Restorative Witness

Evangelism and Reconciliation: A Wesleyan Theological Exploration

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Abstract

In an age marked by declining trust, cultural divisiveness and secularism, *Restorative Witness* offers a theological stance to undergird evangelism by using the lens of reconciliation. Drawing on the work of Miroslav Volf, *Restorative Witness* offers a theological exploration of evangelism, including an examination of the current climate of Western culture regarding issues of trust, mistrust and distrust; a historical overview of factors leading to the present situation; and observations regarding current difficulties facing the church in the arena of evangelism and reasons for those difficulties. The exploration uses theological resources in the areas of evangelism, biblical studies and systematics to offer a new theological disposition from which to engage evangelistic efforts. Firmly grounded in the biblical events of creation, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, and new creation, this theological stance takes seriously understandings of ecclesiology and the kingdom of God with the goal of restoring strength, integrity and power to Christian witness in an age of mistrust and divisiveness.

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Introduction

**The Problem**

Several years ago I attended an art exhibit and recognized an acquaintance from the community. As we introduced our respective spouses, he mentioned to his wife that I was pursuing doctoral work but was unsure of the area. When I responded ‘the theology of evangelism,’ their response was immediate and visceral. In perfect symmetry, they physically recoiled with expressions of horror. Embarrassed by the obviously negative nature of their reaction, he quickly apologized saying, ‘Evangelism, wow. I never would have thought. You’ve always struck me as so open minded.’ As I tried to alleviate his discomfort, I realized how difficult it would be to convince him that evangelism and open-mindedness were not mutually exclusive with one clearly preferable to the other.

Sadly, this experience is not unique. Repeatedly, across denominations and both within and outside the church, I have encountered hesitation, frustration, misunderstanding, denial, negativity, and even outright hostility in response to the entire topic of evangelism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Clearly few people, at least in a Western context, are comfortable talking about evangelism, much less engaging in it. Further, historically there has been either confusion or silence within the academy regarding this area of theological inquiry. William Abraham rightly points out that evangelism ‘falls between a rock and a hard place. The rock is the extraordinary silence on the part of systematic theologians on the subject of evangelism. The hard place is the inability of practical theology to reach any sustained measure of internal self-criticism.’[[2]](#footnote-2) The present project is prompted by this continued discomfort, coupled with the clear need for additional attention from the academic community.

In contemplating the challenges of evangelism, I believe there are several areas in which the church, particularly in the United States, has proclaimed a less-than-holistic message. Specifically, rather than presenting the whole gospel, the church appears to have frequently erred on the side of a message emphasizing the individual at the expense of community; heaven, or some other image of the afterlife at the expense of responsible stewardship of all of God’s good creation; and the salvation of individual souls for eternal life at the expense of the just and merciful care of whole persons, both now and in the age to come. The results of such a partial message can be seen, for instance, in the disregard Christians appear to have in relationship to environmental issues, or the way in which the church appears to be insensitive to issues of domestic violence as evidenced by the frequent advice for women to return to or remain in abusive relationships as part of their role as submissive, ‘Christian’ wives.

Furthermore, proclaiming such an incomplete message has over time led to the unhealthy existence of the church in the midst of antigospel environments, such as slavery, colonialism and postmodern imperialism. This has been unhealthy. Rather than being ‘salt and light’ by proclaiming the gospel for transformation, the church has instead often operated in deliberate partnership or unconscious complicity with powers at work in those settings. Although such complicity is not limited to one faith tradition, an obvious example is the ongoing sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church. For all Christian churches in a Western context, this has led to an atmosphere of mistrust/distrust, a loss of integrity, and a crisis in evangelism, both within the milieu of Western culture and from the perspective of the Western church’s relationship with other cultures. New understandings are needed to restore wholeness to the Christian message, integrity to evangelistic practices and reconciliation in relationships.

**A New Foundation for a Restorative Witness**

In the current exploration, I offer a new means of theologically grounding evangelism that recognizes the need to approach both the gospel and the formation of faith holistically. Using the lens of Wesleyan theology[[3]](#footnote-3) and drawing on theological work in the area of reconciliation, I propose that as the church engages in evangelism it must do so from a stance of reconciliation. In making this proposal, I believe Miroslav Volf’s metaphor of embrace, when adapted to the context of evangelism, is well suited for the task of envisioning what such a stance entails.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Embrace as a means of envisioning the task of evangelism is well grounded in both Scripture and theology; therefore, in explicating my model I look primarily to the fields of biblical studies and systematic theology. However, neither of those disciplines nor the church itself exists in a vacuum; thus other disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology and economics also play a role in the current discussion.

As I am a United Methodist minister from the United States, this project springs from a Wesleyan theological and Western cultural perspective; however, I hope its value will not be limited to those contexts. Reconciliation and evangelism are at the heart of Christian faith (2 Cor. 5.18-19); thus I believe the stance of embrace is valuable regardless of one’s cultural location or faith tradition within Christianity. Further, although the Wesleyan perspective offers a great deal of insight, I do not limit myself to that tributary and attempt to engage the larger theological stream as well. That being said, one does not easily divest oneself of theological DNA; therefore, as I interact with the systematic thought of others, I do so from a Wesleyan perspective, wanting to take the *experience* of evangelism seriously, but insisting that one must think *theologically* about it. In other words, in addressing such issues as the doctrine of God, Christology and soteriology, among others, I do so recognizing that there are always practical implications to all theological theorizing.

While I desire to employ a broad range of thinking, the scope of this project prohibits engaging the entire spectrum of faith traditions or academic perspectives. For instance, despite the wealth of Roman Catholic resources, it is possible to attend only to that point of view in a minimal way. Likewise, the vastness of biblical studies makes it impossible to engage all aspects in any depth. Rather than undermine the effectiveness of the project, however, this limitation ensures a steady focus, avoids overreaching proposals and ensures a judicious use of resources.

**Structure**

Using insights from disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, political science and economics, I assert in Chapter One that currently the church in the global North and West exists in an age marked by declining trust and cultural divisiveness. Further, I believe there are trends within the church that have contributed to this current cultural climate; among them the vocal presence of dispensationalist theology, the emphasis on individual souls at the expense of a robust understanding of the kingdom of God and its representation in the community of faith, the perceived disregard for the environment, the perceived indifference to suffering, and the continuing presence of racism and sexism in the church. I explore these issues in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three moves from the contemporary cultural climate to the discipline of evangelism, highlighting its emotionally, historically and theologically charged nature. Varying conceptualizations produce a variety of approaches that have over time led to confusion, debate, struggle and discomfort in the minds of many. Nevertheless, recent scholarly activity has been very helpful, especially those perspectives that broaden understandings of evangelism beyond sole proclamation.

Definitions of evangelism are important; however, considering the declining trust marking Western culture in the present age, I intend to look beneath definitions of practice to the theological issues undergirding that practice. Therefore in proposing embrace as a metaphor for understanding evangelism, I am not offering a new definition; rather I am asserting a *mode* from which one may engage in evangelistic practice. In other words, there is a theological stance that *undergirds* the evangelistic task. I explicate that stance in Chapter Four, using the metaphor of embrace.

In offering embrace as a foundational theological disposition, I draw on Miroslav Volf’s provocative and discerning work, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*. Although Volf’s work provides the metaphor of embrace as a means of understanding reconciliation, I believe it is also fruitful when adapted to evangelism. Embrace in both contexts is grounded on the divine self-giving of the Triune God and involves concepts of identity, otherness, what Volf refers to as ‘noninnocence’, and the idea of double vision as it relates to both truth and justice.

Embrace as the theological stance undergirding evangelism is only as valuable as the foundations on which it sits; therefore Chapter Five explores those underpinnings from a variety of perspectives. At the outset, if one accepts, as I do, that evangelism involves the aim of initiating others into the kingdom of God, and if embrace is the stance from which one undertakes that task, then one foundation for embrace is an understanding of the kingdom of God as announced by Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, in the aftermath of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, people discerned the unfolding of God’s kingdom and formed communities that reflected the dawning of that reign. A second foundation, then, is an understanding of the kingdom from the perspective of those communities, especially as proclaimed by Paul, the apostle.

In exploring these two foundational areas, given the vastness of biblical studies, I find it necessary to make discerning choices regarding which material and approaches require priority. Regarding Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom, I have chosen to privilege the views of scholars generally referred to as ‘Third Quest.’[[5]](#footnote-5) I believe it is significant that these scholars generally place Jesus firmly in the context of Judaism, fully acknowledging the framework of his eschatology, in contrast to others who prefer a noneschatological view of Jesus.[[6]](#footnote-6) In like fashion, as it relates to Paul’s understanding of the community of the Messiah, I draw on the same group of scholars, believing that their emphasis on Paul’s first-century environment, his world-view as a Jew, and the importance of the overarching story of Israel as the context of his thinking bring an important element of balance to the theological underpinnings for evangelism.

Additional elements of a foundation for evangelism undertaken from the theological posture of embrace are seven events that I believe to be pivotal to the gospel message. Described in Chapter Six, these reflect the priorities outlined in the earliest creeds and include creation, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, and new creation. These seven pivotal events, when properly understood, restore wholeness to the Christian message, providing a level, so to speak, against which evangelism might be judged. If one envisions evangelism as a substantial piece of art requiring various screws to be displayed correctly, these events are those screws. If the art hangs on only one, it will fall, because the weight is too great. If the screws are not correctly placed, the art will be uneven or even grossly skewed; but if the screws are correctly placed, and the art is firmly attached to all of them, the art hangs as it should.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Lastly, Chapter Seven focuses on restorative practice, outlining various implications for ministry of adopting a posture of embrace. Four broad concepts permeate these implications regardless of the particular ministry: identity, relationship, servanthood and power. Additionally, several specific areas of ministry are distinctively impacted by a stance of embrace: congregational life, leadership training (clergy and lay), theological conversation, ecclesiology, and evangelistic practice itself.

In a cultural context of declining trust, where understandings of evangelism are often based on negative images and uncomfortable impressions, both within and outside the church, continued theological reflection is necessary to restore evangelistic practice to its proper place of integrity within the context of the community of faith and beyond. It is my hope that imaging evangelism as flowing from a theological posture of embrace will help to restore the confidence, wholeness and responsiveness to the power of the Holy Spirit, which undergirds all Christian witness.

One

Current Cultural Climate

**A Problematic Context**

Several years ago, while eating my evening meal in St. John’s College dining hall, a young man joined me at table. As a middle-aged American woman in the midst of mostly British twenty-something students, I have always been a curiosity at St. John’s during my visits, and I am sure he was wondering what business had brought me there. Our conversation began with the usual pleasantries; however, when he discovered I was studying the theology of evangelism, he became quite animated. Apparently during that week, there was a very intense, public thrust of Christian witnessing sponsored by Christian Union Mission occurring on the Durham University campus. It was clear that this young man had little regard for this type of evangelism, which he felt to be overbearing and intrusive. As our conversation progressed, however, he mentioned that he had a Christian friend who had shared quite intimately about his faith journey. In contrast to the public witnessing, this young man was dramatically more receptive to the sharing of his friend. I asked him to describe his perspective on the difference between the two experiences. Interestingly, he replied that they were very distinct, the public witnessing was evangelism; the sharing of his friend was not. Yet he recognized that both his friend and the people involved in the public witnessing event provided him with the same information. He could not adequately explain this, even to himself; however, at an intuitive level he knew the answer was in some way related to trust. He could receive information from the friend whom he trusted that he could not receive from strangers making public witness on campus.

I believe this anecdote points to an important truth undergirding any discussion of evangelism, especially in a Western perspective. Trust is imperative. Because this is self-evident, in the literature of evangelism and missiology, very little deliberate attention has been paid to the issue of trust in the Western context. Rather than being clearly articulated, the *existence* of trust as a foundation for mission and evangelism has been assumed.[[8]](#footnote-8) Annette Baier aptly describes this assumption. ‘We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted.’[[9]](#footnote-9)

For better or worse, the climate of trust in the early years of the twenty-first century has become polluted. Trust is something that can no longer be assumed. This observation has at least two dimensions. The first is the dimension of trust experienced in the context of Western culture, especially that of the United States; the second is the dimension of trust experienced in the interaction between cultures, specifically for the current exploration, the interaction between American culture and cultures in the Global South.

The Current Environment of Trust in Western Culture

To gain insight into the current environment of trust in Western culture, it is necessary to briefly examine the concept of trust itself. From a sociological perspective, one definition of trust is ‘confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge).’[[10]](#footnote-10) This definition parallels those of other scholars such as Bart Nooteboom and Frédérique Six, for whom trust is ‘associated with dependence and risk: the trustor depends on something or someone (the trustee or object of trust), and there is a possibility that expectations or hopes will not be satisfied, and that “things will go wrong”. Yet one expects that “things will go all right”.’[[11]](#footnote-11) Or more succinctly, Piotr Sztompka’s definition of trust as ‘a bet on the future contingent actions of others.’[[12]](#footnote-12) Distrust, on the other hand, is the mirror opposite, a lack of confidence or faith in the reliability of another person or system; and mistrust is a neutral position, neither trust nor distrust.

Trust is inversely related to control and certainty. The more control one is able to exert, the less one needs trust to deal with the world. More certainty regarding outcomes means less trust is necessary regarding actions leading to those outcomes. However, the future is essentially unknowable and to a large extent uncontrollable; therefore, for day-to-day purposes most people develop a sense of ‘basic trust’ in others and in ‘taken-for-granted’ ways of living.[[13]](#footnote-13) Because of this, most societies have always been based to varying degrees on trust. It is the way in which humans deal with the inherent freedom of other humans at a concrete, interpersonal level. Each person always has the option to ‘do otherwise,’ which makes human action significantly unpredictable; thus the need to trust.

At the abstract level of social institutions and systems, trust is also essential; however, modernity has placed a unique stress on both sources and objects of trust. Because of the complex nature of the present world, social relations have become more detached from local contexts and expanded technology, and more intricately connected global economies and networks reinforce the dependence on trust. Additionally, this has shifted the varying forms of trust to more abstract levels.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Human agency is also a significant factor. The large-scale recognition that individuals are able to act as autonomous agents has shifted many societies from being based on fate to being moved by human agency.[[15]](#footnote-15) Increased human agency has also created increasingly representative societies with numerous people involved in ‘representative activities,’ acting on behalf of others in arenas such as government, business and technology. Joel Sobel highlights the representative aspect of society in his definition of trust as ‘the willingness to permit the decisions of others to influence [one’s] welfare.’[[16]](#footnote-16)

One result of the representative nature of contemporary societies is increasing interdependence. Increased specialization and an expanding number of occupations, special interests, lifestyles, and tastes are common across societies. Globalization links societies in ways that require cooperation, within societies as well as between them, in a wide variety of ways, for instance politically, economically and culturally. Cooperation is crucial; yet dependence on the cooperation of others increases uncertainty and thus the need to trust.

