



2023

# Study Commission On Doctrine





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# Report of the Study Commission on Doctrine

The Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) has been pleased to serve the General Conference and the Free Methodist Church - USA throughout the past four years. It has been comprised of the following members: Bishop Linda Adams, Bishop Keith Cowart, Bishop Matt Whitehead, Dr. David Bauer, Dr. Daniel Castelo (until 2022), Dr. Allison Coventry, Dr. Bruce Cromwell (Secretary), Dr. Elisée Oouba, Dr. Edward Song, Dr. Denny Wayman, and Bishop Emeritus David Kendall (Chair).

In the 2019 *Book of Discipline* (§ 4080.A), the SCOD is charged as follows: “A Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) shall serve the church by studying theological and social issues facing the church, and make recommendations to the Board of Bishops, Board of Administration, and General Conference.”

The SCOD exchanges e-mails throughout the year and holds face-to-face meetings annually. Since GC 2019, and adjusting to the realities of meeting restrictions during the Covid-19 Pandemic, it has met on the following dates: April 21, 2020 (Zoom meeting); January 14, 2021 (Zoom meeting); April 28, 2021 (Zoom meeting); March 28-30, 2022; and September 14, 2022 (Zoom meeting). As has been the practice for several quadrennia, we chose not to meet in 2023 due to General Conference. However, SCOD members were invited to attend the April 20-22, 2023, meeting of the FMCUSA BOA to help process various resolutions.

During these past four years the SCOD had several papers and issues referred to it from the General Conference. In addition, several issues arose that were deemed important to consider and address. The following list of theological and social issues considered by the SCOD is organized by the year in which they were introduced, with several of these issues demanding multiple years of prayer, thought, discussion, and study. Actions taken by the SCOD are bulleted following each topic. Many of the papers written for the SCOD are available on the SCOD page of the FMCUSA website ([www.scod.fmcusa.org](http://www.scod.fmcusa.org)). Further general counsel to the FMCUSA from SCOD members and others regarding these and other topics can also be found at the FM Communications page ([www.freemethodistconversations.com](http://www.freemethodistconversations.com)).

## 2020

### Review of matters referred to SCOD from GC 2019, including:

#### #305 – Sanctity of Life / Capital Punishment

- The SCOD drafted a revised resolution to be considered and worked on in advance of GC23.

#### #306 – Male and Female Roles within Marriage

- This was adopted as amended, with the hope that further counsel and teaching could be given to guide the church into a more widespread egalitarian view of women and their roles in the church and the world.

#### #408 – Advisory Committee for SCOD

- This was accepted as affirmation of a practice that SCOD has employed for years, utilizing experts and requesting input from persons beyond the SCOD who can help speak into issues facing the Church.

### Discussion on a general statement on sexism

- Given that there are statements adopted on racism and the dignity and worth of all persons, this was discussed with the hope that guidance can be placed on the FM Conversations page.

### Church membership

- Discussion was held on how to clarify the role and function of membership within the local church, as well as designing materials for membership preparation, addressing the issue of consistency of teaching on membership, emphasizing the need for training in ministry, and recognizing the differences between local, conference, and general conference needs.

### Free Methodist catechism

- Work continued on the existing catechism, as well as a new narrative catechism.

## Guidance on Social Media use

- Discussion was held on how the Church ought to handle the rise of “fake news” and address those who share polarizing, false, and harmful articles.

## Teaching on the Sacraments

- A paper from Bruce Cromwell was reviewed, and discussion was held on the sacraments, what they are, and how can they be celebrated, especially given the issues revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic. [click to view article](#)

## 2021 - January

Reviewed the Bishops’ Letter to the Church following the events of January 6, 2021, in Washington, D.C., and provided feedback to the Board of Bishops.

## Marriage and Equality

- Reviewed a teaching document on full equality in marriage and made recommendations for it to be shared to the Church at large.

## Eucharist

- We reviewed David Bauer’s paper on the biblical counsel on Holy Communion. [click to view article](#)
- We further discussed the historical controversies surrounding Holy Communion, as counsel from as early as 110 A.D. says that this sacrament should not be celebrated apart from the presence of a bishop or clergy assigned by the bishop to lead. Does this still apply? Why should it or shouldn’t it?

## Capital Punishment

- A paper from Bruce Cromwell was reviewed which continued work on a resolution for GC 2023, stressing the racial and socio-economic inequalities that exist in the administration of the death penalty. [click to view article](#)

## Racial Unity

- Three recommendations prepared by the Diversity Committee of the BOA were reviewed, with one being the request for the development of a comprehensive theology of diversity, including both racial and gender issues. The SCOD expressed willingness to assist the Diversity Committee, if needed.

## Use of Social Media

- A paper prepared by Bishop Matt Thomas in 2018 was reviewed, with recommendation that it be updated and revised to be given to the Church at large. [click to view article](#)

## Loving From Where We Stand

- Work on the book on ministry with the LGBTQ+ Community was discussed, with hope that a completed text would be at the printers in late Spring or early Summer.

## FM Conversations page

- This website ([www.freemethodistconversations.com](http://www.freemethodistconversations.com)) continues to be monitored and updated with papers that address various issues facing the Church today.

## Reproductive Technology

- Medical and ethical experts were consulted to help us respond to a request from Deaconess Hospital to provide theological perspective on reproductive technology.

## Church / State Relations

- A previous SCOD paper from Bruce Cromwell on this topic were reviewed, as well as ongoing work on a new document about the role of government and the response of the Church  
[click to view article](#)

## 2021 - April

### Marriage and Equality

- Revisions to a working document were considered and revised.

### Eucharist

- Further discussion ensued about revisions on the teaching document on The Lord's Supper. Much of the conversation had to do with what the SCOD was being asked to do. What had originally been a request to give guidance on the appropriateness of "virtual communion" during Covid-19 had grown into guidance on who can celebrate the sacrament, especially given the rise of house churches. More research is recommended so that guidance can be given to the Church at large.

### Capital Punishment

- An update on a proposed resolution for GC 2023 was considered, with further revisions suggested.

### Loving From Where We Stand

- Chapters of the book were reviewed and discussed, with encouragement to complete the work quickly so as to give guidance to the Church as soon as possible.

## Church / State Relations

- Questions about the degree to which the State should affect the Church were discussed, as well as concerns over the rise of religious nationalism. Ongoing research continues.

## FM Conversations Page

- We discussed how to best promote this website and the counsel it provides. Is it the best avenue to inform the Church? How do we explain what is doctrine and what is general counsel?

## 2022 - March

### Conversations about the Role of SCOD

- A general review of the purpose of the SCOD was discussed, including questions such as:
  - How may SCOD better fulfill its mandate to the General Conference and the FMC?
  - What observations, questions, or recommendations concerning the future shape and function of the SCOD can better fulfill Book of Discipline mandates and serve the Church optimally?

### Loving Mutuality as God's Plan for Marriage

- A new paper from Bishop Kendall was completed and posted to the FM Conversations page.  
[click to view online](#)

### Lord's Supper Teaching Document

- We continued our discussion on Holy Communion, including discussing the development of a teaching document which would help describe (rather than proscribe) a Free Methodist understanding of what the sacraments are, reasons to commune regularly, and what biblical and historical reasons have led to our current practice.

## Capital Punishment

- The revised resolution on Capital Punishment for GC 2023 was reviewed and accepted, to be forwarded for consideration.

## Care for the Earth

- A paper on creation care from Howard Snyder was reviewed, with hope that it would be amended and edited for consideration as a GC 2023 resolution. [click to view article](#)

## Church / State Relations

- A paper on Christian Nationalism from Ed Song was reviewed [click to view article](#)

## Use of Social Media

- There was additional discussion of pastoral guidance for the use of social media, including the recommendation of the book *Restless Devices* by Felicia Song.

## Loving From Where We Stand

- The completed book from Bruce Cromwell was discussed, as well as the hope that further work on transgender matters would be researched and provided as pastoral guidance for the Church. [click to view online](#)

## 2022 – September

Four resolutions were considered and recommended to be forwarded to GC 2023. Note that each of the links below shows what the SCOD proposed to the GC23 Resolutions Committee and the FMCUSA BOA. The resolution on Gambling and Determinism was approved by the BOA, but the other three were forwarded to GC23 for consideration. Revisions made by the BOA can be found at [www.gc23.org/resolutions](http://www.gc23.org/resolutions).

## Capital Punishment

- Small editorial changes were made to the GC 2023 Resolution, and it was recommended to be forwarded for adoption. [click to view online](#)

## Criminal Justice Reform

- A resolution for GC 2023 was considered, and recommended to be forwarded for adoption. [click to view online](#)

## Gambling and Determinism

- A resolution for GC 2023 was considered, and recommended to be forwarded for adoption. [click to view online](#)

## Care of the Earth

- A resolution for GC 2023 was considered, and recommended to be forwarded for adoption. [click to view online](#)

Respectfully submitted,



Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.  
SCOD Secretary



# On Virtual Communion

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.

# On Virtual Communion SCOD Paper... Fall 2020

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.

Throughout this season of Covid-19 pastors and laypersons alike have been wondering about many things. When is it safe to gather? If we gather, do we have to wear masks? Can we have corporate singing? One of the most common questions I've been asked as a Superintendent, with much more frequency and urgency when congregations were not meeting face-to-face, was whether or not it was appropriate to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper via Zoom or Facebook Live or other virtual media.

Some pastors have given parishioners guidelines on how to celebrate the Lord's Supper on their own in the privacy of their homes. Others have attempted to lead a service where the individual persons provide their own bread and cup in their homes but follow a liturgy on-line as the pastor leads. The question that SCOD was asked to consider, I believe, is whether one or both or either of these practices are, within the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition, acceptable means of celebrating this sacrament? Put another way, does virtual communion or at-home communion in the absence of an ordained clergywoman or man conform to our sacramental theology? Does it fit within our ecclesiology and our theology of ordination?

There is a level, of course, where this conversation seems a bit silly. I don't believe God faults persons for trying to draw closer to the Lord with whatever means are necessary and available to facilitate that growth. There are not sacrament-police angels ready to pull us over when we "do it wrong". And yet over and over and over again throughout the Scriptures we find examples of persons who are given specific roles within the covenant community. Within the Old Testament we find instances when the entire Israelite community, and at other times the whole tribe of Levi, raise the objection that all persons should share equally in the privilege and responsibility of ministering before the Lord. In both instances God makes it clear that there are certain persons set aside for specific ministries.

This is further revealed in the New Testament, where there are gift-based divisions and role-based divisions within the community of New Covenant people. Saint Paul repeatedly shows how the Holy

Spirit has gifted specific individuals for specific ministries within the Church. It is not clericalism, or the hyper-valuing of the ordained, but rather a clarification of the calling on all persons to a specific place and ministry within the Body of Christ. Each one is needed. Each one has a role to play. But there are specific roles, based on giftedness and calling (not based on gender, I might point out!).

The Free Methodist Church, and the Methodism of John Wesley before that, retained this understanding that though all persons are called to engage in God-given ministry according to their gifts, not all persons are called to participate in all aspects of ministry. There have always been certain things that have been set apart for the ordained clergy alone. Among these is the celebration of the sacraments.

## Sacramental Theology

There are many Christian approaches to the Lord's Table, and many different sacramental theologies within the Body of Christ. It is important to begin by stating where we as Methodists land. I would suggest that there are two main categories of understanding: (1) real absence and (2) real presence.

Wesleyan theology does not historically adhere to a real absence doctrine, sometimes called memorialism, which is prominent in many branches of Protestantism and comes mainly from Zwinglian churches which originated in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Though our sacramental theology as stated in the *Book of Discipline* is intentionally broad and with a particular reading might allow for such a memorial-only viewpoint, such an approach does not conform to our traditional theological understanding.

So what, then, of the real presence? Early on, Methodism only condemned transubstantiation as an invalid understanding of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Consubstantiation, then, as well as the spiritual presence (sometimes called virtualism) were acceptable. John Wesley himself seemed to follow the lead of Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, who professed that Christ is spiritually present in the sacrament and the elements. Though Wesley was close to Calvin than to Luther in his understanding of the Eucharist, a purely Calvinistic understanding of the sacrament does not deal with the elements themselves but rather with the presence of Christ among the congregation. In graduate school in my class on Thomistic Theology we were expected

to participate in a *disputatio*, with the issue in question being whether the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the same as the presence of Christ in the assembly. This is a point where Wesleyan/Arminians may differ from both our Reformed and our Catholic sisters and brothers.

The *Book of Discipline* states in paragraph 125, Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

What, then, does the Free Methodist Church mean when it declares a spiritual presence? First, we must embrace our theological heritage in the ongoing belief that Christ's spiritual presence is truly conveyed through the sacrament. No, it is not in or a product of the elements themselves. Rather, when the elements are received within the corporate gathering in the proper liturgical framework while focused on the presence and power of the grace of Christ, the sacrament is truly celebrated. This understanding and affirmation dates back to the Seven Ecumenical Councils, or what Wesley called the "primitive Church." Something happens to us when we gather at the table of the Lord, receive the elements in faith, and open ourselves to God's ongoing work and will in our lives.

The way in which the sacraments are used is historically as important as the elements themselves. Throughout Church history there has always been an understanding of unity within the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, this aspect of the sacrament has been under-emphasized in many of our congregations. Historically there was an intentional focus on either one loaf of bread or a common cup, or both, giving the sense that the entire gathered body of believers was united together in fellowship of God and fellowship with one another. In time the unity within the Eucharist came to be seen in many churches only by presence in the same room using the same liturgy, as pre-cut pieces of bread and individual cups became more normative.

So, how can the congregation gather as one when Covid-19 restrictions prohibit gathering at all? Even without the Coronavirus pandemic there

have always been persons who could not physically gather with the worshipping community for the Lord's Supper. Typically, a person would deliver the communion elements to these persons. But the emphasis on belonging still was present, as these persons were receiving a portion that came from the main celebration. Using elements from the main congregational act was a way to further connect the shut-in or outlier to the main body. Through the delivery of these elements, unity was still proclaimed and experienced.

One could easily ask, then, how individual persons celebrating Communion in the privacy of their homes would be different from a shut-in receiving the elements on their own? It's a matter of unity, be it spatial or temporal. Yes, a synchronous event through the internet could bring an aspect of unity to the celebration, but the congregation would nonetheless still be individualized and separated. An asynchronous observance, when a pastor may record a liturgy and invite persons to watch it and receive the elements on their own when they have the time, further removes one from this aspect of unity.

## Theology of Ordination and Ecclesiology

I'm the oldest of three children, and have always had a protective, inclusive bent to my interaction with others. On the StrengthsFinder profile I have both Relator and Incluser among my top five strengths. I don't like to think of something being restricted from someone. There is a part of me that wonders why, if we are part of the priesthood of all believers, the celebration of the sacrament should be restricted to the ordained? Some denominations and non-denominational congregations have answered this question in a way that allows any baptized Christian to officiate the Lord's Supper.

Free Methodists, within the Wesleyan/Arminian, Methodist tradition, have not taken that position. It is neither true to our theological heritage nor our understanding. Moving to a lay celebration of the sacrament moves in a direction that is antithetical to John Wesley's theology and our Methodist ecclesiology of the last 300 years.

This is not to say that Methodism has been exempt from such discussion or debate. The first schism in American Methodism was in 1779 over the issue of lay administration of the sacraments. Those who decided to form a presbytery and ordain

themselves so they could administer the sacraments eventually recanted that position and rejoined the Methodist fold, but their actions caused Wesley to intervene. He ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, who joined Thomas Coke, already an Anglican priest, on a trip to the American colonies in September of 1784. They brought with them unbound copies of *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, a new Methodist liturgy written by John Wesley and based upon the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, with specific instructions on the Lord's Supper. In December of that same year the three met with preachers of the American movement for a constitutional convention at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore. With Francis Asbury declared co-superintendent along with Coke, this "Christmas Conference" officially declared the work in America the "Methodist Episcopal Church." Part and parcel of its creation was recognizing an ecclesiastical authority that could ordain clergy to administer the sacraments for Methodists in the United States. Though numerous Methodist off-shoots have come from the original Methodist Episcopalians, including the Free Methodist Church, all continue to retain the proper administration of the sacraments as one of the main responsibilities of the clergy.

My friend and fellow Free Methodist elder the Rev. Dr. Steven Bruns detailed within his book *Full Tables, Closed Doors, Open Fields* how early Methodists witnessed God work through the sacrament of Holy Communion. He effectively highlights how different locations, circumstances, and availability of the clergy made for differing ways of experiencing God's grace. Wesley saw the Lord's Supper as the means of grace *par excellence*. As Methodists crossed the Atlantic and expanded throughout the American colonies, they began to see God work in much the same way Wesley had, though they observed it primarily through closed meetings, not the Eucharist. In time the experience of God's grace moved to camp meetings and other venues. In each instance, and never to the intentional exclusion of another, God worked how God could with what God had.

Regarding these means by which God moved, Coke and Asbury printed a *Discipline* with explanatory notes in it for the early American Methodists. One of the General Rules they wrote in 1798 was on attending the means of grace. The third rule says  
We have also spoken largely on all the ordinances of the gospel, and the necessity of being constant partakers

of them; and have proved this by a great variety of scriptures. Although the ordinances are but means of grace, their end, which is the salvation of our souls, cannot be attained without them. Such is the order of God, except when unavoidable hindrances prevent our attending them; in which case, God himself will be to the sincere soul instead of all the ordinances, yea, will turn the very hindrances themselves into the most profitable of all means (*1798 Discipline*, p. 145).

American Methodists experienced God turning "the very hindrances themselves into the most profitable of all means" as they saw a greater harvest of new believers and members than their English counterparts over the same time across the ocean.

Again, God will use what God can use. We do not have to force God into a box. And when there are unavoidable circumstances such as Covid-19 that keep us from celebrating as we ought to do or perhaps have historically done, God accommodates us. God uses other means to communicate grace to us.

Consider the push within both the Free Methodist and United Methodist Churches these past 30 to 40 years for more access to the sacraments. A renewed understanding of Wesley's theology vis-à-vis the Eucharist and its place as the supreme means of grace led to us go against our ordination tradition and give sacramental authority to non-ordained persons who were appointed to serve a congregation as pastor. I am not arguing that it is wrong to give Conference Ministerial Candidates appointed to lead a church this authority. I am simply pointing out that by allowing this historical anomaly within our churches we are neglecting a part of our history and theology.

## Concluding Thoughts

It was George Santayana who famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." As an historical theologian I say, "Amen!" It is good to look back as we continue to move forward, learning from our mistakes and cherishing our faithfulness. I would argue that it is dangerous to move boldly into the future without understanding what has led to the present moment.

One historic option of the Church that is rarely discussed these days is the Love Feast. This was a wonderful way for Methodists to celebrate God's grace and power when they could not do so through the Lord's Supper. Perhaps it is time to bring that aspect of

our history, theology, fellowship, and ecclesiology back to the fore.

