The Reconciling Word: A Theology of Preaching

By

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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This dissertation seeks to disclose the reconciling power of Christian preaching, and examine the homiletical task through the lens of Jesus’ command to “love your enemies.” Because the heart of Christian preaching lies in the Word of God revealed as the Prince of Peace, Gospel proclamation and reconciliation are perpetually intertwined. God’s message of reconciliation has irrupted in history through a Son who not only forbids the killing of enemies, but also commands his followers to love them. Yet, in the wake of history’s bloodiest century, Christians continue to sanction divisive, violent responses to those considered strangers and enemies—even those who also claim the name “Christian.” The time is ripe for an analysis of the proclaimed Word of God as a potent catalyst for reconciliation.

The church needs a theology of preaching that offers an alternative to the world’s language about enemies. My contention is that a theological investigation of enemy-language will have a positive impact on the theory and practice of Christian preaching, while unearthing new possibilities for churches and other faith communities beset by seemingly insurmountable conflict. I challenge presumptions about who our enemies truly are through descriptions of the rhetorical, theological, and homiletical elements of gospel proclamation in communities torn by conflict. What I finally hope to show is that because God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation, preaching is then an inherently reconciling practice, unintelligible apart from its nature as an address to God’s former enemies. Reconciling sermons address and sustain churches with cruciform speech, or gospel-shaped language redeemed by God’s Spirit, through which
disciples are summoned to recognize and embody the forgiveness of the crucified yet risen Jesus, and equipped to exemplify, as ambassadors of reconciliation, the radical consequences of Christ’s lordship.

Methodologically, the dissertation pursues a theological analysis of preaching based on the relationship between the God of Jesus Christ and humankind. This reconciliation encompasses all things, past, present, and future. Such an assertion proceeds from a paradox: the world rejects Christ, and yet God has reconciled the world through Jesus on the cross (2 Cor. 5:18). Consequently, as Richard Lischer has said, reconciliation is the “animating principle” of preaching. God’s reconciling action in Christ is the essential, constitutive homiletical thrust. Thus, sermonic language must align itself with God’s reconciling action in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

The dissertation advances these claims through a theoretical analysis of the “enemy” as it occurs in theological discourse, biblical interpretation, homiletical rhetoric, and constructive theologies of preaching and reconciliation, as well as through theological investigations of the preaching of Will Campbell, and sermons directly related to The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Overall, the dissertation combines the traditional disciplines of homiletics, theology, biblical interpretation, and rhetoric with contextualized field studies of “reconciling sermons.” The ultimate hope of this work is to invite the field of homiletics and the church it serves toward a more comprehensive acknowledgement of the crucial, reciprocal relationship between preaching, reconciliation, and peacemaking.
FOR Erin
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Years from now, when someone asks me about my time at Duke Divinity School, I hope they will be prepared for a typical Southerner’s nostalgic response—made complete by wistful staring off into the distance. These years have been the best of my life, as the joys of rigorous academic study, teaching, and preaching have combined with the joys of starting a family. I leave this place with a heart heavy with gratitude for all the people who have guided and supported me along the way.

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Finally, to Erin, my love, and my peace: I dedicate this work to you.

AUSTIN M. DENNIS
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, 2014
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BATF  Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
BCC  Beloved Community Center
CWP  Communist Workers Party
GAPP  Greensboro Association of Poor People
GPD  Greensboro Police Department
GTCRP  Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project
GTRC  Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission
FBI  Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICTJ  International Center for Transitional Justice
KKK  Ku Klux Klan
LTF  Local Task Force
NRSV  New Revised Standard Version
SBC  Southern Baptist Convention
SCLC  Southern Christian Leadership Conference
WVO  Workers Viewpoint Organization
INTRODUCTION

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, NRSV\(^1\)). The Word “became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (1:14). This Word, through whom God “created the worlds,” is the reconciling Word. For through this Word God “reconciled us to himself,” and “has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Having entrusted this message to us (5:19), God makes this appeal through us: “Be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:20-21). The reconciling Word, through whom “God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,” comes to us in these last days by a Son (Heb. 1:1). Jesus Christ reveals God to us as this the reconciling Word, “heir of all things,” “the reflection of God’s glory,” and “the exact imprint of God’s very being,” who “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Throughout this dissertation, it will be my aim to show the reciprocal relationship between preaching and reconciliation. I will describe preaching as a reconciling practice that is crucial to the church’s life and mission. I also aim to show how reconciliation is dependent upon the proclamation of the reconciling Word. When the Word is “lifted up,” he draws all people to himself (Jn. 12:32), so that reconciliation anywhere, between anyone, bears traces of the one who has reconciled us to God on the cross. We do not move from enmity to friendship in pure silence, but by the language God has given

\(^{1}\) All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
human beings “for peace and mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19). The peculiar nature of this language lies in its bearing likeness to Jesus, who fully reveals to the world the image of God. According to St. Athanasius, this language is a grace bestowed on human beings by God through the Word Jesus. This grace is

namely, the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as He does, though in limited degree, they might continue for ever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise.²

The cornerstone of this dissertation is the theological claim that God’s mission of love to the world is a reconciling mission, the end of which is the new creation of beloved community. The disclosure of God’s mission through proclamation sets the bond between preaching and reconciliation. The two subjects reach their culmination in Jesus who “came to Galilee, proclaiming” (Mark 1:14). Therefore, we can no longer say preaching and reconciliation exist in exclusive dimensions or in categorically separate academic concentrations. In Christ, preaching and reconciliation are inextricably and perpetually intertwined. In theory and in practice, preaching and reconciliation exist in partnership with one another. They serve and energize one another. So it is possible to say not only that reconciliation is constitutive of the practice of preaching, but also that preaching is an essential part of the church’s reconciling mission. When the church calls the practice of preaching a “service of the Word,” it should recognize such a service as having an inherently reconciling purpose. If it is a service of the incarnate Word of God, the constitution of this proclaimed word will exhibit reconciliation as a preeminent

feature of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. This is another way of articulating what Geoffrey Wainwright has called the “material density” of the Word of God:

To speak of Jesus Christ as ‘the Word of God’ is to name his person. This person came to expression in the thick texture of his human life. His ‘flesh’ is constituted not only by his body, born of Mary, but by an entire range of words and deeds, by his interactions with his historical contemporaries, and by the events which surround and mark his career.³

To preach, then, is to engage with the “thick texture” of Jesus’ mission, fully submitting to the gravitational pull of the reconciling Word’s “material density.”

As a linguistic practice, preaching is also embodied. Preaching is a bodily practice for the preacher, to be sure, but it also has consequences for the body of Christ, and for all human bodies. This fact manifested itself to me in full force during pastoral ministry in a rural North Carolina church. Through the course of my pastorate, I discovered just how powerful preaching could be (and how weak). I enjoyed the warmth of my church’s fellowship, and continue to be inspired by the beautiful people I came to know and love there. Yet, several times, I was stunned by some people’s visceral reactions to my sermons. I came of age as a preacher during the heat of the disastrous Second Iraq War, and often—some would say too often—preached of how the gospel exposes the folly of war, and how the church is an alternative to war. This meant that I made some “enemies.” But this also confused me, because I was convinced those same people were still my neighbors and friends. I maintained close friendships with church members and other people in the community with whom I had deep disagreements. I lost

a few friendships as well, despite genuine efforts to be reconciled with them. I hold onto the hope that when the time is fulfilled, we will truly know one another and fully love one another, as Christ knows and loves us.

During this time I took cues from my former professor of theology, Elizabeth Newman, and immersed myself in the works of Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the preaching of Will Willimon. My poor congregation had to endure an often painful and confusing spiritual journey as I tried to articulate these ideas Sunday after Sunday. I will always be grateful for their patience and grace.

Two watershed events from those years stand out to me. The first was an issue regarding the American flag, which enjoyed a prominent place in that stunningly beautiful sanctuary. There had been a skirmish about the flag’s placement during the previous pastorate, and it was all the pastor could do to keep the church from installing a permanent flag—with a concrete footing—in the church’s front yard. To that pastor’s credit, the church did not. Yet, the issue continued to fester, as some in the congregation feared my anti-war stance would lead me to “take the flag out.” Early one Sunday morning, as people began trickling into the sanctuary, a member of the church cursed at my music minister for failing to return the flag to the sanctuary after a wedding the day before. I had often heard grumbling whenever the flag was removed for such events, but when I heard my colleague had been cursed, it angered me. Instead of removing the flag, I secretly removed the heavy, brass cross from its central placement on the altar table, and hid it behind the wall of the baptistery. Then I went on vacation. Two Sundays later it was still gone. After three weeks, the same music minister found the cross, and put it
back on the altar table. No one ever mentioned the cross’s absence, which convinced me of how deeply blind we are to our idolatry.

The second moment came when I read Richard Lischer’s *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence*. I was spellbound by it, for it enabled me to finally articulate the spiritual renovation I had been undergoing for several years. It calmed me, gave me courage and confidence, and began to make me a better preacher than I would have been otherwise. My preaching found new energy, and I became more intentional about helping my congregation see the world around them theologically. I began to view preaching as a means to enable people to understand themselves as participants in the story of salvation Scripture narrates. The book also helped discipline me to preach theologically in the particular ways Scripture suggests. Simply put, *The End of Words* revealed the gospel to me in a way that helped me “go on.” I read it backwards and forwards, and continue to revisit it and cherish its wisdom. I view this dissertation as an attempt to continue the conversation Lischer started in that book. If I have built on his work in any way, it is grace.

I have written this dissertation with the preaching pastor in mind, especially those who preach in contexts of division caused by what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the three evils of “racism, militarism, and materialism.” It also bears mentioning that the opening convocation of my first semester in seminary was September 11, 2001. I do not know what the final “bookend” of my life’s ministry will be, but I do know the first one was a vision of utter horror—two towers engulfed in flames, human bodies falling from their windows, and the President standing atop the rubble of ashes and charred bodies to
tell the nation, “I can hear you [applause]. I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you [applause]. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon [tumultuous applause].” Since that day, America has descended further into a miasma of fear and violent revenge. We are all under constant surveillance, for the “enemy” could be anyone, anywhere. The current President is reviled for pursuing peaceful negotiations with old enemies, even while he coordinates drone warfare on new ones. With these realities in mind, I regard this dissertation as an “emergency homiletic.” I want preachers to see that preaching reconciliation is a matter of life and death—for the body of Christ, for the bodies of human beings, and especially for the bodies of our supposed “enemies.”

Angela Dienhart Hancock has recently demonstrated the urgency of preaching in Karl Barth’s concern for the body of Christ during the rise of the Third Reich. Bypassing the University at Bonn’s own curriculum and course listing, he commenced an “emergency homiletic,” as Hancock calls it, in order to sound an alarm for the German church. Having foreseen the potential for the myriad horrors of World War II, Barth presented lectures on preaching in an effort to equip students to resist the German church’s capitulation to the Nazi state, and to offer the German people an alternative language of redemption. Faithful preaching, for Barth, was not only the underlying purpose of his *Church Dogmatics*, but also a practical matter of life and death. Preaching
that forgets this principal aspect of its identity and vocation is, as Barth termed it, “heartless.”

The corporeal nature of preaching also designates it as a practice of the church with sacramental power. Like baptism and Eucharist, the preached word is a means by which God saves us, and draws us into ever-deepening communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with all the saints. With its predisposition towards conversion, confession, and celebration, the practice of preaching should also be considered an accomplice to the sacrament of reconciliation (or penance). In *Embodying Forgiveness*, Gregory Jones provides an account of forgiveness as an embodied practice, constituted by the church’s liturgical practices of preaching, hymn singing, prayer, baptism, and Eucharist. Drawing on Alasdair MacIntyre’s definition of “practice,” Jones develops a theology of forgiveness not as an isolated act, but as a way of life. Understood in relation to this Aristotelian-based approach, forgiveness is a communal practice, the goods internal to which are realized in the form of reconciled relationships. What he calls “reconciling forgiveness,” where forgiveness makes possible a return to fellowship between the formerly estranged, involves “learning the habits and practices necessary to

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5 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (The University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1981]) 187. He defines ‘practice’ as follows: any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence, which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the goods and ends involved, are systematically extended.
resist the desire for revenge, and struggling to have those desires transformed by God’s spirit into desires for love.”

The terms “forgiveness,” “reconciliation,” and “peacemaking” are not purely interchangeable, but they are deeply connected to one another. In this dissertation, I have sometimes come near to conflating the latter two terms. I have done so in order to emphasize the peaceable character of the reconciling practice of preaching. John Howard Yoder defines peace from an eschatological perspective, calling it “the goal in light of which [the pacifist] acts, the character of his action, the ultimate divine certainty which lets his position make sense.”7 Barth also connects these terms when he says theology “has the character of peace. Its origin is the reconciliation of the world with God as it is resolved in God’s eternal will and fulfilled in time at Calvary. This reconciliation and therefore this peace are revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”8

Reconciliation is a peaceable practice, but it is also a means to peaceful ends. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the disciples as blessed peacemakers (Mt. 5:9), and proceeds to institute a practice of reconciliation for their life together: “When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to

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7 John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003 [1971]) 53. I do, however, resist the term “pacifist.” One reason is that pacifism is understood to mean different things even among Christians. Another reason is that the label “pacifism” tends to domesticate the way of life it represents, placing the burden of proof on “pacifists” rather than on the (presumed to be “normal”) people who would sanction killing in the name of God, country, self-defense, etc.
your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (5:23-24). Their communal practice of reconciliation is the basis for their identity as peacemakers. As we will see later in the dissertation, the City of Greensboro’s pursuit of truth and reconciliation was also integral to their seeking peace for victims and their families, as well as for the community at large. To be concise, I understand peacemaking and reconciliation to be practices that have overlapping origins in the person and work of Jesus Christ. These practices intermingle as they proceed from and ultimately end in him.

Overall, my intention is to present a cohesive argument about the theological and practical connections between preaching and reconciliation. Methodologically, the chapters move from theory to application. Chapter One presents a theological consideration of enemy language in Barth’s *Dogmatics* as it compares and contrasts with that of two other leading theologians, Miroslav Volf and Stanley Hauerwas. I propose a Barthian theology of reconciliation as a cornerstone for the proper homiletical use and understanding of enemy language in Christian communities. The chapter includes an analysis of one of Barth’s sermons, preached to a congregation of prisoners in Switzerland.

Chapter Two uses enemy love as a metaphor for an approach to biblical interpretation for preaching. Beginning with the nature and purpose of language, I encourage resistance to the “original violence” (Milbank) of a strict literal sense, and argue for a recovery of pre-modern exegesis in the form of Rowan William’s “diachronic” reading of Scripture. Such a hermeneutic will have “journalistic” characteristics, will
resist propagandistic attempts to contrive false enemies, and will focus the preacher’s attention on reconciliation for the sake of human bodies.

Chapter Three cautions against preaching’s blind acceptance of persuasion as the essence of rhetoric because it denies the complexity of the divine Word, and often derails gospel proclamation from its original function, purpose, and infrastructure. Using Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory, I commend “identification” and “cooperation” as more preferable categories for Christian preaching. Finally, I define what I call “kenotic rhetoric,” en route to an assessment of the how the preacher in Marilynne Robinson’s novel, *Gilead*, practices reconciling rhetoric.

In Chapter Four, I showcase the preaching of a significant figure in the racially divided American South, Will Campbell, who uniquely epitomized the reconciling Word through his life and preaching. I explore how his methods of identification, his ecclesiological imagination, and his outstanding witness for racial reconciliation are theologically grounded in the sovereignty of a God who has already reconciled the world in Christ.

In the final chapter, I narrate the Greensboro Massacre of 1979 from a theological perspective, in order to show how preaching has played a crucial role in seeking and establishing “the welfare of the city.” Describing them as “lights in the darkness,” I examine the testimonies and sermons by preachers who played key roles in the establishment and legacy of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I conclude with a call to hope, offering a portrait of Greensboro as a place where the reconciling Word continues to flourish. I commend what has come into being there
as life, and that such abundant life has become light for many people. Indeed, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.
CHAPTER 1: ENEMY LANGUAGE

A woman once asked Karl Barth, “Herr Professor, can I be sure that I will see my loved ones in heaven?”
“To be sure,” he replied, “you will see not only your ‘loved ones’!”

1.1 KARL BARTH ON RECONCILIATION

Throughout Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, there are curiously diverse applications of the term “enemy” as a category crucial for understanding God, God’s relationship to humanity, and interpersonal human relationships. Barth’s magnum opus, which is concerned with providing the church the proper grammar to say “God,” raises an important question: Can Barth’s theological language promote a renewed understanding of Scripture, and provide a grammatical platform for preaching that encourages the healing of ecclesial divisions that contribute to the world’s violence? Or does his sparing use of enemy language in a blood-soaked century undercut his doctrine of reconciliation, and diminish the contributions he might make to preachers who “seek the peace of the city”? These questions call for an exploration of Karl Barth’s theology of reconciliation as it relates to his use of the term “enemy” as a theological concept in the context of Christian communities. I will first emphasize key elements of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation before engaging particular passages in which Barth’s use of enemy language is explicit. The chapter concludes by juxtaposing Barth’s approach to enemies with those of Miroslav Volf and Stanley Hauerwas, in order to show why the means of recognizing “the enemy” matters for a reconciling homiletic.

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Beginning his foreword to Volume IV/1, Barth places the weight of his *Dogmatics* on the foundations of his Doctrine of Reconciliation. Within this doctrine, several overarching themes provide a theological framework upon which fundamental questions about his use of enemy language may be addressed. “To fail here is to fail everywhere. To be on the right track here makes it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole.”

A brief survey of these themes seeks to illuminate Barth’s theology of reconciliation for the purposes of this investigation.

First and foremost, Barth believes the heart of the Christian message is primarily a statement, made by those assembled in the Christian community, that it is God who is with us as God. “God with us” is the core of the Christian message that moves from a narrower usage among those who already “know it but are always learning it afresh,” to a wider usage incorporating “‘us’ other men who have always to learn it afresh because we do not yet know it, although we can know it.” “God with us” is not an object of investigation or speculation, but an event, an act, of which we may be witnesses. God simply *is*, and his being is what makes our existence possible. “The divine being and life and act takes place with ours, and it is only as the divine takes place that ours takes place.” Far more than being a statement about humanity’s general existence as the will and work of God, “God with us” speaks of a single and particular event that has significance for all time and space—the salvation of humankind. “God with us” is God’s

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3 Ibid., 5.
4 Ibid., 7.
Yet and Nevertheless, his not merely coming alongside human beings, or to be before or behind them, but God’s becoming human for humanity’s sake.

God’s condescension to be with us results in our being exalted to God—not to be God or like God, but to be in fellowship with God. This new fellowship with God “does not mean the extinguishing of our humanity, but its establishment…our true and highest activation.” God’s condescension also means there is included in the statement “God with us” a corresponding “We with God.” We are “summoned…lifted up…awakened to our own truest being as life and act…set in motion by the fact that in that one man God has made Himself our peacemaker and the giver and gift of our salvation.” This summoning, lifting up, and awakening enables our participation in God’s being, our absorption into the history of the acts of God, our sharing in the grace of God’s condescension to us, and our freedom to exist and live responsibly as the Christian community. “This ‘We with God’ enclosed in the ‘God with us’ is Christian faith, Christian love, and Christian hope,” the heart of the Christian message.

Barth is emphatic in his belief that we understand the meaning of “God with us” in the name and person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, and God in the work of reconciliation.

The name of Jesus Christ covers the whole power of the Christian message because it indicates the whole of its content, because at its heart, which is normative for the whole, it is a message about Him, and therefore a message about the event of that ‘God with us.’

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5 Ibid., 14-15.
6 Ibid., 14.
7 Ibid., 15.
8 Ibid., 18.
Jesus Christ is very God and very man, the one in and through whom God simultaneously condescends to and exalts sinful humanity. He is the first and eternal Word of God, the knowledge of whom is the subject-matter, origin and content of the doctrine of reconciliation. Jesus is the key to understanding the whole of the *Dogmatics*, and especially the doctrine of reconciliation. He is the Son of God who makes his way into the “far country,” the act whereby God, in God’s own power and will, humbles himself to become the brother of humanity. In every aspect and part of this doctrine, Jesus Christ is “the beginning and the middle and the end.”

This does not mean God has given up being God in becoming a creature. “God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away.”

God’s condescension to humanity in Jesus is precisely how God is revealed and reconciliation is achieved. In this Jesus, who is the Word of God, the church finds the way to the realm of words in which it is made able to speak about God. Jesus creates the possibility of reconciling speech, and inaugurates for the faithful the way to utter the truth that once upon a time was unspeakable. In fact, “apart from and without Jesus Christ we can say *nothing at all* about God and man and their relationship one with another.”

Barth defines reconciliation as “the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man.” Reconciliation is the maintenance, restitution and resumption of a harmonious relationship and fellowship that used to exist between God and humanity, but that became threatened with annihilation. That original fellowship, which came under threat, but is

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9 Ibid., 125.
10 Ibid., 185.
11 Ibid., 45, emphasis mine.
12 Ibid., 22.
now restored and fulfilled in Jesus Christ through reconciliation, Barth describes as covenant.¹³ “Jesus Christ is the Word and work of the eternal covenant.”¹⁴ He is the content, subject, and basis of this act of atonement. What God begins with Israel, Jesus brings into completion as the Mediator, the God-Man, God’s gift of grace to humanity made manifest by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ “is the atonement.”¹⁵ He is “the eschatological realisation of the will of God for Israel and therefore for the whole race. And as such He is also the revelation of this divine will and therefore of the covenant.”¹⁶ The “covenant as the presupposition of reconciliation” refers to the reconciliation made complete in the pre-existent Deus pro nobis, who is the first and eternal Word, of which Jesus Christ is the content and form. Reconciliation transpires in the refusal of this Deus pro nobis to abandon the world and humanity in the unlimited need of its situation, in God’s will to bear this need as his own, his taking humanity’s need upon himself, and crying with humanity in its need.¹⁷

Crucial to this investigation is Barth’s belief that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur merely spiritually or metaphysically. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was not, as Bultmann believed, a result of a spontaneous and simultaneous welling up of Easter faith among the disciples. The disciples did not induce the resurrection through warm recollections of their time together with Jesus. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ

¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., 54.
¹⁵ Ibid., 34, emphasis mine.
¹⁶ Ibid., 35.
¹⁷ Ibid., 215.
from the dead was an event, following the scandal of the cross, that occurred within time and space. The resurrection has necessarily to do with an event [as] something which cannot be disputed on any exegesis which is in any way sound or permissible. And we can widen the circumference of agreement which can be presupposed: the New Testament is speaking of an event in time and space.\textsuperscript{18}

This resurrection from the dead is “the verdict of the Father,” the vindication of God’s saving purpose for man. “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great verdict of God, the fulfilment and proclamation of God’s decision concerning the event of the cross.”\textsuperscript{19}

Barth’s theology of the Holy Spirit emphasizes the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus as the verdict of the Father. “The Holy Spirit is the awakening power in which Jesus Christ has formed and continually renews His body, i.e., His own earthly-historical form of existence, the one holy catholic and apostolic church.”\textsuperscript{20} It is God the Holy Spirit who is about the business of reconciliation in Christ’s body as it exists in the earthly-historical Christian community, the gathering of justified humanity. We can know nothing at all about God and God’s relationship to humanity apart from this awakening power. Therefore, we cannot truly comprehend the nature and purpose of reconciliation apart from God’s reconciling activity as it occurs in and through the church. To be sure, it is not by humanity’s own power that it is able to participate in the divine act of reconciliation. If reconciliation is to take place “in the Christian community and Christian faith,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 337.
\item Ibid., 309.
\item Ibid., 643.
\end{enumerate}
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...if man is to will what of himself he cannot will and do what of himself he cannot do, then it must be on the basis of a particular address and gift, in virtue of a particular awakening power of God, by which he is born again to this will and ability, to the freedom of this action, and under the lordship and impulse of which he is another man, in defiance of his being and status as a sinner. God in this particular address and gift, God in this awakening power, God as the Creator of this other man, is the Holy Spirit.\(^{21}\)

The above overview of key themes creates the necessary context for further exploration of Barth’s use of enemy language. It provides the infrastructure for further discussion by defining the terms of the theological assertions Barth claims are the foundations of his *Dogmatics*: that God is God, that he is with us, and that we are with God. God is with us particularly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom God fulfills his original covenant with Israel, and in whose Spirit God continues to proclaim his love for the world through God’s elect, the church. Most importantly, this overview confirms that henceforth every mention of enemy-language within the *Dogmatics* falls within the purview of a theology that confesses a God who has already reconciled the world in Christ.

### 1.2 Who is an Enemy?

*Enemy* is in one sense a polyvalent word for Barth. He defines it in various ways, and applies the term in several different contexts. Yet, those contexts are always contained within the theological scope of his *Dogmatics*. One cannot comprehend Barth’s enemy-language apart from his doctrine of reconciliation, in particular. Barth is both careful and strategic when using the word *enemy*, whether in its singular or plural

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 645.
form. Discussions involving enemy-language never define enemy in any generic sense. In each instance, the term has a distinct meaning for the Christian community, a meaning that would be unintelligible apart from the context of the church. For example, it becomes clear that Barth does not believe anyone can presume to know who or what their true enemies are apart from their relationship with Jesus Christ. “On the little stool which he thinks is a throne, man does create facts.” 22 These facts are not really facts but illusions.

And there begins the whole misery of the moral battle of everyone against everyone else, in which, whatever position we take up or line we adopt or banner we follow, we are always deceived about our friends as well as our enemies, wrongdoing the former just as much by our affirmation as the latter by our negation, sowing and reaping discord as the children of discord. 23

One is able to discern an enemy only through participation in the reconciling activity of God through the church, the body of Christ in its earthly-historical form. A non-Christian or unbeliever could not assume mutual understandings and shared definitions of enemy terminology with a confessing Christian. Barth’s strict christocentric grammar conscripts enemy-language for the church.

Barth speaks of the church’s mission being not to deny the mission of the state, but to include and transcend it. He models how to practice his claim in the way he speaks of the enemy. Though the state has tried to determine who the enemy is for everyone under its jurisdiction, the Christian includes the state’s definition of enemy only to transcend that definition through the Christian practice of loving enemies—of requiting

22 IV/1, 447.
23 Ibid., 451.
“like with unlike.”24 In doing so, the mission of the church “resists and overcomes the enemy, the man who refuses to accept the message of reconciliation. For it does not recognise him seriously as an enemy. It does not allow him to persist in his hostility to the extent of provoking retaliation.”25 The enemy is the one who refuses to accept the message of reconciliation.26 Though the state has told everyone—including the Christian—who the enemy is, the Christian transcends the state’s definition, receiving the enemy while refusing to become his enemy. The word enemy appears to be a universally accepted term when the state defines it, yet despite the state’s official framework, the Christian is not seduced. Even within this framework, “he does not refuse communion to the enemy, but to evil. And for this reason he seeks it even with the enemy.”27 Because the Christian has accepted God’s message of reconciliation in Jesus, he is able to recognize those who have not yet done so, and to respond to them as one who knows what those outside the Christian community do not yet know.

From this perspective of Barth’s, it would seem that a Christian could never truly have enemies, especially if he continually seeks communion with them. Is it a contradiction to identify as an enemy someone with whom communion is sought? Does this mean the Christian’s enemy is also simultaneously his neighbor? At times, Barth

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24 II/2, 720-21
25 II/2, 721.
26 Here Barth seems to suggest every non-Christian would be a Christian’s enemy. But just prior to this claim, Barth says, “As Christians themselves were reconciled to God when they were still enemies (Rom. 5:16), so now they must undertake and fulfill the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) while others are still enemies” II/2, 720. The implication is that the Christian who recognizes reconciliation is also able to recognize when others reject reconciliation. In this recognition, Christians are able to discern precisely who the “enemy” is, and therefore who it is Jesus is calling them to love.
27 Ibid.
moves freely between these two seemingly contradictory terms—neighbor and enemy. The Christian has a neighbor in one to whom he shows mercy. “We see and have a neighbor when we are wholly the givers and he can only receive.”28 But in the same line of thought, the neighbor can also be an enemy. “We see and have [a neighbor] when he cannot repay us and especially when he is an enemy, someone who hates us and injures us and persecutes us.”29 The neighbor and the enemy of the Christian can be one and the same person. The neighbor and the enemy are the same person especially when the enemy hates, injures, and persecutes us (the “us” is in reference to Christians). The enemy’s injurious intentions heighten the necessity of the Christian to respond to an enemy as a neighbor, as this one in need of the unconditional mercy of the Christian. Barth extends a parallel idea from Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:44 that the disciples should love their enemies. “This destroys the whole friend-foe relationship, for when we love our enemy he ceases to be our enemy.”30

Barth believes the act of what the New Testament calls love can only take place between Christians. This does not mean the Christian community is an end in itself, but that it exists for the sake of the world, so that the love between Christians serves as a “representative manifestation of the action for which all are determined.”31 This love is, therefore, not a universal love of humanity. It is not agape for everyone. The love of

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28 I/2, 419.
29 Ibid.
30 IV/2, 550.
31 Ibid., 805.
God and of Jesus can neither be practiced by all, nor addressed to all, with the following exception:

It is in respect of the love demanded in Mt. 5:43-48—not also but specifically—for the enemy, for the persecutor of the community, to be addressed to him in the form of intercession...As the most interesting and relevant form of the non-Christian the enemy is proleptically received into the community when he is loved and not hated.\(^{32}\)

The love exchanged between members of the body of Christ occurs within the Christian community, which, with the exception of the enemy’s piercing it, remains a closed circle of disciples. The Christian is ready to love everyone, but the love he is ready to give can only come from within the Christian community that knows how to love. The opportunity to love the enemy is that unique circumstance in which Christians may display the extraordinary quality of Christ’s love formed in them by the fellowship of believers.

There is a similar dialectic in the *Dogmatics* in relation to whether God has enemies. Just as the Christian may have an enemy who is simultaneously a neighbor, so God has enemies whom he simultaneously loves and draws close to himself as friends. It is an example of the Yet and Nevertheless of God’s reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ that humanity is both God’s enemy and friend.

So far as God’s revelation as such achieves, what only God can achieve, namely, the restoration of man’s communion with God, destroyed, nay annihilated by us, so far as, in the fact of revelation, God’s enemies are already His friends, revelation itself is reconciliation.\(^{33}\)

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) 1/1, 468 (409).
On the one hand, yes, God has enemies. *We are God’s enemies.* We are the enemies of God “because our disposition to Him is hostile.” We are “defiant sinners, the obstinately godless, the open enemies of God.” We are God’s *bitterest* enemies. To be God’s enemy is the “guilty determination of our existence.” To be God’s enemy is to be hopelessly lost, given to perdition without mercy or refuge, counsel or help. “All men have to look…and see themselves as they really are, and confess that their cloaks are only cloaks, and that in reality they too are manifestly enemies of God.”

There are no exceptions. There is no haven where the Christian, who is caught up in participation with God’s activity on the world’s behalf, is exempted from this enemy status. Even the likes of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah hold no special place in this sense, and they have no ability to choose to die “gladly” or “full of years.” There is no such general privilege. That each of them did so amounts to “an extraordinary intervention of God…They themselves have no capacity to choose such an end. They are all God’s debtors and enemies. Of themselves, they can only die an evil death.”

Humanity is God’s enemy because of the negative act of its rebellion against God’s grace. Humanity is particularly the enemy of God in that it is the enemy of the grace of God. Humanity in its hostility toward God rejects God’s free gift of himself. It is precisely to human beings as the rejecters of God’s grace that

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34 IV/1, 515.
35 IV/1, 282.
36 I/2, 380.
37 II/1, 398.
38 III/3, 222.
39 III/2, 637.
God’s choice has given that which was inaccessible to him and undeserved by him—and more, that which he has positively rejected—the grace of God. This grace is for him, the enemy of God, in spite of his enmity and in spite of his negative act, rejecting his representation of himself as rejected, forgiving his sins, as the justification of the godless.\(^{40}\)

God gives himself to humanity but is rejected by humanity, in spite of the fact that God has given himself fully to all people on the cross. It is this person, the human being as hater of God, who in spite of God’s grace continues to hate God and be hateful to God, that God recognizes as his enemy. “From eternity God knows every man to be this enemy.”\(^{41}\)

On the other hand, though humanity is God’s bitter enemy, there is hope for humankind established from eternity in Jesus Christ. “Those who come to Christ were already sons of God in his heart, though in themselves they were still his enemies. And since they had been predestined to life, they were given to Christ.”\(^{42}\) Apart from God’s condescension to humanity in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we would be left to destruction, to God’s anger and judgment. Left to our own devices, we would have incurred divine judgment and wrath. Thus, because of God’s redeeming work in Jesus, humanity cannot remain God’s enemy.

Indeed the first and essential thing that He has decreed for [man] in His Son is his election to covenant with Him. He loves His enemies, the godless: not because they are godless; not because they seek to be free of Him; but because He will not let them break away; because in consequence they cannot really break away from Him. What is laid up for man is eternal life in fellowship with God.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{40}\) II/2, 317.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., emphasis mine.

\(^{42}\) II/2, 328 (Barth quoting Calvin; the above is translated from Latin).

\(^{43}\) II/2, 319.
Humanity is God’s enemy, but by God’s grace that is not the end of the matter. “God loves man as this enemy.” In this love for humanity as his enemy we see the full disclosure of the sovereignty of God, who loves human beings despite their being unworthy of His love. God “loves him notwithstanding his unworthiness and hostility. Indeed, He loves him just because of it.”

While “the falsehood of man is the great enemy which resists the divine promise declared in the prophetic work of Jesus Christ, but which is at once smitten and routed by the immanent power of this promise, the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” humanity also manages to make God its enemy. Humanity seeks its own way. People believe they can be free without God, and make decisions on their own apart from God. A person in his stupidity, in his sloth and misery, becomes a person of disorder. “And as we become and are men of disorder, God necessarily becomes a stranger and enemy. For He is a God of order and peace. He is the Creator and Guarantor of the peace designed for man in his own nature as the soul of his body.” In the folly of its pride, humanity has not only become God’s enemy, but has also made God its enemy. Such is the nature and cause of the utter hopelessness of humanity apart from God’s determination to save it.

Humanity cannot save itself. “Man may think that he can and should be gracious to himself, but this is impossible. He thinks and acts as his own helper, but believing that he is his own best friend he is all the time his own worst enemy.” Indeed, humanity, as

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44 IV/2, 767.
45 Ibid.
46 IV/3, 434.
47 IV/2, 460.
48 IV/1, 465.
believer in itself as such, becomes a stranger to itself, an enemy of faith in God’s “divine readiness” to help humanity in its dire need. “The enemy of this faith...is man’s faith in himself.” This rejection of God’s graciousness constitutes a sickness in humanity manifested in its confession of sin both in the world and in itself. Human beings confess in a “friend-enemy relationship” to God when, in the instance of their presupposing God’s opposition to all things human, they forget that God is the gracious God. A person confesses as

God’s detective, policeman and bailiff, against various things in the world and the Church, and, if he is sincere, supremely against himself. For the fact that a man is basically at war against himself can only lead him in his confessing to war against others, just as in confessing against others he will always be led back to the war against himself.

Though at times such confessing seems a sincere act, it betrays a fundamental assumption that God stands against his creation. This amounts to a perversion that breeds “doubt and hatred against God in others and supremely in himself!” It is a sign of humanity’s rejection of God’s reconciliation. This rejection of God’s free gift makes humanity its own worst enemy. Human beings fail to comprehend not only that God has acted to save them despite their sin, but that only God can accomplish their salvation. Barth illumines the distinction in biblical Greek between καταλλάσσειν (reconciling), which is said only of God, and καταλλαγῆναι (being reconciled) said only of humanity. God does the reconciling. Human beings can only be the passive recipients of the gift only God can give.

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49 III/1, 40.
50 III/4, 81.
51 Ibid., 82.
52 IV/1, 74.
To acquire character—which Barth calls “a work of the grace of God on man”—a person must realize he is in this particular struggle against himself. His acquisition of character occurs through “a very different and more difficult struggle than the one against strange influences, external authorities etc. can ever be—a struggle in which he must take the field not only for but primarily against himself and press on to freedom.” Humanity’s pride causes it to turn away from God toward itself, to become curved in upon itself (Augustine). This is exactly what is wrong with humanity. The pride-fueled movement away from God alienates humanity from God, makes God humanity’s enemy, and invites the wrath of God. In the final analysis, humanity becomes an enemy both of God and of itself in this betrayal of God. We cannot realize or acknowledge and confess this on our own. We may know it “solely from the divine accusation levelled against us, and therefore solely from the Word of God.”

At the same time, God and humanity also have several enemies in common. One of those enemies is, literally, nothing. Nothing, or “nothingness,” is that which aims to destroy human beings, that does not let people breathe and live, that harasses them with fear and pain, and as such is both the enemy of God and of humanity. “God Himself engages the nothingness…and opposes and contradicts its onslaught on His creation and triumph over His creature.” Nothingness is the uncompromising adversary, the “negative which is more than the mere complement of an antithetical positive,” the

53 III/4, 388.
54 Ibid., emphasis mine.
55 IV/1, 533.
56 III/2, 30.
57 IV/2, 225.
antithesis to God Himself and to “the totality of the created world.”\textsuperscript{58} It can only be active in creation as an absolute alien that opposes and contradicts all positive and negative elements of creation, though it has “no substantive existence within creation.”\textsuperscript{59} Nothingness is “aberration, transgression, evil.”\textsuperscript{60} It can only be perceived and discerned through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who became flesh, who revealed God to us in the flesh, and who therefore is the source of all Christian knowledge. In Jesus, God has already defeated this enemy of nothingness. He stands victorious over nothingness, having made it to be impotent by the incarnation through which He revealed its true nature and threat.\textsuperscript{61} Because nothingness is God’s enemy, “because it is He who allows it to be this, because He has made the controversy with it His affair, it cannot be an eternal enemy or have perpetuity.”\textsuperscript{62}

Another common enemy between God and humanity is sin, which relates directly to nothingness. God opposes and contradicts sin because it is sin which opens the door for the invasion of His creation by nothingness, because in sin the creature delivers itself up to it, itself becoming futile and chaotic. He is wrathful against His own true enemy, which is also the true enemy of man, when He is wrathful against sin.\textsuperscript{63}

Sin is a complex term, as Barth defines it both as an enemy of God and humans, but also as something that causes humanity to become an enemy of God. When a person sins, he places himself against God as an enemy. Sin is a verb and a noun, an act and an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} III/3, 302.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 354.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 312.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 362, original emphasis.
\item \textsuperscript{63} IV/2, 225.
\end{itemize}
entity. In both its forms, though, it remains a common enemy between God and humanity. Sin turns creature and creation against the grain of God’s saving activity on behalf of his creatures and his creation, and against God’s intentions for humanity. Just as Adam’s sin opened the door to creation’s invasion by nothingness, every sin of every person opens the door to nothingness again and again. Apart from God’s triumph over sin in Jesus Christ, nothingness would continue in its threat toward creation unabated.

Death is the primary obstacle for God in his victory over sin and nothingness, making death, itself, yet another enemy in Barth’s *Dogmatics*. Death is the “condemnation and destruction of the creature...the offender against God and the last enemy.” But by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, God reveals that he has put an end to death, and to the onslaught of nothingness and its power to destroy humanity. In his incarnation, Jesus, who is God, exposes himself to annihilation by death, but confirms his victory over it in being raised from the dead.

In Him, i.e., in contradi distinction to Him, nothingness is exposed in its entirety as the adversary which can destroy both body and soul in hell, as the evil one which is also the destructive factor of evil and death that stands in sinister conflict against the creature and its Creator, not merely as an idea which man may conceive and to which he can and does give allegiance but as the power which invades and subjugates and carries him away captive, so that he is wholly and utterly lost in fact of it.

Thus far, this exploration has revealed the diversity of enemy language Barth uses to illustrate his claims about God, God’s relationship to humanity, and relationships between people. It is clear that Barth believes God has enemies. Mainly, those enemies

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64 III/3, 312. See also, I Corinthians 15:26.
65 Ibid.
include humanity, nothingness, sin, and death.\textsuperscript{66} Human beings have numerous enemies, as well, including God, nothingness, sin, death, and other humans. On the other hand, the enemy relationship between God and humanity is not permanent or concretized. Human hostility toward God has been overcome in Jesus Christ, who, as “God With Us,” has stood in humanity’s place and abolished the hostility between us and God. God is not inimical toward humans, though a person in his sin may choose to remain hostile to God. Even then, God lovingly seeks to expose his foolishness and hostility, and to lead him into the truth that God has already achieved reconciliation between himself and humanity in Jesus Christ.

Though Barth speaks of God having enemies in the present tense, it seems he only does so to clarify what he believes is theologically true. Barth even bypasses any use of enemy language that is resigned to the permanency of inimical relationships. The trajectory of his language and his entire Doctrine of Reconciliation suggests what is theologically true about God is that, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God has abolished humanity’s status as an enemy. Quoting Romans 5:16, Barth says, “Christians were reconciled to God when they were still enemies.”\textsuperscript{67} Since Jesus has taken on man’s flesh and identified himself with the enemies of God, man can no longer be God’s enemy, for then Jesus would be implicated. This is impossible, since then Jesus, who is very God, would be set against God. God would be divided against himself.

\textsuperscript{66} It may be helpful to note a peculiar instance in which Barth refers to the Gospel as having enemies, which he calls nominal Christians: “And to-day, it is not the righteousness of works which is the enemy of the Gospel, but the indifference and the secularism of the masses who are only nominally Christian” (I/2, 655).
\textsuperscript{67} II/2, 720.
It is also clear that Barth sees Christians’ enemies as those who approach the community from the outside with inimical, harmful, and injurious purposes. The enemy of the Christian is the one who rejects the love the Christian offers, who continues to do violence, mock, persecute, and denigrate the church in spite of the love extended to him. This is part of Barth’s interpretation of Jesus’ admonition in the Sermon on the Mount to “love your enemies.” Because it is an address to his disciples—those in his immediate circle, seated before him as those eager to listen, those who have accepted his call to come and follow—there is no reference to animosity other than the particular kind that is directed from the world to the church. After all, the Sermon is not merely an address to the general public, though anyone within earshot of Jesus’ witness is welcome to join the disciples and follow him.

What remains to be seen is whether the case can be made that Barth could conceive of Christians being enemies with each other. Barth assumes a kind of impenetrable unity among Christians; they remain united in a cohesive unit in terms of their turning to embrace their enemies. They can do so in complete confidence that God has already arranged their success in this endeavor.

Christians do not need to form a party in the struggle against the wicked, but can and must continue undismayed to tread the way of fellowship with the latter, because God has long ago taken sides against their violence, has long since barred their way so that although they may rattle the bolt they cannot open the door.68

For Barth, God is united with himself in his abolishing the hostility between himself and humanity, and God approaches humanity as one entity in this act of

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68 Ibid., 721.
redemption. Likewise, Christians, as the members of one Holy Apostolic and Catholic church, approach their enemies as one entity. As a loving fellowship of disciples, they constitute the unified Body of Christ. The wicked compose another entity, as is seen in the way Barth depicts them as one distinct side in this meeting, which is “objectively controlled by the order which God, the Father of Jesus Christ, has established and confirmed even in the world outside the church, His Son being the King and Ruler over all powers, and ruling as such in might.”

The point is that Barth leans away from any gray area in which a Christian could define another Christian as an enemy. Christians have enemies, yes, but Barth never sets a conversation in the context of Christians considering other Christians as enemies. His interpretation is that, from cover to cover, the Bible does not refer either to Israel’s or the church’s enemies as coming from within their respective faith communities. Barth sees a specific kind of enmity as constitutive of a Christian’s true enemy, an enmity born out of the rejection of the church’s testimony and visible witness of God’s reconciling activity in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a Christian is by definition incapable of this kind of enmity toward another Christian, since in order to have such enmity one must stand outside the saving knowledge of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Has Barth been careful in his use of enemy-language and its multiple applications? Has he given enough thought to how beneficial this aspect of his theological-grammatical model might be for the church as it is drawn into participation in God’s reconciliation of the world? Would it be fair to ask how the church catholic should

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69 Ibid.
navigate the world Barth describes? Does Jesus’ imperative, “Love your enemies,” apply to hostility between Christians? Can there be hostility without enmity?\(^{70}\)

Barth has not sidestepped these important questions. For Barth, the brutal fact that Christians have already killed and continue to kill other Christians cannot override the truth about God that Barth exhaustively asserts on biblical grounds, that 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.”\(^{71}\) The reconciliation has already taken place. Sin and death have already been defeated. God has reconciled humanity to himself in Jesus Christ. There are those who acknowledge this truth and live by it, and those who do not. The divisions in the church caused by those in the latter category Barth calls “a dark mystery, a scandal,” for “the disunity of the church is a scandal.”\(^{72}\)

If a man can acquiesce in divisions, if he can even take pleasure in them, if he can be complacent in relation to the obvious faults and errors of others and therefore his own responsibility for them, then that man may be a good and loyal confessor in the sense of his own particular denomination, he may be a good Roman Catholic or Reformed or Orthodox or Baptist, but he must not imagine that he is a good Christian. He has not honestly and seriously believed and known and confessed the una ecclesia. For the una ecclesia cannot exist if there is a second or third side by side with or opposed to it. It cannot exist in opposition to another Church. It cannot be one among many.\(^{73}\)

Furthermore, Barth believes “the co-existence and opposition of the Churches in place of the one Church has...been a very potent factor for evil,”\(^{74}\) meaning, in part, that

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\(^{70}\) I am indebted to Geoffrey Wainwright for putting the question this way.

\(^{71}\) Colossians 1:19-20.

\(^{72}\) IV/1, 676-677.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 676.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 677.
division in the church has been both a cause and a catalyst for the world’s violence. In these statements we detect Barth’s pain resulting from a shortage of words to explain even Christians’ hatred of one another. It is as though Barth literally comes to the end of words when categorizing these utter failures as “mystery” and “scandal.” He provides a way for the church to speak about its own who are in opposition to one another, who harbor murderous enmity toward one another. Yet, it is hard to bear the heavy weight of Barth’s argument that some Christians are simply not good Christians (he does not say they are not Christian, but that they are not good Christians). If Barth is right, even these bad Christians must be included as members of Christ’s body, a body that bleeds most profusely from its self-inflicted wounds.

