assertion is simply to deny it. And if any man can prove it from the Word of God, let him bring forth his strong reasons.

7. And a sort of reason there is, which has been frequently brought to support these strange assertions, drawn from the examples recorded in the Word of God: "What!" say they, "did not Abraham himself commit sin—prevaricating, and denying his wife? Did not Moses commit sin, when he provoked God at the waters of strife? Nay, to produce one for all, did not even David, 'the man after God's own heart,' commit sin, in the matter of Uriah the Hittite; even murder and adultery?" It is most sure he did. All this is true. But what is it you would infer from hence? It may be granted, First, that David, in the general course of his life, was one of the holiest men among the Jews; and, Secondly, that the holiest men among the Jews did sometimes commit sin. But if you would hence infer, that all Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live; this consequence we utterly deny: It will never follow from those premises.

8. Those who argue thus, seem never to have considered that declaration of our Lord: (Matt. 11:11:) "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." I fear, indeed, there are some who have imagined "the kingdom of heaven," here, to mean the kingdom of glory; as if the Son of God had just discovered to us, that the least glorified saint in heaven is greater than any man upon earth! To mention this is sufficiently to refute it. There can, therefore, no doubt be made, but "the kingdom of heaven," here, (as in the following verse, where it is said to be taken by force.) [Matt. 11:12] or, "the kingdom of God," as St. Luke expresses it—is that kingdom of God on earth whereunto all true believers in Christ, all real Christians, belong. In these words, then, our Lord declares two things: First, that before his coming in the flesh, among all the children of men there had not been one greater than John the Baptist; whence it evidently follows, that neither Abraham, David, nor any Jew was greater than John. Our Lord, Secondly, declares that he which is least in the kingdom of God (in that kingdom which he came to set up on earth, and which the violent now began to take by force) is greater than he: -- Not a greater Prophet as some have interpreted the word; for this is palpably false in fact; but greater in the grace of God, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we cannot measure the privileges of real Christians by those formerly given to the Jews. Their "ministration," (or dispensation,) we allow "was glorious;" but ours "exceeds in glory." [2 Cor. 3:7-9] So that whosoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard, whosoever gleans up the

examples of weakness, recorded in the Law and the Prophets, and thence infers that they who have "put on Christ" [Gal. 3:27] are endued with no greater strength, doth greatly err, neither "knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." [Matt. 22:29]

9. "But are there not assertions in Scripture which prove the same thing, if it cannot be inferred from those examples? Does not the Scripture say expressly, "Even a just man sinneth seven times a day?" I answer, No. The Scripture says no such thing. There is no such text in all the Bible. That which seems to be intended is the sixteenth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of the Proverbs the words of which are these: "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." [Prov. 24:16] But this is quite another thing. For, First, the words "a day" are not in the text. So that if a just man falls seven times in his life, it is as much as is affirmed here. Secondly, here is no mention of *falling into sin* at all; what is here mentioned is *falling into temporal affliction*. This plainly appears from the verse before, the words of which are these: "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place." [Prov. 24:15] It follows, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief." As if he had said, "God will deliver him out of his trouble; but when thou fallest, there shall be none to deliver thee."

10. "But, however, in other places," continue the objectors, "Solomon does assert plainly, 'There is no man that sinneth not;' (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36;) yea, "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not.' (Eccles. 7:20.)" I answer, Without doubt, thus it was in the days of Solomon. Yea, thus it was from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Solomon, and from Solomon to Christ. There was then no man that sinned not. Even from the day that sin entered into the world, there was not a just man upon earth that did good and sinned not, until the Son of God was manifested to take away our sins. It is unquestionably true, that "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant." [Gal. 4:1] And that even so they (all the holy men of old, who were under the Jewish dispensation) were, during that infant state of the Church, "in bondage under the elements of the world." [Gal. 4:3] "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons;" [Gal. 4:4] -- that they might receive that "grace which is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:10.) Now, therefore, they "are no more servants, but sons." [see Gal. 4:7] So that, whatsoever was the case of those under the law, we may safely affirm with St. John, that, since the gospel was given, "he that is born of God sinneth not." [1 John 5:18]

11. It is of great importance to observe, and that more carefully than is commonly done, the wide difference there is between the Jewish and the Christian dispensation; and that ground of it which the same Apostle assigns in the seventh chapter of his Gospel. (John 7:38, &c) After he had there related, those words of our blessed Lord, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," he immediately subjoins, "This spake he of the Spirit," ou emellon lambanein oi pisteuontes eis auton, -- *which they who should believe on him were afterwards to receive*. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." [John 7:39] Now, the Apostle cannot mean here, (as some have taught,) that the miracle-working power of the Holy Ghost was not yet given. For this was given; our Lord had given it to all the Apostles, when he first sent them forth to preach the gospel. He then gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out; power to heal the sick; yea, to raise the dead. [Mark 10:8] But the Holy Ghost was not yet given in his sanctifying graces, as he was after Jesus was glorified. It was then

when "he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive," that he "received" those "gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them." [Ps. 68:18; cf. Eph. 4:8] And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, [Acts 2:1] then first it was, that they who "waited for the promise of the Father" [Acts 1:4] were made more than conquerors [Rom. 8:37] over sin by the Holy Ghost given unto them.

12. That this great salvation from sin was not given till Jesus was glorified, St. Peter also plainly testifies; where, speaking of his brethren in the flesh, as now "receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls," he adds, (1 Peter 1:9, 10, &c.,) "Of which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace" that is, the gracious dispensation, "that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ. and the glory," the glorious salvation, "that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" [1 Pet. 1:12] viz., at the day of Pentecost, and so unto all generations, into the hearts of all true believers. On this ground, even "the grace which was brought unto them by the revelation of Jesus Christ," [1 Pet. 1:13] the Apostle might well build that strong exhortation, "Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind—as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." [1 Pet. 1:13]

13. Those who have duly considered these things must allow, that the privileges of Christians are in no wise to be measured by what the Old Testament records concerning those who were under the Jewish dispensation; seeing the fulness of times is now come; the Holy Ghost is now given; the great salvation of God is brought unto men, by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is now set up on earth; concerning which the Spirit of God declared of old, (so far is David from being the pattern or standard of Christian perfection,) "He that is feeble among them at that day, shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." (Zech. 12:8.)

14. If, therefore, you would prove that the Apostle's words, "He that is born of God sinneth not," [1 John 5:18] are not to be understood according to their plain, natural, obvious meaning, it is from the New Testament you are to bring your proofs, else you will fight as one that beateth the air. [1 Cor. 9:26] And the first of these which is usually brought is taken from the examples recorded in the New Testament. "The Apostles themselves," it is said, "committed sin; nay, the greatest of them, Peter and Paul: St. Paul, by his sharp contention with Barnabas; [Acts 15:39] and St. Peter, by his dissimulation at Antioch." [Gal. 2:11] Well: Suppose both Peter and Paul did then commit sin; what is it you would infer from hence? That all the other Apostles committed sin sometimes? There is no shadow of proof in this. Or would you thence infer, that all the other Christians of the apostolic age committed sin? Worse and worse: This is such an inference as, one would imagine, a man in his senses could never have thought of. Or will you argue thus: "If two of the Apostles did once commit sin, then all other Christians, in all ages, do and will commit sin as long as they live?" Alas, my brother! a child of common understanding would be ashamed of such reasoning as this. Least of all can you with any colour of argument infer, that any man *must* commit sin at all. No: God forbid we should thus speak! No necessity of sinning was laid upon them. The grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. With the temptation which fell on them, there was a way to escape; as there is to every soul of man in every temptation. So that whosoever is

tempted to any sin, need not yield; for no man is tempted above that he is able to bear. [1 Cor. 10:13]

15. "But St. Paul besought the Lord thrice, and yet he could not escape from his temptation." Let us consider his own words literally translated: "There was given to me a thorn to the flesh, an angel" (or messenger) "of Satan, to buffet me. Touching this, I besought the Lord thrice, that it" (or he) "might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in" these "my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses—for when I am weak, then am I strong." [2 Cor. 12:7-10]

16. As this scripture is one of the strong-holds of the patrons of sin, it may be proper to weigh it thoroughly. Let it be observed then, First, it does by no means appear that this thorn, whatsoever it was, occasioned St. Paul to commit sin; much less laid him under any necessity of doing so. Therefore, from hence it can never be proved that any Christian must commit sin. Secondly, the ancient Fathers inform us, it was bodily pain: "a violent headache, saith Tertullian; (De Pudic. ;) to which both Chrysostom and St. Jerome agree. St. Cyprian [De Mortalitate] expresses it, a little more generally, in those terms: "Many and grievous torments of the flesh and of the body." [Carnis et corporis multa ac gravia tormenta.] Thirdly, to this exactly agree the Apostle's own words, "A thorn to the flesh to smite, beat, or buffet me." "My strength is made perfect in weakness:"—Which same word occurs no less than four times in these two verses only. But, Fourthly, whatsoever it was, it could not be either inward or outward sin. It could no more be inward stirrings, than outward expressions, of pride, anger, or lust. This is manifest, beyond all possible exception from the words that immediately follow: "Most gladly will I glory in" these "my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me." [2 Cor. 12:9] What! Did he glory in pride, in anger, in lust? Was it through these *weaknesses*, that the strength of Christ rested upon him? He goes on: "Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses; for when I am weak, then am I strong;" [2 Cor. 12:10] that is, when I am weak *in body*, then am I strong *in spirit*. But will any man dare to say, "When I am weak by pride or lust, then am I strong in spirit?" I call you all to record this day, who find the strength of Christ resting upon you, can you glory in anger, or pride, or lust? Can you take pleasure in these infirmities? Do these weaknesses make you strong? Would you not leap into hell, were it possible, to escape them? Even by yourselves, then, judge, whether the Apostle could glory and take pleasure in them! Let it be, Lastly, observed, that this thorn was given to St. Paul above fourteen years before he wrote this Epistle; [2 Cor. 12:2] which itself was wrote several years before he finished his course. [see Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7] So that he had after this, a long course to run, many battles to fight, many victories to gain, and great increase to receive in all the gifts of God, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore from any spiritual weakness (if such it had been) which he at that time felt, we could by no means infer that he was never made strong; that Paul the aged, the father in Christ, still laboured under the same weaknesses; that he was in no higher state till the day of his death. From all which it appears that this instance of St. Paul is quite foreign to the question, and does in no wise clash with the assertion of St. John, "He that is born of God sinneth not." [1 John 5:18]

17. "But does not St. James directly contradict this? His words are, 'In many things we offend all,' (Jas. 3:2:) And is not offending the same as committing sin?" In this place, I allow it is: I allow the persons here spoken of did commit sin; yea, that they all committed many sins. But who are the persons here spoken of? Why, those many masters or teachers whom God had not sent; (probably the same vain men who

taught that faith without works, which is so sharply reprov'd in the preceding chapter;) [Jas. 2] not the Apostle himself, nor any real Christian. That in the word *we* (used by a figure of speech common in all other, as well as the inspired, writings) the Apostle could not possibly include himself or any other true believer, appears evidently, First, from the same word in the ninth verse: "Therewith," saith he, "bless we God and therewith curse we men. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." [Jas. 3:9] True; but not out of the mouth of the Apostle, nor of anyone who is in Christ a new creature. [2 Cor. 5:17] Secondly, from the verse immediately preceding the text, and manifestly connected with it: "My brethren, be not many masters," (or teachers,) "knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." "For in many things we offend all." [Jas. 3:1] *We!* Who? Not the Apostles, not true believers; but they who know they should *receive the greater condemnation*, because of those many offences. But this could not be spoke of the Apostle himself, or of any who trod in his steps, seeing "there is no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." [Rom. 8:2] Nay, Thirdly, the very verse itself proves, that "we offend all," cannot be spoken either of all men, or of all Christians: For in it there immediately follows the mention of a man who *offends not*, as the *we* first mentioned did; from whom, therefore, he is professedly contradistinguished, and pronounced a *perfect man*.

