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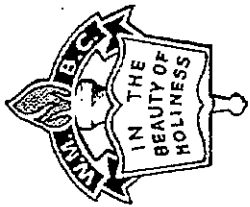
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50 Years



**ALDERSGATE
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THE DIVINE *APATHEIA* AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

by

Glen O'Brien

I. Introduction

The concept of the divine *apatheia*, or the impassibility of God, is thought by many to be a genuine problem in light of the existence of evil in the world. In the context of human suffering, believers have often drawn comfort from the belief that God, in some sense suffers with them, shares in their experiences of sorrow and loss, and is thus able to empathize with them in their weakness. The incarnation of God the Son who takes upon himself all of the limitations of frail humanity, and who, through his death on the cross, enters into human suffering, is often the *locus* of this conviction. And yet a tension becomes apparent when we place this idea of a suffering God, alongside of the classical Christian doctrine of the divine impassibility. If God is a Being whose essence equals his existence, a Being in whom there is no contingency, no change, no potentiality, how can we say in any coherent sense, that he suffers with his creation, that he experiences its pain? Even more unsettling is the question of whether God can be said to be a God of love, if he is incapable of passion.

In this paper, I would like to survey the history of this problem, taking note of some of its proposed solutions, indicating the degree to which one may reverently critique the traditional view, while retaining the sovereign freedom of God over his creation. The

charge that the traditional view renders the problem of evil more acute will also be considered.

II. Some Definitions

The word "impassibility" considered in classical theology to be a divine attribute, is derived from the Latin root, *passio*, meaning "suffering." It is the equivalent of the Greek words *pathema*, (παθημα) and *pathos* (παθος).¹ The English word "passion," is often used in reference to inappropriate feelings of strong desire, sometimes with strongly sexual overtones, or in connection with fits of anger and other intense emotional states. This has led to some degree of misunderstanding over its use by many contemporary theologians in reference to God's suffering, pain, sympathy, sorrow, and so on.

Among Greek theologians, the word *απαθεια* ("apatheia") - the negative prefix *α*, denoting "no" or "not" - refers to the inability of God to experience passions of any kind. God experiences "no suffering," "no pain," because to do so would be to be acted upon, and this cannot be said of an Absolute Being. Again, we may be led into misunderstanding through our English usage, where "apathy" means an attitude of careless indifference, and indeed this is how some have conceived of God - as the Unmoved Mover, sitting passionless in the heavens unmoved by the plight of the cosmos.²

Traditional theism has usually denied three types of divine passibility.

- 1) External passibility, or the capacity to be acted upon from without.
- 2) Internal passibility, or the capacity for changing the emotions from within.

¹ *Passio* was used in the Latin Vulgate to translate both of these Greek words.

² I have in mind, both the Platonic "First Cause," and the Deistic "watchmaker."

- 3) Sensational passibility, or the liability to feelings of pleasure and pain caused by the action of another being.³

The question must be asked whether such a portrait of God, as a being without passions of any kind, matches with that found in Holy Scripture.

III. The Biblical Portrait of God

The concept of God as a being without "passions" seems to be at odds with the Old Testament portrayal of God as an active Covenant God creatively and passionately interacting with his people. He loves and hates; grows angry, and is placated in his anger; is jealous and generous; patient and wrathful. Such descriptions are usually thought of as anthropomorphisms - or more technically, in this case, anthropopathisms - ascribing to God human feelings in order to communicate the mystery of his being to fallen creatures, by way of the principle of analogy. They are not to be understood, so it is maintained, as ontological statements about the divine nature itself, but only as accommodations to human weakness.

In the New Testament, and perhaps especially in the doctrine of the Incarnation, we also read of the capacity of God to enter into suffering in his interaction with his creation. According to R.S. Franks, it is "the fundamental New Testament doctrine of God's Fatherhood [which] suggests the very reverse of His impassibility."⁴ Maldwyn Hughes in his early twentieth century study of the atonement, strikes a similar chord, focusing on the love of God as evidence against divine impassibility.

³ F.L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 694. Cited in Warren McWilliams. *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 5.

⁴ R.S. Franks, "Passibility and Impassibility," in James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928) IX: 658, cited in McWilliams, 10.

We must choose whether or not we will accept the Christian revelation that "God is love." If we do, then we must accept the implications of the revelation...It is an entire misuse of words to call God our loving Father, if He is able to view the waywardness and revelation of His children without being moved by grief and pity...It is the very nature of love to suffer when its object suffers loss, whether inflicted by itself or others. If the suffering of God be denied, then Christianity must discover a new terminology, and must obliterate the statement "God is love" from its Scriptures.⁵

How then, given the biblical portrayal of God, did the doctrine of the divine impassability develop in the history of the church's dogmatic reflection?

IV. The History of the Idea of the Divine *Apatheia*

The hellenization of Christianity had earlier been preceded by the hellenization of Judaism, as represented in the work of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (c. 350 BC - 45 AD). Philo has been thought by many to have distorted the biblical concept of Yahweh, the Covenant God of Israel into the Impersonal Absolute of the Greek philosophical schools. However, it is also possible to trace a resistance in Philo to any complete absorption of the biblical God into hellenistic impassibility.⁶

Similarly, the Alexandrian Christology of Clement and Origen may be understood in one of two ways. It may be thought of as a brilliant *tour de force*, enabling the Church, through the hellenization of its message, to convert its "cultured despisers." On

the other hand, it might be conceived to be the ultimate sell-out of simple biblical religion to an alien philosophy, achieved in the name of relevance, but at the cost of truth.⁷

The condemnation of the "Patripassionist" theology in the third century, which disallowed the possibility that God the Father suffered on the Cross, further sent the doctrine of God in the direction of asserting a radical impassibility in the divine being. The orthodox during the period of the great Christological controversies understood that in some sense at least, God, in Christ, had "in some way descended from his blessedness" but they were very cautious about taking this concept too far in an immanentist direction.⁸

But beyond a certain point orthodox theology could not go. It could not make an adequate investigation of Patripassianism, or Monophysitism, to see whether any precious elements of truth might be involved in either heresy. That was not the method of their age, and indeed, in no age, while a struggle is actually taking place, is it easy to appreciate what may be the strong points in an opponent's position.⁹

Augustine defended the impassability of God,¹⁰ and following him the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages, such as Anselm, who maintained that God certainly *appears* compassionate toward us but in his essence feels nothing.¹¹ For Thomas Aquinas, God is *actus purus* ("pure act"). As a being whose essence equals his existence, God is pure act and a being in whom there is no

⁷ An example of the former approach might be Jaroslav Pelikan, of the latter Adolf Harnack.

⁸ J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 175.

⁹ op. cit.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Augustine, *City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods. (New York: Random House, 1950), 263.

¹¹ McWilliams, *The Passion of God*, 13-14.

⁵ Maldwyn Hughes, cited in Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in Thomas V. Morris, ed. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 212.

⁶ Cf. Hallman, Joseph M. *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 23-29.

contingency, thus he may be said to love humanity, but with a passionless love. In Thomist vocabulary, passion may be defined as "receptivity, being acted upon by another."¹² If God is acted upon by another, he is less than the first cause of all existence, and thus, less than God. Aquinas demonstrates the immutability of God in a three-fold fashion.

First...there is some first being, whom we call God; and...this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable.

Second, because everything which is moved, remains as it was in part, and passes away in part; as what is moved from whiteness to blackness, remains the same as to substance; thus in everything which is moved, there is some kind of composition to be found. But...in God there is no composition, for He is altogether simple. Hence it is manifest that God cannot be moved.

Thirdly, because everything which is moved acquires something by its movement, and attains to what it had not attained previously. But since God is infinite, comprehending in Himself all the plenitude of perfection of all being, He cannot acquire anything new, nor extend Himself to anything whereunto He was not extended previously. Hence movement in no way belongs to Him.¹³

Martin Luther developed a strong distaste for the Aristotelian distinctions upon which Aquinas' scholastic theology was based. Through his treatment of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*

¹² Peter Kreeft, ed. *A Summa of the Summa: The Essential Philosophical Passages of St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica Edited and Explained for Beginners*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

(by which there is a direct correlation between the humanity and the divinity of Christ, so that all that was suffered in his human nature, was suffered also in his divine nature), Luther became the first major theologian to challenge the traditional view of the divine impassibility.¹⁴ However, the majority of Protestant reformers affirmed the doctrine in fairly traditional terms, conceiving of God as one who is "without parts and passions" in order to safeguard the divine transcendence.

Joseph Hallman has indicated the manner in which a minority report has been entered on the issue of divine impassibility, even within the classical Christian tradition.¹⁵ He traces instances of orthodox attempts to "adhere to the portrait of the biblical deity as one who suffers and changes."¹⁶ Even the Alexandrians, Clement and Origen, departed from the Greek concept of impassibility and immutability at a number of points.¹⁷ Tertullian (well known for his anti-philosophical dictum, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy?") countered the prevailing neo-Platonism by arguing that God does indeed experience emotions and undergo change.¹⁸ Athanasius resisted the logic of divine immutability that lay behind the Arian rejection of Christ as *homoousios*,¹⁹ and Gregory of Nyssa's Christology posited "infinity on the divine and mutability on the human level."²⁰ Even St. Augustine, whose theology set the Western church on a trajectory of asserting divine immutability and impassibility, was not without a certain emphasis on divine compassion. His *Deus humilis* contrasted sharply with the god of the philosophers who could never have

¹⁴ Cf. Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther*. Translated by Robert C. Schultz. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 197.

¹⁵ See Hallman, Joseph M. *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-93.

become the condescending and humble God of the Incarnation.²¹ Such reminders ought to caution against an overly simplistic view of classical theology as though it were a complete capitulation to the hellenistic spirit of the age. Even those theologians who drew most freely from the great schools of philosophy, were always Christian theologians before they were philosophers, and were thus frequently active in countering those aspects of philosophy they felt to be incommensurate with the biblical system of belief.

J.K. Mozley indicates three principle motives in the traditional doctrine of the divine apatheia.

- 1) The desire to uphold the divine transcendence.
- 2) The concern to uphold the life of God as a perfectly blessed life.
- 3) The dread of an inappropriate anthropomorphism.²²

Modern theological discussion has been less concerned with such issues, taking a radical turn in the opposite direction.

V. Contemporary Theology - "Only the Suffering God Can Help"

In the late nineteenth century, increasing numbers of theologians began to challenge the traditional view of divine impassibility, and the rate of this trend has accelerated into the twentieth century. Daniel Day Williams suggests three reasons.

- 1) The influence of the process philosophy of Charles Hartshorne and Alfred North Whitehead, with its emphasis on God's active involvement with creation.
- 2) The post-World War II biblical theology movement with its understanding of God as actively involved in salvation history.

²¹ Ibid, 123.

²² Mozley, 173.

- 3) Contemporary theologies of the atonement which have taken the cross as the key to an understanding of the being of God as undergoing suffering.²³

Many modern theologians have insisted that in order to make sense of the biblical teaching that God is love, God must in some sense suffer along with his creatures. The way Mozley see the matter, "the introduction of the notion of God's suffering was no adulteration of the true faith through the leaven of un-Christian thinking, but a logical correspondence with the very core of true Christian thought about God."²⁴

Most contemporary theologians of the divine pathos have been concerned with God's response to human suffering, and as such, have been engaged, either implicitly or explicitly, in theodicy. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "God lets himself be pushed out of the world onto the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us....Only the suffering God can help."²⁵

The Korean theologian, Jung Young Lee,²⁶ in his doctoral dissertation, dealt with the suffering of God. His work draws on the Taoist philosophy of the I Ching, as it critiques the traditional view of God's impassibility. Following Paul Tillich, Lee defines love as "the drive toward the reunion of the separated."²⁷ To say that God is love is to speak of God's drive toward the reunion of himself with his people by way of his active participation in the world. This

²³ Daniel Day Williams, cited in McWilliams, 16.

²⁴ Mozley, 176.

²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rev. ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 188, cited in McWilliams, 177, 190.

²⁶ Born 1935 in Korea, and educated in the U.S., Lee received the Th.D degree at Boston University in 1968.

²⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), III: 134, cited in Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 3.

participation arises out of his empathy, his "feeling with" humanity, and thus God is possible.

Process philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, sees a rejection of the traditional view, in favor of divine passibility, as the way forward for a doctrine of God that makes sense in the face of suffering.

If deity is a process and not a mere stasis, then the old objections to the idea of a suffering deity become less impressive... God is spectator of all existence, but a sympathetic spectator who in some real sense shares in the suffering he beholds. He is neither simply neutral to these sufferings nor does he sadistically will them for beings outside himself. He takes them into his own life and derives whatever value possible from them, but without ever wanting them to occur. Why then do they occur?...because...creatures are not infinitely wise or good, and it is they and not God who finally decide the details of the world's happenings...[and] they cannot entirely foresee the way their own decisions will interact with the decisions of others. Not even God can do that, and this not from weakness or deficiency, but simply because really creative decisions are not foreseeable.

Life is process, divinity itself is process, nothing matters but the kind of processes which occur or can be made to occur...[F]or reality as a whole every new value is a gain. Our role is to do what we can to maximize this gain. That is all we can do, but it is enough. The ultimate issue, the permanence of values once created, is out of our hands, and in God's forevermore.²⁸

There seems to be a contradiction here. Hartshorne wants to say that it is with human decisions that lie the final details of "the world's happenings," and yet "the ultimate issue...is out of our hands,

²⁸ Hartshorne, Charles. "Process Philosophy as a Resource for Christian Thought," in Perry LeFevre, ed. *Philosophical Resources for Christian Thought*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 65-6.

and in God's forevermore." It is hard to see how, in Hartshorne's universe, anything at all may be said to be "in God's hands," since humans finally decide the details, and maximize the gains of the outcomes of their decisions. As Lewis Ford summarizes the process view, "In process theism the future is an open risk. God is continuously directing the creation toward the good, but his persuasive power is effective only in so far as the creatures themselves affirm that good."²⁹ It is unclear from this proposal, precisely how God ensures the permanency of the values gained by human choices.

The work of Jurgen Moltmann on the suffering God, makes heavy concessions to process philosophy, which are disconcerting to more orthodox thinkers.³⁰ He openly admits that his "trinitarian theology of the cross," which seems to focus on an ontological change to God's being wrought through the cross, is "panentheistic... For in the hidden mode of humiliation to the point of the cross, all being and all that annihilates has already been taken up in God and God *begins to become* 'all in all.'"³¹

Clearly Moltmann's theology exhibits an apologetic concern, and serves as something of a theodicy. He wishes to overcome the antagonism toward the traditional doctrine of God on the part of its cultured despisers. One of the important platforms of this antagonism is the apparent responsibility of God for evil. God's perceived apathetic attitude toward human suffering is brought clearly into focus by Moltmann, in the horrors of Auschwitz. Against the

²⁹ Lewis Ford, "Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good," in Michael L. Peterson, ed. *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 257.

³⁰ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974. This material on Moltmann is taken from Glen A. O'Brien, *A Trinitarian Revisioning of the Wesleyan Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. Unpublished M.A. thesis. (Wilmore: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1998) 48-51.

³¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 277. Italics mine.

traditional view of the omnipotent God as one who is "overwhelmingly active, as doing everything, and therefore as, apparently the cause of evil," Moltmann stresses the suffering of God on the cross.³²

But this suffering is not a patripassian suffering, such that the Father is the locus of the Passion. Rather, the Father and the Son alike suffer, and out of this suffering, both experience a new quality of being in the Holy Spirit. In asserting that the Trinity is "deeply involved in the death of Jesus on the cross,"³³ Moltmann rejects the classical concept of *apatheia*, and its corollary belief that only the human, and not the divine nature of Christ suffered on the cross. "The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God; it divides and conjoins the persons in their relationships to each other and portrays them in a specific way. From the life of these three, which has within it the death of Jesus, there then emerges who God is and what his Godhead means."³⁴

According to Moltmann, "The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father is just as important as the death of the Son."³⁵ Not only does the Son suffer the agony of being forsaken by the Father, the Father suffers at the separation from his Son, thus losing his identity as Father. In the mutual surrender of the identities of Father and Son for the sake of humanity, the Father and Son experience "a new unity with one another in the Spirit."³⁶ The Spirit is "the personification of self giving love," and this love is set loose in the world, enabling the establishment of "a deeper and richer form of human life."³⁷

³² Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 21.