What this exploration reveals, though, is that Barth is mercurial in the way he uses enemy language. For example, an inconsistency emerges in his speaking of a person being his own worst enemy, while at the same time not allowing for a Christian to be the enemy of another Christian. If a person, whether Christian or not, can be his own worst enemy, why cannot a Christian consider another Christian an enemy? If a person, even a Christian, considers himself his own worst enemy, what is to prevent him from considering another member of the church—a member of the same body, of which his own body is a part—as an enemy? Furthermore, it is doubtful that Barth’s theological agenda, and his own refusal to acknowledge Christians’ being enemies of one another, would prevent a Christian in the sight of another Christian’s rifle, or at the mercy of another Christian’s machete, from considering his combatant as an enemy.
But this is not, and should not be, unthinkable. Ironically, Barth’s theology of reconciliation fills these grammatical gaps. Whether Barth himself provides the church with a grammar that permits a Christian to consider another Christian an enemy or not, his conviction that God has already reconciled the world to himself in Christ guides his intentional avoidance of naming Christians as enemies of one another. Here is where Barth’s theology of reconciliation provides guidance for the church’s use of enemy-language. Even though Barth wrote in the midst of a century of World Wars and genocides in which millions of Christians slaughtered one another, he refuses to depart from the New Testament’s own refusal to establish a language whereby Christians may categorize one another as enemies. Because God is God, we can only be whoever God says we are. If the God who is fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ says he has reconciled all people to himself, and Christians are witnesses of this truth, then confessing Christians who regard other Christians as enemies have simply forgotten who God says they are. If their language toward one another is unintelligible as Christian speech, then it is a fallen language they speak. It is sinful speech. For if it is through hearing that we are saved, it is through speech that the world of God’s kingdom is revealed to us. If a Christian holds his sword to another Christian’s throat and calls him an enemy, he tells a lie. It may be a “factual lie,” in the sense that the one speaking it may believe he is telling the truth, but it is still a lie. In God’s eyes, they are neighbors who either lack the capacity to name one another as such, or refuse to do so.

Such a refusal would be tantamount to committing the unforgivable sin. For Barth, it is not suicide that constitutes the unforgivable sin, but works righteousness—
acting on the belief that we earn grace apart from God’s merciful acts. Works righteousness is rooted in the belief that God is not the merciful God he says he is. In all three synoptic Gospels in which Jesus refers to the unforgivable sin, he does so following a Pharisaic challenge to his divine authority to cast out demons. The common link throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke on this matter is blasphemy—irreverent speech, or impious speech against God. It is an unforgivable sin to speak as though God has not done in Jesus what Jesus says God has done through him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The unforgivable sin is a sin of speech—a trespassing utterance. After mentioning the unforgivable sin in Matthew, Jesus says, “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).

For a Christian to call another Christian an enemy is an unforgivable sin. It is unforgivable because it denies not only that the Christian’s brother-oppressor is forgiven, but that the Christian-victim is also forgiven. Christians are those who forgive because they have been made participants in the saving knowledge that God has forgiven them. Though a Christian may be the victim of another Christian’s violence, by calling him an enemy, he has rejected the truth that his murderer is also his neighbor, joined to him in baptism, forgiven, and, therefore, deserving of the unlimited forgiveness commanded by Jesus to be extended between church members.\(^{76}\)

\(^{75}\) For Barth’s discussion on suicide and the unforgivable sin, see III/4, 404ff.
\(^{76}\) i.e. Matthew 18:21-22. Peter’s language sustains my point. He does not describe the one who has sinned against him as “enemy,” but “brother.” This brother is a “member of the church,” as the NRSV translates it, due to the context of Matthew 18’s detailed description of how the baptized are to relate to one another.
This will be of small consolation to the Christian who is about to have one of his appendages severed by another Christian. Nevertheless, the truth the martyrs have told by their deaths is that no matter who threatens the body, the one to be feared is God, who has authority to cast into hell. If the church has long been so unfaithful that its members have neglected to cultivate the kind of language already given to them as a gift in the Scriptures (and to which Barth points us), and have thus wounded, maimed, and killed so many of their own as a result, then preachers must stand among those worthy of blame. Those to whom the message of reconciliation has been entrusted have been too slow to proclaim the truth Barth has challenged us to remember, which is that God has already made his decision about us:

The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man’s own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual man consists in this: that this choice of the godless man is void; that he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision.\(^77\)

This is more than an assertion. Here, Barth strikes the gavel in favor of Scripture’s peculiar grammar, including Jesus’ characteristic refusal to pit Christians against one another as enemies.

1.3 “THE CRIMINALS WITH HIM!”

John Marsh calls Barth’s prison sermons a “hidden ministry,” by which Barth exercised his “wonderful power to enter into the situation of the audience, and to speak

\(^77\) II/2, 306.
most relevantly to it.” One sermon, in particular, distinguishes itself as a homiletical test case for my argument about Barth’s use of enemy language, and leaves no doubt as to whether Barth personally applied his complex theology of reconciliation in a most challenging homiletical context. Entitled, “The Criminals With Him!”, the meditation takes its inspiration from only one verse of Scripture, Luke 23:33: “They crucified him with the criminals, one on either side of him.” Through the concepts of identification, reconciliation, and communion, the ensuing proclamation shatters any presumptions about who is included in Christian community and who is not, who the enemy is and is not, and most of all, who it is that most surely constitutes the body of Christ.

Throughout the sermon, Barth accentuates the similarities between Jesus and the two criminals. They experience the same public abuse, endure the same punishment, and meet the same fate. “They are linked in a common bondage never again to be broken, just as the nails that fastened them to the piece of wood would never break” (76). Jesus suffered the same lot they did. He was “with them and they were with him” (78). As well, the criminals “hang on their crosses with him and find themselves in solidarity and fellowship with him” (76). In these particular ways Jesus not only identifies himself with the criminals—to be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12)—but achieves greater solidarity with them than with the disciples. Unlike the disciples,

in this hour [the criminals] could not abandon him, they could not sleep. Willingly or not, they were forced to watch with him many long hours on the cross. Nor could they escape his dangerous company. They could not very well deny him, being publicly exposed as his companions (77-78).

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78 Barth, Deliverance to the Captives (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979 [1961]) 8-9. Succeeding references are in parentheses.
Inasmuch as the criminals were united in solidarity with Jesus, Barth claims something else happened inwardly and invisibly in Jesus that could not have happened in the criminals with him. He asserts that though Jesus was “a man like us,” he was “at the same time different from us because in him God himself was present and at work” (79). Barth reasons that this is the God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

In Jesus, God took upon himself the full load of evil; he made our wickedness his own; he gave himself in his dear Son to be defamed as a criminal, to be accused, condemned, delivered from life unto death, as though he himself, the Holy God, had done all the evil we human beings did and do (80).

Preaching to prisoners, Barth then provides what is arguably his most direct and eloquent definition of reconciliation: “This is reconciliation: his damnation our liberation, his defeat our victory, his mortal pain the beginning of our joy, his death the birth of our life” (80). That one of the criminals “shared in the general, blind and hollow mockery” is “not important enough to invalidate the promise given so clearly, so urgently to both of them, indeed without distinction” (81). Barth maintains that God’s reconciliation supplants this particular criminal’s obdurate mockery so completely that the unrepentant criminal remains—in spite of himself—one of two principal witnesses to God’s action in Jesus Christ.

“What witnesses they were!” Barth continues. “How directly and closely these two not only saw with their eyes and heard with their ears but experienced in their flesh and in their own dying hearts: ‘broken for you, shed for you!’” (82). Though the disciples had recently shared the bread and cup of communion with Jesus, the two criminals
participated “not as mere spectators,” but in communion “with him, in the indissoluble bond uniting them,” where their own blood was shed (82). Because they were the first to suffer and die with Jesus, they were also the first to be gathered by the promise Paul offers, that “if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him (Romans 6:8)” (82). If this is not scandalous enough, Barth continues:

the promise is given only to crucified criminals, who are utterly compromised before God and before men, who move relentlessly toward the end and cannot escape this destiny by their own doing. For men like these Jesus died. And mark this: precisely these, and these only, are worthy to go to the Lord’s Supper (83).

With his conclusion, Barth places Peter and the other disciples “in line behind” the two criminals, who are the first to identify with Jesus, to witness firsthand the consummation of his reconciling mission, and the first to commune with him by sharing in his cup of shed blood. Furthermore, “men of all times” stand in line behind these criminals.

We are such people, all of us—you in this house which is called a prison, with all the burden that brought you here and with your particular experiences in this place—those others of us outside who have different experiences and yet are, believe me, in the same predicament. In reality we all are these people, these crucified criminals (83).

If we think we are not also counted among the lawless, it is because we are not “ready to be told what we are” (83). Herein lies one of the critical keys for unlocking Barth’s imagination about enemies. If the first certain Christian community was composed entirely of criminals—one repentant, and the other resolutely hostile—where does that leave the rest of those who identify as members of the body of Christ? According to
Barth, it leaves us in the back of a long line, the front of which is headed by two unnamed, condemned thieves.

**1.4 Miroslav Volf and Stanley Hauerwas**

What remains to be seen is how contemporary Christian theologians navigate the boundaries of enemy-language, and how Barth’s peculiar use of enemy-language perseveres through recent scholarly developments. Miroslav Volf, a Croatian who taught in the midst of the war in Yugoslavia, has offered an extraordinary analysis of Christian identity in relation to the “other.” His argument is all the more compelling for having been constructed with a direct view of the artillery-scarred buildings of his native country. Volf had just given a lecture in early 1993, during some of the most horrific violence by Serbs against Croats, when Jürgen Moltmann posed a jarring question, “But can you embrace a četnik?”

*Exclusion and Embrace* is the result of Volf’s agonizing journey of being “pulled in two directions by the blood of the innocent crying out to God and by the blood of God’s Lamb offered for the guilty.”

Does Volf’s argument expose cracks in the Barthian foundation laid above?

In *Embrace*, Volf resists a clear definition of the term “enemy,” opting instead to enfold all enemies in the larger purview of the “other.” Unlike Barth, who sustains a rich,

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79 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 9. “Četnik” is a complex, centuries-old term, though the modern definition dates from the early 20th century through the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In the context of Moltmann’s question, a četnik referred to Serbian nationalists who, in Volf’s words, were “sowing desolation in my native country, herding people into concentration camps, raping women, burning down churches, and destroying cities.”

80 Ibid.
dualistic image of the enemy, Volf establishes the “other” as the common denominator for a terminology capable of describing human identity and difference. For Volf, the “other” is not necessarily an enemy, but an enemy is always categorically “other.” As a result, his use of other-language effectively supersedes enemy-language as the definitive terminology for his theology of reconciliation. “We are who we are not because we are separate from others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.”

One’s identity completely dissolves in the absence of a relationship of reciprocity, of giving and receiving from the other. We cannot be ourselves apart from the “other.” The “other” is relationally constitutive of one’s identity.

Drawing on Moltmann and John of Damascus, Volf establishes Trinitarian grounds for constructing a theology of reconciliation with the “other.”

God the Father is the source of divinity, according to Moltmann, for “without such a source, it would be impossible to distinguish between the three persons; they would collapse into one undifferentiated divine nature.”

The Son simultaneously “‘comes from’ and ‘goes to’ the Father, but the Father has ‘given all things into his hands’ and ‘glorifies the Son’ (John 13:1ff.; 17:1).” Each person of the Trinity is distinct from the other, not immanently, but economically. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are neither mere persons nor autonomous “relations,” but persons-in-relation, each perichoretically self-

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81 Ibid., 66, original emphasis.
82 Volf conducts the following Trinitarian conversation in the context of a pivotal argument about gender identity, but his earlier definitions of exclusion and embrace anticipate and directly correspond with the conclusions he makes here.
83 Volf, Embrace, 180.
84 Ibid.

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giving to and “mutually indwelling” in the other. “The Father is the Father not only because he is distinct from the Son and the Spirit but also because through the power of self-giving the Son and the Spirit dwell in him. The same is true of the Son and of the Spirit.”

Having thus “secured” the persons of the Trinity “from the dual threat of dissolution and inequality,” Volf posits the relational dynamic of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the basic model for harmonious human relationships. “God came into the world so as to make human beings, created in the image of God, live with one another and with God in the kind of communion in which divine persons live with one another.”

But a theological problem arises if we pursue Volf’s “other” language to its logical conclusion. The Trinitarian precepts on which Volf depends arose in communities committed to certain practices, such as baptism, preaching, and Eucharist, which make apostolic faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit intelligible to the world. Yet, Volf writes with an assumption that all people can recognize the “other,” no matter what their identity may be. That is, Volf assumes we know who the “other” is with as much certainty as the Godhead recognizes within itself, in the perfect harmony of divine interrelationship. We cannot assume the “otherness” that accounts for the distinctiveness of each person of the Trinity is analogous to human relationships in universal terms. This is tantamount to any human community projecting its own diversity onto the Godhead. If otherness within the Godhead could be understood outside a confessing community of Christians, we might then have to admit the absurd possibility that Jesus, by his death and

85 Ibid., 181.
86 Ibid.
resurrection, somehow reconciles the preexistent “otherness” inherent in the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity. If this were true, Volf’s own valid Trinitarian observations—which rightly defend the distinctions between the three Persons—would fall apart.

Volf does not explain the qualitative differences between the divine Persons-in-relation in a way that justifies his universal application of other-language for reconciling purposes. The church that confesses faith in the Trinity is constituted and sustained by particular kinds of practices that are neither universally applicable nor universally understood. In other words, Volf does not clarify what makes it possible for all people to understand who their “other” is. Thus, either Volf’s expression of Trinitarian language is flawed, or other-language is too generic a means toward reconciling ends, and we must acknowledge that there needs to be a more detailed account of the qualities or levels of identity between human persons-in-relation as they are drawn ever deeper into the inner life of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, other-language bypasses the manner in which Scripture, and Jesus in particular, equips us to recognize who our enemies truly are. When it comes to concrete implementation, other-language places the human self at the center of reference. We must first locate ourselves before determining the other’s identity from our own point of view. Consequently, the other is not simply “the other,” but “the other-than-me.” Such language potentially neutralizes any real ecclesiological identity or difference between individuals and communities, thereby ironically reestablishing Foucault’s “hypermodernism”—which Volf attempts to outmaneuver—by obliterating all
boundaries, and effectively reducing every person to a kind of interchangeable hominid “other.” From this position, even baptized Christian sisters or brothers are essentially as strange to one another as they would be to those of different traditions of faith and practice. Despite Volf’s Christian perspective, he provides no ecclesiological practice as a point of reference for understanding or acknowledging the admittedly porous but no less real boundary between Christian and non-Christian. It does matter for the church’s reconciling practices whether the agent of hostility and bloodshed is a Christian or not. The church, under the authority of Matthew 18, prescribes a particular approach to excluding and embracing a četnik who is also a “brother.”

It is not the case, however, that Volf’s other-language is bereft of Scriptural influence. Every New Testament word translated as “reconciliation” or “reconcile” holds in common the root word, ἀλλασσω (to exchange; transform), which is derived from ἄλλος, which means “the other.” Whether in Paul’s letters, Jesus’ use of the word in Matthew, or Luke’s use of the word in Acts, the basic function of the word remains the same. The New Testament uses forms of the word “reconciliation” to indicate or promote the occurrence of a transformative, redemptive exchange with “the other.” In no instance is a form of ἀλλασσω used to facilitate anything other than estranged parties moving from enmity to friendship. Whether the reconciliation occurs between God and humankind, or between humans, the use of the root word ἀλλασσω only has a proper New Testament origin when it is used to denote exchange between individuals or groups who are or have been estranged. Additionally, the very etymological structure of

87 See Mt. 18:15-17.
although encapsulates and performs the divine and human action the word signifies. Nevertheless, the overarching narrative of the New Testament employs these words with the church’s particular practices in mind, so that the embrace of the “other” is contingent upon the unique clarity afforded to Christian communities by those practices. Thus, an ecclesiologically determined enemy-language that makes the God of Jesus Christ the center of reference offers a more substantial framework for a theology of reconciliation.

Volf’s language reveals that the community of which an enemy is a part, and the traditions that have shaped the enemy, are subjective in light of the preexistent, universally recognizable, objective “fact” that the enemy is the “other.” Consequently, when it comes to human relationships, the most rudimentary element of a person’s existence cannot be baptismal identity but the human condition. An enemy is not necessarily the one who rejects God’s message of reconciliation in Christ, as it finally is for Barth. On the contrary, the enemy is anyone who intends to do harm to others. Because the linguistic dichotomy is other/other or us/them, instead of neighbor/enemy or brother-sister/enemy, the enemy could be anyone—Christian or not. Such language relapses into humanist assumptions about reconciliation Volf tries to avoid, and bypasses the kind of Christ-centered ecclesial identity assumed to be constitutive of the church’s ability to discern enemies in the New Testament. For all the good that can come of an understanding and embrace of the “other,” the theological substructure of other-language is linguistically insufficient for a robust Christian theology of reconciliation. Volf would strengthen his argument with a fuller description of how divine communion might manifest itself through the church’s reconciling practices.
Ironically, one of the church’s most contentious theologians offers just such an account. Stanley Hauerwas, who has persistently called the church to work with its own peculiar grammar, posits the practice of Christian preaching as a central means by which the church may discern its enemies. He believes there is a Christian way to speak that is not available to those who have not yet been “habituated by the language of the faith.” Hauerwas views his theological task as a teacher primarily as an attempt to teach Scripture-shaped speech. He challenges Christians to eschew any attempt “to save the world from danger by appealing to ‘universal values’ that result in justifications to coerce those who do not share what some consider universal.” Hauerwas’ logic frustrates attempts to speak of the “other” in humanist fashion.

Christians do not believe in the ‘human.’ Christians believe in a God who requires we be able to recognize as well as confess our sins. Exactly because Christians are in lifelong training necessary to be a sinner, it is our hope that we might be able to discern the evil that so often is expressed in idealistic terms. So what Christians have to offer is not an explanation of evil, but rather a story, and a community formed by that story, that we believe saves us from the idols of the world.

Preaching this particular story is the means by which the church may become linguistically habituated to recognize enemies.

In his most direct description of the relationship between preaching and enemies, Hauerwas defines the “activity of preaching” as “the proclamation of a story that cannot be known apart from such proclamation.” A primary task of such proclamation is to

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89 Ibid., 31.
90 Ibid., 32.
“attack” the church’s enemies, for without enemies, there can be no Christianity. Moreover, he claims, “Christianity is unintelligible without enemies. Indeed, the whole point of Christianity is to produce the right kind of enemies.”\textsuperscript{92} Good preaching must provide “a sense of where the battle is, what the stakes are, and what the long-term strategy might be.”\textsuperscript{93}

Not unlike Barth, Hauerwas identifies various types of enemies. For example, “Caesar” is one of the church’s most pernicious enemies. So are nihilism, tolerance, pietism, and war. He castigates Protestant liberalism—which he believes is the modern result of Caesar’s having become a member of the church—for having “no enemies peculiar to being Christian,” and for going to church “to be assured we have no enemies.”\textsuperscript{94} Similarly, nihilism is the church’s enemy because it reduces the faith to interminably contingent “values.” Nihilism actively exchanges the overarching narrative of the gospel for commodified values, effectively producing people “who believe they should have no story except the story they choose when they have no story.”\textsuperscript{95} This story, which Hauerwas says is “clearly a lie,” is essentially,

the story of freedom and is assumed to be irreversibly institutionalized economically as market capitalism and politically as democracy. That story and

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 46. “Liberal Christianity, of course, has enemies,” he says, “but they are everyone’s enemies—sexism, racism, homophobia.”
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 48. This maxim gets to the heart of the matter of recognizing enemies, for it exposes a severe weakness of what is perhaps the Enlightenment’s most enduring legacy—the idea that there is a natural order to the world, the self-evident truths about which the individual can objectively observe and understand. Those who believe they have chosen their own story do not recognize that they have been “storied” to think they have such an option. Likewise, those who assume to know who their enemies are apart from a tradition that makes those enemies intelligible have made an epistemological mistake.
the institutions that embody it is the enemy we must attack through Christian preaching.\textsuperscript{96}

Liberal social orders prefer the story of freedom to the story of truth because truth is incompatible with the story of tolerance ingrained in such social orders. This tolerance is really intolerant of the ultimate truth claims the church is called to make. Inevitably, though liberalism in its postmodern form realizes “no unbiased viewpoint exists that can in principle insure agreements,” its institutions continue to underwrite pluralistic societies by violent means.\textsuperscript{97} For this reason, among many others, war is another enemy preaching should attack. Thus, Hauerwas’s claim that “Christians are in a war against war,” and that “to be a Christian is to be made part of an army against armies.”\textsuperscript{98} The Christian weapon in this war is the sword of truth, and the means of wielding this sword are preaching and sacrament.

The great magic of the Gospel is providing us with the skills to acknowledge our life, as created, without resentment and regret. Such skills must be embodied in a community of people across time, constituted by practices such as baptism, preaching, and the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{99}

One might counter that Hauerwas’s enemy-language is too combative, and that his manner of speaking may actually serve to encourage Christians to take up the sword of violence. This is a mistake, for Hauerwas’s overall argument about enemies is a nuanced thread running throughout much of his life’s work as a theologian. He commonly refers, as he does in the present article—and as Barth also does—to a person

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 47. He continues, “Instead, we have comforted ourselves with the ideology of pluralism, forgetting that pluralism is the peace treaty left over from past wars that now benefits the victors of those wars.”
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 48.
being his own worst enemy. He recognizes that preaching against the kinds of enemies described above provokes strong reactions. “After all, the enemy (who is often enough ourselves) does not like to be reminded that the narratives that constitute our lives are false.”\textsuperscript{100} By describing even individual Christians as enemies of themselves, Hauerwas upends the common criticism directed at him, which is that he is a “sectarian, fideistic, tribalist.”\textsuperscript{101} On the contrary, his recognition that Christians are first their own enemies demonstrates an awareness that the dichotomy of church and world he asserts actually runs straight through the human heart. “‘Church / world’ is not ‘us vs. them,’ it’s ‘me.’”\textsuperscript{102}

Hauerwas emulates Barth’s habit of describing “enemy” dialectically. But there is another facet of his theological approach to consider, one that includes but envelops his descriptions of enemies presented above. In perhaps his most popular work, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, Hauerwas provides a Christology that complements Barth’s conscription of enemy-language for the church, and doubles down on his own claim that Christianity is unintelligible without enemies. In fact, we will see that Hauerwas’s Christology makes the phrase, “No enemy, no Christianity,” reversible, so that we might also just as confidently say, “No Christianity, no enemy.” By understanding Jesus’ life as having the same proportional weight as his death and resurrection, Hauerwas’

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Hauerwas, \textit{Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010) 208. This phrase was coined by Hauerwas’s doctoral dissertation advisor, James Gustafson, in an address to the Catholic Theological Society in 1985.
\textsuperscript{102} Hauerwas, Oral communication during guest appearance, “Prophecy and the Church’s Ministry,” Professor Ellen Davis, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, January 22, 2013.
Christological account makes faithful Christian discipleship a prerequisite for the discernment of one’s enemies.

Hauerwas recognizes as deeply problematic the construction of Christologies that regard Jesus’ life as immaterial to the task of interpreting his death and resurrection. Such Christologies “emphasize the cosmic and ontological Christ,” but “tend to make Jesus’ life almost incidental to what is assumed to be a more profound theological point.”¹⁰³ The church and its theologians have neglected to see that Jesus’ death and resurrection are actually subsequent to the narrative portrait of his life. We cannot know Jesus without following Jesus, for “the form of the Gospels as stories of a life are meant not only to display that life, but to train us to situate our lives in relation to that life.”¹⁰⁴ Hauerwas anticipates the charge that he has turned the gospel into a moral ideal by affirming the equal weight of all three aspects—Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. To demote, in practice or through interpretative attention, any one of these three dimensions of the Gospel accounts results in the simultaneous diminution of all three. “Without the resurrection our concentration on Jesus would be idolatry, but without Jesus’ life we would not know what kind of God it is who raised him from the dead.”¹⁰⁵

Neglecting Jesus’ life in this way has a deleterious effect on the church’s performance of the Sermon on the Mount. The view that Jesus’ life and work is

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 119.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 124.
inconsequential to the church’s understanding of his death and resurrection leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Sermon’s demands are too idealistic.

To believe so is to lose the eschatological context of Jesus’ teaching. To be sure, Jesus’ demand that we forgive our enemies challenges our normal assumptions about what is possible, but that is exactly what it is meant to do. We are not to accept the world with its hate and resentment as a given, but to recognize that we live in a new age that makes possible a new way of life.  

What Jesus’ life manifests is the reality of the new age in which the church is given the power, by God’s grace, to practice as a community those skills that would otherwise be impossible—skills such as the forgiveness of enemies. The life of faith, then, is “fundamentally a social life. We are ‘in Christ’ insofar as we are part of that community pledged to be faithful to this life as the initiator of the kingdom of peace.”  

Grace means there is no a priori understanding of peace that Jesus happens to exemplify, but that God has given us a concrete way of peace in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Justification by faith, therefore, comes by “initiation into the new community made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection.”  It is Jesus’ whole life, including his death and resurrection, that reveals the kingdom of God. And it is this whole life to which the disciples have been not only invited, but also made able by God’s grace manifest in Jesus to follow.

What is finally at stake in Hauerwas’ Christology is how much we should emphasize the distinctiveness of the person of Jesus Christ, and whether anyone can know their enemies apart from the entire narrative arc of Jesus’ life, death, and

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106 Ibid., 132.
107 Ibid., 139.
108 Ibid.
resurrection. By declaring “it is only from him that we can learn perfection—which is at the very least nothing less than forgiving our enemies,” and by making the church the locus of such learning, Hauerwas substantiates Barth’s conscription of enemy-language for the church, and provides an additional footing to the claim that the practice of faithful Christian preaching is incomprehensible apart from the reconciling ends to which christocentric grammar points us.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Preachers have been given the task of cultivating the church’s speech in light of Scripture’s refusal to describe Christians as enemies of one another. Those called to preach must teach the church how to respond to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. Now the challenge is for congregations to narrate their life together by the speech God has revealed in Christ, so that, at all costs, they learn to make room at the table for their enemies. If Christians would have this extraordinary grammar written on their hearts, it would only be because their journey began in hearing the correct grammar first. This is not a fantasy; it is a real possibility that lies just on the other side of every reconciling sermon.

The primary intention of a homiletical performance of Barth’s theology of reconciliation would be to cultivate a radical imagination, catalyzed by this renewed implementation of Scriptural language through preaching, that has a diminishing effect on the perceived permanency of our current divisions. If the aim of the reconciling sermon is not to force Christians to rein in their careless enemy-language, but to witness
to the truth about the way the world is from God’s perspective, then a reconciling sermon preached from a platform with Barthian pillars would enable a particular community to see itself as inextricably part of the same Body as another community with whom it has seemingly insurmountable disagreements. The goal is to nurture the retrieval and cultivation of cruciform language that would enable those with reconciling intentions to serve as witnesses of the reconciliation God has enacted in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Indeed, what Barth calls “the strange new world of the Bible” is not an imaginary world. The reconciling sermon is not an offering of principles for how Christians can make the world a better place, but an act that enables us to understand God and one another in light of what God has already done and continues to do in our midst. A reconciling sermon reveals, on the Bible’s own terms, the ways in which God’s will is being done that have thus far remained invisible to us. Such reconciling speech makes the new world visible. It describes what Christians should do, but it first manifests who the baptized already are in light of God’s forgiveness—people called to convert our enemies to neighbors through the radical love of Christ.

Both Barth and Hauerwas place this burden largely upon the practice of preaching, for it is through preaching that the church is given the grammar to recognize its enemies. Reconciling sermons are constituted by the gift of God’s language, given to us in Scripture, manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and entrusted to the church for the glorification of our forgiving God. Would not the implementation of such reconciling language serve as a witness to the world of the grammatical faithfulness
required to rekindle the church’s ongoing participation in God’s reconciling mission? Hopefully, this display of Barth and Hauerwas’s own careful use of enemy language will provoke preachers to pursue a more faithful grammar for the church. By unleashing from their pulpits the torrential truth that Christians have no enemies that God has not already either defeated or called neighbors, they may call the church to live faithfully into the reality its own language has already revealed. Indeed, to be on the right track here will make it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole.
CHAPTER 2: SIGNS AND WONDERS

“At the very least...granting theological concerns priority will involve a return to the practice of using Scripture as a way of ordering and comprehending the world rather than using the world as a way of comprehending Scripture.”

STEPHEN FOWL, THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Having explored the theological limits of enemy-language, we focus now on Holy Scripture as a matrix of reconciling language for preaching. To preach in a reconciling way, one must begin with the language of Scripture, since it is through Scripture that the church substantiates the truth that Jesus Christ, by his life, death, and resurrection, has erased the hostility between God and human beings,

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11).

Preachers find their primordial energy in this act of boasting in the God of Jesus Christ, who has enlisted God’s enemies into God’s own mission. Preaching, then, is the gospel addressed to former enemies. It is the risen Jesus walking through his congregation at the end of hostilities. So, reconciling language may do nothing less than awaken people to the truth that Jesus Christ has declassified human beings as enemies of God and one another. Indeed, it is God’s nonviolent action in the person and work of Jesus Christ that gives birth to all the church’s speech. Apart from this reconciling Word, the church forfeits the richness and depth of biblically determined language, and becomes susceptible to a language of violence.

1 Stephen Fowl, Theological Interpretation of Scripture (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009) 23.
While the previous chapter offers an approach to reconciliation through a renewed theology of enemy-language, chapter two proposes an approach to biblical interpretation that enables and sustains the practice of preaching to “former enemies.” It contends in part that preaching, as a witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is essentially a non-violent practice of the church. More precisely, preaching is inherently a peacemaking practice when its language retains semantic consistency with and proceeds figuratively from the crucified, risen, nonviolent word of God.

First, I will show how a synthesis of the semiotic theories of Augustine and John Milbank illuminate the intrinsically reconciling nature of biblical language. Then, using Hans Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, I will trace the emergence of the kinds of modern biblical interpretation that neglected theological concerns, and present the version of the literal sense of Scripture most suitable for reading Scripture for reconciliation. This literal sense essentially fuses pre-modern exegetical (literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogical) and modern historical methods, in order to encourage a “journalistic reading” of Scripture’s narrative correspondence with and permeation of the complex histories of particular places. Such interpretation privileges theological over historical-critical methods, but circumscribes both approaches in a reconciling hermeneutic that “seeks the peace of the city” (Jer. 29:7). Finally, I will analyze a sermon by Ellen Davis as a practical example of how we might use the reconciling hermeneutic I describe.

2.1 SYNTHESIZING AUGUSTINE AND MILBANK
Augustine points toward a comprehensive view of the *telos* of the Bible’s language. His discussion of signs and things shows how language may operate figuratively, and how preaching puts theological language in service to the love of God and neighbor. In Book 1 of *De Doctrina Christiana*, he writes, “All teaching is teaching either of things or signs, but things are learnt through signs.”\(^2\) Things that are strictly things, like logs, stones, and sheep, “are not employed to signify something.”\(^3\) Alternately, signs are “those things which are employed to signify something.”\(^4\) There can be things that also serve as signs of other things, as well as signs “whose whole function consists in signifying.”\(^5\)

Augustine provides the following, more complete, definition of a sign in Book 2:

> A sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, besides the impression that it presents to the senses. So when we see a footprint we think that the animal whose footprint it is has passed by; when we see smoke we realize that there is fire beneath it; when we hear the voice of an animate being we observe its feeling; and when the trumpet sounds soldiers know they must advance or retreat or do whatever else the state of the battle demands.\(^6\)

Though many kinds of things may also serve as signs, words are the most prolific type of sign. “Words have gained an altogether dominant role among humans in signifying the ideas conceived by the mind that a person wants to reveal.”\(^7\) Words as signs may be either literal or metaphorical. “They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented,” and “they are called metaphorical when the actual things which we signify by the particular words are used to signify something

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\(^3\) Ibid., 8.
\(^4\) Ibid., 9.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., 30.
\(^7\) Ibid., 31.
else.”\textsuperscript{8} So, for example, “ox” may denote the literal living thing called “ox,” or it may refer metaphorically to a “worker in the gospel,” as Paul means in 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18, when he quotes Deut. 25:4, “You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain.”\textsuperscript{9}

This distinction between literal and the metaphorical signs determines Augustine’s use of the fourfold sense of Scripture, where there is a literal sense and a spiritual, or figurative, sense. The literal sense has to do with the “letter,” or plain sense. It attends to the historical narrative and teaches events. Despite that, “one must take care not to interpret a figurative expression literally,” so as not to devolve into a merely carnal and stunted reading.\textsuperscript{10} Then there is the spiritual sense, of which there are three types: 1) allegorical, which has to do with faith, or what to believe, 2) tropological or moral, which indicates what to do, and 3) anagogical, which asks, “To what end?” and aims at the purpose or ultimate hope of the text. Finding the spiritual sense in Scripture is crucial for Augustine, for there lies the deeper meaning the Holy Spirit intends. One remains in a carnal—that is, restricted or finite—understanding by failing to understand literal words as metaphorical. It is “a miserable kind of slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind’s eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light.”\textsuperscript{11}

R. A. Markus observes the implications of Augustine’s attention to the possibilities for limitless transcendence through the kind of signification the spiritual

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 37-38.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
senses make possible. “Language arises from the conflict of this impossibility [of mutual transparency between human minds] with the natural human need for community.”

It is the human urge to discover ever deeper meanings in signs that constitutes the communication needed to create and sustain a community. Augustine is concerned to show that discerning the significations of things is a fundamental human need.

To ‘enjoy’ something that is less than the ultimate, infinite satisfaction, that is to say, to allow the will to rest in its possession; or to wish to ‘enjoy’ it, that is to say, to limit desire to its attainment, without pointing to a further horizon, is a perversion of the natural and rational order of willing. To allow desire to cease in this way is premature closure of the Christian life, a denial of the restlessness in the depth of the human heart.

To reduce all language, especially biblical words and texts, to the literal sense as Augustine defines it is to rob language of its inexhaustible potential for rendering meaning within communities and between individuals. It is unthinkable for Augustine to prohibit figurative interpretations of words as signs. “We thwart this drive of our nature only at the cost of blocking off the process of learning and growth that living in the midst of this realm of limited and unstable things ought always to remain.”

Such an interpretive approach frustrates any full immersion in a linguistic community and prohibits the healing of its ruptures. A denial of the latent power of metaphor to signify things inexorably and exponentially prevents human beings from living toward their ultimate purpose.

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13 Ibid., 101.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 102.
This is not to say that any individual or community may employ language to serve purely human desires, with no regard for divine limits. Augustine explains that some things are to be enjoyed (frui), some are to be used (uti), while others function to be both enjoyed and used.\textsuperscript{16} Scripture is a thing to be both enjoyed and used, but for a specific purpose—for our enlightenment and enablement toward salvation by divine providence, and “to build up this double love of God and neighbor.”\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, Augustine calls for every human being to be loved on God’s account, while God should be loved for himself.\textsuperscript{18} “This reward is the supreme reward—that we may thoroughly enjoy him and that all of us who enjoy him may enjoy one another in him.”\textsuperscript{19} In order to nurture and sustain their love of God and neighbor, Christian communities must prioritize the work of discovering ever-deepening significations and interpretations derived from things signified. “To seek meaning is to enact transcendence.”\textsuperscript{20} But this transcendence is a particular kind with a particular telos. It is a transcendent hermeneutic birthed and harnessed by God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Christian speech, it “renews itself and conveys life from generation to generation from inexhaustible fountains.”\textsuperscript{21}

The church does this in the wake of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, in which Peter reinterprets the significance of biblical events for the new age inaugurated by the gift of

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 27.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 21.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 25.  
\textsuperscript{20} Arnold and Bright, 102.  
the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter connects the following phrase to the present moment: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” These are among the very first words of the proclamation, which constitute the sermon’s first interpretive move involving Scripture. This move initiates a distinguishing mark between the Christian and Jewish communities, where, R. A. Markus says, the former have “an openness to the New Testament context within which the things spoken of in the Old Testament receive a further meaning.” In deference to Jewish interpreters, we should not say that only Christians may pursue “further meaning” from the literal sense. The Christian community is, however, given the task of generating fresh interpretations in faithful response to Jesus Christ. Peter begins his proclamation with a midrashic commentary on Israel’s Scripture in the wake of Easter. The “last days” are no longer days yet to come, but effectively describe the present day and all days succeeding Christ’s resurrection. The literal sense of the “last days” retains its historical meaning as a prophetic vision, but this literal sense is now subsumed by a previously impossible figurative sense. The last days that were heretofore only expected are now a present reality in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s speech bears witness to the risen Jesus through words that signify exponentially greater meaning and significance for God’s people.

Augustine’s theory of language allows for unlimited and unchecked linguistic significations so long as we orient these significations toward their proper ends. The

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23 Arnold and Bright, 104.
church’s language has a *telos*. It expands and stretches forth from its particular roots in choreographed ways. Augustine believes language about God is eternal, but not equivocal, because he believes this is the nature of God. “It is because God is eternal that God is present to all and every time in Augustine’s life. God need not be a creature of change to be attentive to changing creatures.”

So the openness of metaphorical language radiates analogously from God’s own nature, but this freedom of signs signifying things does not move toward chaos. Janet Martin Soskice is right to say in relation to metaphor,

> Perhaps the gaze of God is like the gaze of the artist on the completed painting. Each and every pigment is discreet, and no mark is laid down carelessly...each brush stroke has been laid down, one by one; yet when the painting is complete, we apprehend it in a single vision. But the painting is not ‘time-free’; rather, it is a condensed temporality. We gaze on it as on a complete and consummated whole bearing all the marks of its making.

Indeed, metaphorical interpretation of Scripture should respect appropriate limits—though, “limits” is not as appropriate a descriptor as “divine boundaries,” for Augustine provides us with a theory of language that has its true end in God. His famous statement, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee,” contains the algebraic formula for the *telos* of theological language. We may better understand this in terms of fractal imagery. The closer one looks at a fractal image, the more one notices how its intricate details are statistically consistent with one another. Even the minutest shapes proceed from the same algorithm, and so cannot remain in place apart from their basic, arithmetical formula. Metaphorical language may issue forth infinitely, but only as it

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25 Ibid., 34.
remains consistently parallel or linguistically cooperative with God’s intentions. We interpret Scripture faithfully when we read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of a reconciling God whom Jesus Christ brings into sharp relief by his life, death, and resurrection. This interpretive work never ends until it ends in God. It also does not work, it does not build up the church, unless its end is the love of God and neighbor.

John Milbank’s theological project complements Augustine’s as he examines the foundations of language in *The Word Made Strange*. Here he expands Augustine’s linguistic theory to show how Christian language constitutes its own narrative, one that needs no endorsement from other, supposedly more “real,” narrative structures.

Christians, like everyone else, are scions of language, bound to structures in which reality is already ‘worked over.’ Like everyone else we assume that our constant revisions of our language are evidence that it is indeed reality we are dealing with, but either the entire Christian narrative tells us how things truly are, or it does not. If it does, we have no other access to how things truly are, nor any additional means of determining the question.²⁶

Milbank demonstrates the grounds for the counter-assertion of the biblical narrative over and against all competing narratives’ claims to truth. He is concerned to

²⁶ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 250. He makes this claim in a discussion about the failure of Niebuhrian realism and its assumption that there is some neutral reality “out there” where Christians may contribute their wisdom. Max Stackhouse’s critique of Milbank misses the mark: “Does the logos of God not underlie all areas of life, as those in other fields can see at the depths of what they do if they go deep enough?” [*Journal of Religion*, 78 no 4 O 1998, pp. 640-641]. Stackhouse overlooks the fact that a phrase like going “deep enough” abets a natural theology Milbank rejects. Apart from a community liturgically shaped and led by the Holy Spirit, going “deep enough” will not be enough to discern the logos of God. But we must add a caveat here, which is that the practice of preaching has always employed secular modes of communication in order to bear witness to the gospel. Ted Smith has shown how certain secular rhetorical techniques, which shocked the sensibilities of Christian congregations in the early 19th century, have become second nature for modern preachers (see Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* [Cambridge University Press, 2007]). Christians cannot avoid linguistic cross-pollination when addressing people with the news of God’s activity in the world. The distinctively Christian culture of a local church body always risks exchanging its linguistic habits with a constellation of other competing cultures, habits, and practices. Nevertheless, I am arguing that preaching toward reconciling ends requires reorienting all sermonic language, even, and perhaps especially, language “plundered from the Egyptians.” A reconciling hermeneutic is the first step towards such reorientation.
show that the source of words discloses the way we think, and that we must determine whether the source of our words is theological or anthropological. In a thick historical analysis of the relationship between signs (*signum*), things (*res*), and words (*verbum*—which are really signs), Milbank traces the evolution of linguistics from Augustine to the present wake of the linguistic turn. He surmises that the linguistic turn, which brought an end to the confinement of linguistic theory to the substance-based metaphysical infrastructure of empiricism and rationalism, is in fact a “theological turn” because of its origins in Christian critiques of philosophical assumptions about language. Milbank’s theological account of the linguistic turn leads him to the conclusion that human being is linguistic being that participates in the divine linguistic being.27

Milbank laments the literal sense’s gradual replacement of allegorical, tropological, and anagogical readings of Scripture. The increased emphasis on this “positive (i.e. positivistic) univocal, discourse” eventually led to “the loss of the idea that the *res* was also *signum*, and the confinement of scriptural reading to the literal sense.”28 The modern dichotomy between signs and things originated in empiricist accounts of the origin of language, which “were founded on a name/correspondence semantic theory (‘equivalence’), allied to a metaphysics of substance, and a clear distinction of *res* and *signum*. “29 The violence of this semiotic approach is the linguistic origination of the violence of atheistic epistemologies, which assume human difference automatically creates barriers to peace. The presumption here, that “things are the way they are, and

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28 Ibid., 95.
29 Ibid., 96.
that’s the way they are going to be,” belies the modern project’s attempt to delimit language to modernity’s vision of a “fixed,” empirically verifiable world. The act of distinguishing res from signum actually establishes res as a thing that exists in and for itself. Thus, instead of serving a creativity analogous to the life of God, the division of signs and things serves death. “This complete but potent character of the sign is a function of its lifelessness.”30 Yet, God as logos, as “total sign-being,” has, through Christ’s resurrection, come to “signify absolutely for us” by redefining “the sign of language as life, as eternal logos in the resurrection.”31 Jesus Christ is the “final sign.” By his life, death, and resurrection, he has revealed the telos of all language.

Milbank believes the linguistic foundations of the four-fold sense (and Aquinas’ complex literal sense)32 were right from the beginning, because they assumed the inexhaustible abundance of an eternally creative God. Since, in the logos, sign and thing are unified in essence and orientation, language is freed again to imitate the unfettered-yet-harmonious action of a generous God. The word “reconciliation” in the New Testament corroborates Milbank’s conclusions. Another look at the basic Greek word for reconciliation (αλλασσω) reveals what Milbank calls “plentitude.” That is, the word is a highly versatile, potent, and dynamic word at its core. For it linguistically discloses infinite possibilities for the exchange of enmity for friendship between God and humankind, and also grammatically displays the act of reconciliation within itself as a

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30 Ibid., 138.
31 Ibid., 139.
32 Aquinas redefined the literal sense to mean that there could be many “literal” senses of the same passage. Since the author of Holy Scripture is God, Aquinas believed, and God is not limited to any one meaning in a text, it is conceivable that there could be many faithful interpretations that expand forth from the one literal sense—like a jazz improvisation from set chords—into numerous faithful renderings.
sign of the thing (reconciliation) it signifies. In ἀλλασσω, the fertile, unified, reciprocal relationship between res, signum, and verbum is on full, aesthetic display.  

By conflating signum and res, pre-modern interpreters of Scripture enabled participation in the infinite abundance of Scripturally rooted meaning as analogous to the inexhaustible creativity of the Trinity. Consequently, the history of Christianity displays the creative potential of “unlimited semiosis” as the alternative to the inherent violence and “mystical nihilism” of modern and postmodern thought, which proceed from an assumption of “original violence.” Part of Milbank’s theological project has been to dispel the philosophical myth, posited by Hegel and subsequently Karl Marx, that the heart of all reality is chaos and violence. The lowest common denominator of the universe, the progenitor of all language, is something like pandemonium.

In contrast to Marx and Hegel, Milbank believes human difference does not threaten creation, but is part of God’s design for it. His counterassertion is that violence is always secondary to the peace revealed in Jesus Christ and grounded in creation. Christianity “recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of totalizing reason.

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33 Additionally, the word “reconciliation” began its migration to the English language with the Latin Vulgate’s choice of reconciliatio as the most accurate translation of the Apostle Paul’s word, καταλλαγή, the Greek noun for the English “exchange,” see John W. de Gruchy, Reconciliation: Restoring Justice (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 24. Apparently, Paul originally adapted this word through his preaching and letters in service to the new Christian ministry of reconciliation.

34 I use this particular word intentionally, in order to recall John Milton’s conclusion to Book 1 of Paradise Lost in which he describes the fallen angel, Mulciber—who had been an architect in heaven—constructing Pandemonium, the “high capital of Satan and his peers.” The form of the word in its modern usage is pandemonium, and is presently defined as “noisy confusion” and “loud disorder.” Yet, it originated as Milton’s own invention—a combination of the Greek words pan (all) and daemonion (little demon), meaning “all the demons.” See Milton, Paradise Lost, introduced by Philip Pullman (Oxford University Press, 2005) 38.
Peace no longer depends on the reduction to the self-identical, but is the sociality of harmonious difference."\textsuperscript{35}

The philosophical separation of \textit{res} and \textit{signum} is an unfortunate consequence of this original violence, as well as an act of linguistic violence that shackles the Scriptural imagination.