Whatever may come, I pray we continue to follow the Lord, trusting that God will do what God can do through all we offer His world. As Wesley famously counseled, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” May this include how we celebrate, administer, and participate in the sacraments as well. And may we trust that our desire to serve the world and please God, though at times in perhaps historically novel ways, does in fact please God.



# **Loving Mutuality** **as God's Plan for** **Christian Marriage**

Bishop Emeritus David W. Kendall

## Loving Mutuality As God's Plan For Christian Marriage

The Study Commission on Doctrine Free Methodist Church-USA 2021

Free Methodists celebrate God's original creation of humans in the divine image. Bearing the Divine Image, among the many particulars we might note, characterizes humanity as male and female, and does so especially when together they fulfill their vocation as co-stewards and governors of the creation (see Gen. 1: 26-31, and the note that "it is not good for the human to be alone," in 2:18). Both accounts of Creation stress the mutual, collaborative nature of the original human vocation.

Subsequently, the humans disobey the Lord and bring upon themselves and their world multiple forms of disorder and distortion (Gen. 3). Rather than blessing, the world experiences curse; and instead of ruling together over the world, the man and woman suffer brokenness in their relationship. Now, she will desire the man, but the man will rule over her (Gen. 3:16). This hierarchical pattern characterizes human history from that point on and manifests the consequences of human sin. The impact of this altered or broken relationship for women has been bleak. Men take multiple wives. Women are objectified and valued for their ability to produce children and to provide sexual pleasure. As objects, girls are less desirable than boys, except as dowry for the household. As objects, girls are promised and given in marriage to expand the family's social capital. And, as objects, girls and women are raped as a means of humiliating the enemy and taken as part of the spoils claimed by victors.

Both the disordering of humanity into such hierarchies and its brutal consequences reflect the more general distortion and brokenness of the human beings God intended from the beginning. And both are remedied in the salvation God provides through Jesus. In Christ, men and women participate together in the new creation that his death and resurrection have begun (2 Cor. 5:17). When they are married in Christ, the man and the woman are one and are to live as co-heirs of the grace of life (Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7).

While most Christians agree that men and women participate in the new creation, and are made one in the Body of Christ, many still note that Paul seems to teach a form of hierarchy in Ephesians and Colossians. In those passages, for example, he calls husbands "the head" (Eph. 5:23) and commands

wives to "submit" (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18). Which, they maintain, reflects a model of marriage that functions in hierarchical ways. Thus, some conclude that although women and men are equal in value and standing before God, they have specific and subordinate roles in their function within the home and church.

We disagree with this view on the following bases:

- The clear intentions of God in creation for mutual and shared responsibility for humans, for both male and female;
- The surprising and notable appearance and roles played by women throughout the Old Testament story;
- The full salvation Jesus has provided for the world and all people in it;
- The value and prominence of women in the ministry of Jesus, including the counter-cultural place he gave them alongside his male disciples, culminating in women first proclaiming the reality of the resurrection;
- The roles women played in the life of the early church, which mirror those of men; and
- The way the gospel brought change to the first century world, which is through the subversion of those practices and assumptions that contradicted the reorientation required by the Kingdom of God.

When Paul instructs on Christian marriage this latter point—that of subversion—is front and center. He assumes the model used throughout the ancient world for organizing social groups—the home, society more generally, and political structures. We want to summarize that model and how the NT writers (Paul and Peter) use it, and then note specifically what Paul says about the husband's responsibility as "head" in Ephesians, which reflects the same language and teaching found in Colossians and, more generally, in 1 Peter. All of this will demonstrate the loving mutuality God intends within marriage.

### The Model Assumed

"Everything and everyone in the proper place." That could serve as a motto for ancient societies as they outlined key social relationships. Scholars call these outlines "house-codes" because the ancient world viewed the home as the primary social institution. Basic household relationships became the pattern for society's most important roles. Within that pattern

households organized members into a hierarchy. The hierarchy consisted of superiors and subordinates, clarified the basic responsibilities of each, and functioned to support the order of the household (the religious cult, the political structures, and the society more generally). Superiors were husbands, parents (first fathers then mothers), and slave-owners or masters. Subordinates were wives, children, and slaves. The house-codes addressed primarily the subordinates, affirming their status and instructing them to submit to their superiors. At times superiors were also charged to treat subordinates well in order to avoid disorder in the household and dishonor in the community.

Undoubtedly, early Christians made use of these codes (see Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-3:7). Yet how and why remain matters of dispute. Some believe that church leaders adopted the codes to make or maintain peace with the prevailing social expectations of their day. This view is possible but does not tell the whole story.

The house-codes were the inevitable starting point, since it was the default for first century social, cultural and political organization. But as followers of Jesus brought their faith and mission into the structures of their day, they shaped them to serve the interests and mission of Jesus their Lord and King. Let us see how.

## The House-code Among Followers of Christ

### Motivation

In pagan cultures, subordinates submitted to avoid the wrath of superiors and to enjoy the best life possible. Superiors insisted on submission to maintain their power, sustain the status quo, and to garner social respect. In the biblical use of the house-codes, however, there is scarcely a trace of such motivation.

In Ephesians, Paul commands submission or obedience of wives, children, and slaves to express Christian discipleship. Statements such as, “as to the Lord” (5:22), “in the Lord” (6:1), and “as to Christ” (6:5) make this clear. Not society or even the superior (husbands, fathers, masters), but the church and Christ are the primary focus. Likewise, in the Colossian letter, Paul says, “as is fitting in the Lord” (3:18), “for this pleases the Lord” (3:20), “fearing the Lord” (3:22), and “as serving the Lord” (3:23). 1 Peter motivates the house-code by citing God’s will (2:15), the servant-status of all Christians (2:16), and being aware of God

or “conscience,” (2:19). Peter’s specific counsel to slaves leads them to imitate the conduct of Christ, which is the very conduct he later commends to all of God’s people (2:18-25; 3:8-22).

When Christian discipleship motivates submission, the house-codes are relativized. That is, the most important thing is not the social institution and its maintenance, but faithfulness to God within the varied relationships. That fact explains why the Christian use of these codes hardly mentions making superiors happy or preserving the peace of home and society. Instead, within Christian households the codes provide a context in which household relationships serve the mission of the church. Husbands and wives must so relate that they reflect the reality, unity, and presence of Christ and his church to an unbelieving world (Eph. 5:21-33). Spouses delight in and advance the witness of the gospel (1 Pet. 3:1,7).

The difference in motivation reveals the primary concern of the early church: to honor, serve, and please the Lord. So far as this could be done within the structures of the day, the codes are commended. Yet, they are not commended simply as they were, but with important modifications.

### Modifications

First, within the New Testament documents the codes appear in contexts that alter their application and meaning. For example, in Ephesians, the traditional code, with its focus on submission, concludes Paul’s discussion of the way of life appropriate for the Spirit-filled communities of God’s people (Eph. 4:17-6:9). Before he tells wives to submit, he tells all believers to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), which expresses the mutuality at work within The Body of Christ where all are members of one another, under Christ as Head (Eph. 4:1-16). This setting has two important consequences for understanding the code. The submission of wives becomes a variation or expression of the submission characteristic of all believers. And, husbands, with all “superiors,” must adapt their behavior in the home to correspond with the mutual submission of all believers toward one another.

Second, New Testament writers have as much, if not more, to say to superiors. That fact distinguishes the New Testament use of the codes. It points the superiors have greater responsibility than their counterparts. For example, masters must deal with slaves, remembering that they also are slaves of the ultimate Master, the Lord Jesus (Col. 4:1). This

reminder encourages masters to consider carefully what it means to be a servant of Christ and how that affects their treatment of household servants. Additionally, masters would likely recall the teachings of Jesus that the measure they deal to others will be dealt to them. Thus, by asserting the servanthood of masters, the New Testament profoundly alters their relationships with their servants.

Third, New Testament writers neutralize the power-agenda of the house-codes. The writers never focus on control issues. Instead, love, care, and self-giving command attention. Subordinates often receive extraordinary dignity. Always, the ultimate aim is to please the Lord, rather than the lord (the slave-master). In some passages, writers clearly diminish the power of the superiors. For example, in 1 Pet. 2:17, Peter commands them to honor all people but love the family of God, to fear God and honor the emperor. They owe fear to God as the supreme authority, but honor to the emperor, as they owe to all people. Thus, the most powerful man in the world at that time was downsized in the shadow of Almighty God.

Fourth, New Testament writers connect the codes to the person and work of Christ. Acceptable behavior must correspond to Christ's character and accomplishments. That connection, however, suggests that human organizational models no longer determine behavior. Instead, Jesus Christ does. So far as relationships in Christ could correspond to the social patterns of the day, they would. Yet, ultimately, those patterns proved inadequate.

## Subversion

On the surface it may appear that Christians used the house-codes as others did. Underneath, however, Christian motivation and adjustments subverted the codes. Different motivation meant that anytime obedience to Christ conflicted with the code, Christians would not conform. Thus, in using the codes the early church often undermined the very order the secular codes sought to maintain. For example, Ephesians 5 is often cited to support a hierarchy within marriage. Ironically, this is exactly what the secular world of the first century did with the code. Yet, as husbands follow Paul's instruction seriously, the marriage morphs in ways never envisioned or sanctioned by the code. Self-sacrificing love for the wellbeing of the wife, as we see such love in the life and ministry of Jesus, bears no resemblance to the vision

found in the Graeco-Roman codes so popular in Paul's context of a husband's functional superiority.

Paul's use of "headship" terminology in connection with Jesus also undermines and subverts the code as a guarantee of the hierarchical status quo. Faithful Christians had only to remember what it meant for Jesus to be "head." The first is last, the Lord of all was/is servant of all, and the Master of the Household washes feet—all these suggest a husband's "headship" must reflect that of Jesus, with no trace of self-serving power and privilege. In fact, "headship" itself is turned on its head so that "headship" looks like submission!

In their use of the house-codes, early Christians were only following the lead of their Lord. They affirmed the form of the code as the place to start. But the form became host to the new reality of a kingdom-life that, in the end, co-opted that form for kingdom purposes. Thus, they would agree with the ancient rationale, "everyone in the proper place," but understood that God, as revealed in Christ, must be in the first place. Only when God is first will everyone find his or her proper place. In the final analysis, theologian Carl Braaten was right to observe, "the gospel is a stick of dynamite in the social structure." (In *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamics of Hope*, reprinted by Wipf and Stock, 2016, p. 143)

Therefore, when Paul says the husband is head of his wife, we must allow the rest of that passage to tell us how husbands are meant to function. Here is a summary.

A husband as "head" within the marriage relates to his wife as Jesus did toward the church as head and savior of the church (5:23). To note that Christ is savior already suggests that headship entails relating to his wife entirely for her benefit, not for his (Christ did not benefit by being our savior; we did!).

A husband as "head" will love his wife to the point of sacrificing his very life for her, as Christ sacrificed himself on the cross for us (5:25). That is, he loves his wife until it hurts and then beyond, perhaps to death.

A husband as "head" makes his primary goal the advancement, betterment, and fulfillment of his wife—as Christ died and rose again and continues to work for us to present us holy and glorious before the Father (5:26-27).

A husband as "head," taking his cue from Christ, makes himself totally expendable for her sake—regardless of her worthiness, responsiveness, or constancy. The Head pours self out for her

unconditionally, even if her response is not all he would like it to be.

A husband as “head” loves her as he loves his own body, meeting her needs as he automatically, reflexively, and consistently meets his own needs (5:28-29). He leverages his powers and opportunities to seek and bring about all that is good and pleasing to her.

A husband as “head” nourishes, enriches, comforts, strengthens, and encourages her, at his own expense (5:29).

A husband as “head” assumes responsibility to accept and maintain the creation- intent of God for the man and the woman, that the two would join together to become one flesh (5:31, compare Gen. 2:24). Notably, precisely as “head” the husband seeks to make the unity and mutuality of being “one-flesh” the model of his marriage.

A husband as “head” claims no “right” to have it his way, does not insist on having his needs met, and refuses to make demands, issue threats, or knowingly harm his wife in any way.

A husband as “head” has no authority other than the authority of love that bears its fruit within the home, family, church and world.

## Conclusion

Headship, as envisioned by Paul in this passage, contrasts strikingly with the heads of state, the chiefs of the world, and the bosses and CEOs of worldly institutions. Paul uses the standard model according to social convention in his day—naming the husband as head—but then fills that term with meaning and responsibility that deconstructs the model and re-creates marriage as a union centered in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus. Since Jesus is our Master and Lord, he has the authority to show us how life should be organized, not least our marriages and homes. This is what he does in these passages, commending loving mutuality as God’s intention.

It is within and in response to her husband’s self-sacrificing love that the wife submits. In so doing she reflects the church as Bride joyfully submitting to her loving Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus. Thus, what on the surface appears to be an embrace of the culture’s hierarchical status quo by grace becomes a microcosm of the unity and mutuality God in Christ envisions for all.

It is sadly ironic that many followers of Jesus take the term—head—in this passage and understand it the way the world today understands it, contrary to the specific and clear ways Paul qualifies it, and against the clear example of Jesus whose headship Paul extols. In truth, Paul accepts the model along with its terminology and then instructs mostly husbands (with relatively brief attention to wives) on how to relate within their marriages. When he has finished, it is as though we humans, now participants in the new creation, find ourselves standing once again in a Garden where God’s own self-sacrificing love offers us an opportunity for two to become truly one-flesh.



# Some Observations on The Lord's Supper in The New Testament

David R. Bauer, Ph.D.

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This paper is intended not to be anything approaching an exhaustive study of the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist,<sup>1</sup> in the New Testament, but rather a brief consideration of some of the major aspects of the Lord's Supper that may have a bearing upon the way present-day Christians, and especially Free Methodists, think about this sacrament. Accordingly, I will set aside for the most part the historical-critical matters that have occupied much New Testament scholarship pertaining to the Lord's Supper, such as the attempt to reconstruct the original setting and speech of the Supper of Jesus with his disciples, the discussion regarding which New Testament passage most accurately depicts the original Last Supper, the way in which the tradition of the Last Supper has developed within the New Testament (and the first-century Church), and the question as to whether the dating of the Last Supper is more reliably attested in the synoptics (15 Nissan) or in John (14 Nissan). The solutions to many of these problems remain elusive, and in any event often have only a tangential significance for a New Testament theology of the Supper. I will focus instead upon the presentation of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament as the Church's canonical Scripture and make reference to these historical-critical matters only insofar as they have a bearing upon this canonical construal.

Critical scholarship has, however, drawn attention to a key observation regarding the relationship among the various accounts of the Supper in the New Testament, viz., that the five descriptive accounts of the Supper represent three lines of tradition, or we might say three distinctive forms of presentation. The form that we find in 1 Cor 11:23-26 and Luke 22:14-23 is distinguished in some measure from that which we encounter in Mark 14:17-26 and Matt 26:20-26.<sup>2</sup> And the account in John 13 has a number of peculiar characteristics.

It is important, however, that we not view these distinctive presentations as contradicting each other or in competition with each other. In fact, the accounts in Paul and the synoptics substantially agree, differing only in certain details. And even though some scholars have so emphasized the differences found in the Johannine account as to question whether John is intending to present the same event, in fact a number of the key features in the other accounts appear in John as well (e.g., the betrayal of Judas and immediate connection to events in the Garden). As we shall see, the Johannine form represents John's own theological emphases and literary-theological method, and in fact develops certain themes that we find in the other accounts. So a canonical reading has literary and historical justification to see these various accounts as re-enforcing each other and as complementing each other in the sense that the distinctive features of each contribute to a robust, full-orbed understanding of the New Testament theology of the Lord's Supper.

In addition, we find likely references to the Lord's Supper in a few other New Testament passages, notably Luke 24:13-35; John 6:25-71; Acts 2:41-47; 20:7-16; 1 Cor 10:1-33; Jude 12; and Rev 3:20.<sup>3</sup> I will deal with Luke 24 and Acts 2; 20 in connection with Luke 22:14-23, with John 6 in connection with John 13, and 1 Cor 10 in connection with 1 Cor 11. The others I will mention as appropriate. We might note at this point just how little specific attention is given to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. But it is a principle of New Testament theology that one does not determine the significance of a theme simply by the amount of space it receives. The New Testament contains occasional documents that tend to focus upon problems or potential problems among the readership. Thus, the relative sparsity of references to the Lord's Supper indicates that significant confusion or numerous serious problems around the Lord's Supper did not exist in the first-century Church. In fact, if it were not for the problems surrounding the Lord's Supper in Corinth we would know virtually nothing from the New Testament about the actual celebration of the Lord's Supper within the Church.

1 I will use "Lord's Supper" as well as "Eucharist" in this paper, even though the designation "Eucharist" for the Lord's Supper first appears in *Didache* 9:1 (approximately AD 100). In fact, the verb *εὐχαριστέω* (*eucharisteo*), which means "to give thanks," appears in every narration of the Last Supper in the New Testament, save John 13; and consequently the giving of thanks, and thankfulness, is a significant aspect of the meaning of the Lord's Supper; as I shall mention below.

2 Actually, Luke 22:14-23 seems to draw upon both the tradition employed by Paul in 1 Cor 11:23-26 and that found in Mark 14:17-26. We will leave aside the knotty question as to whether Luke is dependent upon Paul or whether they are both independently employing a common account that lies behind both iterations.

3 Although Acts 27:35-36 contains echoes of the Last Supper, it is clearly not actually the Christian eucharist. These echoes are part of Luke's desire to draw an analogy throughout Acts 19:21-28:31 between Paul on his way to Jerusalem and ultimately to Rome and Jesus on his way to giving his life in Jerusalem.