18. So clearly does St. James explain himself, and fix the meaning of his own words. Yet, lest any one should still remain in doubt, St. John, writing many years after St. James, puts the matter entirely out of dispute, by the express declarations above recited. But here a fresh difficulty may arise: How shall we reconcile St. John with himself? In one place he declares, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" [1 John 3:9] and again, "We know that he which is born of God sinneth not:" [1 John 5:18] And yet in another he saith, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" [1 John 1:8] and again, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." [1 John 1:10]

19. As great a difficulty as this may at first appear, it vanishes away, if we observe, First, that the tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: "If we say we have no sin," in the former, being explained by, "If we say we have not sinned," in the latter verse. [1 John 1:10, 8] Secondly, that the point under present consideration is not whether we *have or have not sinned heretofore*; and neither of these verses asserts that we *do sin, or commit sin now*. Thirdly, that the ninth verse explains both the eighth and tenth. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness:" As if he had said, "I have before affirmed, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; but let no man say, I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from. If we say that we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and make God a liar: But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just,' not only 'to forgive our sins,' but also 'to cleanse us from all unrighteousness:' [1 John 1:8-10] that we may 'go and sin no more.' " [John 8:11]

20. St. John, therefore, is well consistent with himself, as well as with the other holy writers; as will yet more evidently appear if we place all his assertions touching this matter in one view: He declares, First, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. Secondly, no man can say, I have not sinned, I have no sin to be cleansed from. Thirdly, but God is ready both to forgive our past sins and to save us from them for the time to come. [1 John 1:7-10] Fourthly, "These things I write unto you," saith the Apostle, "that ye may not sin. But if any man" should "sin," or *have sinned*, (as the word might be rendered,) he need not continue in sin; seeing "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." [1 John 2:1-2] Thus far all is clear. But

lest any doubt should remain in a point of so vast importance, the Apostle resumes this subject in the third chapter, and largely explains his own meaning. "Little children," saith he, "let no man deceive you:" (As though I had given any encouragement to those that continue in sin:) "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: For his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." (1 John 3:7-10.) Here the point, which till then might possibly have admitted of some doubt in weak minds, is purposely settled by the last of the inspired writers, and decided in the clearest manner. In conformity, therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and to the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion—*A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin.*

21. This is the glorious privilege of every Christian; yea, though he be but *a babe in Christ*. But it is only of those who *are strong* in the Lord, "and have overcome the wicked one," or rather of those who "have known him that is from the beginning," [1 John 2:13, 14] that it can be affirmed they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. First, from evil or sinful thoughts. But here let it be observed, that thoughts concerning evil are not always evil thoughts; that a thought concerning sin, and a sinful thought, are widely different. A man, for instance, may think of a murder which another has committed; and yet this is no evil or sinful thought. So our blessed Lord himself doubtless thought of, or understood the thing spoken by the devil, when he said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." [Matt. 4:9] Yet had he no evil or sinful thought; nor indeed was capable of having any. And even hence it follows, that neither have real Christians: for "every one that is perfect is as his Master." (Luke 6:40) Therefore, if He was free from evil or sinful thoughts, so are they likewise.

22. And, indeed, whence should evil thoughts proceed, in the servant who is *as his Master*? "Out of the heart of man" (if at all) "proceed evil thoughts." (Mark 7:21) If, therefore, his heart be no longer evil, then evil thoughts can no longer proceed out of it. If the tree were corrupt, so would be the fruit: But the tree is good; The fruit, therefore is good also; (Matt. 22:33) our Lord himself bearing witness, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit," as "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." (Matt 7:17, 18)

23. The same happy privilege of real Christians, St. Paul asserts from his own experience. "The weapons of our warfare," saith he, "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations" (or *reasonings* rather, for so the word logismous signifies; all the reasonings of pride and unbelief against the declarations, promises, or gifts of God) "and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:4, &c.)

24. And as Christians indeed are freed from evil thoughts, so are they, Secondly, from evil tempers. This is evident from the above-mentioned declaration of our Lord himself: "The disciple is not above his Master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master." [Luke 6:40] He had been delivering, just before, some of the sublimest doctrines of Christianity, and some of the most grievous to flesh and blood. "I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you; and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other." [Luke 6:29] Now these he well

knew the world would not receive; and, therefore, immediately adds, "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?" [Luke 6:39] As if he had said, "Do not confer with flesh and blood touching these things—with men void of spiritual discernment, the eyes of whose understanding God hath not opened—lest they and you perish together." In the next verse he removes the two grand objections with which these wise fools meet us at every turn: "These things are too grievous to be borne," or, "They are too high to be attained," [Matt. 23:4] saying, "'The disciple is not above his Master;' therefore, if I have suffered, be content to tread in my steps. And doubt ye not then, but I will fulfill my word: 'For every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.'" [Luke 6:40] But his Master was free from all sinful tempers. So, therefore, is his disciple, even every real Christian.

25. Every one of these can say, with St. Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:" [Gal 2:20]—Words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, *I live not*; (my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed;) and positively, *Christ liveth in me*; and, therefore, all that is holy, and just, and good. Indeed, both these, *Christ liveth in me*, and *I live not*, are inseparably connected; for "what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?" [2 Cor. 6:15]

26. He, therefore, who liveth in true believers, hath "purified their hearts by faith;" [Acts 15:9] insomuch that every one that hath Christ in him the hope of glory, [Col. 1:27] "purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3.) He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. [Matt. 11:29] He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. [John 4:34; 5:30] And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering. I say, in the common sense of the word; for all anger is not evil. We read of our Lord himself, (Mark 3:5,) that he once "looked round with anger." But with what kind of anger? The next word shows, *sullupoumenos*, being, at the same time "grieved for the hardness of their hearts." [Mark 3:6] So then he was angry at the sin, and in the same moment grieved for the sinners; angry or displeased at the offence, but sorry for the offenders. With anger, yea, hatred, he looked upon the thing; with grief and love upon the persons. Go, thou that art perfect, and do likewise. Be thus angry, and thou sinnest not; [see Eph. 4:26] feeling a displacency at every offence against God, but only love and tender compassion to the offender.

27. Thus doth Jesus "save his people from their sins:" [Matt. 1:21] And not only from outward sins, but also from the sins of their hearts; from evil thoughts and from evil tempers. -- "True," say some, "we shall thus be saved from our sins; but not till death; not in this world." But how are we to reconcile this with the express words of St. John?—"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Because as he is, so are we in this world." The Apostle here, beyond all contradiction, speaks of himself and other living Christians, of whom (as though he had foreseen this very evasion, and set himself to overturn it from the foundation) he flatly affirms, that not only at or after death but *in this world* they are as their Master. (1 John 4:17.)

28. Exactly agreeable to this are his words in the first chapter of this Epistle, (1 John 1:5, &c.,) "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light—we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." And again, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [1 John 1:9] Now it is evident,

the Apostle here also speaks of a deliverance wrought *in this world*. For he saith not, the blood of Christ will cleanse at the hour of death, or in the day of judgment, but, it "cleanseth," at the time present, "us," living Christians, "from all sin." And it is equally evident, that if *any sin* remain, we are not cleansed from *all sin*: If *any* unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from *all* unrighteousness. Neither let any sinner against his own soul say, that this relates to justification only, or the cleansing us from the guilt of sin. First, because this is confounding together what the Apostle clearly distinguishes, who mentions first, *to forgive us our sins*, and then *to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. "Secondly, because this is asserting justification by works, in the strongest sense possible; it is making all inward as well as outward holiness necessarily previous to justification. For if the cleansing here spoken of is no other than the cleansing us from the guilt of sin, then we are not cleansed from guilt; that is, are not justified, unless on condition of "walking in the light, as he is in the light." [1 John 1:7] It remains, then, that Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers."

29. Thus hath the Lord fulfilled the things he spake by his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; by Moses in particular, saying, (Deut. 30:6.) I "will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul;" by David, crying out, "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me;" [Ps. 51:10] -- and most remarkably by Ezekiel, in those words: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses. Thus saith the Lord your God, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, the Heathen shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places; I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it." (Ezek. 36:25, &c.)

30. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved," both in the Law and in the Prophets, and having the prophetic word confirmed unto us in the Gospel, by our blessed Lord and his Apostles; "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." [2 Cor. 7:1] "Let us fear, lest" so many "promises being made us of entering into his rest," which he that hath entered into, has ceased from his own works, "any of us should come short of it." [Heb. 4:1] "This one thing let us do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" [Phil. 3:13, 14] crying unto him day and night, till we also are "delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God!" [Rom. 8:21]

THE PROMISE OF SANCTIFICATION

(Ezekiel 36:25, &c.)

BY THE REV. CHARLES WESLEY

God of all power, and truth, and grace,
Which shall from age to age endure;
Whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass,
Remains, and stands for ever sure:

Calmly to thee my soul looks up,
And waits thy promises to prove;
The object of my steadfast hope,
The seal of thine eternal love.

That I thy mercy may proclaim,
That all mankind thy truth may see,
Hallow thy great and glorious name,
And perfect holiness in me.

Chose from the world, if now I stand
Adorn'd in righteousness divine;
If, brought unto the promised land,
I justly call the Saviour mine;

Perform the work thou hast begun,
My inmost soul to thee convert:
Love me, for ever love thine own,
And sprinkle with thy blood my heart.

Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst, and wash me clean;
Now, Father, let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.

Purge me from every sinful blot;
My idols all be cast aside:
Cleanse me from every evil thought,
From all the filth of self and pride.

Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to thee.

O take this heart of stone away,
(Thy rule it doth not, cannot own;)
In me no longer let it stay:
O take away this heart of stone.

The hatred of my carnal mind
Out of my flesh at once remove;
Give me a tender heart, resign'd,
And pure, and fill'd with faith and love.

11 Within me thy good Spirit place, Spirit of health, and love and power; Plant in me thy victorious grace, And sin shall never enter more. 12 Cause me to walk in Christ my Way, And I thy statutes shall fulfill; In every point thy law obey. And perfectly perform thy will. 13 Hast thou not said, who canst not lie, That I thy law shall keep and do? Lord, I believe, though men deny; They all are false, but thou art true. 14 O that I now, from sin released, Thy word might to the utmost prove! Enter into the promised rest, The Canaan of thy perfect love! 15 There let me ever, ever dwell; By

thou my God, and I will be Thy servant: O set to thy seal! Give me eternal life in thee.
16 From all remaining filth within Let me in Thee salvation have: From actual, and
from inbred sin My ransom'd soul persist to save. 17 Wash out my old original stain:
Tell me no more It cannot be, Demons or men! The Lamb was slain His blood was all
poured out for me! 18 Sprinkle it, Jesu, on my heart: One drop of thy all-cleansing
blood Shall make my sinfulness depart, And fill me with the life of God. 19 Father,
supply my every need: Sustain the life thyself hast given; Call for the corn, the living
bread, The manna that comes down from heaven. 20 The gracious fruits of
righteousness, Thy blessings' unexhausted store, In me abundantly increase; Nor let
me ever hunger more.
21 Let me no more in deep complaint "My leanness, O my leanness!" cry; Alone
consumed with pining want, Of all my Father's children I! 22 The painful thirst, the
fond desire, Thy joyous presence shall remove; While my full soul doth still require
Thy whole eternity of love. 23 Holy, and true, and righteous Lord, I wait to prove thy
perfect will; Be mindful of thy gracious word, And stamp me with thy Spirit's seal! 24
Thy faithful mercies let me find, In which thou causest me to trust; Give me the meek
and lowly mind, And lay my spirit in the dust. 25 Show me how foul my heart hath
been, When all renew'd by grace I am: When thou hast emptied me of sin, Show me
the fulness of my shame. 26 Open my faith's interior eye, Display thy glory from
above; And all I am shall sink and die, Lost in astonishment and love. 27 Confound,
o'erpower me with thy grace: I would be by myself abhorr'd; (All might, all majesty,
all praise, All glory be to Christ my Lord!) 28 Now let me gain perfection's height! Now
let me into nothing fall! Be less than nothing in thy sight, And feel that Christ is all in
all!

Edited by Dave Sparks (Pastor), with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons.
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THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

JOHN WESLEY
SERMON SEVENTEEN

Preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University, on January 1, 1733.
"Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." Romans 2:29.

1. It is the melancholy remark of an excellent man, that he who now preaches the most essential duties of Christianity, runs the hazard of being esteemed, by a great part of his hearers, "a setter forth of new doctrines." Most men have so *lived away* the substance of that religion, the profession whereof they still retain, that no sooner are any of those truths proposed which difference the Spirit of Christ from the spirit of the world, than they cry out, "Thou bringest strange things to our ears; we would know what these things mean:"—Though he is only preaching to them "Jesus and the resurrection," with the necessary consequence of it—If Christ be risen, ye ought then to die unto the world, and to live wholly unto God.

2. A hard saying this to the natural man, Who is alive unto the world, and dead unto God; and one that he will not readily be persuaded to receive as the truth of God, unless it be so qualified in the interpretation, as to have neither use nor significance left. He "receiveth not the" word "of the Spirit of God," taken in their plain and obvious meaning; "they are foolishness unto him: Neither" indeed "can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned:"—They are perceivable only by that spiritual sense, which in him was never yet awakened for want of which he must reject, as idle fancies of men, what are both the wisdom and the power of God.

3. That "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter;"—that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God, is not either outward circumcision, or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it; -- is one of those important truths that can only be spiritually discerned. And this the Apostle himself intimates in the next words, "Whose praise is not of men, but of God." As if he had said, "Expect not, whoever thou art, who thus followest thy great Master, that the world, the one who follow him not, will say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' Know that the circumcision of the heart, the seal of thy calling, is foolishness with the world. Be content to wait for thy applause till the day of thy Lord's appearing. In that day shalt thou have praise of God, in the great assembly of men and angels."

I design First, particularly to inquire, wherein this circumcision of the heart consists; and, Secondly, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry.

I. 1. I am, First, to inquire, wherein that circumcision of the heart consists, which will receive the praise of God. In general we may observe, it is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;" and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so "renewed in the spirit of our mind," as to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."

2. To be more particular: Circumcision of heart implies humility, faith, hope, and charity. Humility, a right judgment of ourselves, cleanses our minds from those high conceits of our own perfection, from that undue opinion of our own abilities and attainments, which are the genuine fruit of a corrupted nature. This entirely cuts off that vain thought, "I am rich, and wise, and have need of nothing;" and convinces us that we are by nature wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. "It convinces us, that in our best estate we are, of ourselves, all sin and vanity; that confusion, and ignorance, and error reign over our understanding; that unreasonable, earthly, sensual, devilish passions usurp authority over our will; in a word, that there is no whole part in our soul, that all the foundations of our nature are out of course.