[The notion that] the scriptures are ‘the content nebula of all possible archetypes’ depends entirely (for Christianity) on the belief in the incarnation of the \textit{logos}, and ‘allegory’ in its specifically Christian usage (after Origen) is precisely the protocol which decrees that all the \textit{res} referred to in the Old Testament point forward to Christ, and that Christ himself embodies an inexhaustible range of meanings which anticipates every individual and collective future. In fact it is only this particular coding which unleases the symbolic polysemy.\textsuperscript{36}

Milbank’s reformulations of Aristotle’s terms, \textit{poesis} and \textit{praxis}, provide the setting for the unleashing of “symbolic polysemy.” Milbank defines \textit{poesis} as “an act which passes over into something external,” “a logic for the establishment of meanings,” a fundamental activity and mode of knowledge concerned with aesthetics and the beautiful as they escape one’s control as contributions to history.\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Poesis} differs from \textit{praxis}, which “is an act which remains within the subject,” an “intentional act” completely determined by its own \textit{habitus} as it proceeds strictly towards its own \textit{telos}.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Poesis}, which does not nullify \textit{praxis} but absorbs it, supposes that all human action and knowledge create an excess of meaning. So, it is not that later history dispossesses us of an intentional act (\textit{praxis}) once controlled by us and properly our own, but rather that to \textit{act at all} is always to be dispossessed, always continuously to apprehend ‘more’ in our own deed once it ‘occurs’ to us,

\textsuperscript{35} Milbank, \textit{Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 5.
\textsuperscript{36} Milbank, \textit{Word Made Strange}, 94.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 123-124, 127.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 123-124.
than our first hazy probings toward the formulation of a performance could ever have expected.\textsuperscript{39}

This does not entail “a tragic distortion of good intentions which cannot foreknow future circumstances (Hegel), but rather a simultaneous and risky openness both to grace and the possibility of sinful distortion.”\textsuperscript{40} Such openness as a characteristic of human creativity is analogous to the ever-deepening, eternal, and prodigal creativity of God. Consequently, the Aristotelian privileging of \textit{praxis} over \textit{poesis} fails, for \textit{praxis} cannot provide a way for one’s actions to be received by others without their either threatening to displace another’s actions, or their “disappearing” into another’s reception. \textit{Poesis}, on the other hand, more completely manifests the divine plentitude\textsuperscript{41} in which humans may mimetically participate in creation (i.e., as stewards of language). Human action imitates the Trinity’s own divine life when we see human difference as an opportunity for, rather than a hindrance to, a peace born of charity. So the Christian is not merely a moral person, in possession of a good conscience, “who acts \textit{with} what he \textit{knows} of death,

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 127.
\textsuperscript{41} Milbank clarifies his notion of “plentitude” by saying, “To believe in plenitude is to believe in the already commenced and yet-to-come restoration of Creation as Creation. Within this belief alone, as Nietzsche failed to perceive, one can cease to be ‘moral.’ This belief is belief in resurrection. As resurrection cancels death, and appears to render murder non-serious, it restores no moral order, but absolutely ruins the possibility of any moral order whatsoever. That is to say, any reactive moral order, which presupposes the absoluteness of death. For the Christian, murder is wrong, not because it removes something irreplaceable, but because it repeats the Satanic founding act of \textit{instituting} death, or the very \textit{possibility} of irreplaceability, and absolute loss...For in the resurrected order, in the life of our vision of God in his final Christic manifestation, the occasion for the exercise of death-presupposing virtue (as Paul says) drops away, and only charity-gift and counter-gift remain,” \textit{Word Made Strange} 229. For an expanded discussion of plentitude, see pp. 219-231.
scarcity and duty to totalities. He has a bad conscience, but a good confidence: for he acts with what he does not know but has faith in.”

Milbank helps us recognize that the seeds of division and violence reside in linguistic formulations sustained by epistemologies of scarcity, or theories of knowledge based on the presupposition that texts’ meanings are severely limited. Hermeneutics resulting from such epistemologies serve the power of death by counteracting the polyvalent nature of Scripture. Many interpretive strategies can and do build up the church, either as hermeneutics of suspicion or trust. Nevertheless, the Bible is not a cadaver. Reading Scripture for reconciliation requires a disavowal of a “hermeneutic of death.” Pursuing a fixed or perpetually static meaning of a text inevitably leads to a departure from the infinitely generous logos of God. At the moment of this departure, human linguistic being rejects participation in divine linguistic being, and the space for embracing multiple valid interpretations diminishes to the point where transformative exchange between Christians and their enemies becomes unthinkable.

Milbank’s imaginative semiotic conclusions help prepare the way for a reconciling hermeneutic in harmony with the nonviolent nature of the word of God. Language is not begotten from, nor is it beholden to, chaos. Genesis describes God’s first

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43 The Christian reception of an enemy not as such but non-seriously illustrates an application of Milbank’s concept of the linguistic unleashing of God’s “plenitude.” As the refusal of complicity with the word “enemy” as a res that exists within and for itself, signified by a verbum/signum that is intelligible to any community no matter its linguistic culture, this reception is an embrace of the abundant life made possible by Christ’s resurrection. The church begins to embrace its enemies through the practice of a peculiar language that does not, and by definition cannot, take enemies seriously as enemies. God has given the church a Word, a Logos, in Jesus Christ, whose nature as a fusion of both sign and being linguistically establishes ever-deepening communion between God and humanity as the central aim for reading Scripture.
word as *interrupting* and transforming chaos into beauty and goodness. Verse 3 of the Gospel of John reveals the *logos* in this way, “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” The *logos* of God, in any of its threefold forms, moves toward us from God with the reconciling nature of Jesus. The basic character of Scripture, constituted as it is by what Milbank has called “symbolic polysemy,” is as eternally hospitable to its readers as Jesus is to the world. Through Scripture, the *logos* gathers its interpreters toward itself as Jesus draws all people toward himself on the cross. As well, this dynamic *logos* frustrates attempts to tame, kill, or treat it as though it were a lifeless word. Like the word of God who is Jesus, the word of God in Scripture absorbs our violent attempts to suffocate and relegate it to a strict literal sense. When interpreters cynically, ignorantly, or unrepentantly impose themselves on the word, the word bears their stripes and exhausts their negligence and cruelty. When readers kill and bury the word, it rises again, revealing itself by its own will and in its own time.

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44 The Word of God has the following threefold form according to Barth: Christian proclamation, Holy Scripture, and revelation. All three forms of the Word correspond formally to the inner life of God as shared by the three Persons of the Trinity, and find their unity in the Word who is Jesus Christ. “One form of the Word of God cannot be separated from another. No particular form has more or less value than another. The revealed Word of God we know only from the Scripture adopted by Church proclamation, or from Church proclamation based on Scripture. The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which makes proclamation possible, or through the proclamation made possible by revelation. The proclaimed Word of God we know only by knowing the revelation attested through Scripture, or by knowing the Scripture which attests revelation” (*CD* I/1, 121). Moreover, when Barth calls the Bible the Word of God, he means it in the same sense that Christian proclamation and revelation are the Word of God, which is that God has gracefully become an “event” in the human word of the Bible. If the language of God becomes an event in the human word of the Bible, “if the Bible speaks to us thus of the promise, if the prophets and apostles tell us what they have to tell us, if their word imposes itself on us and if the Church in its confrontation with the Bible thus becomes again and again what it is, all this is God’s decision and not ours, all this is grace and not our work” (Ibid., 109).
2.2 The ‘Eclipse’ in Retrospect

Hans Frei has shown how biblical interpreters marginalized the theological concerns Augustine and Milbank advocate, concerns that have historically served the upbuilding of the church. He states, “The choice of the logical priority of the subject matter over the words is the fateful decision of late eighteenth century hermeneutics.”

In his discussion of the hermeneutical options available at the end of the nineteenth century, Frei argues that what led to the limited expressions for the meanings of biblical narratives was a turn toward strictly historical and philosophical criticism, and away from a search for truth. Historical critics viewed subject matter in an acutely different way than pre-modern exegetes by separating it from its depiction or cumulative narrative rendering. For modern historians devoted to historical-criticism,

> historical accounting, by almost universal modern consent, involves that the narrative satisfactorily rendering a sequence believed to have taken place must consist of events, and reasons for their occurrence, whose connections may be rendered without recourse to supernatural agency.

In this sense, truth and true events can only be those that are empirically, historically verifiable. Whatever the “real history” is, it cannot be ultimately determined by what the biblical text itself describes. The factuality of biblical narrative is beholden to this real history for its authentication. Once this dichotomy calcifies, the literal sense of Scripture becomes so separated from figural interpretations that the latter begin to look

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46 Ibid., 249-250.
48 Ibid.
like forced, arbitrary impositions of unity on a group of diverse texts.\(^49\) “No longer an extension of literal reading, figural interpretation instead becomes a bad historical argument or an arbitrary allegorizing of texts in the service of preconceived dogma.”\(^50\)

In the wake of the preference of logical priority of subject matter, Frei describes the three most prevalent options for hermeneutical approaches at the dusk of the nineteenth century. The first option saw subject matter as ostensive, or as having an external reference, “i.e. the meaning of the narratives is the state of affairs in the spatiotemporal world to which they refer.”\(^51\) There were three divisions of this camp, consisting of the supernaturalists, naturalists, and those who believed the biblical authors were simply lying to gain power over others. Supernaturalists believed “the meaning of the narratives corresponds to their authors’ intention, and that the intention is literal,” and also that the author is trying to “give a reliable report of spatiotemporal occurrences.”\(^52\) For them, even the miracles are literal. Naturalists, on the other hand, “dropped the literalistic interpretation of individual miraculous reports,” and directed interpretation primarily to the “vindication of the possibility of some sort of nonmiraculous historical occurrence in back of individual reported incidents.”\(^53\) The third camp believed the real intentions of the evangelists were to design tales “to enable them to perpetrate a spiritual

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 37.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 256.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 257.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 260.
power grab.”⁵⁴ Each of the latter three cliques held in common their commitment to determining a narrative’s status by its “extramental, datable occurrences.”⁵⁵

Devotees of the second option rejected the notion of *ostensive* subject matter in biblical narratives. Instead, narratives transfer ideals; meaning is found in “the ideas or moral and religious truths (*Gehalt*) stated in them in narrative form.”⁵⁶ There were two sub-groups operating within this option. The first believed these ideas and truths were “inseparable from the author’s intentions,” and thus proceeded from “deliberately contrived allegories and fables.”⁵⁷ This approach relies on locating the author’s intention in the allegorical meaning, and spurns any questioning of the historicity of the events described. Immanuel Kant is representative of the second sub-group, who loosed the allegorical subject matter from the author’s intention, and argued that “historiographical considerations are strictly irrelevant to the interpretation of the subject matter, which is the foundation and advancement of a pure moral disposition in the inner man and its connection with the ideal realm of ends.”⁵⁸ These believed one reached the meaning of the biblical narratives by understanding the ideas they represent in story form.⁵⁹ These ideas are universally true, and, thus, not dependent upon Scripture for their authority. In fact, one might find these ideals anywhere outside of Scripture, as well as outside of Christian communities. Despite their differences, both sub-groups commonly held that biblical narratives referred not to bona fide historical events, but to ideas.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 216.
⁵⁵ Ibid., 256.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 261.
⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 262.
⁵⁹ Ibid.
Those Frei calls “mythophiles” promoted the third, or the mythic, hermeneutical option. Mythophiles rejected both the ostensive and allegorical meanings of biblical narratives because the former virtually dishonored the authors, while the latter ignored them and infused meaning into the Bible from outside. They found the meaning of the subject matter “in the consciousness they represented.” Myth, in this sense, “is a genetic-psychological category employed in the process of critical-historical understanding.” So the subject matter consists of what could be described as the plight or condition of the biblical authors’ minds. Schleiermacher approached this hermeneutic from the perspective of “understanding discourse by understanding the author as it were immediately and from the inside.” That is, the consciousness of the author is to be examined and understood. “It is his spirit that must be grasped” in order to reconstruct the “process of discourse by that of understanding.” Hegel pursued a different slant. He believed the realistic narrative shape occurs not in the interaction of character and incident, but in “the integration of the consciousness-event into the history of consciousness, or the stages by which Spirit becomes himself.” The subject matter means “the common framework into which the interaction of incident and character is taken up, so that the interaction may be seen to be more than a contingent external

60 Ibid. 265.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 295.
64 Ibid., 310.
65 Ibid., 301.
66 This brings to mind the conclusion of David Steinmetz’s article, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” in Theology Today 37 (1980): “Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred” 38.
relation." Frei offers the example of Hegel’s interpretation of Christ’s death and resurrection as a watershed moment, by which the stage of individual consciousness transitions to that of general consciousness. Both Schleiermacher and Hegel reject that a narrative’s progression may contain its own meaning. The mythic option involves transcending the actual narrative in order to glean its intended meaning from some place outside the text. Biblical narratives must “mean something other than what they say.”

Frei argued compellingly that the latter three prevalent hermeneutical options severely lacked the ability to provide the church with bountiful resources for ever-deepening friendship with God and neighbor in the ways pre-modern interpretation had. This is because pre-modern interpretation held that “the world truly rendered by combining biblical narratives into one was indeed the one and only real world.” Frei agreed with pre-modern readers in their perception of the entire biblical narrative as unified. Furthermore, their literalism was “at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole of reality,” which led to figurative readings that enabled interpretations of “stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative referring to a single history and its patterns of meaning.” Modern criticism inverted this correspondence between the text and the world. This approach separated biblical events into a factual realm, where they could stand on their own apart from their biblically narrative presentation. “Instead of rendering them accessible, the

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67 Frei, Eclipse, 317.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 318.
70 Frei, Eclipse, 3.
71 Ibid., 2.
narratives, heretofore indispensable as means of access to the events, now simply verify them, thus affirming their autonomy and the fact that they are in principle accessible through any kind of description." Yet, pre-modern interpreters pursued a world as created by Scripture. In the latter case, the reader’s duty is as follows:

to fit himself into that world in which he was in any case a member, and he too did so in part by figural interpretation and in part of course by his mode of life. He was to see his disposition, his actions and passions, the shape of his own life as well as that of his era’s events as figures of that storied world.73

2.3 TOWARD A RECONCILING LITERAL SENSE

Frei’s title, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, refers to the loss of this hermeneutic worldview in terms of biblical narrative’s “eclipse,” because of the shadow modern criticism cast upon it. Nevertheless, eclipses are temporary. Thus, on the slowly brightening crescent that only an appreciation for the pre-modern literal sense perceives, Frei offers his own definition of the sensus literalis. Christian tradition derives meaning “directly from [...] its sacred story, the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. This narrative thus has a unifying force and prescriptive character in both the New Testament and the Christian community” that is unique to that Testament and community.74 The literal sense for Frei, then, is a “sacred story” with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as its “unifying force.”

72 Ibid., 4.
73 Ibid., 3.
Frei proceeds to remind us of three minimal agreements among Christians
inhabiting the pre-modern interpretive worldview, which he offers in the context of an
appeal for their retrieval. First,

Christian reading of Christian Scriptures must not deny the literal ascription to
Jesus, and not to any other person, event, time, or idea, of those occurrences,
teachings, personal qualities and religious attributes associated with him in the
stories in which he plays a part, as well as in the other New Testament writings in
which his name is invoked.75

Second, “no Christian reading may deny either the unity of Old and New
Testaments or the congruence [...] of that unity with the ascriptive literalism of the
Gospel narratives.”76 And third, “any readings not in principle in contradiction with
these two rules are permissible, and two of the obvious candidates would be the various
sorts of historical-critical and literary readings.”77

So for Frei, Jesus is the absolute center, the crosshairs of the focal lens through
which Christian communities have traditionally interpreted Scripture. This also
corresponds with Frei’s intense dedication to the priority of the narrative forms of the
gospels, and his understanding of the literal sense. What Frei seeks with these principles
is a recovery of a pre-modern hermeneutic guided by a literal sense that edifies, inspires,
orients, and guides believing Christian communities as they seek “to love God and enjoy
him forever.” This is good news for a church that has not been well-served by academic
preoccupation with the Bible’s historical and empirical verifiability. Frei’s literal sense
does offer hope for a reconciling hermeneutic.

75 Ibid., 144-145.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Yet, we should pause to question whether Stephen Fowl has not offered a more compelling version of the literal sense than Frei. After all, it may be that Frei has set himself up to do precisely what he seeks to avoid. By saying the literal sense is essentially the narrative arc of the gospel, he may be in danger of limiting the literal sense in ways that are similar to the sporadic constructions of meaning presented by scholars beholden to the historical-critical method. Certainly, Frei advocates for the use of many forms of interpretation, as well as using historical-criticism as a tool subordinated to his narrative theological approach. The Trinity also serves as a boundary for his interpretive method. But, for example, what does Frei mean by the second principle he delineates (above) about the unity of the Old Testament with the New Testament, and “the congruence of that unity with the ascriptive literalism of the Gospel narratives”? Is it not the case that limiting his literal sense to the gospel narrative precludes, or at least disturbs, this unification, and falls short of fully managing the diversity of Scripture?

Perhaps Frei could have strengthened his case by stretching the “sacred story” of Jesus’ life, teachings, death, and resurrection into something more like Irenaeus’ Rule of Faith, so that the latter narrative shape does not constitute the sole content of his literal sense. Irenaeus placed the “sacred story” not as the one unifying story of Scripture, but as the climactic moment of the apostolic faith, formally represented in the Apostles’ Creed. It is “Scripture itself that supplies the categories in which the [Rule of Faith] is expressed. Text and interpretation are like twin brothers; one can scarcely tell the one

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78 Fowl’s definition corresponds also with that of Aquinas, who believed there could be many literal senses of the same passage.

79 Fowl, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, 29.
from the other.”  

It is the *kerygmatic* arc of the Rule of Faith that the apostles use in their sermons and speeches throughout Acts. The consistent framework of the apostolic gospel across the New Testament begins with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and its inauguration of the new age in the coming of Jesus Christ, proceeds through his life, death, and resurrection, continues in his exaltation to God’s right hand, and culminates in his imminent return as judge and savior of all people.

What Fowl does with the literal sense is more hospitable to interpreting Scripture with the Rule of Faith as a practical guide. It certainly complements and extends Aquinas’ approach to the literal sense as having eschatologically infinite possibilities for faith formation in the life of the church. Fowl defines the literal sense of a passage as follows:

Let us take the ‘literal sense’ of a passage to be the meanings conventionally ascribed to a passage by Christian communities. Thus, the literal sense will be those meanings Christians regularly ascribe to a passage in their ongoing struggles to live and worship faithfully before the triune God. This means that the literal sense of Scripture will be those interpretations Christians take to be primary, the basis and norm for all subsequent ways of interpreting the text.

This definition of the literal sense allows for figural readings that are more beneficial for the church today. Especially in the light of the glut of divisions throughout the contemporary church, Fowl’s approach encourages a reclamation of the various pre-

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81 This is a basic part of C. H. Dodd’s argument in *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1936]). Richard Lischer includes an excerpt of this work in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, Richard Lischer, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 23-30, perhaps for the sole reason that Dodd chides contemporary preachers, saying, “Much of our preaching in church at the present day would not have been recognized by the early Christians as *kerygma*” 23.

82 That is, possibilities oriented toward the telos of ever deeper communion with God.
modern approaches to Scriptural interpretation that most fully enable the making of disciples capable of performing the Scriptures, and of being drawn into the communion of saints across time and space.

The saints are those who have masterfully performed the Scriptures, those who have allowed their engagements with Scripture to draw them into an ever deeper communion with God and neighbor. If these are also the ends of theological interpretation in the present, then it is unclear why one would seek to engage Scripture with these same ends in mind without also attending to the lives and interpretations of such successful practitioners.83

By deftly appropriating Irenaeus’ Rule of Faith in a way that builds on Frei’s work and repositions church communities as Scripture’s most authoritative interpreters, Fowl’s literal sense creates an opening for a hermeneutic that emphasizes the reconciling orientation and nature of biblical language. Reading Scripture for reconciliation requires a literal sense that includes reading with the saints, since the saints remind us of Scripture’s richness and complexity. His proposal that “those interpretations Christians take to be primary” should be “the basis and norm for all subsequent” interpretations not only prioritizes theological concerns, but encourages the literal reconciliation of modern interpretations with one another and with past Christian interpreters. Fowl’s literal sense “seeks the peace of the city” by including present readers within the communion of saints for all time, especially those interpreters whose voices were—in a kind of metaphorical fratricide—relegated to the past. Fowl shows that the practice of reading Scripture for reconciliation necessitates participation in the community of the great cloud of witnesses, whom God has gathered to seek the mind of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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83 Fowl, 55-56.
Churches should, therefore, seek to enact what Rowan Williams called a “diachronic” style of reading Scripture. This approach asks, “How—without gross distortion and selectivity, ‘synchronic’ reconciliations—are we to follow the history of Scripture so that the authoritative centrality of the narratives presupposed in baptism and eucharist appears?”\(^{84}\) The diachronic reading of Scripture reads Scripture as a pattern of changes, a sequence of changes in a single time continuum, rather than as a field of linguistic material that is worked out in something more like the surface of a picture, that is, worked out in space.\(^{85}\) Williams’ advocates grounding the literal sense in dramatic modes of reading, so that we are “invited to identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to reappropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story. Its movements, transactions, transformations, become ours; we take responsibility” for the positions in the narrative.\(^{86}\) A diachronic reading recognizes that particular Christian communities in the present participate simultaneously as heirs and forebears within the cosmic scope God’s salvation history. A diachronic reading also recognizes that the time and movements within a text are analogous to our own lives in ways that are recognizable and given to duplication. As we diachronically follow a text, there is room for a wide variety of interpretations and imitations, while there are also sacred limits provided by the text, itself. “Scripture, with all its discord and polyphony, is the canonical text of a community in which there are limits to pluralism. The history of

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\(^{85}\) Ibid., 121-122.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 125.
Scripture, internal and contextual, for all its stresses and cross-currents, is read as the production of the meaning of a corporate symbolic life” with unity and integrity.87

A diachronic reading of Scripture in the terms Williams describes provides a literal sense that is most nimble especially for churches in pluralistic cultures, where there will be an unruly number of different interpretations of Scripture within even one local church body. So, this literal sense could also be understood as an “eschatological sense.”

For,


to read diachronically the history that we call a history of salvation is to ‘read’ our own time in the believing community (and so too the time of our world) as capable of being integrated into such a history, in a future we cannot but call God’s because we have no secure human way of planning it or thematising it.88

This will frustrate the “iron theologies”89 of fundamentalists, but it enables solutions to more pressing problems than the ones that seem always to pre-occupy those who believe there can only be one meaning of a text, those for whom the interpretation of Scripture becomes a game of “finders keepers.” There may be no more pressing need in the church than a way of faithfully reading Scripture with the kind of diachronic method Williams describes, where disciples across the ecclesial spectrum may be both figuratively and dramatically drawn into ever deeper communion with God and neighbor in ways that burn off even our self-perceived virtues.90

87 Ibid., 130.
88 Ibid., 132.
89 Charles L. Campbell and Johann H. Cilliers describe “iron theology” as theology that claims sole access to “truth” that is “set in stone.” It professes “totality and finality” and “finds the powerlessness of the cross intolerable,” so that “the joy of the good news of the gospel is transformed into closed seriousness,” in Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly (Baylor University Press, 2012) 65.
90 In the conclusion to her short story, “Revelation,” Everything that Rises Must Converge (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), Flannery O’Connor describes human virtues as precarious in the searing light of heaven.
In this sense, Scripture is humanity’s enemy. For a diachronic reading demands from the interpreter a capacity for imagination readers are often unwilling to nurture. For Christians, such imagination involves directing the faculties of fascination and curiosity toward the joyful building up of the church. To read the Bible for reconciliation, interpreters should prepare to have their hostility toward Scripture outmatched by Scripture’s hostility towards the readers’ agenda. Scripture’s hostility towards us is really grace, since its hostility aims to soften our hardness of heart.

2.4 Ellul, Brueggemann, and Propaganda

In the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to “someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away” (Matthew 13:24-25). This clandestine operation by “the evil one” (13:38) is not unlike the role modern propaganda plays in frustrating a diachronic reading of Scripture. Because modern propagandists value speed, efficiency, and scientific technique in their interpretations of history, they are innately opposed to the patience and submissiveness so constitutive of the diachronic interpreter’s methods of interpretation. Reading Scripture diachronically will mean preachers must also read as anti-propagandists, proclaiming the kingdom of heaven in stark contrast to the kingdoms of this world.

Her skepticism about human works complements my view that even those works we would acknowledge as obviously “good” remain continuously beholden to divine judgment.
We assume at our own peril that propaganda was merely a tool of 20th Century totalitarian regimes, and that its threat extends no further than the faded images the nightly newscasts dramatically burned into the collective memory of the masses for more than half a century: locals pulling down a statue of a dictator; a poster filled with nationalistic rhetoric hanging from an overpass; grainy videos of soldiers marching lockstep in the capital square; or Hitler gesturing furiously from a podium. Reading Scripture diachronically requires heightened sensitivity to modern propaganda as a technique critical to the function of the modern nation-state and the preservation of its sovereignty. Propaganda is a primary means by which nation-states contrive enemies and domesticate Jesus’ lordship over history.

In his enduring treatise on the subject, Jacques Ellul defines propaganda as a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.\(^91\)

More recent scholars have criticized Ellul’s depiction of the vastness and pervasiveness of propaganda as too indefinite for the kinds of precise investigations needed to unmask it.\(^92\) But what one finds in Ellul’s work that is largely missing in these


\(^{92}\) See Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999) 4: “[We] find Ellul’s magnitude, especially in generalizing without regard for different cultural contexts […] troublesome because we believe that to analyze propaganda one needs to be able to identify it.” Despite their general respect for Ellul, Jowett and O’Donnell’s brief assessment of his work is off-base, since Ellul is less interested in an exhaustive account of propaganda as it corresponds to particular contexts than describing it as a modern phenomenon. In its modern form, propaganda does share many central characteristics across all modern cultures, as Ellul frequently shows. Jowett and O’Donnell seem to misinterpret Ellul’s respect for propaganda’s power. He goes so far as to say even he himself cannot really fully define it, or even escape its effects. His analysis of propaganda’s sheer
more recent analyses is a careful respect for propaganda’s sheer size, its unremitting proliferation, and its spiritual dimensions. In a later work, he describes propaganda in biblical and apocalyptic terms, unapologetically identifying it as the contemporary form of the “beast that rose out of the earth” in Revelation 13. This second beast, which follows the beast from the sea, “makes speeches which induce people to obey the state, to worship it. It gives them the mark that enables them to live in society.”

By this association, Ellul expands our capacity to recognize propaganda’s ability to overwhelm. Recognition is not a vaccine against its effects, but an exposé of propaganda as a kind of leviathan. Readers familiar with Ellul will hear echoes of his analysis of the technological society in his statement that propaganda must utilize all media—“the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing.” Propaganda’s dissemination must be total, rather than sporadic. “Propaganda tries to surround man by all possible routes, in the realm of feelings as well as ideas, by playing on his will or on his needs, through his conscious and his unconscious, assailing him in both his private and his public life.” Additionally, contemporary technology (television, internet, mobile devices) and scientific understanding have combined to produce forms of

immensity as a social phenomenon is precisely what grounds and authenticates the arguments Jowett and O’Donnell claim to appreciate.

94 Ellul, *Propaganda*, 9. We may rightly update this list to include the internet and all devices that utilize it, taking care to note how much more susceptible contemporary technology makes us to propaganda. Ellul would likely have been among the first to recognize the dangers of mobile internet devices, for example, and to describe its unlimited potential to condition its users to be receptacles for nearly uninterrupted propaganda.
95 Ibid., 11.
propaganda previous societies could not have imagined. For example, propaganda is now so omnipresent and pervasive that countries like the United States—where the common citizen sees propaganda as something negative—is nevertheless steeped in it, and even happily dependent upon it. Propaganda surrounds Americans so completely one might say it has an unassuming quality. Left unchecked, it suffuses citizens’ consciousness with its own brand of imagination, and stamps everyone with its unique trademark.96

Ellul’s analysis of propaganda complements Walter Brueggemann’s description of the “royal consciousness,” for which the central criteria are the maintenance of affluence, the politics of oppression, and the subordination of the sovereignty of God to the sovereignty of the king. There are three corresponding elements of the royal consciousness that serve as the distinguishing marks of what Brueggemann calls “the royal program of achievable satiation.” This program has to do with a saturation of the governed with a particular kind of imagination. In particular, the royal program:

- Is fed by a management mentality that believes there are no mysteries to honor, only problems to be solved […]
- Is legitimated by an ‘official religion of optimism,’ which believes God has no business other than to maintain our standard of living, ensuring his own place in his palace.
- Requires the annulment of the neighbor as life-giver in our history; it imagines that we can live outside history as self-made men and women.97

First, the “management mentality” to which Brueggemann refers is precisely what sustains modern bureaucracies. Modern propaganda could not exist without bureaucratic

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96 Ellul offers the caveat that propaganda is largely ineffective against racial and other types of prejudice. The propagandist “wears himself out” making direct attacks on such established opinions, accepted clichés, and fixed patterns. Nevertheless, the propagandist is “aware of this terrain,” and utilizes existing opinion without contradicting it (see 33-35).
managers. There must be an institutional, administrative organization, with a defined hierarchy of leadership. The higher one traces the hierarchical pyramid, the more concealed the administrators are from the general public. An intentional result of this organization is that “[t]he propagandist is always separated from the propagandee, he remains a stranger to him.”

Propagandees are, by definition, “underneath” the propagandist:

Classic propaganda, as one usually thinks of it, is a vertical propaganda—in the sense that it is made by a leader, a technician, a political or religious head who acts from the superior position of his authority and seeks to influence the crowd below. Such propaganda comes from above. It is conceived in the secret recesses of political enclaves; it uses all technical methods of centralized mass communication; it envelops a mass of individuals; but those who practice it are on the outside.

Such separation between propagandist and propagandee mirrors the atomization of the public mass into individuals that appear to the propagandist to be little more than commodities. This corresponds with Ellul’s contention that modern propaganda can flourish only in certain sociological conditions. For propaganda to succeed, the society must be both an individualist and a mass society. These may sound like contradictory terms, but Ellul insists they are not. In truth, “an individualist society must be a mass society, because the first move toward liberation of the individual is to break up the small groups that are an organic fact of the entire society.” The consequence is an epidemic of loneliness and isolation that makes individuals even more susceptible to propaganda.

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98 Ellul, Propaganda, 23.
99 Ibid., 79-80.
100 During current North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory’s 2012 campaign, he repeatedly promised his administration would bring a “customer service culture” to state government.
101 Ellul, Propaganda, 90.
102 Ibid.
“Precisely because the individual claims to be equal to all other individuals, he becomes an abstraction and is in effect reduced to a cipher.”

Thus, there will be “no mysteries to honor” within the bureaucratic royal consciousness, since one of the intended results of achievable satiation is the people’s disenchantment with the legends that once constituted and animated their communal life. Propagandists derive much of their power in a parasitical way from the fact/value dichotomy. “Modern man worships ‘facts’—that is, he accepts ‘facts’ as the ultimate reality. He is convinced that what is, is good. He believes that facts in themselves provide evidence and proof, and he willingly subordinates values to them.” In this context of a simultaneously individualist and mass society, everything is carefully weighed and measured, and reality can only be that which the technicians, politicians, and managers seem to empirically and objectively construct or verify. These are the conditions in which the royal consciousness redefines our notions of humanness, and denies “the legitimacy of tradition that requires us to remember, of authority that expects us to answer, and of community that calls us to care.”

A second principle of the royal program is its “official religion of optimism.” This element functions to maintain the status quo of affluence, especially for the ruling classes. The official narrative also domesticates religion by handing what is really God’s jurisdiction over to the king. It perpetuates myths that hijack God’s sovereignty and gives the king “a monopoly so that no marginal person may approach this God except on
the king’s terms.”¹⁰⁶ Those who challenge authorized accounts of reality are ignored as traitors and fools. Lamentations are mocked. The official religion of optimism suffers no interruptions. “There will be no disturbing cry against the king here.”¹⁰⁷

Likewise, propagandists must advance an etiological myth, one that enables the organization to offer a foundational, all-embracing system of belief and explanation for the way things are. The myth must be a complete answer to all questions occurring in the citizens’ conscience.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, democratic states are required to become religious. “The content of this religion is of little importance; what matters is to satisfy the religious feelings of the masses; these feelings are used to integrate the masses into the national collective.”¹⁰⁹ In the United States, the etiological myth is synonymous with “the American Way of Life.” A democracy needs its citizens to believe in this myth (“of tolerance, respect, degree, choice, diversity, and so on”¹¹⁰) in order to preserve itself. If the state ceased to promulgate its reason for being, its effectiveness in nourishing citizenry’s need for religious content would diminish. The state

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 29.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Ellul, Propaganda, 251. He defines myth as “an all-encompassing, activating image: a sort of vision of desirable objectives that have lost their material, practical character and have become strongly colored, overwhelming, all-encompassing, and which displace from the conscious all that is not related to it” (31). Interestingly, Ellul describes the etiological myth in relation to democratic states, which become propagandist states even if they do not want to. Democratic states must create propaganda to complement the growing dissemination of information necessary for the state to function. “For the information it dispenses is believed only to the extent that its propaganda is believed” (251).
¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Elsewhere, Ellul says, “Propaganda is the true remedy for loneliness. It also corresponds to deep and constant needs, more developed today, perhaps, than ever before: the need to believe and obey, to create and hear fables, to communicate in the language of myths” (148, original emphasis).
¹¹⁰ Ibid. 250.
would become the laughing stock of the citizenry, and its information would lose its effect, together with its propaganda. For the information it dispenses is believed only to the extent that its propaganda is believed.\footnote{Ibid., 251.}

The third distinguishing characteristic of the royal program is “the annulment of the neighbor as life-giver in our history.” The king or ruling class tries to preserve the idea that their citizens are not really dependent upon or accountable to one another, but ultimately dependent upon and accountable to the royal program. The ruling classes establish “barriers and pecking orders that secure us at each other’s expense,” convince us we have denied no one their basic needs by hoarding wealth for ourselves, and expect us to remain blind to the human cost in terms of poverty and exploitation.\footnote{Brueggemann, 46, 88.} In this imagination, the king becomes the agent of God’s providential care. As this imagination gains momentum, and as the king increasingly becomes an historical agent with enduring, ontological significance, the primary vision eventually becomes the well-being of the king rather than the marginalized.\footnote{Ibid., 34.}

Here again the etiological myth arises to displace any idea that the individual is not utterly dependent on the state. The propagandist employs the myth to isolate the individual from his neighbor, to convince him he does not really need anyone else but the state. One of the effects of propaganda is that it diminishes a person, usurping his capacity for imagination until “he can no longer decide for himself, or alone assume the burden of his life; he needs a guardian, a director of conscience, and feels ill when he
does not have them.”114 By positioning it as the sole benefactor and provider of comfort and security, propaganda enables the state to become the people’s true shepherd and neighbor. The state neutralizes the masses, forces them into passivity, throws them back on their private life and personal happiness (actually according them some necessary satisfactions on this level), in order to leave a free hand to those who are in power, to the active, to the militant.115

With this free hand, the state creates enemies for itself, and quite easily mobilizes the citizenry against them. “Man always has a certain need to hate, just as he hides in his heart the urge to kill. Propaganda offers him an object of hatred, for all propaganda is aimed at an enemy.”116 There is no possibility for considering enemies as potential neighbors. In democratic states this would confuse the etiological myth—i.e., the “American Way of Life”—as being merely one among other valid options. In other words, the state’s pursuit of enemies involves the perpetuation of the illusion that it alone determines the truth. The state uses covert propaganda to establish the public’s expectations for who their enemies are and utilizes overt propaganda to agitate the public by attacking those enemies directly.

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114 Ellul, Propaganda, 186. This also has to do with the mechanization of work: “Those who think, establish the schedules, or set the norms, never act—and those who act must do so according to the rules, patterns, and plans imposed on them from outside. [Workers] must not reflect on their actions. They cannot do so anyhow, because of the speed with which they work. The modern ideal appears to be a reduction of action to complete automatism” (180).
115 Ibid., 192.
116 Ibid., 152. See, for example, Patrick E. Tyler, “Pentagon Imagines New Enemies To Fight In Post-Cold-War Era,” The New York Times, 17 Feb 1992, World section: “70 pages of planning documents were made available to The New York Times by an official who wished to call attention to what he considered vigorous attempts within the military establishment to invent a menu of alarming war scenarios that can be used by the Pentagon to prevent further reductions in forces or cancellations of new weapon systems from defense contractors.”
It is extremely easy to launch a revolutionary movement based on hatred of a particular enemy. Hatred is probably the most spontaneous and common sentiment; it consists of attributing one’s misfortunes and sins to ‘another,’ who must be killed in order to assure the disappearance of those misfortunes and sins.117

With its management mentality, status quo optimism, and manufactured enemies, the royal consciousness clearly corresponds with key components of modern propaganda. But a fuller understanding of propaganda will enable preachers to read Scripture against the royal consciousness, in order to embolden the church as it becomes increasingly “surrounded” by the secular order. Brueggemann’s own definition of preaching shows what is at stake in preachers’ interpretive practices. He describes preaching as the “summoning and nurturing of an alternative community with an alternative identity, vision, and vocation, preoccupied with praise and obedience toward the God we Christians know fully in Jesus of Nazareth.”118 Such preaching has wisdom enough to counter the royal consciousness, to expose propaganda, and to discern when “an enemy has done this” (Mt. 13:28). It has the power to “summon and nurture” an alternative community capable of living by truth, lament, and reconciliation.

2.5 A JOURNALISTIC HERMENEUTIC

A reconciling hermeneutic employs diachronic reading as an alternative to the propagandist’s interpretation of time and history. Diachronic reading—where the church recognizes its potential to integrate its present situation within that of the larger story of

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117 Ellul, Propaganda, 73.
118 Brueggemann, Testimony to Otherwise: The Witness of Elijah and Elisha (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) 5.
salvation history—is also the means by which preachers summon and nurture the congregation from disenchantment to enchantment, from cynicism to trust, and from hostility towards the text to friendship with it. This means reconciliation has to do not only with restoring relationships between God and humanity, and between human beings, but also between human beings and Scripture over time. A reconciling hermeneutic begins with the interpreter’s imaginative submission to the lordship of the Word of God revealed in Scripture. Consequently, such a hermeneutic will be “journalistic,” so that it not only imaginatively pairs Scriptural narratives with contemporary lives and events, but does so with a particular concern for those being abused by the powers. That is, a “journalistic hermeneutic” adds to the diachronic reading a predisposition of concern for those on the margins. It exercises a “preferential option” for those being sacrificed.

There is a danger in advocating a journalistic hermeneutic to the extent that modern, corporate journalism in the West is not only thoroughly secular, but also saturated with propaganda, violent motivations, and dubious claims of objectivity and neutrality. Ellul’s study suggests much that passes for modern news is merely the systematic transmission of “facts,” presented so that their a priori objectivity is assumed. Modern news is perceived to be legitimate only when its biases are carefully masked, and

119 By “corporate journalism” I mean to highlight contemporary journalism’s increasing susceptibility to the concerns of only a handful of large corporations in the United States, including The Walt Disney Company, Comcast, Time Warner, News Corporation, Viacom, Liberty Media, and CBS. For a discussion of this dynamic as “the business of propaganda,” see Hedges, Death of the Liberal Class, 83ff.
when readers ignore or do not discern ulterior motives in the content a particular medium presents. In modern journalism, the news cannot be good unless it is impartial.\textsuperscript{120}

One of the cardinal propagandistic qualities of corporate journalists is their general predisposition to offer “both sides of the story,” even when one side is clearly harming the other. One \textit{New York Times} reporter described his approach to a story about a proposed telephone rate hike in New York State as “a kind of arrogance:

I was painting by numbers, I had written the story by calling up legislators who were sponsoring the proposal, and then calling up citizens’ groups who were raising hell about it, and then getting back to the legislators for their reaction. I then stitched all the quotes together under a grand-sounding theme, and voilà! I’d been dutifully ‘objective’ and gathered both sides of the story and made a ‘fair and balanced’ front-page story for the \textit{New York Times}…If anything unfair or truly nefarious was being done by the legislators, lobbyists, or citizens’ groups in the process of getting this rate hike passed, I would have been blithely unaware of it. The principal actors in this story could have driven a bribe or a lie or a loophole or a simple unfairness right under my nose, and I wouldn’t have suspected a thing. The he-said-she-said formula was all I needed to get on page one.\textsuperscript{121}

Journalism, especially journalism disseminated to the public from large, corporate institutions, often harms not only certain powerless demographics and poor, marginalized people, but also the reporters themselves. As a Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign war correspondent for \textit{The New York Times}, Chris Hedges covered wars in Central America, the Middle East, and the Balkans. He suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

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\textsuperscript{120} Some of the most popular forms of mass media in the West attempt to distinguish themselves from other news sources as objective, fair, and balanced, even when they consistently promote very particular ideologies. Whatever the political allegiances, and no matter the source or medium, news cannot be and has never been impartial. One effect of the Internet on news media has been to partition people and ideas, with the effect of efficiently ghettoizing and calcifying divisions across a broad spectrum of political, economic, and social categories. More easily than ever, people may consume prodigious amounts of media content without ever encountering perspectives other than those with which they already agree. The proliferation of such a dynamic in modern, technological societies makes the masses increasingly susceptible to propaganda.
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(PTSD) from living in war zones continuously for decades. He also laments his own participation in the emotional detachment that war correspondence demands from its storytellers.

It is difficult to witness human suffering and not to feel. But to express these emotions in the newsroom, to express outrage at the atrocities committed by Salvadoran death squads, the killings by Bosnian Serbs, or especially the brutality of Israeli soldiers in Gaza, was to risk being reassigned or pushed aside by editors who demanded emotional disengagement. Those who feel in newsrooms are viewed as lacking impartiality and objectivity. They cannot be trusted. And the game I and others played was to mask our emotions and pretend that, no matter how horrible the crime, we were only clinical observers.\textsuperscript{122}

After returning to the United States, Hedges was eventually fired for continuously denouncing, in journalistic reports, opinion editorials, and public speeches, the lead up to the second Iraq War. After criticizing the war in a commencement address to graduates at Rockford College, a \textit{Times} assistant managing editor gave him “a written reprimand for ‘public remarks that could undermine public trust in the paper’s impartiality.’”\textsuperscript{123}

In stark contrast to some of the destructive aspects of corporate journalism, a journalistic hermeneutic will not seek formulaic, objective, or detached interpretations of Scripture or of the life of a worshipping community. Nor will it serve to satiate the modern appetite for “facts” in the sense Ellul describes. Rather, in service to the finality of God’s reconciliation in Christ, the journalistic hermeneutic has Scripture in mind when it is interpreting the community and has the community in mind when it is interpreting Scripture. Scripture’s whole purpose is to reveal Christ. And, as Martin Luther said,

\textsuperscript{122} Hedges, \textit{Death of the Liberal Class}, 126.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 130.
“Nihil nisi Christus praedicantur” (nothing except Christ is preached). Where Luther would say the hermeneutical key to Scripture is finding the proclamation of the gospel in the biblical book being interpreted, a journalistic hermeneutic applies this principle to the interpretation of the present context as well.

This requires faith on the preacher’s part that the Kingdom of God is in fact present in the world in discernible ways for the baptized. Therefore, those who read Scripture for reconciliation will unapologetically approach the text with a bias. With the preconceived notion that God has already so conclusively and irrevocably reconciled humanity to himself in Christ that the consequences of this reconciliation still reverberate today, biblical interpreters concerned with preaching the Scriptures will expect to find evidence “outside” the text that God “has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2:14).

The journalistic hermeneutic really asks two questions: 1) “Where is the gospel in this text?” and 2) “Where is the gospel happening in our midst?” The second question follows the first, and its answer is subordinate to the answer of the first. Nevertheless, every reconciling sermon should be so dependent on the gospel conveyed both in the text and also in the church’s life together that proclamation would fall apart if either were missing. Peter Storey sums up the tragic consequences of preaching that fails to do this. Remark ing on the flat and lifeless sermons of many of his colleagues in the context of Apartheid in South Africa, he recalls, “Every Sunday, their sermons said everything, and

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nothing; they could have been preaching anywhere in the world, or nowhere in the world. They told the old, old story of Jesus and his love as if it happened on another planet.”

In addition to the dialectic between Scripture and communal life, a second key component of a journalistic hermeneutic runs counter to corporate journalism: lament. To read Scripture with a journalistic hermeneutic is to read with the conviction that reconciliation and lament are inextricably related. That is, a journalistic hermeneutic will embrace lament as a crucial part of the journey of reconciliation, and therefore will not shy away from the most difficult realities of the preacher’s context. This adds a supplementary third question, which is, “Who is being sacrificed?” With the tenacity of a zealous reporter, Scriptural interpreters sift through the text and their own context to determine what is happening to human bodies. Here we focus our attention on what is concretely at stake for our bodies in light of the cross (literally, the stake) of Christ, so that through its Scriptural interpretation, the church may learn to lament in ways that offer alternatives to the numbness of corporate journalism.

Introducing his theological response to the Rwandan genocide, Emmanuel Katongole names three particular ways to think about bodies on any journey toward reconciliation. The first sense calls our attention to the bodies of those who have been victimized or physically harmed. “Anyone who watched the news reports from Rwanda in 1994 will remember the images of bodies. Bodies stacked in open graves. Bodies floating down rivers. Bodies hacked to pieces by machetes. We cannot remember

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Rwanda in 1994 without talking about bodies.”¹²⁷ The second sense invites a closer inspection of the body politic.

The genocide of 1994 did not erupt out of nowhere. It has a political history…Rwanda’s genocide is not just a story about the bodies of some who were victims and others who were killers. It is about the ultimate manifestation of a body politic that was sick from the time it was conceived.¹²⁸

The third sense focuses on the broken body of Christ. Christians killed other Christians in Rwanda, “often in the same churches where they had worshiped together. Accordingly, this is not a story about something that happened to a strange people in a faraway place. It happened among the body of Christ, of which we are members.”¹²⁹

Having enumerated these three senses of the word body, Katongole asks Western Christians to consider how their numbness is reflected back to the church in Rwanda’s broken bodies.¹³⁰ The bodies of Western Christians are just as susceptible to the ways in which bodies in Rwanda were dominated and mutilated by violence. A journalistic hermeneutic, therefore, presupposes the reader’s sensitivity to the text’s consequences for the body, in each of the three senses outlined above. Such a hermeneutic will aim to counteract the cool objectivity and scientific rationalism that plagues corporate journalism. With the passion of the Psalmist, of Job, of Jeremiah, and of Jesus on the cross, the journalistic hermeneutic subjects the church to questions so intense they could have only risen organically from the text. Since so many biblical texts are concerned with what is at stake for bodies, any proclamation born from a journalistic reading will

¹²⁸ Ibid., 11-12.
¹²⁹ Ibid., 12.
¹³⁰ Ibid., 13.
contend with the interplay between Scripture’s intentions for human bodies, the body politic, and the body of Christ.

### 2.6 Practicing a Reconciling Hermeneutic

From the discussion thus far we may identify three distinctives of a reconciling hermeneutic. First, a reconciling hermeneutic discerns in Scripture’s inexhaustible potential for figural interpretations a correlative to God’s peaceably drawing the world to himself in Christ. There is, then, a characteristically non-violent, reconciling dynamic to the language of Scripture which all preaching must seek to imitate if it would enable the deepening of communion between God and humanity. Second, reading the Bible for reconciliation requires prioritizing theological concerns over all others. Reconciling interpreters will be inclined to expand the plain sense of a Scripture passage with a “suspension of disbelief” or enchantment, so that curiosity and a capacity for astonishment constitute the interpreter’s fundamental posture towards the text. Third, a reconciling hermeneutic reads journalistically, in that its diachronic vision prioritizes attention to suffering people. Counter to the detached and “objective” methodologies of corporate journalism and its concern to report “facts,” a journalistic literal sense reads Scripture and contemporary events together, in order that the biblical texts may impose themselves to reanimate and reform their hearers’ perceptions of reality.