## 1 Corinthians

A canonical approach to the Lord's Supper may imply that we should treat these various New Testament accounts in their canonical order, beginning with Matthew and concluding with John, even though we know that historically the earliest attestation is 1 Cor 11:23-26, since 1 Corinthians was written before any of our Gospels and, indeed, in this passage Paul insists that he himself received this account as tradition "from the Lord"<sup>4</sup> and passed it along to the Corinthians during his initial ministry with them (around AD 51, hence within two decades of the event of the Last Supper). But I begin with 1 Cor 11:23-26 not because of its historical precedence, but because it is the only passage in the New Testament that actually describes the *Lord's Supper*; in fact, that term appears only at 1 Cor 11:20. Speaking precisely, the other accounts do not describe the Lord's Supper but the Last Supper, i.e., they do not discuss the Church's celebration of the Eucharist but rather they offer historical accounts of an event in Jesus' life. Canonically, we recognize the continuing sacramental significance of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples because of Paul's account in 1 Cor 11, which of course alludes to the Last Supper as the basis and essential framework for the Lord's Supper.<sup>5</sup>

But we come to Paul's presentation of the institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11 through his mention of the Supper in connection with the issue of eating food offered to idols in 1 Cor 10. Consequently, these comments in the tenth chapter inform our understanding of the Lord's Supper as Paul develops it more fully in chapter 11. In 1 Cor 10:16-17 Paul mentions the cup before the bread, which has led certain scholars to suggest that the practice of the early Church was sometimes to partake of the cup before the loaf (an order that is suggested also in the *Didache*). But clearly the reason for this altered order here pertains to Paul's desire to link the mention of the bread at the end of v. 16 to his comments regarding the significance of the "one loaf" in v. 17, which contributes to the point that Paul is trying to make in this passage. Paul is

arguing that the Lord's Supper plays an essential role in the existential formation and the identity-creation of the entire Church and consequently involves a kind of exclusive participation in Christ that rules out any Christian involvement with meals offered in celebration of sacrifices to idols within pagan temples, which certain members of the Corinthian church, who considered themselves "strong," were indulging because of the knowledge (8:1, 7, 11) that "an idol is nothing" (10:19) and insisting that thus there can be no problem with partaking of these meals in pagan temples. Paul counters that partaking of the Lord's Supper defines essentially who Christians are and indeed plays a role in creating who Christians are, viz., the one body of Christ, attached to Christ and through attachment to Christ attached to others belonging to the same body; and therefore the Lord's Supper allows no place for any other meal that would define its participants in contrary ways. In the process, Paul goes on to insist that what individual Christians do in flirting with idol worship necessarily affects others who belong to the same body (10:23-33), which is a way of describing the profound oneness with others in the community that is reflected, reified, and cultivated in the Lord's Supper.

Although granting that food offered to an idol is nothing and that an idol is nothing (10:19; 8:4), Paul insists that demonic powers are dynamically at work in meals set within pagan temples and thus participating in any meals with this kind of religious association is to move into the sphere and to come under the power and influence of these demons (10:20-22).<sup>6</sup> The clear inference is that celebrating the Lord's Supper involves the same kind of profound dynamic personal connection with Christ, which Paul dubs *κοινωνία*, or "participation" with Christ.<sup>7</sup> The connection, or parallel, that Paul makes between the Lord's Supper and meals taken on the occasion of sacrifice to idols suggests that the Lord's Supper is a sacrificial meal. But the parallel suggests, too, that it is not a matter of the sacrifice occurring at, or because of, the meal, but in celebration of a sacrifice that has already been offered.

4 Although some have taken this statement to mean that Paul received it by revelation from the risen Lord, a consideration of the way Paul uses this type of language elsewhere, even in other passages in 1 Corinthians, indicates that he means tradition that has its origin in the teaching of the earthly Jesus. Paul is thus suggesting that it represents the earliest Christian tradition.

5 As we shall see, the repeated references to the "breaking of bread" in Acts probably refer to the Lord's Supper and imply the continuing significance in the earliest Church of Jesus' final meal with his disciples, as recorded in the Gospels (and especially the Gospel of Luke); but these passages involve only the barest mention, and do not develop or explicate the celebration of the Lord's Supper within the Church as does Paul in 1 Corinthians.

6 Paul wishes to "thread the needle," by indicating that eating outside of pagan temples food offered to idols is in itself acceptable so long as it does not offend, or cause to stumble, a Christian brother or sister (8:4-13; 10:23-33), but that eating sacrificial meals within a pagan temple is to come all too close to practicing idolatry (10:1-22).

7 The common description of the Lord's Supper as "communion" actually stems from the KJV translation of this passage. Most recent translations render the term, more aptly, as "participation" in the sense of "sharing in" Christ.

The context suggests that these “strong” Christians had actually adopted a “semi-magical” view of the sacraments according to which they were protected from the defilement that might come through eating meals in idol temples by virtue of their baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper. Thus, Paul warns them that although the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings participated in some anticipatory yet real way in baptism and the Lord’s Supper (“spiritual food” and “spiritual drink”), God judged them severely because of their idolatry (10:1-13). This is an argument against viewing the sacraments in terms of *ex opera operato*, as having inherent and automatic salvific force, even though they are of the Holy Spirit and pertain to spiritual realities and thus cannot be reduced to their physical potentialities. As Paul will make clear in the next chapter, the attitude and actions of the worshipper determine the outcome of participation in the Lord’s Supper, for good or for ill.

When we come to 1 Corinthians 11 we find that Paul moves on from discussing matters “concerning food offered to idols” (8:1) to issues surrounding worship, including problems pertaining to worship, about which he has been informed (11:17-22).<sup>8</sup> The problem that Paul addresses in 11:17-34 pertains to misbehavior surrounding the Lord’s Supper. We can actually reconstruct the situation from Paul’s description with some confidence, especially if we read it in light of what we know of the social setting of Corinth.

Although Paul’s portrayal of the actions of Jesus during the Supper suggests that at the Last Supper conducted by Jesus the two aspects of the Eucharist (the bread and the wine) were separated by the main meal (“after supper he took the cup...”),<sup>9</sup> it seems that at Corinth the fellowship meal, otherwise known as the “agape feast” (cf. Jude 12), immediately preceded the culminative event of partaking of the bread and wine of the Eucharist. In the spirit of the Lord’s Supper, and informed by the Christian gospel, this agape feast was intended to be an opportunity for the sharing of food on the part of the relatively wealthy members of the church with their poor fellow-Christians. This

sharing was not simply a symbolic activity, but it was meant to alleviate the very real problem of hunger and malnutrition that plagued the poor in every city of the Empire. But the wealthy of the Corinthian church had been familiar, before their conversion, with Graeco-Roman dinners, which were characterized by social stratification (i.e., the poor were either not included or were separated physically, forced to eat in another part of the house) and gluttony, and culminated in the *convivia*, a time of excessive alcoholic consumption and drunkenness.

Apparently these wealthy Gentile Christians construed the agape feast/Lord’s Supper according to their experience of these Graeco-Roman dinners. Consequently they refused to share their sumptuous food with the poorer members, and indeed ate their fill before these poorer members—laborers and slaves who were required to work late—arrived (11:33-34), and sated themselves with their own wine to the point of drunkenness (11:21). This behavior not only showed disregard for the physical needs of fellow-Christians but also humiliated or shamed the poor (11:22), a cardinal affront in that honor-shame culture. It is precisely into this situation that Paul reminds his readers of the tradition of the Lord’s Supper that he had initially handed on to them, so as to highlight the contradiction between the Supper and this behavior. Like every other account of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament, this one includes reference to Jesus’ betrayal: “on the night when he was betrayed.” This feature receives greater development in the Gospel accounts of the Supper, but in this very terse rehearsal its presence is arresting. It reminds the readers that the original Supper was characterized by the presence of a betrayer, someone whose commitments and actions fundamentally contradicted the very essence of the meal, who set himself in opposition to Jesus, the host. This reference anticipates Paul’s warnings in 11:27-34 regarding eating and drinking “in an unworthy manner,” and thus possibly falling into condemnation. Although many Christians have allowed this caution to keep them, in fear, from partaking of the Supper because of a sense of their own unworthiness, Paul himself would

8 It is clear that the whole of 1 Corinthians 7-15 is bound together by Paul’s addressing *seriatim* a number of questions that have been posed by certain members of the Corinthian church (7:1). It appears that the “strong” had written about complaints they were receiving from others pertaining to their eating food offered to idols and eating sacrificial meals in pagan temples (8:1-11:1), and that other members in the church (perhaps including also the strong) had raised the question of spiritual gifts, which pertains of course to Christian worship (12:1), and that Paul took the opportunity to address not only the issue of gifts but in the process that of proper attire for men and women in worship (11:2-16) and the problems surrounding the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34).

9 As in the version of the Lord’s Supper in Luke. This is one of the features that the Pauline and Lukan accounts have in common over against the other New Testament portrayals.

have been appalled by such a response. Indeed, a sense of personal unworthiness is exactly the attitude that is required on the part of those who approach the holy table (cf. Rom 1:18-3:31; 5:6-11; Phil 3:2-11). Paul is actually addressing an arrogance that practices consumption and pleasure at the expense of the poor, that celebrates division and stratification at the expense of the unity of the body, and that dares to approach the table in a state of drunkenness and thus shows disdain for the Lord who is the host. Thus, participants are to “discern the body,” referring probably both to assessing their behavior in light of the body of Christ itself which he in selfless humility offered to God “for you” (11:24) and the body of Christ as the community of believers (e.g., 12:12; Col 1:24), whose unity is forged through the partaking of the one loaf (10:17). Paul’s warnings regarding the judgmental consequences of taking the Supper in an unworthy manner underscore the reflectiveness, seriousness, and reverence with which persons are to approach the Supper of the Lord. When Jesus declares “This is my body” it is clear that he is employing a predication of significance rather than a predication of ontological identification. In other words, Jesus is saying that the bread represents, or signifies, his body, and not that the bread is literally his body. This is such a natural reading of the text that it would be unnecessary even to mention it if not for the claims and controversies that arose in the Church’s later theological deliberations over the Supper. When Jesus goes on to assert “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” it is obvious that the cup is not itself the new covenant but represents the new covenant, and more specifically represents the means whereby the new covenant is effectuated. As Wesley (among others) points out, the very fact that Jesus makes this statement while handling the bread indicates that the bread is not in any way literally his body.<sup>10</sup> In Pauline terminology, the body (σῶμα) often refers to the person in his/her embodied existence (e.g., Rom 12:1), and thus indicates here the self-offering of Jesus’ whole bodily existence as a sacrifice to God, even unto death, which is expressed especially by the reference to “blood.” The mention of body and blood, then, reminds celebrants that their salvation has its source in actions pertaining to Jesus’ bodily existence on the plain of history.

But the reception of the Lord’s Supper is likewise a bodily act on the part of the celebrants. And by engaging in this bodily activity they “proclaim the Lord’s death.” The word “proclaim” is typically employed by the New Testament writers, including Paul, in connection with the Word, or the Word of God. The act of taking the Lord’s Supper, then, is a “*visible verbum*,”<sup>11</sup> i.e., speech reified in action, the proclamation of the Word of God, really the Word of the Gospel. Not only does Christ act as host in the Lord’s Supper, but celebrants play an active role as well. Their act proclaims the gospel as do their spoken words, but in participating in the Lord’s Supper it is proclamation with particular emphases, and in a different mode, and apparently a necessary one; for this act is here commanded by the Lord: “Do this...until he comes.” In addition, this Pauline form of the Lord’s Supper, more than any other that appears in the New Testament, emphasizes the Supper as a “remembrance.” Twice Jesus commands, “Do this remembrance of me.” This mention of remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) certainly alludes to the Old Testament notion of זָכַר (zakar), which signifies the calling to memory through a ceremonial act of a great event in the salvation-historical past in such a way as to allow the event that is being remembered to form the character and identity of persons and especially of the community in the present.<sup>12</sup> Here in the Lord’s Supper, it is not an event that is being remembered, but the person of Jesus, particularly in his self-offering to God on our behalf: “Do this in remembrance of *me*.”

Moreover, we learn here that the Lord’s Supper was celebrated regularly, indeed whenever the church met (“when you meet together,” 11:20), apparently every Sunday (16:2). And we learn, too, that there was no designated office-holder who was responsible for officiating at the Lord’s Supper. Paul does need to be present, and he mentions nothing regarding a designated presider. Indeed, if there had been a certain class or group of persons who were authorized to preside at the Lord’s table Paul would have addressed his instructions primarily to them as gatekeepers and thus as those who would be especially responsible for correcting the abuses herein described. A natural inference from the entire letter as well as other Pauline

<sup>10</sup> E.g., John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1950 [1754]), 286.

<sup>11</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Lord’s Supper according to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 38.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., the continuing role of the feast of *Purim* in forming future generations of Jews through the remembrance of the events surrounding Esther and Mordecai (Esther 9:20-28), and the constant alternation between “your fathers” and “you” in the recounting of the events of exodus, wanderings, and conquest in the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 23-24, indicating that in some sense those participating in the ceremony are thereby in some sense participating in the event itself.

material is that the head of the household in which the meal was held would have presided, in which case women may have done so (see 1:11), or that church leaders would have performed such a duty; these would also have included women, such as Junia the apostle (Rom 16:7), Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), or Nympha (Col 4:15). We encounter the insistence on bishops or those designated by the bishop to officiate at the Lord's Supper for the first time in Ignatius (*Smr* 8).

## Luke-Acts

It remains for us to consider passages in the Gospels that pertain to the Last Supper, which, as we have seen, is the basis for the Lord's Supper as presented by Paul. The Last Supper, therefore, necessarily informs our understanding of the Lord's Supper. I begin by exploring the Last Supper according to Luke (22:7-38), because the close resemblance of the Lukan account to 1 Cor 11:23-26, which we have just examined, makes it expedient to do so.

Naturally, we find here many of the same features we encountered in 1 Corinthians 11. But while Paul made no reference to the Passover Luke goes out of his way to emphasize that the Last Supper was a Passover celebration; he not only mentions the Passover repeatedly (22:7, 8, 11, 13, 15), but references the first and third of the four cups customarily employed at the Passover meal (22:17, 20). Insofar as the Passover was a commemoration of the Exodus event, and especially of the deliverance, or salvation, of Israel through the blood of the paschal lamb, Jesus is indicating that in his approaching death ("before I suffer," 22:15) he is accomplishing the salvation of God's people that was adumbrated in the delivery from death at the time of the Exodus. The connection of Jesus' death to the Passover and the paschal lamb is a unique contribution of the Lord's Supper to New Testament theology; it is part of the Supper's unique proclamation, as far as the Jesus-tradition is concerned.<sup>13</sup> Thus the Last Supper alludes to delivery from death and the life-giving power that is effectuated by Jesus' sufferings.

And yet Jesus' actions at the Last Supper mark a significant departure from the protocol of the Passover meal. Jesus replaces the *haggadah*, or announcement of the significance of the various aspects of the meal

for the remembrance of the events surrounding the Exodus, with declarations regarding the significance of the meal for the remembrance of himself: "Do this in remembrance of *me*" (22:19). The Last Supper was a significantly modified Passover Meal.

Consequently, the Lord's Supper, which is to some extent a reenactment of the Last Supper, is not actually a Passover meal. Jesus adopts the form of the Passover meal as a kind of epistemological framework for the Last Supper, but transforms its substantive significance. Even as the Passover was the occasion of giving thanks for God's deliverance of God's people at the Exodus, so the Last Supper is the specially designated occasion for the Church, God's eschatological people, to express thanks for the great act of redemption that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. Even as the Passover was the occasion when the Jews believed that they, through remembrance of the events of the Exodus, became anew partakers of that act of redemption, so in the Last Supper the disciples, through "remembrance," may somehow participate in the benefits of Jesus' self-offering. Even as the Passover was celebrated by many, and probably most, Jews at that time as not only a remembrance of past deliverance but also as confident anticipation of the coming Messiah, so the Last Supper also looks forward to the coming consummation of the Kingdom and the return of Jesus Messiah (22:18). Even as the Passover was a celebration that was to be repeated and observed regularly (annually) in perpetuity, so Jesus' command "do this in remembrance of me" implies that disciples are to continue to celebrate this kind of meal, for "remembrance" implies a time when the events that are transpiring around Jesus' death are in the past. Accordingly, Jesus goes on to say that disciples will "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (22:30), which is a reference to the time of the rule of the exalted Christ between the exaltation and Parousia.<sup>14</sup> As we shall, though, the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated much more often than just once a year.

This Last Supper is actually part of a series of meals that Luke describes throughout his Gospel and then on into Acts. But it is the crucial meal in this series of meals. It is anticipated in the meal-motif in the earlier chapters of Luke, in which Jesus emphasizes that the meal is an occasion for inclusiveness, both

<sup>13</sup> The tradition of the Lord's Supper is probably responsible for Paul's identification of Jesus with the paschal lamb at 1 Cor 5:7-8. The reference to "ransom," which involves manumission or deliverance from slavery, at Mark 10:45/Matt 20:28 probably alludes to the paschal lamb of Exodus 12, but only in a very indirect way.

<sup>14</sup> Like Matthew and Mark, Luke draws a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Jesus' Kingdom. The Kingdom of God involves the rule of God that has come initially in Jesus' ministry/death/resurrection and will be consummated at the Parousia. It is this consummated Kingdom of God that Jesus references in 22:18. But Jesus' Kingdom refers to his reign over the world which is inaugurated with his exaltation (Luke 1:33; 23:42).

of moral outcasts (e.g., 7:36-48) and the poor and the lame (14:12-14), and an occasion for the celebration of forgiveness already experienced as well as the reception of forgiveness (19:5-8). All of this informs the Last Supper, and therefore by extension the Lord's Supper. And the continuing significance of this meal for post-Easter Christians is expressed through the encounter of the risen Christ in the "breaking of the bread" with the disciples on the Emmaus Road (24:13-43), where the reality and the significance of the resurrected One is manifested both in his presence in the meal and in his exposition of the Scriptures (24:32, 25). This connection between the celebration of the meal and the preaching/teaching of the Word is found throughout Luke-Acts (e.g., Acts 1:3-5; 2:42; 20:7-15). We have found this same connection in Paul, which suggests that, according to New Testament theology, the Lord's Supper should not be separated from the teaching.<sup>15</sup> Luke, like Paul, suggests that the Lord's Supper was linked with a common meal; and Luke refers to the entire experience as "the breaking of bread."<sup>16</sup> Luke indicates, too, that it was done whenever Christians gathered: daily in the earliest days of the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:46), and later "on the first day of the week" (20:7).

One final point regarding the Lord's Supper in Luke. Luke presents the Last Supper not only as a Passover meal and a farewell meal (22:14-18), but also a *symposium*, which was a type of gathering common in the Hellenistic world at the time in which a festive meal enjoyed by a small, select group or association would be followed by a lecture or discussion around a theme that was of importance to the group. The material that immediately follows the celebration of the meal proper in Luke's Gospel (22:24-38) has the character of such a *symposium*; and it gives the Lukan Jesus an opportunity to give instruction regarding the significance of certain features of the Supper. Here he emphasizes how the Supper points to the supreme significance of humility. Jesus relates this theme of humility explicitly to the Supper (22:24-28), even suggesting that he not only hosted the meal but also served at the meals with his

disciples and thus assumed the role of a servant, or slave, at the meals (22:27).

## Mark and Matthew

As I mentioned above, the account of the Last Supper in Luke has much in common not only with Paul's description in 1 Corinthians but also with the accounts in Mark and Matthew. Consequently, much of what I have noted in Luke applies also to Mark (14:12-26) and Matthew (26:20-30). Moreover, the accounts in Mark and Matthew are almost identical; and, in fact, assuming the general scholarly consensus of Markan priority, Matthew has only slightly edited his Markan source. Although the overall theological perspectives of Matthew and Mark are quite distinct, in the case of the Lord's Supper they are for the most part similar. For these reasons, we will treat Mark and Matthew together, and relatively briefly.