3. At the same time we are convinced, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is He alone who worketh in us by his almighty power, either to will or do that which is good; it being as impossible for us even to think a good thought, without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit, as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness.

4. A sure effect of our having formed this right judgment of the sinfulness and helplessness of our nature, is a disregard of that "honor which cometh of man," which is usually paid to some supposed excellency in us. He who knows himself, neither desires nor values the applause which he knows he deserves not. It is therefore "a very small thing with him, to be judged by man's judgment." He has all reason to think, by comparing what it has said, either for or against him, with what he feels in his own breast, that the world, as well as the god of this world, was "a liar from the beginning." And even as to those who are not of the world; thought he would choose, if it were the will of God, that they should account of him as of one desirous to be found a faithful steward of his Lord's goods, if haply this might be a means of enabling him to be of more use to his fellow-servants, yet as this is the one end of his wishing for their approbation, so he does not at all rest upon it: For he is assured, that whatever God wills, he can never want instruments to perform; since he is able, even of these stones, to raise up servants to do his pleasure.

5. This is that lowliness of mind, which they have learned of Christ, who follow his example and tread in his steps. And this knowledge of their disease, whereby they are more and more cleansed from one part of it, pride and vanity, disposes them to embrace, with a willing mind, the second thing implied in circumcision of the heart—that faith which alone is able to make them whole, which is the one medicine given under heaven to heal their sickness.

6. The best guide of the blind, the surest light of them that are in darkness, the most perfect instructor of the foolish, is faith. But it must be such a faith as is "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds,"—to the overturning all the prejudices of corrupt reason, all the false maxims revered among men, all evil customs and habits, all that "wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God;" as "casteth down imaginations," reasoning, "and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringeth into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

7. "All things are possible to him that" thus "believeth." "The eyes of his understanding being enlightened," he sees what is his calling; even to glorify God, who hath bought him with so high a price, in his body and in his spirit, which now are God's by redemption, as well as by creation. He feels what is "the exceeding greatness

of this power," who, as he raise up Christ from the dead, so is able to-quicken us, dead in sin," by his Spirit which dwelleth in us." "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith;" that faith, which is not only an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture—and in particular to those important truths, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree;" "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world;" [N.B. The following part of this paragraph is now added to the Sermon formerly preached.] but likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence, whereby every true believer is enabled to bear witness, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," that I have an "Advocate with the Father," and that "Jesus Christ the righteous" is my Lord, and "the propitiation for my sins,"—I know he hath "loved me, and given himself for me,"—He hath reconciled me, even me, to God; and I "have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." 8. Such a faith as this cannot fail to show evidently the power of Him that inspires it, by delivering his children from the yoke of sin, and "purging their consciences from dead works;" by strengthening them so, that they are no longer constrained to obey sin in the desires there of; but instead of yielding their members unto it, as instruments of unrighteousness," they now "yield themselves" entirely "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead."

9. Those who are thus by faith born of God, have also strong consolation through hope. This is the next thing which the circumcision of the heart implies; even the testimony of their own spirit with the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts that
** N. B. The following part of this paragraph is now added to the Sermon formerly preached.*

they are the children of God. Indeed it is the same Spirit who works in them that clear and cheerful confidence that their heart is upright toward God; that good assurance, that they now do, through his grace, the things which are acceptable in his sight; that they are now in the path which leadeth to life, and shall, by the mercy of God, endure therein to the end. It is He who giveth them a lively expectation of receiving all good things at God's hand; a joyous prospect of that crown of glory, which is reserved in heaven for them. By this anchor a Christian is kept steady in the midst of the waves of this troublesome world, and preserved from striking upon either of those fatal rocks—presumption or despair. He is neither discouraged by the misconceived severity of his Lord, nor does He despise the riches of his goodness." He neither apprehends the difficulties of the race set before him to be greater than he has strength to conquer, nor expects there to be so little as to yield in the conquest, till he has put forth all strength. The experience he already has in the Christian warfare, as it assures him his "labor is not in vain," if "whatever his findeth to do, he doeth it with his might;" so it forbids his entertaining so vain a thought, as that he can otherwise gain any advantage, as that any virtue can be shown, any praise attained, by faint hearts and feeble hands; or, indeed, by any but those who pursue the same course with the great Apostle of the Gentiles "I," says he, "so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

10. By the same discipline is every good soldier of Christ to inure himself to endure hardship. Confirmed and strengthened by this, he will be able not only to renounce the works of darkness, but every appetite too, and every affection, which is no subject to the law of God. For "every one," saith St. John, "who hath this hope, purifieth himself even as He is pure." It is his daily care, by the grace of God in Christ, and through the

blood of the covenant, to purge the inmost recesses of his soul from the lusts that before possessed and defiled it; from uncleanness, and envy, and malice, and wrath; from every passion and temper that is after the flesh, that either springs from or cherishes his native corruption: as well knowing, that he whose very body is the temple of God, ought to admit into it nothing common or unclean; and that holiness becometh that house for ever, where the Spirit of holiness vouchsafes to dwell.

11. Yet lackest thou one thing, whosoever thou art, that to a deep humility, and a steadfast faith, hast joined a lively hope, and thereby in a good measure cleansed thy heart from its inbred pollution. If thou wilt be perfect, add to all these, charity; add love, and thou hast the circumcision of the heart "Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment." Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. "Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable," or honorable; "if there be any virtue, if there be any praise," they are all comprised in this one word—love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

12. Not that this forbids us to love anything besides God: It implies that we love our brother also. Nor yet does it forbid us (as some have strangely imagined) to take pleasure in any thing but God. To suppose this, is to suppose the Fountain of holiness is directly the author of sin; since he has inseparably annexed pleasure to the use of those creatures which are necessary to sustain the life he has given us. This, therefore, can never be the meaning of his command. What the real sense of it is, both our blessed Lord and his Apostles tell us too frequently, and too plainly, to be misunderstood. They all with one mouth bear witness, that the true meaning of those several declarations, "The Lord thy God is one Lord;" "Thou shalt have no other Gods but me;" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength" "Thou shalt cleave unto him;" "The desire of thy soul shall be to His name;"—is no other than this: The one perfect Good shall be your one ultimate end. One thing shall ye desire for its own sake—the fruition of Him that is All in All. One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with Him that made them; the having "fellowship with the Father and the Son;" the being joined to the Lord in one Spirit. One design you are to pursue to the end of time—the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, us well as Source, of your being.

13. Have no end, to ultimate end, but God. Thus our Lord: "One thing is needful:" And if thine eye be singly fixed on this one thing, "thy whole body shall be full of light." Thus St. Paul: "This one thing I do; I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus." Thus St. James: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." Thus St. John: "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The seeking happiness in what gratifies either the desire of the flesh, by agreeably striking upon the outward senses; the desire of the eye, of the imagination, by its novelty, greatness, or beauty; or the pride of life, whether by pomp, grandeur, power, or, the usual consequence of them, applause and admiration; "is not of the Father," cometh

not from, neither is approved by, the Father of spirits; "but of the world:" It is the distinguishing mark of those who will not have Him to reign over them.

II. 1. Thus have I particularly inquired, what that circumcision of heart is, which will obtain the praise of God. I am, in the Second place, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry, as a plain rule whereby every man may judge of himself, whether he be of the world or of God. And, First, it is clear from what has been said, that no man has a title to the praise of God, unless his heart is circumcised by humility; unless he is little, and base, and vile in his own eyes; unless he is deeply convinced of that inbred "corruption of his nature," "whereby he is very far gone from original righteousness," being prone to all evil, averse to all good, corrupt and abominable; having a "carnal mind which is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be," unless he continually feels in his inmost soul, that without the Spirit of God resting upon him, he can neither think, nor desire, nor speak, nor act anything good, or well-pleasing in his sight. No man I say, has A title to the praise of God, till he feels his want of God; nor indeed, till he seeketh that "honor which cometh of God only;" and neither desires nor pursues that which cometh of man, unless so far only as it tends to this.

2. Another truth, which naturally follows from what has been said, is, that none shall obtain the honor that cometh of God, unless his heart be circumcised by faith; even a "faith of the operation of God:" Unless, refusing to be any longer led by his senses, appetites, or passions, or even by that blind leader of the blind, so idolized by the world, natural reason, he lives and walks by faith; directs every step, as "seeking Him that is invisible;" "looks not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal;" and governs all his desires, designs, and thoughts, all his actions and conversations, as one who is entered in within the veil, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

3. It were to be wished, that they were better acquainted with this faith, who employ much of their time and pains in laying another foundation; in grounding religion on the eternal *fitness* of things on the intrinsic *excellence* of virtue, and the *beauty* of actions flowing from it; on the *reasons* as they term them, of good and evil, and the *relations* of beings to each other. Either these accounts of the grounds of Christian duty coincide with the scriptural, or not. If they do, why are well meaning men perplexed, and drawn from the weightier matters of the law, by a cloud of terms, whereby the easiest truths are explained into obscurity? If they are not, then it behooves them to consider who is the author of this new doctrine; whether he is likely to be an angel from heaven, who preacheth another gospel than that of Christ Jesus; though, if he were, God, not we, hath pronounced his sentence: "Let him be accursed."

4. Our gospel, as it knows no other foundation of good works than faith, or of faith than Christ, so it clearly informs us, we are not his disciples while we either deny him to be the Author, or his Spirit to be the Inspirer and Perfecter, both of our faith and works. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." He alone can quicken those who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life. and so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace, as to bring their good desires to good effect. And, as many as are thus led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." This is God's short and plain account of true religion and virtue; and "other foundation can no man lay."

5. From what has been said, we may, Thirdly, learn, that it none is truly "led by the Spirit," unless that "Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God;" unless

he see the prize and the crown before him, and "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." So greatly have they erred who have taught that, in serving God, we ought not to have a view to own happiness ! Nay, but we are often and expressly taught of God, to have "respect unto the recompense of reward;" to balance toil with the "joy set before us," these "light afflictions" with that "exceeding weight of glory." Yea, we are "aliens to the covenant of promise," we are "without God in the world," until God, "of his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

6. But if these things are so, it is high time for those persons to deal faithfully with their own souls who are so far from finding in themselves this joyful assurance that they fulfil the terms, and shall obtain the promises, of that covenant, as to quarrel with the covenant itself, and blaspheme the terms of it; to complain, they are too severe; and that no man ever did or shall live up to them. What is this but to reproach God, as if He were a hard Master, requiring of his servants more than he enables them to perform ?—as if he had mocked the helpless works of his hands, by binding them to impossibilities; by commanding them to overcome, where neither their own strength nor grace was sufficient for them.?

7. These blasphemers might almost persuade those to imagine themselves guiltless, who, in the contrary extreme, hope to fulfil the commands of God, without taking any pains at all. Vain hope! that a child of Adam should ever expect to see the kingdom of Christ and of God, without striving, without *agonizing*, first "to enter in at the strait gate;"—that one who v. as "conceived and born in sin," and whose "inward parts are very wickedness," should once entertain a thought of being "purified as his Lord is pure," unless he tread in His steps, and "take up his cross daily;" unless he "cut off His right hand," and "pluck out the right eye, and cast it from him ;"—that he should ever dream of shaking off his old opinions, passions, tempers, of being "sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body," without a constant and continued course of general self-denial!

8. What lees than this can we possibly infer from the above-cited words of St. Paul, who, living "ill infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses" for Christ's sake; who, being full of "signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds,"—who, having been "caught up into the third heaven;"—yet reckoned, as a late author strongly expresses it, that all his virtues would be insecure, and even his salvation in danger, without this constant self-denial? "So run I," says he, "not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air which he plainly teaches us, that he who does not thus run, who does not thus deny himself daily, does run uncertainly, and fighteth to as little purpose as he that "beateth the air."

9. To as little purpose does He talk of "fighting the fight of faith," as vainly hope to attain the crown of incorruption, (as we may, Lastly, infer from the preceding observations,) whose heart is not circumcised by love. Love, cutting off both the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—engaging the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, in the ardent pursuit of that one object—is so essential to a child of God, that, without it, whosoever liveth is counted dead before him. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." Nay, "though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and my body to be burned, and have not love, it profit me nothing."

10. Here, then, is the sum of the perfect law; this is the true circumcision of the heart. Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. "Unto the place from whence all the rivers came thither let them flow again. Other sacrifices from us he would not; but the living sacrifice of the heart he hath chosen. Let it be continual offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love. And let no creature be suffered to share with him: For he is a jealous God. His throne will he not divide with another: He will reign without a rival. Be no design, no desire admitted there, but what has Him for its ultimate object. This is the way where in those children of God once walked, who, being dead, still speak to us:" Desire not to live, but to praise his name: Let all your thoughts, words, and works, tend to his glory. Set your heart firm on him, and on other things only as they are in and from him. Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of him, that you may love nothing but for his sake." "Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions." "Fix your eye upon the blessed hope of your calling, and make all the things of the world minister unto it." For then, and not till then is that "mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus;" when, in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue, in every work of our hands, we "pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure;" when we, too, neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfil our "own will, but the will of him that sent us;" when, whether we;' eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God."