³³ Joseph A. Bracken, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 27.

³⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 207, cited in Bracken, 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 243, cited in Bracken, 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

Our salvation depends on this complete identification of the Father and the Son with each other. The Father must share in the sufferings of the Son. "[O]nly if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election, and divine life."³⁸

Moltmann rejects the God of classical theism, because "the God of theism is poor. He cannot love nor can he suffer."³⁹ In Moltmann, "God has a history with the world. He allows what happens to him in the world in time and on the cross to act back and influence him and so change him."⁴⁰ The Trinity, for Moltmann, "is an evolving event between three divine subjects and the world and...the triune God is not complete until the end."⁴¹ God is still "becoming" until the consummation of all things when God will be all in all.

O'Hanlon responds rather negatively to this concept. "[This] Hegelian-type identification in which the cross is seen as the fulfillment of the trinity in a Process Theology-type way...has no difficulty in directly ascribing change and suffering to God and...ends up with a mythological, tragic image of God."⁴²

And what of the doctrine of providence, which Langdon B. Gilkey calls "the forgotten stepchild of contemporary theology"? What responsibility does God have in the creation of suffering itself? How can we be confident that God will ultimately triumph over suffering? Are God's love and God's power incompatible? Does his love cancel out his power?⁴³ Furthermore, what is the extent to which

³⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 246, cited in Bracken, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 253, cited in Bracken, 29.

⁴⁰ John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴³ Langdon B. Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," in *Journal of Religion* 43 (July 1963), 174, cited in McWilliams, 177.

God maintains his freedom from his creation in the new theology of the divine pathos? It is not at all clear that the theologians of the divine pathos have avoided the complete identification of God with creation, often entailed in immanentist forms of theology. If God is acted upon by his creation, is the divine transcendence compromised? Can the life of God remain essentially a "blessed" life if it enters into the contingencies of time and motion?⁴⁴ Such questions are indicative of the need for further development of the new theology if it is going to prove to be an adequate replacement for the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility.

VI. Is there a *Via Media*?

It cannot be denied that there is "a real religious value"⁴⁵ secured in the idea of God entering into human suffering. How else can the believer make sense of God's promise to be with him or her in the midst of trials? The God who stands aloof may be said to be *for* the pilgrim struggler, but hardly *with* her. The sports fan in the grandstand is *for* his or her favorite player, but can hardly be said to be *with* the player. If God watches the contest from the stands but does not compete, he is a spectator God but not a fellow sufferer.

In addition, one's view of the passion of God has been thought by some to influence human engagement with the world's suffering ones. The knowledge that God actively strives to overcome evil and suffering in the world motivates believers to do the same.⁴⁶ Abraham Heschel, for example, describes the Hebrew prophet as *homo sympathetikos*, because of his being acquainted with the suffering of God, contrasting this with the Stoic philosopher as *homo apathetikos*, unmoved by human suffering because bearing the image of his passionless god.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Mozley, 179-80.

⁴⁵ Mozley, 181.

⁴⁶ Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:4.

⁴⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 88. Cited in McWilliams, 182.

A comparison of the experiences of two men in the face of personal tragedy might serve as an example of two types of response in the face of seemingly meaningless suffering. Richard Hoard reflects on the weak and impassive God who could do nothing to stop the brutal murder of his father.

[I]f somebody determines to kill you, then God Almighty Himself couldn't stop it from happening. Or at least wouldn't. God's only sure-fire way of preventing the lot of us from killing one another was to strike with lightning everybody who'd ever conspired to harm a fellow human being. But there wasn't enough lightning in the world to strike all of us who had ever wanted to do someone harm; He might as well send another flood, but that was something He had already tried and determined never again to do. Instead He sent His best work down in His best effort to reform us. But then even Jesus Christ got killed.⁴⁸

Our second sufferer, Nicholas Wolterstorff, lost not a father, but a son. Through his own suffering, he came to understand God as a sufferer.

God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers. The pain and the fallenness of humanity have entered into his heart. Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God...Instead of explaining our suffering, God shares it...God is love. That is why he suffers. To love our suffering sinful world is to suffer. God so suffered for the world that he gave up his only Son to suffering. The one who does not see God's suffering does not see his love.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Richard G. Hoard. *Alone Among the Living*. (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 2-3.

⁴⁹ Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament for a Son*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987) 81,90.

In researching this topic, one might be forgiven for thinking that the only alternative to a stoic, insensible, and thus unsympathetic God, is a weak and suffering God. Might there not be a middle ground which would hold together both the transcendence and the immanence of God?

Michael J. Dodds, writing from a Thomist perspective, speaks in defense of divine immutability, asserting that God's love is both dynamic (and therefore not stoic) and static (and therefore not passive⁵⁰) at the same time. He does so by making a careful distinction between God's love and human love. Human love is associated with motion and change. It is a restlessness and desire quenched and fulfilled in an unfolding relationship between persons. Dodds resists the identification of this kind of love with God. Love may also be characterized by immovability. The complete fulfillment of love has a fixed character about it. When "the affection or appetite is completely imbued with the form of the good which is its object it is pleased with it and adheres to it as though fixed in it, and then is said to love it."⁵¹ Dodds lead us from this definition of love to his concept of "the dynamic stillness of love."⁵² The idea sounds oxymoronic at first, "dynamic" and "stillness" seeming to be antithetical each to the other. But God's love is understood by Dodds as dynamic, because in the divine life of the Trinity, the procession of the Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and the Son⁵³ is love in motion, a procession based on love. Yet this dynamic and active love is also characterized by "stillness" because it fully apprehends that "other" for which it seeks. God's nature is love, but

⁵⁰ I am using the word "passive" in the technical sense of "unable to be acted upon."

⁵¹ Michael J. Dodds. *The Unchanging God of Love: A Study of the Teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas on Divine Impassibility in View of Certain Contemporary Criticisms of this Doctrine*. (Fribourge, Suisse: Editions Universitaires, 1986) 278.

⁵² Ibid, 280.

⁵³ Following the Western *filioque* tradition.

his love for us, unlike our love for each other, is not based on any lack in him, nor on any perceived goodness in us needed to make up some absence of good in God's own being. While our love is both dynamic and *mutable*, God's love is dynamic and *immutable*.⁵⁴ "All passions implying imperfect possession of goodness are therefore said of God only metaphorically."⁵⁵ Similarly, to speak of divine compassion is to speak of more than human compassion.⁵⁶ Human compassion includes suffering, divine compassion does not. But divine compassion is nonetheless an expression of love which "casts out and triumphs over suffering."⁵⁷

Jerry Walls argues that the pain felt by God over his creatures' rejection of his love is not so much "a feeling which could dominate the divine consciousness," but rather, "a moral attitude, a certain way of thinking about loved ones who have experienced great loss."⁵⁸ Similarly, Paul Fiddes speaks of the way we may conceive of God as one who suffers and yet is not *ruled by* suffering. God *chooses* to suffer along with his creatures, but this is not a choosing based on any desire or thirst for suffering *itself*, but for fellowship with his creatures.

To desire suffering would be a kind of divine masochism, and would detract from the conviction of God's victory over suffering; he would be the eternal auto-victim of the universe. Rather, out of his desire for his creatures he chooses to suffer, and because he chooses to suffer he is not ruled by suffering; it has no power to overwhelm him because he has made the alien thing his own.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Dodds, 280-81.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 282.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 292-304.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 304.

⁵⁸ Walls, Jerry L. *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. (Notre Dame and London: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 108-9.

⁵⁹ Paul S. Fiddes. *The Creative Suffering of God*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 108-9.

The Japanese theologian, pastor, and teacher, Kazoh Kitamori, a pioneer in indigenous Japanese theology, created quite a stir when his *Theology of the Pain of God* was first published in the 1950s. Whilst positing pain in the heart of God, he labors also to make a distinction between divine and human pain. "Man's pain and God's pain are qualitatively different, 'as a dog is different from the Dogstar'...Man's pain is unproductive; it is darkness without light. God's pain is productive; it is darkness with the light of salvation."⁶⁰

Some kind of distinction along the lines suggested above would seem to be necessary if the idea of a suffering God is to be protected against the idea of a weak and ineffective God.

VII. Does the Concept of the Divine *Apatheia* Render the Problem of Evil More Acute?⁶¹

It has often been claimed that the God of classical theism must be a callous and indifferent God in light of the world's great suffering and his apparent non-involvement in eliminating that suffering. Is Peter Geach's concept of God accurate when he refers to God as one for whom "a billion rational creatures are as dust in the balance; if a billion perish, God suffers no loss, who can create what he wills with no effort or cost by merely thinking of it?"⁶² The rejection of such a God lies behind the assertion on the part of process theists that the traditional view renders the problem of evil more acute. How can such a God, all powerful, yet unconcerned and unmoved for the plight of his creatures, be worthy of worship?

⁶⁰ Kazoh Kitamori. *Theology of the Pain of God*. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), 167.

⁶¹ The so-called "problem of evil" is a philosophical problem which may be summarised as follows – God is an all powerful Being. God is a perfectly good being. Yet pointless suffering exists in the universe. If God is all powerful he is able to eliminate such evil. If he is all-good, he must want to. Yet such evil exists. Therefore, either God is not all-powerful, or God is not perfectly good, or God does not exist.

⁶² Geach, *Providence and Evil*, 128, cited in Walls, *Hell*, 106.

Instead, we must understand God as one who resorts only to persuasive power, and never to coercive force in accomplishing his purposes for humanity.

Peter Hare and Edward O. Madden, however, have argued persuasively that the process claim that the traditional view of divine power is a "pseudo-idea," and that its own concept of divine persuasion provides a resource for a more coherent theodicy, is mislaid. How can the process theist explain how the high number of those who remain unpersuaded by God, remain so, in light of the exercise of God's great persuasive power?⁶³ To Hartshorne's claim that any metaphysic should be judged on the basis of its conceptual coherence, Hare and Madden, retort that the process concept of an immeasurable amount of persuasive power appears to be as much a "pseudo-idea" as to speak of "weight that can never require force to lift it."⁶⁴

If the concept of persuasive power in process theism is incoherent, then the metaphysics of process theism fails to pass the very test that Hartshorne proposes. If, on the other hand, persuasive power is made coherent by making such power experientially measurable, then the process theist is obliged to produce a theodicy in which it is shown that the proportion of goods to evils in the world is compatible with the exercise of great persuasive power for the good, and...no such theodicy has been produced.⁶⁵

To assert too strongly the capacity of God to experience suffering, is to run the risk of "depicting God as an emotional hostage to recalcitrant sinners."⁶⁶ On the other hand, to assert too strongly the

⁶³ Peter Hare and Edward Madden, "Evil and Persuasive Power," in Peterson, Michael L., ed. *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 268.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 271-72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 272.

⁶⁶ Walls, *Hell*, 106.

absoluteness of God and thus his incapacity for sharing in our sufferings, is to run the risk of depicting God as an aloof and indifferent absentee God, a *Deus Absconditus*, blissfully unconcerned with the misery of his creatures. It seems then, that in neither direction is the problem of evil rendered more acute. Each approach creates its own set of questions.

VIII. Conclusion

We have seen that the biblical portrayal of God as in some sense actively feeling along with his people, contrasts with the theology of the divine *apatheia* as it developed in the classical Christian tradition. However, we have also identified a "minority report" within this tradition, which resisted the complete hellenization of the biblical portrayal of God, and spoke of God's condescending love, his experience of pain and sorrow and his capacity, in some sense at least, for change. The modern theology of the divine pathos, has rightly rejected the absolutizing tendency in the centrist tradition, but in doing so, has compromised the divine transcendence. It might be argued that the achievement of liberation from an overly-hellenized Christianity (if indeed such has been achieved) is a positive contribution to Christian thought, and that it alleviates to some extent the acuteness of the problem of evil. On the other hand, the price may have been too high, especially if the freedom of God from his creation is compromised. Greater distinctions between human passion and divine passion must be developed, in order to make sense of a God who feels, but is not ruled by, feelings. A revisiting of the "minority report" in the classical Christian tradition may well provide a more adequate resource for this task than can be provided by either the mainstream traditional position, or the new theology of divine suffering.

GRACE AND THE WESLEY HYMNOLOGY

by

Andrew McKinney

I. Introduction

My concern in this paper is a seeking to crystallize my understanding of Charles Wesley's conception of grace as well as a desire for this to be an exercise for devotional purposes. The method of approach was to seek to integrate the theological aspects of grace, as the Wesleys understood them, with the expressions of these in Charles' hymn writing, in a format, I hope, that is reflective in nature.

I am aware that for the most part, the theology is John's and the hymns are Charles', but I sense no real dichotomy in that, for the brothers were of one mind as they ministered among and to the body of people called Methodists. It would seem that Charles was content to work under the shadow of brother John.

I am also conscious of the abundance of material involved in such a task and this is reflected in the variance in depth by which the topics have been presented. I acknowledge that I found difficulty in avoiding the overlapping of some of the categories as outlined but the very nature of the concept under discussion made this impossible and probably undesirable.

II. "Grace, Grace God's Grace"⁶⁷

One of the predominant themes of the Wesleys, and of the

⁶⁷ Julia H. Johnston

Wesley hymns, is that of grace. A cursory survey of the published hymns is impressive of this fact.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My dear Redeemer's praise!
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace.⁶⁸

What was this grace about? The "triumphs of his grace" was the experience of God's salvation in the life of the Wesley brothers. In May 1738 Charles spoke to Peter Bohler about confessing Christ. Bohler replied, "Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise him with them all."⁶⁹

Grace also is the grace of God's coming down among us -

Father, whose everlasting love
Thy only Son for sinners gave,
Whose grace to all did freely move,
And send him down the world to save⁷⁰

In the hymn "And can it be" we read,

He left his Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite his grace!
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free!
For O my God! It found out me!⁷¹

"So free, so infinite his grace!" is this coming down race.

⁶⁸ John Lawson, *The Wesley Hymns* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 127.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

It is free in all and free for all.⁷² Yet even more, grace is reaching out to us -

Thy sovereign grace to all extends,
Immense and unconfined;
From age to age it never ends;
It reaches all mankind.⁷³

And

Come, O my guilty brethren come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in.
He calls you now, invites you home;
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!⁷⁴

Our hearts are warmed by the comeliness of this grace. God doesn't overcome us by grace, he draws us to himself; by love he draws us -

Jesus, thy wandering sheep behold!
See, Lord, with yearning pity see
Lost sheep that cannot find the fold,
Till sought and gathered in by thee.

Lost are they now, and scattered wide,
In pain, and weariness, and want;
With no kind shepherd near to guide
The sick, and spiritless, and faint.

Thou, only thou the kind and good,
And sheep-redeeming Shepherd art:
Collect thy flock, and give them food,
And pastors after thine own heart.⁷⁵

⁷² Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 7:373-374.

⁷³ Lawson, *Op. Cit.*, 96.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Love answers with grace, and herein is the logic of grace: not that we are strong, but because we are weak.⁷⁶ Grace: from the beginning of time; from the beginning of my life to its end, God has been reaching out to me to bring me to fellowship with himself through the grace available to sinners by faith in Jesus Christ.

Thy faithfulness, Lord, each moment we find,
So true to thy word, so loving and kind;
Thy mercy so tender to all the lost race,
The foulest offender may turn and find grace.

The mercy I feel to others I show,
I set to my seal that Jesus is true!
Ye all may find favour who come at his call;
O come to my Saviour, his grace is for all.⁷⁷

III. Preventive Grace

All the blessings bestowed upon humanity are of God's mere grace. Grace formed us and grace allows us life. And it is grace that is the first dawning upon the soul toward salvation -

Had not Thy grace salvation brought,
Thyself we never could desire;
Thy grace suggests our first good thought,
Thy only grace doth all inspire.

'Twas grace, when we in sin were dead,
Us from the death of sin did raise;
Grace only hath the difference made;
Whate'er we are, we are by grace.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Our First Song: Evangelism in the Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1984), 9.

⁷⁷ Lawson, *Op. Cit.*, 11.

⁷⁸ J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941), 123.