Unlike Luke, Matthew and Mark do not explicitly claim that the Last Supper was a Passover meal (cf. Luke 22:15). This consideration has led some scholars to insist that the Last Supper as Jesus himself celebrated it was not a Passover meal, and that this association of the Last Supper with the Passover represented a later development in the tradition. But, in fact, Matthew and Luke do present this meal as a Passover, in that Jesus gives instructions for the preparation of the Passover and the meal contains, according to their accounts, a number of features distinctive to the Passover, including the singing of the *hallel* psalms at the conclusion of the meal (Mark 14:26; Matt 26:30).

As does Luke, Matthew and Mark emphasize that Jesus celebrates this Passover meal *with his disciples*. This is an alteration not only from the custom of Passover celebration, but also from the original legal commands regarding it, for according to Ex 12:1-20 the Passover was to be celebrated by families. By altering the observance of the Passover as he does here in the Last Supper, Jesus suggests that the *ultimately primary* social unit for disciples is not the nuclear or extended family, but rather the disciple-circle, i.e., the Church.

<sup>15</sup> Generally speaking, in the New Testament "teaching" refers especially (though not exclusively) to instruction directed to insiders (disciples/Christians). Most of our contemporary "pastoral preaching" delivered on Sunday mornings to our congregations, then, is technically teaching, according to the New Testament nomenclature.

<sup>16</sup> Only at the Last Supper does Luke explicitly state that Jesus "broke bread," and hence the reference to the "breaking of bread" throughout Acts leads the implied reader of Acts to assume that this alludes to the memorial meal narrated in Luke 22. The reference to Jesus' "breaking them" (i.e., the fish and the loaves) at the feeding of the 5000 (Luke 9:16) is meant to anticipate in some measure the Last Supper, though Luke does not consider it to be in any real sense a Eucharist. Some have drawn the conclusion from Luke's practice of describing the Lord's Supper in terms of the breaking of bread that the observance of the Lord's Supper in the practice of the early Church often did not include wine, but only the bread (*sub una*), or perhaps water instead of wine. The latter was apparently practiced by some at least in the early sub-apostolic Church. But it is more likely that Luke uses "bread" as a metonym for the entire meal, both common and eucharistic, that included wine. Every actual description of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament (over against mere mentioning of the event) includes wine, with the exception of John 13, where no mention of the elements appears.

Jesus has made this point elsewhere in these Gospels, e.g., at Matt 4:18-22; 9:21-22; 10:34-39; and 12:46-50; but here it becomes part of the significance of the ongoing celebration of the meal. This consideration does not deny the importance of the family for disciples or continuing responsibility to family members (e.g., Mark 7:9-13; 10:1-12, 19), but it indicates that the unity and mutual participation of those who share faith in the crucified Lord around the Lord's table is more profound than even family ties.

Yet in their accounts, Matthew and Luke give greater attention to the presence of Judas in the meal than does Luke. In fact, they divide the account of the meal into two parts, each introduced with the phrase, "while they were eating" (Mark 14:17, 22; Matt 26:20, 26); and they devote the entire first part of their accounts to the presence and participation of Judas, the betrayer, in the meal. When Jesus announces that one of those present will betray him, the disciples ask one by one, "Is it I?" The evangelists therefore suggest that a key feature at this Last Supper, which has implications for the later celebration of the Lord's Supper by the Church, is this critical self-examination, with the recognition of the possibility of betrayal of the Lord on the part of those who participate in the meal. Moreover, the context of the meal in both Gospels indicates that those present include not only a betrayer but also weak and stumbling disciples: Peter, who will deny Jesus; and the rest of the disciples, who will abandon him. Again, insofar as the Last Supper points ahead to the Lord's Supper it suggests that the Lord's Supper is not to be restricted to disciples who have no significant weaknesses or flaws, but even such as these are to be welcomed to the table of the Lord.

Moreover, in these Gospels Jesus refers to the cup as containing "the blood of the covenant." Here Jesus alludes to the sacrifice at the foot of Sinai that sealed Israel as the covenant people of God (Ex 24:6-11). The Passover meal itself recalls the sacrifice of the paschal lamb that averted death; here Jesus adds to the imagery the covenant sacrifice.

The covenant ceremony in Exodus 24 completed the purpose of the deliverance at the Exodus, and was actually part of the entire salvific scheme that included exodus, covenant, and conquest/possession. All of this together was the foundational salvation-event, even as Jesus' approaching self-sacrifice is the final,

eschatological one. Insofar as the Passover meal recalls the foundational one and Jesus' alterations focus on the eschatological one, the meal serves as a bridge between the covenants, and reminds disciples that the sacrifice of Jesus that they celebrate in the Supper is the fulfillment of these foundational acts of salvation and consequently that the Supper announces that the celebrants are the true heirs of Israel and have profound fellowship not only with other Christians but with the faithful of the Old Testament people of God. Of course, the meal is also, in fact, an anticipation of the final eschatological banquet, which will bring Jesus' salvific work to its utter completion (Matt 22:1-14; cf. Rev 19:7-9), a banquet that Christian disciples will share with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11). I might have mentioned earlier that Paul and Luke make their own contribution to this theme when they report that Jesus speaks of his blood of the *new* covenant, thus implying that the blessings and joy that Jeremiah announces in his description of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34); this also points to the transcendence of the new covenant over against the first and hence the great joy that properly attends the observance of the Lord's Supper by those who now enjoy the eschatological blessings of the new age (Acts 2:46-47).

### Gospel of John

In the thirteenth chapter of his Gospel John recalls the Last Supper. And in the sixth chapter he recalls the Lord's Supper. I use the word "recall" intentionally, because the evangelist seems not to be interested in the Eucharist as such, but rather he employs language and images that came to be associated with the Eucharist as vehicles for expressing the ideas that he is most desirous to develop.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, John's presentation of the Last Supper (13:1-30) contains no reference to bread and wine; and the breaking of the bread is replaced with the washing of the disciples' feet. We find here no words of institution, but rather the farewell discourse (13:31-17:26). The dinner itself bears the marks of a farewell banquet and a Hellenistic *symposium* more than a Passover meal. Indeed, some have questioned whether John presents this event as a Passover meal at all (cf. 13:1, "Now *before* the feast of the Passover"). Yet John wishes to link this supper with the Passover meal as relayed in the Gospel tradition which we

<sup>17</sup> In this I agree with G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 230-32 over against Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 37-119; and Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 737-38.

find included in the other Gospels and in Paul: John's account describes the betrayal of Judas expressed in the language of dipping in the cup (13:18-30); and, like the Last Supper in the other Gospels, this meal is followed by Jesus' arrest in the Garden (18:1-14). John actually develops significantly two aspects of the Last Supper as found in the Gospel of Luke: the theological discussion immediately after the meal; and the theme of Jesus' humility as the model and basis for humility on the part of the disciples who participate in the meal. Even as in Luke Jesus is "as one who serves at the table" (22:27), in John Jesus assumes the role of a slave at the meal and washes the feet of his disciples as a model for what they are to do (13:2-17). John is hereby suggesting that the ultimate significance of the Lord's Supper is its function as a pointer to the central role of humility in both the Christ whom the Church worships and in the ordering of the Church's corporate life. This view of the Lord's Supper does not contradict the perspectives of the other New Testament witnesses that we have examined, but rather highlights this issue of humility which is one among several other aspects of the presentation of the Lord's Supper in the rest of the New Testament.

Whereas John 13 invokes the tradition regarding Jesus' Last Supper, John 6 recalls Jesus' words of institution at the Last Supper, as preserved in the Gospel tradition and actually found in the other Gospels and 1 Corinthians (6:51-58). And yet these echoes of the words of institution do not stand at the center of John's interest here, but rather are used to develop the main concern of the passage, which is Jesus as the source of life. The chapter commences with the "sign" of the feeding of the 5000 (6:1-15), which leads naturally enough to a discussion with the people about the relationship between Jesus and the bread that he provides, on the one hand, and the manna in the wilderness that came from God through Moses and preserved the Israelites alive, on the other. In a sense, then, the manna was "living bread," i.e., life-giving bread.

It is within this discussion that Jesus makes the claim that stands as the thesis to his entire discourse: "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48), expanded and clarified by the declaration, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (6:51). The manna from heaven

points to him who is "the true bread from heaven" (6:32). But Jesus can function as the bread from heaven who gives life to the world only as he is fully incarnate as a physical human being in the world, an incarnation that involves not simply physical existence but also physical death. It is to support and develop this claim that Jesus talks about his flesh and his blood in 6:51-59.

So Jesus is the bread of life as one who is truly from heaven, the realm of God who is the source of all life, and yet physically incarnated. Only through belief in this heavenly one, precisely in his incarnated existence, can one partake of this life-giving bread, which is himself, and thus experience the kind of life that transcends the mere nutritional sustenance that the manna provided; for those who partook of the manna died, while those who feed on him live forever (6:48-50). Here Jesus speaks about belief in him as incarnated one by the image of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. In other words, Jesus employs this figurative language of eating his flesh and drinking his blood as a way of describing belief in him/coming to him,<sup>18</sup> which involves, among other things, receiving the words that this incarnate one speaks (6:60-66, 68). The offense on the part of the disciples who withdraw, then, stems not from revulsion over the suggestion of cannibalism, but from refusal to believe in the incarnate Son of God.

Thus, this language of eating his flesh and drinking his blood does not describe eating the bread or drinking the wine of the sacrament. And yet this language is reminiscent of the Lord's Supper.<sup>19</sup> By employing this eucharistic language here John seems to indicate what, for his Gospel, is the real significance of the Lord's Supper, viz., that as bread that can be eaten and wine that can be drunk it bears witness, as a sign, to the fully historical, physical, bodily realities of the Christ which form the basis of Christian salvation. John suggests that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper witnesses to Jesus' incarnation and to the necessity of belief in the incarnation, or more accurately, belief in Jesus as the incarnate One. Christian discipleship is not reducible to communion with an amorphous heavenly being, but is the expression of faith in the incarnated Lord, borne witness to through the physical elements of the bread and wine of the sacrament.

<sup>18</sup> John 6:47, 51, 53-55 make it clear that eating and drinking is tantamount to believing and coming to Jesus (which is synonymous in John to believing in him; cf. 3:16-21).  
<sup>19</sup> Jesus could have developed the comparison and contrast between himself and the manna by talking simply about bread/flesh. But introducing here the image of blood is gratuitous as far as the argument at hand, and can be explained only, or at least best, by John's desire to echo eucharistic language.

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# On Capital Punishment

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.

# On Capital Punishment

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.  
SCOD – 2021

In 2019 I presented a resolution for consideration at General Conference regarding Capital Punishment. The impetus behind my writing was the clear inconsistency in our *Book of Discipline* when it comes to our views on the sanctity of human life but our silence on what is commonly called the Death Penalty.

As I wrote:

## WHEREAS:

The Free Methodist Church has historically championed the value and worth of all humans, stating in the *BOD* ¶ 3221 that we will do so “regardless of gender, race, color, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35) and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection”, and

WHEREAS we further believe and state in that same paragraph that Christ “ministered to all without distinction and His death on the cross was for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:8)”, and

WHEREAS that same paragraph continues, declaring, “We are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized, enslaved or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10)”, and

WHEREAS in *BOD* ¶ 3222 entitled “The Sanctity of Life” we already give guidance regarding reproductive technology (¶ 3222.A), abortion (¶ 3222.B), euthanasia (¶ 3222.C), and “other ethical dilemmas”, particularly pertaining to issues rising from advances in medical technology (¶ 3222.D), all under the stated conviction about “the inherent worth of human life”, and

WHEREAS this same paragraph counsels that “Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state”, and

WHEREAS in our statements on “The Sanctity of Life” we say in ¶ 3222.A that the intentional ending “of a

person’s life, from conception on, must be judged to be a violation of God’s command, ‘You shall not commit murder’”, and further that “we believe that human life, whether in vitro, mature or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God”, and

WHEREAS in our statements in ¶ 3222.C we say that we “must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living” and that “there is no such thing as a ‘useless’ life” and that “the value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us”, and

WHEREAS we believe that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) and that God desires that none should perish but that all should come to repentance and a life of faith (2 Peter 3:9), and

WHEREAS capital punishment, commonly referred to as the death penalty, ends once and for all the possibility of awareness of sin, confession of sin, and restoration to new life, and

WHEREAS in our clear statements on “The Sanctity of Life” we currently take no position on the death penalty,

## Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED:

That under *BOD* paragraph 3222, “The Sanctity of Life”, current paragraph 3222.D entitled “Other Ethical Dilemmas” be moved to paragraph 3222.E, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the following be included as the new paragraph 3222.D, entitled “Capital Punishment”:

The Free Methodist Church is deeply grieved when any life is taken in murder or homicide. We believe that persons who commit these or other horrendous crimes should be justly punished by just laws. Nevertheless, we believe that all human life is sacred, created by God, and therefore we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person’s life ends. Its use denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings, regardless of previous attitudes or

actions. For these reasons, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

Following the Spring 2019 meeting of the FMC-USA BOA where resolutions were considered, I was asked to amend my resolution for General Conference and presented the following amendment later that summer at GC 19:

### **WHEREAS:**

capital punishment is not applied equally across racial and other divides, disproportionately being utilized among the poor and persons of color; for example: A study by the United States General Accounting Office on Death Penalty Sentencing found that in 82% of the cases reviewed, race of the victim was found to significantly influence the likelihood of receiving the death penalty, i.e., in interracial cases an Anglo who murdered an African-American was placed on death row 21 times whereas an African-American who murdered an Anglo was placed on death row 290 times, and Prof. Jack Boger and Dr. Isaac Unah of the University of North Carolina found that defendants whose victims are white are 3 ½ times more likely to be sentenced to death than those with non-white victims, saying, “The odds are supposed to be zero that race plays a role.... No matter how the data was analyzed, the race of the victim always emerged as an important factor in who received the death penalty.” And, Though African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the nation’s population, 42 percent of death row inmates are African-American, and 34 percent of those executed since 1976 have been African-American, and The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations declared in 2017 that “if you are poor, the chances of being sentenced to death are immensely higher than if you are rich.... In practice it is really a penalty reserved for people from lower socio-economic groups. This turns it into a class-based form of discrimination in most countries.” And

WHEREAS carrying out the death penalty sentence leaves no room for correcting a mistake of justice, and, since the death penalty was reinstituted in the United States in 1976, 156 persons on death row have been declared innocent and released, and

WHEREAS use of capital punishment is not consistent across the nation, with 26 U.S. states having the death penalty (though 7 of those have not put someone to

death in more than a decade), 21 not having it or having abolished it, and 3 currently having governor mandated moratoria on the use of capital punishment (because of concerns about discrimination, cost, and lack of deterrent value), and

WHEREAS there is no consistent Christian approach to capital punishment, as throughout Church history there have been disagreements among both biblical and historical theologians regarding the legitimacy of capital punishment as a viable option for followers of Jesus, and

WHEREAS any adjustments made to the FMC-USA *Book of Discipline* have a bearing upon provisional General Conferences, Annual Conferences, and Provisional Annual Conferences that are not under the authority of another FM General Conference worldwide, many of whom have significantly worse criminal justice systems than exists in the United States,

### **Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED:**

That the FMC-USA call on all U.S. states to issue a moratorium on capital punishment, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Free Methodist Church be encouraged to commit to ministries targeting the incarcerated and continue to participate in visitation, evangelism, and discipleship ministries to the imprisoned, supporting efforts to prison and penal reforms that have redemptive aims for the incarcerated, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the SCOD be asked to draft a teaching document for the FMC-USA regarding capital punishment, as well as consider how a new paragraph in the *Book of Discipline* addressing sanctity of life and the death penalty might be written, taking into consideration the ramifications on Free Methodists around the world who fall under the authority of the FMC-USA *Book of Discipline*.

This amended resolution was accepted by the General Conference, hence the need for our ongoing study, the creation of a teaching document, and the reconsideration of a potential paragraph or statement in the *Book of Discipline*.

I continue to believe that a statement in the *BOD* against Capital Punishment is warranted. Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society, so direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, no matter the reason. Sadly, in our contemporary society human life is on attack from things like abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, human cloning, and the destruction of human embryos for research, just to name a few. It is right for the Church to speak out against such actions in support of the sanctity of life, and we do so within paragraph 3222 of the *Book of Discipline*.

It is also right to recognize that historic, Bible-based Christianity has held that the State, in its mandate to preserve the common good, ought to act to stop the spread of behaviors injurious to human rights. For example, Thomas Aquinas wrote in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that “legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for another’s life. Preserving the common good requires rendering the unjust aggressor unable to inflict harm. To this end, those holding legitimate authority have the right to repel by armed force aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their charge.”<sup>1</sup>

In plain speech, this has traditionally meant that legitimately recognized authorities have not only the right but also the duty to assign punishments and penalties that are commensurate with the gravity of the crime. The intent is both accountability for the offender and a measure of justice for the one who was offended. The outcome is often twofold as well: expiation for the crime and, ideally, redirection and correction of the offender. Rather than being merely punitive or retributive, the best justice is also restorative. In all cases, the ultimate purpose of punishment, whatever it may be, is to redress the disorder caused by the offender and prevent it from happening again. By ensuring public safety, such punishment also offers the offender an incentive and hopefully assistance to change her or his behavior and be rehabilitated.

For this to happen, for these purposes to be achieved, the nature and extent of the punishment must carefully be evaluated and determined. As Christians, we must advocate for a penal system of justice that aligns with our understanding of human dignity and,

ultimately, with God’s plan for all humanity. In keeping with our view on the sanctity of human life, this means that public authorities ought not to go to the extreme of execution of the offender except in cases when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Again, the Church historic has traditionally allowed this recourse to the death penalty when it is the only predictable way to defend the lives of human beings against an aggressor. It aligns with the societal duty to defend life against violence and to bring some level of justice to victims of crime. And because of this, the Free Methodist Church has not to this point taken a stand against the death penalty for particularly egregious crimes when there was a serious continuing threat to society and no alternative was available.

However, with the steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, as flawed as it may yet be, such threats are extremely rare, if not practically non-existent, particularly in the United States. For this reason alone, our nation’s continued reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified.

When bloodless means are sufficient to defend against the aggressor and to protect the safety of persons, public authority should limit itself to such means because they better corresponded to the development of the common good and are in conformity to the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, given the means at the State’s disposal to effectively repress crime by rendering inoffensive the one who has committed it, without depriving her or him definitively of the possibility of redemption, cases of absolute necessity for death of the offender are, again, very rare, if not practically non-existent.

Therefore, because we have other ways to protect society that are more respectful of human life, I suggest that the Free Methodist Church openly support efforts to end the use of the death penalty and in the meantime urge the restraint of its use through broader use of DNA evidence, access to effective legal counsel, and efforts to address unfairness and injustice related to the application thereof, particularly when it comes to frequency of use along racial lines.