There are also new threats and hazards for which humans bear responsibility that have increased the unpredictable character of life. The unintended consequences of technological developments require increased trust as a means of coping with increased vulnerability. Furthermore, ‘optionality’ is a now predominant aspect of postmodern culture because people are faced with a rapidly expanding number of options in all domains of life.[[17]](#footnote-17) Uncertainty increases as the options available to others increases, making trust indispensible.

Two additional qualities of contemporary society contribute to the need for trust: its increasingly webbed character and the growing anonymity and impersonal nature of the others on whom people depend. The complex makeup of organizations, institutions and technological systems within society increases its intricacy; further, the internal structure of those systems is equally multifaceted and often global in scope. Therefore few people have a full understanding of the crucial systems they encounter and deal with on a regular basis (e.g. computer networks). This places people in the position of ‘looking through a glass darkly.’ Trust prevents them from becoming incapacitated by the complexity.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Likewise, within these intricate systems are vast numbers of participants on whom others depend, but whom they infrequently know personally and whose behavior they are seldom able to influence, control or monitor. For example, it is crucial that I trust the people who pick the vegetables I eat, produce the medicines I take, assemble the car I drive and invest the money I save, even though I will probably never meet them. The complexity of culture has created a chasm of anonymity unbridgeable without trust.[[19]](#footnote-19)

And much of the world is experiencing the effects of dramatic migrations, increased tourism and travel leading to more frequent encounters with strangers in the sense of people one has yet to meet, but also in the sense of people feeling foreign and different from others. The terrain of this sense of ‘strangeness’ includes a sense of the unknown and requires trust to navigate.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In addressing the multifaceted nature of society and its increased dependence on trust, some scholars distinguish between interpersonal trust (involving face-to-face contact) and trust directed toward social objects (faceless commitment). However, Sztompka rightly argues that despite the ‘thickness’ of the current social environment, people stand behind all social objects, even if the connection is complex, extended and even anonymous. One might not be aware of a conscious process of trust-related decisions that produce one’s trust in a social object, but ultimately it is not the object itself that one trusts, but the people connected and involved with that social object.[[21]](#footnote-21)

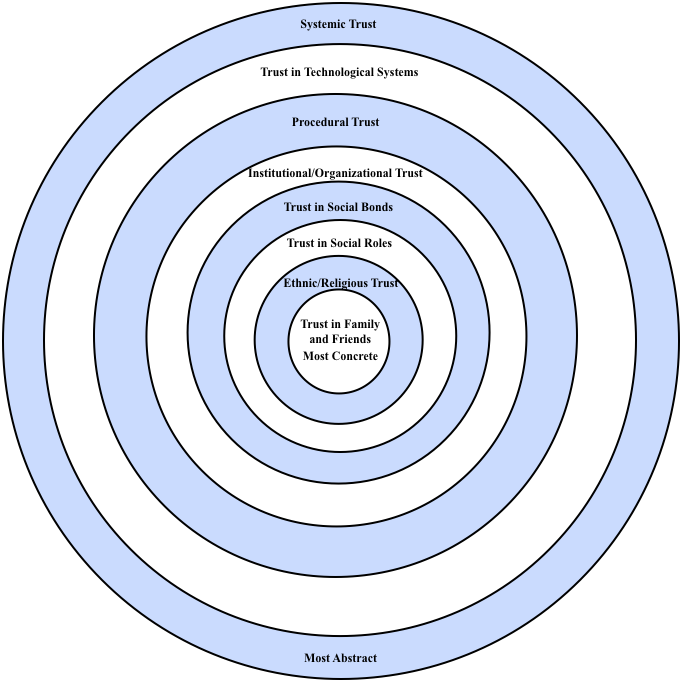
Sztompka uses the example of an airline. I trust Delta/KLM Airlines and fly with them to and from Great Britain, which implies I trust their pilots, cabin crew, and other personnel. It is not necessary for me to have a face-to-face encounter with any of these individuals; I can imagine them in their various roles based on a variety of sources, from past experience to effective advertising to positive references from friends. While I trust the social object (Delta/KLM), it is actually because I trust the people who are connected with the social object, however removed those people might be from my actual experience. Conversely, my trust may decline as I encounter negative personal experiences (e.g. lost bags, delayed or canceled flights) or negative references from friends. Again, I may come to distrust the social object (Delta/KLM) and choose to avoid it, but if that would come about, it would be because I have come to distrust the people who are connected with it, even if I have never encountered those people personally.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The underlying significance of people is important for an exploration of evangelism on a variety of levels. While certain aspects of Christian faith transcend the realm of human interaction and this world experience, people remain crucial. People are integral to the formation, sharing and nurturing of faith. Christian faith does not take place in a vacuum, nor can it be lived out in its fullness in isolation. (Eph. 2.13-22, 1 Peter 2, Rev. 5.9-10) As Lesslie Newbigin has said, ‘It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community.’[[23]](#footnote-23) Therefore one cannot begin to look at issues of evangelism without maintaining a keen awareness of the communal nature of following Christ.

Returning to a sociological perspective, the underlying significance of people is important in developing a basic understanding of the ever-widening circles of trust at work in society, from the most intimate and concrete (e.g. family, friends) to the most abstract and social (e.g. institutions, social systems). Particularly for the present exploration, it is also important when looking at the concept of primary and secondary targets of trust, which are heavily influenced by culture and history.[[24]](#footnote-24) Primary targets include family and friends at the most intimate level, ranging outward to more abstract categories of people that one does not directly encounter but with whom one identifies (e.g. ethnic group, religion). Moving further toward abstraction is trust based on social roles (e.g. doctor, clergy), trust based on social bonds (e.g. football team, political party), institutional/organizational trust (e.g. church, university, government), procedural trust (i.e. belief that certain procedures will produce the best results), trust in technological systems (e.g. telecommunications) and lastly, systemic trust (e.g. democracy, socialism).[[25]](#footnote-25) The following diagram illustrates the outward-moving circles of trust.

Illustration 1

Circles of Trust

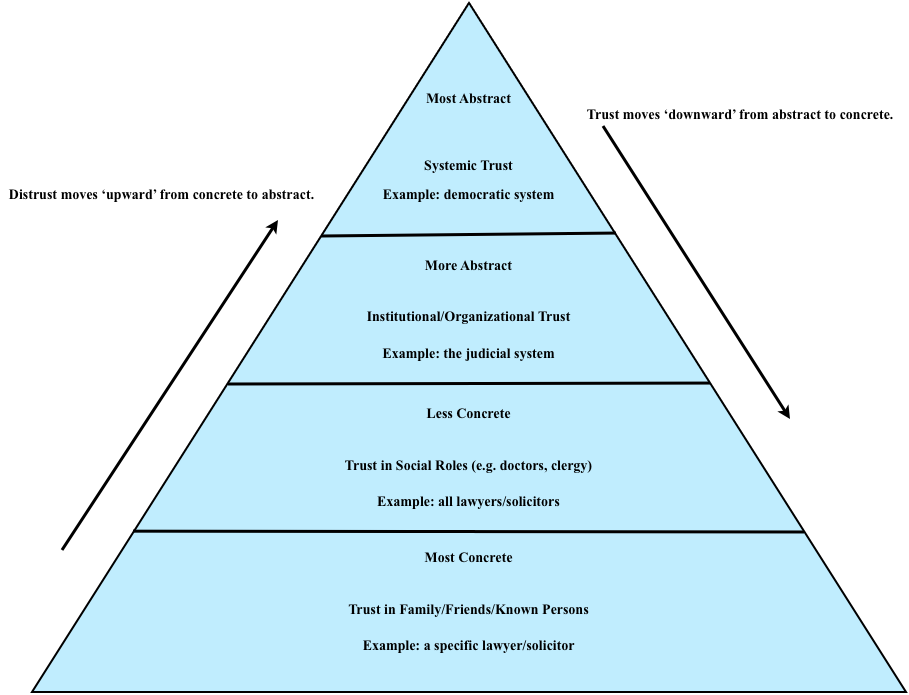


Secondary targets are mechanisms that provide support in determining primary targets for trust. Examples might be peer review committees or licensing boards. Obviously, secondary targets have to be trustworthy themselves to support the trustworthiness of primary targets. Together, primary and secondary targets form pyramids of trust that aid in decision making. Targets of trust often combine and overlap, but they can also take the shape of more diffused trusts, which move along the scale of trusts from concrete to abstract and back again.[[26]](#footnote-26)

An important concept for evangelism is the recognition that when trust is diffused, it tends to move ‘downward’ from the abstract to the concrete, but distrust tends to move ‘upward’ from the concrete to the abstract.[[27]](#footnote-27) For instance, if I trust at the systemic level, perhaps in the U.S. approach to democracy, my trust tends to move downward to institutions that participate in that style of democracy, and downward from there to various positions within those institutions until it reaches a particular person who occupies a particular position. However, if I come to distrust a person in a particular position, perhaps a certain lawyer, it would not be surprising for me to generalize that distrust to lawyers in general, and in certain instances even beyond that to the judicial system itself. This is significant in as much as it indicates the extreme fragility of trust in general; when it crumbles, much crumbles with it. This second diagram illustrates the upward and downward movement of trust:

Illustration 2

Scale of Trust



There is no doubt that most parts of the world are marked by cultures of overall trust. In the U.S., each time one drives through a green light with little thought about whether cross traffic will actually stop, or ingests medication fully expecting it to be both safe and effective, one evidences a sense of the overarching trust foundational to contemporary American culture. The same could also be said for most developed countries. The implications of this for evangelism in a Western context are significant because I believe Christians often operate out of an assumption that others will instinctively trust them, regardless of whether those others are within or beyond the church.

A second helpful arena of thought comes from the field of economics, where trust can be defined as ‘the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community.’[[28]](#footnote-28) The details of that definition are important, because there are often circumstances where one expects regular behavior but that expectation is not trust. If, for instance, in a particular community people regularly cheat and are not honest, others will have clear expectations about that behavior, but those expectations will not include trust. Therefore behavior must be both regular and honest to engender trust.

Economists have long engaged in debate about the role trust plays in economic life. Human capital is a widely recognized economic concept that in contrast to physical capital relates to the knowledge and skills of human beings.[[29]](#footnote-29) A distinct category of human capital, described as social capital, relates to ‘people’s ability to associate with each other.’[[30]](#footnote-30) This ability affects not only the arena of economics, but also virtually every other area of social existence; a society’s success in working in groups and organizations toward common purposes depends on it. Francis Fukuyama asserts that social capital is shaped by how well communities share norms and values, as well as how well they are able to give priority to interests of larger groups in contrast to purely individual interests. Trust emanates from these shared values and is a critical part of all social existence.[[31]](#footnote-31) The strength of a society’s trust is a foundation for the strength of its social capital, which is embodied not only in large groups such as nations, but in even the most basic social group, the family, and every group in between. In contrast to other forms of capital, social capital is created and transmitted culturally through things like religion, tradition or historical habit.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Historically, American society has been marked by an individualistic tradition heavily moderated by a strong communal tradition resulting in society with a ‘high propensity for spontaneous sociability’ and a ‘widespread degree of generalized social trust.’[[33]](#footnote-33) However, a palpable sense of mistrust currently exists in the U.S., in some instances even distrust. Fukuyama relates this mistrust-distrust to social capital. He asserts that,

The decline of trust and sociability in the United States is also evident in any number of changes in American society: the rise of violent crime and civil litigation; the breakdown of family structure; the decline of a wide range of intermediate social structures like neighborhoods, churches, unions, clubs, and charities; and the general sense among Americans of a lack of shared values and community with those around them.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This is significant for evangelism and I believe Fukuyama is right on this point. Studies indicate that in general trust has declined in relation to a wide variety of professions,[[35]](#footnote-35) and polls have provided enough consistent indications of Americans’ declining trust and even clear distrust in major institutions, especially in the government and news media, that it is now acceptable to simply assert that this negative situation is a fact.

Economic discourse supports the thrust of this examination of trust. Fukuyama observes that although Americans have shown great proclivity for association based on trust and as a result have built up a large store of social capital, that capital has been in decline over the past couple of generations. He notes the decline of family life since the 1960s as evidenced in the increase in divorce rates and single-parent families, as well as the breakdown of other forms of community, such as neighborhoods, churches and workplaces. He also points to a ‘vast increase in the general level of distrust, as measured by the wariness that Americans have for their fellow citizens due to the rise of crime, or in the massive increases in litigation as a means of settling disputes.’[[36]](#footnote-36) For Fukuyama, the U.S. is ‘a society living off a great fund of previously accumulated social capital that gives it a rich and dynamic associational life, while at the same time manifesting extremes of distrust and asocial individualism that tend to isolate and atomize its members.’[[37]](#footnote-37)

**A Problematic Context Revisited**

Given the overall acceptance of a general decline of trust in contemporary culture, it would be foolish to think that the institutional church or professional clergy has been immune. Especially because of the wide-ranging scandals that have rocked the church in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, not to mention the rise of televangelists and other media ministries who have shown themselves to have little integrity, assumptions about trust can no longer be confidently held. This brief look at sociological and economic perspectives on trust, notably the observation that distrust flows upward, should be a significant reminder of the fragility of trust, and how the behavior of a few can dramatically affect perceptions toward the many.