Edited by Dave Giles with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene University for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

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Lesson 8: The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification

Due This Lesson

Response paper for Resource 7-6
Response paper for Resource 7-7
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand and be able to discuss the Wesleyan way of salvation as it relates to sanctification, repentance and the holy life, growth in Christian holiness, and the new creation

Homework Assignments

Read John Wesley's sermon, "The Almost Christian," Resource 8-6. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-002.stm>. Write a 1-2 page response paper.

You should be close to completion on the interviews and report as assigned in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the syllabus. Also, respond to the motivator.

Motivator

"What makes Wesley's theology distinctive is his ability to hold together in a working union two fundamentally important factors in the Christian life that have often been disconnected, the renewal of this relation (justification) and the living out of this relation (sanctification), neither of which is possible apart from the other."⁵¹

The New Birth

Justification by grace involves a _____ change between God and the penitent sinner.

Regeneration and sanctification involve a _____ or _____ change.

Justification restores the believer to God's _____. The new birth restores the believer to the _____.

Regeneration is also the _____ of eternal life.

Sanctification

Wesley states:⁵²

- “At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins.”
- He changes “the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into ‘the mind which was in Christ Jesus’.”

H. Ray Dunning says, “the essence of sanctification is the renewal of humankind in the image of God.”⁵³

The span of sanctification has *three* dimensions:

- we _____ redeemed
- we _____ redeemed
- and we _____ redeemed

The Life of God in Christians

Pivotal for the Wesleyan way of salvation is a confidence that because the Spirit of Christ now dwells in us, we are no longer debtors to the flesh. We believe the atonement of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the message of the New Testament establishes the priority of transforming grace over the priority of sin’s power in Christians.

The Grace of Entire Sanctification

Sanctification is an important aspect of the Christian life for all orthodox Christian denominations.

But in some denominational traditions, accompanying the emphasis on sanctification is a parallel belief that throughout this life Christians should think of themselves principally as *sinner*s who have been saved by grace.

Distinctive of the Wesleyan tradition is the conviction that the Spirit of God can decisively “incline our hearts” to love him and our neighbor as ourselves. We accept the New Testament call and promise that Christians are to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit’s promise is that the God of peace, through Jesus Christ, will comprehensively—entirely—sanctify the child of God—spirit and soul and body (1 Thess 5:23-24).

The phrase, “entire sanctification,” describes a *decisive* event in which a disciple comprehensively presents himself or herself to Christ’s reign and glory, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the presentation by sealing it with his powerful witness.

Intentionally *decisive* in character, marked by a qualitative *before and after*, entire sanctification is set within the entire process by which God renews his people in his image.

Repentance and the Holy Life

A Christian does not leave justification behind and move on to sanctification. We continue to be reconciled—converted—to God by grace alone. If it is true that justification leads to sanctification, it is also true that sanctification endlessly unfolds in a process by which more and more of life is defined by the reign of God.

Rather than the life of Christian holiness shutting out recognition of failures that need God's forgiveness, it should make us increasingly sensitive to, and repentant of, the ways in which we offend both the Holy God and our neighbor.

Grace and love make confession possible and urgent, not unnecessary and negligible.

Wesleyan Theology

Theodore Runyon: "There is a peculiar affinity between Wesleyan theology—especially Wesley's doctrine of sanctification—and movements for social change. When *Christian Perfection* becomes the goal of individual, a fundamental hope is engendered that the future can surpass the present. [At the same time], a holy dissatisfaction is aroused with regard to any present state of affairs—a dissatisfaction that supplies the critical edge necessary to keep the process of individual transformation moving. Moreover, this holy dissatisfaction is readily transferable from the realm of the individual to that of society—as was evident in Wesley's own time—where it provides a persistent motivation for reform in the light of a 'more perfect way' that transcends any status quo."⁵⁴

THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

JOHN WESLEY

SERMON TWO

PREACHED AT ST. MARY'S, OXFORD, BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY, ON JULY 25, 1741.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Acts 26.28.

AND many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world, there have been many in every age and nation who were almost persuaded to be Christians. But seeing it avails nothing before God to go *only thus far*, it highly imports us to consider,

First. What is implied in being *almost*,

Secondly. What in being *altogether, a Christian*.

I. (I.) 1. Now, in the being *almost a Christian* is implied, First, heathen honesty. No one, I suppose, will make any question of this; especially, since by heathen honesty here, I mean, not that which is recommended in the writings of their philosophers only, but such as the common heathens expected one of another, and many of them actually practised. By the rules of this they were taught that they ought not to be unjust; not to take away their neighbour's goods, either by robbery or theft; not to oppress the poor, neither to use extortion toward any; not to cheat or overreach either the poor or rich, in whatsoever commerce they had with them; to defraud no man of his right; and, if it were possible, to owe no man anything.

2. Again: the common heathens allowed, that some regard was to be paid to truth, as well as to justice. And, accordingly, they not only held him in abomination who was forsworn, who called God to witness to a lie; but him also who was known to be a slanderer of his neighbour, who falsely accused any man. And indeed, little better did they esteem wilful liars of any sort, accounting them the disgrace of human kind, and the pests of society.

3. Yet again: there was a sort of love and assistance which they expected one from another. They expected whatever assistance any one could give another, without prejudice to himself. And this they extended not only to those little offices of humanity which are performed without any expense or labour, but likewise to the feeding the hungry, if they had food to spare; the clothing the naked with their own superfluous raiment; and, in general, the giving, to any that needed, such things as they needed not themselves. Thus far, in the lowest account of it, heathen honesty went; the first thing implied in the being *almost a Christian*.

(II.) 4. A second thing implied in the being *almost a Christian*, is, the having a form of godliness; of that godliness which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ; the having the *outside of a real Christian*. Accordingly, the almost Christian does nothing which the gospel forbids. he taketh not the name of God in vain; he blesseth, and curseth not; he sweareth not at all, but his communication is, yea, yea; nay, nay. he profanes not the day of the Lord, nor suffers it to be profaned, even by the stranger that is within his gates. he not only avoids all actual adultery, fornication, and uncleanness, but every word or look that either directly or indirectly tends thereto; nay, and all idle words, abstaining both from detraction, backbiting, talebearing, evil speaking, and from "all foolish talking and jesting"--eutrapelia, a kind of virtue in the heathen moralist's account; --briefly, from all conversation that is not "good to the use of

edifying,' and that, consequently, "grieves the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.'

5. He abstains from "wine wherein is excess"; from revellings and gluttony. he avoids, as much as in him lies, all strife and contention, continually endeavouring to live peaceably with all men. And, if he suffer wrong, he avengeth not himself, neither returns evil for evil. he is no railer, no brawler, no scoffer, either at the faults or infirmities of his neighbour. he does not willingly wrong, hurt, or grieve any man; but in all things act and speaks by that plain rule, "Whatsoever thou wouldest not he should do unto thee, that do not thou to another."

6. And in doing good, he does not confine himself to cheap and easy offices of kindness, but labours and suffers for the profit of many, that by all means he may help some. In spite of toil or pain, "whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he doeth it with his might;" whether it be for his friends, or for his enemies; for the evil, or for the good. For being "not slothful" in this, or in any "business," as he "hath opportunity" he doeth "good," all manner of good, "to all men;" and to their souls as well as their bodies. he reproveth the wicked, instructs the ignorant, confirms the wavering, quickens the good, and comforts the afflicted. he labours to awaken those that sleep; to lead those whom God hath already awakened to the "Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," that they may wash therein and be clean; and to stir up those who are saved through faith, to adorn the gospel of Christ in all things.

7. He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities. he constantly frequents the house of God; and that, not as the manner of some is, who come into the presence of the Most High, either loaded with gold and costly apparel, or in all the gaudy vanity of dress, and either by their unseasonable civilities to each other, or the impertinent gaiety of their behaviour, disclaim all pretensions to the form as well as to the power of godliness. Would to God there were none even among ourselves who fall under the same condemnation! who come into this house, it may be, gazing about, or with all the signs of the most listless, careless indifference, though sometimes they may *seem* to use a prayer to God for his blessing on what they are entering upon; who, during that awful service, are either asleep, or reclined in the most convenient posture for it; or, as though they supposed God was asleep, talking with one another, or looking round, as utterly void of employment. Neither let these be accused of the form of godliness. No; he who has even this, behaves with seriousness and attention, in every part of that solemn service. More especially, when he approaches the table of the Lord, it is not with a light or careless behaviour, but with an air, gesture, and deportment which speaks nothing else but "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

8. To this, if we add the constant use of family prayer, by those who are masters of families, and the setting times apart for private addresses to God, with a daily seriousness of behaviour; he who uniformly practises this outward religion, has the form of godliness. There needs but one thing more in order to his being *almost a Christian*, and that is, sincerity.

(III.) 9. By sincerity I mean, a real, inward principle of religion, from whence these outward actions flow. And, indeed if we have not this, we have not heathen honesty; no, not so much of it as will answer the demand of a heathen Epicurean poet. Even this poor wretch, in his sober intervals, is able to testify,

Oderunt peccare boni, virtutis amore;
Oderunt peccare mali, formidine poenae.

[Good men avoid sin from the love of virtue; Wicked men avoid sin from a fear of punishment.]

So that, if a man only abstains from doing evil in order to avoid punishment, Non pasces in cruce corvos, [Thou shalt not be hanged.], saith the Pagan; there, "thou hast thy reward." But even he will not allow such a harmless man as this to be so much as a *good heathen*. If, then, any man, from the same motive, viz., to avoid punishment, to avoid the loss of his friends, or his gain, or his reputation, should not only abstain from doing evil, but also do ever so much good; yea, and use all the means of grace; yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even *almost a Christian*. If he has no better principle in his heart, he is only a hypocrite altogether. 10. Sincerity, therefore, is necessarily implied in the being *almost a Christian*; a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied, that a man have a sincere view of pleasing God in all things; in all his conversation; in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone. This design, if any man be *almost a Christian*, runs through the whole tenor of his life. This is the moving principle, both in his doing good, his abstaining from evil, and his using the ordinances of God.

11. But here it will probably be inquired, "Is it possible that any man living should go so far as this, and, nevertheless, be *only almost a Christian*? What more than this, can be implied in the being *a Christian altogether*? I answer, First, that it is possible to go thus far, and yet be but *almost a Christian*, I learn, not only from the oracles of God, but also from the sure testimony of experience.

12. Brethren, great is "my boldness towards you in this behalf." And "forgive me this wrong," if I declare my own folly upon the house-top, for yours and the gospel's sake—Suffer me, then, to speak freely of myself, even as of another man. I am content to be abased, so ye may be exalted, and to be yet more vile for the glory of my Lord.

13. I did go thus far for many years, as many of this place can testify; using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence; redeeming the time; buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men; constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavouring after a steady seriousness of behaviour, at all times, and in all places; and, God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God; a hearty desire to do his will in all things; to please him who had called me to "fight the good fight," and to "lay hold of eternal life." Yet my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost, that all this time I was but *almost a Christian*.

II. If it be inquired, "What more than this is implied in the being *altogether a Christian*?" I answer,

(I.) 1. First. The love of God. For thus saith his word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Such a love is this, as engrosses the whole heart, as rakes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. he that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually "rejoiceth in God his Saviour." his delight is in the Lord, his Lord and his All, to whom "in everything he giveth thanks. All his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name." his heart is ever crying out, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Indeed, what can he desire beside God? Not the world, or the things of the world: for he is "crucified to the world, and the world

crucified to him." he is crucified to "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life." Yea, he is dead to pride of every kind: for "love is not puffed up" but "he that dwelling in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him," is less than nothing in his own eyes.

(II.) 2. The Second thing implied in the being *altogether a Christian* is, the love of our neighbour. For thus said our Lord in the following words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" If any man ask, "Who is my neighbour?" we reply, Every man in the world; every child of his who is the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Nor may we in any wise except our enemies or the enemies of God and their own souls. But every Christian loveth these also as himself, yea, "as Christ loved us." he that would more fully understand what manner of love this is, may consider St. Paul's description of it. It is "long-suffering and kind." It "envieth not." It is not rash or hasty in judging. It "is not puffed up;" but maketh him that loves, the least, the servant of all. Love "doth not behave itself unseemly," but becometh "all things to all men." She "seeketh not her own;" but only the good of others, that they may be saved. "Love is not provoked." It casteth out wrath, which he who hath is wanting in love. "It thinketh no evil. It rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. It covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

(III.) 3. There is yet one thing more that may be separately considered, though it cannot actually be separate from the preceding, which is implied in the being *altogether a Christian*; and that is the ground of all, even faith. Very excellent things are spoken of this throughout the oracles of God. "Every one, saith the beloved disciple, "that believeth is born of God." "To as many as received him, gave he power to become the sons of God. even to them that believe on his name." And "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Yea, our Lord himself declares, "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; and cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

4. But here let no man deceive his own soul. "It is diligently to be noted, the faith which bringeth not forth repentance, and love, and all good works, is not that right living faith, but a dead and devilish one. For, even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin: that he wrought all kinds of miracles, declaring himself very God: that, for our sakes, he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the third day: that he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father and at the end of the world shall come again to judge both the quick and dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable estate lacking the very true Christian faith." [Homily on the Salvation of Man.]