What does a sermon developed with these distinctions look like? Ellen Davis, a North American Old Testament scholar, regularly employs a reconciling hermeneutic in her preaching. She eloquently combines both modern and pre-modern hermeneutics in
her sermons, and is consistently concerned with the theological interpretation of Scripture. Throughout her sermons, she incorporates her own proposal that,

the preacher’s first and most important responsibility is to educate the imaginations of her hearers so that they have the linguistic skills to enter into the world which Scripture discloses, and may thus make a genuine choice about whether to live there.  

In her sermon, “Psalm 1,” preached from the lectionary text for the Sixth Sunday of Epiphany (Year C), Davis concentrates on the first two verses of the Psalm in order to encourage her congregation of seminarians toward a prayerful disposition in preparation for Lent. Her introduction leads to an exegetical analysis of the Psalm’s first word, ירשא (ashrê), moving from the typical translation of “happy” to “fortunate,” and finally to “privileged.” “Privileged is the one who meditates on Torah day and night.” The privileged are not those gathered “in the sitting place of the scornful,” but the “few who find pure delight in studying the Torah of YHWH.” Her detailed analysis of this one word primarily depicts not her immediate congregation, but the original author, the Psalmist, communicating to the reader one simple point: “you’re not going to get anywhere in the life of prayer unless you’re reading Scripture, God’s Torah, all the time.”

Were the sermon to continue in this vein, the congregation might feel as though they had been subjected to an introductory Hebrew class, with an added “point” or maxim for inspiration. But within moments, Davis places the congregation beside biblical characters as living prayer partners. People we have come to know through

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Scripture—David, Jeremiah, Jesus—“attend us as we pray, and their stories shape our prayers.” When we pray the Psalms, we do so “in the company of Jesus and all these saints.” Davis has transitioned imaginatively from Hebrew instructor to journalist, directly chronicling the good news that these biblical characters pray with us as surely and as presently as the next person in the pew. She has interpreted the text “literally,” that is, with attention to exegesis and application, and even with a view toward the author’s original intent. But now the literal sense has expanded dramatically, so that the focus is not on the author’s “original intent,” but on the hearer as the psalmist, praying in communion with all the saints who have made these words their own. In this way, she not only reconciles the text and congregation so that the text may dovetail with their life together, she “overlaps” the sermonic event with the presence of saints past and present.

Davis is also aware of the time. She attempts to reconcile the Psalm with the present moment, unleashing Scripture’s ambition to absorb the congregation into its own world. “The church as a whole is about to enter the great season of holy discipline, Lent, and so this is a good time to take up the psalmist’s challenge to make a difficult decision about the company we keep.” Focusing on “the sitting-place of the scornful” in verse 1, she transcends more direct, literal connections to “racy company” or folks who “wouldn’t want to hang out with us” godly people. She unapologetically moves further from a literal to a figurative sense, explaining to the congregation, “Christians have long recognized that if the literal interpretation of a psalm doesn’t touch us closely, then we should try a less literal one.”
Now, the scornful become “whoever would hurt us by filling our thoughts and imagination with things that have no substance.” The “sitting-place” becomes the couch in front of the television. She thus invites the congregation not only to abstain from television during Lent, but to continuously ask when watching it, “What is it costing me to sit here?” She provides two immediate answers: 1) sleep, and 2) time in spent in stillness before God, “sitting quietly with the Word of God in your hand or your heart.” With this interpretive move, Davis spares the congregation from an analysis of what the seat of scoffers might have looked like in the fifth century B.C., avoiding as well any tired depictions of the scornful as unbelievers or nominal Christians. Instead, the congregation sees the sitting-place of the scornful in sharp relief, and it is likely waiting for them when they return to their living rooms. Commenting on her sermon, Davis notes when she offered an alternative resting place to overworked students, where they might receive the “the greatest gift, the quiet presence of God,” there was “an audible sigh of longing in the chapel.”

With a final metaphor, she likens someone inhabiting a “full-grown life of prayer” to the tree in verse 3, “planted by water channels, which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not whither; and everything she does will prosper.” She leaves the congregation with a sharper vision not only for a divinely ordained escape from the exhausted and meaningless life of a couch potato, but for the recognition of a psalm-shaped life when they see one. Christians shaped by deep prayer are “like that tree: not ostentatious, yet hardly unnoticeable. People who are on a journey and in need will

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133 Davis, Wondrous Depth, 151.
notice—people looking for shelter from the heat, people who are desperate for water.” This raises the stakes for the congregation, revealing a way for them to navigate the world upon their departure from worship with a heightened awareness of the holiness prayer imbues in themselves and in others. To the watchful eye, the world into which the sermon invites them is full of signs and wonders, an enchanted grove where one just might encounter a living source of God’s peace.

2.7 Conclusion

The ultimate aim of this chapter has been to illuminate Scriptural interpretation as an inherently peacemaking practice. That the threefold word of God corresponds to the unity within the inner life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, means no one form of divine linguistic expression can exist apart from the other two. If God’s peace is fully present in the incarnate word, Jesus, it follows that this same peace constitutes the word of God in its written and spoken forms. It is not that this same peace should constitute these two latter forms, but that we cannot fully describe or identify any of these forms as the word of God apart from the fundamentally peaceable character God has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is both an affirmation of the unity of the Trinity, and a challenge to preachers to heed the intricate complexion and disposition of Scriptural language as divinely inspired by the God, “who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). Sustained by these claims, the reconciling hermeneutic functions to usher the congregation into the “strange new world of the Bible,” where we may be continually astonished to discover
that the God it describes is determined not to count our trespasses against us, but rather entrusts to us the message of reconciliation.
CHAPTER 3: RECONCILING RHETORIC

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

I CORINTHIANS 13.1

Nothing true can be said about God from a posture of defense.

THE REVEREND JOHN AMES, GILEAD

Theologian Elizabeth Newman describes the indelible moment she first encountered the mummified heart of Teresa of Avila, preserved in an ornate glass case in Teresa’s hometown of Avila, Spain.

A faint line could be traced across the heart, where, I was told, the Holy Spirit had pierced her. Teresa writes about this divine ‘arrow’ in Interior Castle, as well as in her autobiography, The Book of Her Life. Such a mark on Teresa’s heart could well be understood as a sign of Teresa’s own reception of the Holy Spirit as ultimately a gift to the church.

The image of a preserved human heart literally engraved by God’s Spirit should strike the baptized not as a tourist gimmick, but as a sign and seal of the LORD’s promise: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33). We should be disappointed if any preacher’s autopsy did not reveal similar marks. For the preacher’s call begins not in her own imagination, but in the deep impact of God’s revelation, which Barth says is like “an arrow from the other side of a shore on which we will never set foot, yet it hits us.”

To amend his analogy, we should describe this arrow more like a harpoon, since God does not pierce us and leave us alone, but draws all people to himself as he is “lifted up from

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3 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (Oxford University Press, 1933) 238.
the earth” (John 12:32). That is, God inaugurates his mission of reconciliation by cutting us to the heart with the Word (Acts 2:37), and persists in this mission in order to dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17).

There is a uniqueness to Christian rhetoric that originates in the deeper recesses of God’s own heart and comes to us only as God wills it. To put this another way, the rhetoric of preaching really begins in the heart of God, where the preacher can never exercise ultimate control, but only hope that God uses her message to build up the church. This does not mean preachers can eschew rhetoric. Preachers are automatically rhetoricians, and their attempts to persuade the congregation constitute a crucial part of what makes preaching an art. But is persuasion necessarily the all-encompassing firmament of the language of preaching? Or has God’s reconciling mission fundamentally altered the nature of gospel proclamation, effectively subordinating rhetoric to the Word of God? Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father has shown preachers the way to shape their language by revealing his divine “form” in Jesus Christ the Son, who is for us the reconciling Word. This means that, together with reading Scripture for reconciliation, preachers must also shape the language of their proclamation in reconciling ways. The challenge of this chapter will be to demonstrate a unique homiletical rhetoric that serves the purposes of reconciliation.

It will not be my sole task to re-catalogue the inner workings and mechanics of classical rhetoric, nor to delineate and rank certain existing definitions of rhetoric as more compatible with my argument than others. Instead, I will seek to build on the historical and complementary relationship between rhetoric and homiletics in order to offer an
account of reconciling rhetoric for preaching. I will first draw from the works of Aristotle in order to demonstrate rhetoric’s original emphasis on persuasion. Then I will examine the works of Augustine and Kenneth Burke to show how more recent understandings of rhetoric have built on classical definitions. From there I will consider how Richard Lischer’s caveat against persuasion as preaching’s fundamental rhetorical orientation compares with Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid’s emphasis on rhetorical “effectiveness.” Finally, after offering my own definition of “kenotic rhetoric,” as the preferential option for reconciling sermons, I will present the character of John Ames in Marilynn Robinson’s novel, *Gilead*, as an exemplary practitioner of reconciling rhetoric. Overall, I will be concerned to show that attention to reconciliation is a more fundamental prerequisite for preaching than the mastery of persuasion. Preaching’s acceptance of persuasion as the essence of rhetoric denies the complexity of the divine Word, and often derails gospel proclamation from its original function, purpose, and infrastructure, to the detriment of deeper theological reflection on and proclamation of the finality of God’s reconciling action in Jesus Christ.

3.1 Classical Persuasions

Noting that it is “a feature of all human communication” even in nonliterate societies, George Kennedy defines rhetoric in its most primordial function as “a form of mental or emotional energy imparted to a communication to affect a situation in the
interest of the speaker.”4 In this sense, rhetoric is a phenomenon of communication that spans all human cultures and even certain species of animals. Yet, rhetoric as an art form and subject of study traces its roots to Greece, several centuries before the birth of Christ. Rhetoric as a specific discipline arose in the Athenian law courts, where adult male citizens assembled to argue decisions over public policy, and to prosecute others or defend themselves before large juries in both criminal and civil trials. Because there were no professional lawyers, both prosecutors and defendants were expected to address the jury with at least one set speech.5 Many lacked the necessary skills with which to persuade juries consisting of over a thousand randomly chosen male citizens, and often relied on helpful pamphlets on rhetoric circulating at the time. The atmosphere was one of argumentation, competition, and rivalry, as cases were decided on the rhetor’s ability to convince a majority of jurors. The art of rhetoric was refined in circumstances where the speaker’s future well being depended on his ability to persuade his audience.

Due to its practical flourishing in the law courts, the Greeks were also the first to develop a methodical vocabulary and complex tradition of rhetorical scholarship. Aristotle inherited a rich rhetorical tradition from Plato, as well as from the works of Homer and other poets. His unique contribution, if one can briefly encapsulate it, was a decisive turn toward an understanding of rhetoric as having both practical and theoretical dimensions. Introducing what perhaps remains the prevailing, authoritative definition, he describes rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case to see the available means of

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5 Ibid, 9.
persuasion.6 The rhetorician, then, will speak persuasively only after having achieved a level of sophisticated knowledge enabling one to grasp the full potential of persuasive speech in particular situations. Before its application through speech, rhetoric first describes an agent’s particular capacity for rhetorical applicability. By defining rhetoric as an ability, a faculty of vision, which precedes the actual utterance, Aristotle posits rhetorical intellect as a prerequisite for rhetorical speech.

There were essentially three public occasions that warranted such an ability. In addition to the law courts, two other circumstances requiring Athenians to demonstrate rhetorical skill were the legislative assembly and certain ceremonial events. All three occasions necessitated the use of one of the following three rhetorical species: deliberative, judicial (forensic), or epideictic (demonstrative). Each of the three species evokes its own “time” and purpose, or telos. The deliberative rhetoric of the legislative assemblies is concerned with what might happen in the future, and so aims to designate what is advantageous or harmful. The judicial rhetoric of the law courts, which is concerned with past actions and events, seeks to determine what is just and unjust. Epideictic rhetoric, which relates to the more immediate concerns of celebratory gatherings or funerals, aims to evoke what is honorable or dishonorable. Kennedy notes that Aristotle’s assigning of “times” to each species of discourse is strained due to the obvious tendency for these species to overlap within their respective domains.7 Nevertheless, Aristotle’s categories are consistent with his contention that rhetoric is an

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6 Ibid., 37.
7 Ibid., 49n81.
ability of vision regarding the available means of persuasion. In its classical orientation, persuasion’s effectiveness requires an initial discernment of the type of occasion and its corresponding time.

Aristotle’s categorization of species is clearly not intended to culminate in the mutual exclusion of their respective aims. He intends for them to serve not as rhetorical straightjackets, but as guides. Considering the rhetorical demands of a specific occasion during his preparation, the classical rhetorician would not approach a jury as though he would a funeral gathering or a legislative assembly. Yet, he may combine the respective aims of each species to constitute his speech for any occasion. In addressing a funeral gathering the speaker may supplement his epideictic rhetoric with both deliberative and judicial aims, thereby blending the “times” associated with each species. For example, in his funeral address to Athens during the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.), Pericles combines epideictic rhetoric with the deliberative and judicial species. While he approaches the podium primarily to praise the dead who lie just behind him in a mass grave, he also takes the opportunity to laud the abiding strength and character of the citizenry:

We have no need of a Homer to sing our praises, or of any encomiast whose poetic version may have immediate appeal but then fall foul of actual truth. The fact is that we have forced every sea and every land to be open to our enterprise, and everywhere we have established permanent memorials of both failure and success.

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8 Ibid. Kennedy briefly mentions Pericles’ “Funeral Oration” in Thucydides and Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” as rhetorical examples that resist Aristotle’s “strained attempt to assign a time to each species.” I am more directly considering the content of Pericles’ speech in order to demonstrate the fluid nature of Aristotle’s rhetorical species.

As well, he commends what would be advantageous for the city’s future welfare. Those young enough to bear children again should do so, for “both maintenance of the population and also a safeguard, since those without children at stake do not face the same risks as the others and cannot make a balanced or judicious contribution to debate.” These two excerpts show how Pericles’ rhetorical approach serves as an interruption and confirmation of Aristotle’s classifications. Though he combines all three species, Pericles puts deliberative and judicial rhetoric in service to the central, epideictic thrust of praise for the war dead. By supplementing other species as he deems appropriate, he demonstrates a refined capacity to see the available means of persuasion.

Just as crucial for the classical orator as the ends of these rhetorical species are the means of persuasion, or “kinds of proof” (pisteis), Aristotle presents: ethos, pathos, and logos. Descriptions of these terms intensify Aristotle’s focus on persuasion, since they function to enrich the three rhetorical species with specific modes of convincing the audience. Ethos, pathos, and logos constitute what classical rhetoricians call invention—the first stage of speech—by which the orator exercises the entechnic form of pisteis, or the embodied art of rhetoric. Entechnic is “whatever can be prepared by method and by ‘us’” through artistic invention. The first of these, ethos, signifies the character of the speaker and her speaking in such a way as to attract the audience by her (perceived) fair-
mindedness. The second is pathos, the means by which the speaker induces emotion in her hearers. The third mode, logos, names the means of persuasion by logical argument through deductive and inductive reasoning. The classical rhetor carefully combines these modes in order to achieve the aims associated with particular rhetorical species.

Centuries later, Cicero would redevelop these widely accepted “proofs” into “duties” that correspond with levels of style. An orator should prove (provare) in the plain style, delight (delectare) in the middle style, and stir emotionally, move, or “bend” (flectere) in the grand style. Even so, the ultimate aim remained the persuasion of an audience.

3.2 Rhetoric’s Augustinian Shift

Augustine further reorients rhetorical aims for teaching and preaching in On Christian Teaching, Book 4, effectively introducing a decisive shift in rhetorical theory in service to the church. Harnessing persuasion for the encouragement of loving God and neighbor, Augustine apparently adopts Quintilian’s adjustments of Cicero’s duties, replacing provare with docere (to instruct), and leaving delectare unchanged. He also intentionally alters the third mode, from flectare to movere, in order to emphasize the importance of affecting obedience. Augustine systematically combs the Scriptures for these rhetorical effects. What made his contribution truly original was the fact that Christian communities had heretofore equated eloquence and flowery language with paganism. Augustine’s rhetorical recalibrations commenced the church’s unapologetic

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13 The orator’s appearing to have good character was essential to Aristotle. He regarded the actual character or personal integrity of the speaker apart from the rhetorical event as superfluous since, in the most typical contexts, the one speaking would have often enough been a stranger to the audience.
use of classical rhetoric, and enabled preachers from Augustine’s own time to the present to see the available means of persuading people towards faith. Nevertheless, though he draws the practices of classical rhetoric close to his lips, he does not swallow them whole.

Augustine reflects on passages from several of Paul’s epistles, illuminating the apostle’s skillful use of rhetoric, and commending these ways to Christian interpreters. He points to Paul’s use of the restrained style in Galatians 4:21-26, where the apostle describes the narrative of Abraham’s two sons as allegorical: “These are in fact the two covenants: one, from Mount Sinai, by which people are born into slavery—this is Hagar...But the heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman, and she is our mother.”14 Here, Paul provides clarity through instruction and probing analysis, fulfilling the purpose of the plain or restrained style. He not only reveals what is hidden, resolving “knotty problems” in the process, but also anticipates other potential questions that might refute his initial case. This restrained style is suitable for syllogisms and logical proofs, introducing ideas, addressing single subjects over longer periods, and for contributing to the rhetorical ebb and flow whereby the other two styles may also find their proper place. Because of its more subdued nature, this style is “easier to tolerate over a long period” than the other two, especially the grand style.

Augustine is particularly drawn to Romans to highlight employments of the mixed style. As a philologian, he delights in the text’s artistry, finding again and again “a

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14 The biblical translation is as it appears in Augustine’s analysis in On Christian Doctrine, trans by R. P. H. Green (Oxford University Press, 1997 [2008]) 126.
graceful flow of phrases each duly balanced by other phrases.” In Rom. 12:6-16, there is an attractive “outpouring of words,” artfully separated by cola in a way that evinces a “stylistic embellishment that derives from rhythmical clausulae” (which Augustine laments has been lost in the Latin translation’s adherence to original word order). For Rom. 13:14, he would replace the strict translation, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not give thought to the flesh by indulging in its passionate desires,” with the following, more rhythmic construction: “Do not, by indulging passionate desires, give thought for the flesh.” The danger with the mixed style lies in the temptation to reduce “the weight of the impressive divine writings while enhancing the rhythm.” Augustine notes his preference for applying moderation in clausular rhythm. Yet, what distinguishes the mixed from the grand style is that “it is not so much embellished with verbal ornament as inflamed by heartfelt emotion.” The mixed style gives delight through eloquence itself. Carried by its own momentum in this regard, the mixed style is most appropriately used epideictically, “when there is something to be praised or censured.”

The grand style evokes the most intensity, since, “as a rule the grand style silences people’s voices with its weight, but elicits tears.” By the audience’s tears the speaker will know the people have been moved. Paul uses the grand style in I Corinthians 5:7-8, “Purge out the old leaven, so that you may be a fresh mixture, unleavened just as you are.

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15 Ibid., 128.
16 Ibid., 128-29.
17 Ibid., 128.
18 Ibid. 129
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 140.
21 Ibid., 138.
22 Ibid., 139.
For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” By the grand style the hard heart is softened, the people groan and weep, and lives are changed. “Many people are transformed by the restrained style of speaking too, but in the sense of knowing what they did not know before.” That is, the change that occurs by the restrained style more directly affects the mind, achieving a more cognitive persuasion. But when the people are persuaded by the grand style, they act in obedience. They make a decision towards a more praiseworthy life.

One rightly suspects at this point that Augustine has adjusted Cicero’s pairing of modes with styles. Whereas Cicero claims, “The eloquent speaker will be one who can treat small matters in a restrained style, intermediate matters in a mixed style, and important matters in a grand style,” Augustine has suggested a more hybridized approach, advising that each aim does not necessarily correspond to or fit within one of the three styles. The aim of instructing is not limited to the restrained style; delight may occur outside of the mixed style; the speaker may move the people without using the grand style. In matters of faith, there should be “the sense that a speaker should always have these three aims and pursue them to the best of his ability even when operating within one particular style.” If the preacher integrates the three aims skillfully enough, he might arouse the congregation to applause even with the restrained style.

23 Ibid.
24 Augustine, 123. See also, Cicero, On the Ideal Orator, trans. by James M. May and Jakob Wisse (Oxford University Press, 2001) 144 [2.80].
25 Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, 141.
That Augustine claims the smallest matters have eternal significance marks the beginning of a decisive divergence with classical rhetorical thinking.

In our [Christian] situation, since we must relate everything, especially what we say to congregations from our position of authority, to the well-being of human beings not in this temporary life but in eternity, where there is added danger of eternal perdition, all matters that we speak of are important…

Augustine’s remark signals a reestablishment of rhetoric’s underpinnings in service to something more groundbreaking and profound than persuasion. While the church must not ignore rhetoric due to its pagan associations, neither should it unquestionably adopt rhetoric on the basis of its classical presuppositions. Augustine shows us the art of persuasion is a virtuous practice, but only as teachers and preachers use it toward charitable ends.

Where Cicero and others too readily equate eloquence and wisdom, Augustine initially separates the two. Eloquence, according to him, does not necessarily indicate wisdom. This becomes apparent at the beginning of Book 4, where he speaks of eloquence as a neutral tool available to those who would use it to do harm or good, “to give conviction to both truth and falsehood.”

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26 Ibid., 124.
27 Athenagoras anticipates Augustine’s concern in Chapter 11 of *A Plea Regarding Christians*. Addressing Roman emperors, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, whom Athenagoras calls “philosophic princes,” he says, “Who of those who analyze syllogisms, resolve ambiguities, explain etymologies, or [teach] homonyms, synonyms, predicates, axioms, and what the subject is and what the predicate—who of them do not promise to make their disciples happy through these and similar disciplines? And yet who of them have so purified their own hearts as to love their enemies instead of hating them; instead of upbraiding those who first insult them (which is certainly more usual), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against them?” Passage excerpted from *Christian Peace and Nonviolence: A Documentary History*, Michael G. Long, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011) 17.
abundance of words and verbal ornament. Knowing evil and good people alike can craft beautiful language to serve their own ends, Augustine makes wisdom the cornerstone upon which eloquence stands or falls. Eloquence then ceases to pursue persuasion for its own sake, but becomes the means by which listeners may understand, delight in, and be moved to obey Christian teaching. Making the love of God and neighbor eloquence’s ultimate aim has a seismic impact on the development of rhetorical theory and practice. Augustine re-synthesizes rhetoric with wisdom, and more particularly with the wisdom of God embodied in Jesus Christ, thereby inaugurating a new age for preaching. In this new paradigm, rhetoric and wisdom inhabit a more formal, complementary relationship in service to the church.

3.3 Burkian Persuasion: Cooperation and Identification

Kenneth Burke discloses the consequences of Augustine’s strategy by describing the ways in which he effectively widens the scope of rhetoric beyond persuasion. In Augustine’s scheme, “wisdom (philosophy, ‘dialectic’) is a ‘source of eloquence.’ not because it is one with eloquence (since the ‘truth’ of Christian doctrine can be stated without eloquence), but because it is the ground of eloquence.” This wisdom is “the heavenly wisdom that comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17), and is gained in direct proportion to one’s progress in learning the holy Scriptures. The Scriptural authors who have achieved such wisdom, in fact, acquire a “kind of eloquence

29 Ibid., 102.
30 Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969 [1950]) 77. All succeeding references including italics are original to his work.
31 Ibid.
32 Augustine, Doctrine, 104-05.
appropriate to writers who enjoy the highest authority and a full measure of divine inspiration.”33 Their “saturation” in Scripture, so to speak, has the real effect of drawing the speaker deeper into the inner life of the Logos, the logic, of God.

Thus, whereas Aristotle grouped rhetoric with dialectic by reason of the fact that both were purely verbal instruments, in Augustine (as with the Stoics) dialectic is more than words: for when it is correct, it deals with the ultimate nature of things, hence has a kind of extraverbal reference to guide the use of ornament (eloquence, rhetoric). The end of rhetoric was ‘to persuade with words’ (persuadere dicendo); but the principle of Logos behind such purely human language was ‘the Word’ in another sense, a kind of Word that was identical with reality.

Burke’s own philosophy of rhetoric turns on notions of persuasion, identification, and cooperation. Initially through literary critique, but also in the wake of general and philosophical analyses of human behavior, he concludes that earlier definitions and theories of rhetoric restrain its fundamental essence. With considerable influence from Augustine, Burke defines rhetoric as a continually renewing “use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.”34 Consequently, persuasion is not an expansive enough category for rhetoric unless it “involves communication by the signs of consubstantiality, the appeal of identification.”35 “Consubstantiality” names a kind of communion between human beings among whom there are admittedly also varying degrees of division. “If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communion would be of

33 Ibid., 106.
34 Burke, Motives, 43.
35 Ibid., 62.
man’s very essence.”\textsuperscript{36} Rhetoric names the means by which symbol-using animals (human beings) exchange symbols in the service of bridging divisions between them. In this light, persuasion is actually relegated to a co-subsidiary status within the genus of rhetoric itself, joining “identification” as its symbiotic counterpart.

Burke reframes classical articulations of rhetoric by revealing its ubiquitous and even “pure” nature. Rhetoric is “everywhere,” ranging from the “bluntest quest of advantage, as in sales promotion or propaganda, through courtship, social etiquette, education, and the sermon, to a ‘pure’ form that delights in the process of appeal for itself alone, without ulterior purpose.”\textsuperscript{37} Pure persuasion contrasts with rhetoric’s more agonistic expressions. Rhetoricians have generally concerned themselves with “proving opposites,” exhortation, invective, argument, winning over an audience. The orator stands in something like an adversarial relationship with the listeners. With his speech he must redirect them in some way, so that they will know or do what they otherwise would not have known or done had they never been addressed. But the rhetoric of pure persuasion involves

the saying of something, not for an extra-verbal advantage to be got by the saying, but because of a satisfaction intrinsic to the saying. [Rhetoric] summons because it likes the feel of a summons. It would be nonplused if the summons were answered…It intuitively says, ‘This is so,’ purely and simply because this is so.\textsuperscript{38}

Burke suggests the actor’s relationship to the audience, or a devout person’s relationship to God, as scenarios for pure persuasion’s flourishing. In each case there are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 22.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., xiv.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 269.
\end{itemize}
three elements—speaker, speech, and spoken-to—which serve as the form in which we find the ultimate rhetorical motive. This motive is “grounded not in the search for ‘advantage,’ and in the mere ‘sublimating’ of that search by ‘rationalizations’ and ‘moralizations,’” but rather in the “persuasiveness of the hierarchic order itself.” In other words, pure persuasion is the continuation of rhetoric after the uttered plea is answered, the joy of communication for its own sake, the verbal and non-verbal communion between symbol-bearing animals (humans) that is continuously present and acting. The tripartite form of speaker, speech, spoken-to has an eternal quality that persuasion toward an advantage does not. “For a persuasion that succeeds, dies.”

Persuasion, for Burke, most fundamentally describes a threefold “form” of relations with an “eternal” quality, rather than a means of winsomely gaining advantage over those addressed. Rhetoric, in this new sense, actually invites the frustration of persuasion’s final declarations. The art of persuasion in its purest form is not a technique for inviting adherence to terminal decrees, but an interference of linguistic finality. The purpose of language is to engage human difference in order to affect cooperation. The speaker so shapes his speech as to “commune with” the spoken-to. It cannot be coincidental that Burke constructs his rhetorical theories in the wake of two disastrous world wars, during which maneuvers of classical rhetoric reached scientific levels of precision with murderous consequences. By advancing a form of persuasion that “never

39 Ibid., 276.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 274.
42 Ibid., 271.
ends,” Burke seeks to unveil an essential, liminal quality in language that interrupts totalitarian aims, and more fully reveals language’s authentic purposes, namely, for the sake of cooperation.

### 3.4 Are We Persuaded?

We have now arrived at a point where, from a Christian position, we must begin proceeding from Augustine’s practical applications and Burke’s aesthetic perspective toward what particular difference the gospel makes for rhetoric, itself. Augustine certainly employs rhetoric in service to the gospel, conscripting modes of persuasion and appropriating them for use in the church’s pulpits. Burke elegantly rehabilitates classical rhetoric, expanding our notions of its jurisdiction and intrinsic function. His emphases on identification and cooperation are consistent with the reconciling rhetoric I will attempt to illumine. But there is nothing in particular about Burke’s philosophy that makes it binding for a community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord. Should confessing Christians uncritically adopt the notion that the sum and substance of God’s speech to them is “persuasion,” whether or not it might be pure? Is the fullness of the biblical witness about God that humanity has been “persuaded”? Both Augustine and Burke leave rhetoric to inhabit the same “world,” or paradigm, of persuasive language. The question is whether theology has any sublimating consequence for rhetoric. Can there be a uniquely Christian rhetoric that transcends persuasion as its primary substance?

Two preaching scholars, Richard Lischer and Lucy Lind Hogan, have wrestled with the question of persuasion’s relationship to preaching. Lischer approaches the issue
from a theological perspective. He asks, “Why would anyone wish not to be persuasive, especially a preacher, of all people, whose success depends on his or her ability to win an audience?” His question highlights the firm grip classical rhetoric holds on preachers and their assumptions about the purposes of preaching. Is it not the preacher’s job to move the congregation from one place to another through whatever rhetorical maneuvers are necessary? If persuasion is not the preacher’s quintessential aim, then what is preaching for? Lischer counters that insistence upon “‘persuasion’ as a paradigm, for the sowing and germination of the word of God simply does not do justice to the environment in which we live and minister. It does not do justice to the richness of our theological calling.” Because its language is eternally rich, versatile, and complex, the gospel cannot be reduced to a technique. Rather than “crushing the gospel into a persuasion,” preachers should understand their speech as “redeemed—crucified and risen—and located at the heart of a new community of the baptized.” A preacher’s first questions during sermon preparation should not be, “Is this persuasive enough?” but, “How does the speech adhere to God’s revelation on which it is based? Does it respect the richness of the Bible’s many voices? And secondly, how shall we join this speech to the other practices of the church?”

Lischer draws upon Amos Wilder’s assertion that the basic character of the Gospel is revelation, not persuasion. “If you reread the gospels and epistles through the

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44 Ibid., 14-15.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 16.
lens of his insight, you cannot miss the necessary continuity between God’s method of communication and our habits of speaking." Wilder illuminates the ways in which Christian speech, from its birth onward, infuses existing forms of speech with the revelatory newness of the gospel.

[Christian speech] beginning with Jesus himself, represented an identification with and a renewal of existing idioms. In one sense, as language the Gospel met each man and each people where they were—was ‘all things to all men’—in another sense it spoke a new word to all.

The first four evangelists of the New Testament canon departed so conspicuously from the rhetorical tools at their disposal that they needed a new name for their genre—gospel. The author of the Gospel of John could have written instead a meditation on the incarnation of the Word, or the visit to this lower world of the heavenly Revealer. Thus we might have had from him not a gospel but a homily like the Coptic Gospel of Truth. But the narrative pattern established by Mark or otherwise known to him imposed itself upon him so that his unique heavenly discourse is presented in gospel-form.

Wilder shows how the gospel’s peculiar rhetoric is akin to what the poet Rilke called “the uninterrupted news that grows out of silence.” This news proceeds from Pentecost, the gospel’s rhetorical wellspring, which is a “sound like the rush of a violent wind” (Acts 2:2). Lischer follows Wilder’s logic in advocating for a specifically Christian rhetoric that remembers the birth of the church’s odd speech, and attempts to bring it into the present through human speech. This rhetoric gushes forth in a way that,

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49 Ibid., 30.
50 Quoted in Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, 16.
brings out on the one hand the miraculous unedited newness of the word, breaking forth out of silence, out of ignorance, out of nescience. And it also brings out the flowing character of that word as ‘uninterrupted news’—the speech of the Gospel that renews itself and conveys life from generation to generation from inexhaustible fountains.  

According to Lischer, preaching devolves into moralism when it “presupposes a vaguely democratic atmosphere” where the congregation is in conflict with the preacher. We should not transpose the rhetorical version of Hobbes’s “war of all against all” onto the church and “accept it as the normative environment for worship and preaching.” To preach with a rhetoric whose purpose is always to convince is to deny that the congregation to which one preaches is not already convinced. “Despite the increasingly conflicted nature of church life, preaching still occurs in an ecology of shared hope and humanity in which the listeners are no less persuaded than their preacher.”

Hogan and co-author Robert Reid embrace the former questions over the latter. Their approach to rhetoric in preaching is first to determine not whether the preacher’s speech inhabits the gospel’s own modes of communication, but whether the preacher’s speech “connects with the congregation.” Their primary concern is not reconciliation with the gospel’s language, but “effectiveness.” Hogan and Reid believe that learning rhetorical theory “is not enough to make one an effective preacher.” Implicit in this statement is that, though rhetorical theory is not enough, the preacher’s goal is still to learn how to be effective, to get the sermon to “work.” And what works is determined or

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51 Ibid., 17.
53 Ibid.
measured less by how much the preacher’s rhetoric is shaped by the various patterns of the gospel, and more by the congregation’s response. “We need to be willing to follow the ‘rules,’” they say, but we must also “deviate from them when we feel that it is necessary. If, for example, you have come to know that your congregation responds well to something your preaching professor told you NEVER to do, as long as it is ethical, do it.” The preacher must do “what works,” as long as it is ethical. Hogan and Reid do not seem to consider the ethical consequences of a preacher’s deviation from the gospel’s own parlance.

Their approach to rhetoric is to search for the formula or rubric that works best to keep the congregation’s attention, and persuade them to accept and act on the preacher’s ideas. It is basically an argumentative approach. The congregation is in one place, while the preacher (who seems perpetually to be standing on higher ground) provokes and cajoles the people to step closer toward the preacher’s conclusions about the text. Whether the sermon is semantically reconciled to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is of secondary importance in relation to whether the sermon effectively attends to the maintenance of a preacher’s persona (ethos), appropriately balances reason and emotion (pathos), and maintains a rhetorical stance (logos) based on arguments and examples that best fit the needs of a particular congregation.

Ironically, Hogan and Reid’s application of a rhetoric of novelty and effectiveness is a derivative of Charles Finney’s “New Measures,” which are now entering their third weary century. As Ted Smith has elegantly shown, new measures preachers use

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55 Ibid., 159 (original emphasis).
rhetorical techniques that arose in the overlapping arenas of the Second Great Awakening and the early years of America’s thriving democratic republic. New measures adapt almost seamlessly between ecclesial and secular realms. Preachers of these measures employ methods that set goals and seek immediate fulfillment—they use whatever “works.” They are, by definition, anxious to achieve a hearing “NOW.” For the revivalist Finney, preaching was not preaching unless it sought immediate conversion. “God commanded [the sinner] to repent now, to believe now, to make him a new heart now.”

Smith’s book does not provide an exhaustive list of the practices called “the new measures.” He does enumerate the six specific measures, showing how they influenced, and were influenced by, democratic culture in America. The six measures are: 1) organizing worship so that it achieves measurable results; 2) using novelty to compete in an economy of attention; 3) demanding that people make free decisions; 4) proclaiming the formal equality of all people; 5) representing private selves in public spaces, and so speaking with the authority of celebrity; and 6) telling stories to illustrate points. Smith believes these measures continue to dominate preaching today, and have “shaped the rhetoric of preachers as diverse as William Sloane Coffin, Michael Lerner, T. D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Daniel Berrigan, Rick Warren, and Barbara Brown Taylor.” One can find new measures preachers in the largest churches of America’s most populous cities, as well as in the smallest congregations in the most rural hamlets.


Ibid., 8.

Ibid., 9.
The new measures’ omnipresence reveals their nearly inescapable influence. They have so ingrained themselves in the practice of preaching in America that most preachers, even if their dependency on the new measures were exposed, would have to struggle mightily to avoid using them. These practices “seem so obvious that they rarely merit explicit discussion except in the most rarefied homiletical circles.”\textsuperscript{59} Since their establishment in the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of the new measures has remained essentially unchanged. “A new measures sermon sought, above all else, to work effects in this world. It sought to move people to make decisions to change their hearts and minds and actions.”\textsuperscript{60} And it still does. New measures rhetoric was and is intentional in its desire to compel people toward immediate change. However, as Smith reveals, what once “worked” so well that it shocked the senses now passes nearly unnoticed.

The crucial difference between Lischer and Hogan/Reid turns on their respective perceptions of new measures like the ones Smith describes. The kind of rhetoric Hogan advocates is, like the new measures, theoretically “at home” in the halls of secular power, while the rhetorical approach Lischer encourages is one that could not exist apart from the language of a crucified God. While Hogan pursues the exhausting goal of achieving agreement between preacher and congregation, Lischer is primarily concerned with whether the sermon lifts the weight of the gospel. He promotes a rhetoric reconciled with “the new utterance” of the gospel that ruptures existing idioms. His basic claim is that the word of God redeems even our most “cherished homiletical rules,” and flourishes

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 258.
only as it is grounded in the church’s mission. Analogously, apart from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, there would be no such thing as Christian preaching. If the preacher’s rhetoric “makes sense” whether or not Jesus is risen from the dead, it cannot be gospel preaching. We are not persuaded to God; we are reconciled to God. Hogan and Reid’s rhetorical strategy, on the other hand, does not live or die by the language of the gospel; it appeals across a wide spectrum of rhetorical strategies. For them, the effectiveness of a sermon depends on whether the congregation agrees with the message. For Lischer, a sermon’s effectiveness is subservient to its weight. “Let two or three prophets speak,” he might say, “and let the others weigh what is said” (1 Cor. 14:29). Lischer encourages a kind of rhetoric that shapes a sermon in such a way that if it were placed on a scale, its natural weight would “lift up” the gospel.

3.5 Preaching ‘Downhill’

In constructing a “reconciling rhetoric” we are not doing something “new,” but recovering something “old,” something that is truly from the beginning. At the same time, it is also eschatological, for it is something that is truly from the end. That is, we are expecting to find by this excavation, to borrow a phrase from Lischer, “the end of words.” For a reconciling rhetoric attempts to proclaim the gospel by crafting language theologically understood as proceeding from a distinct beginning and ending. Christian language begins and ends in a person, the alpha and omega, Jesus Christ, in all of his power and weakness. Reconciling sermons will therefore not compete for a microphone

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with the great orators of the age. Rather, preachers committed to living peaceably as followers of Jesus Christ will attempt to craft their language in such a way that it simply “rings true.” Their language will sound patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It will not insist on its own way; it will not be irritable or resentful; it will not keep a record of wrongs, but will rejoice in the truth. It will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things.

Reconciling rhetoric evokes Karl Barth’s theological description of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s work:

Why is it that this man is so incomparable? Why is it that for the receptive, he has produced in almost every bar he conceived and composed a type of music for which ‘beautiful’ is not a fitting epithet: music which for the true Christian is not mere entertainment, enjoyment or edification but food and drink; music full of comfort and counsel for his needs; music which is never a slave to its technique nor sentimental but always ‘moving,’ free and liberating because wise, strong and sovereign?  

Mozart’s genius lay in his miraculous ability to capture reality from a theological point of view—a view which confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ makes available. He was able to convey through music the truth of creation’s final redemption in God, and the harmony of God’s ultimate providence, while simultaneously leaving himself out of his productions. “He was remarkably free from the mania for ‘self-expression.’ He simply offered himself as the agent by which little bits of horn, metal and catgut could serve as the voices of creation, sometimes leading, sometimes accompanying and sometimes in harmony.”

Mozart used every instrument at his disposal, including the

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63 Ibid., 298.
human voice, but gave the latter no special place in terms of a hierarchical ranking.
Human emotions served the music, and not *vice versa.*

Analogously, reconciling rhetoric arises from the truth of what God has already done by revealing himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For Barth, preaching must conform to this revelation. The Word of God is revealed in Jesus, in Scripture, and in preaching. Both the Bible and preaching are not the Word of God in themselves. The Word of God in Scripture and in preaching become the Word of God whenever God so chooses to make it God’s Word. “Whenever it becomes God’s Word, it is God’s Word.”

The revelation of God’s Word is “a closed circuit in which God is both Subject and Object and the link between the two.” Preaching is an “event” into which the preacher and the congregation are drawn in “listening to the self-revealing will of God.”

They are called by this event. The event becomes a constituent part of their own existence. Because God has revealed himself and wills to reveal himself, and because preachers are confronted by this event, their preaching—if they are commissioned to preach—is necessarily governed by it in both content and form, in the logical content of what is said and in their relation to the fact that God has revealed himself and will reveal himself.

Consequently for Barth, “the thrust of the sermon is always downhill, not uphill to a goal. Everything has already taken place.” “Downhill” movement characterizes preaching as an event that owes its existence to the truth that, in Christ, God has already confirmed his final decision about humanity. In other words, proclamation’s movement

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64 Ibid.
65 Barth, *Homiletics*, 47.
66 Ibid., 78
67 Ibid., 47.
68 Ibid., 50.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 53.
has a gravitational momentum that disembarks from the conviction that God has finished reconciling us to himself on Christ’s cross. Golgotha has reoriented history in such a way that the friction of its contingencies cannot impede God’s reconciling Word. “All preaching must have the total assurance of ‘It has happened, it is done, and also the forward thrust.’”

The focus for Barth is on the way the content of preaching conforms to the content and form of God’s revelation. He is not, then, developing the sermon so that its function is beholden to a rhetorical form. Rather, the sermon functions in obedience to the content of God’s revelation. “From first to last Scripture says the same thing, but it constantly says the one thing in different ways.”

It is the purpose of preaching to preach “the one thing,” the gospel, which is not in our thoughts or hearts; it is in Scripture.

Barth’s theology of preaching leads him to declare that sermons should eschew rhetorical “gymnastics.” Rhetorical moves like the use of central themes, illustrations, repetition, and even introductions are distractions and impediments to the Word, and reflect the preacher’s distrust in complete reliance on Scripture for sermonic content.

Barth even discourages allegories, which for him are occasions for practicing our own arts with the Word. We rightly disagree with Barth’s stringent (in his theory, though not in his later practice) refusal to recruit rhetorical tools in service to proclamation of

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71 Ibid., 55.
72 Ibid., 76.
73 Ibid., 78.
74 Ibid., 121.
75 Ibid., 94.
76 i.e., Barth’s later prison sermons often model the kind of lively, rhetorically sensitive preaching to which he theoretically objects in *Homiletics.*
the Word. In his reaction against the Protestant liberalism of his day and its attempts to make the Bible relevant, he ignores the fact that Scripture itself uses a host of rhetorical devices. One would think that in order to follow Barth’s logic, one would have to employ rhetoric to some extent if “the text itself must always be master.” 77 As we learned earlier from John Milbank, these stringent limitations may even serve death in terms of their constrictive effects on the life-giving Word, and the polyvalent nature of Scripture.

Yet we must view Barth’s warnings against allegory with an eye toward his historical context. Barth is battling against the rise of Nazism, and countering his contemporaries’ proclivity to wrap the text in the political pathos of the day. 78 Otherwise, we would mistakenly assume Barth not only contradicts himself, but also discounts centuries of great Christian homiletics. Where Barth implores us to “repress” the “concerns that burn in on our souls, no matter how pressing,” we must remember he is attempting to preserve pathos “for the question of the theological reality underneath, behind, and beyond any particular political position.” 79 By ignoring the historical context of Barth’s Homiletics, we put him in the position of contradicting his admonitions to preachers to live among and love their congregations. Barth would not encourage preachers to conform their messages to every Mother’s Day and homecoming event, or every page of the newspaper. But neither would he encourage preachers to ignore the

77 Ibid., 93.
78 For a convincing discussion of Barth’s theology of preaching as an attempt to starve the German state of its pathos, see Angela Dienhart Hancock, Karl Barth’s Emergency Homiletic, 1932-1933: A Summons to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013) 122ff.
79 Ibid., 124.
places and events happening in and around the congregation into which the gospel may offer hope, or engender resistance to the principalities and powers. An appropriate solution to the complexities of preaching allegorically in a particular context is to allow the lectionaries of the church to determine the texts for the day. Where the texts coincide with local, regional, and national events, the preacher does well not to ignore the world into which the people walk when the gathering disperses.

A significant strength of Barth’s homiletical theology is its reclamation of the sacraments as necessary for truly hearing and understanding the sermon. The sermon will have its meaningful place between the sacraments of baptism at the beginning of the service and communion at the end. “Life begins with baptism, not with birth,” and communion interprets the sermon as communal gift. Only by having the sacraments and preaching together do they become legitimate in their relation to one another. Then the sermon, which Barth says is a liturgical act, becomes part of the creation of a liturgical and linguistic world in which the “already finished” good news of God takes shape in visible ways. Baptism, preaching, and communion together form “rhetorical” manifestations of Christ’s victory on the cross. In the midst of worship the reconciled people of God receive the Word of God as gift, one that is meant to give shape and direction to our life, and especially our language.

Having made “downhill,” a central, theological descriptor of reconciling rhetoric, we must contend with one of Barth’s critics on the matter. In *As One Without Authority*,

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80 Ibid., 58.
81 Ibid.
Fred Craddock takes issue with Barth’s “condescending” language. At the same time, Craddock does make critical contributions to preaching in this book, including his preliminary theological, philosophical, and scientific discussion on the oral nature of language. His insights here intersect in key places with conclusions one might infer from my overall project. For example, Craddock claims that the spoken word grounds our very being, and that it “presupposes that which it also creates: community.”

Additionally, few can claim to have more authority than Craddock in matters of imagination, vernacular, speaking from an imbedded position within the congregation, and reintroducing Scripture as the church’s living, breathing resource for preaching as a communication of the Word. Yet a component of Craddock’s theology falters at this latter point. Craddock believes the Word of God is strictly contingent, modified by the situation of the congregation.

To say the scripture is the Word of God or that scripture contains the Word of God is to identify the Word of God too completely with only one partner in the dialogue. Word, whether it be of God or of humanity is properly understood as communication, and it is rather meaningless to discuss word in terms of one person.

The Word of God for Craddock is located neither at the “pole” of Scripture nor the “pole” of the congregation, but “in movement, in conversation, in communication between Scripture and church.” Apart from such communication, claims of locating the Word of God in a particular place have more to do with potentiality than actuality.

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82 Fred Craddock, As One Without Authority, revised and with new sermons (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) 36.
83 Ibid., 106. Ironically, as I will show, Craddock does in fact preach to one person at a time.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
“And this is affirmed in full awareness that there is a strong tradition of preaching that consistently refuses to embrace any position that implies that the Word of God...moves in any direction other than downward.”\textsuperscript{86} Craddock’s theology of the relationship between the Word of God, Scripture, and the congregation reveals a disdain for theologies of preaching based on God’s Word as only moving downward to God’s people.