In June 2002, as the Roman Catholic Church was struggling to work its way through the crisis of sexual abuse within the priesthood, Scott Appleby, of Notre Dame University, addressed the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In remarks laden with references to moral bankruptcy, betrayal of fidelity, and arrogance of power, he mentioned a message sent to him by a friend who knew he was to address the Conference:

You and I are the father[s] of teenagers who are experiencing all that teenagers experience. Our children struggle with the whole concept of Church, the nature of God, the tradition into which they’ve been born. I am confident that God will speak to each of them at some point in their lives…But you and I both know that, above all else, teenagers hate hypocrisy…they will spot a phony from miles away. And right now they are thinking that if this is what is going on with the Church, I want no part of it.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Trust is indeed fragile; yet this is not simply a challenge to the Roman church. Protestant traditions have suffered significant blows to their trustworthiness as well. The hypocrisy that lies between what Christians profess and the way they actually live has been displayed in all too many public scenarios. Speaking specifically from the perspective of evangelism, Abraham has said that ‘much of modern mass evangelism has reached such a nadir of public scandal and disorder that one wonders whether the operation represents an evangelistic underworld of spiritual and theological corruption.’[[39]](#footnote-39)

Appleby is a dedicated Roman Catholic and his critique came from one who clearly loves his church. Abraham is an Irish United Methodist who has dedicated himself to creating fresh understandings of evangelism so that it might be pursued with integrity. The encounter I initially related was with a young man who had been connected in some way with the Anglican Church all his life. Given that this sense of declining trust can be found within the walls of the community of faith, I believe it is quite reasonable, as well as extremely important, to expect that it might also be felt among those who see the church from the outside.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Recalling my initial observation that distrust is the opposite of trust (actively not trusting); and mistrust is a neutral category, implying a lack of trust but not total distrust, it is clear from both the secular perspective as well as the perspective of the community of faith that the current overall cultural climate is one of either mis- or distrust. So pervasively observable is this climate that I suggest referencing it in a uniquely descriptive way as a climate of ‘mis-distrust.’ Although it is a new word, it holds within it both the skepticism that marks the neutral space between full trust and complete distrust, as well as the total loss of trust that the word distrust implies. Because of the fullness of this descriptor and the ease and clarity it brings to writing, I will be using it throughout.

Certainly a more extensive exploration of the experience of trust and/or mis-distrust in the context of Western culture would be helpful in providing a better understanding of the details of the current cultural environment. At a very minimum there are intracultural issues of trust that need to be addressed, racial issues in the U.S., for example. However, it seems safe to say that while contemporary culture rests on an overarching and generalized sense of trust, the foundations of that trust are showing signs of stress, and the wide variety of trusts that make up daily life, especially those related to the Christian church, have been dramatically shaken. Therefore in exploring the evangelistic task, it is no longer wise (if it ever actually was) to make assumptions about the level of trust that exists in Western culture. Rather, it appears more prudent to begin not from the position of a trusted one, but from the position of one whose work is restorative, the work of creating or recovering the level of trust needed to be allowed into the lives of others.

The Environment of Trust in the Context of Cultural Interaction

The experience of trust and the growing sense of mis-distrust in the context of Western culture is one dimension of the assertion that an environment of trust can no longer be assumed in the exploration of evangelism. The experience of trust in the context of the interaction between cultures is a second dimension. Regardless of how I might be perceived by others as an individual human being, there will always be elements of my culture that I bring with me to any encounter with another person or group of people, especially with a person or group from a culture different from my own. However much I might wish it not to be so, however much I attend to my habits of dress and behavior, there is no mistaking me as anything other than a white woman from the U.S. This is not a new concept; yet it is crucial to recognize it and have it in the forefront of any exploration of evangelism in the current age.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The gospel never stands alone, isolated from the people who lay hold of it and then seek to share it. As David Bosch eloquently asserted, ‘the gospel always comes to people in cultural robes. There is no such thing as a “pure” gospel, isolated from culture.’[[42]](#footnote-42) As Christians seek to account for the faith that is within them, each carries on his or her shoulders the burden of culture.[[43]](#footnote-43) There are many times in which that burden is light; however, because of the weight of history, whether that history be far in the past or here in the history that various nations are currently creating, the burden of culture is often a heavy one indeed.

Just as other academic disciplines aid in understanding trust and culture, so they facilitate understanding the experience of trust and/or mis-distrust between cultures as well. The lessons of history, especially the history of the Enlightenment, are crucial for any discussion of cross-cultural interaction. The Enlightenment shaped the West and informed its interactions with the rest of the world in a dramatic way; therefore few eras have had such a significant impact on such a wide diversity of cultures.[[44]](#footnote-44) Although a detailed discussion is impossible, it is important to highlight a few key attributes of this era and their impact on mission and evangelism as a foundation for understanding the current sense of mis-distrust on the part of persons of other cultures when interacting with persons from the West.[[45]](#footnote-45) As with most aspects of religion, culture and history, none of the various characteristics of the Enlightenment stands alone; they are instead intertwined and interrelated. That being said, it will be easiest to look at them individually.

**The Enlightenment – An Overview**

The easiest point of departure in any discussion of the Enlightenment is its description as the ‘Age of Reason.’ Descartes’ phrase ‘Cogito, ergo sum’ (I think, therefore I am) pointed to the era’s overarching sense that reason was the natural capacity of all human beings, that it operated independently and was the basis of all knowing. This very optimistic view of humanity stood in great contrast to the anthropology of both the Medieval Catholic and the Protestant Reformation eras. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe this shift in anthropology as ‘the affirmation of the powers of *this* world, the discovery of the plane of immanence’ where humanity recognized ‘its power in the world and integrated this dignity into a new consciousness of reason and potentiality.’[[46]](#footnote-46) As shall be seen, however, this new optimistic consciousness was clouded by a strong sense of Western superiority, which affected much of Western culture, including missionaries of all types, whether theologically liberal or conservative.

A second characteristic of the Enlightenment era was the delineation of subject and object, which emphasized a mechanical view of nature, led to the explosion of empirical study yet fragmented science and creation. The whole was no longer as important as the parts from which it was made; the collection of facts and observations held greater import than conceptual reflection or theoretical enquiry.

An example of this dichotomy was culturally produced alterity or otherness. Beginning with real differences between non-European peoples, Western anthropologists assembled an ‘other’ with an entirely different nature: ‘different cultural and physical traits were construed as the essence of the African, the Arab, the Aboriginal.’[[47]](#footnote-47) These non-European subjects and cultures were presented as infant versions of Europeans and civilization as can be seen in G. W. F. Hegel’s understanding of history as ‘developing’ from East to West, from China through India, Greece and Rome, and achieving its fullest maturity in Europe.[[48]](#footnote-48)

In missionary circles, this understanding surfaced in a variety of ways, with peoples of distant lands often being treated more as objects and less as brothers and sisters.[[49]](#footnote-49) Similarly, in describing a report of the Centenary Missionary Conference in 1888, Andrew Walls highlights a section entitled, ‘Races Represented,’ which emphasized the extensive influence of ‘the Saxon race’ (meaning British and American) in world missions. Walls concludes perceptively, ‘The Centenary Conference comes as nearly as possible to thanking God that the British are not as other people are.’[[50]](#footnote-50)

An outgrowth of the dichotomy of subject and object was a diminishing of limits: no part of the earth or human experience was out of bounds for discovery and mastery. In turn, this was inextricably bound to the elimination of purpose in Enlightenment thinking. An emphasis on causality replaced the desire to answer questions of why or for what purpose. Mystery disappeared into the deterministic realm of cause and effect.

Intimately connected with this was the idea of progress, the confidence that through human effort and achievement the world and all life in it could be developed, improved and mastered. This confidence resulted in an expansionist mentality. The bold conviction that human progress was assured and the entire world could be controlled, subdued and civilized led to, among other things, the long, painful history of colonialism, and it was in this context and with this mentality that the church was ‘understood largely as conqueror of the world…wherein the missionary task was perceived to be one of converting the non-Western “heathen” world into a “civilized Christian” world after the Western pattern.’[[51]](#footnote-51)

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, it is possible to see through the rhetoric of progress to the issue of power, which in any era can be used either for the common good or for the benefit of those who are already in privileged positions.[[52]](#footnote-52) Understanding the ‘dialectic of colonialism,’ however, is useful in grasping the uniqueness of this era. Hardt and Negri helpfully assert that one of the elements of colonialism was a dialectical structure of identity and culture in which ‘the negative construction of non-European others is finally what founds and sustains European identity itself.’[[53]](#footnote-53) This assertion echoes Frantz Fanon’s description of the colonial world as ‘a world divided in two’ where the separation of Europeans and the colonized related not just to the physical and territorial, or to the realm of rights and privileges, but to the arena of values, where the ‘native’ was beyond the sphere of defined European civilized values: ‘declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values…the enemy of values…absolute evil.’[[54]](#footnote-54)

This pushing of difference to the extreme was coupled with an understanding of that difference as absolute; the colonized other was perceived as the absolute negation of the European self, ‘the most distant point on the horizon.’[[55]](#footnote-55) Once difference has become absolute, it is a short step to inverting it as a foundation for the self. ‘The evil, barbarity, and licentiousness of the colonized Other are what make possible the goodness, civility, and propriety of the European Self…*The identity of the European Self is produced in this dialectical movement*.’[[56]](#footnote-56)

The idea of progress undergirding this expansionist mentality led to colonialism as ‘an abstract machine’ producing otherness and identity. Despite appearances, these representations have ‘no real necessary basis in nature, biology, or rationality…yet in the colonial situation these differences and identities are made to function as if they were absolute, essential, and natural.’[[57]](#footnote-57) Presently, vestiges of this mentality can be seen in the challenges indigenous Christians in Latin America continue to face in relation to the majority-culture Spanish-speaking churches and denominations, a situation William Bivin refers to as the ‘Hispanic captivity of the indigenous church in Latin America.’[[58]](#footnote-58)

The Enlightenment commitment to progress and a mechanical view of nature had significant ramifications for mission and evangelism. With questions of why and for what purpose overtaken by questions of causality, all that appeared to be required for success in foreign missions was the creation of the right conditions. Depending on which side of the theological spectrum one was situated, either improving the social environment and circumstances of ‘poor heathens’ would lead to their openness to the gospel and their successful evangelization, or their successful evangelization would guarantee an improvement in their social situation. It was simply a matter of cause and effect, planting seeds and bearing fruit. Regardless of the perspective from which one viewed evangelism and mission, Western Christians were marked by ‘technical and civilizational optimism,’[[59]](#footnote-59) confident that they had the ability to both civilize and Christianize the world.

An interesting aspect of this view was the meshing of culture and religion. In large part during this time, it was extremely difficult to distinguish between the spread of Western Christianity and the spread of Western culture because the superiority of both were assumed, and all contexts were ‘governed solely by Western perspectives.’[[60]](#footnote-60) This began as an Enlightenment assumption, but continued even after the dismantling of colonial empires when ‘the world was divided into “developed” and “undeveloped,” “underdeveloped,” or “developing” nations’ with the underlying concept being ‘that “development” means moving in the direction taken by the West European and North American peoples.’[[61]](#footnote-61) Not surprisingly, up until the latter part of the twentieth century, such reshaping was not seen as overbearing or intrusive because the strength of the West was attributed to its commitment to the gospel. With that premise it follows naturally that once the gospel was brought to other nations they would become strong as well.

With the assumption of Western superiority was the identification of Western people as being chosen by God. There was a great deal of confidence that because of the unmatchable qualities of Western Christians and culture, God had chosen them to lead the effort to evangelize the entire world. It was manifest destiny, a concept that would have both religious and nationalistic overtones.[[62]](#footnote-62) Strikingly, all of these concepts, Western cultural and religious superiority and the sense of manifest destiny, were so fundamental in nature that they were often accepted almost unconsciously even into a substantial part of the twentieth century, and in some religious arenas this sense remains. In Africa, for instance, though the sense of ‘theological captivity to the West’ has faded dramatically during the last forty years with a ‘rising tide of genuine African reflection and theological contributions…curiously, the insights of these thinkers are largely ignored by Western theologians.’[[63]](#footnote-63)

Another assertion of the Enlightenment that was especially challenging to Christians in the West was that all scientific knowledge was factual, value-free and neutral in contrast to the world of values, which were connected to opinions and preferences.[[64]](#footnote-64) This assertion removed religion from the public arena of fact and placed it in the private realm of opinion. In the exceedingly anthropocentric environment of the Enlightenment, humans did not appear to need God; belief was viewed as outmoded, an immature crutch that seemed out of place in the ‘modern’ world. As a result, Christianity became relativized, one choice among many in an array of assorted values that could be changed and adapted as circumstances dictated.

The Christian reaction came in two extremes that impacted the work of mission and evangelism. The first was to insist that Christianity must remain in the realm of facts because of the factual nature of Scripture. This led to a rigid and narrow view of Scripture and provided the foundation for early twentieth-century assertions of biblical inerrancy, emphasizing the factual truth of every statement in Scripture.[[65]](#footnote-65) A second response was to accept that this separation was completely appropriate. Religion was indeed in a different world than facts and therefore beyond the scope of science or history.[[66]](#footnote-66) On this view, Christian faith is completely otherworldly, which has huge ramifications for thinking about the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. Stripped of any political or worldly connections, the kingdom becomes a completely interior concept, an exclusively private world, spiritualized and entirely oriented toward the future. The gospel as a whole, then, becomes directed only to the individual in the privacy of his or her own soul.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Not surprisingly, because of the anthropocentric nature of the times, another Enlightenment characteristic was a conviction that in principle at least, no problem was unsolvable. If a specific problem remained unsolved, it was assumed that eventually, as the pertinent facts were mastered, the problem would be mastered. This view was aptly expressed by French historian and philosopher Hippolyte Taine, who claimed that ‘The growth of science is infinite. We can look forward to the time when it will reign supreme over the whole of thought and over all man’s actions.’[[68]](#footnote-68)

The implications of this infinitely progressing view of science for Christianity were significant. Miracles and any other evidence of the supernatural were dismissed and the rapidly increasing volume of knowledge continued to push God to the edges. Ironically, this move was due less to scholarly scientific writings than to popular works on religion. For instance, in young G. W. F. Hegel’s *Life of Jesus*, there is no mention of miracles.[[69]](#footnote-69) Further, prominent theologians such as David Friedrich Strauss were writing extensively on the Gospels as myth and raising questions, such as ‘whether the meaning and truth of the dogma of Christ depend on the historical reliability of the Gospel reports of the life of Jesus and His miraculous uniqueness.’[[70]](#footnote-70)

When the idea that all problems were in principle solvable was translated into the missionary environment of the era, an additional and somewhat different effect was felt: great motivation for Western Christians to volunteer for overseas mission efforts. This optimism led to the proliferation of a wide variety of missionary agencies and contributed sizably to the overall belief that Christians in the West could solve all the world’s problems – evangelizing, civilizing, educating, and providing medical care and agricultural assistance.