Such grace is irresistible! And this "grace that comes before"⁷⁹ creates within us the power to respond to God or resist him; it is a wooing grace -

Ho! Every one that thirsts, draw nigh!
'Tis God invites the fallen race:
Mercy and free salvation buy;
Buy wine, and milk, and gospel grace.⁸⁰

It is a convincing grace, involving repentance and the breaking of a heart of stone -

Jesu, let thy pitying eye
Call back a wandering sheep!
False to thee, like Peter, I
Would fain, like Peter, weep:
Let me be by grace restored,
On me be all long-suffering shown;
Turn, and look upon me, Lord,
And break my heart of stone.

Saviour, Prince, enthroned above,
Repentance to impart,
Give me through thy dying love
The humble contrite heart:
A portion of thy grief unknown;
Turn, and look upon me, Lord,
And break my heart of stone.⁸¹

⁷⁹ John Lawson in Steve Harper, *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1983), 40.

⁸⁰ Lawson, *Op. Cit.*, 94.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

But there is struggle, a battle; and prevenient grace holds in balance our inability to move toward God, because of original sin, and our freedom to respond to him.⁸²

Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

In vain thou strugglest to get free,
I never will unloose my hold!
Art thou the Man that died for me?
The secret of thy love unfold;
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

My prayer hath power with God; the grace
Unspeakable I now receive;
Through faith I see thee face to face,
I see thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.⁸³

What grace that gives us power to respond, yea, grasp hold of God lest he slip from our hands!

IV. Saving Grace

But having become aware of God and wrestled with him, it is only through the direct knowledge of the grace available to us in

⁸² Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 41.

⁸³ Lawson, Op. Cit., 39-41.

Christ's death that we can come to justifying faith.⁸⁴

Wherewith, O God, shall I draw near,
And bow myself before thy face?
How in thy purer eyes appear?
What shall I bring to gain thy grace?⁸⁵

And the answer -

O that the world might know
The great atoning lamb!
Spirit of faith, descend, and show
The virtue of his name;
The grace which all may find,
The saving power impart;
And testify to all mankind,
And speak in every heart.⁸⁶

"Grace is both the beginning and the end" of salvation.⁸⁷ It is the source of salvation with faith as the condition or channel through which grace comes.⁸⁸

By faith we know thee strong to save;
Save us, a present Saviour thou!
Whate'er we hope, by faith we have
Future and past subsisting now.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Williams, Op. Cit., 75.

⁸⁵ Lawson, Op. Cit., 110.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁸⁷ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), Eph. 2:8.

⁸⁸ William Ragsdale Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 77; A Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Pub. Co., 1967), 227.

⁸⁹ Lawson, Op. Cit., 107.

But the ultimate source of faith is God and God alone!

Author of faith, eternal Word,
Whose Spirit breathes the active flame;
Faith, like its Finisher and Lord,
Today as yesterday the same.

To thee our humble hearts aspire,
And ask the gift unspeakable;
Increase in us the kindled fire,
In us the work of faith fulfill.⁹⁰

From the hymn quoted above, "Wherewith, O God," come the words:

Will gifts delight the Lord most high?
Will multiplied oblations please?

Can these avert the wrath of God;
Can these wash out my guilty stain?

What have I then wherein to trust?
I nothing have, I nothing am;

'Tis just the sentence should take place;
'Tis just; --- but O thy Son hath died!⁹¹

And at the bottom line, in the covenant of grace, God forgives all provided only that we believe in him.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁹² E.H. Sugden, *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1956), 1:138-139.

No man can truly say
That Jesus is the Lord,
Until thou take the veil away,
And breathe the living word;
Then, only then, we feel
Our interest in his blood,
And cry with joy unspeakable,
'Thou art my Lord, my God!⁹³

How can we not fail but to respond to such divine grace?

V. Means of Grace

Grace and response; all is of God's grace and we are dependent upon the initiative of God; we must wait upon God. But that does not imply that the walk of faith in grace is a passive one. For the Wesleys, to keep the faith and to keep from falling requires of us continual watchfulness and constant attendance upon the means of grace.⁹⁴ These means of grace were a 'trusting place,' and included worship and fellowship, prayer, private and public, the study of the scriptures, fasting, Christian conference and accountability and climaxed in the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper.

We meet, the grace to take
Which thou hast freely given;
We meet on earth for thy dear sake,
That we may meet in heaven.⁹⁵

Through the Eucharist, spiritual grace is imparted⁹⁶ and the real presence of Christ is mediated through the elements to the heart

⁹³ Lawson, *Op. Cit.*, 106.

⁹⁴ Jackson, *Works*, 8:322-324.

⁹⁵ Lawson, *Op. Cit.*, 186.

⁹⁶ Williams, *Op. Cit.*, 160.

of the worshipper.⁹⁷

Victim divine, thy grace we claim
 While thus thy precious death we show;
 Once offered up, a spotless Lamb,
 In thy great temple here below,
 Thou didst for all mankind atone,
 And standest now before the throne.

We need not now go up to heaven,
 To bring the long-sought Saviour down;
 Thou art to all already given,
 Thou dost even now thy banquet crown:
 To every faithful soul appear,
 And show thy Real Presence here!⁹⁸

It is by the means of grace, instituted and prudential, that a person's works, corporately through the church, reflect the "living portrait of God's grace."⁹⁹

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
 Who joins us by his grace,
 And bids us, each to each restored,
 Together seek his face.

The gift which he on one bestows,
 We all delight to prove;
 The grace through every vessel flows,
 In purest steams of love.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lawson, Op. Cit., 176.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Cannon, Op. Cit., 150.

¹⁰⁰ Lawson, Op. Cit., 186.

The means of grace were not an end in themselves but were ordained that I might know God and that I might express the character of Christ to the world in the context of community, his church.

VI. Sanctifying Grace

O for a heart to praise my God,
 A heart from sin set free!
 A heart that always feels thy blood
 So freely spilt for me!¹⁰¹

These words reflect the desire of the earnest seeker after God. But, oh, the struggle to find rest!

Wrestling I will not let thee go...
 My strength is gone, my nature dies,
 I sink beneath thy weighty hand...
 Yield to me now, for I am weak...¹⁰²

And then the submission -

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
 My dear Redeemer's throne,
 Where only Christ is heard to speak,
 Where Jesus reigns alone.

An humble, lowly, contrite heart,
 Believing, true, and clean;
 Which neither life nor death can part
 From him that dwells within.

Thy nature, dearest Lord impart!
 Come quickly from above,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰² Ibid., 39-40.

Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love.¹⁰³

The submission to perfect love; the purifying of the intention of the heart to serve and love God with one's whole heart, soul, mind and strength was, for the Wesleys, the culmination of celebrating the sovereignty of God's grace.

In the hymn "Jesus, Lover of my soul" comes this final verse:

Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin:
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within:
Thou of life the fountain art:
Freely let me take of thee,
Spring thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity!¹⁰⁴

VII. Growth in Grace

"Make and keep me pure within" are words which indicate that the experience of sanctifying grace is not the end; there is more! The Christian walk, the sanctified life, the spiritual journey is a life of trust; a perseverance in the grace of God no matter where we are in our experience of God.

The Wesleys were convinced of the activity of the Holy Spirit at every stage of one's journey with God and continually encouraged believers to grow in grace; to move on with God. How was this to occur? By working through the disciplines of the means of grace and through moral experience.¹⁰⁵ How was I to know that I was still on the path and had not deviated? By the witness of the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 142-143.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 139.

Spirit within, resonating with my spirit, bringing a present assurance of salvation.

How can a sinner know
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my Saviour show
My name inscribed in heaven?
What we ourselves have felt, and seen,
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible.

We by his Spirit prove,
And know the things of God,
The things which of his love
He hath on us bestowed:
His glory is our sole design,
We live our God to please,
And rise with filial fear divine
To perfect holiness.

I want the Spirit of power within,
Of love, and of a healthful mind;
Of power, to conquer inbred sin,
Of love, to thee and all mankind,
Of health, that pain and death defies,
Most vigorous when the body dies.¹⁰⁶

"Come, Holy Ghost, my heart inspire!"¹⁰⁷

VIII. The Christ of Grace

Our thoughts have been focused primarily on the roles of God, the Father and God, the Holy Spirit in imparting grace to the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 116-118.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

life of faith. Yet the Wesleys were holistic in their theology of the Trinity. And it is in the cross that they found God's great grace for us and all humanity -

Ah! Show me that happiest place,
The place of thy people's abode,
Where saints in an ecstasy gaze
And hang on a crucified God.¹⁰⁸

Hence we sing with Charles:

God of unexampled grace,
Redeemer of mankind,
Matter of eternal praise
We in thy passion find ...

Faith cries out, 'Tis he, 'tis he,
My God, that suffers there!¹⁰⁹

In the same hymn, "that mysterious tree" shows the very heart of the gospel of "unexampled grace." God so loved that he came into this world himself in Jesus, the God-Man, and died for our salvation.

God's presence is here and:

We meet, the grace to take
Which thou hast freely given ...¹¹⁰

The cross and God's presence are intimately linked. For the Wesleys, God was present by his grace because he was the crucified Lord -

With glorious clouds encompassed round,
Whom angels dimly see,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 186.

Will the unsearchable be found,
Or God appear to me?

Will he forsake his throne above,
Himself to worms impart?
Answer, thou Man of grief and love,
And speak it to my heart!

In manifested love explain
Thy wonderful design;
What meant the suffering Son of man,
The streaming blood divine?

Didst thou not in our flesh appear
And live and die below,
That I may now perceive thee near
And my Redeemer know?

Come then, and to my soul reveal
The heights and depths of grace,
The wounds which all my sorrows heal,
That dear disfigured face.¹¹¹

I know now the presence of God because Christ is my Redeeming Lord, and so also in his presence, I know "the wounds which all my sorrows heal." This is, indeed, the God of grace!

¹¹¹ Ibid., 37-38.

**TOWARD A NEW TESTAMENT MODEL
FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING ¹¹²**

by

David R. Wilson

I. Introduction

The topic of a biblically-based philosophy of leadership is complex and in addressing the topic here, we will simply scratch the surface and leave many things undone and unspoken. That is the main reason behind the “towards” in the title. Please do not judge this paper by what is not said...but use what is said to stimulate reflection, discussion, and any God-directed change of which we are convicted in the process. Three concerns lie behind the writing of this presentation. The first is the idea that “Leadership is a gift”. This idea is usually based on Romans 12:8 which places leadership in a list of gifts. The second is the idea that “We need more Leaders, not Pastors”. This idea is sometimes spoken, often inferred, and based on the idea that a certain style of leadership is what the church needs today for it to move ahead. The third concern lies in the area of “Models for Church Leadership” which come more from the Social Sciences or from Business Management theories than they do from Scripture.

¹¹² This paper was first presented as “Work in Progress” to the National Institute for Christian Education Scholarly Conference 1998.

II. Addressing the Concerns

A. "Leadership is a Gift"

In Romans 12:8, the Greek word *proistemi* is translated as "leader" in the NRSV and "leadership" in the NIV. This word can mean to oversee, to preside, or to rule. In this verse it is seen as one of the gifts that God gives. This same Greek word is used in I Thessalonians 5:12 and is translated in such ways as "over you" or "have charge over you". In I Timothy 3:4 it is translated as "rule his own house" or "manage". In I Timothy 5:17 it is rendered as "rule well" or as "direct the affairs". In Titus 3:8 it has the idea of "devoting themselves to good works". The verb *proistemi* literally means "to stand before" and has specific meanings relating to either management or administration or maintenance, both in a church and in a family. It is also interpreted as "giving aid".

Is there a so-called "Gift of Leadership"? If there is a Gift of Leadership, we need to be training those who "have it", and only those who "have it", as this would become the only criteria which we would look for in potential church leadership. However, three points come to mind.

First, there is the concept of "*charismata*". It is possible that we need to have a more fluid understanding of the idea of gifts. Are there certain gifts as limited by the lists of Romans, First Corinthians, and Ephesians? It seems that it is more likely that these are some examples of manifestations of the Holy Spirit for ministry of God's people (I Corinthians 12:7).

In commenting on Paul's use of the word *charismata*, Kevin Giles states, "It is a rare word before Paul, but in his writings it appears some sixteen times. It is a form of the word *charis* (grace). In choosing this term, Paul emphasizes that every ministry is a gift from God."¹¹³ Giles further suggests that the idea of *charisma* covers everything that the Spirit wishes to use for equip-

¹¹³ Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians* (Collins Dove, 1989), 16

ping and up-building the church.¹¹⁴

In discussing this particular passage from Romans 12, John Stott talks about the difference between the lists in First Corinthians, Ephesians, and Romans, and then concludes, "It is evident that we need to broaden our understanding of Spiritual Gifts."¹¹⁵ It is probable that Paul is saying, "No matter what you do, see it as from God, empowered by the Spirit, for the common good...so do it well." It is also probable that the gift mentioned in Romans 12:8 is a specific function of leadership, namely management or administration. Some are more gifted in this area than others but this is not the only function of leadership. This probability fits the specific meaning of the word, *proistemi*. The Pastoral Epistles do not call for Timothy or Titus to look for the gift of leadership in the appointment of such, but instead to look for Godly character and qualities and the ability to teach.¹¹⁶

The call to leadership is not a call to those with the "Gift of Leadership", but a call for people to use their giftedness for leadership functions, to lead people in the quest of knowing God and making Him known. This idea comes quite clearly through an understanding of Ephesians 4:11 which the NRSV translates as follows: "The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers." If this rendition is correct, then Paul is suggesting that the functions of leadership listed here were not the gifts themselves but that gifts were given for the exercise of these roles. Further, the objectives of such leadership are equipping, edification, unity, and Christlikeness.¹¹⁷

The idea of a "Gift of Leadership" moves us toward the institutionalization of leadership offices and away from the idea of Body ministry and "lay" leadership. The concept of "giftedness for leadership" highlights the need of Body ministry and generalizes

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16

¹¹⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 328-29.

¹¹⁶ Cp I Timothy ch.3, Titus ch. 1.

¹¹⁷ Ephesians 4:12-13.

leadership to some extent – the emphasis is on the gifts of the individual being used in some form of leadership capacity. Jim Petersen addresses the problem of institutionalization of leadership when he talks about the measures that Early Church Fathers and Apologists took to preserve the Gospel and to protect the unity of the church. He states: “The intentions of the Church Fathers seem clear. They were concerned about unity and order within the church and were looking for a system of defence against heresy from without. They achieved their goals, but at an awful price. They created a clergy-laity caste system, which put the average believer out of business in terms of his or her ministry in the Gospel. The freedom experienced in the New Testament period vanished as the authority of the Bishops grew”¹¹⁸

This is *not* a call for leaderless churches or for all members to have the same function-role of leadership. These are determined by giftedness, opportunity, and call. Again, we turn to Jim Petersen:

I’m not saying that organizations and institutions are wrong. Life would be maddeningly chaotic without them, but they are often misused. I believe that what we saw in our review represents a misuse. To begin with, these men took their cues for organizing and administrating the church from the model of the Roman Empire rather than from Christ and the Scriptures. But their more serious error lies in the fact that they counted on the structures they had created to preserve the Saints and their faith.¹¹⁹

For the church to grow, it needs to be healthy. A healthy church has God-gifted leadership fulfilling their functions of equipping all of the Body of Christ to be leaders by using their giftedness for and in ministry. To do that, we do not look for the Gift of Leadership, we help people discover and develop their

¹¹⁸ Jim Petersen, *Church Without Walls* (NavPress, 1992), p.89

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.96

unique giftedness and help provide opportunity for the expression of those gifts.

B. “We Need More Leaders, Not Pastors”

Some of the concerns behind this statement have already been mentioned. I simply want to address two more concerns under this heading. First, such a statement usually refers to the style of leadership which is more a product of personality than it is of giftedness. It is often felt that a “*leader*” is somebody who is entrepreneurial, visionary, motivational, enthusiastic, confident, extravertish, goal and task oriented, initiatory, and pro-active. This type of leader in current literature is often referred to as “The Rancher.” In these terms, a “*Pastor*” is often seen as being relational, personal, introvertish, having a caring and counselling ministry, and being more involved in maintenance of programs and the status quo. He or she is often portrayed as “The Shepherd.” In literature on these types of leadership, Paul is often seen as the ideal type of the Leader and Barnabas as the ideal type of the Pastor.