The fundamental error in this whole approach is the artificiality of the objective-subjective way of thinking. If the biblical text or the Word of God is objective and the human hearer is subjective, obviously the human is secondary, for the Word is the Word even if spoken into an empty room or into the wind.\textsuperscript{87}

The insinuation in this case is that Barth’s theology of preaching is too limited to God’s action alone, to the exclusion of any participatory human role. But whether the Word of God is on its way down or up, or found in the conversation “between” Scripture and congregation, is beside the crucial point Craddock does not make. The weakness of his argument lies in its lack of emphasis on the initial downward movement of God to God’s people \textit{as the measure} of all of God’s movements toward humankind, and which all movements of the Word of God make thereafter. This is another way of stating that the Word of God, wherever one may or may not witness its location, is pure gift. Not only is the Word of God pure gift, but also pure gift to God’s enemies. “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11). And, “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (1:14).

The agenda underlying Craddock’s theology of the Word of God is his determination to prevent preachers from “moving downward” from themselves to the


\textsuperscript{87} Craddock, \textit{As One Without Authority}, 58.
congregation as authoritarian, theological experts who must now impart the wisdom they gleaned during preparation. Preachers must include the congregation throughout the process of preparation and delivery. “Those who hear are not just an audience; they are participants in the story. The pure gospel has fingerprints all over it.” Yet, where Craddock displays the way one imagines the hearers, he tends to view the congregation not as a unified (or even a broken) body, but as a collection of individuals. The purpose of preaching devolves into creating an “experience” of the gospel for the hearer (singular). The preaching of the church addresses the needs of “the whole person.”

“When a pastor preaches, she doesn’t sell patent medicine; she writes prescriptions.”

But, as Charles Campbell has rejoined,

> When preaching focuses on individual experience in this way, the Christian faith all too easily gets relegated to the private realm. The gospel becomes divorced from serious, radical, public claims and from a concrete, public community of faith. By succumbing to this private-public split and focusing preaching on ‘private’ experience, contemporary homiletics runs the danger of selling out to the presuppositions of modern, liberal, American culture.

Craddock finally does not practice his own theology of preaching in *As One Without Authority*, especially in terms of his admonition to imitate the Bible’s own rhetorical modes of speech:

> If the speech-forms of the Bible were adopted, sermons would be strengthened by the fact that the text would not be forced to fit a new frame. In other words, narrative texts would be shared in narrative sermons, parables in parabolic form, biography in biographical sermons, and similarly in other speech models.

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88 Ibid., 59.
89 Ibid., 71.
90 Ibid., 67.
92 Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 121.
But the normative divine speech-forms in the Bible constitute God’s address to \textit{a people}, a gathering. It comes particularly to a forgiven “y’all.” Especially in matters of preaching, the sermon is not for consumption by one mind, but an address to a gathering of those who are to be “of one mind” about God’s having reconciled them in Christ. When preaching becomes an attempt to communicate the gospel in a way that moves “from the present experience of the hearers to the point at which the sermon will leave them to their own decisions and conclusion,”\textsuperscript{93} it not only usurps the communal nature of a congregation’s hearing the gospel, but also creates a habitat for the perpetuation of listening habits ingrained into us by “the rulers of this age”—politicians, television producers, marketers, and so on. Stuck in this veritable quicksand, the preacher is hampered by the constant tug of anthropological concerns alone, and continually plagued by a perceived need to persuade.

\section*{3.6 Kenotic Rhetoric}

Preaching downhill is not condescension in a haughty sense. It dives beneath Craddock’s superficial description of the objective-subjective relationship between God and humanity. It is a metaphorical attempt to juxtapose the rhetoric of preaching with the image of love flowing down from Golgotha. Since many preachers, regrettably, are too concerned with offering individualistic or therapeutic salvation, most sermons never scale this summit.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 115.
Most sermons do not make the final ascent. The preacher turns around at [the point of inviting acceptance of the good news at the level of a personal relationship with God], satisfied with the view, and heads down the mountain. Too many gospel sermons do not make the ultimate gospel gesture by celebrating God’s reconciliation of enemies in the church and the world. Which means that such sermons have no basis on which to encourage their hearers to seek the appropriate level of reconciliation in their lives. They come very near the true end of words, but fall short of its glory.\textsuperscript{94}

The problem that many homiletical discussions on rhetoric seem to ignore is that churches around the world, from the United States to Sub-Saharan Africa, continue to send out missionaries of violence, disciples not of Christ but of whatever tribe they happen to be part of.\textsuperscript{95} Whether one preaches a narrative sermon in Atlanta, Georgia, an expository sermon in Kigali, Rwanda, or a three-point sermon in the Czech Republic, the sermon form, itself, does not engender resistance to the wielding of machetes, the operation of drones, or the dumping of bullet-riddled bodies in mass graves. Preaching forms must conform to God’s enemy-embracing reconciliation. Barth was right to blame the world’s wars on the kind of preaching that bypasses “the objective reality of salvation.”\textsuperscript{96} God has given the church the language that creates enclaves of Christ’s peace, whereby the world may be reminded that its violence is atheistic. When the

\textsuperscript{94} Lischer, \textit{The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 153.

\textsuperscript{95} Emmanuel Katongole explores whether the waters of baptism go deeper than the blood of tribalism in \textit{Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith After Genocide in Rwanda}, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). Tribalism, in this sense, is not limited to the racist Western notion that tribes pertain only to “primitive” peoples. Tribalism is just as descriptive of American nationalism and exceptionalism.

\textsuperscript{96} In a letter to a Japanese professor, Barth asks, “Why does our world continually show itself to be a world of war? I seek the blame for the disasters that constantly threaten the world afresh less in the corruptions that have become man's second nature than in the laxity of the Christian churches throughout the world in fulfilling their special task of proclaiming to men the objective reality of salvation, and therefore of peace too, by word and also by example, and doing so with the clarity and definiteness, the joy and consistency, that are commensurate with this great matter,” in \textit{Letters: 1961-1968}, to Prof. Hiderobu Kuwada, Tokyo, from Basel, 22 January 1963, 90; cited in William H. Willimon, \textit{Conversations with Barth on Preaching} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006) 314.
church’s language does not serve as such a reminder, neither the church nor the world can see its violence as a result of agonistic rhetoric.

God’s message of reconciliation introduces the possibility of what we may call “kenotic rhetoric.” With kenotic rhetoric, preachers pursue not their own techniques or rhetorical interests, but present the gospel on its own terms—as gift poured out for us—in ways consistent with Christ’s emptying himself on the cross. Kenotic rhetoric seeks first not to teach, delight, and persuade, but to be taught, delighted, and persuaded by the forgiving Word, Jesus. It is an invitation for the language of preaching to theologically imitate the divine pattern of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. We might more appropriately say in classical rhetorical terms that kenosis is the “genus” of the church’s rhetoric. Kenotic rhetoric does not move downward from God to humankind like a judge’s gavel, but like blood poured out for us from the heart of God on the cross. The Word streams down to us with all of its terrible beauty to become incarnate in human preaching. It is from God’s having given himself to us in Jesus in precisely this way that preaching as an address to former enemies takes its rhetorical shape.

The theological pattern follows that of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus Christ, the form (μορφή) of God, empties himself (κένωσις), “taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness,

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the
point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly
exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and
under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The rhetorical shape of this text has both *concedescending* and *ascending*
movements. Perhaps the church’s earliest hymn, it poetically describes the divine
reconciling activity that makes salvation possible. By his condescension and ascension,
Jesus Christ, the Word of God, has demonstrated in his very body the reconciling purpose
and destiny of all language, beginning with the language of the church. The Word
proceeds to us from God’s own mind. The Word’s condescension is a “pouring out” of
God’s self for us—God’s complete self-denial. The Word’s exaltation enables us to
share in the doxological praise of God. The linguistic corollary of the Philippian Christ-
hymn is what God’s redemptive action in Jesus does to human language. This is not
simply about Jesus in a historical sense, but about Jesus as *logos*, as the church’s *logic*.
Paul in Philippians passes down to the church a rhetorical mold with its own intrinsic
logic—the wisdom of God that is foolishness to the world. It is “foolishness” not to
retaliate with violence in order to protect oneself from suffering. Nevertheless, this is the
way of Jesus, the way of the cross, and, therefore, the way our words should run. To
implement the *logos* of reconciling rhetoric the preacher speaks as one who has
relinquished control of her message to God. The crucified God is her logical “proof.”
Thus, she gives up, or gives herself over to God, that she may be caught in the undertow
of his humiliation and exaltation. She speaks “unassumingly,” convinced that the regeneration and conversion of humanity has already taken place in the cross, because it is finally and supremely in His cross that He acted as the Lord and King of all men, that He maintained and exercised His sovereignty, that He proved His likeness to the God who is so unassuming in the world but so revolutionary in relation to it.\footnote{Barth, \textit{CD} IV/2, 291.}

Following upon the rhetorical means of \textit{logos}, kenotic rhetoric also reorients the means of \textit{pathos}, by which Aristotle meant the effect of persuasion on the listeners’ emotions. The preacher, however, is concerned not with her own ability to see the “available means of persuasion.” Instead, she is an ambassador of a message not her own. As a herald of God’s message of reconciliation, she knows “there can be no question of our doing the revealing in any way.”\footnote{Barth, \textit{Homiletic}, 47.} She has emptied herself of the “mania for self-expression,” so that the aim of her \textit{pathos} is not sentimental appeal, but the genuine emotion that corresponds with Christ’s own self-denial. Her aim is more akin to a hope in the message’s unique power to elicit the congregation’s tears, that they might be of the same species as the tears of the sinful woman that wet Jesus’ feet with her hair (Luke 7:38); of Jesus’ tears that fall like drops of blood in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:44); or precursors of those tears that shine on the faces of saints assembled before the throne in Revelation (Rev. 7:17; Isaiah 25:8).

The kenotic \textit{ethos} is Christ-centered as well: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Aristotle claimed, “character is almost, so to speak, the most

\begin{footnotes}
\item[97] Barth, \textit{CD} IV/2, 291.
\item[98] Barth, \textit{Homiletic}, 47.
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authoritative form of persuasion.”\textsuperscript{99} Augustine echoes him: “More important than any amount of grandeur of style to those of us who seek to be listened to with obedience is the life of the speaker.”\textsuperscript{100} But the redeemed aim of ethos belongs to the Christian category of vocation. It remembers Lischer’s claim that, “A vocation puts an end to you in order to disclose your true end.”\textsuperscript{101} It also recalls Bonhoeffer’s declaration: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” The vocation of the preacher inhabits the pattern of humiliation and exaltation by her pilgrimage “through faith for faith” (Rom. 1:17). The literal Greek translation more closely follows the semantics of kenosis, “into faith, out of faith.” The preacher’s character is constituted not in the moment she rises to speak, but in relinquishing her life to the Holy Spirit’s promise to abide with her and her people (John 14:17). She is not “taking over” language in order to control it, as much as she is taken over by the Word. The preacher achieves this level of character only insofar as she “looks to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). Her self-denial is reckoned to her as righteousness. Her vocation calls her away from what she thought was best in her, purifies it, and promises to make her something or someone she is not yet.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition to the three means of persuasion, Aristotle also speaks of rhetorical “times.” Rhetoric’s judicial, epideictic, and deliberative species have their own corresponding times of (respectively) past, present, and future. But in the realm of kenotic rhetoric, past, present, and future inhabit the more determinative dimension of

\textsuperscript{99} Aristotle, \textit{On Rhetoric}, 39 [1.2.4].
\textsuperscript{100} Augustine, \textit{On Christian Teaching}, 142.
\textsuperscript{101} Lischer, \textit{The End of Words}, 31.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 30.
eschatological time. By “eschatological” I do not mean to elicit the ominous or the foreboding images characteristic of literalist interpretations of The Apocalypse of John. Rather, I share John Howard Yoder’s contention that eschatology summons, “a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning.” 103 Kenotic rhetoric assumes that Christ established the meaning of history once and for all on the cross, from which God also exalted him, so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection constitute God’s definitive apocalypse, by which all of creation, including all of human history, has been ushered into a new time.

Yoder interprets history in terms of John the Revelator’s claim that, “The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power!” (Rev. 5:12). In this new time, “the cross and not the sword, suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history.” 104 The preacher acknowledges a new “species” of time by addressing those gathered with the conviction Yoder articulates, that “the ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church.” 105 In this new time, past, present, and future are absorbed into the person and work of Jesus Christ, whose “very obedience unto death is in itself not only the sign but also the first fruits of an authentic restored humanity.” 106 Eschatological time therefore introduces something new to rhetoric that transcends the art of persuasion.

For Christian preaching, the primary definitions of classical rhetoric are subordinate to

103 Yoder, The Original Revolution, 53.
the shape and aims of divine language in Scripture. When rhetoric subordinates the force of persuasion to the contours of the life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Word, the preacher intentionally risks “losing control” of the Word. Here the image of the preacher as “peacemaker” is fitting. Those “will be children of God” who speak not only with the rhetorical forms God has given us in Scripture, but also, and more importantly, in the manner of the One who forgave his enemies on the cross. In this new time, effectiveness—the animating principle of persuasion—is supplanted by patience. As Yoder contends,

The triumph of the right is assured not by the might that comes to the aid of the right, which is of course the justification of the use of violence and other kinds of power in every human conflict. The triumph of the right, although it is assured, is sure because the power of the resurrection and not because of any calculation of causes and effects, nor because of the inherently greater strength of the good guys. The relationship between the obedience of God’s people and the triumph of God’s cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.  

As Nathan Kerr observes, Yoder understands Jesus’ resurrection and Lordship from the perspective of its having been “‘finished’ in its culmination on the cross.”

The resurrection of Jesus “drives us back into the cross, and even into the life of Jesus of Nazareth’s own cruciform journeying, as the key to the risen Jesus’ relationship to history as its sovereign Lord.” This means preaching inhabits a cruciform dimension of time, where the language of preaching lies “with the grain of the universe” provided that the preacher takes seriously the way of the cross.

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107 Ibid., 232.
109 Ibid.
This Gospel concept of the cross of the Christian does not mean that suffering is thought of as in itself redemptive or that martyrdom is a value to be sought after. Nor does it refer uniquely to being persecuted for ‘religious’ reasons by an outspokenly pagan government. What Jesus refers to in his call to cross-bearing is rather the seeming defeat of that strategy of obedience which is no strategy, the inevitable suffering of those whose only goal is to be faithful to that love which puts one at the mercy of one’s neighbor, which abandons claims to justice for oneself and for one’s own in an overriding concern for the reconciling of the adversary and the estranged.\textsuperscript{110}

Though there is a latent quality to kenotic rhetoric due to the fact that it may often have a persuasive effect on congregations, this effect will be ancillary to the more primordial kenotic dynamic. God has not persuaded us to himself. God has reconciled us, and those who know this are the beneficiaries of a new species of human speech—a language of peace that wells up from places so deep in God’s heart that they surpass all understanding. Kenotic rhetoric manifests itself in the peculiar, christocentric language of peacemaking. Both its means and ends seek to emulate and echo the Word Jesus and his concern to reconcile the adversary and the estranged. Kenotic rhetoric’s distinguishing marks include these respective expressions of \textit{logos}, \textit{pathos}, and \textit{ethos} as they are redeemed in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation, as well as the full and patient awareness of eschatological time in which history is determined by cruciform suffering. This new language, which is also as old as the Ancient of Days, transcends the worldly wisdom of classical rhetoric through the patience borne of confidence in eschatological time. Those entrusted with the message of reconciliation will speak in this time of God’s patience to those “in heaven and on earth and under the earth”—all three congregations, which are really one congregation—as if they are all listening at the same time.

\textsuperscript{110} Yoder, \textit{The Politics of Jesus}, 236.
3.7 There is a Balm in Gilead

Rather than analyzing one particular sermon as with the previous two chapters, the thesis of this chapter requires an alternative route through a work of fiction. One might suggest that so many sermons attempt to be persuasive that there are few examples from which to choose and apply my theory. But the advantage of considering the person and work of a fictional preacher in this case is important due to the fact that reconciling rhetoric has so much to do with a preacher’s ethos. Fiction has a way of expanding our vision and grasp of reality in ways that other kinds of literature do not. In this case, the fictional preacher, John Ames, in Marilynne Robinson’s novel Gilead, presents us with the opportunity for considering how reconciling rhetoric encompasses the whole life of a person called to preach the gospel. Robinson provides the reader with glimpses of a preacher whose logic, passion, and character are beautifully integrated in his belief and practice, and whose humility in preaching originates in his untamed awe of creation and its graceful God. His constant insistence that truth evades our attempts to harness it for our advantage constitutes his wisdom, and makes Ames the epitome of a reconciling preacher. The brief excerpts he provides of his exegetical imagination and sermonic content provide compelling instances of reconciling rhetoric.

Ames, a pastor in the fictional town of Gilead, Iowa, is an aging, third generation preacher addressing his memoirs in letters to his son. Having lost his first wife and infant daughter decades before, he marries again in old age, and is compelled to share the

111 Subsequent quotes from this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.
wisdom he will not live to share in person with his young son. We also learn that Ames deeply dislikes his namesake, John Ames (Jack) Boughton, the troubled son of his best friend and fellow preacher in town. Despite Jack’s untrustworthiness, and the ambiguous nature of his relationship with Ames’s young wife, Lila, he is also like a son to Ames. Jack is finally the recipient of John’s blessing, in a scene strikingly similar to the return of the prodigal son. The latter scene confirms for the reader that John Ames is a type of the forgiving father in the parable. He is the wise father who does not chase after the wayward son in his anger, but waits for him, welcomes him upon his return, and blesses him, “to the limit of my powers, whatever they are,” with the benediction from Numbers 6:24-26 (241).

This moment illumines the nature of Ames’s ethos. His character takes on the “mind” of Christ as he extends mercy to a man he distrusts, and who has finally returned to a town he once left in disgrace. Upon seeing Jack’s head remain bowed and his eyes shut at the end of the blessing from Numbers, Ames continues, “Lord, bless John Ames Boughton, this beloved son and brother and husband and father” (241). Ames then tells Jack it was an honor to bless him, and later writes that he would have gone “through seminary and ordination and all the years intervening for that one moment” (242). Such is the substance of a preacher who revels in the joy of participating in an act of love made possible only by a God who has loved us first. This moment of blessing is the culmination of a life of preaching the love of enemies. His is a reconciling ethos because his forgiveness is a consequence of his calling, the consummation of his gradual struggle to faithfully inhabit the consciousness of God for his enemy’s sake. God’s having
reconciled John Ames makes it possible for John Ames to initiate reconciliation with Jack Boughton. In an earlier passage, as Ames reflects on Jack not merely as a “son,” but as “another self, a more cherished self,” he says,

I fell to thinking about the passage in [Calvin’s] *Institutes* where it says the image of the Lord in anyone is much more than reason enough to love him, and that the Lord stands waiting to take our enemies’ sins upon Himself. So it is a rejection of the reality of grace to hold our enemy at fault. Those things can only be true. It seems to me people tend to forget that we are to love our enemies, not to satisfy some standard of righteousness, but because God their Father loves them. I have probably preached on that a hundred times (189).

Ames’s *pathos* is likewise consistently reconciling, whether he is standing in or outside of the pulpit. Though he would not avoid inducing emotion in his hearers, whether it be through inciting joy or delight, he admits he is “much better at weeping with those who weep” (134). It is not that he would prefer to weep more than rejoice. It is rather that he does not set out to stir the congregation to emotion as much as he attempts to describe the ways God stirs human beings. He is so often amazed by the traces of God’s grace in his own quotidian existence. Partly due to his old age, he regards existence itself as, “the most remarkable thing that could ever be imagined. I’m about to put on imperishability. In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye.

The twinkling of an eye. That is the most wonderful expression. I’ve thought from time to time it was the best thing in life, that little incandescence you see in people when the charm of a thing strikes them, or the humor of it. ‘The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart.’ That’s a fact (53).

This is not an appeal to the emotions of the listener or reader, but an expression of doxological praise we should dare not reduce to something so functional as a persuasion. Ames’s rhetoric permeates the boundaries of *pathos* as a merely persuasive tactic, and transforms it into something more like “one kind of vision, as mystical as any,” which
knows “there is nothing more astonishing than a human face” (66). From the perspective of the way reconciliation reverses pathos, so that the preacher is its subject rather than its agent, a human face’s capacity to astonish is related to its being in the image of God, whose face is too powerful for human sight. When Ames says, “Any human face is a claim on you,” it is not the persuasive power of the face, but that “you can’t help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it” (66). Ames’s rhetoric is that of an enchanted man, delighted again and again by God’s abrupt transformations, which “occur unsought and unawaited, and they beggar your hopes and your deserving” (203).

Ames’s insistence on the “disjunction between our Father’s love and our deserving” (73) is a persistent theme in Gilead. This theme undergirds the reconciling dimension of Ames’s logos. There is a gap between God and God’s creatures, across which only God may traverse according to his prerogative. This separation between God and humanity invites doubt and unbelief on humanity’s side. Though he calls these human responses “possible” (177), Ames calls us not to take unbelief so seriously that we would try to defend religion with “proofs.” Such logical proofs only confirm unbelievers’ suspicions. “In the matter of belief, I have always found that defenses have the same irrelevance about them as the criticisms they are meant to answer” (178). Ames is not pursuing an anti-intellectual perch, from which he may sit protected from religion’s cultured despisers. He is more concerned to trump the rationalistic with the rational.112

112 Robinson is likely aware that this is a concern of Barth’s as well. In CD I/1, Barth explains the difference between rational and rationalistic as follows: “All dogmatic formulations are rational, and every
We must not look for proofs. “Don’t bother with them at all. They are never sufficient to the question, and they’re always a little impertinent, I think, because they claim for God a place within our conceptual grasp” (179). Ames’s logic is not beholden to proofs but to obedience. “You can assert the existence of something—Being—without having the slightest notion of what it is” (178). Apart from obedience, one cannot presume to know anything about the character of the object of one’s obedience. We can even “know a thing to death and be for all purposes completely ignorant of it” (7). Here, Ames echoes Augustine’s paraphrase of Isaiah 7:9, “Unless you believe, you will not understand.” The authority of the preacher’s logos increases exponentially as it becomes reconciled through obedience to the Logos of God.

Finally, and perhaps most endearingly, Ames models reconciling rhetoric by preaching in the species of eschatological time. His impending death heightens his sensitivity to the way God’s radiant presence surrounds him. He recalls a Pentecost sermon, in which he confesses,

“It has seemed to me sometimes as though the Lord breathes on this poor gray ember of Creation and it turns to radiance—for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again, and to look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light” (245).

dogmatic procedure is rational to the degree that in it use is made of general concepts, i.e., of the human ratio. It can be called rationalistic, however, only when we can show that the use is not controlled by the question of dogma, i.e., by subordination to Scripture, but by something else, most probably by the principles of some philosophy. If it is clearly understood that dogmatics generally and necessarily involves rational formulation, a rational formulation which is, of course, related to a completed proof and which takes account of Scripture, then no objection can be taken to logical and grammatical formulae as such, for we fail to see why these should be especially suspect any more than certain legal formulae,” 296.
Then, having since reconsidered this line of thinking, he corrects himself in the narrative, and asserts that the Lord is more constant and far more extravagant than his sermon implied. “Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don’t have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see” (245). Since grace is “not so poor a thing that it cannot present itself in any number of ways” (240), the preacher Ames appraises the ability to see the available means of grace as a mark of true wisdom.

Ames’s receptivity to God’s apocalyptic dynamism in this time between Christ’s ascension and return exemplifies Yoder’s earlier statement that, “The relationship between the obedience of God’s people and the triumph of God’s cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.”113 Despite Ames’s claim to be “the good son,” that is, the elder son, “the one who never left his father’s house” (238), we could more appropriately place him alongside the forgiving father. The love he shows in his life and in his language, which for him are one and the same, would make no sense if Jesus Christ were not raised from the dead. As soon as he compares himself to the elder son, he anticipates that heaven’s rejoicing over him will be “comparatively restrained.

And that’s all right. There is no justice in love, no proportion in it, and there need not be, because in any specific instance it is only a glimpse or parable of an embracing, incomprehensible reality. It makes no sense at all because it is the eternal breaking in on the temporal. So how could it subordinate itself to cause or consequence? (238).

Here in the nexus of God’s “disproportionate” love lies the quickening power of reconciling rhetoric, which is no respecter of cause or consequence. Ames’s sermonic memoirs recall Barth’s description of Mozart, in that they are for the true Christian not mere entertainment, enjoyment or edification but food and drink; words full of comfort and counsel for our needs; words which are never a slave to technique nor sentimental but always ‘moving,’ free and liberating because wise, strong and sovereign. The reconciling preacher is wise to follow Ames’s path in assuming God’s sovereignty over all language, such that all time, all existence, all speech “is all an ember now,” waiting its turn for the good Lord to breathe it into flame (246).

3.8 Conclusion

John Ames’s name seems designed to evoke the names of John the Evangelist and the prophet Amos. It would not be a waste of time to ruminate on the parallels between these three characters. But perhaps Robinson would permit us to pursue yet another facet of the meaning of his name, which is that “Ames” may be a slightly veiled reference to rhetorical “aims.” That is, he aims 1) to love his people, and more specifically, to love them as God loves them, and 2) to share this wisdom to the glory of God the Father so gently that it is often hard to determine his audience, whether it is his seven year-old son, God, his congregation, or himself. Ames shows that a preacher’s dogged insistence on persuading the congregation to think, feel, and obey what they would otherwise not have thought, felt, or obeyed apart from the sermon is actually the result of a troubled heart. Preachers obsessed with persuading the congregation, cajoling them, winning them,
ultimately remain stuck in the dimension of moralism. Moralistic sermons never quite rise above the category of a compelling opinion-editorial. Such twisting of the Bible’s forms of language into a “strategy of influence” is inadequate for “the richness of our theological calling.”114

But “do not let your hearts be troubled,” Jesus says in the gospel of Ames’s namesake (Jn. 14:1). Jesus leaves us to go and prepare a place for us. This is so often interpreted to mean that Jesus is “somewhere else,” preparing a place for us, perhaps building another mansion. Yet, in verse 2 he explains, “in my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” Does this not raise an interesting question? If the mansions are already in the Father’s house, why has Jesus told his disciples he is going to prepare something he has just said already exists? It would help us to think of Jesus in this text as the Word from chapter 1, rendering it as follows: “If the Word goes and prepares a place for you, the Word will come again and will take you to itself, so that where the Word is, there you may be also” (14:3). This means the Word leaves us, but comes back to us again and again. It is in this sense that the risen Jesus prepares a place for us, by piercing us repeatedly like an arrow from a distant shore. Slowly we discover that with every strike, he has brought us closer and closer to himself until, finally, where he is, we are also. Having found the way to the Father by the reconciling Word, Ames knew this in the end. He lays down his pen to pray, to sleep, and to “smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence” (247).

CHAPTER 4: RECONCILED BASTARDS

My heart is crushed within me, all my bones shake; I have become like a drunkard, like one overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words.

Jeremiah 23:9

What you say up there in the pulpit, that’s probably the poorest way to communicate with a congregation.

Will D. Campbell

One might argue the sudden transition from the gentle rhetoric of John Ames to the irascible preaching of Will Davis Campbell wrenches my argument from its moorings. If, as I have claimed, the proclamation of the reconciling Word must echo the patience and kindness of Paul’s description of love in I Corinthians 13, one might object that what follows is an outright contradiction of my claims in chapter 3. As will soon become clear, the word “irritable” (I Cor. 13:5) captures one of the more striking aspects of Will Campbell’s public persona, so much so that his life and work seem to obfuscate or even obliterate any attempt to place him alongside those with more refined approaches to reconciliation. Those without a trained ear might describe his speech as inpatient and unkind, sometimes even “boastful or arrogant or rude.” In what sense could it be reconciling to call fellow Christians—as Campbell did—“whited sepulchers” and “ecclesiastical bullies”? Yet, Campbell unapologetically styled himself as a “bootleg preacher.” He was often fiercely at odds with the church, and had, at best, a mercurial relationship with it for most of his life. Yet, though he leaves one of the most

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iconoclastic legacies in the history of the American South, Campbell was one of the most prophetic of the racial reconcilers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

According to one account, “He was a walking nerve center. He was enormously important but so deft and nimble that the reactionaries never caught on to him. His fingers were everywhere, but when you looked around—there were no fingerprints. He was the Invisible Man.”

By turning now to the gifts of his witness, I hope to offer a compelling portrait of a historical figure who courageously epitomized the intersection of the practices of Christian preaching and reconciliation. First, I will introduce key themes for understanding Campbell by presenting the simultaneously brilliant and “foolish” tensions between his theology and ecclesiology as a practicable approach to reconciling proclamation. Second, I will discuss how Campbell’s ability to identify with people gave him authority to tell them the most difficult truths, and how such identification evokes the Gospel of John’s account of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (4:1-42). Third, I will present Campbell as a “performer” of certain communicative approaches peculiar to the prophet Jeremiah, in order to demonstrate crucial elements of the prophetic aspect of preaching reconciliation. To conclude, I will briefly recount the consequences of Campbell’s bearing such a prophetic yoke in the pulpits of a racially divided United States. As often as possible throughout each phase of my argument, I will

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rely on Campbell’s sermons and addresses, in addition to several of his other works, with the intention of focusing first and foremost on Campbell as a reconciling preacher.

4.1 Unsystematic Theology

A white Baptist preacher from Mississippi, and a friend of both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ku Klux Klansmen, Campbell falls in the Christian Radical camp of the Free Church tradition. Few Baptists have been more penetrating in their theological critique of the church in the American South than he. His anti-institutionalism, refusal of state-sanctioned violence, and friendship with the downtrodden of every race place him on the margins of Southern Baptist tradition. Nevertheless, Campbell offers a vision of reconciliation too compelling to be left on the fringe of Baptist history, much less Christian theology. His insistence that the sovereignty of God—rather than a governmental dictum—be the foundation of any Christian response to racial division differs substantially from the political epistemologies to which many American Christians assent. If “the only point of reference is God,” Campbell asserts, what business does the church have relying on a Supreme Court decision for its authority to promote desegregation? Campbell’s homiletical application of the politics of Jesus to the resistance of racist principalities and powers offers an inspiring witness to the

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3 It is often noted that Campbell was the only white person present at the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), even though Campbell himself downplays the significance of his invitation. He was initially refused admittance until Bayard Rustin spoke on his behalf, telling younger black organizers, “Let this man in. We need him.” Quoted by Emily Langer, “Will D. Campbell, preacher and civil rights activist, dies at 88,” The Washington Post (Published 8 June 2013, National Section). Retrieved online, 25 April 2014: http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/will-d-campbell-preacher-and-civil-rights-activist-dies-at-88/2013/06/08/70b67d0a-ceed-11e2-9f1a-1a7c0e20287_story.html.

4 This is indicative of Campbell’s though after Brown v. Board, and especially after his epiphany during the conversation (below) with P. D. East.
theology and practice of preaching. But the theological infrastructure of his reconciling homiletic is complex and liminal, “of the times” while also “ahead of its time.” Who were Campbell’s primary theological influences, and how did he synthesize their respective ideas in his own life and work?

Despite his misgivings about systematic theology, Campbell has a theology that informs his preaching. But we cannot begin to understand it apart from the radical shift he underwent after the most defining event of his life, the moment he believed the true nature of the gospel was revealed to him. On August 14, 1965, Campbell received the devastating news that his friend, Jonathan Daniels, a young Episcopal seminarian and Civil Rights activist, had been killed instantly by a shotgun blast at close range just after his release from jail in Lowndes County, Alabama. Daniels had come south from Massachusetts, having been granted permission by his seminary to spend a semester living with an African-American family in Alabama, picketing segregated stores with other activists, and helping to register voters. The shooter, an unpaid special deputy and prominent local citizen named Thomas Coleman, had cursed and accosted Daniel and three other companions at a convenience store near the jail. As Coleman aimed his shotgun at one of the black women standing beside Daniels and began to pull the trigger,

5 In his article, “Values and Hazards of Theological Preaching,” Campbell asks, “Theological preaching? Never thought about it. Now that I have I am convinced that it can only be the living of a life in community, based on faith, not certitude.” He is concerned that much of what has been called “theology” in the church’s history has often been misappropriated and misunderstood even by original authors. Theology as doctrine—in the form of creeds, for example—has also often been used to justify violence, which leads Campbell to the conclusion that we are better off pursuing only the simpler things that constitute the Way of Jesus as they enable an active faith. See his discussion in Campbell and Goode, Writings, 118-123.
Daniels pushed the woman out of the way, and was instantly killed by the bullet intended for her.

Campbell was in Fairhope, Alabama, with his brother Joe and friend P. D. East when he received the news of Daniels’s death. East, who had been exiled from Mississippi for publishing an integrationist newspaper, used the opportunity to hold Campbell accountable for a definition of the Christian faith Campbell had once given him: “We’re all bastards but God loves us anyway.”6 Showing no empathy or sensitivity for Campbell’s fresh grief, East faced Campbell closely, put one hand on Campbell’s knee, raised the other hand in oath-taking fashion, and asked, “Which one of these two bastards does God love the most? Does he love that little dead bastard Jonathan the most? Or does He love that living bastard Thomas the most?”7 Campbell had no immediate response. He walked across the room and peered out the window into the glare of the streetlight. Intensified by the “glow of the malt which we were well into by then,” Campbell began to whimper, cry, and laugh at the same time. “I remember trying to sort out the sadness and the joy. Just what I was crying for and what was I laughing for. Then this too became clear.” Campbell called it a revelation.

I was laughing at myself, at twenty years of a ministry which had become, without my realizing it, a ministry of liberal sophistication. An attempted negation of Jesus, of human engineering, of riding the coattails of Caesar, of playing on his ballpark, by his rules and with his ball, of looking to government to make and verify and authenticate our morality, of worshiping at the shrine of enlightenment and academia, of making an idol of the Supreme Court, a theology of law and order and of denying not only the Faith I professed to hold but my

7 Ibid., 222. Inconsistent capitalization of “He” in this quote is in the original text.
history and my people—the Thomas Colemans. Loved. And if loved, forgiven. And if forgiven, reconciled.⁸

Campbell would never be the same. He continued to engage in the Civil Rights Movement, but from a radically different perspective. Though certain neo-orthodox themes had already suffused Campbell’s theological training and activism, East’s relentless questioning had the ultimate effect of forcing Campbell to clarify his presuppositions. Merrill Hawkins, Jr., relates how the general themes of neo-orthodoxy appear in Campbell’s thought in the wake of his watershed moment in Fairhope:

After his own self-examination in the 1960s, his writings reflect an emphasis on human sinfulness or potential evil, the sinfulness of human institutions, a criticism of liberal optimism, the otherness of God, and a call for a return to scriptural ideas as the starting point for Christian social action.⁹

The most crucial of these emphases for understanding Campbell’s renewed approach to racial reconciliation was the significant attention he began placing on the sovereignty of God. An essay entitled, “The Christian Concern and Starting Point,”¹⁰ directly displays this particular foundation of Campbell’s most counter-cultural theological beliefs. More than any other element of his thinking, it was Campbell’s insistence on the Lordship of a reconciling God that compelled him into the kind of action and prophesying that angered both sides of the race debate during and after the Civil Rights Movement, from the local grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan to Coretta Scott King. Campbell believed that, for liberals, the Christian concern and starting point was (and remains) mistakenly located in humanitarian and egalitarian concerns.

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⁸ Ibid.
¹⁰ See, Campbell and Goode, Crashing the Idols, 114-120.
Campbell argued these concerns alone would never convert a segregationist. They “certainly lie within the province of Christian witness but...taken alone, are not enough. The segregationist who is honest and who wants to remain loyal to the church has very clearly seen this point and has taken clever advantage of its weakness.”\(^{11}\) It does not take sin seriously enough, and therefore does not pierce the heart of the matter. Its fundamental flaw is that it makes humans the central subject, and supplants God as the almighty and sovereign king. The truth is,

Once a man has truly seen this truth he can no longer be racist, nor can he any longer grovel in the agonies of self-pity. From that point on, the racist logic and desire for self-justification terrify him. As for the racist, he is now afraid to call any man unclean, to discriminate against any man, to stand in judgment over any group or individual or to set himself above any of God’s human creatures. From the moment either the segregationist or the integrationist really accepts the absolute sovereignty of God, he is forever thereafter terrified to usurp that authority or claim any part of it for himself.\(^{12}\)

Campbell builds his argument for the sovereignty of God on the works of F. O. Matthiessen,\(^{13}\) Karl Barth, and, eventually, Jacques Ellul. Matthiessen argues that a theological shift occurred in the nineteenth century that stressed an anthropological point of reference to the detriment of traditional understandings of the Incarnation. There was “an alteration in the object of [orthodox belief] from God-Man to Man-God.”\(^{14}\) The Jesus long confessed as having descended from the right hand of God, born of a virgin, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried, but risen and now seated at God’s right hand became, instead, a mere “rebel prophet who was murdered by a

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 114.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 446.
society that was unable to abide the horror of truth.” Consequently, the focus of theological concern became the deification of the human as reward for a righteous life. Christ’s resurrection became the result of human triumph rather than the graceful act of the sovereign God in Christ. “With the diminution of the idea that man might find completion in something greater than himself, what could follow more naturally than for Protestantism to make man the subject of racial and social justice?”

This slide from the sovereignty of God to the glorification of human action catalyzes the theological liberalism that hampers Protestantism from acting according to its own core theological claims. Campbell recalls the emphasis Barth placed on God as the subject and humanity as the object and recipient of God’s revelation in Christ. Barth displays the concerns of the biblical writers and their ultimate concern with what God thinks about human beings. He reverses modernity’s anthropological starting point, so that the modern person’s question, “Does God exist?” cannot precede the question, “Do I exist?” If “I exist at all, I do so as this subject…For in my natural and ethical life, to the extent that I think that I can see and control myself in these respects, I can only consider and handle myself as an object of this subject.” So influenced by Barth, Campbell says, “When one is able and willing to confess that sovereignty belongs to God alone he is no longer able to be at ease in the camp of the racist. He ceases to be excessively preoccupied with man or with any particular man or group of men.”

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15 Campbell and Goode, Crashing the Idols, 115.
16 Ibid., 116.
17 Barth, III/2, 110.
18 Campbell and Goode, Crashing the Idols, 117.
Campbell sees Barth’s work drawing on Calvin, who explains “when we begin with ourselves rather than God, we see ourselves in a more powerful, glamorous, and impressive light than we actually are.”\textsuperscript{19} The displacement of God as the subject ultimately leads to moralistic arguments for racial integration, which trip over the segregationist’s own facts and figures and references to experience, and ultimately collapse under the gravity of human disobedience. The only way to avoid badgering people into loving each other is to humble ourselves to God, and reject statistical data—accurate or not—as being of no account.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to his indebtedness to Matthiesen and Barth, Campbell’s views of God’s sovereignty also made him sympathetic with the work of Jacques Ellul, particularly in relation to the nature of state politics. Ellul regarded himself as a Christian anarchist, not because he was anti-government, but because he was convinced that the state’s power was simply illusory. Ellul describes Christian anarchy not in the traditional sense of “disorder,” but as “\textit{an-arche}: no authority, no domination.”\textsuperscript{21} More concretely, he defines anarchy as the way of love that absolutely rejects violence.\textsuperscript{22} These convictions complement his most famous work, \textit{The Technological Society}, in which Ellul levels a devastating philosophical critique of modernity’s characteristic insistence on the fragmentation of human life for the sake of efficiency. By “technique,” Ellul does not mean technology (or machinery), itself, since “technique” actually precedes

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 11-13.
technology. Rather, Ellul is describing humanity’s habitual enslavement to technology, and the subordination of the human to a systematized existence. He defines technique as the “totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given state of development) in every field of human activity.” Summarizing Ellul, Campbell states that “because our new environment is now technique, not nature, the political implications are that technique and bureaucracy, not an exchange of ideas in political debates and elections, are the stuff of politics today.” Politics in the traditional sense is, therefore, an “illusion.”

While Campbell did not use the expression “Christian anarchy,” his theological convictions led him to unilaterally reject any attempt by the church to engage “in politics with utopian pretensions.” This is a crucial point for understanding Campbell’s posture toward the state vis-à-vis his faith in God’s sovereignty. Campbell was certain that so long as we persist in the belief that there are no limits to what politics can do for us because all that is critical about man is politics, it is inevitable that we shall try to tear each other asunder, shear off into disillusioned and hateful factions, each with our own political nostrums which we shall brutally inflict upon those who do not share our nostrums because they have ones of their own.

For Campbell, what the church calls social action “recrucifies” God by attempting to build up the kingdom of God with human hands through the state, its laws, and its sprawling, bureaucratic structures. “The church has, in a word, tried to effect

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25 Ibid.
26 Hawkins, Jr., *Radical Prophet of the South*, 80.
reconciliation where there already is reconciliation, while the only thing God ever asked from the church was to live thanksgiving for others and so express thanksgiving for what he has done for us!”

28 That God has reconciled humanity to himself “is already a fact.”

The permanency of God’s reconciliation is the Good News. Yet, the church’s participation in and reliance upon “programs, strategies, imperatives, laws, and acts of obedience” constitute the Bad News of works righteousness. 30 Campbell is emphatic: because Jesus Christ is truly Lord, reconciliation is neither a rule to be obeyed, nor a goal to be accomplished, but is rather a gift to be enjoyed. “St. Paul’s imperative—‘Be reconciled to God’—is the only social action there is for the Christian life.”

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The theological influences of Matthiessen, Barth, and Ellul began to coalesce in Campbell’s thought beginning with the latter half of the turbulent 1960s. This was a time, Campbell believed, that too many American Christians had placed their ultimate hopes and allegiances in the systems of democratic capitalism and its electoral processes. The aforementioned theologians became the most authoritative for Campbell as he began to proclaim the apocalyptic reality of reconciliation in the wake of his revelation that “we are all bastards, but God loves us anyway.” God’s reconciliation is not merely a future promise but a present gift that encompasses all people. God has reconciled human beings to himself and to one another. Therefore, white American Southerners’ prejudice against their black neighbors is a theological problem requiring a theological solution.

28 Campbell, Introduction to Up to Our Steeples in Politics, Reconciliation and Resistance, 199. In the next paragraph, Campbell says such a life of lived thanksgiving involves the “giving of food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the homeless, and clothes to the naked,” 199.

29 Ibid., 198.

30 Ibid., 199.

31 Ibid.
Campbell scholar Merrill Hawkins, Jr., is not convinced by the alternative approach of Campbell’s theological language. He concludes, “it is very doubtful that a religious approach to the segregationist would have been any more effective [than appeals to laws or civil rights].”

He reasons that the segregationists’ racism was “the heritage of their culture, which their religion reinforced.” Most likely, he continues, the segregationist would simply dismiss the interpretation of the social activist. In many ways, the behavior of the segregationists was changed by a legal action. It was, in hindsight, much easier to convince segregationists that their practices violated the law of the land than to tell them they stood in danger of divine wrath.

Hawkins is not incorrect in this assessment. However, he does not seem to recognize that his doubts about Campbell’s claims distract from Campbell’s more fundamental suspicions about the fragmentation of theological language, and the seminal contributions of such language to the perpetuation of systemic racism in America. That Hawkins concludes with the latter claim betrays his assumption that one’s “heritage” and “religion” are distinct entities, such that one entity might “reinforce” the other.

Campbell’s language, on the other hand, assumes that for the “religiously oriented segregationist” (Hawkins’s phrase), cultural heritage and “religion” are indivisible. By concluding with as assumption that Campbell’s overarching goal is to provide yet another rubric by which those in positions of power—whether religious or secular—might reason with segregationists, he actually overlooks the mournful tone of Campbell’s assessment.

32 Hawkins, Jr., Radical Prophet of the South, 100.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 101. Hawkins’s contention here is reminiscent of a statement Martin Luther King, Jr., made in an address to Western Michigan University: “It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me but it can keep him from lynching me and I think that is pretty important, also.” But Hawkins’s application of the legal response to segregation misses the mark of Campbell’s concerns.
Campbell’s critique of the theology’s disastrous turn away from the primacy of God’s action in Jesus Christ is characterized more by lament than by paternalism. After his revelation in Alabama, the “Bootleg Preacher” never showed any intention in his preaching or writing that he believed a better plan of social activism would counteract this theological sea change. As I now hope to show, Campbell addressed the practical implications of his theology by advancing renewed ecclesiological understandings. But in both theological and ecclesiological matters, the common thread of Campbell’s concern was whether the church’s adoption of the politics of “Caesar” effectively disappears the potential witness of the church’s alternative politics of reconciliation.

“Ours is simply a question derived from the fundamental question we are here raising: is obedience to Christ exhausted by immersing one’s self in Caesar’s definition of politics?”

4.2 Campbell’s Search for Community

The church’s visible witness in the world was Campbell’s most vexing and persistent dilemma. A brief pastorate, a contentious stint as a university chaplain, and the continuously disheartening and even life-threatening encounters with hostile Christians in the South finally dissuaded him of the traditional church’s authenticity as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Campbell was raised in Amite County, Mississippi, by devout Baptists. He was a product of the traditional—or what he called the “institutional”—church, including Wake Forest College and Yale Divinity School. But as his thinking

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35 Campbell, “Up to Our Steeples in Politics,” Reconciliation and Resistance, 188-89.
matured, Campbell became increasingly adamant that all institutions—especially those claiming to be Christian—were untrustworthy and oppressive. The dynamics of his own education and experience combined to induce Campbell’s perennial struggle to find an intelligible answer to the question, “Where is the church?” What I hope to show in this section is that Campbell’s insistence upon reconciliation not only influenced his ecclesiological imagination, but also led to his becoming a liminal, transitional figure. In other words, I will claim that, though we should not swallow Campbell’s ecclesiological vision whole, Christian hope in the American South would have been significantly diminished without his voice.