Lastly, the exploitative tendencies that have emerged so dramatically in both capitalism and Marxism are in no small part because of the Enlightenment view that rather than standing in relationship to God and the church, human beings were instead radically autonomous. Individual rights stood over and against the needs of the community, and people became drastically disengaged from any real sense of their need for God. From this perspective, humans were at one and the same time greater than God, but no more important than animals. For those who wished to use others for their own purposes (the very real and dark underside of both capitalism and Marxism), viewing humans as entities to be manipulated and exploited became easy.[[71]](#footnote-71)

This emphasis on autonomy impacted Christianity by thrusting both God and the church to the margins. In describing Immanuel Kant’s thought, Hugh Heclo coincidentally also describes a foundational thought that moved the church to the sidelines: ‘…To be enlightened is to have the maturity and courage to use your own understanding and not be guided by another.’[[72]](#footnote-72)

In the area of evangelism, this emphasis on the individual unfolded in a variety of ways. Individual choices became decisive. Paul’s organic metaphor of the church as a body faded as the church came to be seen more and more as a collection of individuals, each of whom could choose from a ‘plurality of churches operating *de* *facto* in competition with each other for the religious affiliation of the people.’[[73]](#footnote-73) This sense of the church remains today.

Furthermore, the image of each person as a sinner, standing alone before God was vividly painted by many Christian evangelists, an idea held in concert with the conviction that the Holy Spirit worked only within the interior self, in each person’s own heart through personal experience. The Methodist history of ‘camp meetings’ and revivals is replete with stories of individual conversion experiences as the concept of an ‘economy of redemption’[[74]](#footnote-74) developed that emphasized a ‘scientific conception of causation in which God’s works had mechanically harmonious consequences.’ From this perspective, faith occurred as individuals operated as free moral agents with an emphasis on the rationality of religious experience. In this sense, ‘a person’s religious experience attained a new validity…[and] conversion came to be [a] powerful and widely understood symbol of individual freedom.’[[75]](#footnote-75)

In missions, the emphasis on the individual was evident in the intense focus on ‘saving souls,’ which came to be seen as the central responsibility of every missionary. This concern for individual souls; however, was colored by an image of the indigenous peoples as helpless and in need of the benevolent help of Christians from the West.[[76]](#footnote-76) This understanding was reinforced by the sense of religious and cultural superiority discussed earlier so that even as missionaries focused on individuals and their salvation, there remained ‘a common inability to take seriously any norms or testimonies not originating in Western Christendom [and] an unwillingness to grant exotic cultures the kind of hearing automatically expected for Christian and Western values.’[[77]](#footnote-77)

The Enlightenment was a complex mix of seemingly contradictory characteristics: relativizing attitudes toward belief, deep-seated feelings of Western superiority and prejudice, tolerance, bigotry, racism, and paternalism. Despite tension between Christianity and Enlightenment values, it was impossible to escape the effect of the dramatic shift in worldview this era initiated. Thus often without recognizing it, missionaries proclaimed their own idea of the gospel, rather than the gospel in and of itself, and they were as likely to overlook the flaws of their own cultural perspective as they were to identify the cultural flaws of those they sought to reach.

This is not to say that all missionary activity during this period was inappropriate or harmful. On the contrary, Bevans and Schroeder are right in their reminder:

Every context had its share of ambiguities, complexities and variations [and] missionaries often were the ones who defended the rights of the indigenous peoples…While these missionaries were primarily shaped by their context, with their blind spots and superiority complexes, their general concern for indigenous peoples often provided a much-needed *prophetic* conscience to the colonial movement.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Although it is important not to deny or condone ‘the prejudice and ethnocentrism…reflected to various degrees in missionary attitudes and practices,’ it is also important to avoid portraying various non-Western peoples as ‘helpless and incapable of resisting and/or accepting Western cultural, political and/or religious elements.’[[79]](#footnote-79) As Lamin Sanneh astutely points out regarding Africa, ‘to view Africans as a victimized projection of Western ill will is to leave them with too little initiative to be arbiters of their destiny and meaningful players on the historical stage.’[[80]](#footnote-80)

It is always easier in hindsight to recognize the limitations of an earlier era. In this environment it is hoped that highlighting the various shortcomings of the Enlightenment framework might lead to awareness that all peoples, regardless of which end of the missionary experience they are situated – sending or receiving – ‘are active social beings constantly involved in, not only maintaining, but also constructing and reconstructing their world (world view).’[[81]](#footnote-81) That being said, the complex residue of this history remains in the guilty conscience of the postcolonial West, including the U.S. Its vestiges can also be seen in Western Christian’s lingering sense that ‘civilization is in their hands and that they alone can bring light to benighted souls.’[[82]](#footnote-82)

It should therefore not be surprising that another legacy of Enlightenment history is the mis-distrust of much of the rest of the world in relation to the West. Further, even though this sense of mis-distrust may have been created by centuries-old history, it is often exacerbated by the current history that various nations, especially the U.S., are presently creating. For instance, decisions made by the U.S., whether in the international arena, such as its activity in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, or in the realm of domestic issues, such as farmer subsidies and immigration legislation, all have global ramifications. Lastly, the current age of globalization, driven as it is by the West, holds within it great potential for unchecked consumerism, rapidly expanding technologies, and the ever-widening gulf between rich and poor, all of which provide a strong basis for a continued and exacerbated sense of mis-distrust on the part of much of the world.

Thus far my discussion of the climate of mis-distrust that marks the current age has been at the general level of culture. The overview of the Enlightenment and the challenges to trust that its vestiges continue to offer have also by necessity been at a general level. Therefore further exploration is now needed to identify the ways in which the Christian church, in a distinct way, has contributed to and/or been affected by the current climate of mis-distrust.

Two

Negotiating a Terrain of Mis-distrust: Missteps and Stumbles

The atmosphere of mis-distrust that currently marks Western culture is a stance affecting a wide range of institutions – political, educational, social, and governmental. Although many factors are at play, the result is a pervasive sense of mis-distrust directed toward the ‘entire institutional apparatus of modern society,’ whereby people expect the worst because they have ‘already reached the conclusion that institutions and their leaders are generally oppressive and self-serving.’[[83]](#footnote-83)

The Christian church, unfortunately, has not been exempt from the damaging effects of this atmosphere. Along with other institutions, the church as a whole has suffered from the effects of two specific types of mis-distrust: performance-based and culture-based. Recalling the ‘scale of trust’ discussed earlier, performance-based mis-distrust involves the knowledge of various individual violations of trust, which serve to cast a shadow over the reliability of the whole. In this situation, the church’s integrity has been called into question by the ‘experience of millions of ordinary people hearing about all sorts of breaches of trust by those in positions of institutional authority.’[[84]](#footnote-84) The sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church is illustrative as unsettling revelations continue to come to light, possibly implicating the highest levels of authority.[[85]](#footnote-85) It is inappropriate to single out the Roman Catholic Church because Protestant and independent churches have not been immune to dramatic breaches of trust. The public disgrace of the former president of the National Evangelical Association and mega-church pastor, Ted Haggard, regarding inappropriate sexual behavior comes to mind.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Clerical misconduct at all levels and across the spectrum of churches has had a dramatic effect on trust. Descriptions of such misconduct are wide-ranging and easily accessible. Baylor University researchers have found that more than 3% of women who attend worship services regularly have been the target of sexual advances by a religious leader.[[87]](#footnote-87)

It might be argued that the church is larger than and distinct from the leaders who have, by their individual behavior, generated a loss of confidence; however, Heclo correctly asserts the following:

Over any significant period of time the performance of leaders and the performance of institutions are inextricably bound together. Institutional failure, and the distrust it engenders, is the result of people continually failing to live up to legitimate expectations attached to their positions of responsibility.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Some might also argue that at its heart, the church is much more than an institution; it is the body of Christ. Theologically speaking, that is an accurate portrayal; however, from the perspective of those both within and beyond the church, its institutional nature often overshadows theological reflection. Given that the church is an *institution* claiming to be the body of Christ, Heclo’s claims carry even greater force and are especially disturbing, primarily because of their ring of truth.

Culture-based mis-distrust is a second type of mis-distrust that has adversely affected the church along with a wide range of other institutions. Culture-based mis-distrust relates to an individual’s view of his or her moral position in the world, in other words, one’s view of how people are to live among others. Although in U.S. culture a wide variety of views are found in this arena, it can confidently be said that most revolve around the concept articulated by John Stuart Mill: people have the right to live as they choose without interference from others, as long as living thus does not interfere with the right of others to do likewise.[[89]](#footnote-89) From the outset, democracy in the U.S. has been based on an understanding of society as comprised of ‘free individuals making self-validating choices that respect, without judging, the equal freedom of others.’[[90]](#footnote-90) The importance of this for evangelism lies in how this value has affected the cultural view of institutions generally, and the church specifically, especially in light of the dramatic social upheavals of the 1960s.

The usual nature of all institutions is to provide authoritative rules for behavior. The church is no exception and is, in fact, a prime illustration of this institutional aspect. Yet the cultural value of being free to live as one pleases runs directly counter to the institutional expectation of deference to an external authority or an inherited way of living, and this conflict intensified during the 1960s. Such deference to an inherited way of living or to an external authority was increasingly seen as limiting one’s options, which in turn was seen to limit one’s humanity. Thus in the current cultural context, people apparently chafe at the thought of any external obstacles or burdens that might hamper their personal journey toward meaning.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Adam Seligman describes this anti-institutional stance as ‘sincerity – the belief that truth resides within the authentic self.’[[92]](#footnote-92) Complementing Heclo, Seligman argues that post-Enlightenment culture has privileged this stance in no small part because of ‘the very Cartesian orientations of modern science, which seek to build certitude by linking the categories of the world to those of the human mind itself.’[[93]](#footnote-93) The sincere model rests on ‘the internal, humanly defined core of experience, on the perception of the world as arising out of self-generated categories of order, rather than as a created, external, and heteronymous – essentially, transcendent – reality.’[[94]](#footnote-94) In an environment marked by the privileging of sincerity, where each person is essentially a sect unto his or her self, it is not surprising that the church, with its claim of institutional authority and demand for conformity to inherited ways of understanding the world, would evoke a response of mis-distrust.

Not insignificantly, the sense of mis-distrust is exacerbated by the perception of the church as judgmental and intolerant.[[95]](#footnote-95) Generally, institutions are perceived as restricting liberty even to the extent of being oppressive. This general perception, coupled with the view of the church as judgmental and intolerant, intensifies the cultural mis-distrust that plagues institutions as a whole, making the church’s place in society less secure.

Both performance-based and culture-based mis-distrust are attitudes that affect all institutions; however, the church, especially in the U.S., has uniquely contributed in several ways to its loss of integrity and trust. I believe five interrelated issues are notably significant to this loss: the pervasive proclamation of rapture theology (Dispensationalism); an emphasis on the individual without an equally robust commitment to community; a perceived backlash against environmentalism; a perceived indifference to suffering; and the continuing presence of racism and sexism within the church. At the heart of each of these issues is a gap, either real or perceived, between what the church proclaims and how it behaves. It is the gap that leads to a loss of integrity.

I recognize that there may be other equally significant contributing factors to the challenges facing the church; thus I am not asserting that these five are the only issues connected to a loss of integrity and trust. Moreover, debate over which specific issue (of these five or others) is the most significant is a distraction; therefore my only assertion is that these five are of special significance when exploring a theological stance to undergird evangelism.

A variety of research, trends and general experience support the significance of these five. For instance, consistent with the affects of performance-based mis-distrust, Gallup has found that overall confidence in the church is at an all time low, a fact they attribute to the variety of scandals that have surfaced in recent years.[[96]](#footnote-96) Though connected to all five in a general way, this performance-based mis-distrust is especially relevant to the issue of suffering. Further, research by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons indicates that Christians are often viewed as judgmental, hypocritical, and tend to ‘target’ others in an attempt to ‘save’ them.[[97]](#footnote-97) This is especially relevant as it relates to Dispensationalism, an imbalanced emphasis on the individual and the issue of suffering. Moreover, Dan Kimball’s work highlights the perception that ‘the church is dominated by males and oppresses females.’[[98]](#footnote-98) Lastly, the ongoing tension between science and religion impacts the issue of environmentalism. As the debates continue, white, Evangelical Protestants in particular, are seen to be out of step with the views of the majority on issues such as climate change and evolution.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Again, it is not my intent to imply that these five are the only significant factors in the church’s decline in integrity and trust, only that they are significant to that decline. As I stated, at the heart of each issue is a gap, either real or perceived, between what the church proclaims and how it behaves and that gap is crucial.

**Dispensationalism – Rapture Theology**[[100]](#footnote-100)

Historically referred to by the somewhat broad category of Dispensationalism, but which in current cultural circumstances might be better recognized generally as ‘rapture theology,’ this understanding of Christianity continues to have a dramatic effect on the cultural landscape.[[101]](#footnote-101) Much of mainline Christianity rightly distances itself from faith communities that espouse rapture theology, thus not perceiving these views to have a problematic impact on their own relationships with those outside the church. It has been my experience, however, that those outside the church make few distinctions (if any) between the theological approaches of various faith communities. To outsiders, all Christians are generally painted with a similar (and very broad) brush. Therefore when particular groups proclaim an overtly dispensationalist message, all communities that profess to follow Jesus Christ are colored by that message to some degree or another.[[102]](#footnote-102) Thus, in regard to relationships with those outside the church, it behooves all faith communities to attend to the effects of the proclamation of rapture theology.

Flowing from the dichotomy of facts and values outlined earlier, a major foundation of rapture theology is a literal reading of Scripture, especially Revelation and other prophetic passages throughout the Old and New Testaments. From this perspective, Robert Thomas claims the purity of Scripture, asserting that it is ‘straightforward communication…undiluted or unmixed with extraneous material [having] no hidden meanings unless clearly specified.’[[103]](#footnote-103) When this approach is taken, specifically when addressing issues of Christian hope and the future, the resulting picture is one based not only on fear rather than love, but also on violence and destruction rather than wholeness and healing.

Several components of rapture theology are pertinent to this discussion. First, at the heart of this belief system is the assertion that ‘Christ is coming again to judge this world, and the basis of judgment will be whether or not people have received Him as Savior and Lord.’[[104]](#footnote-104) This statement is creedal and in itself is not controversial. Yet the way in which it is explicated places virtually all the emphasis on divine judgment and its accompanying wrath, with little attention to understandings of forgiveness or grace. Christian hope is oriented almost exclusively toward escaping God’s wrath, with little attention paid to embracing the fulfillment of all creation in Christ.