My second concern is to bring the reminder that the use of the terms “Pastor” and “Shepherd” are biblical to the core! A Pastor is a Shepherd who models his or her life on Jesus as “The Good Shepherd”. The way he or she leads (shepherds, pastors) is dependent upon a number of factors including personality, models, training, and circumstances. Consequently, to suggest that the church does not need Pastors is a move away from the biblical model. The dichotomizing of Leader and Pastor is false and can be very damaging to the church when one is played off against another as being “better” or more needed today.

III. Models for Church Leadership

Models for leadership abound in the world today and the church is buying into the debates quite vigorously. Leadership needs are often determined by organization models and so one’s perception of the church will greatly influence one’s perception of

leadership, function and style. Church structural models today have been influenced by therapeutic and business management theories and these in turn have been foundational in the model of leadership presented as "best" for the church. Allow me to turn to three of my favourite authors for help in introducing and addressing this concern. First of all, Eugene Peterson in his book, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*.

Pastoral work is that aspect of Christian ministry which specializes in the ordinary. It is the pragmatic application of religion in the present....Pastoral work properly originates, as does all Christian ministry, in the biblical sources. But for at least two generations the perspective generated by recent behavioral sciences have dominated the literature directed to pastors....When I look for help in developing my pastoral craft and nurturing my pastoral vocation, the one century that has the least to commend it is the twentieth. Has any century been so fascinated with gimmickry, so surfeited with fads, so addicted to nostrums, so unaware of God, so out of touch with the underground spiritual streams which water eternal life? In relation to pastoral work, the present-day healing and helping disciplines are like the River Platte as described by Mark Twain, a mile wide and an inch deep. They are designed by people without roots in an age without purpose for a people without God....

When I go to my library for instruction and nurture in my preaching and teaching I readily put my hands on volumes by Karl Barth and C.H. Dodd, John Bright and Donald Miller, George Buttrick and David Reed, Brevard Childs and Gerhard von Rad. The scholars, theologians, and preachers who lead, support, and encourage me in proclaiming the biblical message and who instruct me in biblically informed understandings of the Christian faith are a magnificent company.....But when I get up on Monday to

face a week of parish routine, I am handed books by Sigmund Freud and Abraham Maslow, Marshall McLuhan and Talcott Parsons, John Kenneth Galbraith and Louis Mumford. It is a literature of humanism and technology. The pulpit is grounded in the prophetic and kerygmatic traditions but the church office is organized around IBM machines. The act of teaching is honed on biblical insights....while the hospital visit is shaped under the supervision of psychiatrists and physicians. The sociologists, psychologists and management consultants and community organizers of the twentieth century are brilliant. Their in-sights are dazzling and their instruction useful. I have profited a great deal under their tutelage, but I am ill at ease still. I can demonstrate acceptable competence in the skills I've been taught, but am I a *Pastor*? I function adequately in a variety of dovetailed roles, but is there a biblical foundation providing solid, authoritative underpinning for what I am doing so that my daily work is congruent with the daily ministries of prophet, priest, and wiseman to which I am heir? My instructors frequently lift a text from the Bible to assure me that they are on my side, but the plain fact is that I never seem to meet pastoral companions, living or dead, in the culture that they nurture....The pastoral work that results is not lacking in skills or usefulness – but I have little sense that it is indigenous to the world of faith, no feeling of having my practice developed from within the biblical world.... Instead of subtly nuanced abilities in pastoral visitation we get training in mass visitation movements, misnamed evangelism, that promise to fill the pews on Sunday.

Instead of letters of spiritual counsel we get slogans designed for the mass media. Instead of models for patience we get pep talks and cheer leader yells to work up church spirit. And if our lumpish congregations refuse to wave their pompoms on signal, we stalk off to another

congregation, and another, until we find some people dumb enough to put up with such inanities.¹²⁰

And now we turn to Os Guinness. He suggests that:

We have uncritically bought into the insights, tools, and general blessings of modernity.... This has led us to idolize modern approaches to life, such as politics, management, marketing, and psychology. We also have fallen prey to powerful modern myths, such as change, technique, relevance, and need....

Radical opposition to idolatry is also fundamental to the protestant principle. Confronting idols is the corollary to letting God be God, living by faith alone, and practising the principle of (that)... The church always needs reformation. At the heart of the Reformation was an insistence on the utter dependability of God and an unrelenting protest against any absolutizing of the created, the relative, and the purely human....

On the one hand, in searching for what is best in modernity, we should ask: Where are modern insights and powers legitimate and fruitful? Because all truth is God's truth, we are free to plunder truth wherever it is found. On the other hand, in looking out for what is best, we should ask several questions. First, where are modern insights and powers double-edged? (The double-edge exists because modern insights contain negative and positive aspects, intended and unintended consequences.) Second, where are they excessive? (Useful though they may be, it is possible to trust in them inordinately, making them unbalanced or unbounded.) Third, where are they autonomous? (Their very brilliance and effectiveness encourages us to treat them

¹²⁰ Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 1-5, 13

separately from other moral, human, and theological considerations.) Fourth, where are they idolatrous? We ask this final question not because the insights and tools are inherently evil, but because – through their very usefulness – they can be points of false reliance and even working substitutes for God.¹²¹

Guinness goes on to suggest later in the book that the leading sources of contemporary Christian idolatry are the managerial revolution and the therapeutic revolution.¹²² We will look more at these models and their implications for leadership below.

Before we do that, however, let me turn to John Stott for some insight from Scripture. Stott suggests that the pastoral ideal in Scripture is exemplified in Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This was the model that Jesus wanted leaders to copy and He talked much about it in such passages as John 10. However, Stott goes on to say that this model needs to be complemented by two other models which He warned His followers to avoid.

First, He said, there are the secular rulers who “lord it over” and “exercise authority over” people. “Not so with you,” He added emphatically. Leadership in His new community was to be entirely different from leadership in the world. “Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant”....

Secondly, Jesus urged His disciples not to imitate the Pharisees. They loved both places of honor (at banquets and in the synagogues) and titles of honor... “Do not do what they do”, Jesus said. Christian leaders are not to be called “Rabbi” (teacher), “Father”, or “Master”. That is, we are not to adopt towards any human being in the church, or

¹²¹ Os Guinness and John Seal, eds., *No God But God*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 23-26.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 112.

allow anybody to adopt towards us, an attitude of helpless dependence, as of a child on his or her father, or of slavish obedience, as of a servant to his or her master, or of uncritical acquiescence, as of a pupil to his or her teacher....

Here are two different contemporary models of leadership, one secular (rulers) and the other religious (Pharisees), which nevertheless shared the same basic characteristic: a hunger for power and prestige. Today the most likely model presented to us for imitation is that of business management. It, too, despite some acceptable parallels, is often more worldly than Christian. We have to beware lest, as the status of pastors in society declines, we seek to compensate for it by demanding greater power and honor in the church. The essential mark of Christian leadership is humility, not authority; servitude, not lordship; and "the meekness and gentleness of Christ."¹²³

The secular authority model Stott refers to is mentioned in Mark 10:42-45, the religious authority model in Matthew 23:1-5.

In summary, Peterson is suggesting that models for pastoral leadership, outside of the pulpit, are influenced more by the Social Sciences than they are by Scripture. Guinness is stating that our thinking about life in general, and the church specifically, has bought uncritically into modernity and its obsession with technique and technology. Stott then calls us back to Scripture in pointing out that Jesus warned us about faulty models of leadership, whether they be secular or religious.

Let us now take a closer look at the Therapeutic and Managerial Models of leadership.

A. The Therapeutic Model

Pastoral Leadership is carried out in many functions – in

¹²³ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, (Leicester: IVP, 1992), pp.290-91.

and out of the pulpit. Much of what is done during the week involves helping people apply the Word of God to their lives and this is carried out in such functions as counselling and visitation. Eugene Peterson suggests that both of these weekly functions of pastoral leadership have been secularized, one by psychology and the other by the public relations industry.

Counseling has become secularized under the influence of the psychological sciences and visitation under the influence of the public relations industry. By learning how to use them as a means for story-telling and story-making, they can easily be restored to their original settings and do good service as biblically informed pastoral work.

As a counselor, the pastor is secularized away from being a friend in Christ into functioning as substitute for God, which is, in effect, an act of idolatry. It is an extremely difficult process to resist, who does not like to be treated as a god? The person who comes for counseling has the expectation that he or she, the weak one, will be helped by the strong pastor. The inferior comes to the superior. Persons look for experts to solve their problems for them so that they will not have to acquire competence to live authentically and responsibly. They are used to deferring to experts in every other area of life – why not here?....

The secularization of pastoral visitation takes place when the pastor gives up the uncertain and somewhat modest work of being a companion to persons in pilgrimage and takes on the job of public relations agent for the congregation; the job then is to whip up flagging enthusiasm, raise money for the budget, promote new programs, and "get out the vote" on Sundays....Under the pressure of such expectations, visitation ceases to be pastoral work.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Eugene Peterson, pp. 91-95

Peterson goes on to say that both counseling and visitation can be reclaimed as pastoral work if the pastor uses them in biblically-prescribed ways. He gives some very good examples of what this might look like. I recommend this book for your perusal.

In another place, Eugene Peterson talks about the pastor's role of making saints.¹²⁵ One of the problems that the Therapeutic Model brings with it is the idea that a pastor should be a "doctor fix-it" because there are hurting people who demand that they feel good. Peterson suggests that people today are not hurting any more than past generations (even though some of the issues may be different). The main difference is that people expect to get things fixed and the pastor is expected to make them feel good. Peterson states, "The pastor's primary responsibility is to lead people into worship to re-orient themselves (so that they come to see that)...this problem is not the whole world even though it feels that way." Worship becomes a place where we have our lives redefined for us. In the light of this the pastor's primary job is not to fix problems but to make saints – we are in the saint-making business, not the human-potential business.

However, Peterson is quick to add, that to be this type of pastor one needs to give up many things held dear: efficiency, control, quick returns, and the satisfaction of pleasing people, to mention a few. He states that pastors are better off without these things because it forces them to adopt a work that is slow, hard to measure, and that people don't necessarily want – a tough sell, and not many are buying it, but very necessary. The bottom line is that the pastor is not called to be a therapist. He or she is called to be the pastor, to help people live in the grace of God no matter what.

Os Guinness addresses the Therapeutic Model specifically when he states:

¹²⁵ Eugene Peterson, "The Business of Making Saints", *Leadership Journal* (Spring 1997), 20-28.

In the 1990's, the roving spotlight of national attention is on the recovery movement. The twentieth century is closing with the same national nervousness and psychic epidemic as did the nineteenth century. But the recovery movement is only the latest, fastest growing, most popular, most accessible, and most religious of the many therapies that make up the broader therapeutic movement. So dominant have these therapies become – so self-evident in their claims and so seemingly effectual in their cures – that they have been well described as "the therapeutic revolution". And when Christians handle them thoughtlessly and uncritically, they easily become "another gospel"....

In some, where the American Church at large and the evangelical community in particular have been unguarded about the therapeutic, they have been caught in the toils of a new Babylonian captivity. But this captivity is enforced on couches instead of brick kilns and experienced in affinity groups instead of chaingangs.¹²⁶

Indeed, the Therapeutic Model has offered the church a way of being in control and a leadership function she feels is needed. This Therapeutic Model has suggested that leaders should be counsellors, people who are there to fix other people's problems and help them to be happy. This is a far cry from the servant leadership model we see in Christ, a leadership that is not so much given to the alleviation of suffering as it is to finding God in the midst of life's pain. This model will be addressed more fully later in this paper.

B. The Managerial Model

The second model that has heavily influenced church structure and church leadership is the Managerial Model. This has come to us mainly through what is known as the "Church Growth

¹²⁶ Os Guinness, *No God But God*, 112, 115.

Movement.” Os Guinness states that, “The Church Growth Movement is committed to ‘effective evangelism’ through such means of ‘growing churches’ as management, marketing, and mega churches.”¹²⁷

Guinness goes on to mention that the use of modernity insights and technologies (which the Church Growth Movement does without apology) could actually lead to a fruitful period of innovation within the church. Guinness suggests that the managerial revolution could provide the church with many needed tools and he is quick to point out that innovation in itself is not a problem. He states, “If Christians would use the best fruits of the managerial revolution constructively and critically, accompanied by a parallel reformation of truth and theology, the potential for the gospel would be incalculable.”¹²⁸ Guinness then adds that

Whatever criticisms need to be raised, this point is beyond dispute: the Church Growth Movement is extraordinarily influential and significant within American churches today. At its best, it should be applauded. Where it is not at its best, it requires criticism so that it might be. The Church of Christ concerned for the glory of Christ needs more – not less – of the best of true church growth.¹²⁹

After pointing out a number of concerns that he has with the Church Growth Movement, Guinness indicates that there are three main dangers of modernity upon which church growth seems to be based. These three dangers are secularization, privatization, and pluralisation. He states:

Unquestionably the component that bears directly on the Church Growth Movement is what Max Weber called

¹²⁷ Ibid., 151.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 154.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

“rationalization”. This is the first of the two underlying dynamics of secularization. (The other is differentiation.)...

For religion, the result of rationalization is what Weber also called “disenchantment” (and C.S. Lewis called “a new enchantment”). All the “magic and mystery” of life is reduced and removed – not so much unwanted as unnecessary. No one in the process is necessarily hostile to religion. Rather, as technique and the “figure it out” rationality spread further and further, the decisiveness of faith is rendered more and more irrelevant.... There is no need for God, even in His church.

The two most easily recognizable hallmarks of secularization in America are the exaltation of numbers and of technique. Both are prominent in the Church Growth Movement. In its fascination with statistics and data at the expense of truth, this movement is characteristically modern. Some people argue that the emphasis on quantifiable measures – on counting – is the central characteristic of a rationalized society. Thus the United States is government by polling, television programming by ratings, sports commentary by statistics, education by Grade Point Averages, and academic tenure by the number of publications. In such a world of number-crunchers, bean-counters, and computer-analysts, the growth of churches as a measurable “fact-based” business enterprise is utterly natural.

The problem with this mentality is that quantity does not measure quality, numbers have little to do with truth, excellence, or character. As one sociologist says, ‘Big Mac’, even with billions and billions of hamburgers served, need not mean ‘Good Mac’. But what is misleading at the trivial level of fast food becomes dangerous as one moves through sports prowess, educational attainment, and presidential character to spiritual depth. For church growth viewed in measurable terms such as numbers, is trivial compared with growth in less measurable but more

important terms, such as faith, character, and Godliness. Having growth in terms of numbers, of course, does not rule out the more important spiritual growth. But it does not necessarily include this type of growth either.

A tell-tale pre-occupation with technique is also prominent in the Church Growth Movement and is linked to secularization. Life is viewed as a set of problems, each set having a rational solution, an identifiable expert, and therefore a practical mechanism to effect it. Take the example of the changing profiles of the pastor. Needless to say, distortions of the ministry are not new....

Anyone who doubts this shift has only to look at church growth literature and check for such chapters as "Portrait of the Effective Pastor". The bulk of such chapters keep theology and theological references to a minimum – little more than a cursory reference to the pastor's "personal calling" and to "God's vision for the church". In their place are discussions of such themes as delegating, confidence, interaction, decision-making, visibility, practicality, accountability, and discernment – the profile of the pastor as CEO....

Those who live like CEO's are fired like CEO's – and spiritual considerations have as little to do with the ending as with the beginning and the middle. Small wonder that one eminent Christian leader returned home from a church growth conference puzzled. There had been "literally no theology", he said. "In fact, there had been no serious reference to God at all."¹³⁰

One of the major problems with selling out to an obsession with technique and technology is the de-mystifying of faith and the elimination of the awe and the mystery of God, who is trivialized in

¹³⁰ Os Guinness, 163-165

the process. This theme is taken up by Donald McCoullough¹³¹ and the problem of the loss of awe is mentioned by Douglas Coupland¹³² as he laments the loss of connectedness with the profound with which Generation X has to deal.

Another problem lies in the area of dependency. A church sold out to technique and management models is going to feel self-reliant and able to do anything as long as the right technique/model is found. Scripturally, it is the church who recognizes its own impotence, who will be thrown on to God in utter dependency – exactly where God requires us to be.