Obviously, there are parallel matters to which this relates as well. In my opinion, our view on the sanctity of human life calls us also to oppose torture, unjust war, and the indiscriminate use of drones for violent purposes. We decry genocide and attacks

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1 Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 64, 7.

against noncombatants, we oppose racism and human trafficking, and we strive to overcome poverty and suffering. Nations are called to protect the right to life by seeking effective ways to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts, except as a last resort after all peaceful means have failed. We revere the lives of children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings as children of God, no matter their circumstances. Simply put, we stand opposed to these and all activities that contribute to a cultural belief that some lives are not sacred and created in God's image.

# Above Board

A Contemporary FMC Understanding of  
and Approach to Problems of Secrecy,  
and Our Desire to Live Relationally in  
Christlike Harmony.

Bishop Emeritus Matthew A. Thomas

# Above Board

A Position Paper of the Free Methodist Church – USA  
A Contemporary FMC Understanding of and  
Approach to Problems of Secrecy, and Our Desire to  
Live Relationally in Christlike Harmony.

## ¶ 3132 Secret Societies

The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, as members of the Free Methodist Church we abstain from membership in secret societies.

Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy or a secret password as conditions of membership are to be considered secret societies. In contradiction to the teaching of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join (Matthew 5:34-37). As Christians, therefore, we refuse to swear unreserved loyalty to any secret society since we see such an allegiance to be in direct conflict with unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. We must keep ourselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things. Most secret societies are religious in nature. Prayers are offered, hymns are sung, and members engage in acts of worship before an altar. Chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. But the worship of these societies is typically unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). We refrain, therefore, from membership in all secret societies and when we unite with the Church we resign from active membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

## Introduction

Secrets are universally popular for insiders of clubs, cliques, or organizations, but are not enjoyable for those adversely affected by them. In fact, trading in secrets can cause incalculable damage to individuals, groups, and entire organizations.

Historic Free Methodism and Secrecy  
The Free Methodist Church — as part of a comprehensive worldview committed at its founding to help the poor and disenfranchised, care for the widows and orphans, raise the value of women in life and access to leadership in ministry, and advocate for the freedom of slaves — also made a commitment for

its members to be free from membership in secret societies (Book of Discipline Par. 3132). Distinct commitments to abolition, gender equality, care for the poor, and freedom from secret societies closely affirm the church's principle that no one should be excluded, marginalized, or disadvantaged. Everyone is valued, and thereby informed and supported.

Common practices at the time of the denomination's founding were inherently exclusive, demeaning, and class-based. Modern variations of these practices continue to facilitate separation reflected by those who are inside and outside, privileged and underprivileged, elite and common. They potentially compromise obedience to Christ first and result in bondage — the opposite of freedom. They often hide that which should be in the light or leave in darkness that which should have access to the light. They divide and separate.

## The Shift in Practices of Secrecy

Though the types of secret societies functioning at the time of our founding are less prevalent today, the church must remain committed to fair treatment and access. Cliques, clubs, and exclusive communication continue to compromise love for and loyalty to Christ and openness to truth. The means of meeting, collecting, and distributing information may keep some people outside of important conversations, prayer, and unifying presence, thereby causing marginalization.

Divisiveness Caused by Unholy Secrecy  
Secrets by nature conceal and restrict information. Cliques leverage communication efforts that withhold information from certain groups of people and cause real harm on an equal level with restrictive and ritualistic secret societies. Studies in psychology suggest that secrecy hurts one's physical and emotional health ([fmchr.ch/psychologyt](http://fmchr.ch/psychologyt)) and is most always maintained through deception. They create relational schisms, seek to control narratives, and threaten the higher obligations of honesty and integrity.

Organizations that keep secrets from some members display relational illness. While some secrecy may be defined as holy confidentiality, such confidences protect whereas unholy secrecy destroys. Jesus was not silent about the problems of exclusivity, making conflicting vows, and maintaining secrecy.

He labeled secrecy as part of the hypocrisy or "yeast of the Pharisees" (Luke 12:1-3). He pronounced that concealed things would be exposed. God reveals. It is not His desire to mask, distort, or hide truth and reality.

## God's Light Reveals All Things

"Light" is the word mentioned most in the Bible to highlight God's commitment to revelation and truth. Jesus came full of light, life, and truth (John 1:4-9). The Bible mentions light not only in reference to Jesus and God's glorious presence and revelation but also in reference to the condition of the mind and soul of those who come to Him. Jesus and angels appeared in light, and they brought light and revelation to the people to whom they appeared. God called forth light in the creation (Genesis 1:3) before He created other life. Jesus' appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:29), in Revelation (Revelation 1:13-15), and to Saul (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13) are indescribably radiant. Believers walk in light as God is in it (1 John 1:5-7). We hold light up, exposing truth and good news for the world to see. We are called the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). God is light, and those who live in Him possess it. Light abounds in Scripture.

Whether in the creation or with our Lord and His people, light represents exposure and elimination of spiritual darkness. Adam and Eve hid from God, and hiding has been standard form for their descendants throughout history. Humankind has been hiding, masking and covering sin and evil since the beginning of humanity. Darkness represents attempts to conceal sin and evil. Life, forgiveness, and love are so closely associated with light that Jesus declares, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light ..." (John 3:19). Light reveals; darkness conceals. Light liberates; darkness enslaves. Secrets have the attributes of darkness. Commit to Living Above Board: In the Light The Free Methodist Church commits to openness and light. Our freedom is endangered by efforts to marginalize some members through closed classes, cliques, or groups. Denominational and local church finances and budgets are open to inspection of our members. Our board meetings, with few exceptions, are open for members to attend. The minutes of official meetings are open to review by our members. Matters remain confidential only in rare circumstances such as when disclosure risks the trust and confidence of our most vulnerable members.

Our leadership is accessible, and our churches are open, as evidenced by openly offering the Lord's Supper. Members have voting privileges and access to information that helps them vote. Conference boards and committees include local church members. This open distribution of leadership helps local churches access information. The general conference is similarly

led by leaders of our 24 annual conferences. Leaders are openly evaluated from bishops to superintendents to pastors and ministry leaders on local levels. Our leaders and members aim to live an exemplary life as revealed by living above board, in the light.

Above Board with Electronic Communication Therefore, members of the Free Methodist Church are to exhibit a commitment to walk in light, remain open in their communication, and remove all clouds of darkness that signify secrecy. Whether through email, social media, websites, or directly through leadership relationships, we commit to openness, information flow, and full disclosure.


Members are to keep themselves from creating private/secret social media groups/pages, websites, systems, networks, clubs, cliques or fraternities that cloak, mask, or withhold information in ways that violate our principle to love God and people. Furthermore, using the name Free Methodist for such secret groups misrepresents the denomination and our heart, polity, and distinctives. Further members are expected to advocate for all people, refraining from creating classes through varying levels of information, opportunity, and participation. Our social media, websites, systems, networks, and other interaction should be as open and accessible as the doors of our churches and the sharing of the gospel with the world. In local church leadership, lay leaders and members are to refrain from secret meetings that exclude pastoral leaders. The Bible is clear as to how God's people are to resolve conflict and disagreement, and our Book of Discipline provides additional guidance.

## In Closing

Free Methodist Churches are to ensure equality and love for all people in church structures and activities. No member should be marginalized or discriminated against through secrecy of programs, structures or media. Collectively and individually we commit to walk in the light as He is in the light. The result is a unique and incomparable fellowship (1 John 1:5-7) that is not reflected in any other institution.

This document was authored by Bishop Emeritus Matthew A. Thomas and authorized by the Board of Bishops of the Free Methodist Church – USA.

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# The Relationship Between Church and State

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.

# The Relationship Between Church and State

## SCOD 2018

Rev. Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Ph.D.

The 2015 FMC-USA General Conference directed the SCOD to research things that make for peace, the use of force or violence, and the concept of a just war. As I began to study this topic and research these issues,<sup>1</sup> eventually resulting in a paper on capital punishment for the SCOD,<sup>2</sup> it was suggested that the broader and yet more foundational issue which must be addressed is the relationship between the Church and the State. Such interchange is rife with challenges and opportunities. History has found the dizzying dance between the city of God and the city of humans to often have the respective partners switching the lead, or at least attempting to each guide the relationship. But the two-steps and dips and twirls and spins that Church-State relations seem to currently be engaged in have led to increased questions about what a Christian should do in our complicated and confusing political reality.

When looking at the issues facing our societies and the best ways for peoples and nations to address such societal concerns it is important to ask what the proper place and role of the Church is alongside of political entities. How much should one influence the other, or even relate to the other? The words “separation of Church and State” are frequently thrown about in such discussions, though they are often used in a manner not intended by Thomas Jefferson, the originator of the phrase.

In expressing his understanding of the intent and function of the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause within the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, a clause which says in part that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” Jefferson wrote, “I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.”<sup>3</sup> This furthered Article Six of the Constitution, which already specified that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

So, what is the proper relationship? How much should a Christian be involved in political engagement? How much should one’s faith matter when it comes to effective governance? In what ways should a follower of Jesus seek to participate in the State functions of their community, their country, their world? Does the Church have a political role in any of this?

And in a more pastoral vein, how does sin corrupt government, and politics, and Christian advocacy and involvement in the public sphere? How does the Church work to counter the effects of both individual and systemic sin? Does it seek to align with the government? To bring about change from within the government? To be content to work from the outside?

The answers may be sought in Scripture (and its interpretation), as well as reason, experience, and tradition. For our purposes we may ask how each could guide what might come to be formulated as a basic Free Methodist political thought. Within this paper I

<sup>1</sup> Resources addressing these topics seem almost limitless. I have read all or portions of several books on just war, political theory, and other topics related to church-state relations. These include Bell, Daniel M., Jr. *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church rather than the State*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009; Boyd, Gregory A. *The Myth of a Christian Nation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005; Brugger, E. Christian. *Capital Punishment and Roman Catholic Moral Tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 2014; Chalke, Steve. *Radical: Exploring the Rise of Extremism and the Pathway to Peace*. London: Oasis Global, 2016; Claiborne, Shane. *Executing Grace*. San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2016; Gundry, Stanley N., Ed. *Five Views on The Church and Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015; Hamburger, Philip. *Separation of Church and State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002; Hauerwas, Stanley, and Willimon, William H. *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something Is Wrong*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989; additionally, Hauerwas and Willimon’s *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996; Hauerwas, Stanley. *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995; Hendricks, Obery M., Jr. *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006; Holmes, Arthur F., editor. *War and Christian Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005; Mattox, John Mark. *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2006; Moss, Candida. *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. New York, NY: Harper, 2013; Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990; Sprinkle, Preston. *Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013; Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011; Willimon, William H. *Fear of the Other*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2016; Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992; and Yoder, John Howard. *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See my 2017 SCOD paper, “The Christian and the State Regarding Legitimate Defense and Punishment”.

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson, Thomas. *Jefferson’s Letter to the Danbury Baptists: The Final Letter, as Sent*. The Library of Congress Information Bulletin: June 1998. The letter was originally dated January 1, 1802, barely ten years after the adoption of the First Amendment.

will seek to share some historic approaches to political theory, presenting a broad and yet general narrative within which a more pointed Free Methodist political theory may be developed. I am not attempting herein to present or propose a finalized theory, but rather to generate conversation toward a more coherent and articulated position.

For though I realize the temptation may be to say we don't need to narrowly specify what Free Methodists ought to think about politics, and I do think there is great wisdom and health in the *via media* that Wesley and Methodism have often taken when it comes to fluidity and freedom across ecclesiastical and cultural boundaries, I am not sure given the contemporary climate of political discourse that the subject can be ignored or unaddressed.

For example, just this week<sup>4</sup> the Rev. Jerry Falwell, Jr., President of Liberty University, argued, "Jesus said love our neighbors as ourselves but never told Caesar how to run Rome – He never said Roman soldiers should turn the other cheek in battle or that Caesar should allow all the barbarians to be Roman citizens or that Caesar should tax the rich to help the poor. That's our job." Barely two hours later he added to his Twitter feed a somewhat conciliatory post, saying in part, "Jesus never told Caesar he shouldn't tax the rich to help the poor either. You can be a good Christian whether you vote conservative or liberal!"<sup>5</sup>

I agree with Falwell that one can be a good Christian, regardless of the political party with which one aligns. However, I disagree with Falwell's implicit statement that Christian values are unnecessary for good governance. Of course, he and I would be far from the first brothers in Christ to differ when it comes to Christian interaction with governing authorities and the broader culture.

Jesus was famously dragged into such a political controversy by the Pharisees and Herodians. Anticipating that whatever answer Christ gave would create problems for Him socially, they sought to trick Him into making a dangerous statement. "So tell us what you think," they asked, "Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"<sup>6</sup>

Unwilling to take their bait, Jesus responded

with a command and question. He asked to see the coin used to pay the tax, and then He asked them whose image it bore. When they responded that it was the likeness and inscription of Caesar, He gave His famous response. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."<sup>7</sup> With this enigmatic answer Jesus in one fell swoop acknowledged that His followers owe ultimate allegiance to God, and yet they also have rights and responsibilities as earthly citizens. Gordan Wenhem has written that Christ refused to take a side in the fierce political debate of His day regarding taxation and simply "implied that loyalty to a pagan government was not incompatible with loyalty to God."<sup>8</sup>

As we've already said, political debates on a whole range of issues continue to divide persons, even persons within the Church. Just as in Jesus' day, we still debate what it means to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. This is where an historical overview can be helpful to focus in on an appropriate Free Methodist response.

Many traditions have offered varying interpretations of how much followers of Christ should engage with governing powers, of what it means to be faithful citizens. Yet many individual Christians are seemingly unaware of the richness of these traditions and the input they can give to persons today who struggle with doing the right thing and living the right way, wherever we may find ourselves. Church history can speak loudly still about the relationship between faith and politics. So, following the helpful framework of *Five Views on the Church and Politics*,<sup>9</sup> I want to briefly explore five specific historic traditions within Christianity and how they view the relationship between Church and State. These traditions, broadly described from those most connected in relationship and intent to those least connected, are Roman Catholic, Reformed, those generally called Black Churches, Lutheran, and Anabaptist. My hope is that in seeking to understand how these sisters and brothers have addressed political thought, the Free Methodist Church might come to a greater sense of God's leading and how we work in this world for justice and righteousness for all persons in our communities.

4 Posted on Twitter at 7:15 pm on January 25, 2018

5 Posted on Twitter at 9:38 pm on January 25, 2018

6 Matthew 22:17. Unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent Scripture quotations will be from the Common English Bible.

7 Matthew 22:21

8 Wenhem, Gordan J., et. al, eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994, 933.

9 Gundry, Stanley N., and Black, Amy E. *Five Views on the Church and Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.

## Roman Catholic Political Thought

The oldest of these traditions is Roman Catholicism, whose core centers on the unity and mission of the Church, with particular emphasis on the incarnation and the sacraments. God's Son taking on human form in the incarnation of Jesus Christ highlights the dignity of humanity. And just as Christ came to earth and lived among us, so God designed all people to live in deep communion with one another, taking responsibility for the needs of each other and God's created world. The sacraments, the second of these emphases, physically connect Christians with Christ as the center of life in the Church.<sup>10</sup> They also provide regular rhythms which shape our perspective of Christ and Christ in us in the world.

These basic ideas help undergird some core elements of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a tradition which articulates fundamental principles for engagement with society, including seven central themes for the Church's posture toward the world.<sup>11</sup> These include: life and dignity of the human person<sup>12</sup>; the call to family, community, and participation<sup>13</sup>; rights and responsibilities<sup>14</sup>; preferential care for the poor and vulnerable<sup>15</sup>; the dignity of work and the rights of workers<sup>16</sup>; solidarity<sup>17</sup>; and care for God's creation<sup>18</sup>.

These seven themes within CST can be summarized fairly succinctly.<sup>19</sup> Because humans are created in the image of God, human life is sacred. All people and institutions should therefore protect human life and uphold human dignity inherent in all

persons. God created humanity to live and flourish in community, beginning with the foundational relationships of marriage and family and extending outward to other forms of community. And so within our communities the rights and responsibilities we articulate should indicate and direct the way in which justice ought to govern life on earth. Of special focus is concern for the marginalized and the poor, modeled after Christ's sacrificial love and care for the "least of these." The dignity of work and the rights of workers give meaning to life in a fallen world by upholding central ways of participating in creation. A humility that leads to solidarity binds the members of communities together in a mutual commitment to the common good, each looking not just to their own interests but also the interests of others. And finally, the Catholic Church teaches that as we are participators in the ongoing work of creation, we need to therefore care for creation. Humans have the responsibility to be good stewards of the world God has made.

Informed by the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas and, through his writings, Aristotle, Catholic political thought recognizes the essentially political and social nature of human life. It highlights the responsibility of the State to cultivate the common good. This tradition, then, upholds what it sees as the God-given nature of governmental institutions and views the State through the lens of human flourishing, which has both individual and communal aspects. The

<sup>10</sup> Of course our Catholic friends recognize seven sacraments whereas we Free Methodists acknowledge two, though I believe an argument could be made to elevate the spiritual role of marriage... but that's for another SCOD paper!

<sup>11</sup> "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching." U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm> (accessed January 26, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Such a belief is foundational for all Catholic social teaching. And so Catholicism establishes strong guidelines for protecting the value of human life, including doctrines against things like birth control, abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty. It also calls on societies to avoid war, arguing that nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and, when this fails, to resolve them by peaceful means. This first principle for engagement with society essentially argues that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

<sup>13</sup> Expanding on the sanctity of human life, Catholicism seems the person as not only sacred but also social. Therefore a society must be organized, be it economically, politically, or however, in a way that positively affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are among the central social institutions that protect and model such communal life, and therefore must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. It is one way to help all persons participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

<sup>14</sup> Catholic social tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. This means that every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Along with these personal rights is the duty and responsibility to others, to our families, and to the larger society.

<sup>15</sup> It has been said that a basic moral test for any society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. Society has always seen a division between rich and poor. Catholic social teaching points to the story of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and calls persons to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

<sup>16</sup> Catholic economic policy would argue that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living. It is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected as well. This includes the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

<sup>17</sup> The word "catholic" means "universal." The very name of this tradition bespeaks that we can be one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our sisters' and brothers' keepers, wherever they may be. And in an ever-shrinking world, loving our neighbor has global dimensions. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.

<sup>18</sup> One way Christians show respect for the Creator is by our stewardship of creation. Within Catholic social teaching, care for the earth is a requirement of the faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.

<sup>19</sup> Footnotes 12-18 above give slightly more elaboration on each.

logical outcome of such an approach is to encourage citizens to participate in government as a means of furthering the betterment and blessing of all people. Regarding this, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines three specific obligations of all Christian citizens: voting, defending one's country, and paying taxes.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that duty to country extends beyond national borders to the entire world community, with the special goal of promoting peace.