For a closer look at Campbell’s ecclesiological beliefs, we will need to consider yet another theologian who had a notable impact on his life and thought. William Stringfellow’s influence on Campbell’s understanding of principalities and powers is immeasurable. Campbell conscripted Stringfellow’s interpretation of the principalities and powers as the “ideologies, institutions, images and systems” that accost us every day.36 Stringfellow believed the principalities and powers were not only countless in number, but always found in temporal realities and material structures, including:

- all institutions, all ideologies, all images, all movements, all causes, all corporations, all bureaucracies, all traditions, all methods and routines, all conglomerates, all races, all nations, all idols. Thus, the Pentagon or the Ford Motor Company or Harvard University or the Hudson Institute or Consolidated Edison or the Diners Club or the Olympics or the Methodist Church or the Teamsters Union are all principalities. So are capitalism, Maoism, humanism, Mormonism, astrology, the Puritan work ethic, science and scientism, white supremacy, patriotism, plus many, many more—sports, sex, and profession or

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discipline, technology, money, the family—beyond any prospect of full enumeration. The principalities and powers are legion.\(^{37}\)

These powers are “creatures having their own existence, personality, and mode of life,” and have come to existence just as mysteriously as did the creaturehood of human beings.\(^{38}\)

According to Richard Goode, Campbell agreed with Stringfellow’s emphasis on the creatureliness of the principalities and powers. “All of us are caught up in, with, and by these powers,” which seek to wreck the kingdom God in Christ has established.\(^{39}\)

“Principalities can best be understood in modern language as institutions [or ideologies].”\(^{40}\) They are beings that exert their power for the purposes of domination, enslavement, and alienation—or virtually any other purpose whose means and ends pervert the purposes and mock the establishment of God’s kingdom. “All [powers and principalities] are blasphemy for they usurp the authority of the one true God.”\(^{41}\) They also include “isms,” such as racism, “an idol with a life and power of its own.”\(^{42}\) That the principalities and powers are both real, observable entities, and destructive servants of death are the two primary motivators of Campbell’s rejection of what he called the “institutional church,” and his concomitant, defiant stance against the power of racism.

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\(^{37}\) Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1973) 78.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 79.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 248.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 249.
Campbell often spoke equivocally about the church. He attempted to differentiate the “true church” from the “institutional church”—which he knocked as little more than “steeples” hosting “altar fires” and “tea parties.” As institutions, these steeples are also principalities. As principalities, they are inherently evil. In a speech to the William Whitsitt Heritage Society in 1995, he concluded, “All institutions, every last single one of them, are evil; self-serving, self-preserving, self-loving; and very early in the life of any institution it will exist for its own self.” More directly concerning the church, in an undated manuscript addressed to a gathering of journalists at an unnamed Southern university, Campbell states,

I do not love my church. I did for a long time. I probably worshipped it. I now see it as an idol, as a broken down machine, an ineffective tool, and perhaps the greatest barrier to the proclamation of the Gospel of all the institutions in society because it is an institutions [sic] and I believe that all institutions are, by nature evil. It stands today where the rich young ruler stood—good, powerful, rich. Yet Jesus told such a one to go and sell it all and get rid of it. And what would happen if the steepled, institutional churches should suddenly follow that admonition. I, of course, don’t know. But it may be that we might on that day learn to sing the Psalms for the first time in our lives.

On the other hand, in an interview with The Wittenburg Door five years before the Heritage Society address, he stated, “I never say the church is bad. Obviously, it’s not a bad outfit; the institutional church—structure—is a good outfit.” Nevertheless, the wider context of his speaking and writing shows that, though the church may be good,

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44 Campbell, “Redneck Religion,” Undated manuscript, Will Campbell Papers (University of Southern Mississippi) Manuscript 341, Box 12, Folder 47.
45 Campbell, *Writings*, 73.
and may have the potential to do enormous amounts of good, Campbell believes it is fundamentally corrupt.

Don’t trust it. That doesn’t mean God doesn’t work wherever God chooses, so I wouldn’t rule out the stained glass and the mahogany pews and the silver chalices. I don’t rule any of that out. I am just trying to say that if God is the God of the universe, don’t try to put God in this pigeonhole and say, ‘If you want to be with God, come to this edifice or this steeple or serve this particular cause.’

This does not mean the institutional church, as Campbell understood it, is either evil or good despite its untrustworthiness. For Campbell, the true church may distinguish itself from the “altar fires and tea parties” presided over in “the steeples.” “Hell, I don’t know what the church is.” That is, he does not want to know because he feels compelled to resist what he might do if he did know. “I believe the church is at work in the world only because of my faith in this Jesus person. Trouble is, I don’t know what Jesus is up to or where his church is. That’s good because if I found the church then I’d give it a name and start running it.” The church for Campbell was wherever people happen to be doing the things Jesus commanded. It is “wherever two or three are gathered in my name” (Mt. 18:20). “In my name,” in this sense, has to do with the power and activity revealed by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

What does it matter what someone believes? If you are bringing good news to the poor and restoring sight to the blind and healing the brokenhearted and releasing the captives, but you happen to believe that a whale swallowed Jonah or you happen not to believe that a whale swallowed Jonah, what difference does it make ‘as long as Christ is preached’?

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46 Ibid., 72.
47 Ibid., 71.
48 Ibid., 71-72.
49 Ibid., 74. In context, Campbell is speaking about the importance of the unity of belief and discipleship. In the interview, he clearly expresses strong disagreement with those who care only about “what you believe” and not “about how you live” (73 ff.).
This articulation of Campbell’s ecclesiology complements the Anabaptist tradition he so deeply appreciated and epitomized, and informs his approach to preaching Christ to “the steeplings” as a way of resisting racist principalities and powers. Though he eschews temptations to pinpoint where Jesus has decided to be among people, Campbell is confident in his ability to detect an institution, and, therefore, the particular location of a principality. “They are real, this-world entities, earthly structures and systems to be named and engaged.” 50 This is why his aim is so precise when gibing the powers. Because they are earthly, they are vulnerable to attack even despite their enormous presence and potent dominion. When a church assumes the status of a principality, when it becomes institutionalized and, thus, self-serving, Campbell targets it as an idol to be “crashed.” This does not mean he advocated violence against the institutional church. Rather, he believed Christians must speak and act in ways that expose the institutional church as a principality that is already fallen, disarmed, and defeated by Christ’s death on the cross. God reigns supreme already. Christ’s defeat of the powers has been accomplished. God has already reconciled us to himself and to one another. Because one of the seminal verses of Scripture for Campbell was 2 Corinthians 5:16a, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view,” human categories and points of view no longer mattered to him. Campbell’s belief that this is true now—today—lay at the heart of his mission to crash the idol of racism. 51 It especially drove his

50 Campbell and Goode, Crashing the Idols, 173.
51 “Well, first of all, it should be understood that I am not a reconciler. I am a Christian preacher, and I believe that all are already reconciled...In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said that Christ has reconciled us. Not he’s
passion to unleash this Gospel often in the places where it ought to make sense already—church sanctuaries.

In the celebrated PBS documentary about Campbell’s life, “God’s Will,” Campbell mentions an unnamed author who had written about him and his ministry.\footnote{PBS Documentary, “God’s Will,” Center for Public Television, 57 min. (Quote at 9:50).} He favorably recounts the writer’s critique as having reduced the essence of Campbell’s life and writings to “a search for community.” This author might have been Hawkins, himself, who, in the published version of his dissertation, wrote, “Campbell argues that community is the essence of true religion. He equates community with the true church and contrasted community with institutional religion.”\footnote{Hawkins, Jr., Radical Prophet of the South, 133.} But is this not a deeply problematic dichotomy given what we know of Campbell’s own forceful convictions about the present reality of reconciliation? Is his attempt to distinguish between the “true church” and the “institutional church” not a subtle contradiction of Campbell’s own terms? If institutions have a “creaturely” existence, are they still excluded from any possibility of redemption? Furthermore, in what sense do the principalities and powers constitute a dimension of existence that is resolutely “beyond” God’s reconciling mission?

In order to read Campbell with the charity he deserves, we cannot forget that he was, as everyone is, a person of his time. Campbell was so disgusted with the church’s
deep enculturation with Southern racism he could not bear to say that this grotesquely compromised “institutional” rendering of the church might also be the body of Christ. Those with a casual acquaintance with Campbell’s work might dismiss him for wanting to claim the good without the bad. But such a critique is too superficial to penetrate the depths of Campbell’s ecclesiological imagination. The discrepancies of his ecclesiology notwithstanding, Campbell remains a figure who, even in the wake of this death, remains perched at the threshold of a new time in the church’s life. Not unlike the Reformers before him, and like all the saints through the ages who sought to cut through the accouterments of ecclesial excess, Campbell was calling the church back to its original, radical mission. “What Campbell wants is an ecclesiological Reformation wherein the authentic Church is radically distinguished from institutional religious structures.”

The baseline tension in Campbell’s language manifests itself in a tug-of-war between the contrasting legacies of Reinhold Neibuhr and Karl Barth. Campbell wanted to speak of the institutional church in a Niebuhrian fashion, while simultaneously speaking of the authentic church in relation to Karl Barth’s theology of the Word of God as “event.” Though Campbell does not seem to have explicitly incorporated anything substantial from Niebuhr’s work in his own writings, speeches, and sermons, Niebuhr’s influence on theological ethics at that time was, nevertheless, ubiquitous (and arguably remains so). Though it would be futile to offer a thorough account of any aspect of Niebuhr’s work here, there is general agreement among scholars about his emphasis on

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54 Ibid., 151
humanity’s sinfulness. Niebuhr’s steadfast engagement with the Doctrine of Original Sin led him to the following, paradoxical conclusion about humanity:

…on the one hand life in history must be recognized as filled with indeterminate possibilities. There is no individual or interior spiritual situation, no cultural or scientific task, and no social or political problem in which men do not face new possibilities of the good and the obligation to realize them. It means on the other hand that every effort and pretension to complete life, whether in collective or individual terms, that every desire to stand beyond the contradictions of history, or to eliminate the final corruptions of history must be disavowed.\textsuperscript{55}

For Neibuhr, history is the story of the consequences of humanity’s sinful nature. All institutions, ideologies, movements—all expressions of human communities, relationships, cultures—inevitably wreak havoc by their bungling attempts to achieve what only God is capable of doing. Even in spite of the most sincere attempts by churches to practice a Kingdom ethic, humanity is ultimately determined by its sin to the degree that “the ‘Kingdom of God’ which we achieve in history is never the same as the Kingdom for which we pray.”\textsuperscript{56}

Ironically, in a passage that sounds as though Campbell had written it himself, Niebuhr describes the possibility of the objectively verifiable historicity of God’s grace as it might occur outside the boundaries of established churches.

‘The wind bloweth where it listeth,’ said Jesus to Nicodemus; and that is a picturesque description of the freedom of divine grace in history, working miracles without any ‘by your leave’ of priest or church. Since some of the most significant developments in the field of social morality have taken place in modern life in defiance of a sacramental church…it is understandable that modern culture should still be informed by a strong resentment against the pretensions of such a church.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Reinhold Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941 [1949]) 207.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 208.
Though Campbell could not have improved upon the latter passage, and in fact embodied Neibuhr’s point here throughout most of his ministry, Campbell’s theology differed from Neibuhr’s in one very crucial way. According to Stanley Hauerwas, America was always the subject of Niebuhr’s ethics. “[He] paid almost no attention to the social significance of the church—for finally, in spite of all the trenchant criticism he directed at America, America was his church…from beginning to end [Neibuhr] was involved in a stormy love affair with America.”

Despite his rejection of liberalism, Neibuhr’s theology was still grounded in anthropology. His “compelling portrayal of our sinfulness, which seemed to function as a critique of liberal optimism, was in fact a continuation of the liberal attempt to demonstrate the intelligibility of theological language through its power to illuminate the human condition.”

Because of his convictions about God’s sovereignty, Campbell shared none of Neibuhr’s faith in the United States of America to be a force for justice in the world. For him, one of the primary causes of the institutional church’s corruption was due to its unholy alliance with America’s domestic and foreign policies. Yet, Campbell did ascent to Neibuhr’s language of realism in relation to the church. He never relented from emphasizing the church’s inherent sinfulness as an institution. Whenever Campbell refers positively to established churches, the spirit of Neibuhr seems always to be whispering in his ear, “The church is just like any other human institution, as doomed to failure and as intrinsically corrupt as all institutions finally are.”

59 Ibid., 60.
What makes Campbell’s ecclesiology so disorienting was his simultaneous endorsement of Neibuhr’s realism together with Barth’s language of the church as an “event.” Unlike Neibuhr, Campbell was captivated by the social significance of the church. As much as he criticized establishment churches, he dedicated himself to searching for the church’s most authentic expressions. In the journal he helped edit, *Katallagete* (Be reconciled!), Campbell’s repeated and often bombastic appeals to Scripture and the person and work of Jesus Christ sound distinctively Barthian:

> Jesus’ news is specific, immediate, indifferent to moral codes. It is an event as close to us as brothers, children, neighbors, bedrooms and bars, and the poor and black who stand as judgment on our citizenship and our confessions about Jesus as Lord.\(^60\)

In the same article, he invites “each institutional church” to adopt three prisoners for visitation, “so that at least once each week every man and woman and child behind bars could have one human being with whom he could have community, to whom the prisoner could tell his story.”\(^61\) This invitation is a telling demonstration of Campbell’s ecclesial imagination. In this particular instance, Campbell implores the institutional church to live up to the calling to which it has been called. He engages the deeply acculturated church with the familiar, Scriptural language of Matthew 25:36. He knows that the “wind bloweth where it listeth,” but also that Jesus promises to be with those who gather in his name. Campbell is convinced Jesus makes good on this promise, that church “happens,” in the sure and certain community constituted by prison visitation.


\(^61\) Ibid., 4.
What makes Campbell such an important transitional figure in the church of the American South and beyond is that he passionately articulated what authentic Christian community requires, while also disrupting church communities and their services almost every chance he got. One particularly acute disruption occurred at a weekday morning chapel service for students at Furman University. Campbell was the guest preacher for the day, but upon realizing the students were obligated by school rules to be in chapel, he ascended the pulpit and said, “I was going to preach my sermon until I heard y’all were required to be here. Who ever heard of requiring people to go to church? That’s bullshit.” And he proceeded to take out a banjo and play country music songs to the congregation for the duration of his allotted time.62 Similar stories could fill several volumes, from Campbell walking out of his own sermon during worship in Duke Chapel in order to aid hurricane victims in Durham, NC, to his famous suggestion during a sermon at Riverside Church in New York City that they should sell off their buildings and give the proceeds to the poor. In the latter sermon, Campbell exposes power after power, from the United States prison system, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and even Riverside Church, itself. “How much is Riverside Church worth? We’ll just auction it off.”63 He chides the FBI for working discreetly to support the activities of the Klan. He calls for clandestine infiltrations of “the Pentagon, the State Department, maybe even the Masonic Lodge, and my son’s college fraternity.”64

62 As told to me by William Willimon, personal conversation, 9 October 2013.
63 Campbell, Writings, 168.
64 Ibid., 173.
He then proceeds to pillory the idea that we can “do something” about the problem of race in America. Thinking we can alter the course of history by maneuvering within the principalities and powers is a lost cause. “For too long we have concentrated our efforts on the assumption that our vocation is to solve all the problems of the world. Rather than trying to determine what we are, who we are, already, here and now, in this present world.”

So what do we do? Nothing. “That’s what we can do. Nothing.” This “nothing” serves as a rhetorical foil to the “nothing” of singing, “Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come.” Campbell claims the lyrics ought to be, “Lamb of God, I go” with my 75,000 fellow worshipers to stand outside a real prison made of concrete and steel and raze it to the ground, and the prisoners set free. The “nothing” Christians ought to pursue is what has already been given to us to do. Campbell calls it doing “nothing” because active faith in Christ does not require the creation of new strategies for changing the structures of domination, but the practice of the acts of releasing prisoners, visiting nursing homes, hospitals, and slums, which have already been given us by Christ, and which by their very application subvert and expose the limits of the principalities and powers. We announce Christ’s disarmament of the powers by doing “nothing” except living as the people God has already created us to be.

Campbell is reminiscent of such historical figures as Symeon the Holy Fool, who disrupted church services in his day by blowing out candles and throwing nuts at the

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65 Ibid.
66 Campbell is apparently referring to Billy Graham, and speculating about number of people attending one of his evangelism crusades at Yankee Stadium, *Writings*, 173. See also his article with James Y. Holloway, “The Good News from God in Jesus is Freedom to the Prisoners,” *Katallagete*, Winter-Spring, 1972, 2-5, in which he argues that Jesus’ announcement of freedom to prisoners was not metaphorical, but intended for literal application.
priests during their sermons and administration of the sacraments. Because of the many accounts of such stunts, we may rightly say Campbell falls squarely in the category of “preaching fools” that Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers have described. Will Campbell was obviously no fool in the derogatory sense. But his affinity for church “on the margins” led to his being perceived by some as foolishly idealistic at best, or dangerously subversive. Campbell and Cilliers identify the present situation, of which Will Campbell was a part, as a “liminal space at the juncture of the ages, the space of being and becoming as we inter-face and inter-form with others.” Campbell’s “foolishness” resulted from there being so little receptivity to his ecclesiological vision that he inevitably clashed with existing structures. As Campbell and Cilliers explain,

> Preaching fools know this new [liminal] reality; they have an odd wisdom that takes them ‘outside the gates’ in search of Christ. Preaching fools, like fools generally, do not side with those who are powerful according to the old age. Rather, they are more often than not found in the vicinity of those whom the world considers powerless. Preaching fools are fond of the old age’s fringes. They face those faces on the fringes that others would rather turn away from.

Campbell also tended to “float” from one form of church to another. At any given time he might be preaching in Riverside Church in New York City, speaking at a funeral for a murdered black college student in a college auditorium another day, or performing a marriage ceremony in a roadside honky-tonk bar. The church as “event” might occur in an establishment church on main street, Anytown, USA, or at any prison, or even at diners, drive-ins and dives like Gass’s Store in rural Tennessee, Campbell’s regular

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69 Ibid.
One never knows where or how the Risen Jesus will appear in the midst of people. In this sense, Campbell should be regarded not as one who offers final resolutions to our most pressing ecclesiological questions, but as a man whose witness was both a product of his time as well as a harbinger of things to come—a man whose vision flourished in the liminal space between different ecclesial forms.

We may confidently say that Campbell’s ecclesiological vision accords with his understanding of God’s reconciling mission: that church is what happens whenever people gather to respond to God’s reconciliation through worship (including the sacraments of baptism and communion), and by doing the particular things Jesus commanded his followers to do. From this perspective, we might liken Campbell to Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-53). With a fallen countenance, he walks away from what was—to his way of thinking—a hopeless scenario of death. His despair lifts only in the revelatory moment of a communal breaking of bread, where his eyes are opened for the first time to behold the risen Jesus. As he testifies about this experience to other disciples, Jesus appears to all of them, startling and terrifying them as though they had seen a ghost. It is the nature of Cleopas’ encounter with the risen Jesus that he should expect any further revelation of God to be protean, unmanageable, but always reconciling. That is, Cleopas would have counted himself amongst those who abandoned Jesus on the cross. The good news is that Jesus comes back to him and the others, meets them face to face, dines with them, and offers his body to them to be touched. In response, “they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God” (Lk. 24:53).
Campbell, unlike Cleopas, was not “continually in the temple blessing God.” But like Cleopas, he came of age in a time of spectacular turbulence, where one could never be sure where or how God might appear. In this liminal space, even establishment white churches that sinfully, deplorably abandoned their suffering black brothers and sisters could not do worse than the disciples who abandoned Jesus on the cross. Yet, Jesus returns to dine with them all. By his life, Will Campbell demonstrated this good news, again and again: that beginning with the cross the curtain in the temple has been torn in two. The church that Jesus Christ establishes and sustains cannot control Christ’s power to reveal himself. The risen Jesus can appear at random, in the midst of any gathering he chooses. In Campbell’s imagination, that meant church, which had long been a comfortable place for racists, was made dangerous again. Thus, both characters—Campbell, like Cleopas—serve as reminders that the church inhabits an unsettled space, where, as Flannery O’Connor described, the Word of God is like “a wild ragged figure, motioning for you to turn around and come off into the dark where you are not sure of your footing, where you might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown.”

4.3 Campbell’s Identification and Authority

Great preachers do not receive their authority to preach in a vacuum, disconnected from their congregations. They gain the authority to speak by living, in one way or another, in relationship with people, whether “from an embedded position,” or at the very

least by being perceived as “one of the people.” Campbell exemplified Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification in his life and in his preaching, especially in relation to Burke’s description of “consubstantiation.” Consubstantial identification links two entities, but does not necessarily mean the two are identical. Consubstantiality names a way of life by which humans act together, “and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial.” Identification “is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity.” Campbell sincerely crafted his public persona as a Baptist preacher—with his language and his body—in ways that epitomize Burke’s contention that “identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.”

It is crucial to note that Campbell’s subject matter—reconciliation as an eschatological reality impacting the present—actually presents a paradox in Burkean terms. For, “If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man’s very essence.” In other words, if we are all already reconciled (“of one substance,” so to speak), what is the purpose of preaching reconciliation? Does asking human beings to be what they already are, as Campbell often does, make any sense? Indeed, it does through the loophole Burke provides, whereby “ideal” or “absolute” communication is “as natural, spontaneous, and total as with… the

72 Ibid., 22.
73 Ibid.
theologian’s angels, or ‘messengers.’” To say this in a theological way, the content of Campbell’s communication is intelligible only if its source is divine. Campbell’s ability to identify with his audience was primarily dependent upon the listeners’ reception of his message as an expression of the divine Word.

Campbell certainly understood himself to be a carrier of a message from God. Even more, he understood that he did not carry this message by himself, that he must embody his message within a particular community. Charles Campbell and Johann Cilliers name such embodiment as a critical function of preaching fools:

Taking the incarnation seriously, preaching fools live and preach in solidarity with those with whom God identifies. They trust that God is revealed within the realms of our humanity through Christ, including through those embodied humans who dare to preach this foolish gospel. Preaching fools thus view congregational life as embodied, fully human life. They approach their congregations theologically—kenotically. These are people with whom God has bodily identified; God has been having a relationship with them for a long time, before the preacher appeared on the scene.\(^75\)

Campbell’s genius for identification was also at times a source of frustration for him, and a perennial stumbling block for many others. In July 1977, Campbell went to court to observe the proceedings of a libel suit brought against NBC-TV by one Victoria Price, who contended that a recent television show about the Scottsboro Nine had depicted her as a racist buffoon. In 1931, Price and another woman, Ruby Bates, accused nine black men of raping them. Despite the inconsistencies and absurd nature of the women’s respective testimonies, a jury sentenced all nine men to death. They were eventually exonerated, but only after their lives had been ruined. At the trial in 1977, the

\(^{74}\) Ibid.  
\(^{75}\) Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools*, 161.
last survivor of the Scottsboro boys was not present. Campbell had a dilemma. Where should he sit? With Victoria Price, the executives of NBC, or with others? “I recognized five different and distinguishable groupings, all small, all with plenty of room around them…Each had a right and reason to be there. Each reason had something to be said for it. I like to take sides. But I couldn’t decide where to sit.” In the heat of the moment, Campbell considered how each of the groups represented both victims and perpetrators to one degree or another. Price was the notorious accuser, but also a “pathetic countrywoman,” a woman of ill-repute whose circumstances in life were as unenviable as those of the Scottsboro Boys. She “stood no more of a chance in that courtroom in 1977 against NBC than the Scottsboro Boys had stood in another one nearby against the state of Alabama in 1931.” Campbell decided to sit alone. “I felt a little confused. And a little sad for Victory Price, for the Scottsboro Boys, and for us all.”

Campbell’s concern to identify with both victims and perpetrators was a common characteristic in his speeches, and a source of much controversy. In an undated address to a university somewhere in the South, Campbell spoke as a resident Southerner who could sympathize not only with oppressed blacks, but also with the oppressed whites. He grew up in a poor white family and knew firsthand what it meant to be victimized by institutions and systems of economic power over which his community had no control. The central theme of this address, however, was not primarily about institutions, but the language of racism, which institutions across the country construct and perpetuate. More

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77 Ibid., 70.
78 Ibid.
particularly, Campbell’s speech is an indictment of the common use of the word “redneck,” which he calls “a dirty word, same as nigger.”\textsuperscript{79} “Redneck” is the linguistic signification of the ongoing oppression by principalities and powers over “the culturally deprived and increasingly alienated caucasian minority.”\textsuperscript{80} While he honors the gravity of the African-American struggle, he details the struggle of poor Southern whites.

The real tragedy of the redneck is that he has been victimized one step beyond the black. He has had his head taken away. The black man had his back and his blood taken but we never got his head. Through it all he knew what was happening, that he was suffering, why he was suffering, and early in the game he set about doing something to correct it. The job on the redneck was more extensive. He had his head taken away. He still hasn’t identified the enemy.\textsuperscript{81}

The enemy is the power of racism. Yet, “there continues to be less true racism in redneckism because the reneck [sic] participates in the society from a base of considerably less power than the rest of us.”\textsuperscript{82} Comments like these aroused the anger of the program’s chairman, who accused him of “posing as a ‘know-nothing’ because he knew that [Campbell] had graduated from an Ivy League school and ‘knows better than

\textsuperscript{79} Campbell, “Redneck Religion,” Campbell Papers, Manuscript 341, Box 12, Folder 47.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. In this same address, Campbell compares a song he heard at a Klan rally to one of the imprecatory Psalms: “Have you heard such spirited psalms as: ‘You niggers listen now, I’m gonna tell you how to keep from being tortured when the Klan is on the prowl. Stay at home at night, lock your doors up tight. Don’t go outside or you will find them crosses a burning bright. Move them niggers north, move them niggers north [the Campbell Papers are indecipherable at this point in the sentence] and then the rousing sounds of DIXIE.’ It is an experience that is sickening and frightening. If you have not had that experience, then perhaps you have heard these words: ‘If I forget you, O Jerusalem let my right hand wither away; let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth id I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. Remember, O Lord, against the people of Edom the day of Jerusalem’s fall, when they said, ‘Down with it, down with it, down to its very foundations;’ O Babylon, Babylon the destroyer, happy is the man who repays you for all you did to us! Happy is he who shall seize your children and dash them against the rocks.’ Not a Klan ritual but called a Song of Degree by the commentator, the 137\textsuperscript{th} Psalm.
to use that kind of grammar.”83 But Campbell defended himself as having spoken, like the educated black man who had addressed the gathering immediately before him, “in the idiom of my people, the rednecks.”84

Campbell was proud of his people, who he believed were also victimized, and who, without “the incessant manipulation by the politics of the privileged,” would have made a better life for themselves.85 He expressed shame about his earlier aspirations to escape the South’s “ignorance” through the educational opportunities at Wake Forest and Yale. He began to more fully embrace his identity as a Southerner. In one particularly direct introduction to an audience, he said, “I’m a Baptist preacher. I’m a native of Mississippi. And I’m pro-Klansman because I’m pro-human being.”86 Campbell was learning the truth from and about his own people, even from Klansmen, whom his colleagues referred to as “the Enemy.” And of these Klansmen Campbell would go on to say, “In a strange sequence of crosscurrents we were of them and they were of us. Blood of our blood. Our people. And God’s people.”87 By this deft maneuver, Campbell flipped the meaning of “the Enemy” on its head. If the Ku Klux Klan is not the enemy, who is?

Even with a reputation for identifying with and befriending Klansmen, Campbell remained a participant in and close ally with leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. He could do so only because he was just as intentional about identifying with African-

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83 Campbell and Goode, *Writings*, 42.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 43.
87 Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly*, 249-50. Also quoted in Hawkins, Jr., *Radical Prophet*, 179.
Americans as he was with his own people. He tried to embody their suffering, endangering himself and his family by fighting for civil rights. He received death threats and was fired from his chaplaincy position at the University of Mississippi for supporting integration. He helped escort black students into the front doors of the Little Rock, Arkansas, public schools, in addition to helping at other events of integration where there were credible threats of violence. He preached constantly against racial discrimination at a time when such preaching was rare—and dangerous—in America, and almost unheard of from Southern white preachers.

It was this embodied nature of Campbell’s “consubstantial identification” (Burke) that enabled Campbell to preach with authority to people across racial boundaries. Such identification was a performance of the relational dynamics of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:1-42). The passage not only exemplifies Campbell’s own way of identification, but also provides a framework for all efforts at identification in the midst of racial divisions. Jesus “looks in wonder” upon the woman at the well (4:35); they share a personal, theological conversation during which Jesus demonstrates compassion for her life story (4:18); Jesus helps her understand what God is doing in a way that neither condemns nor excludes her (4:21-24); finally, Jesus fully reveals his own identity to her (4:26). Each phase reveals an aspect of how Campbell “follows Jesus” in his way of identification.

Though modern concepts of race as a method of determining and categorizing human identity are different today than for biblical authors, there can be no denying that then, as now, forms of manmade distinctions were widespread, and applicable to both
ancient and modern conceptualizations of the principalities and powers. For example, the historical context of Jewish disdain for Samaritans stems largely from the results of political and theological animosity. Clearly, there are multiple principalities and powers working in the background and foreground of the text—political, theological, legal, sexual—all sanctioned by the political and religious institutions of the day, constitutive of the status quo, and permeating the surrounding culture. These powers, though not identical to the power of modern understandings of race, still prescribe the social context in ways that illicit the same reactivity to scandal in the reader today as they did in the Johannine community.

Yet, none of these powers determines Jesus’ attempt to identify with the Samaritan woman. None of them deters Jesus from entering Samaria in the first place. It is not as if Jesus “had to go through Samaria” (4:4 NRSV). Jesus travels miles out of his way on foot to the last place his own people would ever expect him to go. This has to do not only with the formal truth that it is Jesus’ mission as the Word of God sent to enter

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88 According to Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 170, Samaritans are descendants of two groups: “(a) the remnant of the native Israelites who were not deported at the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.; (b) foreign colonists brought in from Babylonia and Media by the Assyrian conquerors of Samaria. There was theological opposition between these northerners and the Jews of the South because of the Samaritan refusal to worship at Jerusalem. This was aggravated by the fact that after the Babylonian exile the Samaritans had put obstacles in the way of the Jewish restoration of Jerusalem, and that in the 2nd century B.C. the Samaritans had helped the Syrian monarchs in their wars against the Jews. In 128 B.C. the Jewish high priest burned the Samaritan temple on Gerizim.” Additionally, by the time of John’s writing, there existed a relatively new law, instituted in A.D. 65-66, that warned Jewish men against touching a Samaritan woman due to their being “menstruants from their cradle” (Ibid.). Leviticus’ strict regulatory dictums regarding menstruation in 15:19-24 were already deeply ingrained into the customs of Jewish daily life, and served to heighten the scandal of Jesus’ sharing a cup of water with the Samaritan woman.

90 “This is not a geographical necessity; for although the main route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria, if Jesus was in the Jordan valley he could easily have gone north through the Bethshan gap, avoiding Samaria,” Ibid., 169.
into loving relationship with “the world” that takes him to Samaria. It has also to do with the fact that Jesus reveals the God who simply enjoys being with the “wrong” kind of people. If this Jesus is truly the incarnation of God, then the human categories obliterated by his presence and conversation with the Samaritan woman must have always been demonic powers in service to death. Here we receive a glimpse the sovereign God who snubs the artificial and bureaucratic directives of human engineering and intentionally enters forbidden spaces to seek fellowship with forbidden people. This is precisely the image of God Campbell evokes in his preaching.

The theological corollary in John 4 is Jesus’ movement toward Samaria as a sign of God’s condescension to humankind. The Samarian woman did not earn Jesus’ favor, but was visited, interrupted even, by the Word of God. The woman leaves her water jar and goes back to her city. She tells the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (vv. 28-29). Jesus reveals her true identity in God. She does not discover this on her own. Her newfound understanding of herself is contingent upon God’s self-giving nature. It is purely a gift that she now sees herself as part of a larger story in which God is revealed as no respecter of human difference. God in Christ “looks in wonder” upon the fields and sees they are ripe for harvest (v. 35). Jesus commends his own perceptive sight as a gift to be shared, because it is a kind of sight that deliberately interprets others for the purposes of entering into ever-deepening relationship with them. Because God has looked in wonder upon us, we may now look in wonder upon our supposed enemies.
“That is a scandal, and I don’t like it,” Campbell preached in a sermon to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—an institution under the authority of his original denominational community, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).91 “I want somebody to be left out. I want somebody to be beyond the pale.” The sermon makes the claim that “the least of these” in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt. 25:31-46) could range from disheveled street beggars to dapper pastors of rich churches. No one is left out of the description “least.”

Sometimes the least thing I can think of is church bureaucrats, presiding over their altar fires and tea parties, in the midst of suffering and death. Big spires and steeples costing millions upon millions upon millions of dollars, casting their physical shadow, to say nothing of their spiritual life, upon slums and whores and addicts and drunks and thieves and rat-infested tenements, with the fingers and toes being gnawed off the young and the elderly. Investments and holdings in agencies whose profits are made from instruments of death. Could that be ‘the least of these?’ Well, if they are, then we have it on good authority that I relate to my Lord as I relate to them.92

The scandal is not that we should be reconciled to manufacturers of scud missiles, or black civil rights organizers, or poor whites or Kluxers, but that we already are reconciled to them. We are not reconciled to the structures of domination any of the “least of these” serve, but we are reconciled “to every last person within them.”93

Many visitors to Campbell’s log cabin in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, report that they found him to be unwelcoming at first, or even rude or boorish. Upon his poor reception to Campbell’s home, syndicated cartoonist Jules Feiffer, said, “I’m a proud man like anyone else. I was insulted, and I was offended, and I wanted to get the hell out of

91 Campbell, “Speech to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” Reconciliation and Resistance, 82.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., 83.
there.”

He could come across to others as “distant,” or as having receded so far into his persona as a radical, bootleg Southern Baptist prophet that the “real” Will Campbell was said to be in hiding. Wearing his signature cowboy boots and wide-brimmed, black, Amish hat, he was always “in character.” But as journalist Lawrence Wright concluded in his biopic of Campbell,

I realized I had gone as far as I could go with my guru. I had set out to see who he really was and whether I could accept his teachings. I had tried as much as possible to pry off his mask of authority and see the person inside - the flawed, insecure, fallible, often foolish person who was no better than I. And I had seen that person or at least caught a glimpse of him. He seemed to me like a deer I had once come upon in the woods, who had given me a brief, direct look, passing some piece of obscure intelligence between us, and then had fled into the cover. But I had seen him, nonetheless.

Nevertheless, the most astonishing quality of Will Campbell’s life and preaching stems from his ability to identify with everyone—blacks, whites, rich, poor, educated, and ignorant. This includes the black member of the Nation of Islam as well as the red-faced, cross-burning Kluxer, and even the Brooks Brothers-clad Wall Street executive. When someone else’s well-being was at stake, Campbell was not afraid to befriend anyone. He pursued friendships with his enemies. Such pursuits mimic Jesus’ intentional intrusions into places the bureaucrats of the day had previously thought

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94 “God’s Will,” PBS Documentary, (quote begins at 50:10 min.). Campbell called him “Mr. Pfizer,” and ignored him at first. But by the end of Feiffer’s visit, it was, “as though we’d known each other forever.” Campbell had befriended him through the course of the evening, memorizing Feiffer’s family members and referring to them by their first names. Feiffer said, “It was Will’s way of making me go through an initiation process. He was not going to let somebody with a name come down from New York without proving himself.

95 Lawrence Wright, “The First Church of Rednecks.”

96 See his letter exchange with prison chaplain, Amos L. Wilson, of the Tennessee State Prison, who was resisting working with Campbell’s associates on the Committee of Southern Churchmen’s Southern Prison Ministries. He invites a conversation with the chaplain, “Let’s get together and have a beer and try to love one another as The Man has loved us. Right now I doubt if either of us does,” in Campbell and Goode, Writings, 29-30.
impenetrable. But Campbell cannot avoid embracing Klansmen. He grew up among them. He preached his first sermon at age 16 from a Bible given to his church by the local Grand Dragon of the KKK. He once shared parts of their bigoted worldview. He knows that though they can be extremely dangerous, they are still “little boys playing war—little boys for whom Christ also died—Raymond Crawford and Eldridge Cleaver. That’s the scandal of the gospel.” 97 Thus, Campbell also mimics the woman in John, who comes from a reviled and excluded people, but who does not shy away from relating with a likely bigot at her well.

Jesus says to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman replies, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? (For Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans” (vv. 7-9). This brief exchange discloses an enormous amount of information about the culture and customs to which both characters had been subjected by the principalities and powers. But in this instance, it is the woman who provides the most telling evidence. She makes public a previously “hidden transcript.” 98 She could have simply obliged Jesus with a drink. But she speaks. She has her say. She “smarts off.” She questions his intentions to his face. As a woman alone with a man, she makes herself vulnerable to

97 Campbell, Letter to McGeorge Bundy, then president of the Ford Foundation, requesting that racists be appreciated and included in conversation about legislation affecting the racial issues in the South, ibid., 56.
98 James C. Scott, in Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), defines a “hidden transcript” as “a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” It is the linguistic form of a “third realm of subordinate group politics...of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors” (19). “An individual who is affronted may develop a personal fantasy of revenge and confrontation, but when the insult is but a variant of affronts suffered systematically by a whole race, class, or strata, then the fantasy can become a collective cultural product. Whatever form it assumes—offstage parody, dreams of violent revenge, millennial visions of a world turned upside down—this collective hidden transcript is essential to any dynamic view of power relations” (9).
attack if her words are ill-received. Most of all, she “publishes” the previously unspoken truth about how their interaction is supposed to work, according to the direction of the powers. The question, “How can you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” is loaded with each actor’s respective history, ethnicity, gender, and religious and political presuppositions. She puts a question back to the one in the assumed position of authority, and, in so doing, assumes some authority for herself. In this most explosive realm of politics, where one ruptures the “political ‘cordon sanitaire’ between the hidden and the public transcript,” the woman “obliterates the distinction by making the hitherto hidden transcript public.”

Through identification with both black and white people, but especially with his own people, Will Campbell gains access to their respective hidden transcripts. In his possession, they do not remain hidden for long. In his speech to the Whitsitt Heritage Society, he tells stories of his childhood days in the Campbell family. He wistfully relays anecdotes of the different views of race he came to know from his father, uncles, and grandparents. Many of them were not bigots. One of them, Uncle Jesse, who died later of a gunshot wound, never came back to their church after he watched the preacher thank the Grand Dragon of the local Klan chapter for presenting the church with a brand new, large pulpit Bible. But he remembers all of them, from his racially hospitable family members to the local Klan members, as poor people attempting to do what was right as they understood it. “And these are the people who have been double-crossed, betrayed, ignored, trampled on like so much chaff in this demonic fight [over control of the

99 Ibid., 19.
Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s].”

These are the people the Convention forgot, as well as African-Americans, not only in the Southern Baptist “struggle for the soul of the Convention,” but in the many decades preceding the 1980s. Where were the Southern Baptists (Campbell includes himself as culpable here) during the sixties and seventies, “when cities were burning, when black Americans were being gunned down for no greater crime than the color of their skin,” when women were not allowed to cast ballots in elections, when the United States was annihilating hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, or even today in relation to gay and lesbian Christians and non-Christians? He speaks as one of them, but also as one who comes from a people who would have been better off if the Convention had not participated in or acquiesced to multiple forms of oppression by principalities and powers.

Then he turns his attention to the latest culprits. He calls out the current leadership of the SBC for their rejection of the kind of freedom that made possible his and others’ ordination to ministry.

Are you listening, you who wreck schools of learning, who pass absurd resolutions, who place limitations on God Almighty as to what gender he can and can’t call to preach His gospel. You don’t scare me, you ecclesiastical bullies, you blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel, who devour widows’ houses, who bind heavy burdens and lay them on the shoulders of the poor and lift not a hand, you who for a pretense make long prayers, you who compass sea and land to make one convert and when he is made make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you! Whited sepulchers outside; inside full of the bones of the dead, and of all uncleanness. Are you listening to this old man? THERE COMES A TIME!102

100 Campbell and Goode, *Writings*, 149.
101 Ibid., 145-146.
102 Ibid., 150.
Here is a man who speaks for a people who have not been able to speak directly into the teeth of the powers. He makes public the hidden transcript of the Convention’s participation in oppressive systems and structures. The Convention was then, and had long been, a comfortable partner with the powers that squash the poor, the outcast, the prisoner, the sick, and the stranger, even despite their mission to evangelize the world.

But this is not the last word. Campbell, too, has been caught up in the institutional dramas. Now he can only “leave to the One so mysterious, so elusive and evasive, so hidden as to say to Moses from a burning bush, I AM WHO I AM, to be the sole judge. I can only exult that grace abounds.”103 The sermon moves from the eviscerating “law” language of the publicized transcript—the bad news—to the gospel language of abounding grace. To be sure, the former consumes more time than the latter, but both are present. The bad news, which only an insider like Campbell could have proclaimed, fades in light of the good news. This is part of Campbell’s preaching persona, and another example of what it looks like to engage the principalities and powers with “mere” words. It is a raucous example, but it is nevertheless a peacemaking mode of speech. The gospel Campbell preaches proceeds from his consubstantial identity with Southerners—both black and white—thereby scrambling the racial categories sanctioned by the principalities and powers. His proclamation introduces previously unthinkable possibilities for fellowship, where people who have long looked at each another with hatred and suspicion might finally see one another in a new light.

103 Ibid., 151.
4.4 Campbell as Prophetic Preacher

Campbell’s legacy remains largely “iconoclastic,” to the extent that many pastoral preachers keep him at a safe distance. His fellow Baptists enjoy regaling one another with “Will Campbell” stories, and many of them might wish they could just once say to their congregations what Campbell was prone to say everywhere he preached. But Campbell’s message is difficult, and his example is hard to follow. His character may often be imitated, but never duplicated. Preachers interested in long-term employment by their congregations might rather leave Campbell’s message alone, even though they might occasionally enjoy sharing bits and pieces of Campbell’s wisdom in the pulpit, savor his award-winning books, or nostalgically quote his maxims about bastards. But after Campbell’s death on June 3, 2013, is this all we have left of him—enduring literature, entertaining stories, and dated journals? Is the legacy of his witness so directly tied to the Civil Rights Movement that he is, for all practical purposes, irrelevant for the ongoing practice of Christian preaching?

We must answer with a resounding “no.” The church would be wise to keep his books in print, and to remember his name and his contributions to civil rights, but it will be even more important for the church to preserve the wisdom of his preaching. Campbell’s fundamental understanding of himself was that he was called to be a preacher. That he had “a call but no steeple” should not disqualify his contributions from being shared by pastors everywhere who preach to the same congregation week after week. Certainly, Campbell’s style could be abrasive, even scandalous at times. He could visit a church, preach a strident sermon, and leave the resident pastor to deal with the
consequences. His style won him the title of “Radical Prophet.” But the trouble with that description is that it gives preachers permission to disregard him. If he is a “prophet” in the popular sense of the word, it is easier to place him on a pedestal so he can no longer reach us. I hope to show that Campbell performed certain aspects of biblical prophecy in ways we should view as being practicable for all preachers. I will focus specifically on Jeremiah to explore three of these aspects: 1) dangerous memory, 2) lament, and 3) love of enemies.

Why focus on Jeremiah? Because he epitomizes certain characteristics of the preaching life that need further exploration and elucidation for the church’s sake in this violent and technological age. He knows what is going on and who is being sacrificed, and he tells people the truth. His language is raw, mercurial, even profligate at times. With little regard for half-truths and social graces, he interrupts the carefully measured, official accounts of the king’s court. His witness to the leaders in Jerusalem cuts to the heart. His critiques invite such swift retribution because they are so devastating to the carefully woven, royal narrative. Also, more than any other prophet, Jeremiah comes as close as one can to complete despair without losing all hope. He is not “speaking truth to power” as much as he is punching through the delicately gilded, official account of reality with persistent lamentations. Perhaps most importantly of all, he intentionally

104 I use the phrase “king’s court” in relation to Walter Brueggemann’s analysis of the “royal consciousness.” The royal “program,” as he describes it, is “fed by a management mentality that believes there are no mysteries to honor, only problems to be solved”; “legitimated by an ‘official religion of optimism,’ which believes God has no business other than to maintain our standard of living, ensuring his own place in his palace”; and “requires the annulment of the neighbor as life-giver in our history; it imagines that we can live outside history as self-made men and women.” See Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 37.
disrupts all royal conceptions of the enemy. Jeremiah entrusts his enemies to God’s care. Violent human retribution is not an option.

The first aspect of Jeremiah’s prophetic mission is his dangerous memory.\textsuperscript{105} Such memory informs his chastisement of the leaders of Judah for doing evil. They have turned from God in order to worship false gods. At the heart of their wickedness is an enduring and powerful lie, spoken earlier in ch. 8:11, that there is “peace, peace.” In reality, there is no peace, but impending violence. Babylon’s war horses are snorting in the distance. Judah’s destruction is imminent. But the lie lives, and is perpetuated by what Jeremiah calls “the false pen of the scribes” (8:8). The scribes have flipped the tradition of their ancestors upside down, rigging language in service to their own power and affluence. By the power of the pen, and the power of persuasive speech, the scribes, chief priests, and kings have diluted the word of God, and saturated the people with falsehoods.

They have convinced the Judeans that it is a blessed thing to build high places whereupon they may sacrifice their own flesh and blood. More specifically, they have sanctioned the sacrificing of children. The word of the \textsc{LORD} in Jeremiah 7:31 (and 19:5) says: they “burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command.” Not only did the \textsc{LORD} not command it, but, the \textsc{LORD} says, “nor did it come into my

\textsuperscript{105} I borrow this phrase from Sharon D. Welch, \textit{A Feminist Ethic of Risk}, revised ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). It is the memory the oppressed use to remember that they are a people “of dignity and self-respect who were violated” (63). But it is also a memory of victory, or “the sense that they are worth more than their [oppressors] realize” (ibid.). Those with “dangerous memories” are able to see the oppression of both past and present. “They are continuously aware of the horrors of the past and the suffering of the present. They do not forget the soul-and-body-destroying effects of exploitation” (61). In this case, Welch refers to the oppression of black slaves, while Campbell applies it to both blacks and poor whites.
mind.” The inhabitants of Jerusalem, those whom the Lord brought up out of Egypt, who were saved from Pharaoh’s iron fist, have not only broken God’s heart but continually trampled it. They manufactured something so horrible that it could only be generated outside God’s own imagination, and they turned it into a cornerstone of religious observance. This gruesome aberration could not have come to pass apart from the “false pen of the scribes.” I suggest this “false pen” is a corollary to propaganda, as it represents the means by which those in positions of authority use language, images, and symbols to consolidate and perpetuate their power through systematic deception and violence.

Campbell has a “dangerous memory.” He uses it to disrupt official versions of reality, for example, by dismantling the myth that racism is a problem exclusive to the South. Like a modern-day Jeremiah, Campbell knows what is going on in the history of the principalities and powers of racism. He traces this history in the sermon at Riverside Church, noting how many of the more obvious racial problems (lunch counters, voting booths, water fountains) now take on subtler, often hidden forms. He anticipates people’s deceptive responses to the problem of race in the North, shrewdly proclaims that the gospel is ready and waiting to be practiced by liberal, upper class New Yorkers as much as it is Kluxers. In fact, Campbell more than insinuates the Ku Klux Klan as a principality in the South is far less dangerous than the institutions in the North that have created the environment for the Klan’s repeated resurgence.