The Managerial Model of church obviously has great ramifications for the concepts of leadership. A Business Management Model will demand a leader who is task-oriented and given over to the objective of productivity. He or she will be motivated by success and will have a bias toward action and performance. Competitiveness will be encouraged and independence valued.¹³³ On the other hand, a Family Management Model (which I believe is the more Scriptural model) will have a leader who is relationship oriented, motivated by love, with a bias toward being and character, who will favour equality and unity and encourage such, and will value interdependency.

Peter Berger states that, "He who sups with the devil had better have a long spoon. The devilry of modernity has its own magic: the (believer) who sups with it will find his spoon getting shorter and shorter – until that last supper in which he is left alone at the table, with no spoon at all and with an empty plate. The devil, one may guess, will have gone away to more interesting company."¹³⁴

¹³¹ Donald McCoullough, *The Trivialization of God*, NavPress, 1995.

¹³² Douglas Coupland, *Life After God*, Pocket Books, 1994.

¹³³ See Thomas Peters, *In Search of Excellence*, for an elaboration of these characteristics and the modern manager.

¹³⁴ Peter Berger, as quoted in Os Guinness, *No God But God*, 5

Os Guinness suggests that "The challenge of modern church growth is the problem of modern discipleship in large, how to engage in the world freely but faithfully." He then tells us that there are at least two cautions that need to be addressed.

The first caution to ponder is historical. In the early 1980's when the Christian Right was the dominant trend, criticism of the movement was often treated as treason. Today, when the trail of its debris-strewn illusions is all too obvious, many former enthusiasts wonder why they did not recognize the movement's short-comings earlier. Could it be that the Church Growth Movement in its present expansionist phase is also a movement waiting to be undeceived. It would be wise to raise our questions now.

The second caution to ponder is theological. If modernity is history's greatest reinforcement of the idol-making factory that is our hearts, nothing can resist it short of the truth of radical monotheism: "There is one God, no God but God, and no rest for any people who have any god but God". Only an impossible God, revealing impossible truths and making impossible demands, can call out an impossible people adequate for this challenge.

For all who are committed to church growth and eager to use the best of modernity, it is sobering to realize the length of God's iconoclasm. As the Scriptures show, God is not only against the idolizing of alien gods, God is against His own gifts when idolized. The fate of the tabernacle and the temple are both a warning to mega churches built not on rock but on sand.

We should therefore remember Peter Berger's contemporary warning: "He who supps with the devil of modernity had better have a long spoon". By all means dine freely at the table of modernity, but in God's name keep your spoons long. We should also remember Origen's ancient principle: "Christians are free to plunder the Egyptians, but forbidden to set up a Golden Calf." By all

means plunder freely of the treasures of modernity, but in God's name make sure that what comes out of the fire that will test our life's endeavors is gold fit for the temple of God and not a late twentieth century image of a Golden Calf.¹³⁵

IV. Towards a New Testament Model

It has been said that to be always relevant you have to say things which are eternal. There are at least two eternal truths that must influence our thinking when it comes to building a New Testament Model for leadership today. The first is that the umbrella term in Scripture for all leadership positions and functions is servanthood.

The idea of being a servant (*diakonos*) or slave (*doulos*) is the dominant theme throughout the New Testament when we think of leadership in the church. These terms occur in the Gospels and the Epistles and are used to describe both function (to serve) and office (servants). Acts 6 uses the term to describe the function of both apostles and deacons. The apostles are to have the *diakonia* (ministry) of the Word (verse 4) and deacons are to have the *diakoneo* (service) of waiting on tables (verse 2).

The second eternal truth that needs to be said is that the context for all ministry and leadership is quality relationship. This relational base for leadership is highlighted in the dominant themes throughout the New Testament of love, character development, exemplary teaching, and other-centredness. Such quality relationship is the cornerstone of all of Jesus' teaching as He summarizes the Commandments in relational terms,¹³⁶ and as He gives a Commission to His disciples to love as He has loved them.¹³⁷

All leadership is to be understood in terms of servanthood within quality relationships where sacrificial love is the main

¹³⁵ Os Guinness, 174

¹³⁶ Luke 10:27-28.

¹³⁷ John 13:34-35.

characteristic. This outlaws utilitarianism, one of the major "relational" sins (in relationship with God and in relationship with others) of the contemporary church. I now turn to four New Testament case studies – Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, and Jesus.

Paul is often seen as the bold, courageous, tough, passionate, exuberant, pro-active, and confrontational leader. These characteristics are seen in many passages, such as the following references from Acts:

- 8:1 He is seen as giving approval to Stephen's death.
- 8:1-2 He is breathing out murderous threats and then carrying them out.
- 9:21 He is raising havoc.
- 9:17-19 Paul is converted and filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 9:20-22 He is involved in public preaching and it is described as powerful and as baffling the Jews.
- 9:28 Paul speaks boldly in the name of the Lord.
- 13:46 Paul is courageous in his public confrontation.
- 15:39 Paul is seen in sharp disagreement with Barnabas (and with Peter in Galatians 2:11-14).

In other examples we see him passionately involved in church planting, teaching, and encouragement. We find him confrontational in both religious and civil courts and victorious in spiritual warfare. He perseveres through incredible physical and emotional suffering. One gets the idea of an "A-type" personality, an extravertish style of relating, and a definite tendency towards pro-activity.

It is possible that Paul had a problem with harshness and an abrasive approach as he has to defend his ministry from such criticism. He, also, perhaps had a problem with pride and arrogance.¹³⁸ These would be normal weaknesses in this type of personality.

¹³⁸ Cp. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

However, there is another side of Paul's leadership that is often times not mentioned when we talk about Paul as an exemplary leader. In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders,¹³⁹ we see him having an attitude of humility, servanthood, and tears. He states that he has not been covetous, that he has been self-sacrificing and not demanding, and that his hard work amongst them has been an example for them to follow. Part of this hard work included his self-giving attitude towards weak people. He is involved in a prayer of humility and much weeping and embracing is included. Perhaps we are seeing here a "softer" side of Paul's character.

This can also be seen in 2 Corinthians 3:6-13 where Paul lists the hardships that he has gone through and describes himself in the following ways:

- understanding, patient, kind and loving (verse 6).
- opened heart wide to them, not withholding affection from them (verses 11-12).
- urging them to open their hearts to him (verse 13).

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 we have him communicating that learning weakness was a good thing for him and then in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20 he mentions that he has been gentle amongst them, like a mother (verse 7), that he has loved them very much and that they have become dear to him (verse 8), and that he has been involved with them like a father, encouraging, comforting, and urging them to live lives worthy of God (verses 11-12). He now has an intense longing to see them (verse 17).

Paul's "A-type" personality has been moulded by God and he has become more like Jesus. This is further exemplified in his teaching, especially throughout the Pastoral Epistles where he places the emphasis on character development and exemplary teaching as necessary requirements for leadership. I turn now to Barnabas.

¹³⁹ Acts 20:17-38.

Barnabas' name means "Son of Encouragement" and we discover him as a giving, self-sacrificial person. He befriends Saul and is sent to Antioch where he sees evidence of God's grace. He is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.¹⁴⁰ He and Paul have a team ministry where he is the leader of the team at first and when the team expands to include John Mark, Barnabas is still the leader. He is gifted as a prophet and teacher and is set aside by the Holy Spirit for special ministry, ordained by the church, and sent out on mission.¹⁴¹

In Acts 13 the team hierarchy changes where we see Paul assuming leadership and Barnabas staying within the team. After Paul's dispute with Barnabas, Barnabas leaves the team, taking John Mark with him.¹⁴² The outcome of Barnabas' ministry to Mark is profound. As a result of Mark growing and becoming a leader himself we have his Gospel and we have him meeting up with Paul again and being involved in ministry with him as well as with Peter.¹⁴³

In Galatians 2:13 Barnabas is said to have been led astray on the Jewish-Gentile issue, highlighting the fact that perhaps Barnabas had a problem with timidity. Barnabas is often seen as the "pastoral type" and is a good example of a leader who has a very different personality from that of Paul.

Timothy is another example of a "pastoral" model. In Philippians 2:19-22, we see that he is genuinely interested in the welfare of others, not concerned about his own interests, and committed to team ministry and servanthood. The task that he has is the gospel. In 1 Timothy 4 we see that he perhaps had a problem of inferiority due to his youth and that this could cause him to neglect his giftedness. In 2 Timothy 1 it is suggested that he had a problem with timidity (or at least compared to Paul he did). The answer to these personality problems that Timothy had was not to

¹⁴⁰ Acts 11:22-24.

¹⁴¹ Acts 11:25; 12:25; 13:1-5.

¹⁴² Acts 15:36-39.

¹⁴³ Philemon 24; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13.

quit, and not to become more like Paul, but to "fan into flame" the gifts that God had given to *him*.

Jesus is the prime example of leadership given to us in Scripture. John Stott suggests that John 10:1-16 is a primary passage for our understanding of leadership principles as based on Jesus.¹⁴⁴ In these verses we see that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and that the Good Shepherd:

- Knows His sheep – personal relationships are essential and they are reciprocal relationships ("I know them, and they know me.")

- Serves His sheep – in Ezekiel 34 and Jude 12, God's chief complaint against shepherds is when they feed only themselves and, therefore, use their position to feed their own egos rather than the people committed to their care. Stott suggests:

So there is a good deal of dirty and menial work in shepherding; it includes strengthening the weak ones, healing the sick, binding up the injured and bringing back the strays...Pastors need this sacrificial, serving love in their ministry today. For like sheep human beings can often be 'perverse and foolish' and stray from the path. Some can also be demanding and unappreciative, and we will find it hard to love them. But then we will remember that they are God's flock, purchased with Christ's blood and entrusted by the Holy Spirit to our care. And if the three persons of the Trinity are committed to their welfare, how can we not be also?"¹⁴⁵

- Leads His sheep – "It is our solemn responsibility to lead people in such a way that it is safe for them to follow us. That is,

¹⁴⁴ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 279-90.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 283-284.

we have to set them a consistent and reliable example. We need to remember that Jesus introduced to the world a new style of leadership, namely leadership by service and example, not by force."¹⁴⁶

- Feeds His sheep – “Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd was preeminently a teacher. He fed His disciples with the good food of His instruction...Indeed, the ultimate goal of our pastoral ministry is both ‘to present everyone perfect in Christ’ and ‘to prepare God’s people for works of service’. It would be hard to imagine a nobler ambition than through our teaching ministry to lead God’s people both into maturity and into ministry.”¹⁴⁷

- Rules His sheep – This is the overseeing role of leadership where obedience and submission of the people to the leader is always in the context of servant relationship of the leader to his or her people.

- Guards His sheep – especially by opposing false teachers.

- Seeks His sheep – by reaching out to those who do not yet belong to Jesus.

As we imitate the leadership model of Jesus, these functions will be carried out in different ways by different people because of different circumstances and different personalities, not to mention giftedness and training. Such diversity is necessary and, in fact, to be welcomed, but the principles of the model as outlined above will always be evident if our leadership is truly based on Christ’s example.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 285.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

V. Some Conclusions

My call here is “Let’s get back to the Book.” It is in the Book that we learn what God wants His church and leaders to be and do. For the church to be what God wants her to be, we need more biblical leaders. Let’s also recognize the difference between character, function, and style. *Character* is biblically mandated for leadership. It is to be exemplified by the fruit of the Spirit, godliness, Christlikeness, servanthood. *Function* is also biblically mandated and is based on giftedness - Spirit empowerment, through which the character of God is expressed within quality relationships. The task is the gospel and the consequent making of disciples, all to the glory of God.

Style will be the consequence of such things as personality, training (especially from young years), modelling, circumstances, experiences, and growth in grace. Style will include an enormous diversity but always needs to be in line with character and function for it to be Godly.

People who are more “Pauline” in their style of leadership often need to learn about weakness, vulnerability, humility, and patience. People who are more “Barnotim” in their style of leadership often need to learn about strength, confidence, courage, boldness, and passion. The truths of 1 Corinthians 12 (Paul’s passage on body ministry) and respect for God’s design for diversity in the Body of Christ need to be emphasized and applied to the area of leadership affirmation. The call for leadership is a call for all God’s people to live in obedience to Him, allowing God to develop them, and to use their giftedness as He gives opportunity. We must stop all overt and covert denunciation of certain styles of leadership. All of God’s varied giftedness and styles of expressing that giftedness need to be affirmed and deeply appreciated. If there are certain styles that are undermined in our culture, perhaps, in the light of 1 Corinthians 12, greater emphasis needs to be given to these.

VI. Some Implications for Training and for Denominational Leadership

A. Training is not Cloning

Expectations of training programs often amount to cloning rather than equipping. Cloning involves taking some raw material and fashioning it to a pre-determined plan, usually to look like, or be like the trainer. Equipping involves taking the raw material and helping it to be what it was designed to be in the first place. The process of cloning often happens by putting the perceived goal ahead of the raw material so that the raw material is shaped to meet the perceived goal rather than it being shaped according to its own uniqueness and strength and seeing the calling flow from God and His involvement in that process.

An example of this would involve a denomination setting a goal such as having more "seeker-sensitive" type churches. The perceived problem could be that we don't have any "seeker-sensitive" type leaders and, therefore, the solution is to get some raw material and instruct the training college to make us some!

The biblical alternative to this is along the lines of recognizing a person's giftedness, taking the raw talent and ability and character qualities that are Godly and continuing the life-long process of shaping this person to be who God has created him or her to be and set him or her free to take up the opportunities that God allows.

B. Character Development is the # 1 Essential

Most leadership models today are either skill-based or personality-based rather than character-based. Scripture calls for character development before anything else and this needs to be taken into account in all training programs for Christian leadership. Skills development in such training programs should give tools for the expression of that character.

C. What About the Area of Giftedness?

Training programs for Christian leadership should help people "fan into flame" the gifts that God has given them. This is the teaching of 2 Timothy 1:6-7 and it is in the context of God-given power, love, and self-discipline. The goal of this is to help the individual to overcome whatever inadequacies he or she has due to personality or any other factor.

VII. Discussion Questions

1. Have you had personal experience with any of the "three concerns"? Which ones? What do you feel and think about them?
2. Discuss the use of the term "gift of leadership" as applied to Romans 12:8. What are your conclusions?
3. What are your feelings and thoughts about personality style and leadership?
4. Discuss the Therapeutic and Managerial Models for leadership. What are your conclusions?
5. It is suggested that the concepts of servanthood and relationships are two eternal truths. What do you think? How does this apply to your own leadership?
6. To whom do you relate more: Paul? Barnabas? Timothy? How do you feel about that? Do you get frustrated by the other type?
7. How does Jesus' model of leadership from John 10 relate to you? Reflect on what God is saying to you through this passage. Share your reflections with someone.
8. What implications for training do you see from the conclusions reached through this paper? What are your thoughts of the three implications mentioned in Section VI?

REVIEW

**WHEN TWO ARE THREE:
JUNG YOUNG LEE'S
THE TRINITY IN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by

Jonathan P. Case

I. Introduction: Lee's Contribution to the Wider Discussion

Jung Young Lee has offered an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, from an East Asian perspective, that he hopes will contribute to our changed context of globalization, in which our understanding of Christianity has come to require what he calls a "world perspective."¹⁴⁸ Interpretations of the Trinity and/or Christology from eastern religious perspectives have become more and more popular over the past few decades. Now *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, with its appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity from Taoist and Confucian perspectives, can be added to such works as Raimundo Panikkar's *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*,¹⁴⁹ Michael von Brück's *The Unity of Reality*,¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 11

¹⁴⁹ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon, Person, Mystery*. New York: Orbis; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973.

¹⁵⁰ Michael von Brück, *The Unity of Reality: God, God-Experience, and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue*. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991.

John Keenan's *The Meaning of Christ*¹⁵¹ and Masao Abe's influential essay on "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata."¹⁵²

But Lee is interested not only in the East - West theological encounter; along the way he is concerned to show how an Asian interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity can also answer significant questions raised by feminist and liberation theologies. These are laudable aims, surely, and Lee's work has been praised by significant figures working in the area of East - West interreligious dialogue. And Lee does provide helpful material on what he conveniently terms "yin/yang symbolic thinking" represented in Confucianism and Taoism. Upon close examination, however, I believe that this book, considered as a contribution to contemporary discussions of Trinitarian theology, is flawed seriously by questionable presuppositions, misreadings of the history of Christian thought and instances of sheer incoherence passed off as examples of creative theological thinking. I have no wish to pillory Prof. Lee's work, but it is imperative to scrutinize his book carefully and subject it to stringent criticism, for in it he proposes a far-reaching, programmatic reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of East Asian thinking, and to all appearances this book will have a significant impact in the area of interreligious dialogue.