5. "The right and true Christian faith is (to go on in the words of our own Church), "not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the Articles of our Faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey his commandments."

6. Now, whosoever has this faith, which "purifies the heart" (by the power of God, who dwelleth therein) from "pride, anger, desire, from all unrighteousness" from "all filthiness of flesh and spirit;" which fills it with love stronger than death, both to God and to all mankind; love that doeth the works of God, glorying to spend and to be

spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict, --whosoever has this faith thus working by love is not almost only, but altogether, a Christian.

7. But who are the living witnesses of these things? I beseech you, brethren, as in the presence of that God before whom "hell and destruction are without a covering--how much more the hearts of the children of men?"—that each of you would ask his own heart, "Am I of that number? Do I so far practise justice, mercy, and truth, as even the rules of heathen honesty require? If so, have I the very *outside* of a Christian? the form of godliness? Do I abstain from evil—from whatsoever is forbidden in the written Word of God? Do I, whatever good my hand findeth to do, do it with my might? Do I seriously use all the ordinances of God at all opportunities? And is all this done with a sincere design and desire to please God in all things?"

8. Are not many of you conscious, that you never came thus far; that you have not been even *almost a Christian*; that you have not come up to the standard of heathen honesty; at least, not to the form of Christian godliness?—much less hath God seen sincerity in you, a real design of pleasing him in all things. You never so much as intended to devote all your words and works. your business, studies, diversions, to his glory. You never even designed or desired, that whatsoever you did should be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and as such should be "a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.

9. But, supposing you had, do good designs and good desires make a Christian? By no means, unless they are brought to good effect. "Hell is paved," saith one, "with good intentions." The great question of all, then, still remains. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Can you cry out, "My God, and my All"? Do you desire nothing but him? Are you happy in God? Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of rejoicing? And is this commandment written in your heart, "That he who loveth God love his brother also"? Do you then love your neighbour as yourself? Do you love every man, even your enemies, even the enemies of God, as your own soul? as Christ loved you? Yea, dost thou believe that Christ loved thee, and gave himself for thee? Hast thou faith in his blood? Believest thou the Lamb of God hath taken away thy sins, and cast them as a stone into the depth of the sea? that he hath blotted out the handwriting that was against thee, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross? Hast thou indeed redemption through his blood, even the remission of thy sins? And doth his Spirit bear witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God?

10. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who now standeth in the midst of us, knoweth, that if any man die without this faith and this love, good it were for him that he had never been born. Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God: call in the day when he may be found. Let him not rest, till he make his "goodness to pass before thee;" till he proclaim unto thee the name of the Lord, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Let no man persuade thee, by vain words, to rest short of this prize of thy high calling. But cry unto him day and night, who, "while we were without strength, died for the ungodly," until thou knowest in whom thou hast believed, and canst say, "My Lord, and my God!" Remember, "always to pray, and not to faint," till thou also canst lift up thy hand unto heaven, and declare to him that liveth for ever and ever, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

11. May we all thus experience what it is to be, not almost only; but altogether Christians; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus; knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ; rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto us!

Edited anonymously at the Memorial University of Newfoundland with corrections and other modifications by Ryan Danker and George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene University.

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Lesson 9: A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 1

Due This Lesson

Response paper to Resource 8-6
Journal
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand and be able to discuss the Wesleyan response to pluralism
- understand and discuss the nature and importance of positive responses to prevenient grace by persons in non-Christian religions
- possess a Wesleyan theological rationale that will equip him or her for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world

Homework Assignments

Read John Wesley's sermon, "On Faith," Resource 9-7. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/weslew/sermons/serm-106.stm>. Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Begin working on your Credo as assigned in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

Motivator

"What, if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils? If I did, I could not forbid even him, without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea, if it could be supposed that I should see a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk, doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still.

"O stand clear of this! But be not content with not forbidding any that casts out devils. It is well to go thus far; but do not stop here. If you will avoid all bigotry, go on. In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge, but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge, as far as you can, his sphere of action; show him all kindness in word and deed; and cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him."⁵⁵

Wesley's Beliefs

Without ambivalence, for Wesleyans, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and Life (Jn 14:6). He is humankind's way home to the Father.

But Wesley did not believe that these affirmations provide a warrant for coercing others to embrace them. He believed that the way we announce the gospel must evidence the character of God and the gospel itself. What the herald "heralds," and the way he or she does it, must reveal the incarnate God who rode into Jerusalem on the back of a lowly donkey, not the back of a horse of war. As Wesley's warnings against bigotry show, the reality of prevenient grace should lead Wesleyans to respect the ways the Holy Spirit is already working in all persons. Wesleyans are partners with the God who is already present; they are neither brokers who introduce God's presence nor enforcers who have to insure his effectiveness. He is the free and sovereign God. The Holy Spirit will use whatever instrument he chooses, and when he chooses.

The Universality of Prevenient Grace

The centerpiece for developing a Wesleyan response to religious pluralism is the doctrine of _____
_____.

For the Wesleyan tradition all grace is _____.

Through the Son and by the Spirit's power the Father acts to _____ and _____. The range of God's gracious activity is universal, and it is anchored in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Just as the Father took the initiative in sending his Son, even so the Triune God—from the Father, by the Son, and through the Holy Spirit—takes the gracious initiative in his manifold efforts to bring all persons to reconciliation in Christ. God leaves no person unattended by grace. No person anywhere “is in a state of mere nature . . . that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called ‘natural conscience.’ But this is not natural; it is more properly termed ‘preventing grace’.”⁵⁶

The Holy Spirit's Universal Faithfulness

No one can formulate in advance how prevenient grace will begin to stir one's hunger for God, or predict the paths by which the Spirit will urge him or her towards an evangelical encounter with Christ. But we can be certain that the Holy Spirit works to awaken one to his or her hopelessness without God's mercy, and to attract him or her to salvation.

Prevenient grace neither diminishes one's recognition of spiritual death, one's radical dependence upon God's mercy, nor the decisive quality of the New Birth. But how or when such an encounter will occur rests with the Sovereign God. We know only that it happens as a confluence of the workings of God's mysterious grace in a complex of religious, psychological, social and many other factors, many of which may never be known.

Prevenient Grace

Prevenient grace extends to all persons without reference to the historical, cultural or religious context in which they are born, whether they be Hindu, Buddhist or Christian. Prevenient grace is the real presence of the Spirit of Christ in the soul.

God's definitive revelation of himself in Jesus, the Word *enfleshed* among us, has its normative expression in Scripture. And the Spirit bears witness to Scripture's faithfulness to Christ. So there is no full hearing or understanding, and hence no full reception, apart from the Scriptures.

Prevenient grace points and leads toward a transforming personal and experimental—experiential—relationship with God.

Positive response to prevenient grace introduces a distinction between the *"faith of a servant"* based on "fearing God," and the *"faith of a Son"* marked by the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit. Love for God and for one's neighbor, coming through evangelical transformation, characterizes such a person.

The Fruit of Prevenient Grace

“I have no authority from the Word of God ‘to judge those that are without.’ Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and [Muslim] world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is ‘the Father of the spirits of all flesh;’ who is the God of the heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.”

John Wesley⁵⁷

However, a warning must be issued and heeded. As rich as the doctrine of prevenient grace is for the Wesleyan Tradition, we do not collapse the full proclamation of the gospel and regeneration by the Spirit into prevenient grace. While “the faith of a servant” is to be recognized and affirmed, there is a sharp qualitative difference between it and the “faith of a son.”

Apart from an explicit revelatory encounter with Christ through hearing the word of the gospel, persons do not “know” Christ manifest.

ON FAITH JOHN WESLEY

SERMON ONE HUNDRED SIX

"Without faith it is impossible to please him." Heb. 11:6.

1. But what is Faith? It is a divine "evidence and conviction of things not seen;" of things which are not seen now, whether they are visible or invisible in their own nature. Particularly, it is a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of the things of God. This is the most comprehensive definition of faith that ever was or can be given; as including every species of faith, from the lowest to the highest. And yet I do not remember any eminent writer that has given a full and clear account of the several sorts of it, among all the verbose and tedious treatises which have been published upon the subject.

2. Something indeed of a similar kind has been written by that great and good man, Mr. Fletcher, in his "Treatise on the various Dispensations of the Grace of God." Herein he observes, that there are four dispensations that are distinguished from each other by the degree of light which God vouchsafes to them that are under each. A small degree of light is given to those that are under the heathen dispensation. These generally believed, "that there was a God, and that he was a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." But a far more considerable degree of light was vouchsafed to the Jewish nation; inasmuch as to them "were entrusted" the grand means of light, "the oracles of God." Hence many of these had clear and exalted views of the nature and attributes of God; of their duty to God and man; yea, and of the great promise made to our first parents, and transmitted by them to their posterity, that "the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head."

3. But above both the heathen and Jewish dispensation was that of John the Baptist. To him a still clearer light was given; and he himself "a burning and shining light." To him it was given to "behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Accordingly our Lord himself affirms, that "of all which had been born of women," there had not till that time arisen "a greater than John the Baptist." But nevertheless he informs us, "He that is least in the kingdom of God," the Christian dispensation, "is greater than he." By one that is under the Christian dispensation, Mr. Fletcher means one that has received the Spirit of adoption; that has the Spirit of God witnessing "with his spirit, that he is a child of God."

In order to explain this still farther, I will endeavour, by the help of God, First, To point out the several sorts of faith: And, Secondly, to draw some practical inferences.

I. In the First place, I will endeavour to point out the several sorts of faith. It would be easy, either to reduce these to a smaller number, or to divide them into a greater. But it does not appear that this would answer any valuable purpose.

1. The lowest sort of faith if it be any faith at all, is that of a Materialist—a man who, like the late Lord Kames, believes there is nothing but matter in the universe. I say, if it be any faith at all: for, properly speaking, it is not. It is not "an evidence or conviction of God," for they do not believe there is any; neither is it "a conviction of

things not seen," for they deny the existence of such. Or if, for decency's sake, they allow there is a God, yet they suppose even him to be material. For one of their maxims is, *Jupiter est quodcunque vides*. "Whatever you see, is God." Whatever you see! A visible, tangible god! Excellent divinity! Exquisite nonsense!

2. The Second sort of faith, if you allow a Materialist to have any, is the faith of a Deist. I mean, one who believes there is a God, distinct from matter; but does not believe the Bible. Of these we may observe two sorts. One sort are mere beasts in human shape, wholly under the power of the basest passions, and having "a downright appetite to mix with mud." Other Deists are, in most respects, rational creatures, though unhappily prejudiced against Christianity: Most of these believe the being and attributes of God; they believe that God made and governs the world; and that the soul does not die with the body, but will remain for ever in a state of happiness or misery.

3. The next sort of faith is the faith of Heathens, with which I join that of Mahometans. I cannot but prefer this before the faith of the Deists; because, though it embraces nearly the same objects, yet they are rather to be pitied than blamed for the narrowness of their faith. And their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light. When one asked Chicali, an old Indian Chief, "Why do not you red men know as much as us white men?" he readily answered, "Because you have the great Word, and we have not."

4. It cannot be doubted, but this plea will avail for millions of modern Heathens. Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. As to the ancient Heathens, millions of them, likewise were savages. No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had. But many of them, especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by His inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, and Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdan. The story seems to be feigned; but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled.

5. But, in general, we may surely place the faith of a Jew above that of a Heathen or Mahometan. By Jewish faith, I mean, the faith of those who lived between the giving of the law and the coming of Christ. These, that is, those that were serious and sincere among them, believed all that is written in the Old Testament. In particular, they believed that, in the fulness of time, the Messiah would appear, "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness."

6. It is not so easy to pass any judgment concerning the faith of our modern Jews. It is plain, "the veil is still upon their hearts" when Moses and the Prophets are read. The god of this world still hardens their hearts, and still blinds their eyes, "lest at any time the light of the glorious gospel" should break in upon them. So that we may say of this people, as the Holy Ghost said to their forefathers, "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Acts 28:27.) Yet it is not our part to pass sentence upon them, but to leave them to their own Master.

7. I need not dwell upon the faith of John the Baptist, any more than the dispensation which he was under; because these, as Mr. Fletcher well describes them, were peculiar to himself. Setting him aside, the faith of the Roman Catholics, in general,

seems to be above that of the ancient Jews. If most of these are volunteers in faith, believing more than God has revealed, it cannot be denied that they believe all which God has revealed, as necessary to salvation. In this we rejoice on their behalf: We are glad that none of those new Articles, which they added, at the Council of Trent, "to the faith once delivered to the saints, does so materially contradict any of the ancient Articles, as to render them of no effect.

8. The faith of the Protestants, in general, embraces only those truths as necessary to salvation, which are clearly revealed in the oracles of God. Whatever is plainly declared in the Old and New Testament is the object of their faith. They believe neither more nor less than what is manifestly contained in, and provable by, the Holy Scriptures. The word of God is "a lantern to their feet, and a light in all their paths." They dare not, on any pretence, go from it, to the right hand or to the left. The written word is the whole and sole rule of their faith, as well as practice. They believe whatsoever God has declared, and profess to do whatsoever he hath commanded. This is the proper faith of Protestants: By this they will abide, and no other.