Accompanying the emphasis on judgment is a belief in the complete depravity of creation with the implication that it must be totally destroyed to be saved. It is important to note that assenting to a doctrine of total depravity does not by itself imply a dispensationalist disposition. Wesleyan theology is also grounded on such a doctrine; however, John Wesley was extremely nuanced in his understanding of it.[[105]](#footnote-105) Therefore rather than emphasizing the wrath of God in response to a totally depraved creation as is common in rapture theology, Wesleyan theology highlights ‘the sheer graciousness, the utter benevolence, the necessary initiative, of a loving God.’[[106]](#footnote-106) Further, in contrast to Dispensationalism, in which creation is so depraved it must be destroyed to be saved, Wesleyan theology emphasizes both the goodness of creation and creation as the context in which the salvific process occurs.[[107]](#footnote-107)

As with many other theological streams, rapture theology places great stress on obedience and the interior moral life; however, without corresponding attention to forgiveness and grace and given the total depravity of humanity, one is left with a works-laden outlook burdened by the fear of judgment in the very likely event of falling short. Again, the contrast with Wesleyan theology provides clarity. Unlike Dispensationalism, which emphasizes that one’s name can at any time be blotted out of God’s Book of Life, Wesleyan theology focuses on the ‘initiating operations of the Holy Spirit as manifested in prevenient (and other) grace [that] removes “all imagination of merit from man,” while at the same time…increases human ability and, consequently, human responsibility.’ This ‘thoroughgoing synergism [is] a vision of divine/human cooperation [where] the initiative in the process of salvation is clearly from God [but] precisely because God has previously acted and continues to do so, humanity must act and improve the considerable grace of the Most High.’ For theology flowing from Wesley, rather than blotting out names, God continually works to meet people at their present level and beckon them further.[[108]](#footnote-108)

A second component of rapture theology is the belief that the ‘true’ church will be taken from the earth (raptured) before the final resurrection, leaving unbelievers or inadequate believers to face a horrifically violent and terrifying several years during which all manners of suffering will take place. The purpose is to allow any latecomers to the faith an opportunity to declare their allegiance to Jesus Christ. It is at the end of this period that Christ will come in final glory. Accompanying a belief in the event of rapture is a belief in the second death when ‘people who have died in unbelief are resurrected and cast alive into an eternal state of separation from God in the place called “the lake of fire.”’ (Rev. 20.15)[[109]](#footnote-109)

Several concluding aspects of rapture theology are its decidedly negative attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestantism, its antiecumenism, its privileging of men and other elitist perspectives, and its assertion that the work of Christ is finished, from which follows that true Christians are to wait for the rapture while continuing to be separate from and undefiled by a world of unbelievers and apostate believers. These miscellaneous characteristics increase the overall negativity of this belief system, providing an antagonistic witness to many both within and outside of the Christian faith.[[110]](#footnote-110)

The number of Christians who actually lay claim to a thoroughgoing rapture theology is not easy to discern.[[111]](#footnote-111) Regardless, it is quite easy to hear the fundamentalist message as it is frequently stated loudly and visibly by public figures whose messages are disseminated via the secular media. The message is one of profoundly negative judgment, threat, fear and prejudice. Unfortunately, from the perspective of those outside the church, not only is the message one of God’s negative judgment, Christians often appear to be usurping God’s role as ultimate judge by exercising that judgment prematurely on God’s behalf. The prevalence of that sentiment is borne out in the research of Kinnaman and Lyons who found that 87% of young people outside the church believe ‘the term *judgmental* accurately describes present-day Christianity.’ Furthermore, 53% of young *Christians,* ages sixteen to twenty-nine agree. One interviewee asserted, ‘Christians talk about hating sin and loving sinners, but the way they go about things, they might as well call it what it is. They hate the sin *and* the sinner.’[[112]](#footnote-112) When one considers the current climate of mis-distrust, not surprisingly many have responded to this overriding negativity with disdain.

Although the antagonistic witness of rapture theology undergirds the remaining issues I believe are significant for the current discussion, it is not the sole factor in these issues. Placing responsibility for current evangelistic difficulties in the West solely on one theological stance, particular approach, or specific group of Christians would be a mistake. That being said, in turning to the remaining four issues one finds that the influence of this more fundamentalist theology can be easily seen.

**Individual Souls versus Communal Salvation**

A strong inclination toward individualism has shaped Western Christianity throughout history. Roughly following a theological trajectory from Tertullian, through Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Protestant Orthodoxy, Fundamentalism and Neo-Thomism, this emphasis on the individual can be seen in the perspective that ‘the world and human history [are] ultimately unimportant in the scheme of salvation…What matters is that men and women keep the divine commands and so prove themselves worthy of inclusion in God’s final order.’[[113]](#footnote-113)

The interior focus of Puritan religiosity has been instrumental in molding present-day Christian culture, not to mention the secular forms of sincerity about which Seligman writes. From the Puritan perspective, it was necessary to search one’s soul for the workings of grace, with the assumption being that the self ‘could be fully grasped, a whole and complete inner state that could be judged for what it was, saved or damned, regenerate or unregenerate.’[[114]](#footnote-114)

Like other mainline Protestant theologies, the Wesleyan perspective has also emphasized the personal, individualistic nature of salvation, as can be seen in John Wesley’s sermon *The Scripture Way of Salvation.* To his credit, Wesley insists that salvation is not limited to ‘going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul’s going to paradise…[or] a blessing which lies on the other side of death.’ Rather, for Wesley, a significant component of salvation is that it is ‘a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of.’ Further, salvation is ‘extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.’[[115]](#footnote-115) Although Wesley emphasized the practical and tangible results of salvation that extend beyond the individual believer to the rest of the world, for example, living a life of personal and social holiness as evidenced by acts of piety and mercy, and though his eschatology emphasized a new creation that included the whole cosmos, not just humans, his primary emphasis regarding salvation points toward an interior event within the individual ‘soul’ whereby a person is ‘inwardly renewed by the power of God.’ For Wesley there is a ‘*real* as well as a *relative* change,’ but it is an *interior* change nevertheless.[[116]](#footnote-116) Further, despite Wesley’s description of salvation as a ‘present thing’ with its resulting effects in the lived world, salvation is decidedly spiritual, and the direction of movement in the life of the believer remains firmly focused on the future when the soul is ‘consummated in glory.’

In all these cases, the transcendent nature of soteriology is cast in terms of immanent, human processes. When the transcendent is overshadowed by, rather than held in tension with, the immanent, Christian faith is exposed to the now common critique of being ‘SPAG – self-projection as God.’[[117]](#footnote-117) In the search for evermore ‘authentic’ forms of belief and spiritual experience, faith can appear arbitrary, dependent less on the Holy Spirit than on personal needs and preferences. Additionally, when understandings of salvation are limited to a future oriented focus on individual souls getting into heaven (or avoiding judgment), recognition of the communal is diminished and participation in the community of faith becomes more a ‘transient exchange of convenience’ than a deep commitment to the communal nature of Christian faith.[[118]](#footnote-118)

This is not to say that salvation does not involve a decidedly personal or future element; it most certainly does. However, that is not the only dimension of Christian soteriology. There is great danger in believing that ‘the whole of Christian truth *is all about me and my salvation*.’[[119]](#footnote-119) That type of approach mistakenly assumes that humans are the ‘center of the universe’; however, it is *God* who lies at the center. What is lost in the overemphasis on the interior, individual ‘me and my salvation’ experience is the overarching, all-creation nature of salvation, the part of salvation that answers N. T. Wright’s apt question, ‘what is God going to do to sort out his world and his people?’[[120]](#footnote-120) The answer to this question is the communal dimension of salvation: God has a plan to save the whole world, not simply a collection of individuals. Wright asserts correctly:

God made humans for a purpose: not simply for themselves, not simply so that they could be in relationship with him, but so that *through* them, as his image-bearers, he could bring his wise, glad, fruitful order to the world. And the closing scenes of Scripture, in the book of Revelation, are not about human beings going off to heaven to be in a close and intimate relationship with God, but about heaven coming to earth. The intimate relationship with God which is indeed promised and celebrated in that great scene of the New Jerusalem issues at once in an outflowing, a further healing creativity, the river of the water of life flowing out from the city and the tree of life springing up, with leaves that are for the healing of the nations.[[121]](#footnote-121)

That is why in Paul's writings the ideas of ‘dealing-with-sin-and-rescuing-people-from-it’ (the individual aspect of salvation) on the one hand, and ‘bringing-Jews-and-Gentiles-together-into-a-single-family’ (the communal aspect of salvation), on the other, are always bound up together.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Without a robust understanding of the communal nature of the Christian faith, one is left with an overly interior understanding of salvation that resembles inhabiting an empty house of mirrors. Yet it is intuitive that humans gain profound satisfaction less from isolation than from the meaning found in deep relationships with others. Community enables the mirrors of the private salvific experience to become windows and doors to a wider shared spirituality. Seligman is helpful in his explanation of ritual (in contrast to sincerity) as the space of a shared ‘could be’ as well as a shared ‘once there was.’[[123]](#footnote-123) The communal nature of Christian soteriology creates the shared space Seligman refers to, with the addition of a shared ‘what *will* be.’

Even though Western culture is currently marked by an attitude of mis-distrust, the yearning for strong bonds of attachment has not disappeared. Without community, however, without that shared space, those bonds have little opportunity to develop. Though Seligman is not speaking directly of the community of faith, his observation is significant. Without community,

without a common origin in a pre-given and authoritative reality (authoritative precisely because it is assented to collectively), individuals must project alternative sets of bonds to connect to each other. If we are not bound by a shared subjunctive, we can only be bound by the depths of our own sincerity.[[124]](#footnote-124)

In a climate of mis-distrust, an overemphasis on the salvation of individual souls not only deemphasizes the all-creation nature of salvation, it potentially plants seeds of doubt within those outside the church, leading them to wonder if Christians really care about them in the here and now. Granted, one might argue that care for a person’s eternal soul is the deepest care conceivable; however, that sentiment does not translate easily to those whose real life needs, problems and challenges are deep and significant. And, an overemphasis on the salvation of individual souls focuses the efforts of Christians on the task of ‘saving’ others. That, in turn, is perceived less as genuine caring and more as targeting, and Christians are seen as having ulterior motives: the winning of converts rather than the building of relationships.[[125]](#footnote-125)

As the yearning for strong bonds of attachment continues even in a milieu of mis-distrust, for Christians to embrace a holistic understanding of salvation that includes both the personal and communal dimensions becomes vital. In this way Christian care can be seen as genuine and directed at the whole person, both in the current age and the age to come.

**The Perceived Disregard for the Environment**

Understanding Christian soteriology as extending beyond individual salvation to the whole of creation is a helpful step in addressing a third issue within the church that exacerbates the existing climate of mis-distrust, a perceived antienvironmental stance.[[126]](#footnote-126) Traditional Christian images of humans exercising God-given dominion over the earth (Gen. 1) can seem to imply that the environment has little intrinsic value in and of itself. Rather than being inherently valuable, creation instead derives its worth first and foremost through its use by humans. This apparant discounting of the intrinsic, God-given value and worth of creation is exacerbated by Christian soteriological language. Simply put, when Christians emphasize salvation as redemption *from* the world rather than redemption *of* the world, they unwittingly reinforce the existing perception of a lack of respect and concern for the environment, God’s creation.

Dispensationalist theologies contribute to this perception by stressing the total depravity of creation, human transcendence of and rightful mastery over creation, and the assertion that humans will never destroy the earth.[[127]](#footnote-127) Without assenting to the whole of Dispensationalist theology, one is correct in affirming that God will not allow the utter destruction of God’s creation; however, emphasizing the complete corruption of all creation and human domination of nature undermines any notion of stewardship or care.[[128]](#footnote-128)

Christian faith does, in fact, contain a strong commitment to creation care.[[129]](#footnote-129) From the perspective of those outside the church, however, that element is unfortunately not as pronounced as is either the emphasis on dominion over creation or the ‘world to come.’ The resulting perception is that Christians are not greatly interested in issues of the environment (or even hostile to them).[[130]](#footnote-130)

The language Christians use, as well as differing understandings of that language, contribute to this misrepresentation. To the ears of the outsider, for instance, when Christians talk about the hope for ‘new creation,’ they sound as though they are anticipating that existing creation will be utterly remade with nothing of the old included in the new. The logical conclusion by outsiders is often that Christians are therefore not concerned with protecting or preserving the existing environment. Adding to the confusion, Christians themselves are actually quite divided about what they mean when they talk about ‘new creation,’ with some holding the above position and others believing that the existing creation will be transformed, not obliterated with something entirely new put into its place.

My intent is not to resolve the tension between these two views; however, in an environment of mis-distrust, consistency significantly improves one’s integrity. The witness of Scripture provides a great deal of guidance at this point: creation belongs to God, Who declared it good and entrusted it into humanity’s care (Gen. 1-2); from the beginning, humanity’s first experience of God is ‘through the goodness of creation, the concrete realities of air, food, water, and shelter, the abundant forms of life’[[131]](#footnote-131) (Gen. 1-3); the most universal evangelistic witness is creation, which points to God (Romans 1.20); further, the incarnation ‘hallows for all time the common dust of this earth and all its creatures.’[[132]](#footnote-132) Given this scriptural witness, regardless of which view Christians hold in regard to existing creation, whether it will be transformed or entirely remade, it is not inconsistent to commit to active stewardship of the environment. When all Christians ‘take a prophetic stance on behalf of the environment, they become moral leaders in our broken world’ and thus gain integrity in their overall witness.[[133]](#footnote-133) This is important in relation to the evangelistic task, for as Elaine Heath correctly points out, ‘evangelism is not good news until it is good news for all of creation, for humanity, animals, plants, water, and soil. For the earth that God created and called good.’[[134]](#footnote-134)

**The Perceived Indifference to Suffering**

A fourth issue is especially difficult, because of the profound love and compassion on which Christian faith claims to be based. It is the perception that the Western church is indifferent to suffering. From the perspective of the church, this may seem strange given the claim that the church draws its existence from the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it is because of this claim that such a perception is not far-fetched. Jesus’ compassion, his love and care for those on the margins of society, his teaching about justice, mercy and forgiveness, and the story of his own suffering and death are well known both within and beyond the church, which makes the gap between Christians’ claims regarding their basis for faith and the way in which they practice that faith very apparent. Space necessitates that three examples suffice to make the point. However, before exploring those examples, a brief word is necessary at a general level.