II. Questions of Method

In terms of theological method laid out in his introduction,¹⁵³ Lee admits unabashedly to the priority of the apophatic. "I begin with a basic assumption that God is an unknown mystery and is unknowable to us directly....The God who said to Moses 'I am who I

¹⁵¹ John P. Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Christology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989.

¹⁵² In *The Emptying God: A Buddhist - Jewish - Christian Conversation*. John Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

¹⁵³ Lee, *The Trinity*, Chapter One.

am" is the unnameable God...."¹⁵⁴ This statement revealed to Moses is compared, incredibly, to the familiar passage from the *Tao te ching*, "The Name that can be named is not the real Name." One hopes that Lee will encounter one day the name of YHWH in his reading of the Exodus story, and the importance of this name for the doctrine of the Trinity (Robert Jenson no doubt would be happy to help on that point).¹⁵⁵ But perhaps this is an unfair criticism, since Lee claims that his method is not "deductive," i.e., relying on "special revelation," but "inductive," i.e., relying on natural revelation given in cultural or natural symbols.¹⁵⁶ It is not at all clear what difference "special revelation" would make--even though Lee generously assumes that "the divine Trinity is a Christian concept of God implicit in Scripture"¹⁵⁷--since every theological statement we make, the author assures us, does not speak of the divine reality, but rather only "of its meaning in our lives...[A]ny statement we make about the divine reality is none other than a symbolic statement about its meaning".¹⁵⁸ The symbol of the Trinity, therefore, gives "meaning" as it participates in the life of the community, because this community is none other than that which "produces and sustains it".¹⁵⁹ In the *Unity of Reality*, Michael von Brück was intemperate enough to state that "whether Christ or the Upanishads are 'true' depends on a personal faith experience"¹⁶⁰--and many of us were (and are) understandably suspicious of those who do not scruple to put *truth* or *true* in quotation marks. Lee, however, appears to be uninterested altogether in asking the truth-question.

Although Lee means to confess that "the symbol of the divine Trinity itself transcends various human contexts," the

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁵⁵ See Jenson's analysis in *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 1 - 18.

¹⁵⁶ Lee, 229.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Michael von Brück, *The Unity of Reality*, 5.

meaning of this symbol does not.¹⁶¹ Theological statements are invariably contextual, so much so, Lee says, that if the context of controversy were not present in the early centuries of the church “the divine Trinity would never have become a doctrine or norm for orthodoxy to defend...”¹⁶² The familiar lament about Hellenistic ways of thinking imported into the church’s doctrinal thinking is sounded, as well as the familiar warning that traditional terminology is not meaningful or relevant to contemporary contexts—the East Asian, for example. How then, exactly, does culture determine meaning? “How we perceive and think are directly related to our conception of the world. All images and symbols we use in our thinking process area directly taken from the world. Thus our thinking is closely connected with cosmology.”¹⁶³ Since “the yin - yang symbol can be regarded as the paradigm for East Asian thinking”¹⁶⁴ the interpretive upshot is easy to predict: “the Asian way of thinking” serves as Lee’s hermeneutic key to understanding the Christian faith, “especially as to reinterpreting the idea of the divine Trinity.”¹⁶⁵

In chapter two, “Yin - Yang Symbolic Thinking: An Asian Perspective,” Lee goes on to explain the basic dynamic of “yin - yang symbolic thinking” by first locating it within a Taoist cosmology characterized by cyclical bipolarity. The *I Ching* or *Book of Change* is, of course, at the heart of Lee’s exposition. The necessary and complementary opposite forces (seen, e.g., in such oppositions as light/dark, hot/cold, male/female, action/nonaction, etc.) which characterize everything in the world are known in terms of yin and yang, forces whose complementary opposition constitute “the basic principle of the universe”.¹⁶⁶ In this cosmology, change is understood as prior to being; hence yin and yang must be seen not

¹⁶¹ Lee, 14.

¹⁶² Ibid., 15.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

as independent, substantial realities but rather as a symbol of continual movement or relation. Because of this relational character, yin - yang *thinking* is best characterized as a holistic “both/and” thinking, as opposed to (but supposedly also encompassing) the “either/or” thinking characteristic of the West. While “[t]he either / or way of thinking splits the opposites as if they have nothing to do with each other...the both / and way of thinking recognizes not only the coexistence of opposites but also the complementarity of them”.¹⁶⁷ We are told that while “either / or” thinking has its uses in certain situations, in the big picture of things it cannot hold up. “In our organic and interconnected world, nothing can clearly and definitely fall into either a this or a that category”.¹⁶⁸ It is more than a little interesting to consider how a judgment that claims “nothing can...” is exempt from the kind of charge leveled against either / or kind of thinking. But Lee apparently has little time for such logical niceties; he has theology to do. And for theology especially, which deals with questions of ultimate reality, the “either / or way” is clearly inadequate. Such a way of thinking is appropriate for only “penultimate matters”,¹⁶⁹ and not with a symbol like the divine Trinity, which has universal import.

The notion that the “symbol” of the Trinity might have the potential for calling into question “yin - yang symbolic thinking” and its worldview is never considered. For a supposedly groundbreaking book, the central assumption is a tired, old liberal one: that an *a priori*, cultural worldview with its concomitant way of thinking is fundamental and that Christian doctrine must remain secondary and derivative; theological concepts must be trimmed to fit this already-existing picture. It is worth quoting Lee at length on this point, as he introduces us, in chapter three, to his notion of “Trinitarian Thinking”:

¹⁶⁷ Lee, 33.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

The Trinity is a meaningful symbol, because it is deeply rooted in the human psyche and is manifested in various human situations. It is then the human situation (both inner and external, or psychic and social situation) that makes the Trinity meaningful...

Today we seek how the Trinity can be meaningful to us rather than the Trinity as reality, because our situation has changed. The reason is that what is meaningful to me is real to me, even though it may not be "objectively" real. Thus divine reality does not precede its meaning; rather, the former is dependent on the latter. What is meaningful to me must correspond to my conception of what reflects my situation as an Asian Christian in America. If yin and yang symbols are deeply rooted in my psyche as an Asian and manifested in my thought-forms to cope with various issues in life, what is meaningful to me must then correspond to this yin-yang symbolic thinking. Similarly, the Trinity is meaningful if I think in Trinitarian terms. Unless the yin - yang symbolic thinking is a Trinitarian way of thinking, the idea of Trinity is not meaningful to me.¹⁷⁰

Seldom has the self-centeredness at the core of so much contemporary theology been articulated so clearly, and without embarrassment. Lest anyone think this too severe a judgment, consider Lee's estimation of the importance of the theologian's "personal journey" in theological construction.

It is...one's personal life that becomes the primary context for theological and religious reflection. That is, a theology that does not reflect my own context is not meaningful to me. That is why any meaningful and authentic theology has to presuppose what I am...The theology that I have attempted here is based on my autobiography. In other

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 51.

words, 'what I am' is the context of my theological reflections.¹⁷¹

Feurbach wins, Freud wins, as well as innumerable talk show hosts, new age gurus and pop theologians and therapists. In what age other than one which has been characterized by the "triumph of the therapeutic"¹⁷² could one get away with claiming that "what I am" is the context of one's theological reflection?

In order to find out if Trinitarian thinking is "meaningful" to him, Lee attempts to answer the question, "Is yin-yang thinking also Trinitarian thinking?"¹⁷³ This may seem like a nonsensical question. After all, to the outsider at least, Taoism and "yin-yang thinking", with polarities of darkness/light, soft/hard, female/male, etc., seem committed to a dualism that is claimed to be resolved (I dare not say "sublated", for fear of being branded too "western") in a higher monism. Threeness does not seem to have much to do with this worldview. Actually, Lee says, this way of looking at Taoism is mistaken, and proceeds from holding on to a substantialist metaphysic. Seen within a relational framework, "when two (or yin and yang) include and are included in each other, they create a Trinitarian relationship".¹⁷⁴ Lee attempts to illustrate this from the familiar Taoist diagram of the Great Ultimate, where one is symbolized by the great or outer circle, and three is symbolized by the yin, yang and the connecting dots in each. To express this linguistically, Lee says we must understand that the preposition "in," when saying (for example) that "yin is in yang" and vice-versa, is a relational, connecting principle. "In the inclusive relationship, two relational symbols such as yin and yang are

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷² The description is taken from Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith After Freud*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966. In a world understood solely therapeutically, Rieff says that there is "nothing at stake beyond a manipulatable sense of well-being" (13).

¹⁷³ Lee, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Lee, 58.

Trinitarian because of 'in,' which not only unites them but also completes them".¹⁷⁵ The same sort of relational understanding must be applied to the word "and" in the phrase "yin and yang." "...[Y]in - yang symbolic thinking based on relationality is Trinitarian because 'and' is a relational symbol that connects other relational symbols."¹⁷⁶ One can see where this logic proceeds long before Lee draws the conclusion that "[t]wo...are three because of the third or the between-ness, but each is also one because of their mutual inclusiveness".¹⁷⁷ With this logic operating, Lee is able to examine such pronouncements of Jesus as "Believe me that I am *in* the Father and the Father is in me"¹⁷⁸ and "I *and* the Father are one"¹⁷⁹ and conclude that such statements are Trinitarian. "In" and "and" in these statements are ciphers for the Spirit.

There are troubling aspects to this "relational" logic. Could Lee be serious about extending the logic? If "two are three" because of the relational "and" between yin and yang or Father and Son, what about other combinations? To what absurd lengths could this logic lead? Are two "and" two not only four but also five? And what are we to do with the Trinitarian formula—"Father, Son 'and' Holy Spirit"? Remove "and" so as not to wind up with four relations? The most Lee can say to head off these kinds of absurdities is that in Taoism, "[t]hree does not give birth to four. Rather three gives birth to all things...Three is the foundation of existence. It is the symbol of completion and fulfillment".¹⁸⁰ Apparently "in" and "and" are relational categories when dealing only with one, two and three, but somehow not so when dealing with other combinations of relations. As far as I am able to determine, we do not have a thoroughgoing relational way of thinking here, but rather a Taoist convention.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹⁷⁸ John 14:11.

¹⁷⁹ John 10:30.

¹⁸⁰ Lee, 62-3.

Another, perhaps more troubling, aspect of this logic involves Lee's criticism of western theology and its substantialist logic. According to Lee, from this perspective "in" and "and" are meaningless, because they cannot be a part of substance or being, while from a "relational" perspective, "'and' is a relational symbol that connects other relational symbols".¹⁸¹ According to Lee, however, "'and' is not only a linking principle in both/and thinking but also the principle that is *between* two".¹⁸² This is just silly. The early church fathers understood conjunctions and prepositions like "and" and "in" not as "meaningless" words but precisely as relational terms, because that is how they function in grammar. One cannot read, for example, Basil of Caesarea's treatise *On the Holy Spirit* without gaining an appreciation for his insights as to how the doctrine of the Trinity generates a theological grammar that enables us to speak responsibly and coherently about the triune relations and our place in the economy of salvation. The Fathers used words like *ousia* and *hypostases*, and they have been roundly criticized for that (often by people who do not understand the discussions), but it seems to me that, after criticizing the fathers for not paying attention to "and" and "is" because these terms were not substantial, Lee is the one guilty of reifying these words. For example, Lee says that while "substantial thinking overlooks 'and' as if it does not exist...[i]n reality, 'and' is a part of everything in the world, just as the spirit exists in all things."¹⁸³ It seems incredible that one could damn the fathers for merely being intelligent grammarians, then pride oneself on committing the error they had sense enough to avoid.

On the basis of his "relational" understanding of the Trinity, Lee proffers a few criticisms and revisions of "Trinitarian thinking." Among such criticisms, the one aimed at Karl Rahner's "simplistic understanding of the divine Trinity" (!) is the most memorable in this chapter. The depth of Lee's misunderstanding of

¹⁸¹ Lee, 60.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Rahner's position can be seen in the former's judgment that "[i]f God's presence in the world is completely unaffected by the world, it is possible to conceive that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the also the economic Trinity".¹⁸⁴ It is, of course, precisely "Rahner's Rule" (to use Ted Peter's apt description¹⁸⁵) that gets Rahner himself in trouble with his grip on the classic immutability thesis. Perhaps we should forgive Lee for his lapse in rigorous attention to this important argument, since early in the book he admitted to spending "more time in meditation than in library research and more time in rereading the Bible than reinterpreting existing theological works on the Trinity."¹⁸⁶ But it is no light matter to shrug off one's commitment to scholarly integrity and fidelity to one's subject matter—especially when interpreting works the likes of Fr. Rahner's, whose "simplistic understanding" of the doctrine of the Trinity has been one of the most important contributions in this century to the ongoing discussion.

III. The Trinitarian Relations

A. The Son

Chapters four, five and six are devoted to understanding the divine persons, but, surprisingly, Lee's order begins with a discussion of the Son (chapter four), then moves to the Holy Spirit (chapter five) and finally to the Father (chapter six). Chapter four is by far the most interesting, with chapters five and six working out Lee's logic expressed in four. In this chapter, his attempt to begin the discussion with the Son has a biblical flavor to it, but here Lee's methodological confusion is plain. He has already claimed that his

¹⁸⁴ Lee, 67. That the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa, is Rahner's central thesis in *The Trinity*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

¹⁸⁵ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 22.

¹⁸⁶ Lee, 12.

method is "inductive" or based on natural theology rather than a deductive approach based on special revelation. Yet here he claims that we begin with the Son because "God the Father was revealed through God the Son" and therefore "the concrete and historical manifestation of Christ becomes the foundation for our understanding of God," —immediately adding, incoherently, that "the traditional approach to the Trinity is deductive; our approach to it is inductive."¹⁸⁷ However the reader is supposed to make sense of this, it is clear in what follows that Lee is concerned not so much with the story of Jesus found in the Gospels as he is with an abstract discussion of the Son "who has two natures, divinity and humanity, just as we have begun our Trinitarian thinking with yin-yang symbolic thinking."¹⁸⁸ This is a natural place for us to begin, Lee explains, since the Christological issue preceded the Trinitarian formula -- apparently forgetting that Nicea preceded Chalcedon.

Leaving that aside, how exactly are the two natures of the Son supposed to function as a key to understanding the Trinity? To begin, Lee explains that "[i]f Christ is the symbol of divine reality, Jesus is the symbol of humanity...He is both Jesus and Christ or Jesus-Christ, who is different from Jesus as Christ. Jesus as Christ means Jesus is equal or identical with Christ, but Jesus-Christ means that Jesus and Christ are neither equal nor identical. Just like yin and yang, they are different but united together."¹⁸⁹ One would be hard pressed to find in contemporary theology a more palpable lack of understanding the meaning of "Christ." But, bolstered by his understanding of familial symbols taken from the *Shou Kua* or *Discussion of the Trigrams*, in his appropriation of the biblical material for his Trinitarian musings, Lee continues to venture where sane exegetes would fear to tread, by claiming that in the nativity narratives in Luke *two* distinct divine powers are actually involved in the conception of Jesus — "the Holy Spirit" and the "power of the

¹⁸⁷ Lee, 70.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

Most High.”¹⁹⁰ Thus Lee concludes that “[t]he familial symbols of the Trinity are definitely established in this story: the Most High as the father, the Holy Spirit as the mother, and Jesus to be born as the son. In this Trinitarian relationship, the Son possesses the natures of both Father and Mother. The Father is represented by the yang symbol and the mother by the yin symbol.”¹⁹¹ It seems the doctrine of the Trinity is not all that difficult to understand—just one big happy divine family. So much for Mary as *Theotokos*.