9. Hitherto faith has been considered chiefly as an evidence and conviction of such or such truths. And this is the sense wherein it is taken at this day in every part of the Christian world. But, in the mean time, let it be carefully observed, (for eternity depends upon it,) that neither the faith of a Roman Catholic, nor that of a Protestant, if it contains no more than this, no more than the embracing such and such truths, will avail any more before God, than the faith of a Mahometan or a Heathen; yea, of a Deist or Materialist. For can this "faith save him?" Can it save any man either from sin or from hell? No more than it could save Judas Iscariot: No more than it could save the devil and his angels; all of whom are convinced that every title of Holy Scripture is true.

10. But what is the faith which is properly saving; which brings eternal salvation to all those that keep it to the end? It is such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables every one that possesses it to "fear God and work righteousness." And whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle declares, is "accepted of him." He actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance. But he is at present only a *servant* of God, not properly a *son*. Meantime, let it be well observed, that "the wrath of God" no longer "abideth on him."

11. Indeed, nearly fifty years ago, when the Preachers, commonly called Methodists, began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprized of the difference between a servant and a child of God. They did not clearly understand, that even one "who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." In consequence of this, they were apt to make sad the hearts of those whom God had not made sad. For they frequently asked those who feared God, "Do you know that your sins are forgiven?" And upon their answering, "No," immediately replied, "Then you are a child of the devil." No; this does not follow. It might have been said, (and it is all that can be said with propriety,) "Hitherto you are only a *servant*, you are not a *child* of God. You have already great reason to praise God that he has called you to his honourable service. Fear not. Continue crying unto him, and you shall see greater things than these."

12. And, indeed, unless the servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the *faith* of the children of God, by his *revealing* his only begotten Son in their hearts. Thus, the faith of a child is, properly and directly, a divine conviction, whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, "The life that I now

live, I live by faith the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." And whosoever hath this, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit, that he is a child of God. So the Apostle writes to the Galatians: "Ye are the sons of God by faith. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;" that is, giving you a childlike confidence in him, together with a kind affection toward him. This then it is, that (if St. Paul was taught of God, and wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost) properly constitutes the difference between a servant of God, and a child of God. "He that believeth," as a child of God, "hath the witness in himself." This the servant hath not. Yet let no man discourage him; rather, lovingly exhort him to expect it every moment.

13. It is easy to observe, that all the sort of faith which we can conceive are reducible to one or other of the preceding. But let us covet the best gifts, and follow the most excellent way. There is no reason why you should be satisfied with the faith of a Materialist, a Heathen, or a Deist; nor, indeed, with that of a servant. I do not know that God requires it at your hands. Indeed, if you have received this, you ought not to cast it away; you ought not in anywise to undervalue it but to be truly thankful for it. Yet, in the mean time, beware how you rest here: Press on till you receive the Spirit of adoption: Rest not, till that Spirit clearly witnesses with your spirit, that you are a child of God.

II. I proceed, in the Second place, to draw a few inferences from the preceding observations.

1. And I would, First, infer, in how dreadful a state, if there be a God, is a Materialist one who denies not only the "Lord that bought him," but also the Lord that made him. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But it is impossible *he* should have any faith at all—any conviction of any invisible world; for he believes there is no such thing—any conviction the being of a God; for a material God is no God at all. For you cannot possibly suppose the sun or skies to be God, any more than you can suppose a God of wood or stone. And, farther, whosoever believes all things to be mere matter must, of course, believe that all things are governed by dire necessity—necessity that is as inexorable as the winds; as ruthless as the rocks as merciless as the waves that dash upon them, or the poor shipwrecked mariners! Who then shall help thee, thou poor desolate wretch, when thou art most in need of help? Winds, and seas, and rocks, and storms! Such are the best helpers which the Materialists can hope for!

2. Almost equally desolate is the case of the poor Deist, how learned, yea, how moral, soever he be. For you, likewise, though you may not advert it, are really "without God in the world." See your religion, the "Religion of nature, delineated" by ingenious Mr. Wollaston; whom I remember to have seen when I was at school, attending the public service at the Charter-house chapel. Does he found his religion upon God? Nothing less. He founds it upon truth, abstract truth. But does he not by that expression mean God? No; he sets him out of the question, and builds a beautiful castle in the air, without being beholden either to Him or his word. See your smooth-tongued orator of Glasgow, one of the most pleasing writers of the age! Has he any more to do with God, on his system, than Mr. Wollaston.? Does he deduce his "Idea of Virtue" from him, as the Father of Lights, the Source of all good? Just the contrary. He not only plans his whole theory without taking the least notice of God, but toward the close of it proposes that question, "Does the having an eye to God in an action enhance the virtue of it?" He answers, "No; it is so far from this, that if in doing a virtuous, that is, a benevolent, action, a man mingles a desire to please God, the more there is of this

desire, the less virtue there is in that action?" Never before did I meet with either Jew, Turk, or Heathen who so flatly renounced God as this Christian Professor!

3. But with Heathens, Mahometans, and Jews we have at present nothing to do; only we may wish that their lives did not shame many of us that are called Christians. We have not much more to do with the members of the Church of Rome. But we cannot doubt, that many of them, like the excellent Archbishop of Cambray, still retain (notwithstanding many mistakes) that faith that worketh by love. And how many of the Protestants enjoy this, whether members of the Church of England, or of other congregations? We have reason to believe a considerable number, both of one and the other, (and, blessed be God, an increasing number,) in every part of the land.

4. One more, I exhort you that fear God and work righteousness, you that are *servants* of God, First, flee from all sin, as from the face of a serpent; being

Quick as the apple of an eye,
The slightest touch of sin to feel;

and to work righteousness, to the utmost of the power you now have to abound in works both of piety and mercy: And, Secondly, continually to cry to God, that he would reveal his Son in your hearts, to the intent you may be no more *servants* but *sons*; having his love shed abroad in your hearts, and walking in "the glorious liberty of the, children of God."

5. I exhort you, Lastly, who already feel the Spirit of God witnessing with your spirit that you are the children of God, follow the advice of the Apostle: Walk in all the good works whereunto ye are created in Christ Jesus. And then, "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God," go on to perfection. Yea, and when ye have attained a measure of perfect love, when God has circumcised your hearts, and enabled you to love him with all your heart and with all your soul, think not of resting there. That is impossible. You cannot stand still; you must either rise or fall; rise higher or fail lower. Therefore the voice of God to the children of Israel, to the children of God, is, "Go forward!" "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward unto those that are before, press on to the mark, for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus!"

Edited by Dave Rotz and George Lyons with corrections by Ryan Danker of Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, Idaho) for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.
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Lesson 10: A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 2

Due This Lesson

Response paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand how Wesleyans assess the relationship between the Christian gospel and non-Christian religions
- begin to develop a basis for ministering as a Wesleyan in a world marked by religious pluralism
- be prepared to engage a communicant of a non-Christian religion in a manner that is distinctly Wesleyan

Homework Assignments

Read John Wesley's sermon, "A Caution Against Bigotry," Resource 10-3. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/weslew/sermons/serm-106.stm>. Write a 1-2 page response paper.

Continue working on your Credo.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the syllabus. Also, respond to the motivator.

Motivator

"Would not openness to other religions relativize the truth claims of Christianity? How can Christians be [attentive, respectful and patient toward] persons of other faiths without undermining their own convictions not only [regarding] the validity of Christianity, but the importance of efforts to reach non-Christians with the good news of Jesus Christ? Is there any way to combine strong conviction with genuine [respect and patience]?"⁵⁸

The Christian Gospel

Wesleyan's and the Ideology of Religious Pluralism

Any form of religious pluralism that deviates from Christ as the incarnate, unsubstitutable Redeemer of the world violates Wesleyan fidelity to the Scriptures, the Apostle's Creed, and the Creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon.

The Unresolved Question

"What is the relationship between prevenient grace and the non-Christian religions?"

- What role, if any, do those religions play in the Spirit's efforts to bring persons to repentance and new life in Christ? Are non-Christian religions grace-endowed paths to God?
- Are they vehicles that God intentionally uses, and to some extent indwells, in anticipation of the proclamation and reception of the gospel?
- Does God explicitly work through non-Christian religious structures in the service of prevenient grace?
- Should non-Christian religions be recognized as preliminary servants—vehicles—of God that await the coming of the more complete Christological revelation of God?

Response

While most of the religions make space for other religions, none of them can be reconciled with the New Testament affirmation regarding the person of Jesus Christ.

Wesleyan Inclusivism

Wesleyans are more in harmony with the *inclusivism* represented by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders and Karl Rahner.

“Christianity” and the “Kingdom of God”

Neither the Kingdom of God nor the gospel of Jesus Christ are to be equated with “the Christian religion.” John Wesley had seen enough distortions of the Christian gospel and enough misrepresentations of Jesus Christ to know that persons and nations that identify themselves as “Christian” can be as far away from God as overt pagans.

A Wesleyan Assessment of non-Christian Religions

- To *begin*, we can't easily separate a person from his or her religion.
- Some religions better serve the goal of prevenient grace than do others. Some religions—more correctly, some forms of some religions—suggest rough parallels to important features of the Christian faith, and hence may better serve prevenient grace.
- The value of a non-Christian religion resides not in what it claims for itself, but in its capacity for instrumental service to God's prevenient grace.

We should remind ourselves that how God will judge a person with reference to his or her response to Jesus Christ rests with the sovereign God of Holy Love alone. In all instances he will be faithful to himself, to his word, and to his world.

A CAUTION AGAINST BIGOTRY

by JOHN WESLEY
SERMON THIRTY-EIGHT

"And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name: and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not." Mark 9:38, 39.

1. In the preceding verses we read, that after the Twelve had been disputing "which of them should be the greatest," Jesus took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, said unto them, "Whosoever shall receive one of these little children in My name, receiveth me; and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth not me" only, "but him that sent me." Then "John answered," that is, said, with reference to what our Lord had spoken just before, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbad him, because he followeth not us." As if he had said, "Ought we to have received him? In receiving him, should we have received thee? Ought we not rather to have forbidden him? Did not we do well therein?" "But Jesus said, Forbid him not."

2. The same passage is recited by St. Luke, and almost in the same words. But it may be asked, "What is this to us, seeing no man now *casts out devils*? Has not the power of doing this been withdrawn from the church, for twelve or fourteen hundred years? How then are *we* concerned in the case here proposed, or in our Lord's decision of it?"

3. Perhaps more nearly than is commonly imagined; the case proposed being no uncommon case. That we may reap our full advantage from it, I design to show, first, in what sense men may, and do, now cast out devils: secondly, what we may understand by, "He followeth not us." I shall, thirdly, explain our Lord's direction, "Forbid him not;" and conclude with an inference from the whole.

I. 1. I am, in the first place, to show, in what sense men may, and do, now cast out devils.

In order to have the clearest view of this, we should remember, that (according to the scriptural account) as God dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness. As the Holy Spirit possesses the souls of good men, so the evil spirit possesses the souls of the wicked. Hence it is that the Apostle terms him "the god of this world;" from the uncontrolled power he has over worldly men. Hence our blessed Lord styles him "the prince of this world;" so absolute is his dominion over it. And hence St. John: "We know that we are of God, and" all who are not of God, "the whole world," "en tw ponhrw keitai," —not *lieth in wickedness*, but "*lieth in the wicked one*;" lives and moves in him, as they who are not of the world do in God.

2. For the devil is not to be considered only as "a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour;" nor barely as a subtle enemy, who cometh unawares upon poor souls, and "leads them captive at his will;" but as he who dwelleth in them, and walketh in them; who ruleth the darkness or wickedness of this world (of worldly men and all their dark designs and actions), by keeping possession of their hearts, setting up his throne there, and bringing every thought into obedience to himself. Thus the "strong one armed keepeth his house;" and if this "unclean spirit" sometimes "go out

of a man," yet he often returns with "seven spirits worse than himself, and they enter in and dwell there." Nor can he be idle in his dwelling. He is continually "working in" these "children of disobedience." he works in them with power, with mighty energy, transforming them into his own likeness, effacing all the remains of the image of God, and preparing them for every evil word and work.

3. It is, therefore, an unquestionable truth, that the god and prince of this world still possesses all who know not God. Only the manner wherein he possesses them now differs from that wherein he did it of old time. *Then* he frequently tormented their bodies as well as souls, and that openly, without any disguise: *now* he torments their souls only (unless in some rare cases), and that as covertly as possible. The reason of this difference is plain: it was then his aim to drive mankind into superstition; therefore, he wrought as openly as he could. But it is his aim to drive us into infidelity; therefore, he works as privately as he can: for the more secret he is, the more he prevails.

4. Yet, if we may credit historians, there are countries, even now, where he works as openly as aforesaid. "But why in savage and barbarous countries only? Why not in Italy, France, or England?" For a very plain reason: he knows his men, and he knows what he hath to do with each. To Laplanders he appears barefaced; because he is to fix them in superstition and gross idolatry. But with you he is pursuing a different point. He is to make you idolize yourselves; to make you wiser in your own eyes than God himself, than all the oracles of God. Now, in order to do this, he must not appear in his own shape: that would frustrate his design. No: He uses all his art to make you deny his being, till he has you safe in his own place.