In recent years the Catholic Church has been more vocal in expressing how the Church and the State should remain separate to protect religious freedom. For though the tradition has seen many ways that the two can and should work together to achieve common goals, the fact remains that the Church has a transcendent purpose only she can fill. It follows Christ and furthers the gospel. The State, having a necessary and important role, cannot meet all societal needs on its own. So Catholic political tradition holds to what is called "the principle of subsidiarity." It says that matters are best handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralized competent authority. Political decisions should be made at the local level if possible, rather than by a central authority. Churches, families, and community groups, this principle claims, are best equipped to perform their respective roles and meet local societal needs.

There is a certain irony in a Church that is often described with capital T "Tradition" and seen as fairly monolithic saying that smaller groups should have greater freedom to work, outside of institutional control. But such engagement in politics for those committed to the sacramental life of the Church is the tension within Catholicism. Politics by definition is about the good of the people. God cares about all people. So, people who seek to follow God must care about politics.

## Reformed Political Thought

The Reformed Church tradition developed primarily from sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox.

This theological tradition emphasizes God's supreme sovereignty over all things, including individual people, the Church, and the State. Nothing lies outside God's sustaining providence, and nothing and nobody but God deserves to receive the ultimate glory God is due. This in part stems from a narrative of the creation, fall, and redemption which lies at the center of Reformed thought, a narrative that shapes how Christians understand God's relation to the world and to humanity.

Reformed thinkers emphasize that God created the world very good, bestowing it initially with great beauty. God granted humans both the ability and the responsibility to fill the earth and multiply the good God had placed in it. But then came the fall. Because of it, all humans bear the scars of rebellion, the marks of depravity which affect everything humans touch, indeed, affect all of life. This certainly includes politics. Even a cursory glance at modern politics would seem to bear this out! However, in God's great mercy, sinners outside of Christ are empowered to do good things through what is known as common grace. It is an unmerited gift that enables wicked people to live rightly and receive earthly, though not eternal, blessings. It enables some of the fallen to nonetheless "develop many virtues and express many truths."<sup>21</sup>

Such right standing in this life does not equate with right standing in the next. God's particular grace in Jesus Christ provides the only way to attain right standing before God. It is the most complete manifestation of God's redemption in this world, allowing persons to find communion with God through Christ and His forgiveness of our sins.

As already mentioned, what the Reformed tradition would call common grace is different. Common grace allows for there to be institutions such as governments which might act on behalf of the welfare of persons. So whereas complete redemption and restoration is not possible in this life and is only realized through Christ's work on human behalf, humans still should be agents of earthly and temporal renewal, even as they long for the complete harmony, glory, and renewal that will only come in our eternity in heaven.

20 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997, 540, paragraph 2240. It reads, "Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country." The Catechism then quotes Romans 13:7, "Pay to all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." It also quotes *Ad Diognetum* 5, 5 and 10; and 6, 10 as found within the *Patrologia Graeca* 2, 1173 and 1176. "[Christians] reside in their own nations, but as resident aliens. They participate in all things as citizens and endure all things as foreigners.... They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws.... So noble is the position to which God has assigned them that they are not allowed to desert it." Finally, it quotes 1 Timothy 2:2, "The Apostle exhorts us to offer prayers and thanksgiving for kings and all who exercise authority, 'that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.'"

21 Smidt, Corwin. "Principled Pluralist Perspective." *Church, State, and Public Justice: Five Views*. Ed., P.C. Kemeny. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007, 131.

Government is thus a good gift from God that, along with other fundamental societal institutions such as schools, churches, families, businesses, and workforces, can be an agent of transformation. Because God instituted government, obedience to government is an expression of obedience to God. The counter of this is therefore true as well. “To despise human government is to despise the providence which set that government in place.”<sup>22</sup> Christians are called to engage the world in all its dimensions, to spread the transforming power of the gospel into each area of life, and to let the light of Christ shine more and more brightly in society at large.

From this theological perspective, it follows that the Church can advocate explicitly for beliefs and policies in the public realm, with the recognition that success cannot be forced or guaranteed. Followers of Jesus can and should love all people in all places while fully realizing that only the cross of Christ has the power to save. Government should promote justice and the common good, but Christians should have tempered expectations of what government can and cannot do. Ultimately our hope rests in Christ.

## Political Thought of the Black Church

In the middle of our spectrum stands what I will broadly call the Black Church. Unlike the other traditions I will briefly review, the Black Church is distinctly American. Transcending common denominational boundaries, this tradition is rooted in the response of African-American Christians to their tumultuous and often tragic history. For much of the American past, whites sought to dominate all aspects of black lives, including their religious practice. Intentional or not, and with the systemic racism that is still often seen it is hard to ignore that some intentionality has existed, the marginalization of African-Americans has been a sad and ongoing legacy in this country. Out of such oppression rose the black denominations, the Black Church, creating safe spaces for African-Americans to worship freely and independently.

Because of the complexity of their history, I have placed the Black Church at the middle of this review. The historical experiences of African-Americans have indelibly shaped how they view the Church, the State, and the broader society. Having

faced great oppression while also bearing distinctive and powerful witness to some liberation, the Black Church tradition is well aware of the potential benefits and yet frequent shortfalls of governmental action.

In Black Church tradition, as with other traditions that might generally be linked to Liberation Theology, at the center of the faith stands the cross. It is a reminder that we must view whatever suffering we endure in light of the One who faced the greatest suffering of all on our behalf, and who through His suffering freed us from the power of sin. With the harsh realities of life in mind, covered by the shadow of the cross, the Black Church emphasizes God’s particular heart for the marginalized, the downcast, the lost, and the least. Recognizing the sin and suffering that permeates people and institutions around the world, this tradition often seeks to speak truth to power with a prophetic voice.

It may be said, then, that the goal of the Black Church in politics and in all of life is the relentless pursuit of liberation, justice, and reconciliation. Within such a focus there is a mixed view on the role of the State. On the one hand, the Black Church emphasizes the positive and constructive role that government can play in serving justice, in seeking the good of all people, and in promoting reform and reconciliation. And yet on the other hand the Black Church is acutely aware that power can be a means of oppression, for most of the persons within this tradition have experienced such oppression in one form or another firsthand.

These racial and cultural challenges have led the Black Church to tend to view the Church and the State not so much in an individual sense but rather as communal endeavors. The eternal, abundant life that God desires for all His children is something that everyone must play a part in bringing about and realizing. So, the Church must seek holistic justice as a community within the community and serve as a voice for peace. This means calling attention to institutional wrongdoing and systemic sins, especially evidenced in racism, and seeking the transformation of social and political institutions. And yet for corporate changes to be made to address corporate sins there often must be structural adjustments. These often only happen through legislative and political means. This is where the Church acts as a voice for communal reform, calling on the State to do its part in working for the betterment of all persons.

In 1972 Larry Norman released the song *The Great American Novel*. My favorite line among the many powerful lyrics, lack of gender inclusivity notwithstanding, is toward the end. “You say all men are equal, all men are brothers. Then why are the rich more equal than others?”<sup>23</sup> The Black Church has asked this question for years.

In its work to apply the leveling aspect of the gospel to the messy places of human life and associations, the Black Church advocates on behalf of the poor and marginalized with the hope that redemption and reconciliation can be accomplished by God’s grace. In this way we might say that the Black Church is less politically engaged in a comprehensive way than the Reformed or Catholic traditions, and certainly less optimistic about the role of the State. And yet, as we will now discuss, it is more active than what is found in the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions. In all things, the Black Church places her ultimate hope in the eternal Kingdom of God, where all things will be made right, the rough places made smooth, and where peace and justice will ultimately reign.

## Lutheran Political Thought

The Lutheran tradition comes to us largely (but not exclusively) from the teachings of Martin Luther. Some of the essential elements of Lutheranism are justification by faith alone, the reality of human sinfulness, the significance of Scripture and the sacraments, the “two-kingdom doctrine,” and human vocation.

Lutherans believe that God has chosen to rule earthly kingdoms through laws and principles that can be rightly regulated through the State. The State can effect change within society, but it cannot redeem sinful hearts. No amount of human effort can ever do that. The good that is done, then, is not done to merit salvation but rather as a response to God’s gratuitous love. This is important, for there is great danger in conflating these two systems, that which is of the world (the kingdom of creation) and that which is of God (the kingdom of redemption). If not careful, people can look to observance of the law as a means to salvation, turning God’s love into an ethical norm or a standard by which we must achieve some level of merit.

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23 The entire song says:  
I was born and raised an orphan in a land that once was free  
In a land that poured its love out on the moon;  
And I grew up in the shadows of your silos filled with grain,  
But you never helped to fill my empty spoon.  
And when I was ten you murdered law with courtroom politics,  
And you learned to make a lie sound just like truth;  
But I know you better now and I don’t fall for all your tricks,  
And you’ve lost the one advantage of my youth.  
You kill a black man at midnight just for talking to your daughter,  
Then you make his wife your mistress and you leave her without water;  
And the sheet you wear upon your face is the sheet your children sleep on,  
At every meal you say a prayer; you don’t believe but still you keep on.  
And your money says in God we trust,  
But it’s against the law to pray in school;  
You say we beat the Russians to the moon,  
And I say you starved your children to do it.  
You are far across the ocean but the war is not your own,  
And while you’re winning theirs, you’re gonna’ lose the one at home;  
Do you really think the only way to bring about the peace  
Is to sacrifice your children and kill all your enemies?  
The politicians all make speeches while the news men all take note,  
And they exaggerate the issues as they shove them down our throats;  
Is it really up to them whether this country sinks or floats?  
Well I wonder who would lead us if none of us would vote.  
Well my phone is tapped and my lips are chapped from whispering through the fence,  
You know every move I make, or is that just coincidence?  
Well you try to make my way of life a little less like jail,  
If I promise to make tapes and slides and send them through the mail.  
And your money says in God we trust,  
But it’s against the law to pray in school;  
You say we beat the Russians to the moon,  
And I say you starved your children to do it.  
You say all men are equal, all men are brothers,  
Then why are the rich more equal than others?  
Don’t ask me for the answer, I’ve only got one:  
That a man leaves his darkness when he follows the Son.

Sin entered the world at the fall, with the result that all people have sinned. The State was brought about in part because of the effects of the fall. However, according to Lutheran tradition one of the functions of the State is the God-ordained purpose of protecting its citizenry, seeking justice, and resisting and restraining evil. This means that the State may at times have a legitimate reason to use force. It further means that Christians can participate in governmental functions because the State is the means by which God governs this fallen world. Helping the State effectively punish wickedness and pursue justice is a way that followers of Christ can fulfill their call to love their neighbors.

The Church, though, stands apart from this. It is called to maintain its focus not on the temporal and limited power of social or cultural transformation but rather the gospel of redemption proclaimed through the Word declared and the sacraments administered. This is where ultimate human hope should be found. And because of this, the Lutheran Church often refrains from direct involvement in politics, focusing instead upon instruction and shaping persons to serve other persons well, out of love. The power and presence of Christ within a believer will influence and guide their activities and actions in the workplace and in society wherever one goes. No State realm can escape the influence of the gospel on the lives of Christians, marked by the Church.

This is the thrust of the two-kingdoms, or two-governments, doctrine. Luther wrote: God has ordained the two governments: the spiritual which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians and pious people; and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they are obliged to keep the peace outwardly.... The laws of worldly government extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth. For over the soul God can and will let no one rule but himself. Therefore, where temporal power presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads and destroys souls. We desire to make this so clear that every one shall grasp it, and that the princes and bishops may see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing one thing or another.<sup>24</sup>

The Lutheran doctrine of vocation balances

the call to follow God as informed by the Church and to serve God in the realms overseen by the State. It places importance on any occupation, activity, or sphere of life. Since some of the faithful are called to share the Church's social concerns with the world and "translate the concerns of God's Word into arguments appropriate for civil government,"<sup>25</sup> Christians are able both to act in partnership with non-Christians and to disagree on political matters with other believers.

## Anabaptist Political Thought

If Roman Catholicism is at one end of our Church-State spectrum, the Anabaptist tradition is at the other. It arose in the sixteenth century in Switzerland. Many modern Baptist groups, a different movement than the Anabaptist tradition, have their roots in seventeenth century English Puritanism and Separatism.<sup>26</sup> The two largest Baptist traditions that emerged from England, the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, differed over their views of the atonement but held many things in common, including believers' baptism, congregational independence and autonomy, and religious freedom. Both also tended to emphasize the individual. And though the earlier Anabaptist tradition certainly influenced these Baptist churches, the two traditions are quite distinct.

When in the 1500s a group of "Radical Reformers" such as Menno Simons spoke against the infant baptism characteristic of churches at the time, teaching that baptism instead ought to be reserved for adult believers, they found themselves under increasing scrutiny and persecution. Many of the early Anabaptists endured intense suffering, including even execution, because of their beliefs. As a result, much of Anabaptist teaching focused on the role of the community, both for personal preservation and for the promulgation of the gospel.

This gospel is best exemplified in the person, life, and teachings of Jesus, and is expressed most fully in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 – 7. Jesus taught quite clearly that we ought to prioritize forgiveness and extend grace, even and especially to the point of turning the other cheek when persecuted and not just praying for but loving our enemies. He personified this by rejecting the violent tendencies

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Sockness, Brent W. "Luther's Two Kingdoms Revisited." *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2002. 20 (1): 93.

<sup>25</sup> "Render unto Caesar... and unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State." *A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1995, 67.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Buschart, W. David. *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

of the zealots, by refusing to give a defense or make a resistance at His own trial and death, and by willingly, as Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 say, to give His life as a ransom for many.

Because of this compelling example in Christ, Anabaptists take a posture of nonviolence. They do not endorse the use of lethal force or coercion in any circumstance, be it by the hands of an individual or the State. This extends even to the rejection of violence for self-defense, recognizing that such a pacifist approach to life can lead to suffering and pain. But that's okay. As Werner Packull has stated, "For Anabaptists, nonresistance was not a calculated survival strategy but a principle of Christian life and conduct; an assumed nonpolitical kingdom ethic revealed by Christ."<sup>27</sup> Much of what the State does in defense of its citizenry or in punishment of those who violate its laws is tainted by violence, and as such Anabaptists have an uneasy relationship with politics. It's not that they are opposed to participating in the good that the State often does. It's that close affiliation with the State may result in a believer having to engage in activities, particularly violent activities, which go against the Anabaptist belief and tradition. So, Anabaptist political thought strongly affirms that the Church should lead the way in modeling the actions of Jesus. This then leads many to separation from the work of the State because of its frequently coercive power and non-Christlike behavior, leading the Christian to abstain from government interaction such as serving in the military, running for public office, or taking public oaths.<sup>28</sup>

Many, but not all. Some Anabaptists make concession for some forms of political involvement, expecting that Christian presuppositions will shape all political interactions and believers will oppose violence in every form. They realize that this stance is unlikely to lead to political success, and they grapple with the fact that nonviolence could entail greater opposition. Through all these actions, they point to the witness of Jesus, who suffered and calls His followers to do the same.

Instead of looking to the government as an agent of change, Anabaptist thought emphasizes the centrality of the Church and her call to serve as an alternative community that embodies the truths of the gospel. The Church should not seek to influence the

broad social and political realms as much as it should be a distinctive social ethic that prefigures the Kingdom of God in all its Christ-like particularity. Thus, the Church simply cannot engage in politics or in violence on the world's terms. Love of God and neighbor must permeate every Christian and Church in every context. This requires a countercultural voice and a unified community that lives in light of Jesus' radical commands.

## Common Themes

In looking at these five traditions within Christianity and how they might inform our conversations about Free Methodism and its view of Church and State relations, some common themes emerge.

First, all stress the centrality of the Church and its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though the traditions may differ in how this is communicated, all share the common goal of building and living in the Kingdom of God. Anabaptists may look to the Church, set apart as a witness to the outside world, as the community of disciples and discipleship. The Reformed and Catholic traditions, on the other hand, tend to hold a broader view of the role of the Church in society, seeking to transform law and culture with the love and grace of God. Again, how the gospel is lived out may look different from one Church to another. But that all see the gospel as ultimately transformative and the core of the Christian's identity and life is clear. Second, each understands the importance of the State in society. Governing institutions have temporal power to further the common good. Sadly, they also can hinder and oppress. So, whereas some Churches hold the State to be an instrument of positivity and growth in civil society, each wrestle to varying degrees on how to guide, limit, or control the power and influence of the State.

Third, each tradition believes that freedom must be allowed to flourish in a civil society. But again, how this looks and operates varies. The Catholic understanding of subsidiarity allows each small group to best determine how to impact and influence those around it. It's not that different from the Kuyperian notion of sphere sovereignty, which is based on the

<sup>27</sup> Packull, Werner O. "An Introduction to Anabaptist Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David V. N. Bagchi and David Curtis Steinmetz. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, 209.

<sup>28</sup> See Stassen, Glen H. "Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36, no. 4 (October 1962): 34f.

idea that every part of human life exists equally and directly *coram Deo*, “before the face of God.” Each sphere, then, is distinct and autonomous, is sovereign, and necessitates a separation from other spheres when it comes to how it chooses to best function in society. The Church and the State, in Kuyper’s notion, are by definition unrelated and separated from one another.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the degree of overlap and influence, all traditions agree that communities of faith, families, schools, and other important civil and religious institutions play essential roles in society and deserve protection.

Fourth, each tradition expresses great concern to cultivate virtue in persons and to work toward creating a more virtuous society. How virtue is defined and accessed might vary. Is it revealed only through Scripture? Can it be perceived through the natural law? Despite these significant differences all the Church traditions we’ve explored agree that God is the source of all virtue and that virtue is essential for human flourishing.

## Personal Conclusions

I hope the broad-brush strokes with which I’ve attempted to paint a picture of Church and State relations has brought some direction to a conversation about what the Free Methodist Church might say. As I have limited myself to a scant overview of some historic Christian traditions, I think deeper Scriptural analysis is warranted.

For in many ways I think questions about Church and State cannot be separated from questions about eschatology and our understanding of the Kingdom of God. In Luke 17:21 Jesus clearly says that God’s Kingdom is already among us. In both Matthew 3:2 and 4:17 He says that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. It’s here. And since Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God with great frequency, it’s important to understand what He means by it. My experience as a pastor has been that many Christians have made the Kingdom of heaven, or what is too often shortened to simply “heaven”, the result of a system of rewards for the faithful few. The reign of God is something that will clearly only happen in the next life, so salvation is

reduced to little more than, as Brian McLaren has called it, an “evacuation plan” into another world.<sup>30</sup>

One result of this thinking is that people have principles instead of God.<sup>31</sup> But my understanding, and indeed, the understanding of each of the traditions I’ve highlighted in this paper, is that God wants to give us God’s-self, not just good ideas and laws. It’s about a relationship, not just the rules. It’s about transformation into the likeness of Christ, every bit as much as it’s about the beginning of that process when we recognize we are justified by Christ. For salvation isn’t just forgiveness. It’s redemption and renewal.