There are in this reinterpretation a number of implications for liberation and gender concerns. Jesus becomes the perfect symbol of “marginality,” being in touch with the world of heaven and the world of earth, belonging to both worlds yet neither in this world nor in heaven, transcending both. So “Jesus-Christ [*sic*] as the Son, possessing the two natures of humanity and divinity, becomes the margin of marginality, the creative core, which unites conflicting worlds.”¹⁹² But because the Son includes the Father and the Spirit while simultaneously excluding both of them, he is at the margin of the Father and the Spirit, and therefore he acts as “the connecting principle between the Father and the Spirit.”¹⁹³ The implication for the gender issue is that, although according to the biblical witness Jesus was male, yin - yang “both /and” thinking enables us to affirm that “Jesus was a man but also a woman,” (and “not only men but also women”¹⁹⁴) since human beings are microcosms of the universe. Like all other creatures, Jesus was subject to the yin-yang polarity, and in terms of gender, the upshot of this polarity means that the existence of male (yang) presupposes the existence of female (yin). “In this respect, Jesus as a male person presupposes that he is also a female person.”¹⁹⁵ Of course there is a Trinitarian pattern discerned here by Lee, since Jesus not

¹⁹⁰ Cp. Luke 1:35.

¹⁹¹ Lee, 74.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

only brings male and female together but also transcends them. Further, if Jesus was not only male but also female, then he was more than a single person—he was “one but also two at the same time”—and by now it should be clear as to where this kind of rhetoric leads. If one symbolizes singularity and two symbolizes plurality, then Christ is a single person representing individuality but also a people representing a community.

What is disturbing about all of this, soteriologically speaking, is that on this score we are re-presented in the incarnation of the Son not because the divine nature comprehends and sanctifies human nature; rather, such re-presentation takes place by virtue of an East Asian communal “cosmo-anthropological” principle that can be extended to all persons. When this principle is extended theologically to the triune fellowship, the results are ridiculous. It means that “Jesus as the Son is not only a member of the Trinitarian God but is also the Trinitarian God’s own self.”¹⁹⁶ When this principle is applied hermeneutically to the story of Jesus, the results are horrific. It means that that death of Jesus on the cross was the death of the Father, and the death of the Spirit as well.¹⁹⁷ “It was then the perfect death....”¹⁹⁸ Lee is motivated to make such extravagant claims partly by his desire to redress the traditional notion of divine *apatheia*, but this is assuredly not how to do it. The resurrection of the Son, then, is also the resurrection of the Trinitarian God. Now how can this happen, if—to put not too fine a point on it—everyone is dead? Quite simply, we have in Lee’s reading a resurrection *by principle*, by virtue of the fact that “just as yin cannot exist independently without yang...we cannot speak of death without resurrection.”¹⁹⁹ Although Scripture speaks of death as the result of sin and the enemy of life, an enemy that is overcome through the resurrection of Christ, the cosmo-anthropological perspective animating Lee’s reinterpretation reveals that death and

¹⁹⁶ Lee, 82.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

life cannot exist apart from each other--and hence are not truly enemies to each other after all. Moreover, our perception is so skewed that we fail to understand that there is no genuine gap between death and resurrection in eternity; death and resurrection take place simultaneously. Thus, "[t]he death of God occurs in the resurrection of God, just as the resurrection of God occurs in the death of God."²⁰⁰ In answer to the question, "Oh Death, where is thy sting?," Lee's response seems rather anemic. Death never really *had* much of a sting.

In attempting to draw out some implications for creation and redemption from the relation of the Son to the Father, Lee makes some startling claims, the most disturbing of which bears upon the equality of Father and Son in the Godhead. As a Father has priority over his son, so, Lee reasons, creation must take precedence over redemption; indeed "salvation means restoring the original order of creation, which is distorted because of sin."²⁰¹ Hence the work of the Savior is dependent upon the work of the Father, which creates what Lee terms a "functional subordination of the Son to the Father."²⁰² Fair enough. But then Lee draws the wholly unjustified judgment that it was "[t]hus a mistake of the early church to make Christ coequal with the Father, by placing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit side by side...[the Father and the Son] are one but not the same. This is precisely why it is not possible to make the Son coequal with the Father."²⁰³ They are one but not the same, therefore they cannot be equal? Perhaps I have missed Lee's point here, but he appears to be committing the elementary blunder of reading into the inward Trinitarian relations an order he believes he has discerned in the outward works. For someone so enamored of "both/and" thinking, with these intemperate (some would say heretical) comments it seems to have never occurred to Lee to affirm "both" functional subordinationism "and"

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 88.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

equality of being or essence. Subordinationism is hardly a new idea in the history of Trinitarian theology, and many people have held various forms of it while still adhering to the central insight expressed at Nicea as to the consubstantiality of Father and Son.

B. The Spirit.

In his treatment of the Spirit, Lee is out to help remedy the short-shrift this member of the Trinity has gotten in the history of Christian thought. "The Spirit is often regarded," Lee says, "as an attribute of the Father and Son without having a distinctive place in the Trinity."²⁰⁴ A bit overstated, perhaps, but intending to "clarify" the place of the Spirit is a genuinely praiseworthy aim. The real question for Christians in this chapter, however, is whether we can afford (or stomach) Lee's "clarification". According to Lee's Asian Trinitarian thinking, the Spirit is known "as 'she', the Mother who complements the Father." Then, Lee adds this for the feminists: "The Spirit as the image of Mother, as a feminine member of the Trinity, is important for today's women who are conscious of their place in the world."²⁰⁵ In Lee's reading, "[i]t is the two primary principles of reality, the Father [“the essence of the heavenly principle”] and the Mother or Spirit [“the essence of the material principle”], who have logical priority over the Son," so in this respect, "it is not the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son, but the Son who proceeds from the Spirit and the Father."²⁰⁶

Lee attempts to identify the Spirit with the Asian idea of *ch'i*, or the vital energy which animates and transforms all things in the universe. The Spirit is "the essence of all things, and without her everything is a mirage," and Lee does not hesitate to compare this notion to the Hindu *prana* when speaking of the function of *ch'i* to unite matter and spirit. The author realizes that he is on

²⁰⁴ Lee, 95.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 103.

dangerous ground (even for him) in talking like this, and does his best to explain that “[t]he unity of the Spirit as *ch’i* and the Spirit as Godself does not mean that the former is identical with the latter even though they are inseparable.”²⁰⁷ So, while the Spirit as *ch’i*, the essence of life, must manifest herself in “trees, rocks, insects, animals and human beings,” Christianity is “more than animistic or pantheistic because the Spirit is not only *ch’i* but also more than *ch’i*. She is more than *ch’i*, because she is also God.”²⁰⁸ There you have it; theism rescued by the conceptual clarity offered by yet another variation on “both/and” thinking. Harnack’s familiar comment about Augustine avoiding the charge of modalism by the mere assertion that he did not wish to be a modalist might well be tailored to fit Lee on the question of pantheism.²⁰⁹

Because Lee cannot successfully navigate the problem of pantheism entailed by his position, he cannot, not surprisingly, successfully navigate the problem of evil or (in his terms) the problem of the relationship between *ch’i* and evil spirits (“I do not know how this disharmonious element occurs in the universal flow of the Spirit”).²¹⁰ This does not prevent him, however, from presenting a kinder, gentler Spirit, oriented to the *K’un* hexagram in the *Book of Change*. “Because fragility is the nature of the Spirit, the Spirit is always gentle.”²¹¹ Gentle metaphors for the Spirit (drawn from the *Discussion of the Trigrams*) such as cloth, a kettle, water, a large wagon, form, and multitude are all investigated, but, interesting as some of these are, by far the most interesting metaphor for the Spirit is a cow with a calf or a pregnant cow, insofar as such metaphors “signifies the fertility of the earth mother.”²¹² These metaphors signify “the self generating power inherent in the

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 99.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 100.

²⁰⁹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. IV (London, Edinburgh and Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1898) 131.

²¹⁰ Lee, 102.

²¹¹ Ibid., 105.

²¹² Lee, 106.

Spirit,” so that the Spirit is the authentic mother of Jesus, while Mary was the “surrogate mother.” Again, commenting on Luke 1. 34ff: “If the Holy Spirit represents female divinity, the Most High may represent male divinity. In other words, the relationship between God the Mother and God the Father caused the conception of Jesus in Mary.”²¹³ One might say that St. Thomas had it wrong: the real relations should be Paternity, *Maternity*, Filiation, etc.²¹⁴ We are assured that Mary fully participated in the process of conception and birth, yet Lee laments that “[w]hen the church failed to recognize the feminine element in God or to recognize the Spirit as God the Mother, the church had to elevate Mary as God the Mother. Divinizing Mary was a tragic mistake.”²¹⁵ Elevating Mary to God the Mother? Is that what Lee thinks those sneaky Roman Catholics have been up to? Or what church is this man talking about? Try as one might, it is difficult to see why this fictitious error would be worse than the paganism Lee proposes; at least Mary as “God the Mother” might not land one so squarely in Docetism, as Lee’s position does, despite his protests to the contrary.

Two of the dominant motifs which characterize the work of the Spirit are integration and transformation. At first glance, these motifs strike one as reasonable enough, pneumatologically speaking, but they are expounded without the slightest hint of subjecting to theological criticism *what* is being integrated and transformed. “Integration,” we are told, encapsulates that “inclusivity without discrimination” and “complementarity of opposites” characteristic of what Lee calls love.²¹⁶ And why the Spirit’s transforming work enabling movement “from one stage to another in human growth and spiritual formation” is such a big deal remains a mystery. After all, as Lee tells us, “[a]ny sharp distinction between the secular and the sacred...is not only contrary to the

²¹³ Lee, 107.

²¹⁴ See Thomas’ discussion of the real relations in *Summa Theologica* 1. 28. 4.

²¹⁵ Lee, 106.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 108.

Trinitarian principle but also unacceptable from the cosmo-anthropological perspective of East Asian thinking.²¹⁷ Although the New Testament distinguishes between flesh and spirit, we need not operate with a division between them, what with the blessing of yin-yang thinking. In fact, “‘what is born of the flesh’ has the potential for becoming ‘what is born of the Spirit.’”²¹⁸ Lee explains that “[t]he Spirit in all things makes up the continuum between saints and sinners, between the flesh and the spirit, between the bad and the good. Thus, *the continuum itself* is the power that moves us from one pole to the other.”²¹⁹ It is not without good reason, of course, that the creed refrains from referring to “the Continuum Itself, the Lord and Giver of Life.” With his unstudied, unbiblical and undifferentiated amalgam of flesh and spirit, no wonder Lee can conclude that “because the Spirit is immanent in the world, the world is the church.”²²⁰

If all of this sounds like so much pneumatological gurgling from the contemporary liberal pluralist agenda, it is. “In this pluralistically and ecologically oriented age,” Lee says, “we have to rethink our theological task. An exclusive and absolutist approach, which has been fostered by a Christocentric perspective, must be revised. Our theological focus must change from Jesus-Christ to the Father, and from the Father to the Spirit.”²²¹ And despite Lee’s assurances that “the Spirit-centered approach” does not exclude a Christ-centered approach, we have heard all this before. “Because the Spirit is truly immanent and inclusive of all things in the cosmos, a theology based on the Spirit must include all...From the perspective of the Spirit, all religions are manifestations of the same Spirit.”²²² Such groundbreaking pneumatology.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 115.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 116

²¹⁹ Ibid., italics added.

²²⁰ Ibid., 117.

²²¹ Ibid., 123.

²²² Ibid., 123.

C. The Father

In chapter six we see the political quandary in which Lee is landed as a result of his hermeneutical commitments. Nearly one quarter of the chapter is devoted to explaining why the Father has preeminence in the Trinitarian relations. This has very little to do with the Son’s relation to the Father in a biblical perspective. In the West, because of liberation and feminist concerns, Lee suggests we do not have to take seriously the patriarchy expressed in the Scripture. But because he is committed to reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity from “the contextual reality of Asian people,” and in that context the dominant familial structure is patriarchal, he has no choice but to argue for the preeminence of the Father. So, while Lee is aware of, and sympathetic to, Western calls to dismantle patriarchy, and while he attempts to soften an unyielding patriarchal structure in the doctrine of the Trinity by reimagining the Spirit as a feminine member of the Trinity, he must admit nevertheless that “[s]ince the purpose of this book is to present the Trinity from an Eastern perspective, not from a Western perspective, I have to accept reluctantly, with some reservation because of my Western influence, the biblical witness that the Father (the male) is more prominent than the Spirit, who represents the image of the mother (female).”²²³ Make no mistake, that “biblical witness” is “accepted” only because of the East Asian perspective on the family. “The Eastern perspective is relative to the context of Eastern people at the present time, and any theological treatise from an Eastern perspective must reflect the context of Eastern people.”²²⁴ It is touching indeed to see a liberal theologian torn between his sympathy for a western feminist political agenda and his commitment to a radically contextual hermeneutic that will permit him to reinterpret the Trinity from only an East Asian (i.e., patriarchal) perspective.

²²³ Ibid., 129.

²²⁴ Ibid.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted largely to interpreting the Father from the perspective of *Ch'ien* or the symbol of heaven found in the *Book of Change*. This hexagram bears four cardinal virtues which Lee explicates in relation to heaven's attributes: origin, success, advantage and correctness—reinterpreted as the Father's love, harmony, justice and wisdom. Following this, Lee examines a number of metaphors from the *Discussion of the Trigrams* for unfolding the character of the Father: the 'round,' the prince, the father, jade, metal, cold, ice, deep red, a good horse, an old horse, a lean horse ("I would like to think that the Father in the Trinity is like my own father, working like a horse for his Trinitarian family..."), a wild horse, and tree fruit. Yet among the various characteristics discussed, the creativity of the Father and the universal moral principle or order originating in him constitute his "centrality," which unifies the relations and the cosmos. But speaking this way about "centrality" in reference to the Father's place smacks way too much of patriarchy and subordinationism, and once again Lee has to scramble to salvage a more egalitarian way of distributing power. Fortunately, "in yin-yang thinking, everything changes and transforms itself. The center changes as an entity or as a relation change. Thus, the center is redefined again and again in the process of creativity and change."²²⁵ Hence, Lee can claim that the Spirit is also central because she represents the centrality of the earth, and the Son is also central because the centrality of the Father is marginalized through the Spirit and recentered in him (the Son), who is between both Father and Spirit and heaven and earth.

It becomes clear by the end of this chapter that Lee is unable to reconcile his commitment to traditional Eastern "family values" (my term) with his sensitivity to contemporary gender concerns. He believes that "the Trinitarian structure is fundamental to human community" and can serve as "the archetype of the human family." In the face of crumbling family life, Lee maintains that no sound family can exist without either a mother or a father, and that without children the family is incomplete. Yet "[w]hat is needed in family

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

life today is not to change the images of father, mother and children, but to reinterpret their images to meet the ethos of our time."²²⁶ Not changing the images, but merely reinterpreting them for our time? That is a bit like offering clarification without clarity. But the underlying ideology has at least become clear. In his concluding remarks on this chapter on the Father, Lee admits that "[t]he real issue regarding the Trinity is neither the familial images nor the gender of the Father. To me the real issue is the lack of the feminine member of the Trinity."²²⁷ By this point in the book, it come as no surprise to learn *that* is the real issue, even in a chapter on the Father.

IV. "The Orders of the Divine Trinity."

In chapter seven, Lee says he "hopes to examine how using one's imagination and drawing from one's existential context shows us new ways in which the Trinitarian members can be interrelated in the mystery of divine life,"²²⁸ and he is out to do this unencumbered by both Greek and Latin ways of conceiving the relations within the Godhead. Lee's interest in Trinitarian "orders" is somewhat baffling, and although he says that in general theologians tend to be fascinated by the inner workings of the divine life, it appears that Lee's real fascination in this chapter is with less divine questions of hierarchy and power. The political and hermeneutical dilemma, for example, is evident again in full force. "Although I lean strongly toward feminist and liberationist interpretation of Trinitarian doctrine in terms of equality, mutuality and community, my approach to the orders of the divine Trinity is distinct because of my Asian background, which presupposes not only a cosmo-anthropological and organic worldview but also a hierarchical dimension in the order of the divine Trinity."²²⁹ In the traditional order, "the Father,

²²⁶ Lee, 150.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

the Son, the Spirit," Lee judges that commitment to the coequality of persons should be questioned, since the idea of coequality of the three persons "is based not on the biblical witness but on the aspirations of equal rights advocates and a democratic society."²³⁰ One learns such invaluable lessons about the history of theology from Prof. Lee's book. Instead of countenancing such egalitarian idealism in our doctrine, Lee reminds us that "[i]n praxis, there is no equality of all people. Ethnic minorities and many women are oppressed, class structure cannot be eliminated, and utopia is only a dream of those who suffer injustice today. If we truly want to reflect the contemporary situation in which we live, we must not be too idealistic."²³¹ This is truly a pathetic picture. Here is a theologian who accuses the Fathers of something that they could not possibly be guilty of (viz., being democratic idealists), who then reminds us to be hard headed pragmatists on account of the political realities in our world, but who all along has admitted to reimagining the Spirit as feminine in order to balance out the patriarchy of the traditional interpretation. One almost would counsel Lee to develop a more active political imagination, so at least he could appreciate the error he mistakenly attributes to the Fathers.