In a very basic way, the sense that Christians are indifferent to suffering seems to parallel the perception of the church as judgmental and unloving. Kinnaman and Lyons have found that ‘only 16% of young outsiders say the phrase “consistently shows love for other people” describes [Christians] “a lot.”’[[135]](#footnote-135) This lack of love is reflected in the perception that Christians are not interested in knowing others outside the church, not willing to actually learn about their lives or genuinely listen as they relate the challenges and struggles of their past or present. When Christians appear more concerned with what people do or do not do rather than being willing to place themselves in the shoes of the other, it is not a large step to conclude that they are indifferent to suffering. Three examples support this conclusion by many outside the church.[[136]](#footnote-136)

In the 1980s when the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic burst onto the international scene, the overarching reaction of the Western church was not one of compassion for the suffering of those who were infected or otherwise affected by the disease. The disease was briefly referred to as ‘Wrath of God Syndrome,’[[137]](#footnote-137) which is a small indication of the negative response from the faith community. The voices of the church were profoundly hostile, in some quarters announcing that in keeping with the initial name, this new disease was God’s punishment on the gay community, the group who were, in the early years of the virus’s onslaught, the most dramatically affected.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Fear, stigmatization and avoidance rather than compassion characterized much of the early response to HIV/AIDS within the church. Even in recent years a distinct sense of ‘otherness’ related to those the disease infects and affects remains. In her 2008 review of several religious books on HIV/AIDS, Susan Henking raises an important question. Granted, an increased compassionate response to the pandemic in Africa has arisen, which Henking notes as a positive change. The pandemic is also now clearly recognized as a predominantly heterosexual disease that has dramatically affected some areas of the world (e.g. Africa) more severely than others (e.g. the United States). However, given the past negative response of religion to the crisis in general, one may legitimately ask whether, AIDS, at least in the Western context, is ‘still equated with the “other” and, today, with a more comfortable “other” at that – an other that is conveniently elsewhere?’[[139]](#footnote-139)

It could be argued that the Christian church should not bear the entire blame for the negativity associated with the HIV/AIDS crisis because the church’s response has not been dramatically different from the broad spectrum of society in general. However, to use another group’s bad behavior as an excuse for one’s own is not only weak argumentation, but also glaringly hypocritical, given the claim that the church is the body of Christ and follows the one who touched and healed lepers and others stigmatized and deemed unclean.

In the current context where HIV/AIDS is clearly a global crisis no longer limited to one specific population group (e.g. sexual orientation, ethnic identity), the church continues to wrestle with its impulse toward negativity, moving slowly in response to those infected and affected. Issues of racism and gender bias continue to cloud the issue, hindering adequate responses to the suffering caused by the pandemic. For instance, the traditional teaching of the church regarding sexuality and gender relationships has contributed to a ‘culture of silence that surrounds sex.’ This, coupled with women’s overall economic dependency, among other things, increases their vulnerability to HIV. ‘Research has shown that the economic vulnerability of women makes it more likely that they will exchange sex for money or favors, less likely that they will succeed in negotiating protection, and less likely that they will leave a relationship that they perceive to be risky.’[[140]](#footnote-140) Similarly, research has also shown that ‘the overrepresentation of minorities in various disease categories, including AIDS, is partially related to racism…The slow national response to the AIDS epidemic in minority communities illuminates this racism.’[[141]](#footnote-141) Given that the church has not been immune to institutional and other forms of racism and sexism (as will be discussed), it follows that the response of the church to the pandemic generally has also not been immune to the insidious, negative effects of racism and sexism.

Lastly, besides all the complexities that layer the HIV/AIDS crisis, the church’s emphasis on moral prohibitions (such as those related to contraception) has contributed to the sense that it is indifferent to suffering.[[142]](#footnote-142) It could be argued that this charge is valid only in relation to the Roman Catholic Church; however, even without papal pronouncements, few denominations can escape the accusation that Christianity, as it is lived out especially in the U.S., has a reputation for creating rigid moral categories of ‘do’ and ‘do not’ that have affected the overall church’s response to the AIDS crisis. This is in keeping with the assertion that opened this section regarding a perceived lack of love: when Christians appear more concerned with what people do or do not do rather than with a willingness to place themselves in the shoes of others, the step to conclude that they are indifferent to suffering is not large. With this in mind, outsiders, not surprisingly, based on the church’s public stance as well as its behavior toward those infected and affected, easily infer that moral imperatives, regarding sexuality or contraception, for example, are of greater significance than the immense suffering of millions of human beings.

A second example of the church’s perceived indifference to suffering is the ongoing clergy sexual-abuse scandals. Following my open concerns about this issue earlier as it relates to the current climate of mis-distrust, only a few additional comments are necessary. From the earliest revelations of these various and far-reaching scandals, one pervasive commonality has been the magnitude of concern for the effects information regarding specific cases might have on the church (in the larger sense of the word). That this concern for the church reached the uttermost levels of Roman Catholic leadership is only now becoming more disturbingly apparent.[[143]](#footnote-143) Again, from the perspective of outsiders (and even from the perspective of those within the church), it is difficult to conclude that compassion for the suffering of the actual victims (or concern for the potential suffering of future victims) was anything other than incidental relative to concern for the protection of the reputation of the church as a whole.

As with other issues that seem to affect one community of faith within the Christian family more than another, it is a mistake to assume that this problem is confined to the Roman church. In 2008, a Baylor University study released the following unsettling statistics:

* More than 3% of women who had attended a congregation in the past month reported that they had been the object of CSM [clergy sexual misconduct] at some time in their adult lives;
* 92% of these sexual advances had been made in secret, not in open dating relationships; and
* 67% of the offenders were married to someone else at the time of the advance.
* In the average American congregation of 400 persons, with women representing, on average, 60% of the congregation, there are, on average of [*sic*] 7 women who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct.
* Of the entire sample, 8% report having known about CSM occurring in a congregation they have attended. Therefore, in the average American congregation of 400 congregants, there are, on average, 32 persons who have experienced CSM in their community of faith.[[144]](#footnote-144)

Further, participants in the study came from *seventeen* different Christian and Jewish affiliations.[[145]](#footnote-145)

It may appear to some that sexual misconduct with a minor is of graver significance than that directed toward an adult; however, to debate such a distinction appears irrelevant given the enormity of the current crisis. Further, a similar shroud of silence surrounds clergy sexual misconduct whether the victim is an adult or a minor. The pervasive maintenance of that silence, which colors the church’s response to these issues, is difficult to ignore in light of the intense need for compassion toward all victims.

A final related example is the issue of sexual and domestic violence beyond the circumscribed environment of clergy misconduct. In the U.S., about a third of all women and a sixth of all men have been sexually abused by the time they are eighteen, not to mention the countless additional people indirectly affected by this issue.[[146]](#footnote-146) In the broader arena of domestic violence, 85% of domestic violence victims are women, and it is estimated that one in four will experience some form of domestic violence in her lifetime.[[147]](#footnote-147) As shocking as these statistics are, it is widely accepted that the incidence of sexual and domestic violence is grossly underreported. Also, domestic violence crosses the boundaries of age, economic status, race, religion, nationality and educational background. Such violence, predominantly against women, is connected to emotionally abusive and controlling behavior that places the victim in the midst of a systematic pattern of dominance and control. Such violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and even death; and its consequences can cross generations with lifelong effects.[[148]](#footnote-148)

Yet despite this reality, little is ever said about this issue, either from the pulpit or in the context of congregational ministry. In conjunction with the shroud of silence that generally accompanies most discussions about sexuality within the context of the church, victims of domestic violence are often left voiceless and seemingly alone. Further, pastors continue to be trained for ministry with a remarkable lack of preparation to handle these types of issues, and in many cases have used Scripture as the basis for advising battered women to return submissively to their husbands. As a result, millions of suffering individuals find little solace within the church; little compassion or concern for the pervasive damage such abuse inflicts; and little care for the pain caused by the shame and other problems associated with sexual and domestic violence.

Heath is correct to call attention to an interesting measure of compassion for the suffering of victims of sexual and domestic violence in my own denomination as it relates to the training of ministers. Although many United Methodist seminaries offer optional courses, most require no course work related to learning about the signs of abuse or strategies for intervention.[[149]](#footnote-149) If one were to gauge the level of concern for the suffering of one-third of women and one-sixth of men in the U.S. by the prioritization of course work in the training of its ministers, the United Methodist Church, at least, would fall dramatically short, given that courses in Hebrew or church business administration are required, and courses in the prevention and healing of the wounds of sexual and domestic violence are not.[[150]](#footnote-150)

I am confident that many if not most Christians share my dismay at the perception that the church is indifferent to suffering; however, the gap between compassion claimed by the church and compassion actually shown often produces this perception. Although there are certainly many instances where the church is engaged in authentic ministries of compassion with those who suffer, those ministries often rightly operate without demanding (and often by necessity avoiding) outside attention. This lack of outside attention enables the gap between ‘preached’ compassion and the perception of ‘actual’ compassion to remain and sometimes widen. What is missing is not ministry itself, though I am convinced that the gospel requires ever-greater ministries of compassion. What is missing in an environment of mis-distrust is a robust, public and prophetic witness of solidarity with those who suffer and a willingness to give voice to suffering apart from moral determinations to undergird and strengthen existing ministries and to bring together with greater integrity the church’s claims and behavior.

**The Continuing Presence of Racism and Sexism in the Church**

Undeniably, the sins of racism and sexism have plagued the church for centuries. Thus as with the issue of suffering, a gap exists between what the church claims (Gal. 3.28), and how it behaves that continues to damage Christian witness in the world.

At heart, both racism and sexism are spiritual issues with deep roots in sin. Both reflect an attitude of ‘rebellion against God’s revealed truth that all human life is created in God’s image.’[[151]](#footnote-151) Both assert that human dignity and worth are determined by skin color or gender, yet Christian faith asserts that human dignity and worth stem from one’s place as a being created in love by the one true God.

Although racism and sexism are not identical, these spiritual maladies share a defining element of power. Racism is,

the abuse of power by a ‘racial’ group that is more powerful than one or more other groups in order to exclude, demean, damage, control, or destroy the less powerful groups. Racism confers benefits upon the dominant group that include psychological feelings of superiority, social privilege, economic position, or political power.[[152]](#footnote-152)

Sexism, on the other hand, refers primarily to ‘the belief that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of their [gender]. It also refers to attitudes, value systems, and social patterns which express or support this belief.’[[153]](#footnote-153) The defining element of power inherent in sexism can be seen in the systematic disadvantaging of women by society evidenced by the fact that,

by many ways of measuring well-being, women around the globe lead lesser lives than men. In much of the world they are less well nourished, less healthy, and less well educated…Many more women in the world lack access to education and many more are illiterate…Independently of their participation in the paying workforce, women suffer from domestic violence at much greater rates, bear primary responsibility for childrearing and housework, and are much more likely to be sick and poor in their old age.[[154]](#footnote-154)

It is not controversial that the church has been affected by and often complicit in the cultural and societal norms of racism and sexism; however, a brief look at history offers an important reminder.

Even after its slow and uneven response to the issue of slavery, the church continues to create racially biased environments, whether in its worship life (currently, 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning is said to be the most segregated hour in the U.S.), denominational structures, or ecumenical activity, into the present.[[155]](#footnote-155)

The history of American Methodism aptly illustrates this. African-Americans have been a part of the American Methodist movement almost from the beginning; however, various facets of discrimination led to the formation of several independent African-American Methodist denominations early in the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the Civil War, having already separated into the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and the Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS) in 1844 over the issue of slavery, challenges over racial issues continued. On the one hand, the MECS separated African-Americans into separate conferences, which eventually became the independent Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. On the other, the MEC had allowed African-Americans to remain within the church; however they were segregated into separate annual conferences. At the time of the reunification of the Methodist Protestant,[[156]](#footnote-156) the MEC and the MECS in 1939, one of the major issues was ‘the place of the black Methodists in the Methodist Episcopal Church.’[[157]](#footnote-157) The result was the creation of a racially oriented Central Jurisdiction. Though not intended to be ‘a permanent solution to the problem of race relations,’[[158]](#footnote-158) the Central Jurisdiction remained part of the Methodist Church in the U.S. until 1968 when it was eliminated through the merger of the Methodists with the Evangelical United Brethren.

Even though many mainline denominations continue from an institutional perspective to work on the issue of racism,[[159]](#footnote-159) they continue to be far from conforming to Paul’s description of the church as being ‘one in Christ Jesus.’ (Gal. 3.28) There are certainly instances of multiethnic communities of faith, but by and large, the extensive variety of ethnic tensions that plague the wide range of human societies also continue to infect the life of the body of Christ.[[160]](#footnote-160) In an age of mis-distrust, such infection is detrimental to the church’s overall witness as it provides evidence that the gap between what Christians say they believe (that all are one in Jesus Christ), and how they behave (continuing racial tension and the privileging of Caucasians) continues to be great.

The church’s history in relation to its views on the role of women in ministry and the life of the church also provides an example of its complicity in the sexism that permeates society. There has never been dispute about the inclusion of women within the body of Christ, but women’s roles in leadership, notably in regard to the sacraments, preaching and teaching, has been hotly contested.[[161]](#footnote-161) This is primarily because at a foundational theological level, much of traditional Christian teaching associates women with sin and sinfulness, a fact that is compounded and made more complex by the church’s historically negative attitude regarding sexuality.[[162]](#footnote-162)

Space limits the discussion, but several brief remarks are in order. First, throughout Christian history, especially in the first several centuries, women played important roles in leadership within the community of faith. As the church moved from the more private realm of a minority, persecuted religion, to the more public realm of an institutional body, however, women’s leadership roles became more controversial, and the long process of their marginalization began.[[163]](#footnote-163) Second, women have emerged as Christian leaders in a variety of ways (despite overarching marginalization), often leading with power and fruitfulness in areas of preaching, teaching and evangelism.[[164]](#footnote-164)

Although my own denomination is institutionally committed to gender inclusivity, women often remain on the outskirts of leadership.[[165]](#footnote-165) Furthermore, it does not go unnoticed that as a woman involved in evangelism, I have further placed myself in an even smaller minority. Unfortunately for women currently in ministry, my own experience of being referred to as ‘an out-of-control little girl’ when asserting leadership in my first local church appointment is all too similar to Bishop Alexander’s reference to ‘disorderly little women’ during a fourth century theological controversy in Alexandria.[[166]](#footnote-166)

In sum, the continued presence of theologies that devalue women, coupled with the lived reality of constricted avenues for women in leadership within the church, blemish the overall witness of the body of Christ. When the sin of sexism is held alongside the sin of racism, it becomes difficult for outsiders to trust the integrity of the church’s assertion that all are one in Christ Jesus.[[167]](#footnote-167)

**The Integrity of Evangelism in a Culture of Mis-distrust**

Having explored the current climate of mis-distrust from a variety of perspectives as well as particular issues within the church that exacerbate that climate, I find it appropriate to recognize that given the present global backdrop, some voices in the world of mission and evangelism question whether North America and Europe are well suited for leadership in the new chapter of Christian history unfolding in the twenty-first century.[[168]](#footnote-168) Far from being the people chosen by God to lead the effort to evangelize the entire world, for some the West has shown itself to be entirely unfit for the task.