When we see case after case of what we call resurgence of the Klan going hand in hand with the intelligence community. What’s going on here? Is what we’re doing organizing hate groups so we can watch them and report on them and get
award-winning series and prizes? And if so, for what purpose? I’ll tell you for what purpose. To keep black people and poor white people hating each other. To keep black people as “niggers,” and poor white people as “rednecks.” And if you don’t know it, I’ll tell you; those two words mean the same thing...I’m getting about as tired of [‘redneck’] as black people got of that word. Because I know what’s going on. The two words mean the same thing.106

Campbell fearlessly reintroduces suppressed memories, resurrecting their power to cut people to the heart. When preachers unleash such dangerous memories, they point to God’s terrible freedom to know us completely—both our past and our present—and to lighten our darkness.

The second prophetic aspect Campbell and Jeremiah share is the practice of lament. Jeremiah’s lamenting is inseparable from the truth he tells. He grieves for Jerusalem. But he also grieves God’s treatment of him. “Oh LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed” (Jer. 20:7). The word rendered “entice” sometimes has sexual connotations, such that one could conceivably argue that Jeremiah is accusing God of rape. It is a visceral lament. He is accusing God of taking advantage of him for no reason. In a moment of utter despair, he curses his own birth. “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!” (20:14). We can hardly imagine a more anguished lament than wishing aloud to God, not that you were dead, but that you had never been born.

As Ellen Davis has argued, this kind of lament, which is not foreign to the Psalms, has a way of “marking the trail into despair in God’s plain sight, so that God can follow

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106 Campbell and Goode, Writings, 172-173.
‘to the bottom of the night’ the one who is crying out in anguish.”\textsuperscript{107} She says this in light of Wendell Berry’s comment:

The distinguishing characteristic of absolute despair is silence. There is a world of difference between the person who, believing that there is no use, says so to himself or to no one, and the person who says it aloud to someone else. A person who marks his trail into despair remembers hope—and thus has hope, even if only a little.\textsuperscript{108} 

To lament in such a way, and especially to do so within earshot of those duped by the false pen, has a destructive effect on official narratives. It creates cracks in their façade through which newness of life may sprout and grow to create further, deeper cracks, until what was once thought to be impenetrable lies in pieces on the ground. As Brueggemann writes, “The riddle and insight of biblical faith is the awareness that only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embraced endings permit new beginnings.”\textsuperscript{109} 

In Luke 22:25, Jesus says to his disciples, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But not so with you.” Principalities and powers insist that they are beneficial to the common good. They are ever the optimists. But the power of Jeremiah’s lament lies in its exposure of the false narratives of optimism, affluence, and beneficence, by which the rulers and authorities proclaim their concern for the people’s welfare and prosperity. Jeremiah’s tears leave hard evidence that all is not well. His weeping is what

\textsuperscript{108} Wendell Berry, \textit{What Are People For?} 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1990, 2010), quoted in Davis, \textit{Wondrous Depth}, 25.
\textsuperscript{109} Brueggemann, \textit{Prophetic Imagination}, 56.
Brueggemann calls “a radical criticism, a fearful dismantling because it means the end of all machismo; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism.”

In a sermon at a liturgical conference, Will Campbell preaches a homily he hopes will be a lamentation for those blacks killed in racial violence, as well as a song of reconciliation with “our brothers in the Ku Klux Klan.” It is a most somber reflection on racial divisions in the churches and other institutions across the United States. He quotes a poem by Josh White,

Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Throughout the sermon, Campbell is notably more reserved than usual. He speaks in lamentations and in prayers, as though that is all he can do, but also because he knows that such speech is a form of hope. Campbell seems to depend here on lamentations as cries to God that have hope at their core. That they are complaints directed to God is the indication that Campbell’s lamentations are essentially hopeful. Despite the sadness he has, he still hopes enough to assume God listens to the word he proclaims in the presence of the congregation, which in turn may bring the congregation as a lamenting gathering into the presence of God. Because of the sin of racism, and their guilt by association, they are dying.

110 Ibid., 57.
111 “Homily to a Liturgical Conference,” from an undated manuscript of the Will Campbell Papers, University of Southern Mississippi, published in Campbell and Goode, *Writings*, 33-36.
Yes, let the homily be a lamentation for the dying, for us the sick and dying. And let it begin right here for these gathered, these of the Holy Mother Church of us all. For it was religion, Christian religion, more than Caesar, that has killed our black brother. Let the homily be the casting out of demons. The power of exorcism is not mine.\footnote{Ibid., 35.}

Campbell depends on the weakness of the word because of his trust in the sovereignty of God.\footnote{In 	extit{Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), Marva Dawn proposes that Christians should actually pursue weakness instead of ordinary power. Following the exegetical studies of R. C. H. Lenski, Dawn contends that 2 Corinthians 12:9 should not read, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness,” but, “for the power is brought to its finish in weakness” (37, emphasis added). Dawn believe…} We submit to the power of God, who has already accomplished the revolution of the kingdom of God once and for all. “And we revolutionists, do we think we will win? No, we will not win. But that is our sad vocation. That is our holy call. Not to stage a revolution, but to be a revolution already staged.”\footnote{Campbell and Goode, \textit{Writings}, 36.}

The third prophetic aspect Jeremiah and Campbell share is love of enemies. Part of any journey toward reconciliation is the relinquishment of one’s enemies to God’s care. Jeremiah gives up control of his enemies to God. The powers concoct narratives about who the enemies are in order to confirm their order as righteous. There must be an enemy, and the enemy must be in the form of flesh and blood. Once the enemy has been
identified, the powers may use the threat of violence as a means of manipulation.\textsuperscript{115} Without enemies to rely on, the powers have little power to persuade. In order to rouse the masses to action, there must be an orienting adversary, a fear-inducing point of focus for the people’s attention. Jeremiah does not fall into the trap. He urges cooperation with the Babylonians. But the kings of Judah go their own way. They are puffed up. They are mad for war. They believe they can outmaneuver the most powerful empire of their day.

Jeremiah’s relationship to enemies is all encompassing. “Give heed to me, O LORD, and listen to what my enemies say!” says Jeremiah (18:19). He proceeds to describe the details of Judah’s impending destruction. However, Jeremiah understands the business of dealing with enemies to be God’s business. In his despair, he asks God not to forgive their sin, and implores God to deal with them while God is angry. Nevertheless, even in the midst of Jeremiah’s jeremiad, he relinquishes vengeance to God. He compares God to a “dread warrior” who is with him. He asks God to allow him to see God’s retribution upon his adversaries. Even in Jeremiah’s anger and despair, when it would seem fitting to encourage a violent response to a violent system, he instead places himself in God’s hands. By imploring the leaders of Judah to pursue cooperation

\textsuperscript{115} Nazi Reichsmarshall, Hermann Goering, once said to American intelligence officer, Gustave Gilbert, in a conversation in Goering’s cell during the Easter break of the Nuremberg Trials, “Naturally the common people don’t want war: Neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.” See G. M. Gilbert, \textit{Nuremberg Diary} (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1947) 278-279.
with the Babylonians, he epitomizes in his own person a relationship of exchange and embrace with enemies. Jeremiah knows God is the primary agent of redemption, and that human beings may only participate in God’s mission. Jeremiah anticipates God’s reconciling prerogative with the enemies of Judah, and with his adversaries in the house of the Lord. By doing so, he models the way prophetic language may disrupt the false pen of the violent, who feverishly work not only to create enemies out of thin air, but to convince the people they can defeat their enemies by violent means.

By now we have seen the way Campbell’s understanding of reconciliation permeates his work, and the broad consequences of this understanding for loving enemies. His ministry to the Klan serves as the most obvious indicator of his refusal to abide by cultural norms for the naming of enemies. Klansmen were not his enemies. Neither were the Black Panthers, the Vietcong, Saddam Hussein, or Al-Qaeda. In year two of the second Iraq War, Campbell sermonized in The [Nashville] Tennessean,

We’ve been lied to and driven into a war of aggression by the leaders of our own government, who justify their actions with slogans. ‘Destroy their weapons of mass destruction.’ Not ours, but theirs. ‘Destroy the regime of this vicious dictator.’ Not just any dictator but this particular one…Young men and women with serial numbers are doing the bloody deeds their commander-in-chief sent them to do, at the risk of their lives and the lives of the invaded, evil and innocent alike. Such a waste! How in the name of God can this be justified?\textsuperscript{116}

Like Jeremiah, Campbell refused violence as a means of enacting the will of God. Campbell did, however, confess, “I am not a pacifist; I am not a non-pacifist.”\textsuperscript{117} He was suspicious of these terms because they were too imprecise to capture the nature of Jesus


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 6.
Christ’s ministry, particularly with regard to his cleansing of the temple. He rejected the common interpretation of Jesus’ cleansing the temple as a certificate of approval for committing violent acts. “It is a long way for sure from a leather strap to chase chicken peddlers out of the church house to dropping forty thousand tons of bombs on a tragic little country on His birthday.”

In an epistemological and practical way, Campbell believed human beings could not be enemies of one another. Here Campbell doubles down on the conclusion from chapter 1—that Christians cannot be enemies of one another—and extends that thesis to include all people. For him, God has reconciled humanity on the cross. The enemies are no longer flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. Racism, materialism, and militarism are the enemies, as well as patriotism, which “is immoral. Flying a national flag—any national flag—in a church house is a symbol of idolatry. Singing ‘God Bless America’ in a Christian service is blasphemy…it is a violation of the First Commandment.”

We can summarize Campbell’s prophetic vision in his preaching and writing, indeed in every aspect of his life, by saying he never saw anything more astonishing than a human face. For him, every human being reflected the image of a God who will ultimately have the last word about humanity. “What can be said of us, whatever our race or class, except that we and all our fortunes and destinies belong to him? And this is enough to know.”

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118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 56.
120 Ibid., 120.
4.5 Conclusion

One of the risks of drawing from Campbell’s theology for homiletical insights certainly has to do with the fact that Campbell believes all institutions, including—or especially—ecclesial ones, are evil. More unsettling still is Campbell’s opinion about the very act of preaching: “What you say up there in the pulpit, that’s probably the poorest way to communicate with a congregation.” Yet, Campbell was a preacher who preached often, and whose own life was made possible by one of the very institutions against which he so piquantly testifies—the church. His iconoclastic legacy profoundly enriches not only the Baptist heritage, and not only the story of an entire nation’s struggle with the sin of racism, but also the theological framework for preaching at a time when the church’s words seem to have reached the point of exhaustion. Campbell points us to the God of Jesus Christ, who “had to go through Samaria” (4:4), not because it is the quickest path between Judea and Galilee, but because it is the only way to get from where we are to where God has already called us to be. “The revolution is accomplished. It is over. It is finished. The truce was signed on a jagged tree. O when will we ever learn?”

121 Campbell and Goode, Writings, 36.
CHAPTER 5: SEEKING THE PEACE OF THE CITY

It is [Mayor] Jim Melvin! It is the Councilmen’s class! And so we declare war
against them! War!

NELSON JOHNSON, MOMENTS AFTER
THE ‘GREENSBORO MASSACRE’
NOVEMBER 3, 1979

In my view there can be no quality reconciliation unless it is built on a
reasonable foundation of truth. Truth is more than a few facts. At the deepest level truth
is love.

REV. NELSON JOHNSON, TESTIFYING BEFORE THE GREENSBORO TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION AUGUST 26, 2005

On November 3, 1979, just after the fog lifted on an unusually warm fall morning
in the “sleepy little mill-town”\(^1\) of Greensboro, North Carolina, a caravan of Ku Klux
Klansmen (KKK) and American Nazis interrupted the beginning of an anti-Klan rally
organized by the Communist Workers Party\(^2\) (CWP). As the Klansmen and Nazis cruised
by those gathering for the parade, the groups exchanged harsh words.\(^3\) Seconds later, a
Klansman from the lead car fired a warning shot, inciting a brawl with fisticuffs and
picketing sticks. Some Klansmen near the rear of the caravan exited their vehicles,
retrieved guns from an arsenal in their trunk, and began firing on the demonstrators.

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\(^1\) Lisa Magarrell and Joya Wesley, quoting Walter Cronkite’s description of Greensboro in his news report

\(^2\) The Communist Worker’s Party, originally known as the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO), was
officially founded in 1979 just days after the Greensboro Massacre as a movement to promote the Marxist
philosophies of Mao Zedong and others. Its particular emphases were on labor organizing and civil rights
for African-Americans. At the height of its activity, the CWP had small branches in major cities across the
United States. Its leadership voted to dissolve in 1985 to form what was then called the New Democratic
Movement.

\(^3\) Klansmen yelled racial epithets, including the phrases, “Show me a nigger with guts and I’ll show you a
Klansman with a gun!” and “Shoot the niggers!” while CWP rally participants chanted, “Death to the Klan!
Death to the Klan!” See *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report: Final Report*,
Presented to the residents of Greensboro, the City, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Project and
Eighty-eight horrifying seconds later, five members of the CWP lay dead or dying at the intersection of Everitt and Carver Streets; ten more were wounded. By the time the Greensboro Police descended on the scene, it was too late. A storm of hatred, bigotry, and violence had torn the roof off of a city where the Civil Rights Movement had gained traction at a Woolworth’s department store only nineteen years earlier. Tensions escalated the following year after an all-white jury acquitted the killers—a stunning verdict considering that camera crews from four area television stations captured much of the chaos and carnage on film. The ghastly events of November 3rd continue to haunt this community three and a half decades later, even in the wake of unprecedented reconciling efforts by the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission on American soil.

It would be more than twenty years before a determined group of victims, witnesses, and other sympathetic citizens pushed for the development of a local truth and reconciliation process concerning the events of that November day. The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) grew from their efforts, formally commencing in 2004, and submitting their final report in 2006. Despite being painstakingly constructed over the course of two years, with significant support from

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4 Carver Street has since been renamed Bingham Street.
5 Greensboro, twice named an “All-American City” (1966, 1991), has long promoted itself as a comfortable, middle-class city with a reputation for forward thinking. It was once a hub of abolitionist fervor in the antebellum South, and an important station along the Underground Railroad. As well, it was and still remains uniquely inclusive of Jewish and Quaker communities. It is home to over half a dozen schools of higher learning, including the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Guilford College (Quaker), Bennett College, and Greensboro College.
6 See North Carolina State v. Jack Fowler et. al. (Superior Court: Guilford County, NC, 1980). This was the first of three trials. An additional Federal trial (United States v. Virgil Griffin et. al. [United States District Court, 1983]) reached the same verdict. A civil trial (James Waller et. al. v. Bernard Butkovich et. al. [United States District Court, 1984]) later awarded meager damages to a spouse of one of the victims, but there was no admission of guilt by the original perpetrators, police or other authorities, and local media continued to portray the victims as Communist agitators who largely deserved their fate.
local citizens and national and international leaders, such as Desmond Tutu, Peter Storey, and Bongani Finca, some of the committee’s most crucial—albeit legally non-binding—recommendations have gone ignored by city leaders. Nevertheless, the process has made reconciliation possible by interrupting and exposing the fabricated, official rhetoric about the event, enabling victims and perpetrators to tell their stories without fear of legal reprisal, and giving a divided city a foretaste of redemption that had previously been unimaginable. In several instances regarding personal relationships of those directly involved in the massacre, former enemies apologized to one another, hard hearts were softened, and new friendships emerged. The past eight years have shown that the seeds of peace the GTRC planted are only beginning to sprout.

There remains a great deal of interest in the Greensboro Massacre and GTRC. Several engaging and academically rigorous books have been written about both events, in addition to articles, award-winning documentaries, and artistic responses such as a theater production in Princeton, New Jersey. Yet, from a forensic perspective, it seems as if there is nothing new to say about Greensboro. Every possible angle of evidence concerning the massacre and the Commission’s work has been analyzed down to the nub by interested parties, from survivors to trial lawyers, interested citizens, and even more objective scholars peering in from the outside. On the other hand, the contributions of faith communities in the aftermath of the Massacre, and to the efforts of the GTRC, have largely been overlooked from a theological perspective. From the massacre’s immediate aftermath to the present, preachers have been among the most effective leaders working

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7 Magarrell and Wesley, 3.
underneath a citywide pall of distrust to seek the truth, bridge divides, and encourage healing. It is important to consider how their contributions stimulated these historic efforts at reconciliation.

The unique offering of this chapter will be to discuss Greensboro from a theological perspective, and, more specifically, to consider how preachers proclaimed reconciliation in sermons and other addresses as they partnered with the GTRC. I will begin by framing Greensboro’s story with the terminologies of theologian Douglas John Hall and historian William Chafe in order to present the very complex context in which my selected preachers spoke in Greensboro. Following these preliminary descriptions, I will analyze manuscripts, transcripts, and testimonies from some of the most notable pastors involved in the massacre and the GTRC’s efforts. Throughout the chapter, I will present the voices of preachers and other local participants in order to guide and enrich the discussion. It will be my overall intention to show not only that pastors fostered reconciliation in a city divided by race, class, and lethal violence, but also that they continue to serve as models for preaching reconciliation in a variety of contexts where the dividing walls of hostility seem thus far to be impenetrable.

5.1 Lighten Our Darkness

Douglas John Hall might phrase it this way: “Reconciling preachers lighten our darkness.” His seminal book, Lighten Our Darkness, was published only a few years before the Greensboro massacre, and its revised edition was published in 2001, the same year the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Community Project (GTRCP) was
established. The book remains a relevant guide for framing Greensboro’s plight as a community where the dialogue between “expectation and experience” had become toxic enough to create the ecology for such an explosive confrontation.

The function of expectation is to deliver us from bondage to the past. When expectation ceases, there occurs what is called, according to the better understanding of it, death. The function of experience is to keep us tied to the life of the body, to history. When experience ceases to make itself heard in the dialogue, the consequence is illusion. Human life is thus a perilous journey between death and illusion. Few are able to reach the end of the journey before they capitulate to one or the other peril. Most people, before their time runs out, are acquainted with both.

Where expectations persistently diverge from experience, communities become increasingly vulnerable to a “state of contradiction.” In Greensboro’s case, the experience of blacks and working poor citizens severely contradicted the white establishment’s hypocritical narrative that asserted the sanctity of free-market capitalism, and advertised the possibility of a comfortable, middle class lifestyle, while also concealing their duplicitous strategies to preserve the legacy of Jim Crow legislation. To be sure, the Communist Workers Party naively and recklessly engaged the Klan—historically the most violent organization in the South. Yet, the CWP did not rise ex nihilo, but in reaction to the contradiction between the myth of the American Dream and their collective American experience. CWP leaders were not “spies,” as some alleged them to be. They were impassioned young doctors and civil rights activists who

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8 The GTCRP was the organization that formed a National Advisory Committee (NAC) to study the possibility of forming a truth and reconciliation commission. The NAC then created the Local Task Force, which would eventually nominate members of, and organize a broad coalition of support for, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
10 Ibid., xxvii ff.
idealized communism because it seemed the only alternative to the revolutionary force of capitalism. Among those dead or injured on November 3 were men and women who, as Duke University medical students, had rejected the pursuit of wealth to organize health clinics and hospitals in some of the most neglected neighborhoods in Durham, NC. CWP leader, Nelson Johnson, who was arrested for “inciting a riot” as he raged at the police as his friends lay dead around him—and who was jailed with a bond over twice the amount ($115,000) of the highest bonded Klansmen charged with murder ($50,000)—had worked tirelessly as an advocate for poor blacks in Greensboro for over a decade.

From a Christian perspective, what the CWP did not grasp was that Marxism’s fatal flaw compounded the same problems they fought through their activism. As Hall described in 1976, and again in 2001, Marxism failed in its attempt to eliminate or neutralize experience.

That is, [Marxism] denies that there is in human experience any essential predisposition to question great expectations, such as the ideals expressed in communist doctrine. It rejects the contention that exposure to the abyss of nothingness belongs to the human condition.11

In other words, Marxism ignored one of Christianity’s most central teachings, the doctrine of sin, which declares that humanity is doomed apart from God’s saving mission in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Human beings are so hopelessly mired in sin that only the grace of God—not an ideology—can save them.

Marxism’s mirror ideology, existentialism, indulges only the most immediate realities of experience in ways that eliminate expectation.

11 Ibid., xxxvii.
Existentialism rejects the vision of the individual person as the conscious center of a significance that transcends and precedes our existence. At its most influential, existentialism insists that what has been called ‘essential’ being is a construct superimposed on the raw stuff of existence in order to make it bearable.\footnote{Ibid., xxxvi.}

The existentialism Hall describes comes to its fullest expression in the American South in the white establishment’s rejection of the truth about its own brutal history, its ruthless domination of human beings, its ravenous destruction of the land, and its domestication of sin as mere “immorality.” Such existentialism affects the church by reducing its central theological claims to demonstrations of sentimentality. The gospel is then tamed to serve the powers of domination and oppression.

Hall uses the phrase, “lighten our darkness,” in two ways en route to a theological solution to the false optimism of Marxism and existentialism and their approximate roads to perdition. The first is that the light of truth will lead us into our darkness. “For it is known that only as we become accustomed to the night, the deepening gloom, are we able to see the light that is specifically light for this darkness.”\footnote{Ibid., 227.} Secondly, “the beautiful prayer, ‘Lighten our darkness,’ means, at the same time, ‘show us the darkness that is really our habitat’ and ‘give us light enough for moving about in that darkness.’”\footnote{Ibid.} With these two perspectives in mind, Hall invites to look not for “meaning beyond our suffering, but in it—in the midst of failure, a way; in the midst of darkness, a light; in the midst of despair, hope.”\footnote{Ibid., 241.} He implores the church to engage the particular darkness of the contemporary context in which it orders its life and work, not to run away from the

\footnote{Ibid., xxxvi.}  
\footnote{Ibid., 227.}  
\footnote{Ibid.}  
\footnote{Ibid., 241.}
darkness, or pretend it is not a mortal threat. Only authentic pursuits of the truth will disclose the way to a cruciform theology of hope. As Hall says,

> The only hope that would be pertinent to our condition and responsible, within the context of the contemporary world, would be one that was born out of an encounter with the despair implicit in and emanating from our own way of life.\(^{16}\)

Such an “indigenous theology of the cross” of Christ will give up the profane madness that has saturated so much of the contemporary church’s activity in its quest for survival. Hall believes the church’s time for pursuing these self-preserving measures has long passed, if it ever was a legitimate concern. Now is the time for the church of Jesus Christ to “perform a service for humankind that is worthy of the power and majesty of its Lord.”\(^{17}\) Bourgeois culture lacks the ecology to perform this service. Rather, putting trust in the crucified Jesus at the most personal, concrete level

> means the willingness of the people of the cross to give evidence that, in their words as in their deeds, they are people whose faith lives only in company with unfaith, whose hope is a dialogue with doubt, whose sense of meaning comes out of an ever-renewed confrontation with the data of despair and meaninglessness.\(^{18}\)

Hall’s theory parallels the practices of preachers who partnered with the GTRC to seek the peace of their city. Knowing that “the day of the Lord is darkness and not light,” they set their minds and hearts on seeking the truth in ways that could prepare the ground for reconciliation. The challenge that lay before them was to lighten the darkness by first naming the darkness. And, as Hall reveals, naming the darkness of racial and economic oppression is comparable to witnessing to the light. “Is it so different if one bears

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 255.
witness to the darkness than if one bears witness to the light? …To know the darkness and to name it, then, would be the special task of the people of the cross in this society.”

5.2 Descent into Darkness

William Chafe has offered the most perceptive historical analysis of 20th century racial and economic relations in Greensboro before November 3, 1979. He describes the city’s story as a complex blend of “civilities and civil rights.” “Civilities” describes the thin veneer of polite relationships along the spectrum of race and class that masks the white structure’s strategic efforts to maintain their hold on power. “Civil rights” names the ongoing struggle toward freedom by blacks and others who place organized pressure on the powers of domination and oppression. From as early as Greensboro’s rise as a prosperous industrial and professional “New South” city in the late 19th century, the white upper class worked shrewdly to displace and oppress local blacks both economically and politically. Upper class whites made sure Greensboro’s economic “ascendancy produced stark economic divisions,” even though politically, “a new system of paternalism had emerged, with members of the white elite ready to assist those

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19 Ibid., 255-56, original emphasis.
20 William H. Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Despite the publication date being after November 3, 1979, the book was completed before the massacre occurred. To read it now gives one a haunting sense of its relevancy at the time of its publication, and continues to serve as a penetrating source for interpreting the inner-workings of Greensboro’s community infrastructure. Many of those interviewed for this book are still living, and several were central participants in the work of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
21 Ibid., 19.
blacks willing to accommodate to white interests.” This new system of white paternalism became increasingly ensconced through new laws that created overt racial divisions from downtown white-collar offices all the way to blue-collar neighborhoods on the city’s east and south sides. From Reconstruction to the end of the Civil Rights Movement, whites in Greensboro deftly maneuvered to establish one of the South’s most polished versions of Jim Crow segregation. By 1979, Greensboro’s inveterate “system”—known colloquially among blacks as “the Man,” “the White Man,” or “the enemy”—was so powerful it ultimately absorbed local black reformers’ most concerted efforts and significant victories. But, on November 3, Greensboro’s careful harnessing of the ambiguous dynamic between civilities and civil rights met its greatest challenge.

As the sun dissolved the fog that morning, the Communist Workers Party gathered at the Morningside Homes public housing project to hold an anti-Klan rally, followed by a march and conference. This trio of events would serve the dual purpose of challenging the Klan and evoking a host of socio-economic and racial issues plaguing black and poor residents of Greensboro. Decades later, as Magarrell and Wesley confirm, the GTRC Report would substantiate many of the CWP’s concerns,

Among the racial inequities the report cited was the fact that Greensboro city council members were elected through an at-large system of voting, which left the black community essentially unrepresented. Significant inequities existed

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22 Ibid., 21.
23 For example, a city ordinance in 1914 “barred blacks from purchasing homes on any street where a majority of residences belonged to whites” (ibid., 20).
24 Chafe quotes black reformer, Nelson Johnson, in an epigraph: “To me the single most important thing that came out of the 1960’s is how the superstructure was able to absorb a revolutionary thrust for a long period of time [without ever really changing]” (ibid., 336).
also in wages, education, housing, and health care during the decade leading to 1979.\textsuperscript{25}

The WVO (CWP) had already achieved small victories as it attempted to organize workers in the local textile mills, and the KKK, as well as other local authorities, had taken notice. Regrettably, the CWP’s advocacy and activism on behalf of Greensboro’s more disadvantaged residents spilled over into an organized confrontation with, and violent rhetoric about, the Klan. Flyers promoting the November 3 rally emphasized inflammatory slogans such as, “Take a Stand! Smash the Klan! Expose the Misleaders!” and “\textsc{Death to the Klan.}” One flyer included a picture of WVO members burning a Confederate flag at an earlier confrontation with the Klan in China Grove, NC.\textsuperscript{26} The flyers, in addition to testimonies by Klansmen and Nazis that CWP organizers Nelson Johnson and Paul Bermanzohn—among others—had called them “cowards” who would be “crushed,”\textsuperscript{27} played right into the hands of official Greensboro. From the immediate aftermath onward, those concerned to preserve Greensboro’s culture of civility framed November 3 as a murderous brawl between incendiaries who got what they asked for. As one local pastor said,

\begin{quote}
The big take on what happened was initially, ‘These are a bunch of outside agitators, and we don’t know any of these people…Some of them were communists, and some of them were Nazis, or Klan, or something. And they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Magarrell and Wesley, 7.

\textsuperscript{26} A heated confrontation with violent overtones occurred on July 8, 1979, in China Grove, NC, where the Klan had announced they would show the film, \textit{Birth of a Nation}, at the town’s community center. WVO members traveled from Durham and Greensboro to march in protest with China Grove residents. Many marchers were armed, as were Klan members, when they met outside the community center. Klansmen and marchers exchanged bitter words and violent threats with one another. In this instance, there was a strong local police presence, and there was no bloodshed. However, four of the five people killed on November 3 participated in the China Grove march. Bill Sampson was not present.

deserved each other, and they deserved what happened, and they’ve besmirched our city’s name…A pox on both their houses.’

What the GTRC found in its investigations of the Massacre exposes this even-sided interpretation of events as propaganda. In its final report, the GTRC showed how local media employed language that underwrote the status quo of a city “reliant on civility as a means to avoid overt conflict and to downplay racial and class undertones of the event.”

Multiple headlines of the mainline daily newspapers described November 3 as a “shootout,” and the CWP as “radical leftists.” The African-American newsweekly Carolina Peacemaker offered the only alternative to the approved narratives of official Greensboro. They called the event a “massacre,” and focused on the police’s absence as a conspiracy. Their suspicions were not without warrant. The GTRC’s investigations left no doubt that the Greensboro Police Department’s (GPD) own paid informant, Eddie Dawson, “acted in a leadership role to bring the two sides into contact.”

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28 Frank Dew, personal interview, 16 December 2013. During the state murder trial (4 August – 17 November, 1980), questions were raised about which group shot first, in order to determine whether the Klan acted in self-defense. CWP members, united in their conviction that there was a government conspiracy against them, refused to testify during the trial. In a later documentary, Nelson Johnson challenges the notion that the CWP came to the rally prepared for a shootout: “Why would you have all of your children and all of your people standing in a big group singing a song if you were planning an ambush? None of that registered on the minds of many of the citizens of this city,” in Greensboro’s Child, documentary film, directed by Andy Coon, (All Aces Media, 2004) DVD.

29 GTRC Final Report, 326.

30 See the GTRC’s list of noted headlines by the Greensboro Record and the Greensboro Daily News in their Final Report, 325.

31 Most of the pastors with whom I spoke used the term “massacre” without exception. Still, some pastors who remain most sympathetic with the CWP confessed that after 35 years, they still have not come up with the proper description for the event. To call it a “shootout” would be unfair, even though shots were fired from both sides. “Killings” also has its shortcomings. The term “massacre” can also be misleading. The complexity of November 3 makes those events resistant to encapsulation in a single word.

32 Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report: Executive Summary, Presented to the residents of Greensboro, the City, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Project and other public bodies, 25 May 2006, 8. Additionally, Dawson “made the initial racist, virulently anti-communist speech at the Klan rally designed to incite a confrontation with the WVO; he arranged for the assembly point for Klan
The Greensboro Police Department, the majority of [GTRC] commissioners found, had knowledge that the Klansmen and Nazis planned to disrupt the march, that they might be heavily armed when they did so, and that the white supremacists had emerged from a confrontation with the WVO/CWP a few months earlier [in China Grove] with a score to settle.33

Not only was the GPD guilty of “negligence,” at best, the federal government also had knowledge of the potential for bloodshed, but did nothing to stop it. On October 26, 1979, Dawson asked FBI agent, Len Bogaty, to stop the march, but Bogaty refused. As he exited the agent’s office, Dawson told him, “I tell you what, though, the next time I’ll have to bring you a bucket of blood.”34 In addition to Dawson, there was Bernard Butkovich, a Nazi informant for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF). Butkovich infiltrated the American Nazi Party and testified he knew in advance that the Klan and Nazis were preparing to confront CWP demonstrators. A New York Times article from 1985 details the testimony of two members of the Nazi group on trial for murder, Raeford Milano Caudle and Roland Wayne Wood,

Mr. Butkovich told them he would train them in hand-to-hand combat and the use of explosives and would help them to convert their guns to automatic weapons. Mr. Wood testified this week that Mr. Butkovich visited him the evening before the demonstration and encouraged him to take a gun to the confrontation in Greensboro.35

and Nazi members prior to going to the parade; he was in regular contact with Klan leader Virgil Griffin to discuss plans to disrupt the parade; he obtained a copy of the parade permit and route; he drove the route with Klansmen the night before the parade; he pointed out the route prior to leaving the Klan assembly point; he rushed people into cars at 11 a.m. to get to the parade. When Klansmen leaving the house asked, “Who’s running this thing?” Klan leader Virgil Griffin pointed to Dawson and said, “I guess he is,” 9.

33 Magarrell and Wesley, 7.
35 “Agent tells of ’79 threats by Klan and Nazis,” The New York Times (12 May, 1985) section 1, 26. The article continues, “Mr. Butkovich characterized his role as an undercover agent as one that gave people with a known propensity for illegal activity the ‘opportunity to violate the law.’ …Mr. Butkovich’s superior, Robert F. Dukes, testified that Mr. Butkovich ‘was certainly authorized to talk our target into producing guns.’ Mr. Butkovich testified that at a planning meeting Nov. 1, 1979, two days before the Greensboro
The GTRC analyzed the state murder trial’s failure to scrutinize federal government involvement, ultimately concluding that the circumstances “indicate reluctance to vigorously investigate the government’s role in the tragedy.”\textsuperscript{36} Assessing the federal criminal trial, the \textit{Final Report} states “the lack of evidence to support the allegation that the FBI failed to rigorously investigate or engaged in other misconduct is largely due to the inaccessibility of data controlled by federal authorities.”\textsuperscript{37}

The \textit{Report} maintains that widespread racial and economic preconceptions were significant reasons why neither the state nor federal trials resulted in guilty verdicts for Klan and Nazi members. All-white juries, fears of government retaliation on CWP members, as well as deep-seated prejudices against communists as “America’s enemies” coalesced so powerfully that even explicit footage of Klan members shooting people at point blank range in the street was not enough to secure guilty verdicts. As attorney Lewis Pitts, who worked on behalf of CWP members in the 1985 civil trial,\textsuperscript{38} said,

\begin{quote}
That was the middle of the Reagan era, and there was major Cold War activity. So to be called and labeled ‘communist’ was a real way to undermine and create
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{36} \textit{GTRC Final Report}, 281.
\item\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 285.
\item\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Waller et. Al. v. Butkovich et. al.}, 11 March 1985 – 7 June 1985. After extended and heated deliberations, a multiracial jury awarded compensatory damages of $351,500 and $38,358.55 to Martha Nathan and Paul Bermanzohn, respectively (Nathan is the widow of Michael Nathan. Gunshot wounds left Bermanzohn permanently paralyzed). The plaintiffs saw the amount of the award as a disappointment, but were pleased that it was the first time in the American South that a jury had held a police department jointly liable with Klan and Nazi members for a wrongful death. In a highly controversial move, without admitting any wrongdoing, the City of Greensboro settled the case to avoid further litigation by paying the award on behalf of the GDP, Klan and Nazi members.
\end{itemize}
a notion...that you’re less than human. Therefore, you don’t deserve any rights. You don’t deserve any protection.\textsuperscript{39}

The \textit{Report} leaves little doubt as to whether the voices of CWP victims, their family members, and the residents of Morningside Homes were systematically marginalized and obstructed. The U. S. government, the City of Greensboro, including Mayor Jim Melvin, as well as city councilmen, the GPD, mainstream media, and establishment whites—including many mainline white churches—all promoted the message that the CWP received their just deserts, thereby expediting Greensboro’s further descent into darkness in the wake of the massacre. Perhaps no one expressed these matters more coarsely and succinctly than Ed Dawson. Sitting on the passenger side of a truck as his Klan-Nazi motorcade arrived at the rally, he coldly peered at CWP member Paul Bermanzohn and said, “You communist bastard. You asked for the Klan and you got ‘em.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{5.3 LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS}

Greensboro serves as a focal instance of how ideologies and civilities generally espoused throughout the United States affect a particular community’s interpretation of controversial events. Despite the city’s openness to certain minorities, and its reputation as a center of civil rights activism, “there was also still a great desire to keep the lid on, and to keep people in their places.”\textsuperscript{41} Nearly 26 years would pass after the massacre

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Greensboro’s Child} documentary, min. 32:10.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{GREENKIL}, 9.
\textsuperscript{41}Dew personal interview.
before several Greensboro pastors rose to offer formal statements to the GTRC. The Reverends Cardes Brown, Mazie Ferguson, and Nelson Johnson—all African-American—were among the first witnesses to name the darkness as the journey of truth and reconciliation commenced. Though these statements were not sermons, they functioned as testimonies that helped remove the lid of “civility” as they spoke to the Commission within earshot of television cameras, journalists, and hundreds of concerned citizens. Their testimonies provide a window into these preachers’ theological vision as they narrated events from Christian perspectives. They did not attempt to mask their identity as Christian pastors with a “third language,” so often prescribed by advocates of tolerance. Rather, Scriptural imagination, prophetic critique, expressions of lament, confessions, and appeals to forgiveness constituted their language, which has helped cultivate an ecology ripe for reconciliation in Greensboro.

The Reverend Cardes Brown had been pastor of New Light Baptist Church for four years, and president of the Pulpit Forum42 for one year, when the gunfire erupted. At that time, the church was located near the intersection of the massacre. “I could look out the back door of the church and see the bloodstained street, and I wondered, how in the world can we allow this to happen?”43 Outling his own historical perspective of the lead up to November 3, he recalled being reprimanded as a boy for drinking from a whites-only water fountain. “I remember my mother coming to get me and I said to her,

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42 The Pulpit Forum is an organization of prominent African-American pastors devoted to fellowship and cooperation on religious and social issues in Greensboro. It remains a vibrant organization, and a key part of ensuring the success of the GTRC’s legacy.
‘Mama, there is no difference in the water.’” He viewed speaking on behalf of others who could not “speak as they ought for themselves” as an integral part of his ministry. But some of the most striking portions of his testimony are those that evoke lament, prayer, and reasons behind his preaching resistance to propaganda and toward hope.

He begins his prepared statement in the mode of lamentation. Having just viewed with the audience some video footage of the 1979 attack, he says through tears: “You’ll have to excuse me (he stops to wipe tears). I’ve seen that footage many times, I have it in my office, but there is never a time…There is never a time that I view it without being emotionally troubled.” He then pivots to thank God for the opportunity to offer a reflection “of a very painful remembrance.” He pursues such pain “because of a belief that in God’s own time, this troubling and disturbing issue will be addressed properly. To say that these hearings are a response to that faith in God that this would come about is truly, I believe, the reason I am here today.” Brown repeats questions he pursued and continues to pursue in his role as a pastor, “How could this have happened in the city of Greensboro? How could it have happened anywhere?” He concludes with an apology for his emotions “concerning the pain that I will bear, no doubt, until I meet my maker.” Finally, Brown confesses, “It’s hard to remove some things from your mind, especially if there are instances when they are placed before you and your thoughts and your mind cannot remove them without expressing to the God that you have faith in that I still care.”

He also speaks in the language of prayer. In a particularly direct passage, he says,

I pray for the day that true brotherhood and love might exist among all of God’s people. I pray that this effort today to seek truth might not be hampered or hindered by our failure to recognize that the forces that would speak against
knowing the truth are only the forces that intend to keep us bound and enslaved, for only the truth will set us free. I could remind you even today of painful moments that seem to point to the fact that we who feel at times that the way to live without being disturbed is not to get involved, to deny the importance of standing for what is right. It was a wise man who said that he who did not stand for something would fall for anything.

One detects a journalistic hermeneutic in his concern to preach hope to a congregation struggling to endure suffering. Midway through his testimony, Commissioner Patricia Clark asked about the impact of, and his congregation’s reaction to, the not-guilty verdict (of the state trial). Brown responded that it was one of anger and frustration, but that he resolved to make his message to them one of assurance.

Otherwise, his people would ask, “Why not just give up?”

So, I said in my statement that the only way to deal with that is to have a faith and a hope that in some way, in God’s own time, this matter will come to bear. And I think that’s what I’d say, now after 31 years of preaching, 41 years, in all that preaching that message of hope, it was what I did continually, up until this day, to reassure people that right temporarily defeated is better than evil triumphant. Truth crushed to the ground will rise again. You have to do that because otherwise people just become—and this is the part I’ve always said, we look at a situation and we wonder why people come to the point where they don’t have any feelings, they become numb and a person who is not able to have the sense of fear will do anything. So keeping people from losing their mind became an issue.

Brown preached resistance to propaganda about communism. The massacre, he said, “wouldn’t have happened if [the CWP] were not communist. That was what was being fed—media, everybody. That was the issue.” And this issue, he believes, forestalled reconciling efforts throughout the city. In his preaching and teaching at New Light Church,

I explained this whole view of communism differently. I talked about the fact that…if we’re not going to understand the importance of tolerance and sharing, then we were going to have a problem. And when we look at it from the standpoint and ideology, we’re talking about things being held in common,
people recognizing that in order to survive we have to share things in common. That’s the way I would always explain it in our congregation that there has to be room for all of us. All of us are not going to see things the same. Does that mean that because I don’t see it the way you see it that you can no longer exist? I think that the fact that the media and others used that opportunity to justify a hideous crime because of a person’s ideology, I think that was one of the things that I constantly set right in terms of people’s discussion. And I do believe that were it not for the fact that that was the basis of justification, that things would have probably moved to a more reconcilable end earlier than now.

The Reverend Mazie Ferguson was the only ordained female pastor to give a statement to the GTRC. In addition to being an attorney, at the time of the public hearing she was also president of the Pulpit Forum, and founding pastor of Liberation Baptist Church in Greensboro. Ferguson was profoundly affected as a child by the death of Emmitt Till, and still grapples with fears she harbors about the Klan. Her testimony emphasizes a biblically informed prophetic critique of the reality of divisions in the city.

In the years and months leading up to the founding of the GTRC, there had been enormous pressure on advocates of truth and reconciliation to stop their work. From City Hall to rank-and-file citizens, one of the prevailing attitudes was that the events of November 3 were in the past and should remain there. Brown countered these claims by noting the issues were a “sore” that, if left to fester, would turn “cancerous.” Ferguson contests such public resistance with even more rhetorical potency.

The wounds are not old, the wounds are still here. The wounds are quite present. The wounds walk up and down our streets. The wounds go by the names of homelessness. The wounds go by the name of the unemployed. The wounds are still with us. The wounds are still known by the name of racism, and it is still raring its ugly head.44

44 Mazie Ferguson, Statement to the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1 October 2005. All subsequent quotes of Rev. Ferguson are drawn from her statement.
Commissioner Mark Sills, also an ordained minister serving in Greensboro, asked Ferguson how she would interpret the failures of local religious leaders leading up to November 3, and afterward. She responds by recalling Jesus’ warning, “Woe be unto you,” to the religious leaders of his day for “not doing what they should have done.” Too many local preachers, she says, “have become part of the status quo. Too many of us are afraid to speak as we ought to.” She prefaces her next remarks with language drawn from Jesus’ reading from Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19, proceeding to say,

I subscribe to a cannon [sic] called the Holy Bible where from Genesis to Revelations God continues to demand, not suggest, but to demand that God’s people fight for justice. That God’s people look and work to take care of the widows and the children and that includes those people right now who do not have a living wage and who cannot feed their children. That includes people who sit on councils and have all that they need but do not understand that the others also need to be able to pay for doctor bills, have health insurance, be able to do the kinds of things they want to do. And not only is that necessary in the political sense, but even more necessary in the religious community. This is, these are our marching orders. We have no others. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, visit the prisoner, take care of the stranger, take in the stranger, these are our marching orders…

Like Brown, Ferguson is also aware of propagandistic motives by those in power, and of the historic relationship of abuse toward minorities by police. But she describes these issues in more concrete, biblical terms, giving them a more cosmic, theological perspective. She likens “the culture of the powerful” to “powers and principalities” against which people must struggle. She advocates for a citizens review board that would have subpoena power over police.\(^{45}\) Her concluding remarks also name the media as a

\(^{45}\) See the GTRC’s formal recommendation of such a review board in *Final Report*, 386. As of this writing, the recommendation has yet to be implemented despite organized efforts by concerned citizens.
“power” in the Scriptural sense, in response to Sills’s request that she provide other questions the GTRC should explore.

I guess I want to say to you, be sure to try to put yourself 25 years into the future. And ask the questions that the journalists who are not writing today accurately will have for tomorrow. Because you see, outside of the contemporary context more things come. So right now so many of our, [sic] you wonder why the journalists are writing the way they are writing. They are writing that way because who buys the ads for their newspapers? The people who buy the ads for their newspapers are the powers that be, they are not going to fund journals and newspapers that write things against them. But 25 years from now it will be safe to do so.

Another way Greensboro authorities manipulated prejudices following November 3 was to demonize one individual in particular, CWP leader, longtime civil rights activist, and the third minister under consideration here, the Reverend Nelson Johnson. If there was one man on whom whites in Greensboro focused their collective hatred and distrust before, during, and after 1979, it was Johnson. The sitting mayor in 1979, Jim Melvin, described Johnson as “the most dangerous man in Greensboro.”46 As another local pastor and friend of Johnson’s remarked, “It’s one thing to have a black attorney, or physician, or dentist. But Nelson Johnson? He’s messing up all the equilibrium.”47

Johnson’s life story reveals a fascinating Christian pilgrimage, from passionate advocacy for secular ideologies earlier in his life, to his present Christian ministry at his church, based at the Beloved Community Center he co-founded with pastor “Z” Holler. He grew up in eastern North Carolina, “two miles from the family who owned my

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47 Ibid.
ancestors.” Before he began studying communism, Johnson saw himself as a follower of Martin Luther King, Jr. As a young man, he and a friend tried to sit near the front of a bus heading to Gastonia, NC, on their way to a student council convention.

When we got to Charlotte, a seat opened up on the second row. There were two seats on the right side of the bus. And we decided we were going to sit in those seats, so we came up and sat down. And a man stood up, a white man—actually people started throwing paper, balls of trash, and saying the ‘n-word’, that people don’t know where they belong, that kind of thing. And a guy had on a London Fog coat, and he held it up as he turned and just hit me on the head. I was sitting on the aisle seat. So I fell over in the lap of my friend…and it was a jarring blow. And the people all sat there like nothing had happened.

Today, even though Johnson is an ordained minister, a graduate of Virginia Union School of Theology in Richmond in 1989, and pastor of Faith Community Church, he continues to be perceived as a divisive figure by many. Especially for Greensboro citizens most concerned about civilities, Johnson’s rise to infamous prominence as an outspoken communist, labor, and civil rights leader during the white heat of the Cold War seems to have permanently marked him as a “radical” to be feared or simply ignored.

His testimony to the GTRC is arguably the most powerful, for in it we hear from someone who was in the middle of the fight on November 3. He was stabbed in the arm as he defended himself with a stick against a butcher knife-wielding Nazi. He witnessed the murder of close friends. He raged against the police before they wrestled him to the blood-soaked ground. But as he spoke to the Commission in August 2005, he epitomized

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48 Nelson Johnson, Personal interview, 31 January 2014. Johnson also explained that during his years of communist activism, he remained a great admirer of King. On April 4, 1968, Johnson, who had never personally met King, was waiting to meet him at the Greensboro airport. They had arranged a meeting to discuss the ideas of non-violence and loving enemies. King never made the flight. He was assassinated that morning.