The other orders imagined are "the Father, the Spirit, the Son" (the "distinctively Asian" order²³²), "the Spirit, the Father, the Son" (admittedly difficult to support from the biblical witness, but not if taken "from human imagination based on human experience"²³³), "the Spirit, the Son, the Father" (a matriarchal family structure supported by "shamanism, often regarded as the religion of women in Asia,"²³⁴), "the Son, the Father, the Spirit" (an order against the norm of the East Asian idea of family structure but one which can be salvaged by virtue of the yin-yang principle²³⁵) and

²³⁰ Ibid., 157.

²³¹ Ibid., 158.

²³² Ibid., 153.

²³³ Lee, 161.

²³⁴ Ibid., 166.

²³⁵ Ibid., 169.

finally, "the Son, the Spirit, the Father" (Lee's favorite paradigm because it represents "the existential situation of human experience,"²³⁶). Each of these orders is explicated with the aid of a hexagram.

What is the significance of these Trinitarian "orders"? Lee admits that these different orders "are based purely on the imagination of human experience and may have no relevance to the inner life of the divine Trinity."²³⁷ Yet, he insists that such an exercise is not merely a pointless exercise. "Rather, I have attempted to discover the meaning of the divine life from my own experience...My imagination of the divine Trinity is rooted in the meaning of my familial life. The orders of the divine Trinity are then meaningful images of my experience of life."²³⁸ So although what he has done in this chapter cannot be identified with what the life of God is like, it is "not sheer nonsense but has a meaning that relates my life to the divine."²³⁹ If one is baffled initially by Lee's fascination with Trinitarian orders, the bafflement increases by the time the chapter is at an end and the realization sinks in that these orders do not have anything to do with God but only with Lee's search for "meaning" for his life--yet still, somehow, the church is supposed to profit by reading a chapter of his personal imaginings.

V. "Trinitarian Living."

As another episode in Lee's theological autobiography, chapter seven could be excused perhaps as one theologian's imaginative ramblings. But theology must be more than a privatistic, imaginative vision quest. Once one's search for personal meaning is divorced from the search for truth, disaster cannot be far behind when one attempts to think about *other* people, and nowhere is that

²³⁶ Ibid., 172.

²³⁷ Ibid., 175.

²³⁸ Ibid., 176.

²³⁹ Ibid.

more apparent in this book than in chapter eight, where Lee holds forth on what he calls "Trinitarian living" with respect to church life, family life and community life.

With respect to his understanding of church life, we have in Lee's proposals nothing short of a pagan reinterpretation of the life of the Christian church. Baptism represents the ebb and flow of yin and yang. "Just as yang changes to yin, which again changes to yang, life dies in the water and rises up to new life. In this process, the old yang (old yang) becomes new yang (new life) because of yin (death)."²⁴⁰ This symbolic representation of cosmic forces is seen throughout the church year, most notably during the Christmas and Easter seasons, when we experience the "cycle of life-death-new life."²⁴¹ The paganism is furthered in Lee's treatment of the service of holy communion, which he relates to the Asian practice of ancestor worship or ancestral rite. In Lee's Trinitarian model of preaching, we do not see paganizing so much as we do his implicit assent to outright clichés about genders. A good sermon, he says, has an ethical or rational axiom (related to the mind), an emotive axiom (related to the heart) and a volitional axiom (related to the "lower abdomen" or seat of strength). The rational or ethical component belongs to the Father (the masculine principle), the emotive element to the Spirit (the feminine principle) and the volitional component to the Son, who mediates the Father and Spirit (mother). In Lee's final reflections on church life, he suggests that meditation is "the soul of the church's life," and that "the real crisis of today's church life comes from a lack of meditation."²⁴² In response to this crisis, the church needs to either revive its mystic tradition or learn meditation techniques from Asia. In meditation, Lee explains, we are connected or "yoked" to the divine. All separation from the divine life - whether that separation is caused by

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁴² Lee, 188.

thinking, self consciousness, sound or sensory images - is eliminated, so that "we are 'in' the life of divine Trinity."²⁴³

In Lee's treatment of what he calls "Trinitarian family life," the gender issue once again comes to the fore. We are told that "remaking the image of God with feminine members"—for example, changing the name "Father" to that of "Mother"—"can create the same problem that patriarchy has created." So, to avoid that problem, Lee says his strategy has been to reimagine the Spirit as the feminine member of the Trinity, as "the mother who complements the Father," thus completing the "Trinitarian family of God."²⁴⁴ The glaring, unexamined assumption in all of this is that while one cannot change "Father" to "Mother" for fear of repeating the same kind of problem that patriarchy has created, somehow one can with impunity feminize the Holy Spirit. Apparently, while names in the Holy Scripture such as "Father" and "Son" provide gender boundaries Lee is unwilling to cross, he has no reservations about ignoring in Scripture the existence of mere pronouns (he, his) in reference to the Spirit. This inconsistent and uncritical hermeneutical posture carries over into Lee's estimation of the trinity as the "archetype" of our family life. Although the heavenly model was "influenced" by our human context, Lee will not admit that he has sold out to a "contextual approach, where the present family context might be used as a norm for interpreting the familial life of the divine Trinity... We cannot attribute our family experience to the divine."²⁴⁵ Has this man read his own book? For the better part of two hundred pages he has done just that; why get sentimental about revelation now?

The Trinity as the archetype of the human family does more than provide a theological blueprint for families which are able to exhibit the traditional father-mother-child structure; in Lee's reading this archetype should also provide hope for families that do not manifest this structure. Single-parent families, childless

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

couples, even single persons are regarded as families "in transition," and even in this transitional phase all of these groups manifest, nonetheless, the divine archetype. What is highly revealing in this portion of chapter eight is a complete lack of interest in "alternative" family structures, such as *de facto* arrangements and homosexual partnerships. In particular, one wonders if homosexuals in the church have an ally in Lee or not, especially given his commitment to complementarity of opposites, male and female forces, etc. This seems to be one more of example of how, from the traditional East Asian understanding of family, Lee is restrained from capitulating wholesale to predominantly western concerns, no matter how sympathetic he might be. Granted, because of this restraint, Lee can at times sound very conservative. "No matter how firm the commitment made by the husband and wife, how much they love each other, their marriage and family do not succeed unless they have the right structure, based on a firm foundation."²⁴⁶ One of my Sunday School teachers might have said the same, and I believe it. But then almost immediately the theological craziness resumes. "What is needed is to build the family on the archetype of the Trinitarian Family...Thus, it is not only mutual commitment but also meditation that reaches the depth of God the Family, which then becomes the foundation of the human family."²⁴⁷ No organization is more sacred than the family, for this basic unit reflects the structure of the Trinity. Hence the church itself must be regarded as "the extension of the family unit," and Lee even makes the accusation that, since the church tends to look at the home as a secular realm and the church as the only sacred realm, "the church is indirectly responsible for the deterioration of family structure."²⁴⁸ Chalk up one more disaster for which the church is responsible.

Lee discerns familiar Trinitarian "principles" in his treatment of "community life" or society, which is envisioned as a large

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Lee, 197.

family system or as a "mosaic" of many family units. In this section the author executes an amazing backflip away from his early position on the notion of "coequality." Whereas earlier in the book he was sharply critical of the church's judgment that the divine persons are coequal, here without explanation he claims that "[j]ust as the coequality of the three is an essential ingredient of the Trinity, the coequality of different ethnic and racial groups in society is imperative for Trinitarian living in the world...Society is an extension of the family, and our family is a reflection of the familial image of the divine Trinity."²⁴⁹ Yet, even as a functional hierarchy is also at work in the Trinitarian "family," so a hierarchy of power must exist in any society. The power in the structure of that hierarchy, however, should be based on an individuals' capacities and not on racial origins or ethnic orientations. A more masterful exposition of the obvious would be hard to find, but the socio-economic platitudes continue. In surveying actual society, Lee soberly admits that "classes are inevitable in this life."²⁵⁰ But in response to liberationists' concerns, Lee says that the liberation theology he affirms "does not liberate us from the reality of the poor itself but from the unjust structure that is oppressive for the poor and weak."²⁵¹ The poor, I am sure, will be grateful for that clarification.

However, Lee tells us we must consider "the possibility that the structure of the social classes reflects the functional hierarchy in the Trinity."²⁵² In a poignant display of naiveté, he attempts to explain from yin-yang thinking why this position does not merely endorse the social and economic order. Governments should not attempt to fix the order of society so that only certain groups are benefited, "for everything must change according to yin-yang cosmology. Just as yin changes to yang when yin reaches its maximum and vice versa, people change from the lower class to the

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

upper and from the upper class to the lower."²⁵³ How long do we have to pray, and wait, for this kingdom (of sorts) to come? We really don't *just* wait for it, Lee says, for "we are fully participating in the process of change," since God is immanent in the whole process of our collective efforts to fulfill the needs of a just society. However, the middle class is particularly important in Lee's vision of society, since "[i]f society truly reflects the Trinitarian image of God the Family, the people of the lower strata and those of the upper strata are complemented through the middle strata, which acts as a mediator...It is this middle [class] that provides the stability of society and prevents conflict between the upper and lower classes."²⁵⁴ So when, for the benefit of society, the *Tao* is allowed to work through us its ceaseless ebb and flow of yin and yang, in our enlightenment we will come to recognize...the middle class in all its glory? Hegel has found a Taoist soulmate.

In the last few pages of this chapter, Lee includes his take on the concept of time from a "Trinitarian perspective." This is a strange little addition to the chapter; it was added, I suppose, because all of our Trinitarian living takes place, well, in time. But, no surprise, Lee's "Trinitarian perspective" on time is little more than a cover for a Taoist/Confucian perspective. "Linear" time is an illusion or "a limited perception within human experience," while "[i]n an ultimate sense, our time is cyclic, because our time is cosmic time."²⁵⁵ Lee's contribution to this discussion is neither unique nor interesting. Eschatology is associated with "dualistic concept of time," which is infected with the strange division of time and eternity, while in "Trinitarian thinking" now *is* eternity, since the Son serves as the "present" connecting principle to the "past" of the Father and the "future" of the Spirit. Why is it so difficult for people to understand that one can dress up an unchristian worldview with a Christian formula, and that worldview will still remain

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 208.

unchristian? With Lee's revision of eschatology, his paganizing program is complete.

VI. Lee's Conclusion

Lee's conclusion (chapter nine) briefly reviews the main themes of his book, and in important respects a few of these themes summarize the unexamined assumptions, confusion and errors running through his project. All he has done in this book, Lee admits, is to have drawn "a picture of the divine Trinity based on imaginations coming from my own experience, which is deeply rooted in Asian tradition. Realizing that I, as a human being, am incapable of the knowing the reality of the divine mystery, I have searched for the meaning of the divine Trinity in my own life." Lee warns us that "[w]hat is meaningful to me my not always be meaningful to others," but he hopes nonetheless that his book will function as "a catalyst for those who are seeking out the meaning of the Trinity in their own lives."²⁵⁶ This sounds so very humble, but it is the outcome of a theology almost wholly concerned with contextual "meaning" and not with truth. Lee uses Scripture in his construction, and one would think that some recognition of special revelation would factor into his claims. But, as we have seen repeatedly, he eschews the claims one might make on account of special revelation, preferring to use snippets from the Gospel merely as stimuli for his own imaginative and so-called "inductive" theological method. As we all know, there is using *Scripture* and then there is *using* Scripture. Bereft of the ability to make robust universal truth claims, Lee can only finally wonder, "Does my imagination of the Trinity, which is translated into my Trinitarian thinking, have anything to do with the divine Trinity itself? I do not know. However, if my Trinitarian thinking is intrinsic to my creatureliness, the Trinitarian God who created the world has something to do with my Trinitarian thinking. This gives me hope

²⁵⁶ Lee, 212-13.

that my Trinitarian thinking is not completely out of focus."²⁵⁷ Lee's thinking is not completely out of focus. That is cold comfort. This is hardly a full-blooded Trinitarian theology for the community of faith; to the degree that Lee's faith remains primarily in the "Trinitarian thinking intrinsic to [his own] creatureliness," his theological project remains a private affair. As Lee has reminded the reader again and again, "[t]he Trinity is meaningful to me because I think in Trinitarian terms."²⁵⁸ For over two hundred pages, the author has extolled the corporate virtues of family, community, etc. It is a pity he never made the connection between the theological enterprise itself and the life of the people of God--which is public, confessional and mission-minded. To the degree that this work stumbles at this point, despite the concerns for holism, pluralism, racism, feminism and a host of other postmodern "-isms," Lee's project remains an eminently *modern* way of doing theology.

Lee's indebtedness to modernity is made clearer in some of his final comments on the relationship between the religions. As opposed to dialogue, in which "one religion relates to another religion because they are strangers to each other," Lee suggests what he calls *trilogue*, an inclusive conversation which moves beyond the constraints of oppositional, "either/or" thinking. In trilogue, the religions "relate to each other because they are part of each other"²⁵⁹ since, if we are all part of the Trinitarian family of God, we cannot help but be part of the religious traditions of our brothers and sisters. "In trilogue, many religions are in one religion and one religion is in many religions, because every religion bears the image of the Trinity."²⁶⁰ Such trilogue is common enough in the East Asian religious context, Lee assures us. What, then, becomes of the vast differences between many religions? How do we think about such differences? Apparently, rational discrimination *is* the problem.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 219.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 213.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 217.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 218.

Trilogue "transcends talking, discussing, arguing, comparing, criticizing, analyzing, judging, classifying, or agreeing with each other. In trilogue one simply accepts other religions as part of one's own...Trilogue is a spontaneous act of communication, which is a direct recognition of the presence of 'one in many.'"²⁶¹

A "spontaneous act of communication," transcending discussion, argument, criticism, analysis, etc.? We have in the idea of "trilogue" a most extreme manifestation of what George Lindbeck in his *Nature of Doctrine* calls religious "experiential - expressivism,"²⁶² the notion that at the core of all religions is a common, pre-linguistic experience of the sacred, the Absolute, etc. (pick your religious abstraction). The most well known exponent of this holdover from nineteenth-century religious romanticism is, of course, John Hick, and Lee's understanding of religious "trilogue" fails at the same basic point that Hick's model of the religions and religious experience does: seeing the very obvious differences among the religions, it throws its hands up in despair and claims no single religious perspective has the absolute truth, but assumes for itself a Babel-like, absolute perspective in order to make this claim, and then falls back on some vague, pre-linguistic religious experience. With respect to the relations between the religions, in the final assize Lee looks like a garden-variety pietist of a higher (or, depending on your point of view, lower) order.

At the close of this review, I find very little by way of which to commend Lee's work. There are interesting expositions of Taoist and Confucian ideas, but Lee betrays such little understanding of why the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is important, and misunderstands so many critical discussions in the history of Christian theology, that this work has only marginal importance in contributing to the genuine issues in the current discussion. A good, basic question for Lee to ask would be why the Gospel story

²⁶¹ Lee, 218.

²⁶² George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1984.

(rather than an abstract discussion of “two natures”) is important to the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁶³ But, committed as Lee is to his so-called “inductive” method, Holy Scripture cannot help but receive the short end of the stick. What Lee fails to realize is that, given his unexamined hermeneutical and theological assumptions, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* is a predictable deduction, republishing a number of liberal clichés about religion, politics, gender and Christian theology.

²⁶³ See, for example, Eberhard Jüngel’s discussion of “The Humanity of God as a Story to be Told,” in *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983) 299 - 314.