5. He reigns, therefore, although in a different way, yet as absolute in one land as in the other. He has the gay Italian infidel in his teeth, as sure as the wild Tartar. But he is fast asleep in the mouth of the lion, who is too wise to wake him out of sleep. So he only plays with him for the present, and when he pleases, swallows him up! The god of this world holds his English worshippers full as fast as those in Lapland. But it is not his business to affright them, lest they should fly to the God of heaven. The prince of darkness, therefore, does not appear, while he rules over these his willing subjects. The conqueror holds his captives so much the safer, because they imagine themselves at liberty. Thus "the strong one armed keepeth his house, and his goods are in peace;" neither the Deist nor nominal Christian suspects he is there: so he and they are perfectly at peace with each other.

6. All this while he works with energy in them. He blinds the eyes of their understanding, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ cannot shine upon them. He chains their souls down to earth and hell, with the chains of their own vile affections. He binds them down to the earth, by love of the world, love of money, of pleasure, of praise. And by pride, envy, anger, hate, revenge, he causes their souls to draw nigh unto hell; acting the more secure and uncontrolled, because they know not that he acts at all.

7. But how easily may we know the cause from its effects! These are sometimes gross and palpable. So they were in the most refined of the heathen nations. Go no farther than the admired, the virtuous Romans; and you will find these, when at the height of their learning and glory, "filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, despiteful, proud, boasters, disobedient to parents, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."

8. The strongest parts of this description are confirmed by one whom some may think a more unexceptionable witness. I mean their brother heathen, Dion Cassius; who observes, that, before Caesar's return from Gaul, not only gluttony and lewdness of every kind were open and barefaced; not only falsehood, injustice, and unmercifulness abounded, in public courts, as well as private families; but the most outrageous robberies, rapine, and murders were so frequent in all parts of Rome, that few men went out of doors without making their wills, as not knowing if they should return alive!

9. As gross and palpable are the works of the devil among many (if not all) the modern heathens. The natural religion of the Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and all other Indians bordering on our southern settlements (not of a few single men, but of entire nations), is to torture all their prisoners from morning till night, till at length they roast them to death; and upon the slightest undesigned provocation, to come behind and shoot any of their own countrymen! Yea, it is a common thing among them, for the son, if he thinks his father lives too long, to knock out his brains; and for mother, if she is tired of her children, to fasten stones about their necks, and throw three or four of them into the river, one after another!

10. It were to be wished, that none but heathens had practised such gross, palpable works of the devil. But we dare not say so. Even in cruelty and bloodshed, how little have the Christians come behind them! And not the Spaniards or Portuguese alone, butchering thousands in South America: not the Dutch only in the East Indies, or the French in North America, following the Spaniards step by step: our own countrymen, too, have wantoned in blood, and exterminated whole nations; plainly proving thereby what spirit it is that dwells and works in the children of disobedience.

11. These monsters might almost make us overlook the works of the devil that are wrought in our own country. But, alas! we cannot open our eyes even here, without seeing them on every side. Is it a small proof of his power, that common swearers, drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, thieves, robbers, sodomites, murderers, are still found in every part of our land? How triumphant does the prince of this world reign in all these children of disobedience!

12. He less openly, but no less effectually, works in dissemblers, tale-bearers, liars, slanderers; in oppressors and extortioners, in the perjured, the seller of his friend, his honour, his conscience, his country. And yet these may talk of religion or conscience still; of honour, virtue, and public spirit! But they can no more deceive Satan than they can God. He likewise knows those that are his: and a great multitude they are, out of every nation and people, of whom he has full possession at this day.

13. If you consider this, you cannot but see in what sense men may now also cast out devils: yea, and every Minister of Christ does cast them out, if his Lord's work prosper in his hand.

By the power of God attending his word, he brings these sinners to repentance; an entire inward as well as outward change, from all evil to all good. And this is, in a sound sense, to cast out devils, out of the souls wherein they had hitherto dwelt. The strong one can no longer keep his house. A stronger than he is come upon him, and hath cast him out, and taken possession for himself, and made it an habitation of God through his Spirit. Here, then, the energy of Satan ends, and the Son of God "destroys the works of the devil." The understanding of the sinner is now enlightened, and his heart sweetly drawn to God. His desires are refined, his affections purified; and, being

filled with the Holy Ghost, he grows in grace till he is not only holy in heart, but in all manner of conversation.

14. All this is indeed the work of God. It is God alone who can cast out Satan. But he is generally pleased to do this by man as an instrument in his hand: who is then said to cast out devils in his name, by his power and authority. And he sends whom he will send upon this great work; but usually such as man would never have thought of: for "His ways are not as our ways, neither his thoughts as our thoughts." Accordingly, he chooses the weak to confound the mighty; the foolish to confound the wise; for this plain reason, that he may secure the glory to himself; that "no flesh may glory in his sight."

II. 1. But shall we not forbid one who thus "casteth out devils," if "he followeth not us"? This, it seems, was both the judgement and practice of the Apostle, till he referred the case to his Master. "We forbid him," saith he, "because he followeth not us!" which he supposed to be a very sufficient reason. What we may understand by this expression, "He followeth not us," is the next point to be considered. The lowest circumstance we can understand thereby, is, he has no outward connexion with us. We do not labour in conjunction with each other. He is not our fellow-helper in the gospel. And indeed whensoever our Lord is pleased to send many labourers into his harvest, they cannot all act in subordination to, or connexion with, each other. Nay, they cannot be personal acquaintance with, nor be so much as known to, one another. Many there will necessarily be, in different parts of the harvest, so far from having any mutual intercourse, that they will be as absolute strangers to each other as if they had lived in different ages. And concerning any of these whom we know not, we may doubtless say, "He followeth not us."

2. A Second meaning of this expression may be, --he is not of our party. It has long been matter of melancholy consideration to all who pray for the peace of Jerusalem, that so many several parties are still subsisting among those who are all styled Christians. This has been particularly observable in our own countrymen, who have been continually dividing from each other, upon points of no moment, and many times such as religion had no concern in. The most trifling circumstances have given rise to different parties, which have continued for many generations; and each of these would be ready to object to one who was on the other side, "He followeth not us."

3. That expression may mean, Thirdly, --he differs from us in our religious opinions. There was a time when all Christians were of one mind, as well as of one heart, so great grace was upon them all, when they were first filled with the Holy Ghost! But how short a space did this blessing continue! How soon was that unanimity lost! and difference of opinion sprang up again, even in the church of Christ, —and that not in nominal but in real Christians; nay, in the very chief of them, the Apostles themselves! Nor does it appear that the difference which then began was ever entirely removed. We do not find that even those pillars in the temple of God, so long as they remained upon the earth, were ever brought to think alike, to be of one mind, particularly with regard to the ceremonial law. It is therefore no way surprising, that infinite varieties of opinion should now be found in the Christian church. A very probable consequence of this is, that whenever we see any "casting out devils," he will be one that, in this sense, "followeth not us" --that is not of our opinion. It is scarce to be imagined he will be of our mind in all points, even of religion. He may very probably think in a different manner from us, even on several subjects of importance; such as the nature and use of the moral law, the eternal decrees of God, the sufficiency and efficacy of his grace, and the perseverance of his children.

4. He may differ from us, Fourthly, not only in opinion, but likewise in some point of practice. He may not approve of that manner of worshipping God which is practised in our congregation; and may judge that to be more profitable for his soul which took its rise from Calvin or Martin Luther. He may have many objections to that Liturgy which we approve of beyond all others; many doubts concerning that form of church government which we esteem both apostolical and scriptural. Perhaps he may go farther from us yet: he may, from a principle of conscience, refrain from several of those which we believe to be the ordinances of Christ. Or, if we both agree that they are ordained of God, there may still remain a difference between us, either as to the manner of administering those ordinances, or the persons to whom they should be administered. Now the unavoidable consequence of any of these differences will be, that he who thus differs from us must separate himself, with regard to those points, from our society. In this respect, therefore, "he followeth not us": he is not (as we phrase it) "of our Church."

5. But in a far stronger sense "he followeth not us," who is not only of a different Church, but of such a Church as we account to be in many respects anti-scriptural and anti-Christian, --a Church which we believe to be utterly false and erroneous in her doctrines, as well as very dangerously wrong in her practice; guilty of gross superstition as well as idolatry, --a Church that has added many articles to the faith which was once delivered to the saints; that has dropped one whole commandment of God, and made void several of the rest by her traditions; and that, pretending the highest veneration for, and strictest conformity to, the ancient Church, has nevertheless brought in numberless innovations, without any warrant either from antiquity or Scripture. Now, most certainly, "he followeth not us," who stands at so great a distance from us.

6. And yet there may be a still wider difference than this. He who differs from us in judgement or practice, may possibly stand at a greater distance from us in affection than in judgement. And this indeed is a very natural and a very common effect of the other. The differences which begin in points of opinion seldom terminate there. They generally spread into the affections, and then separate chief friends. Nor are any animosities so deep and irreconcilable as those that spring from disagreement in religion. For this cause the bitterest enemies of a man are those of his own household. For this the father rises against his own children, and the children against the father; and perhaps persecute each other even to the death, thinking all the time they are doing God service. It is therefore nothing more than we may expect, if those who differ from us, either in religious opinions or practice, soon contract a sharpness, yea, bitterness towards us; if they are more and more prejudiced against us, till they conceive as ill an opinion of our persons as of our principles. An almost necessary consequence of this will be, they will speak in the same manner as they think of us. They will set themselves in opposition to us, and, as far as they are able, hinder our work; seeing it does not appear to them to be the work of God, but either of man or of the devil. He that thinks, speaks, and acts in such a manner as this, in the highest sense, "followeth not us."

7. I do not indeed conceive, that the person of whom the Apostle speaks in the text (although we have no particular account of him, either in the context, or in any other part of holy writ) went so far as this. We have no ground to suppose that there was any material difference between him and the Apostles, much less that he had any prejudice either against them or their Master. It seems we may gather thus much from our Lord's own words, which immediately follow the text: "There is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of me." But I purposely put

the case in the strongest light, adding all the circumstances which can well be conceived, that, being forewarned of the temptation in its full strength, we may in no case yield to it, and fight against God.

III. 1. Suppose, then, a man have no intercourse with us, suppose he be not of our party, suppose he separate from our Church, yea, and widely differ from us, both in judgement, practice, and affection; yet if we see even this man "casting out devils," Jesus saith, "Forbid him not." This important direction of our Lord I am, in the Third place, to explain.

2. If we see this man casting out devils: But it is well if, in such a case, we would believe even what we saw with our eyes, if we did not give the lie to our own senses. He must be little acquainted with human nature who does not immediately perceive how extremely unready we should be to believe that any man does cast out devils who "followeth not us" in all or most of the senses above recited: I had almost said, in any of them, seeing we may easily learn even from what passes in our own breasts, how unwilling men are to allow anything good in those who do not in all things agree with themselves.

3. "But what is a sufficient, reasonable proof, that a man does (in the sense above) cast out devils?" The answer is easy. Is there full proof, (1) That a person before us was a gross, open sinner? (2) That he is not so now? that he has broke off his sins, and lives a Christian life? And (3) That this change was wrought by his hearing this man preach? If these three points be plain and undeniable, then you have sufficient, reasonable proof, such as you cannot resist without wilful sin, that this man casts out devils.

4. Then "forbid him not." Beware how you attempt to hinder him, either by your authority, or arguments, or persuasions. Do not in any wise strive to prevent his using all the power which God has given him. If you have *authority* with him, do not use that authority to stop the work of God. Do not furnish him with *reasons* why he ought not any more to speak in the name of Jesus. Satan will not fail to supply him with these, if you do not second him therein. *Persuade* him not to depart from the work. If he should give place to the devil and you, many souls might perish in their iniquity, but their blood would God require at *your* hands.

5. "But what, if he be only a layman, who casts out devils! Ought I not to forbid him then?"

Is the fact allowed? Is there reasonable proof that this man has or does cast out devils? If there is, forbid him not; no, not at the peril of your soul. Shall not God work by whom he will work? No man can do these works unless God is with him; unless God hath sent him for this very thing. But if God hath sent him, will you call him back? Will you forbid him to go?

6. "But I do not know that he is sent of God." "Now herein is a marvellous thing" (may any of the seals of his mission say, any whom he hath brought from Satan to God), "that ye know not whence this man is, and, behold, he hath opened mine eyes! If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." If you doubt the fact, send for the parents of the man: send for his brethren, friends, acquaintance. But if you cannot doubt this, if you must needs acknowledge "that a notable miracle hath been wrought" then with what conscience, with what face, can you charge him whom God hath sent, "not to speak any more in his name"?

7. I allow, that it is *highly expedient*, whoever preaches in his name should have an outward as well as an inward call, but that it is *absolutely necessary*, I deny. "Nay, is not the Scripture express? `No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron'" (Heb. 5:4).