This means we change our loyalties from power and success and money and ego to the imitation of our God, in whose Kingdom servanthood and surrender and simplicity reign. And this is where the State and the Church necessarily come into conflict with one another. The goals are different.

Last night<sup>32</sup> President Trump gave his first State of the Union Address. I don’t recall how many times he used his catch-phrase “make America great again” or “America first.” After reminding the assembled guests of his action just months ago to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, he said, “Shortly afterwards, dozens of countries voted in the United Nations General Assembly against America’s sovereign right to make this decision. In 2016, American taxpayers generously sent those same countries more than \$20 billion in aid. That is why tonight I am asking the Congress to pass legislation to help ensure American foreign-assistance dollars always serve American interests, and only go to friends of America, not enemies of America.”<sup>33</sup>

This is what the State does. It puts its own interests first. It makes sense to say such things in a State of the Union Address. But such an inward focus, highlighting our country’s power or wealth or might or greatness, can sound not just politically but even theologically appealing to many persons who view an Almighty and Omnipotent God in the same way. Vulnerability and humility are not often seen as attributes of our Sovereign Lord. The history of Christianity’s role in affirming oppression and violence in the name of its own interests and rightness and power bears this out.

I would argue that whenever we echo John the Revelator in Revelation 22:20 and say, “Come, Lord Jesus” or confess with the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that “Jesus is Lord” we are actually announcing our commitment

<sup>29</sup> For more information on sphere sovereignty, see Domenico, Roy P. *Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Politics*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006, page 102.

<sup>30</sup> McLaren, Brian. *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?: Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*. New York, NY: Jericho Books, 2013, 211.

<sup>31</sup> I was first struck by this thought by reading Frederick Beuchner’s *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973, 73.

<sup>32</sup> January 30, 2018

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-state-of-the-union-2018-full-transcript-latest-immigration-fact-check-congress-a8186516.html> (accessed on January 31, 2018).

to an upside-down kind of world where “the last are first and the first are last.”<sup>34</sup> If Jesus is Lord, it means that Caesar is not. If Jesus is Lord, it means that the Stock Market is not. If Jesus is Lord, it means that my career or my home or any of my earthly possession are not. If Jesus is Lord, it most certainly means that I am not.

For a first-century person in the Roman Empire the implications of such a statement were obvious. “Caesar is Lord” was the shibboleth for loyalty to Rome. The earliest Christians essentially changed their political allegiance when they welcomed Jesus as Lord and Savior instead of the Roman emperor. If nothing else, the Free Methodist Church does well to continue to proclaim that our ultimate hope is in God, not any action of any institution of the State. Our hope is in Christ and His grace freely given, not our political party and the laws passed or mandates overturned. And so, no matter what the State may do, the Church will continue to seek to be led by the Spirit of God, living and being the Body of Christ on earth.

Writing in the third century, Cyprian of Carthage first used the phrase *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, “there is no salvation outside of the Church.” Ecclesiastical and soteriological nuances aside, we believe this to be true. Salvation is not found through the State. Our life may be in it. But our eternal life is born out of the Church.

G. K. Chesterton wrote, “It is merely that when a man [sic] has found something which he prefers to life itself, he then for the first time begins to live.”<sup>35</sup> Everyone is searching for something to surrender to, something that can give our life meaning, for Someone who can fill us with hope and with purpose in this life and into the next. The great wonder of our faith is that we can surrender to God and not lose ourselves. We deny ourselves. But in so doing we actually find our true selves, our true life. This means we can be in the world, though we are not of it. We can be formed in the Church and make a difference in the State. How we bring both realms together in the Kingdom of God among us is the challenge facing us all.

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34 Matthew 20:16

35 Chesterton, G.K. *Wit and Wisdom of G. K. Chesterton*. London: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1911, 188.



# Honoring God's Covenant: Caring for the Earth

Howard A. Snyder, Ph.D.

# Honoring God's Covenant: Caring for the Earth

Howard A. Snyder

## Introduction:

God has an everlasting covenant with His earth, as well as with His people. Since we humans are God's stewards on earth, called to care for the garden (Genesis 2:15), God's earth covenant is our stewardship commission. This is particularly true for Free Methodists, called to "maintain the Bible standard of Christianity."

## God's Covenants with the Earth

The Lord God brings salvation to earth through a series of revealed covenants, culminating in the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. The first of these covenants, following humanity's fall into sin and after the flood, is revealed in Genesis 9.

## God's Earth Covenant

God says to Noah after the flood, "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" (Genesis 9:9-10). God makes it clear that this covenant is "with every living creature" and is "for all generations." It is in fact an "everlasting covenant" — true and to be observed throughout all history. God calls this simply His "covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:12-16).

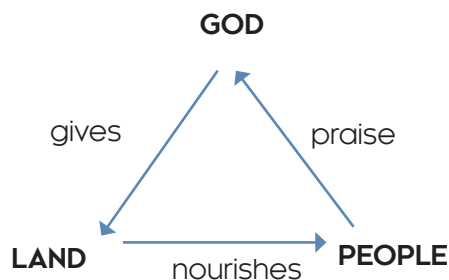
All covenants have a *sign*. Here the sign is the rainbow.

Through His covenant with earth, God acts to *preserve* the earth. The Lord God limits His judgment (the flood) so He can fulfill larger purposes. Here we see the ever-present biblical focus on God's concern for people and also the land, the environment we inhabit — the earth God has given us to enjoy and care for, helping it to flourish. Thus, the Bible shows that God's plan is to save people *with* their environment, not *out of* their environment.

The rainbow is God's cupped hand over the earth. It shines forth His care and concern for the world and its creatures. God sees the rainbow — and *remembers* His covenant (Genesis 9:14-16). We, His people, should to the same. Enjoying the rainbow, we should recall God's covenant with all His creatures.

As Israel was about to enter the promised land, Moses charged them: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given

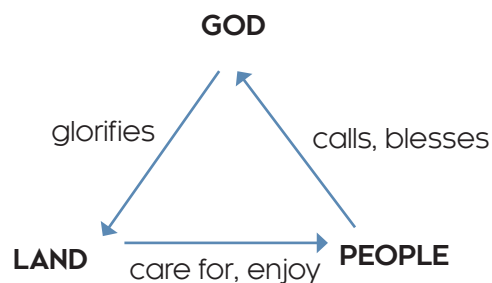
you" (Deuteronomy 8:10 TNIV). This short verse holds all the seeds of the biblical understanding of comprehensive, integral mission. It speaks of three realities: God, the people, and the land, showing their proper relationship:



The story in Deuteronomy, and in fact throughout the Bible, is the story of *God, people, and the earth*. It is the story of God's action through a chosen people to restore harmony to creation by their being a blessing to all earth's peoples (Genesis 12:3). This is the larger narrative behind Deuteronomy 8:10. It echoes the Genesis 9 covenant.

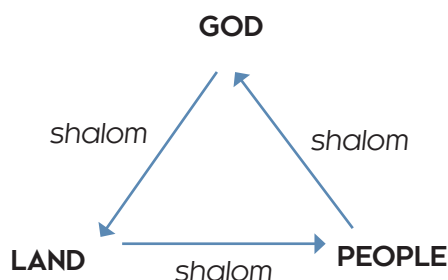
Here is the truth: (1) God *gives the land* to the people; (2) the land *provides food for* and nourishes the people; and (3) the people *praise* or worship the Lord. These actions form a perfect triangle — the relationship God intends between Himself, His people, and His land.

In other passages the arrows are reversed. God forms and blesses His people; the people are to enjoy and faithfully care for the land (Leviticus 25); and the land shows forth the glory of God (Psalm 19:1):



Here is *the God-intended relationship between Yahweh, His people, and the land*. Since in Hebrew "land" and "earth" are the same word, this is actually a picture of the God-intended relationship between God, humankind, and the entire created order. This is the relationship God intends but that has been disrupted by sin.

Through Israel, God begins a plan to restore creation. God intends *shalom* — harmonious, reconciled interrelationship between Himself, His people, and the land. So, the arrows actually point both ways, a perfect ecology:



In the biblical narrative, God creates “the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1); God places humans on the earth; and God plants a garden for the enjoyment and sustenance of community. (This God — People — Land covenantal relationship is elaborated fully in *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, by Howard Snyder with Joel Scandrett.)

## The Joy of Creation Care

Underlying all of Scripture is a joyful truth: Tend the garden and be blessed! The joy of mission. (See Deuteronomy 28 with its blessings and curses to grasp the larger picture.)

Jesus-centered mission is not holistic if creation care is not woven into its very DNA. Biblically speaking, God’s redemptive plan involves His whole creation, not just the human part. For in Jesus Christ “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19-20). Beginning in Genesis, we see that God’s covenant has always involved the earth as well people. Therefore, *if it doesn’t include the land, it’s not the whole gospel*.

This theme has special resonance for Wesleyan Christians. Wesley emphasized “the wisdom of God in creation” and the Book of Nature (Creation). His persistent focus on “justice, mercy, and truth” and “all inward and outward holiness” embraces earth and all its creatures, nonhuman as well as human. Birds, trees, flowers, rivers, fungi — the whole wondrous web of life.

John Wesley’s accent on love for God and neighbor means loving all that God has made (including the created order) and everything that impinges on human well-being (as the health of the environment surely does). Wesley vigorously opposed slavery. Today, concerned Free Methodists want to abolish the bondage of earth and its creatures to exploiting human masters.

Free Methodists stand in the long line of faithful disciples, evangelists, and reformers who have sought to be fully faithful to God’s covenants. B. T. Roberts — a farmer as well as church leader—took up the cause of justice as a founder of the Farmers’ Alliance (*Populist Saints*, Chapter

35). He opposed slavery and advocated for women’s rights. He and his wife Ellen were deeply concerned with social and economic justice. They cared carefully and successfully for their farm in North Chili, New York (now the Roberts Wesleyan College campus).

This is what *creation care* meant then. Today creation care means honoring God’s “everlasting covenant” with the earth by giving witness to the Good News of Jesus through faithful, intelligent creation care. One example is Free Methodist Steve Fitch, who embodies the best of FM witness in this area through Eden Reforestation — now a flourishing global movement that honors God’s earth covenant, showing that earth care is a life and death matter.

## Five Key Reasons for Creation Care

At least half a dozen biblical themes ground the mandate for creation care. The Bible plan of salvation is one of peace, *shalom*. In the Bible, *shalom* is a deeply ecological concept, linking people and their social and physical context. The biblical theology of land, from the Old Testament to the New, “grounds” (literally) salvation in God’s plan for the whole earth. The theme of the earth as God’s habitation implies human respect for and care of nature. The key biblical theme of justice and righteousness — the principal basis for a kingdom of God ethic — rules out harmful exploitation of the land. The incarnation and servanthood of Jesus Christ show what it means to live righteous and godly lives physically, on earth. The biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of the church as charismatic underscores the role of the Spirit in both creation and the renewal of creation (Psalm 104:30).

The doctrine of the Trinity itself is rich in ecological insights, for it implies mutual interdependence and self-giving on behalf of the other rather than self-centered dominance or exploitation. The created order is the way it is because of the way God is. Earth’s unity and diversity reflect in some sense the diversity-within-unity that is the Trinity.

Creation care is thus grounded in God’s character, in Scripture from the beginning, and in the Good News we proclaim. *Everything in the gospel, in the kingdom, becomes clearer once we see it in through the lens of creation and the promised new creation.*

Here are five compelling reasons for Free Methodists to join joyfully in the ministry of creation care:

## 1. Creation care for God's sake.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). God created the universe to glorify himself and to assist the human creation in praising him. We are to praise God through, and also because of, his beautiful but complex world.

The primary reason for faithful creation care is that caring for God's world is a fundamental way we glorify God. We glorify God by the proper stewardship of the world He has made. We care for the environment for God's sake.

## 2. Creation care for our own sake — for human well-being.

We care for creation as if our life depended on it — because it does.

We often forget how dependent we are upon the physical environment — "a few hundred yards of atmosphere and a few inches of topsoil." We are mostly unaware of our actual dependence. But then come hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, droughts, fires, or volcanic eruptions. We relearn our vulnerability.

But we are no less vulnerable when the sun is shining, flowers are blooming, and birds singing. We are just less aware. Here environmental science helps us.

If we are passionate about people, we will be passionate about their environment.

The key fact is ecological interdependence. If we care about people, we will care for the land and air and multiplied species on which our well-being depends.

## 3. Creation care for creation's sake.

We should care for the created order because it has its own God-given right to flourish. The world after all is *God's* handiwork. God created the universe for His good purposes, *not all of which are yet known to us*. We need a certain eschatological humility and reserve.

In great measure, God's other creatures depend on us for their well-being and survival.

Since all living creatures reflect God's glory and have a place in God's plan, they are part of legitimate Christian concern. If God cares for and about the creatures, so should we.

## 4. Creation care for the sake of mission.

Another major reason faithful Jesus-followers are passionate about creation care is because it's essential for effective mission. The biblical doctrine of creation assures us that

integral mission necessarily includes the church's mission to and on behalf of the earth.

The argument is both theological and strategic. Theological, because a fully biblical view of mission necessarily includes creation care. But it is also strategic and pragmatic. We want people of all nations and cultures to come to faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Therefore, we should proclaim and demonstrate that Jesus is the renewer of the whole creation, the whole face of the earth. Salvation is that big.

## 5. Creation care for our children's sake.

Finally, a persuasive motive for creation care today is our children and grandchildren. Our unborn descendants. As Scripture teaches, we have a responsibility — a stewardship — on behalf of generations yet to come.

Today we may look back at Christian slaveholders in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and ask, How could they not see that slavery was incompatible with the gospel? What did they think they were doing?

Our grandchildren, as they wrestle with ecological disasters, will look back on this generation and ask: Why could they not see the Christian responsibility for earth stewardship? Why did they wait so long? What did they think they were doing when they failed to defend the forests and the seas and to protect earth's endangered species? Did they not understand what they were doing to their own future flesh and blood?

We hope that our children and grandchildren will know and serve Jesus Christ; we hope also that they will inherit a world that is not choked and poisoned by pollution or made uninhabitable by environmental disasters. If that is our hope, the time for action is now and ongoing.

We should treat future generations the way we would want to be treated.

## Five Practical Steps we Endorse Regarding Creation Care

The Holy Spirit gives a wide variety of gifts to his church. Part of ministry is helping people find and use their gifts. Within local churches, Jesus often raises up one or two or a few with a passion for earth stewardship who can inspire the church to engage practically in creation care.

Earth stewardship can take many forms. Some practical ones include:

1. *Include the earth, and creation care, in the church's teaching, preaching, and Sunday School curriculum.* Good, sound material is now available from (for example) the Evangelical Environmental Network. And, above all, the Bible.

2. *Make church property a visible sign of earth stewardship.* This may include solar panels on church buildings or harnessing wind power. Especially, it means tree planting. Trees give life, oxygen. Planting trees *appropriate to the environment* is both a witness and an actual contribution to earth's health.

3. *Include creation (the Book of Nature) in our spiritual disciplines.* This includes prayer, Scripture (noting the hundreds of references to *land* in the Bible, for instance), recycling, and outdoor walks. Enjoying God's beautiful creation is a cure to "nature-deficit disorder."

4. *Start a mission group* in the church to study and respond to creation-care challenges locally and globally.

5. *Support civic efforts to care for the physical environment.* This can take many forms. For instance, supporting public officials who effectively address creation care.

(See *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, pages 200-03, for additional ideas.)

## Recommended Strategic Resources

*Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment*, by Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas (Bethany House, 2016).

Evangelical Environmental Network website.

*Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists*, by Howard A. Snyder (Eerdmans, 2006), especially Chapter 35.

*Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace*, by Howard A. Snyder with Joel Scandrett (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2011).

*Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says about the Environment and Why It Matters*, by Sandra Richter (InterVarsity, 2020).

"Was Wesley an Environmentalist?" Chapter 4 in Howard A. Snyder, *Yes In Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission, and Culture* (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2011).

## The Ten Commandments Are Ecological

Since the story of salvation in the Bible is the story of God, God's people, and God's land, one would expect that every one of God's commands would have something to do with land, directly or indirectly.

Look carefully at the Ten Commandments, and you will see that this is in fact true. Well before the Ten Commandments were given, God's people were told to care for the land, with which God has established covenant (Genesis 2:15, 9:8-17).

When God's people fail to care for the land, they

actually break every one of the Ten Commandments. For all God's commands touch the land in one way or another.

## Ecology of God's Commands

God says, "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3). But when we despoil the creation we are not honoring God; we are putting our own selfishness and comfort before God the Creator and His intentions for the creation.

God says, "*You shall not make for yourself an idol*" (Exodus 20:4). When we fail to care for God's creatures, we make an idol of ourselves. We put ourselves ahead of God and His glory and mission.

God says, "*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God*" (Exodus 20). When people profess to be God's people, yet mistreat the earth and claim to own the land, they misuse the name of the Lord who says, "The earth is mine, and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1).

God says, "*Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy*" (Exodus 20:8). The sabbath principle is rest, acknowledging God as sovereign provider. God says the land must be allowed to rest, to rejuvenate itself; to be properly cared for. "The land will rest, and enjoy its sabbath years" (Leviticus 26:34). If not, God promises judgment. Exploiting the land is one of the ways we fail to keep sabbath and so break the fourth commandment.

God says, "*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land*" (Exodus 20:12). God's economy ties together the honoring of family relationships and peaceful living in the land. Since our parents (and all future generations) depend on the land, we dishonor our father and mother if we exploit the land. More and more we are coming to understand today how interlaced the welfare of people and the land are. If one suffers, the other suffers.

God says, "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:13). We are to nurture the life of others, not destroy it. Yet, we now know that polluting the climate raises the death toll, especially among the poor. Environmental exploitation and death are linked at multiple levels. Creation care is pro-life from conception to end of life.

## Ecological Adultery

God says, "*You shall not commit adultery*" (Exodus 20:14). Adultery springs from lust for someone or something that does not properly belong to us; it leads us to break faith with those to whom we have promised to be faithful — thus dishonoring God. So, the Bible speaks much of spiritual adultery and prostitution. God's original intention was that we would be stewards and caretakers of the land, the land we were placed in to "husband." But our lust to serve ourselves has led us to abandon the land. Failure to nurture the land is ecological adultery.

God says, “*You shall not steal*” (Exodus 20:15). Spoiling the land steals from God, who owns the land, and from the poor, to whom God gives special rights to the land and its produce (Leviticus 19:10, 23:22).

God says, “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*” (Exodus 20:16). But when we blame others, not ourselves, for the spoiling of creation (blaming politicians, for instance, or environmentalists, or other countries, or even God’s will or providence) we bear false witness. We ignore our environmental interdependence and co-responsibility. If we say we have no clear God-given responsibility for local and global creation care, we bear false witness against God’s Word.