It is indisputable that mainline Christian denominations in the West have long been in a period of complacency and decline. In the United Methodist Church alone, membership has decreased by more than 20% since 1973, and the number of churches has declined by 12.4% in that same time frame.[[169]](#footnote-169) In contrast, the church in the Global South has been marked by vibrancy, excitement and growth. This dynamic manifestation of Christianity beyond the West is what Lamin Sanneh refers to as ‘worldwide Christianity’: a ‘movement of Christianity that takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel.’[[170]](#footnote-170) Though worldwide Christianity is not a single thing but shows itself in a wide variety of forms, it is consistently without a ‘European Enlightenment frame.’ For Sanneh, this is in sharp contrast to ‘global Christianity,’ which is the ‘faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe.’[[171]](#footnote-171)

Given the ‘new shape…new ethnic composition, and …new cultural orientation’ of worldwide Christianity, Walls has asserted that Christianity is becoming a non-Western religion’[[172]](#footnote-172) echoing Sanneh’s reference to ‘post-Western Christianity.’[[173]](#footnote-173) Walls goes on to say this:

If suffering, persecution, and faithful wrestling with impossible situations are marks of Christian authenticity, then we may assume that God has been training certain churches for leadership in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, imparting to them accumulated knowledge of God's salvation.[[174]](#footnote-174)

It is not difficult to infer that these certain churches are not in the West. From Walls’ perspective, ‘Western theology is, in general, too small for Africa; it has been cut down to fit the small-scale universe demanded by the Enlightenment, which set and jealously guarded a frontier between the empirical world and the world of spirit. Most Africans live in a larger, more populated universe in which the frontier is continually being crossed.’[[175]](#footnote-175)

Walls is not alone in his sense that the Western church must learn more about facilitating and assisting rather than making an assumption of leadership in the new millennium. Dana Robert, in reflecting on the Great Commission and its intimate connection to mission and evangelism, highlights the conflicted nature of current thinking, pointing out that ‘even as we celebrate the worldwide spread of Christianity, critics implicate the Great Commission as the ideological core of the dominant Western socioeconomic system of privilege.’[[176]](#footnote-176) Drawing a parallel between the uncomfortable relationship perceived to exist between economic globalization and missionary Christianity in the twenty-first century and the twentieth-century unease about the relationship between colonialism and Christian mission, she rightly asks, ‘What is the relationship of the Great Commission to economic globalization? Should Westerners still go overseas as missionaries when peoples in poor parts of the world associate us with oppressive wealth, political domination, and a culture of materialism?’[[177]](#footnote-177) The answers Robert offers provide a starting point in the exploration of evangelism in this new context of mis-distrust.

First and foremost, she emphasizes the need to sever the correlation between the current situation of economic globalization and the theological vision of the kingdom of God. She is correct to question whether ‘disproportionate attention to numerical growth owes more to Western economic and cultural expansionism, or to a gospel of prosperity, than to biblical Christianity.’[[178]](#footnote-178) In an age of mis-distrust, it appears prudent to vigilantly avoid the mistake of many early missionaries who unconsciously mistook their own cultural norms for the gospel. Translated to the current context of mis-distrust, such vigilance might lead one to recognize that the task is to proclaim Christ, not Western economic self-interests.

In light of Walls’ suggestion that God has been training other churches for leadership in the Great Commission, it would seem wise for Western Christians to contemplate Robert’s proposal to intensify the focus on what it means to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ and give appropriate attention as the global body of Christ to the question of which ethnic and national groups are best suited to witness to the in-breaking of God’s kingdom in specific contexts.[[179]](#footnote-179) Although this might involve the painful process of Western Christians divesting themselves of their egos and laying bare the economic privilege that accompanies being from the West, it might also guard them from the mistake of ‘putting [their] own faces where Jesus Christ’s ought to be.’[[180]](#footnote-180)

Another of Robert’s suggestions is significant for an exploration of evangelism in the current age of mis-distrust: that Christians reground their commitment to evangelism as expressed in the Great Commission in the New Testament church. Her reminder is appropriate: ‘The true context for the Great Commission is that of the persecuted minority church, not our dominant Western culture.’[[181]](#footnote-181) It was not because of worldly power that the gospel spread beyond the boundaries set by nations and ethnicities. It was because the first followers of Jesus were faithful to the vision of the kingdom they had glimpsed in him. Unfortunately, Westerners have extreme difficulty separating the self from the trappings of worldly power. As I mentioned earlier, I will forever be a white, North American woman from the United States, which, by the rest of the world’s standards, comes with privilege, prosperity and power. For that reason there is a sense in which I am trapped by my own culture, as well as by the rest of the world’s interpretation of that culture.

Westerners face the unique challenge of separating the faithful following of Jesus Christ from all the things that flow from their culture, especially the increasing contrast between wealth and poverty in a global economic system. In facing that challenge, Robert’s observation is pertinent: ‘For North Americans, our mission in the twenty-first century may mean glorifying God as slaves, just as Paul was willing to do in 2 Corinthians 4.5-6.’[[182]](#footnote-182)

The contemporary situation of mis-distrust created by the weight of history and culture provides a significant context in which to contemplate not just the questions raised by both Walls and Robert, but also the question of evangelism and missiology in general. If one accepts that evidence of God’s work in the world can be seen in the dynamic vitality of the body of Christ, it is clear that God is at work in worldwide Christianity. As Sanneh says, ‘What is at issue now is the surprising scale and depth of the worldwide Christian resurgence, a resurgence that seems to proceed without Western organizational structures, including academic recognition, and is occurring amidst widespread political instability and the collapse of public institutions.’[[183]](#footnote-183) Clearly, while Westerners debate the role of the West in mission and evangelism, God is continuing to work beyond and often without them. With that in mind, the task becomes one of envisioning ways in which Western Christians might restore the vitality of their witness and thus reconnect with the powerful ways in which God is working in the world.

Moving toward a more holistic understanding of the evangelistic task requires an awareness of the ways in which the perceptions of those outside the church differ from the perceptions of those within it. Those within the church may not understand the outsider’s perspective and quite possibly may believe it to be an unfounded and false representation of reality; however, that does not change the significance of the outsider’s perception. In a very real sense, one’s perceptions *are* reality even when they conflict with those of another. Thus especially in a culture marked by mis-distrust, it is important for Christians to be attentive to the observations of others and to develop an awareness of the fragility of integrity in the sight of others when their behavior comes into conflict with their proclamation.

That being said, it is important to remember that the church does not operate in a situation bereft of hope. That the church in the West is living in a climate of mis-distrust is evidenced to a great extent by the defensive nature it often takes toward the world. Christians generally, but Christian leaders specifically, often appear to operate out of a basic sense of anxiety rather than any overarching joy that being part of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God might bring. It is as though Western Christians actually believe the Enlightenment assertion that religion will indeed eventually die out. Yet the reality is quite the opposite. Christianity has not died out, not even in the West. Centuries ago, Augustine of Hippo was thoroughly attuned to the human condition when he wrote that humans were made for God, with restless hearts until they find their rest in God (Confessions I, i, 1).[[184]](#footnote-184) Humans never thrive in a spiritual vacuum; people continue to search, as they always have, for something to fill the God-shaped hole that is within them.

Therefore while the present age is one of deep uncertainty, uncertainty is the nature of any time that is ‘between times.’ That is the present context of the church. Vestiges of the Enlightenment linger, though they continue to fade. Other worldviews are forcefully taking shape and asserting their own primacy; however none has yet won the day. It is in this environment that the current discussion transpires, recognizing not simply the Western church’s chastened position, but the continued power of God to work in the world. It is in this environment that this question arises, ‘how can a foundation for evangelism be created that is sensitive to the contemporary situation of mis-distrust?’ Offering an answer to that question is a major goal of the current exploration. In movement toward possible answers, it is important to understand not only the current cultural climate, but also the current climate in the study of evangelism as well. It is to this task that we now turn.

Three

Current Thinking in Evangelism: Affirming a Wesleyan Trajectory

In seeking to discover a theological stance to undergird evangelism that is sensitive to the contemporary situation of mis-distrust, it is important to gain insight from the resources available within the discipline of evangelism. Unfortunately, far too many decades have been marked by scant theological attention in this arena.[[185]](#footnote-185) Thankfully, however, there has been a resurgence of interest during the past thirty years.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Even as the study of evangelism has become more accepted as a legitimate theological discipline, confusion often remains regarding what evangelism actually is.[[187]](#footnote-187) Further, before one is able to approach the question of what evangelism *is*, there is foundational disagreement on where evangelism (whatever it is) fits in an overall understanding of mission. Bosch outlined the wide variety of possibilities, ranging from the evangelical to the ecumenical, including six positions holding evangelism and mission as synonyms and four distinguishing evangelism from mission.[[188]](#footnote-188) Guided by his scheme, I believe mission and evangelism are distinct entities with mission being the broader category relating to the ‘total task that God has set the church for the salvation of the world’; in other words, mission is ‘being involved in the redemption of the universe and the glorification of God.’ Evangelism, then, is a narrower concept; however, it is ‘the *core*, *heart*, or *center* of mission.’[[189]](#footnote-189)

Having proposed the foundational understanding of the relationship of evangelism to mission, there remains the question of what it actually is. For a variety of reasons, evangelism is an emotionally, historically and theologically charged issue, as my experiences at the art exhibit and with the university student indicate. When the topic arises, well-entrenched images, both positive and negative, immediately flood the mind and permeate the conversation.

Several years ago at an international meeting of Methodists, I shared a meal with the British delegation. At one point, two delegates began discussing an earlier presentation by an American evangelist. Interestingly, though these ministers are in the British Methodist Church, they are not British by birth. One is a black South African, and the other is from Brazil. I was fascinated by their perceptions. Where I reacted to the presentation positively, hearing an emphasis on God’s grace and love, they had a pronounced negative reaction, hearing loud echoes of ‘fire and brimstone’ embedded in their perception of the presenter’s evangelistic style. I pushed them on this contrast, pointing out that there were no references to damnation, no appeals to guilt or shame. In fact, the man’s presentation was not specifically evangelistic in its intent; rather, it was a report on the evangelism work being done by one segment of the organization. As such, it focused on the positive things that were happening around the world. For me, the life-giving aspects of God’s love and grace were clearly prominent throughout the presentation.

Their response was intriguing. It was not the man’s words; it was his impression: his presence, his style, his age, the fact that he was white. For these individuals, it was not the *content* of what was said; it was what was *represented*, the images brought to mind from their past, the feelings evoked. While growing up on two different continents, their experience of this man was surprisingly similar, and it was not the experience of one who comes to present good news.

While anecdotal, the encounter points not only to the crucial nature of developing a clear understanding of what encompasses evangelism, but also to the importance of redeeming evangelism from the grip of past negative experience. Both of these needs are especially significant, given the current climate of mis-distrust, and it is with those needs in mind that I begin a review of current thinking.

**What *is* Evangelism? A Point of Departure**

The beginning point of any argument is crucial to the entire project. What the final product of one’s thinking looks like depends heavily on how one chooses to frame thoughts and discussion early on. In other words, the place from which people choose to start their journey quite frequently impacts the place at which they find themselves in the end. Abraham’s assertion provides an appropriate starting point for the current discussion:

Whatever evangelism may be, it is at least intimately related to the gospel of the reign of God that was inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Any vision of evangelism that ignores the kingdom of God, or relegates it to a position of secondary importance, or fails to wrestle thoroughly with its content is destined at the outset to fail. This is so because the kingdom of God is absolutely central to the ministry of Jesus and to the vision of the disciples that launched the Christian movement into history.[[190]](#footnote-190)

Abraham rightly contends that at stake in choosing this as the beginning of the discussion is the ‘fundamental theological horizon within which both Jesus and his followers conceive and carry out the first, and paradigmatic, evangelistic action of the church.’[[191]](#footnote-191) In opting to begin with the gospel of the reign of God, Abraham echoes Mortimer Arias’s assertion that ‘to evangelize is to announce the coming kingdom, the kingdom of peace and justice, of love and life, the consummation of God’s purpose of love with humanity and his universe – to announce the undefeatable fulfillment of creation.’[[192]](#footnote-192)

Like Abraham, for Arias the reign of God is the only place from which to begin a discussion of evangelism, because it is the place Jesus himself began as the ‘first evangelist’ in announcing the good news of the kingdom. Furthermore, for Arias the kingdom is multidimensional and all-encompassing, both present and future, both for the individual and all of society:

It embraces all dimensions of human life: physical, spiritual, personal and interpersonal, communal and societal, historical and eternal. And it encompasses all human relationships – with the neighbor, with nature, and with God. It implies a total offer and a total demand. Everything and everybody has to be in line with it.[[193]](#footnote-193)

Abraham and Arias are not alone in beginning the discussion with the gospel of the reign of God. Bosch, Orlando Costas and Newbigin begin there as well.[[194]](#footnote-194) Given the current culture of mis-distrust and the missteps of the church previously identified, I believe it especially wise to follow these scholars: however ideas are shaped regarding what evangelism is or is not, whatever new paradigms are created to better conceive the evangelistic task; it is imperative to remain firmly rooted in the fundamental theological horizon of the kingdom of God as announced by Jesus. Further, it is crucial to stand with Arias in being clear that this kingdom is not the partial or reductionist versions that have been put forth over the ages. It is not a purely transcendental kingdom in heaven awaiting the faithful at the end of this life.[[195]](#footnote-195) Nor a solely inner kingdom of religious experience offered for one’s own spiritual benefit.[[196]](#footnote-196) Nor a cataclysmic kingdom of the apocalyptic *Left Behind* series of novels, nor a political kingdom initiating a new social order, nor an ecclesiastical kingdom of church growth.[[197]](#footnote-197) It is much more than any one of these, and I believe it requires much more of Christians as well.