Numberless times has this text been quoted on the occasion, as containing the very strength of the cause; but surely never was so unhappy a quotation. For, First, Aaron was not called to preach at all: he was called "to offer gifts and sacrifice for sin." That was his peculiar employment. Secondly, these men do not offer sacrifice at all, but only preach; which Aaron did not. Therefore it is not possible to find one text in all the Bible which is more wide of the point than this.

8. "But what was the practice of the apostolic age?" You may easily see in the Acts of the Apostles. In the eighth chapter we read, "There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles" (verse 1). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (verse 4). Now, were all these outwardly called to preach? No man in his senses can think so. Here, then, is an undeniable proof, what was the practice of the apostolic age. Here you see not one, but a multitude of lay preachers, men that were only sent of God.

9. Indeed, so far is the practice of the apostolic age from inclining us to think it was *unlawful* for a man to preach before he was ordained, that we have reason to think it was then accounted *necessary*. Certainly the practice and the direction of the Apostle Paul was, to *prove* a man before he was ordained at all. "Let these" (the deacons), says he, "first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon" (1 Tim. 3:10). *Proved*, how? By setting them to construe a sentence of Greek and asking them a few commonplace questions? O amazing proof of a Minister of Christ! Nay; but by making a clear, open trial (as is still done by most of the Protestant Churches of Europe) not only whether their lives be holy and unblamable, but whether they have such gifts as are absolutely and indispensably necessary in order to edify the church of Christ.

10. But what if a man has these, and has brought sinners to repentance, and yet the Bishop will not ordain him? Then the Bishop does forbid him to cast out devils. But I dare not forbid him: I have published my reasons to all the world. Yet it is still insisted I ought to do it. You who insist upon it answer those reasons. I know not that any have done this yet, or even made an attempt of doing it. Only some have spoken of them as very weak and trifling: and this was prudent enough; for it is far easier to despise, at least seem to despise, an argument, than to answer it. Yet till this is done I must say, when I have reasonable proof that any man does cast out devils, whatever others do, I dare not forbid him, lest I be found even to fight against God.

11. And whosoever thou art that fearest God, "forbid him not, either directly or indirectly. There are many ways of doing this. You indirectly forbid him, if you either wholly deny, or despise and make little account of, the work which God has wrought by his hands. You indirectly forbid him, when you discourage him in his work, by drawing him into disputes concerning it, by raising objections against it, or frightening him with consequences which very possibly will never be. You forbid him when you show any unkindness toward him either in language or behaviour; and much more when you speak of him to others either in an unkind or a contemptuous manner; when you endeavour to represent him to any either in an odious or a despicable light. You are forbidding him all the time you are speaking evil of him, or making no account of his labours. O forbid him not in any of these ways; nor by forbidding others to hear

him, —by discouraging sinners from hearing that word which is able to save their souls!

12. Yea, if you would observe our Lord's direction in its full meaning and extent, then remember his word: "He that is not for us is against us; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth": he that gathereth not men into the kingdom of God, assuredly scatters them from it. For there can be no neuter in this war. Every one is either on God's side, or on Satan's. Are you on God's side? Then you will not only not forbid any man that casts out devils, but you will labour, to the uttermost of your power, to forward him in the work. You will readily acknowledge the work of God, and confess the greatness of it. You will remove all difficulties and objections, as far as may be, out of his way. You will strengthen his hands by speaking honourably of him before all men, and avowing the things which you have seen and heard. You will encourage others to attend upon his word, to hear him whom God hath sent. And you will omit no actual proof of tender love, which God gives you an opportunity of showing him.

IV. 1. If we willingly fail in any of these points, if we either directly or indirectly forbid him, "because he followeth not us," then we are bigots. This is the inference I draw from what has been said. But the term "bigotry," I fear, as frequently as it is used, is almost as little understood as "enthusiasm." It is too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, church, and religion. Therefore he is a bigot who is so fond of any of these, so strongly attached to them, as to forbid any who casts out devils because he differs from himself in any or all these particulars.

2. Do *you* beware of this. Take care (1) That you do not convict yourself of bigotry, by your unreadiness to believe that any man does cast out devils, who differs from you. And if you are clear thus far, if you acknowledge the fact, then examine yourself, (2) Am I not convicted of bigotry in this, in forbidding him directly or indirectly? Do I not directly forbid him on this ground, because he is not of my party, because he does not fall in with my opinions, or because he does not worship God according to that scheme of religion which I have received from my fathers?

3. Examine yourself, Do I not indirectly at least forbid him, on any of these grounds? Am I not sorry that God should thus own and bless a man that holds such erroneous opinions? Do I not discourage him, because he is not of my Church, by disputing with him concerning it, by raising objections, and by perplexing his mind with distant consequences? Do I show no anger, contempt, or unkindness of any sort, either in my words or actions? Do I not mention behind his back, his (real or supposed) faults --his defects or infirmities? Do not I hinder sinners from hearing his word? If you do any of these things, you are a bigot to this day.

4. "Search me, O Lord, and prove me. Try out my reins and my heart! Look well if there be any way of" bigotry "in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." In order to examine ourselves thoroughly, let the case be proposed in the strongest manner. What, if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils? If I did, I could not forbid even him, without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea, if it could be supposed that I should see a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk, doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still.

5. O stand clear of this! But be not content with not forbidding any that casts out devils. It is well to go thus far; but do not stop here. If you will avoid all bigotry, go on. In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge, but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with

thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge, as far as you can, his sphere of action; show him all kindness in word and deed; and cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him.

6. I need add but one caution: Think not the bigotry of another is any excuse for your own. It is not impossible, that one who casts out devils himself, may yet forbid you so to do. You may observe, this is the very case mentioned in the text. The Apostles forbade another to do what they did themselves. But beware of retorting. It is not your part to return evil for evil. Another's not observing the direction of our Lord, is no reason why you should neglect it. Nay, but let him have all the bigotry to himself. If he forbid *you*, do not you forbid *him*. Rather labour, and watch, and pray the more, to confirm your love toward him. If he speak all manner of evil of *you*, speak all manner of good (that is true) of *him*. Imitate herein that glorious saying of a great man (O that he had always breathed the same spirit!), "Let Luther call me a hundred devils; I will still reverence him as a messenger of God."

Edited anonymously at the Memorial University of Newfoundland with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, Idaho) for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

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Lesson 11: Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World

Due This Lesson

Response paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- appreciate and embrace the qualities required of a Christian minister—with specific reference to the Wesleyan tradition—in a religiously pluralistic world
- understand and embrace biblical principles for communicating the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world
- understand how to communicate the gospel in a pluralistic world

Homework Assignments

Interview two clergy persons and two lay persons you respect—preferably from different denominations. Ask them to describe the character of the Christian minister they believe effective Christian ministry will require. Write a 2-3 page paper.

Complete module assignments as described in the syllabus—Interviews and Credo—page 12 in this Student Guide.

Write in you journal. Follow the instructions as described in the syllabus. Also, reflect on the motivator.

Motivator

John Fischer tells of attending a “birthday bash” at the Starplex amphitheater in Dallas. The partygoers were there to celebrate the anniversary of a local alternative rock station. On that summer night the smoke from tobacco “and some other leaves” hung low. One Christian group—“Jars of Clay”—was the only Christian group to appear. The man next to Fischer had five earrings on his face, only two of which were on his ears. As Fischer looked out over the crowd, six young men—“Jars of Clay”—slipped on stage and began to sing, “Arms nailed down, are you telling me something?” Fischer said to himself, “We’ve waited a long time for this.”

Noticing Fischer’s backstage pass, the man with the facial jewelry asked Fischer, “Are you with Jars?” “Yes,” Fischer answered. The man continued, “If you’re going to see them afterwards, would you thank them for me? I became a Christian listening to their CD. I played it over and over and figured out just about everything. I went and got a Christian friend of mine—pulled him out of a party—and told him I wanted to get saved right away. He didn’t believe me. You wouldn’t have either. I hated Christians.”⁵⁹

The Christian Minister in a Religiously Pluralistic World

A Christian minister must first have been grasped by the glory and power of the Christian gospel.

A Christian minister must be a diligent student of the gospel.

A Christian minister must be a curious person.

<http://www.pluralism.org/resources/links/index.php>

A Christian minister must be a student of the world.

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Principles that Should Govern Communication of the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World

1. Know what the gospel is.
2. The gospel is first of all “good news” about God and about what God has done for the redemption of humankind, the creation, and commissioning the Church to herald God’s salvation.
3. The relationship between the Old and New Covenants must be made clear.
4. One must clearly understand what it means to call Jesus “the Christ”—Messiah—of God.
5. The gospel is meant for all persons everywhere.
6. The gospel of redemption is purely the gift of God’s grace.
7. The herald must recognize how the Spirit of God has already prepared the way for telling the good news.
8. Recognize the difference between “witnessing” and “convincing.”

Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

1. He or she who communicates the gospel must know that he or she is a steward. He or she speaks for God, not for himself.
2. One who understands that he or she speaks in the name of the righteous God will have nothing to do with deceit or clever devices for heralding the good news.
3. As has always been true, and is certainly true in a pluralistic world, he or she who hopes rightly to bear witness to the gospel must place himself or herself in the service of justice and mercy in the world.
4. He or she who faithfully heralds the good news in a pluralistic world will place his or her total trust in the wisdom, timing, and power of God, not manipulation, our own impulsiveness, or privileges associated with power of any kind.

Lesson 12: Student Accountability

Due This Lesson

Clergy and lay person interviews
Non-Christian interviews
Credo
Journaling

Learner Objectives

- By the end of this lesson, participants will
- identify characteristics of a Christian minister that are essential for effective ministry
 - explore and understand how adherents to some non-Christian religions view religious pluralism
 - explain how he or she will minister as an orthodox Christian and a Wesleyan in a religiously pluralistic world

Homework Assignments

Commit to communicating the gospel—Christ—to a lost world.

Have a passion for reaching out to the lost.

Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the through you, that God be glorified.

Be Christlike in all your life and ministry.

Motivator

“The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all persons, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2: 11-13, RSV).

Endnotes

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- ¹ *Letters on England, Letter 6, "On the Presbyterians" (1732)*. Wisconsin Center for Pluralism <http://www.wisresearch.org/plural.htm>
- ² Diana Eck, "A New Religious America: Managing Religious Diversity in A Democracy: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia," Keynote Address. Professor Dr. Diana L. Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies, Harvard University, USA, at MAAS. Dr. Eck is the Director of the Pluralism Project of Harvard University. International Conference on Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from August 20-21 2002. <http://www.usembassymalaysia.org.my/eck.html>
- ³ The Pluralism Project of Harvard University <http://www.pluralism.org/resources/links/>
- ⁴ Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus, Die neue Rundschau*, vol 33, 1922, 572-90.
- ⁵ Cf. Thomas Haskell, "The Curious Persistence of Rights Talk in an Age of Interpretation," in *Objectivity is not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History*. Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998.
- ⁶ F. W. Graf. "Die antihistorische Revolution in der protestantischen Theologie der zwanziger Jahre," in Jan Rohls and Gunther Wenz, eds. *Vernunft des Glaubens: wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre*. Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988, 35776.
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- ⁸ Taken from: Henry C K Liu. "The Abduction of Modernity: Part V: The Enlightenment and modernity" *Asia Times on line*. <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/EH12Dh02.html>
- ⁹ *PRIMISE/* Volume II, Number 8 / September 27, 1995 / Page 6 The article is used with permission from the September/October 1995 issue of *Modern Reformation*, a superb magazine available from CURE, 2221 East Winston Road Suite K, Anaheim, CA 92806.
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- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 103.
- ¹³ Roger Lundin. *The Culture of Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 64.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, et al., ed. *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, 13.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ McLaren, Brian. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001.
- ¹⁸ *PRIMISE*. Volume II, Number 8, September 27, 1995, Page 6.
- ¹⁹ Cited in Colin Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 69.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ²² Roger Lundin. *The Culture of Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993, 64.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 68.

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- ²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, et. Al., ed. *Theology Without Foundation: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, 13.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Gunton, op. cit., 135.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
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- ³⁰ Tyron Inbody. "Intellectual Velcro," *Theology Today*. January, 1995.
- ³¹ Frederic B. Burnham, ed., *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989, 25.
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- ³⁵ Peter Berger. *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. New York: Doubleday, 1990, 12.
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- ³⁷ Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium*, Paulist Press, 1999, 2.
- ³⁸ McLaren, 61.
- ³⁹ <http://www.usembassymalaysia.org.my/eck.html>
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- ⁴¹ Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Post Liberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Brazon Press, 2003, 71-72.
- ⁴² Harink, 80.
- ⁴³ Harink, 68-69.
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- ⁴⁵ Runyon, 33.
- ⁴⁶ "The General Deliverance," John Wesley, Sermon Number 60.
- ⁴⁷ Wesley, *Works*, 1:56.
- ⁴⁸ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 42.
- ⁴⁹ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 42.
- ⁵⁰ Wesley, *Works*, 8:4.
- ⁵¹ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, Abingdon 1998, 222.
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- ⁵³ Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 43.
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- ⁵⁵ John Wesley, "Against Bigotry," Sermon number 38, IV, 4,5.
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- ⁵⁸ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, Abingdon 1998, 215.
- ⁵⁹ John Fischer. *Fearless Faith: Living Beyond the Walls of "Safe" Christianity*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002, 221-223.