God says, “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor*” (Exodus 20:17). The Lord tells us to practice mutual respect, especially with regard to those things that properly “belong” to us as God’s creatures. The earth does not belong to us, but the right to the proper enjoyment of the land and its beauty and bounty does. This right belongs to the whole human family — certainly not just to ourselves or our family or nation or religion. Creation care means not coveting the land or the economic advantages or profits of others.

If we consider the ecological setting of the Ten Commandments, we see how our intentional actions as well as our unthinking habits actually defy God’s Word. Loving God and keeping his commandments (Dt. 7:9) means not putting our conveniences and customs and politics ahead of following God’s way. If we spoil creation and multiply its groaning, we daily break God’s Word.

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# On Christian **Nationalism**

Edward Song, Ph.D.

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### Nationalism as a Political Ideology

Nationalism refers to an amorphous political ideology or set of political movements that holds that political sovereignty ought to be identified with a specific nation. Nations are to be understood as specific people groups that self-identify with each other on the basis of history, ethnic identity, race, culture, or ethos. As a political ideology expressing some set of political ideals, nationalism is amorphous precisely because its values will vary depending upon the ethos of the underlying nation. So, any specific instance of nationalism cannot be expected to advocate for any stable set of political values. A particular nation might be multi-ethnic or liberal democratic. Equally, it could be limited to specific members of a race, ethnic group, tribe, religion, or constructed community, and very much opposed to liberal political values. In some instances, nationalist sentiment arises as a means for minority ethnic groups to achieve some degree of political sovereignty or protection in the face of political disenfranchisement or discrimination. Equally, national identity can be a tool for majority groups to oppress distinct ethnic groups within a state's borders. If nationalism expresses any general normative conception of the political order it is one that prioritizes the nation or political community over all other ends. It "elevates the nation-state to a place of primacy—one that transcends class, kinship, or regional affiliations in commanding popular loyalty."<sup>1</sup> The national community and identity become the ends to which every other aspect of the state is meant to serve.

It goes without saying that national identity, community, political solidarity, unity, shared values and traditions are goods worthy of being affirmed. But nationalism as a political phenomenon tends to engender suspicion for there are all too many instances in which national identity becomes a tool manipulated by the state to serve specific political ends. As Hans Kohn notes, nationalism tends to imbue loyalty to the state with a certain religious fervor<sup>2</sup> and in this way national

identity becomes an overriding value. Nationalist movements are often associated with their willingness to use violence as a tool of political self-determination. Nationalism movements often use racial or ethnic identification as a standard of membership, and see the presence of any kind of group outside of the self-defined national community as being a threat to its existence.

Indeed, national identity itself is a source of political manipulation. As Benedict Anderson argues nations as we now understand them are "imagined communities," that arise only after the advent of "print capitalism" and the capacity to institute shared vernacular language across regions that had formerly identified with smaller families or tribes. Nations are in this way, deliberate social constructions, often manufactured by political elites for their own ends.

Religion as a marker of communal identity often plays a role in the construction of national identity, and is an important casualty as political elites exploit religious affiliation for the sake of political ends. In this way, religious convictions, beliefs, practices and values often get manipulated for the sake of the construction of some overarching national identity for the sake of some political movement. Religious identity plays an important role in nationalist movements around the globe. A striking characteristic of the religious in such political movements is the distortion that occurs of their more traditional religious practice in service of these political ends. Religious adherents in such political movements often do not exhibit the signs of traditional religious piety or religious conviction, as the symbols and commitments get watered down into markers of national identity.

### Christian Nationalism in the United States

All of these dynamics of national political identity have been at play in the United States from the beginning. The Pilgrim settlers that left England are a deep part of our national imagination and myth. They themselves represented a homogenous religious community that quickly established a community that mixed religious identification with the political life. More generally, this founding American political mythologizing grew

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kupchan, "Introduction: Nationalism Resurgent," in *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe*, ed. Charles A. Kupchan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, p. 4.

into a national narrative that mixed Christian religious concepts and identification into part of the story of the American founding. Many insist that the United States was founded not only as a Christian nation, but as one that has covenanted with God in much the same way that God had covenanted with Israel. In this way, the Christian identity of the country needs to be protected lest God punish the United States in much the same way that Israel was punished for its own idolatry. The United States is exceptional among all nations because it is the primary vehicle in which God will achieve his plans. In this way Christian national identity takes on eschatological significance. Because of this, virtually no means is ruled out in achieving this end. Violence is regularly a feature of much Christian nationalist political activity, either symbolically, linguistically, and more recently, literally. And as in other nationalist movements around the globe, traditional religious belief is actually the first casualty when religious conviction gets turned towards political ends. Christian religious identity gets highly selective and narrow. Adherents to such political movements often show little theological sophistication, and the traditional markers of religious piety are often very much in short supply.

In a recent study of contemporary American Christian Nationalism, Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry define Christian nationalism as “a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life.”<sup>3</sup> This fusion is one that waters-down and distorts much traditional Christian conviction, and helps to explain why so many Christians: 1) enthusiastically support Donald Trump despite his considerable moral failings; 2) exhibit xenophobic fears regarding immigration; 3) are resistant to acknowledge our national failings on race, and 4) hold patriarchal views about the place of women at work and in the family.

Worries about the threat of violence and the growing instability of American political life make Christian nationalism the object of widespread concern. For Christians, however, the threats of Christian nationalism go far deeper. The identification

of Christian religious conviction with this specific political movement is a threat to our mission as Christians in the United States, especially for Christians who identify with the evangelical movement.

## American Evangelicalism

“Evangelical,” in the first instance, is a description of theological conviction. But it is also a word with a history, and therefore additional contested meanings, which we may or may not be happy with, but which we can’t deny are there. In addition to describing a set of theological commitments, it also describes a distinctive social culture with its own habits of worship, music, books, entertainment, and systems of education. These days “evangelical” is now mostly associated with a political stance focused on sexual morality and religious liberty that is increasingly suspicious of and hostile towards mainstream institutions. Historically, American evangelicalism is a mostly white<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Taking American Back for God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 10.

movement, though even this is changing along with the demographics of the whole country and planet. There are about 2.2 billion Christians in the world.<sup>4</sup> Of these, about 600 million identify as evangelical,<sup>5</sup> and the vast majority of them live in Africa, Asia and Latin America (427 million).<sup>6</sup> The fastest growing demographic group within American Evangelicalism is Hispanics.

The word, “evangelical,” literally means “good news,” and its usage arose historically among Protestant reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> C. as a way of distinguishing their perceived biblical orthodoxy from the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics.<sup>7</sup> It is rooted in doctrinal commitments to 1) the authority of the Bible as the Word of God; 2) the centrality of Jesus’ death and resurrection for individual salvation and eternal life; 3) the belief that human beings are broken and need to be saved; and 4) the call of Christians to actively express this message to the world.<sup>8</sup> When I call myself an evangelical, it is to these theological commitments to which I am primarily referring. To be an evangelical is to believe that the story of the Bible is true, that God has created everything that exists, that He has made us in His image, that we are made to be in relation with Him and each other, that sin and human brokenness has destroyed this plan, but that Jesus’ own life, death and resurrection makes possible the healing and redemption of all things. It also refers to a particular style of religious practice. There is an emphasis on personal salvation and transformation—being “born again.” All good evangelicals have their testimony ready to tell, and are eager to share the specific story of how they came to know Jesus.

Beyond these doctrinal commitments, American evangelicalism is also obviously a religious movement with a specific history. Indeed, as the historian, Randall Balmer puts it, evangelicalism “is a quintessentially North American phenomenon,”

deriving its character from the historical confluence of Pietism (its “warmhearted spirituality”), Presbyterianism (“doctrinal precisionism”), and the vestiges of Puritanism (“individualistic introspection”).<sup>9</sup> The word was embraced by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> C. American revivalists.<sup>10</sup> In this way American evangelicalism has always had a populist style, shaped by the horse riding evangelists who rode around the growing American frontier preaching a simple, emotive message of salvation to a populace that was rural, simply educated, suspicious of hierarchy and elite institutions, and fiercely individualistic. By the 19<sup>th</sup> C., American evangelicalism had become a dominant cultural force. In 1860, 85% of all American churches were evangelical.<sup>11</sup> Northern

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<sup>4</sup> “Global Christianity—A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

<sup>5</sup> Estimating the size of the global Evangelical population is, of course, a complicated task, not least because there are debates about who to count as an “evangelical.” *Pew Research Center* estimates that there are 285 million self-identified evangelicals in the world, but when Charismatics and Pentecostals are added, the number is 584 million. See, Brian Stiller, *Evangelicalism Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> “Christianity in Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion & Mission, 2013” *The Center for Global Christianity*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, p. 17. <[www.globalchristianity.org/globalcontext](http://www.globalchristianity.org/globalcontext)>

<sup>7</sup> John H. Gerstner, “The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith,” in David P. Well’s *The Evangelicals* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> This is the so-called “Bebbington Quadrilateral,” expressed in David Bebbington’s *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 2-17.

<sup>9</sup> Randall Balmer, *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. vii-viii.

<sup>10</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 170, 197.

Christians saw the successes of the Union army as advances towards a Christian millennium that was just around the corner, once the blight of slavery was dealt with (even as many southern evangelicals were also vociferous defenders of the “peculiar institution,” but that is a subject for a later chapter).<sup>12</sup> The United States was a largely evangelical Protestant nation that took for granted that American civic life was held together by a set of Christian mores. American evangelicals were active in shaping their social and political horizons as advocates concerned with urban poverty, women’s suffrage and prohibition.

This golden age, however, was short lived, as Christians struggled to deal with the growing threats of secularization, and the rise of Darwinism towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> C. These proved to be challenges to which this populist, anti-intellectual, and sentimental style of Christian belief was particularly ill-equipped to respond. American evangelicals quickly went from the age of the “Evangelical Empire,” to being characterized as poor, half-wit yokels, “the gaping primates of the upland valleys,”<sup>13</sup> as the journalist, H.L. Mencken, once put it.

Fundamentalism, as a distinct theological and social movement, arose as a doubling down on these populist, anti-intellectual tendencies. The term was first popularized by the Baptist pastor, Curtis Lee Laws, who himself took it from *The Fundamentals*, a series of essays published between 1910 and 1915, laying out the “fundamentals” of historic Christian belief, over against modernist Christians, who were increasingly skeptical about the supernatural elements of traditional Christian religious conviction. Originally, these fundamentals were just a reassertion of all of the elements of traditional 19<sup>th</sup> C. evangelical theological beliefs, but it soon came to embrace a particular kind of narrow Biblical literalism, and a premillennial eschatology that saw history as a steady road of decline to Armageddon. But more than anything else fundamentalism was characterized by a kind of militant, separatist attitude. Scorned and mocked by the cultural mainstream, these

fundamentalists effectively withdrew from any kind of engagement with the larger social and political worlds.<sup>14</sup> They disappeared from the cultural mainstream, but quietly grew and flourished on the margins. In contrast, Christians in the mainline denominations sacrificed historic theological orthodoxy for intellectual and social respectability, and a place at the table of cultural privilege.

These historical developments left those less militant Christians who still hewed to traditional Christian theology, awkwardly in the middle. By the 1940’s, more moderate fundamentalists recovered the language of “evangelical” to distinguish themselves from their more strident fundamentalist brothers and sisters.<sup>15</sup> They began to thrive in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. as they created a whole set of parallel institutions—colleges, schools, book, magazine and music publishers, radio networks, and movies and television shows, to support and maintain their social world. Billy Graham’s popularity and influence created theological and social space for a vision of Christian belief that embraced traditional theological convictions while eschewing fundamentalism’s angry, separatist tendencies. Fuller Theological Seminary was created in 1947 as an institutional and theological bulwark for a more inclusive “Neo-Evangelicalism.” Graham and Fuller’s first president, Harold John Ockenga, were

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> While fundamentalist Christians were consigned to the social and political sidelines, it wasn’t for a lack of trying. Daniel K. Williams notes that there has been a consistent interest and engagement in the political realm by both fundamentalist Christians and evangelicals throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> C. Their influence, however, remained minimal because neither party was particularly receptive to their participation until the late 1960’s. See his *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> George Marsden, *Recovering Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. xi.

influential in launching *Christianity Today*, whose first editor was the Fuller professor, Carl F.H. Henry.<sup>16</sup> *Christianity Today* was created to be the journal for the “new evangelicalism,” which preserved theological orthodoxy while also trying to actively engage the American mainstream. Ockenga was also the founding president of both the National Association of Evangelicals, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Even as neo-evangelicalism was growing in social prominence in the post-war years, fundamentalism was also thriving, and growing in numbers. Neither group, however, exerted much influence or prominence in mainstream American politics. While some Christians were increasingly aligned with the Republican Party over shared fears about communism, most mainstream evangelicals held moderate stances on many of the social upheavals of the 60’s and 70’s—the election of the first Roman Catholic president, Supreme Court decisions on school prayer and abortion, the sexual revolution, and protests against the Vietnam War. The reaction to these controversies, however, fueled the rise of a number of fundamentalist pastors and televangelists, who were no longer content to sit on the political sidelines. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and others, created a new evangelical/fundamentalist conservative political alliance around social issues such as abortion, pornography, and school prayer that helped sweep Ronald Reagan into the presidency in 1980 and make American religious conservatives an essential part of the new Republican, post-civil rights political coalition.

The rise of the Religious Right created a new kind of synthesis amongst American religious traditionalists. The historic divide between neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists has collapsed. “Evangelical” has effectively become the catch-all term for any kind of theologically traditionalist Christian, though the public face and political witness is dominated by the anti-establishment, militant style of American

fundamentalism. This public political witness has grown increasingly heated over the years, by continued concern over abortion, the controversies of the Clinton presidency, 9/11 and Islamic terrorism, growing public acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, corresponding worries about religious liberty, rising inequality and joblessness as a result of globalization culminating in the financial crisis in 2008, and fears about immigration. This story climaxes with the election of Donald Trump, the most unlikely of Presidents. The same people who decried Bill Clinton’s character in the 90’s, were now proclaiming that Donald Trump—who once supported partial-birth abortion, bragged about sexual assault, had multiple divorces, and who introduced speculation about the size of his sexual organs into a presidential debate—was a “dream president” for evangelicals.<sup>17</sup>

Trump received prominent support from a number of traditional evangelical leaders such as James Dobson,<sup>18</sup> Franklin Graham, and Jerry Falwell, Jr.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, some evangelicals were among the most prominent members of the “Never Trump” movement, loudly proclaiming that they could never vote for Trump precisely because they *were* Christians. Russell Moore, for example, the director of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, earned the ire of many of his fellow Southern Baptists for his unrelenting polemic against Trump’s candidacy. Trump’s personal moral failings, authoritarian tendencies, hypocrisy, cravenness, and willingness to incite racial conflict made him a uniquely awful candidate. To vote for Trump, Moore argued,

Christians “must repudiate everything they believe.”<sup>20</sup> The influential evangelical theologian, Wayne Grudem, who himself was one of the signatories of the AAE’s “Call to Repentance and Renewal” issued what turned out to be a series of open letters first supporting,<sup>21</sup> then denouncing,<sup>22</sup> and then ultimately endorsing Trump’s candidacy.<sup>23</sup> At the end of the day,

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<sup>16</sup> Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/may/trump-dream-president-liberty-commencement-jerry-falwell-jr.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october/james-dobson-why-i-am-voting-for-donald-trump.html>

<sup>19</sup> In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Falwell favorably compared Trump to Winston Churchill. “Trump is the Churchillian Leader We Need,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2016.

according to exit poll results, 81% of self-identified white evangelicals ended up voting for Trump, a higher percentage of such votes than any other Republican presidential candidate had received in the previous three elections, and probably ever.<sup>24</sup> These are confusing times to be an evangelical.

## The Threat of Contemporary Christian Nationalism

Timothy Keller has recently noted the recent rise in American Christian Nationalist sentiment has more to do with the Fundamentalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and its anti-intellectual and separatist tendencies, than the new evangelical movement that arose in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. that attempted to repudiate it.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, these nationalists have hurt the evangelical brand so that it is no longer a marker of any kind of theological distinctives, than it is a political badge with very superficial religious content.

Aside from its political dangers, contemporary American Religious Nationalism represents a threat to genuine Christian conviction. It represents a grotesque distortion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and dangerously misleads people into pursuing a false gospel or idol. Indeed, N.T. Wright notes that much of Jesus's teachings and prophetic actions should be interpreted as acts of judgment against Israel for failing to pursue its historic vocation as a national of priests, whose purpose was to call the world back to the worship of the one true God. Instead, Israel had been taken over by widespread revolutionary nationalist

sentiment in which there was an "expectation of the saving sovereignty of the covenant god, exercised in the vindication of Israel and the overthrow of her enemies."<sup>26</sup> Wright notes that we ought to understand Jesus call "to repent and believe" not as a moralistic call of humility, but as specifically political language to people to abandon their revolutionary aspirations and to follow Jesus into a new way of being Israel.<sup>27</sup> "Jesus was claiming to be speaking for Israel's true ancestral traditions, denouncing what he say as a deviation and corruption at the very heart of Israel's present life."<sup>28</sup> In this way, Israel's ultimate destruction was an act of divine judgment against those that rejected Jesus, a destruction that arose ultimately from its own nationalist aspirations and idolatry of itself.

This is a telling and worrying message for contemporary American Christians because so much of the Christian witness in the United States is dominated by the rise or renewal of a distinctive kind of Christian Nationalism that has traded in traditional Christian religious convictions for a certain vision of nationalist life. It has hallowed revolutionary aspirations and the embrace of violence at the expense of a Messiah, who died on a cross, and preached a message of love of one's enemies. In this way contemporary American Christian Nationalism represents not merely a danger to our social and political life, but it also represents a threat as a false Gospel to genuine Christian faith.

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<sup>20</sup> "Have Evangelicals Who Support Trump Lost Their Values?" *New York Times*, September 17, 2015. In a particular verbal flourish characteristic of the kind of disdain that he had toward Trump, Moore claimed that Trump's "attitude toward women was that of a Bronze Age warlord."

<sup>21</sup> <https://townhall.com/columnists/waynegrudem/2016/07/28/why-voting-for-donald-trump-is-a-morally-good-choice-n2199564>

<sup>22</sup> <https://townhall.com/columnists/waynegrudem/2016/10/09/trumps-moral-character-and-the-election-n2229846>

<sup>23</sup> <https://townhall.com/columnists/waynegrudem/2016/10/19/if-you-dont-like-either-candidate-then-vote-for-trumps-policies-n2234187>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Keller, "Can Evangelicalism Survive Donald Trump and Roy Moore," *The New Yorker*, December 19, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-258.

<sup>28</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999), p. 52.



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