49 Ibid.
central elements of the reconciling Word. With a broken heart and humble tone, his speech exhibits the effects of over two decades of spiritual transformation. The agonistic tenor of earlier days is gone, replaced by the kenotic rhetoric of a pastor determined to pursue reconciliation. “I come today with my scars, my wounds, my regrets and my self-criticism, to share my story,” and to seek “authentic truth and understanding the killings of 1979.” Of the pastors considered here, Johnson’s testimony is the longest and most detailed about November 3. Its subjects are too broad to consider fully here. There are, however, several stunning moments—most notably, his account of being attacked, and his apologies to the community for his own mistakes, as well as his use of Scripture, and the broad spectrum of his reconciling vision for Greensboro.

Johnson details his being blitzed by a Nazi during the initial skirmish.

Who I later determined was a Nazi member rushed towards me with a long butcher knife. I was thrown a stick (on which we were attaching signs to be carried in the march) by Lacy Russell. The throwing of that stick by Lacy probably saved my life. The man with the long knife attempted to stab me in an upper cut motion into my mid-section. I used the stick to keep the knife-wielding Nazi away from me. For a period of about 30 seconds we faced off—him with the long knife and me with a stick. I was cut about the hands. He dropped low and attempted to come up under me in this fashion. I managed to block the knife with my arm as the knife went through my arm.

As the shooting began, Johnson found refuge behind a television truck. When he emerged, “I was bleeding and I saw bleeding people and bodies strewn around.” He turned over friend Jim Waller, who had been fatally shot, and “felt and heard the air go out of him as he took his last breath.” The events of the previous days began to flash in his mind, how the police had obstructed the parade permit, the harassing phone calls
about the parade posters, and the role police played in preventing a local church from hosting the conference.

I rose from Jim Waller’s dead body and began to speak with all the force my emotional state could muster. I charged that this could not have happened without the involvement of the police. I denounced Mayor Jim Melvin as a “dog” and a representative of the capitalist class.

With his next words in the testimony, Johnson apologizes to Melvin.

I recognize that calling Mayor Melvin a “dog” was wrong. While it reflected my state of mind at the time, it was no less wrong and should not have been done. I am sorry that I used such language. Under any circumstances, it demeaned his humanity and thereby reduced my own stature as a moral being.

In addition to this public apology, Johnson offers several regrets as well. First, he confesses regret for using the slogan “Death to the Klan,” as well as for the development of the flyer that called Klan members cowards and “demeaned and devalued the potential of people who were members of the Klan and or the Nazi.” He also regrets using the word “communism.” He cherishes much of what he has learned from his study of Marxism. “The word communism, however, no longer describes my core beliefs.”

Concluding his list of regrets, Johnson adds,

I would note in passing that there is a passage in a very broadly read book, which says, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” This saying comes from the second chapter of Acts, verses 45 and 46, in a book called the Holy Bible. I think our culture would do well to ponder its implications as it relates to our economic structure and way of life.

Johnson also quotes Scripture as he clarifies a primary theological motivation for his work for the poor in Greensboro. “Truth and sense of moral purpose require us to be partial, to take sides,” he argues. Jesus “took sides.”
Jesus of Nazareth declared without equivocation in his inaugural sermon, “I have come to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18)...I do not think for a minute that Jesus was against non-poor people. If done properly, standing with the poor, the abused, and the neglected can be a way of standing for everyone.

Johnson’s testimony reveals that his inclusiveness, in this sense, encompasses all of Greensboro, including its core institutions.

In my way of thinking, there can be no real ‘community reconciliation’ without substantial involvement of core institutions. The roles of the power structure before, during and after the killings of November 3rd have been enormous and are critically important to understand...[E]nduring, quality change that includes the deepest and broadest reconciliation...will grow from the involvement of our political, economic, educational, law enforcement, and mass media institutions.

He laments the “extraordinarily negative response by the Greensboro City Council to the request to endorse the [GTRC] process,” but he also invites them to reconsider. He thanks Klan and Nazi members, as well as a police officer and several lawyers who have participated in the process, while encouraging those who have refused participation to reconsider. Essentially, Johnson invites those who have been his “enemies” to join him in the journey toward truth and reconciliation, “an opportunity,” he says, “for all to learn and grow without a spirit of hatred or revenge.” Summoning the image of table fellowship, he speaks hopefully,

It is my deepest desire that those that I call the establishment and establishment apologists, the Klan and Nazis, poor blacks, Latinos, Asians, and whites can find our way to a common table. I know that we are all connected and I want that connection to be on a basis of mutual respect and shared concern for the welfare of all.

Johnson concludes his testimony by adding to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s well-known quote, “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice”:

So let us participate together in bending that moral arc just a little more towards truth, forgiveness, healing reconciliation and restorative justice for all. I pray for
the strength to respect everyone, to love everyone, and to learn from everyone as we continue this journey. May God bless all of us.

Together with the testimonies of Cardes Brown and Mazie Ferguson, Nelson Johnson’s words lightened Greensboro’s darkness by cutting through decades worth of false and misleading claims, “civilities,” official narratives, and the rhetoric of the power establishment. All three pastors spoke in character—as ambassadors of the reconciliation of the God of Jesus Christ—in order to aid the reconciling purposes of the GTRC. Until they stepped up to the microphone, most people in Greensboro had never heard their respective versions of the events on November 3. Moreover, their testimonies were crucial to the GTRC’s work, and to the credibility of the GTRC’s final report. Following their statements, these pastors have continued working in their respective places of ministry. All three preach regularly at the churches they pastor, serving also as mentors to a generation of new leaders working to implement many of the GTRC’s formal recommendations.

5.4 RECONCILING SERMONS

Christian preachers in Greensboro were the driving force behind the GTRC’s creation and work, and remain central to the success of its legacy. Preachers played indispensible roles in every part of the Commission’s activities, beginning with its inception, and continuing through its organization and implementation. Dozens of prominent international, national, and local pastors sat on either the National Advisory Committee or the Local Task Force, which preceded and ultimately appointed the
GTRC’s commissioners. Another pastor, Reverend Dr. Mark Sills, was one of those seven commissioners. The GTRC met with and drew inspiration from Bishop Desmond Tutu, who blessed and publicly endorsed their work during a speaking tour in North Carolina. Preachers across Greensboro drew their congregations’ attention to the GTRC’s efforts during sermons and other church events. The sheer volume of influence by people of faith on the GTRC is immeasurable.50

It would be impossible to catalogue every noteworthy sermon preached in Greensboro about the GTRC for several reasons: 1) some of the preachers, like Otis Hairston, the former pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, have since died; 2) many of the preachers who were closely involved with the GTRC’s efforts, such as Alfred “Chip” Marble, Associate Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, do not use manuscripts or notes; 3) some pastors approached for these sermons have been reluctant to share them; and 4) the controversial nature of these events meant the pastors of many mainline or establishment churches in Greensboro said little or nothing about the GTRC from their pulpits. Nevertheless, this section will consider two sermons preached in connection with the GTRC. The first is by the Reverend Dr. Peter Storey, a Methodist pastor from South Africa; the second is by Z Holler, retired Presbyterian pastor, co-chair of the GTRCP, and co-founder (with Nelson Johnson) of the Beloved Community Center.

I will preface each sermon analysis by exhibiting features of each preacher’s basic theological convictions about reconciliation. In terms of the sermons themselves, I will

50 People of other faiths, especially Jews, have also been integral to the GTRC’s success. In particular, Rabbi Fred Guttman, of Temple Emanuel in Greensboro (1995-), remains a prominent voice in the community, as well as a friend of the Pulpit Forum.
attend to the ways each preacher practiced the reconciling word as they sought the welfare of the city. My ultimate aim in this section is to show how these pastors effectively lightened Greensboro’s darkness by subverting civilities with the proclaimed truth of Jesus Christ.

Storey is the former President of the Methodist Church of South Africa, former prison chaplain to the late South African President, Nelson Mandela, and was, at the time of this sermon (April 2005), Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School. His sermon emphasizes the necessary ingredients for an ecology of reconciliation. That is, certain things must be in place before a divided community can pursue true reconciliation. The address is an eloquent expression of deeply held convictions about reconciliation, which Storey has both proclaimed and embodied throughout the decades of his ministry. For him, reconciliation is not a contingent Christian “value.” It is Scripture’s primary subject, and, therefore, the church’s primary subject and agenda. Reconciliation is the Christian’s ultimate reality, as well as,

…the starting point for the Christian. The impossible has happened. Therefore let’s try and live in the impossible, into the impossible. And in exactly the same way as I would argue that my departure point for what kind of world I preach is not the realities that we live with but the dream God has. And God’s dream is the true reality… So, for me, that has always been utterly clear: that Jesus has given us a picture of the world God wants to see—God’s dream for this world. And our job is to realize that dream, to live into God’s future in the now, to live God’s future in the now.\(^{51}\)

His is an apocalyptic imagination, where the reality of God’s reconciliation has come upon us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and continues to unfold in the

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\(^{51}\) Peter Storey, Personal interview, 13 November 2013. For a more complete picture of Storey’s preaching, see Peter Storey, *With God in the Crucible: Preaching Costly Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).
church’s mission. Living into this reality, preachers should preach “holistically,” so that each sermon addresses the “three levels of who we are, where we live, and have our being.”

Though each sermon may not “hew to a specific text” in an expository way, it must always be biblically based, and “faithful to the broad message of Scripture.” The preacher listens carefully, then, to both the text and the congregation’s present context. “Preaching that’s not contextual is not preaching…People need to be able to make a connection between the preached word and what is happening in the world round about them. And the one interprets the other. They speak to each other.”

So persuaded by the gospel’s power to impact the present, Storey bristles at the false humility of the church’s preaching.

Pastors seem to think…they are called to keep the peace between the Democrats and Republicans in the congregation, who are usually there on a scale of about 60% Republican, 40% Democrat in a Methodist church. And if I have heard it once, I’ve heard it a thousand times: ‘You know this congregation is pretty divided between Democrats and Republicans, so I have to be very careful what I say.’ That, to me, is a non sequitur. That sentence makes no sense. What does the political affiliation of the people in the pew have anything to do with what he says? Surely that is the last thing that should bother him. He should be interested in what God says, and where Jesus’ affiliation is at any given moment.

Storey believes what he calls “genuine Christianity” in America has squandered its message by wrapping it in the flag, domesticating its radical message, and surrendering space in the public square to warped forms of Christianity. These problems have led the church to relegate core strands of its mission and to abandon the poor and working classes. “It’s a deep, profound tragedy that it had to be the Communist Workers Party

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52 Storey, Personal interview.
53 Storey, Personal interview.
who came to Greensboro to stand for the people who were losing their jobs. Why were the churches not there? That’s the hard question that has to be faced.”

Storey preached in Greensboro from one verse of Scripture, Isaiah 42:9: See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.” He addressed his message, entitled, “God’s Peacemakers,” to the Faith, Prayer and Reconciliation Service at First Baptist Church on 10 April 2005. The GTRC participated in the service as a central part of its focus. “It was a big event,” Storey remembers, “with drama, interracial groups of kids performing… it was a serious attempt to bring the community together.” And, he noted, “I was pretty amazed that it was in the white Baptist church in that town, which I think took a bit of courage on the part of the pastor of that church.”

The service came just a few months before the GTRC began its first round of public hearings, on 15 July 2005, which were entitled “What Brought Us to November 3, 1979?”

Typical of his style, Storey’s sermon is forthright and compelling, full of stories and examples, and drawn directly from Scripture while being deeply contextual. He begins by noting his desire to speak about all people of faith being God’s Peacemakers, committed to the ministry of reconciliation. Wherever there are people “praying, teaching, working, struggling, negotiating, mediating, marching…and suffering” in order

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54 Storey, Personal interview.
55 Storey, Personal interview.
56 Storey, Personal interview. The pastor to which he is referring is the Rev. Dr. Ken Massey, former senior minister of First Baptist Church, Greensboro. In his newsletter articles leading up to the event, Massey writes, “The purpose of this gathering will be to call people of faith to prayer and participation in community reconciliation according to their own faith tradition. No one is going to ask us [First Baptist, Greensboro] to approach reconciliation like Jews or Muslims. They will pray and participate in their own unique way. We will do so in a way that honors Jesus (I hope).” Manuscript in my possession.
to “cross terrible divides that are tearing the world apart,” that is where God’s Peacemakers are. These peacemakers are urgently needed because “there is a disease in the human bloodstream (an addiction really), that poisons the human soul…We are addicted to division.”

Storey narrows his focus to his own Christian convictions, stating clearly that his “own faith is unequivocal…that in the life and death of Christ, God was busy making enemies into friends, and that God has entrusted us with that same ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).” For Christians, “it is not a matter of choice, it is non negotiable: reconciliation is an obligation. We do it out of obedience, we do it for the sake of the world, but we also do it because unless we do, we become sick in our souls.” Reconciliation is also more than tolerance. “Tolerance is when we hold on to our prejudices and resentments, but don’t speak of them publicly anymore, hiding them under a thin layer of civility…God surely has a more compelling dream for humankind.”

He offers six points to the congregation, which he calls “non-negotiable steps—or objectives—we must include for reconciliation to have a chance.”57 The first is to “acknowledge each other’s permanency.” That is, we must respect our opponents’ presence, and include them in the solution. He quotes the late Percy Qoboza, who once said, “If there is a bloodbath in South Africa, what will be left afterward? A majority of blacks and a minority of whites who will have to work out how to live together. That’s what we have right now, so why don’t we sit down now and avoid the bloodbath?”

57 “God’s Peacemakers,” Sermon by Peter Storey (First Baptist Church, Greensboro, NC: 10 April 2005) manuscript in my possession. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent Storey quotes refer to this sermon.
Africa’s first breakthrough in the struggle against apartheid was a “refusal to leave anybody out.”

Second, there must be a “prime mover,” someone with enough courage to interrupt the status quo. Storey recalls a particular individual who risked his life to ask a question in the presence of his enemies:

With every killing the cycle of violence was ratcheted up, until one man took a radical step: a humble Zulu mineworker walked into the barricaded hostel of his Xhosa enemies, and said, “I know you will kill me, but listen to this one question before you do: how many more must die?” His courage touched his enemies to such an extent that they not only spared him, but one of their leaders offered to join him in seeking out a church leader…to begin a peace initiative that ended that terrible slaughter.

Third, he says, “the parties must engage.” Reconciliation can only happen in person, not at a distance. It may begin with something as simple as two people in church, divided from one another for some reason, but choosing to pass the peace during worship. He then recalled how “very stiff and distant” the initial meetings were between representatives of anti-apartheid churches and the Dutch Reformed Church, which had supported apartheid. As they addressed their grievances with one another, the conference “became a remarkable experience of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. It set the atmosphere that would enable us to launch the National Peace Accord that saved South Africa from civil war.”

Fourth, “the truth must be told.” And this search for truth must seek not to bring retribution but healing. “There are some deeds of the past that lie buried like toxic waste deep in our collective memories. Unless we deal with those burial sites, the toxins will leak to the surface bit by bit over the years, allowing the past to poison the future.”
Storey acknowledges how frightening it might be to tell one another the truth. This may require recognizing, respecting, and reverencing the suffering of those we have harmed.

“It starts when we say, ‘Yes, this is what happened.’”

The fifth point asserts the importance of justice. Quoting Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Storey says, “How can I reconcile with you when your foot is on my neck?” Yet, he clarifies that this justice is not about retribution, but restitution. The sign that we have transcended sentimentality is the moment we “sincerely look to changing those circumstances that hurt people and harmed relationships.”

Finally, he says, we must make space for newness. And here is where Storey’s theology of reconciliation comes into a more complete view. This “new thing” that happens is the reconciliation of God, and it wells up to affect change within each one of us. He concludes with the stirring example of his meeting Roelf Meyer, former minister of police in South Africa’s apartheid government, during a pilgrimage through Alabama with other civil rights leaders. “One afternoon, we South Africans spoke to the group and Roelf Meyer asked to go first. This is what he said:

I knew that we were travelling in the wrong direction, and I knew that would have to change. I just didn’t realize how much I would have to change. I didn’t change until I realized that it was not just my mind that was involved – I had to reach down deep inside to my soul. That’s where it had to happen.

Storey’s sermon asks citizens gathered in First Baptist Church from all over Greensboro to narrate their reconciling aims theologically, and to envision the GTRC’s work as having its origins in the mind of a God who entrusts to them the risky but rewarding work of peacemaking. With reconciling words, and a genuine concern to seek
the peace of the city, Storey lit a candle in the darkness. By enumerating the elements necessary for reconciliation, he offered “everyone with ears to hear” a lens through which to discern God’s dream for their city. He did so with a uniquely Christian language, though without a hint of arrogance. This pastor proclaimed the gifts of the gospel—as Jesus did—to disciples gathered closely around him, but also to those sitting in close proximity who might follow him—or might not. For the hardest work of all still lay before the GTRC, from listening to testimonies and reflecting on their findings, to writing a final report that would be distributed throughout the city.

Other than Nelson Johnson, Zeb “Z” Holler was the local preacher most involved in the creation and the success of the GTRC. As retired pastor of Presbyterian Church of the Covenant in Greensboro, and co-founder of the Beloved Community Center, Holler was a trusted voice for both black and white Christians throughout the city. He served as co-chair of the GTCRP, through which the commissioners of the GTRC were selected, and remained an outspoken voice in the media as the Commission’s work progressed. In 2010, Holler published a collection of his sermons preached over four decades of ministry. Close study of these sermons reveals that Holler—a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, with a Ph.D. in Biblical Criticism from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland—is a penetrating exegete of Scripture. His sermons also reveal a man who transcends categories. He crashes through the tired paradigms of “liberal” and “conservative.” Just as one begins to think he may be a dyed-in-the-wool liberation theologian, he suddenly morphs into an orthodox Trinitarian, or an expository or narrative preacher.
The most striking characteristic of his preaching, one that distinguishes him from so many preachers of this age, is that his primary subject is the God of Jesus Christ. Wherever one hears Holler utter the predicate, one has most likely just heard “God” or “Jesus” as the subject. Holler tends to move out of God’s way, to let God speak on God’s own terms. He offers no “points” or “principles for living.” He does not make a habit of crafting catchy introductions. Holler’s preaching will jar those more accustomed to hearing preachers assess their psychological health, or probe the depths of the human condition. He is not at all interested in cheering people on as they try to “make a difference.” He is a theologically grounded preacher, with an acute knowledge of church history and doctrine, and a deep conviction that the gospel is a fundamentally subversive message.

A quick scan of his sermon titles in the volume of his collected sermons quickly dispels any doubts about whether Holler is the type of preacher mainly interested in placating the congregation. The following headings are representative: “Jesus Enrages the Home Folks,” “Jesus’ Tough Love,” “A Call to Live Jesus’ ‘Impossible Possibility,’” “A Prince of Peace Who Disturbs Our Peace,” and “A Vulnerable, Suffering God.” Holler preaches costly discipleship with no apologies. As Johnson, his longtime friend and colleague, remarks in the foreword, these sermons “engage the raw edges of life, including the many faces of our inhumanity toward one another.”

stewardship; sharing wealth; adventurous, risky discipleship; and attending to the church’s resources of prayer, Scripture-reading, and fellowship. The Gospels figure prominently in his text selections, though they are often coupled with Old Testament texts. He tends to gravitate to Old Testament Prophets and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Interestingly, one of Holler’s most powerful “sermons” came in the form of a letter promoting support for the GTRC, which was distributed as a flyer for worship bulletins in churches across the city. Entitled, *A Plea to the Christian Churches of Greensboro*, and written on behalf of the GTCRP, Holler urges Greensboro Christians to give their “confidence, respect, and full cooperation,” as well as their “full and enthusiastic support” to the GTRC.\footnote{Ibid., 130-31. The document is also listed as “Appendix 3.”} Acknowledging the suspicions and unresolved anger of many in the community after November 3, he appeals to Matthew 5:25-26: “Settle matters quickly with your adversary.” Showing solidarity with his neighbor’s concerns, he includes himself in the first-person-plural address,

> We blamed the Communist organizers of the rally, blamed the Klan-Nazi group who did the killing, blamed Greensboro’s Police and officialdom for failing to prevent it, blamed the media for their reporting of it. But as a community we have not troubled ourselves to get to the full truth in and behind the confusing stories that still surround those shootings, dividing us from our neighbors and weakening trust in our public institutions.\footnote{Ibid., 131.}

Before concluding with a moving invitation to “offer God the gift of a community healed of a painful episode of its past,” Holler introduces another key passage of the Matthean text (vv. 23-24),

> Should followers of Jesus pass up this unique opportunity to learn the truth that just might set us all free from our prisons of distrust? Listen to Jesus again: ‘If
you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.’

This letter is indicative not only of Holler’s theological concerns about reconciliation and loving enemies, it is also a typical example of the way many local pastors interacted with the purposes of the GTRC—through sermons, newsletter articles, Bible studies, flyers, hosting GTRC workshops, and attending GTRC functions. This particular letter shows how Holler combines his passion for costly discipleship with his care for the city he has called home since July 1979.

The final sermon in Holler’s book was preached in September 2009 to the congregation at Faith Community Church, which gathers on the site of the Beloved Community Center. The sermon provides a comprehensive look at the theological underpinnings of the Beloved Community Center’s ministry as it has tried to build on the GTRC’s legacy. Entitled, “God Frees Us for Beloved Community,” and based on Exodus 3:1-12, it is the sermon in the collection that most directly addresses the Greensboro Massacre. Impressive in its biblical scope, Holler draws from texts across the canon, from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The sermon is indicative of Holler’s preaching style and substance. In it, he names the powers that imprison people “Pharaoh,” while naming God the great “Liberator,” who frees both the powerless and the privileged to befriend one another in a mutual pursuit of beloved community.
First, Holler assumes Pharaoh’s voice, and delivers the bad news. “I will not let them go!” Pharaoh says, “speaking from the perspective of the powers of this world.” Pharaoh’s response is typical of the powerful “to the pleas and demands of the troublesome Moses types who…rattle society’s chains.”

This NO! of the powerful may be accompanied by brutal repression. Or lacking the stomach for that, the powerful may conspire with thugs who are willing to do their dirty work for them, as some of our Greensboro authorities conspired with the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis in 1979 to bring about the massacre of five labor organizers working with laborers in the textile mills.

Pharaoh epitomizes the “spirit of those determined to dominate others. But the “strange God who got Moses’ attention…speaks in a very different spirit.” This God is “the eternal enemy of every form of slavery and oppression.” Holler identifies the oppressed as the “victims of slavery in our nation’s past and of continuing racism in its present,” as well as “the children abroad who make our clothes and the migrants who raise the crops that nourish us.”

This Liberator God does not out-maneuver Pharaoh at his own game, but “deeply feels the pain of all the oppressed.” This God’s “NO”—given in the Ten Commandments—is not a burdensome requirement, but the “indispensable basis for life as God would have it lived.” Providing Scriptural support at each point, Holler describes the Commandments, together with humane laws “unparalleled in the ancient world,” Sabbath instructions, and the law of Jubilee, as “generous provisions” from the “Spirit of Israel’s Liberator God.” These provisions stand in stark contrast “to the world of competition and domination” in which we live today. “We are always tempted, and

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Ibid., 119. Subsequent quotes will be from the sermon, 119-25.
regularly encouraged, to use our personal gifts and opportunities for our own self-advancement and pleasure, at the expense of those who are disadvantaged.” Our temptations block “the fullness of life that God intends for us all.” The powers of the modern world have limited our choices to “community or catastrophe, life or death.”

The good news is that Jesus embodied God’s passion to liberate all people from Pharaoh’s spirit of domination and exploitation. Jesus “came on the scene in the Spirit of God who told Moses…‘I know their sufferings, and I have come to deliver them.” Holler’s love of the common folk then shines through, as he illuminates the kinds of people with whom Jesus most closely identified. “In his teaching, Jesus drew on the experience of farm workers, slaves, day laborers, and beggars.” Jesus “couched his stories” in the lives of farmers, children at play, women living lives of courage and compassion in male-dominated society. He “captured the realities of the experience of these ordinary, mostly forgotten or unappreciated folk as windows into, and parables of, the reality of God’s presence and purpose at work in the world.”

Holler proclaims Jesus as the only alternative to Pharaoh’s way of domination, and describes Jesus as “allying” not with the “‘great ones’ of his society,” but with those most “vulnerable to the uncertainties of nature and the whims of the masters and employers who dominated their lives.” But then Holler makes a homiletical turn toward both “the least of these” and those the society privileges or deems gifted. Matthew 25:40 is “Jesus’ final verdict as the Son of the liberating God of all.” So, though God sides with the “least,” Jesus reveals that “the final significance of our lives will depend on whether we use our gifts and goods in the healing of the human community, or for our own
pleasure and profit and to curry favor with those who can return our favors.” God is not opposed to the gifted and privileged. In Jesus, he was present to the struggling masses as well as to the powerful and privileged. God refuses to give up on any of them. In the sermon’s most comprehensive statement, Holler claims,

God’s desire, as Jesus embodied it, was a community in which there were no first- and second-class members, and no expendables—a beloved and loving community in which all were equally loved by God, and all equally called to love God and to love and forgive one another as freely and generously as they themselves had been loved and forgiven.

God’s call goes far beyond compelling us to be heroes who “on occasion forsake our comfort zones and offer handouts and used clothing and kindly smiles to those whom we deem worthy of our charity or our tax dollars or our friendship.” No, God calls us to be “dangerously free” to “follow in Jesus’ way of identification with all who are captives in our time”—those without work, immigrants, those with poor wages, the sick children of poverty, drug addicts, homeless, and the growing numbers of prisoners. And not only those, but we are also to identify as Jesus did with “those who are addicted to their own privilege and power, blinded by greed and by fear of loss of their wealth and status and power over others.” Holler concludes that God’s desire is to “free us all” to be a “beloved human community.” There is no other way to this community of radical freedom than through serving “our rabble-rousing, liberating God, who will be with us all the way.”

Holler’s sermon is an artful articulation of God’s vision for humanity. We are freed to serve a God who shows no partiality. The rich and powerful are not God’s enemies. Slavery and oppression are. Those society leaves behind are not the only ones
to whom good news is given. But they are the ones with whom God calls us to identify if we would come to see and know Jesus Christ. Beloved community is ultimately not up to us. It is God’s gift to those willing to accept it as gift. The sermon moves from bad news to good news, from death to life. It reveals to us the world as Pharaoh would like it to remain, but goes even further in describing the world around us as God will ultimately have it. It is a world that breaks through in the present wherever human beings give themselves to one another as God has given himself to us in Jesus Christ.

To be sure, things always go missing from the printed versions of sermons. Looking strictly at this volume, it appears Holler’s sermons would not suffer to include more rhetorical flourish—readers may find themselves at certain points wishing for a dash of delectare. Many of his points could be strengthened by shorter explanations. At times, one gets the feeling that a dour Calvinist still lurks in the shadows of Holler’s homiletical imagination. Holler might benefit from the poetic rhythms of speech, the rhetorical flair, and “musicality”62 of the African-American preachers he has befriended during his ministry in Greensboro. Nevertheless, it is to Holler’s great credit that no one can blame him for shying away from telling the truth of Jesus Christ. If Holler misses an opportunity to delight us, he makes up for it with prophetic vision. For in his refreshing originality, he discloses the reconciling word in all its power. If you come to the end of a Z Holler sermon and your imagination about God has not changed, if your heart has not

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been softened, if your mind is still as made up as it was, if you still think your enemy is your enemy, you must not have been listening.

### 5.5 Conclusion

Douglas Hall’s damning critique of modernity, with its empty promises of efficiency and technique, concludes by suggesting a way into the darkness. “To know the darkness and to name it, then, would be the special task of the people of the cross in *this* society.”63 The darkness to which Christians must bear particular witness is that which “robs individuals and groups of their *humanitas*, while seeming to give them the very substance of the Good Life.”64 But here arises the “final temptation to a theology of glory,” whereby Christians endeavor to retain some vestige of triumphalism by using theology to reassert their superiority. Our attempts to remember who Jesus is can never give us the clarity of vision necessary to usher in the kingdom of God. The temptation remains to serve humanity by using an image of Christ that only accords with our own “absolute vision, definitive and unassailable.”65 We forget that,

> In our remembering, too, we are beggars. There is nothing left us but the promise, from Jesus’ side, that he will be present in our remembering. It is the promise from the cross to that first beggar, that to this remembering there would correspond a remembering from eternity.66

Hall would have us place our hope in the cross, where the “‘Peace! Peace!’ of expectations unsullied by contradictory experience” cannot substitute for “the meeting

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 257.
66 Ibid.
place of the real expectations and the real experiences of people.” Faith in this cross begins with “the courage to have failed,” the courage to name the darkness and one’s place in it.

My hope in this chapter has been to let those preachers speak who have been so faithful and courageous. More specifically, I have tried to show how the nature of their language and theology has been constitutive for reconciliation in Greensboro. Some critics of the GTRC have tried to argue that it was merely a “Truth Commission” that failed to pursue any actual reconciliation, that the proceedings were biased toward victims and survivors, and that many of the GTRC’s proceedings were tarnished by the maudlin spectacle of “carefully edited” video montages from November 3. Elizabeth Wheaton, a CWP critic who testified before the Commission, argues that the Andrus Fund’s own researchers “found that the effects of the truth and reconciliation process on Greensboro—its people, its government, its institutions—were negligible at best.”

Wheaton, of course, has her own biases, which one can quickly discern in the disparaging tone of her historical accounts of those who died on November 3. More importantly, Wheaton is indicative of those who do not understand that reconciliation is a journey, one that takes far longer than a few years to complete. It is only ever truly complete in God’s own time. But it cannot begin apart from saying, in Storey’s words, “Yes, this is what happened.”

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67 Ibid., 261.
68 Wheaton, GREENKIL, 308-09. The Andrus Fund was a major donor to the GTRC, giving nearly one million dollars to their efforts over a period of five years.
69 See Wheaton, GREENKIL, 9-71.
Several things have escaped Wheaton’s meticulous attention to detail. As Joseph Frierson, a staff coordinator for the LTF, explained,

> We called upon seventeen different organizations to appoint someone from their organization to go through all the names that would come from the community for those who were being nominated to serve on the commission…This entire work had truth, and community, and reconciliation tied through it. Because when you’re sitting at a table trying to agree on a document, and you’ve got 35 or 40 other people who believe that it should say this, and this, and that, and now we have to talk about why it should say this and that, versus what I feel, reconciliation is happening. Truth is happening.\(^{70}\)

GTRC Commissioner Patricia Clark confirmed this dynamic.

> There was major camaraderie with the other commissioners. Things would get tense, and I don’t think there was a time when at least one person on the commission wasn’t ready to walk away. But we made a commitment to stay there for each other, so we really worked hard to work it out. I think that was helpful. Just going through the process of saying, ‘Okay, this is really, really hard, but we’re not going to give up,’ was also a model that we wanted to lift up. You know, things get difficult, but you don’t give up.\(^{71}\)

Not only did the Commissioners’ relationships epitomize reconciliation in their own sometimes-heated discussions. Former CWP member, Nelson Johnson, has continuously sought to communicate and reconcile with Klan and Nazi participants in the massacre since the mid-1980’s. In 1987, after learning of the KKK’s plan to march in Greensboro for the first time since 1979, Johnson “reached a spiritual, faith decision that I was going to find these Klan guys and ask them not to march in Greensboro.”\(^{72}\) After seeking spiritual guidance from two seminary professors, both of whom discouraged him, Johnson received blessings from two friends, and Rev. Otis Hairston, who encouraged him. He typed up a statement, where he quoted from Matthew that “we love our enemies,

\(^{70}\) Joseph Frierson, Personal interview, 24 January 2014.
\(^{71}\) Patricia Clark, Personal interview, 6 November 2013.
\(^{72}\) Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors’ Eyes*, 341. Subsequent quotes of Johnson are from the passage beginning on 341.
pray for those who despitefully use us,” and then tracked down the home of KKK leader, Carroll Crawford. Ignoring a sign that read, “No niggers allowed,” Johnson approached Crawford’s trailer. After no one answered the knock, he slid the note under his door.

Johnson later called Crawford, and after introducing himself, was greeted with a slew of cursing: “Not that goddammed communist!” Johnson tried to calm him. “Go and look under your front door,” he said. Crawford replied, “You’ve been to my goddammed house?” “Yes,” Johnson said, “and I left a word for you.”

They managed to have a conversation, where it was decided Johnson and Crawford would meet in person. As Johnson drove to the rendezvous point, a service station off of the interstate, “I got nervous, so I stopped and prayed…Once I prayed, I felt okay.” Arriving at the station, Nelson met Crawford, and agreed to follow him and his cohorts, eventually ending up at a Holiday Inn in Salisbury, NC. Virgil Griffin, a leader in the 1979 Klan caravan, was among them.

Johnson asked to pray with them, to which they responded, “Pray as much as you want.” He did, and, after enduring another episode of cursing from Crawford, talked back and forth with the Klan members on the subjects of race and economics. Finally, Johnson asked them, “Will y’all not march in Greensboro?” They said, “Actually we don’t really want to march in Greensboro.” Johnson believes the conversation changed their minds. “But they went on to say that they couldn’t go back and tell the rest of the Klan they weren’t coming because Nelson Johnson persuaded them not to.” They could not commit to canceling the march, but they “gave their word that even if they marched in Greensboro, they wouldn’t start anything violent.”
At different points in their meeting, both Johnson and the Klan were afraid the other might be leading them into an ambush. Before they departed the Inn, the Klansmen asked Johnson if he knew why he was sitting in front of the motel window. He said, “I don’t know.” They said, “Because we got men inside several rooms, on the second floor, and they have a bead on you.” Johnson thanked them for telling him, and asked if they saw any potential for a relationship based on things they could agree on. The Klansmen said they “were open to talk.”

After all, what better place to begin a reconciling journey than in the frame of a shotgun scope?
CONCLUSION

One of the effects of the reconciling word in Greensboro has been to give people hope. So I will conclude this dissertation by offering hopeful words about the Beloved Community Center’s (BCC) work in Greensboro, and by inviting two ministers who have led the BCC to have the last word. Through their dedication to working for reconciliation over an extended period of time, and their love of both neighbors and enemies, Nelson Johnson and Joseph Frierson—together with many colleagues—have helped establish an oasis of peace in the heart of an American city. As the BCC’s mission explains, they exist “to foster and model a spirit of community based on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of a ‘Beloved Community.’ In this spirit, we envision and work toward social and economic relations that affirm and realize the equality dignity, worth and potential of every person.”1

Local pastor, Frank Dew, believes the BCC is the most significant bearer of the GTRC’s legacy. “It has been a resource for the community in pushing for dialogue over a variety of issues, from educational issues to issues about poor people, to issues about police.”2 Dew, who continues to pastor the multi-racial church he founded in Greensboro in the 1980s, believes the BCC “has been a real gift to Greensboro in that they have continued to raise social justice questions that I’m not sure would have been raised had

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1 Beloved Community Center, website, http://www.belovedcommunitycenter.org/, accessed 8 March 2014. In December 2013, Joseph Frierson left the BCC in a formal capacity to join the pastoral staff of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Greensboro. He continues to work in partnership with the BCC.
2 Frank Dew, Personal interview, 16 December 2013. Subsequent quotations of Dew are from this interview.
they not been present.” Retired Episcopal Bishop, Alfred “Chip” Marble, believes the BCC is a major part Greensboro’s potential to be a model of reconciliation for others.

Greensboro, with its history, the sit-in movement, all that happened here—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission…When I moved to Greensboro, I was blown away with the multiple peoples from all walks of life, and nationalities, ethnicities, races. I was blown away. And I had moved from Mississippi, which was primarily black and white, but also beginning to be brown, black, and white, with the Hispanic expansion in Mississippi. But Greensboro had, I felt—and feel—a possibility of being a model city for the rest of the nation, for respecting the dignity of every human being, from whatever walk of life…And there are others who would hold up that vision as well.³

Here, I will highlight Johnson and Frierson in order to show how the BCC pursues its mission in Greensboro with a very intentional approach to loving enemies. When you visit the BCC, you immediately notice its location on the edge of what was once the most dilapidated and neglected part of downtown Greensboro. Some of the buildings in the surrounding neighborhood remain so, but others have been renovated.

“This area has been changed,” Johnson says.

When we got here about 18 years ago it was the most beat up area in town. Right behind us where all those new apartments are was just the slummiest housing, and addiction was a big problem. I was out there nailing a fence one day and I was talking with a guy. When I went back to get my hammer somebody had stolen my hammer. And I thought, ‘This is going to be a rough little place.’

Yet, Johnson was not cowed. He and his wife, Joyce, together with a dozen other staff members, area clergy, and community volunteers, decided to continue their work on the site. The BCC is also home to Faith Community Church, a non-denominational church Johnson serves as pastor. In any given week at the Center, one will find people gathering for worship; tilling the community garden; eating in the Homeless Hospitality

³ Alfred Marble, Personal interview, 7 February 2014.
kitchen (which feeds 200 people, four mornings a week); working on civic issues such as police accountability, energy efficient housing, voting rights, labor rights, and public education; and doing crisis ministry. None of this would have happened without Johnson’s original determination to see the local people as potential friends.

I had a decision to make…I’d come up here to get a book—and people had broken in the church and were cooking eggs. When I came, they ran out. I ran and caught up with them—though I’m out of shape—and I brought ‘em back. I said, ‘Why do you break my window and come in like this?’ One said, ‘Because we were hungry.’ I said, ‘You know that I have worked to try to feed people and I would’ve given you some eggs.’ He wanted to know whether I was going to take him to court or not. I said, ‘Well, I’m not going to discuss that.’ But the short version of this is that the choice I had was to make a decision that these people weren’t enemies. And I could snapshot them, take a picture of them right there. And if I freeze them in that frame, they would be permanently that to me. I think that actually negates potentiality. And it allows actuality, which is a thin layer of what we can be, to override potentiality…We are capable of being the meanest, evil, no-caring people. On the other hand we are capable of being enormously kind and generous. The choice is: which one do I want you to be? And therefore, I have to sow to that one. I’ve worked it out that way, which allows me to be an agent of reconciliation without trying to compute too much…I know who I think you are. I know who I want you to be. And that actually anchors me. And I know that because of Jesus Christ.

Johnson eloquently articulates who he believes “the enemy” is from a theological perspective:

I’m not thoroughly convinced that there is an enemy in the way we talk about enemies. And I say that cautiously because a lot of bad stuff, ugly stuff, happens, and we are agents of it. If you look at the kind of pattern that I see in history…there emerges out of a broken heart a need for affirmation. And that affirmation often comes over against somebody else. If you take the history of this country, for example, we can go down the road about who we are against at any given point. And actually when you win your againstness—we humans celebrate our humanity, what we think is our humanity. We throw confetti out the window, have bands and everything else. And what we’re doing, I’m afraid, is scapegoating somebody in order to give some sense of affirmation to our injured self. If there’s not somebody treating us wrong, if we’re injured like that we will invent somebody to be against. That is a spirit. And I think [St.] Paul talks about it: we’re not fighting flesh and blood, but we are fighting something. And it is that spirit in the universe, which gets to be a mystery to me, that
indwells in us and can indwell in us. But my deepest conviction is that it does not override the initial stamp—the image of God. Therefore, most of us live our lives with a false identity. We think we are this person or that person. And our stamp contradicts that. But actually as we think, we begin to behave that way. So the enemy is that spirit that distorts and confuses and divides. And it is that that must be engaged. It also constructs systems and methodologies that affirm the being of that. But my faith is that we are captives of that, but we are not that. We are not primarily that. So I use the term enemy cautiously. I don’t like to call people my enemy.

Johnson’s colleague and mentee, Joe Frierson, was hired to work at the BCC just after his graduation from NCA&T University. He admits now how naïve he was about the job he was given to convince the community to pursue truth and reconciliation. “We did a lot of outreach work to people who were possibly negative to the process, or spoke against the process, didn’t want to see it, felt as if we were going backwards, that this was not progressive,” he said. He had no idea people in Ireland, Peru, and South Africa were watching and waiting to see what might happen in Greensboro.

Frierson has learned much about loving enemies from his mentor. Citing Paul’s language of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians, he calls Jesus the “world’s greatest reconciler.” Hence,

I can’t look at the police officer as my enemy. I can’t look at the city council member who voted against the Truth and Reconciliation creation process as my enemy. I must see all of these people as my friend and my neighbor. And I must not see myself in a lofty situation, as if I know it all. I believe we all have to understand and share the truth together. So we must hear each other’s realities, and passionately lay hold of what God has gifted in all of us.

Over the last decade, Frierson has risen as a trusted pastor and community leader. He is married, and intends to raise children in Greensboro. He is devoted to this

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4 Joseph Frierson, Personal interview, 24 January 2014. Subsequent quotations of Frierson are from this interview.
particular place. He has a solid grasp of its history, its strengths and its weakness, its tendency to mask certain realities with “civilities.”

Greensboro’s a city that really loves its image, and we’re trying to boost our image so that we’re attractive to businesses and attractive to different commercial projects and aspirations, and trying to keep people here…So Greensboro has always said, ‘No, we’re good. Jobs are coming.’ And in order for it to say that, Greensboro thinks that we must leave those sleeping giants of the past alone, and we must push those things aside. I believe businesses want to be in a city where people are able to talk about the issues. I believe businesses want to thrive in a city where people are talking about the hardest issues as well as the easiest of issues. I believe that is attractive. So we’ve got to begin to change the way that we see culture. We’ve got to change the way that we see business. And…I think we can be that city. We can be a model city.

Frierson also believes in non-violent, civil disobedience. “There comes a time when we must use our bodies as a living sacrifice.” As he has participated in community efforts with other clergy to draw attention to police accountability, he has joined their common refrain: “We are willing to use our bodies as a representation for plight and plea for this work.”

There is a certain level of joy—I can’t even describe it really—of knowing that you are doing something for righteousness’ sake, and that a jail cell doesn’t scare you; a judge doesn’t scare you; a police officer doesn’t scare you. And I think that’s the place where the Apostles had to be, where they actually saw the sufferings of the present time were not able to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed. And I am grateful—not in a prideful way—to say that I felt as though we were doing the work of Christ.

During my time conducting interviews and attending worship services in Greensboro, I have gained a renewed sense of hope, not only for this city, but also for the church catholic. I have wondered if Bonhoeffer felt the same thing during his visit to America, when he claimed that “nowhere is revival preaching so vigorous and so wide-spread” as among the African-American churches. In Greensboro, though, the vibrancy
of Christian fellowship transcends race and class. It did with those who participated in the GTRC, and continues in many of the relationships between those who care about the GTRC’s legacy. The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be regarded as an event that provided some closure for the many victims of the Massacre, and, to some extent, closure for the entire city. But even more, the GTRC should be seen as a new beginning, as a model of how human beings can seek peace with one another, and as a sign of things yet to come. That Christian preaching was one of the GTRC’s most significant catalysts is reason enough for hope. Greensboro’s preachers have served as remarkable witnesses to the power of God’s reconciliation in Christ. They have often done so at extreme risk to themselves. Preachers like Johnson and Frierson, Cardes Brown, Mazie Ferguson, Z Holler, Otis Hairston, Gregory Headen, Clarence Shuford, Ken Massey, and Frank Dew, as well as young preachers like Wesley Morris and Irvin David Allen, have all preached the reconciling word, and for their efforts, Greensboro is doing a new thing for those who perceive it (Isaiah 43:19).

One bitterly cold January morning, as I drove to an interview, I stopped near East Lee Street to view the site of the Greensboro Massacre. There, at what is now the intersection of Everett and Bingham Streets, are new houses and a new community center. An open field extends westward from the intersection on the other side—room
for even more new construction. A mile in the distance, a single, industrial smokestack rises above the site as if to taunt it.

The Morningside Homes are gone. Also missing is the only beautiful, old tree that survived the new construction on the far corner lot, where Sandi Smith was shot in the temple. There was no reason to remove it, but it, too, is gone. Other than the streets themselves, there is no point of reference to connect the present with the past. There are no memorials, no markers, no ribbons, and no flowers. One would never know anything notable happened here. The GTRC recommended the city construct a memorial on this site—a simple task, it would seem. But there is only the gilding of new landscaping.

I am reminded of something Wendell Berry wrote:

This is a nation where
No lovely thing can last.
We trample, gouge, and blast;
The people leave the land;
The land flows to the sea.
Fine men and women die,
The fine old houses fall,
The fine old trees come down:
Highway and shopping mall
Still guarantee the right
And liberty to be
A peaceful murderer,
A murderous worshipper,
A slender glutton, or
A healthy whore. Forgiving
No enemy, forgiven
By none, we live the death
Of liberty, become
what we have feared to be.⁵

⁵ Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013) 105-06.
Approaching the sidewalk, I noticed several of the new trees planted by the roadside were strangely twisted. They were grotesquely different than the others planted with them, as if someone had cursed them. I thought of the blood crying out of the ground in Genesis, and Cain asking, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what it must have been like to stand here on November 3, 1979. But that was too much for me.

Instead, I bowed my head and prayed, giving thanks that this cold silence would not have the last word.
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**STATEMENTS TO THE GREENSBORO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**


PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE & INTERVIEWS
Cynthia Brown. Personal interview. 8 July 2012.

Patricia Clark. Personal interview. 6 November 2013.
Frank Dew. Personal interview. 16 December 2013.
Gregory Headen, Telephone conversation, 19 March 2013.
Alfred Marble. Personal interview. 7 February 2014.
Wesley Morris. Personal interview. 31 January 2014.
J. Herbert Nelson, II. Telephone conversation. 28 February 2014.
Clarence Shuford. Personal interview. 8 January 2014.
Peter Storey. Personal interview. 13 November 2013.

COURT CASES


DOCUMENTARY FILMS


**Biography**

Austin McIver Dennis was born in Henderson, NC, in 1979. He attended Vance County Schools, and was a member of First Baptist Church, where he was baptized, discerned a call to preach, and was ordained to gospel ministry. He graduated in 2001 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. From there, he went to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, where he received his Master of Divinity in 2004. At Richmond, he was awarded the John Grover Scales Preaching Award in 2003, and the John and Charlotte Canning Pastoral Ministry Award in 2004. After serving as pastor of First Baptist Church, Mt. Gilead, NC, (2004-2009) he began his studies at Duke Divinity School, receiving the Doctor of Theology degree in May of 2014. In addition to the Duke Th.D. Fellowship, he received grants from The Blackwell Fund of First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem; The Jim and Nell Briley Scholarship Fund of First Baptist Church, Henderson, NC; The Helen Hutchinson Scholarship Fund, Albemarle, NC; and the American Baptist Doctoral Grant. He lives in Durham, NC, with his wife and two sons.