Before continuing, however, a word about the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ is in order. ‘Kingdom of God’ is the English phrase most often used to translate the Greek βασιλεια του θεου (basileia tou theou). This is unfortunate because currently the word *kingdom* carries a great deal of monarchical and political associations, implies geographical limitations, and is burdened by connections to colonial and patriarchal structures and language. Some writers believe the phrase is so heavily laden with negative images that they opt for the phrase ‘reign of God,’ feeling it both avoids the difficulty and implies a sense of God’s active participation in the world.[[198]](#footnote-198) I appreciate this concern; however, in theological and religious language the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ is an ingrained technical term that can hardly be avoided.[[199]](#footnote-199) Additionally, it is symbolically tied to Jesus’s message in a very intimate way.[[200]](#footnote-200) Thus while in some instances I will use the phrase ‘reign of God,’ I continue to use the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ with the intention of reclaiming the sense in which Jesus used it. This ‘Jesus-sense’ is not static, but rather it is overwhelmingly dynamic: ‘so all-embracing and all-encompassing that it puts under question and under judgment any exclusivistic image, myth, language, structure, or doctrine, and declares wanting all of our dualisms, dichotomies, and reductions.’[[201]](#footnote-201)

In grounding this exploration in the fundamental theological horizon of the gospel of the reign of God, it is also important to recognize a deeper, even more fundamental place from which to begin the discussion: love. Love is the fundamental category upon which all else in the gospel depends.[[202]](#footnote-202) Arias, Abraham and others[[203]](#footnote-203) assume this; however, it is important to be explicit. Love is God’s most basic attribute. (1 Jn. 4.16)[[204]](#footnote-204) Arias would hardly disagree, because love is a crucial descriptor: God’s kingdom is a ‘kingdom of peace and justice, of love and life, *the consummation of God's purpose of love* with humanity and his universe.’[[205]](#footnote-205) Love as a basic attribute of God undergirds Abraham’s assertions as well: ‘Christians love God because God first loved them, and they love the neighbor because God’s love has been shed abroad in their hearts.’[[206]](#footnote-206)

In an age of mis-distrust, it is of grave importance to frame any discussion of evangelism in God’s fundamental love for creation. Love explains why God cares enough to reign at all; it explains why God announces the coming of that reign in Jesus. Love is the very reason Christ died for the redemption of the world. ‘God creates, redeems, and saves the world because God is love. God loves the world.’[[207]](#footnote-207)

Additionally, flowing out of the fundamental category of God’s love is the response of the believer. Christians are commanded to love God with all their being and to love their neighbors as themselves. This is not only the foundational motivation for evangelism, but the chief criterion for its adequacy. It is not out of bounds to assert that evangelism, as it has been practiced historically, has on many occasions failed to embody the kind of love for the people being evangelized that Jesus demanded.

Thus from the outset, the current exploration begins on the firm foundation of both God’s fundamental love for creation and on the believer’s response of love, which provides the motivation for all evangelistic practice.[[208]](#footnote-208) Further, both the love of God and that of the believer are presented within a specific theological horizon: the gospel of the kingdom of God as announced by Jesus of Nazareth.

**What *is* Evangelism? Limited Visions**

Even when rooted firmly in God’s love and with a vision of the theological horizon of Jesus in the forefront, it is easy to lean toward a limited picture of what evangelism entails. Such is the tendency of the Western church, severing the organic connection between evangelism and the overall mission of the church and narrowing its focus to proclamation and persuasion. The Lausanne Covenant is a good illustration of both of these tendencies.[[209]](#footnote-209) The very structure of the document indicates how genuinely disconnected the thinking about mission and evangelism is. Section Four, ‘The Nature of Evangelism,’ is quite distinct from Section Five, ‘Christian Social Responsibility.’ And the latter contains this seemingly affirming yet clearly boundary creating distinction: ‘Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, *nor is social action evangelism*, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.’[[210]](#footnote-210)

To further emphasize the separateness of evangelism, the Covenant asserts, ‘In the Church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary.’[[211]](#footnote-211) Yet as distinct and primary as evangelism is, according to Lausanne, its nature is very circumscribed: ‘To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.’ Certainly Christian presence is involved; however, ‘evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.’[[212]](#footnote-212)

The conceptualization of evangelism as focused on proclamation and persuasion, apart from social action, has been historically prevalent, has withstood formulations and reformulations and is now thoroughly entrenched in the collective consciousness of both the church and the secular world. Such strong entrenchment most likely accounts for the attempt by the Third Lausanne Congress to more explicitly bridge the gap between the two. Quoting the *Micah Declaration on Integral Mission*,[[213]](#footnote-213) *The Cape Town Statement of Faith* asserts that,

Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.[[214]](#footnote-214)

That the false dichotomy of evangelism and social action continues to be prevalent accounts for the need for these types of statements and points to a dawning recognition of the difficulty of this position:

The moment you regard mission as consisting of two separate or separable components – evangelism and social action – you have, in principle, admitted that each of the two components has a life of its own. You are then suggesting that it is possible to have evangelism without a social dimension and Christian social action without an evangelistic dimension.[[215]](#footnote-215)

Apart from The Third Lausanne Congress, there have been attempts to incorporate into evangelism an emphasis on, for example, lifestyle, works of mercy, or the sacraments. While seeming to broaden the concept of evangelism, such attempts actually often remain rooted in proclamation with only the sense of that proclamation having changed. Rather than being literal, proclamation becomes figurative. One continues to ‘proclaim’ Christ; however, one no longer does it solely with words, but ‘through’ one’s lifestyle, or works of mercy or the sacraments. Such metaphorical broadening of what it means to ‘proclaim’ the good news, however, is helpful only on the surface as it subtly moves the conversation into a vague and ambiguous arena where anything the church does might be considered evangelism. Abraham rightly cautions that when ‘everything is evangelism then nothing is evangelism; and we should be surprised if anyone in the church takes it very seriously.’[[216]](#footnote-216)

An additional and parallel danger of a figurative approach to the evangelistic task is that the verbal element potentially falls away all together. Christians ‘evangelize’ others by their lifestyle or works of mercy without any reference to the underlying foundation of God’s love for creation as revealed in Jesus Christ. Bosch perceptively points out the problem with this metaphorical understanding of proclamation:

Our deeds and our conduct are ambiguous; they need elucidation. The best we can hope for is that people will deduce from our behavior and our actions that we have ‘a hope within’ us. Our lives are not sufficiently transparent for people to be able to ascertain whence our hope comes.[[217]](#footnote-217)

Bryan Stone is even more to the point: ‘To conclude that one can bear witness to God’s reign without ever explicitly offering others an invitation to be part of that reign is not merely half right; it is wholly wrong.’[[218]](#footnote-218)

A final, also limited option for understanding evangelism is the church growth movement, which focuses on church expansion. Sparked by the work of Donald McGavran, this movement began as a serious effort to study the factors affecting the numerical strength of the church. Thus from the outset it was ‘less a set of specific suggestions about evangelistic practice and more a program of research.’[[219]](#footnote-219) However, as the research data accumulated, a wide variety of constantly evolving strategies began to emerge. Some of these have proven numerically successful; yet the danger of approaching evangelism from the perspective of numerical growth cannot be overstated.

Certainly one always hopes that evangelistic efforts will bear the fruit of new lives transformed by the power of the God’s Holy Spirit, and that numerical growth will be a byproduct of that transformation, because as Bosch notes, it is completely legitimate to desire to ‘bring people into the visible community of believers.’[[220]](#footnote-220) However, it is easy for the church growth emphasis on expediency to move into the terrain of utilitarianism. Such movement can potentially, and often subtly, change values such as love and friendship into the means to an end rather than ends in themselves. Moreover, the decision to join a church and the decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ in the context of the in-breaking of the reign of God are not always identical, evangelism is not the same as membership recruitment. When one gauges effectiveness by numbers, deeper spiritual needs can be overlooked because of a false sense of accomplishment; or conversely, meaningful spiritual growth is missed because of a false sense of failure regarding numerical growth.

Lastly, there is grave danger in confusing numerical growth with ‘organic and incarnational growth.’ What is at stake is the proper focus on the ‘irrupting reign of God’ rather than the extension of churches.[[221]](#footnote-221) As Stone argues, it could be that ‘in a culture where churches have become used to accommodating themselves to the preferences, tastes, and felt needs of consumers in order to grow, planting more of these marketing-oriented churches may not be the answer.’[[222]](#footnote-222) Indeed, in a culture marked by both mis-distrust and an abundance of mega-churches, it is reasonable to ask if such ‘preoccupation with ecclesial ingathering’ has not turned evangelism into ‘a mechanism for institutional self-aggrandizement.’[[223]](#footnote-223)

It has been asserted that ‘although remnants of church growth methodologies linger, momentum related to its study has largely passed and/or shifted into new directions.’[[224]](#footnote-224) This is largely true, especially in the realm of academics; however, church growth influences are still felt in the nonscholarly literature as a brief Internet search on the phrase ‘church growth’ easily shows.[[225]](#footnote-225) I believe this lingering effect is concerning because the somewhat unstable theological grounding of the church growth movement makes it less than helpful as an overarching means of understanding the evangelistic task.[[226]](#footnote-226)

Limited conceptualizations of evangelism continue to hold sway across large parts of the church; however it is encouraging to see the Lausanne Movement’s efforts to cast a more integrated vision at their recent meeting in Cape Town, South Africa.[[227]](#footnote-227) That being said, broader, more holistic approaches are available that offer hope for understanding the evangelistic task in an age of mis-distrust. These approaches are exemplified not only by current scholars, but also by historical example. Further, they are grounded in God’s love for all creation and presented within the theological horizon of the kingdom of God as announced by Jesus of Nazareth. It is to these more holistic understandings that we now turn.

**What *is* Evangelism? A Broad Place**

Although it certainly errs at times on the side of a more limited understanding of evangelism, the general trajectory of Wesleyan theology arcs toward more holistic conceptualizations, which I believe are vital to understanding evangelism in an age of mis-distrust. A helpful beginning for the discussion is a broader definition offered by Abraham. Drawing on Bosch, who emphasizes that evangelism ‘consists in word *and* deed, proclamation *and* presence, explanation *and* example,’[[228]](#footnote-228) Abraham sees evangelism as ‘a polymorphous ministry aimed at initiating people into the kingdom of God.’[[229]](#footnote-229) This definition enlarges the discussion of evangelism in a significant way; yet it provides enough clarity to avoid the pitfalls of the ambiguity associated with metaphorical renderings of evangelism as proclamation and the shifting theological underpinnings of church growth.

Two aspects of Abraham’s definition deserve special attention: the focus on one’s intentions and the objective of one’s efforts. Even as evangelism is a polymorphous ministry, the inclusion of intentionality is a key to determining whether a specific ministry is to be considered evangelistic. This is significant in that it provides both clarity and breadth to the evangelistic task.[[230]](#footnote-230) Clarity is evident because when Abraham’s definition is applied, not everything will necessarily be considered evangelism, even preaching, which is often seen as the heart of evangelism. There will be preaching that aims to initiate people into the reign of God; because of its intent, such preaching is evangelistic. However, there may also be preaching for other purposes, for life application of biblical truths or theological correction, perhaps; such preaching, on Abraham’s definition, would not be evangelistic.

Besides clarity, the emphasis on intentionality provides latitude as it opens up the possibility that a wide variety of activities might be considered evangelistic, in more than a figurative sense. If the intent is to see people initiated into the reign of God, the activity is evangelism, whether it be preaching, teaching children to read or feeding the hungry.

Intentionality is important from a historical perspective as well as from the perspective of the current context of mis-distrust. From a historical perspective, including intentionality broadens understandings of evangelism by recognizing the contributions of numerous women who, while working within the circumscribed roles allotted them by both the larger society and the church, approached the evangelistic task holistically, often combining their desire to see people enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ with their work in a variety of arenas, such as higher education and social work.[[231]](#footnote-231)

Retrieving this holistic approach to evangelism is significant in the current context of mis-distrust because it ‘refuses to separate social responsibility from evangelism.’[[232]](#footnote-232) Furthermore, when understandings are broadened, space is made for evangelism to be placed more firmly within the overall witness of the church. This in turn imbues the whole of Christian practice with greater integrity, for as Warner astutely observes, ‘If practices of worship, discipleship, and outreach are pursued without an evangelistic component, namely an intentional proclamation and/or embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then such practices not only lose their motivation and power but arguably cease to function as Christian practices.’[[233]](#footnote-233)

Stone furthers the notion of evangelism being firmly placed in the overall witness of the church in his affirmation of evangelism as both a distinct and intentional practice and being intrinsic to ‘the comprehensive praxis of Christian faith itself.’[[234]](#footnote-234) For Stone, evangelism must be practiced ‘explicitly and intentionally,’ and the church cannot be understood to be faithful without ‘engaging in the explicit practice of reaching the world, challenging sin, communicating the good news, offering Christ, sharing Christian worship, drawing persons into Christian friendship, inviting and welcoming persons to be a part of God’s reign, and summoning persons to a new and living way.’ At the same time, bound up with explicit intentionality is the implicit evangelistic character intrinsic to the comprehensive life of the church. For Stone, ‘evangelism is practiced implicitly whenever and wherever the church bears witness to the good news by its distinctively peaceful, cruciform, and subversive existence in the world. Indeed, evangelism is no less powerful a practice for that.’[[235]](#footnote-235)

The second key word in Abraham’s definition is initiation. Keeping in mind the Jesus-sense of the kingdom referred to earlier is important in understanding the component of initiation. For Abraham, the initiation toward which Christians work is different from other instances of initiation in the world. The goal is initiation into the reign of God, which has a distinctive character, has come into history in a singular way, and has its own internal logic and agenda.[[236]](#footnote-236) This uniqueness makes Abraham’s understanding of initiation much broader than the sacramental or liturgical understanding of Christian initiation that is generally understood across the church, shifting the focus from an anthropocentric horizon (i.e. the external admittance into a specific organization such as a particular ecclesiastical community and its requirements for belonging) to a more theocentric horizon, ‘where our focus is on the majestic and awesome activity of a trinitarian God whose actions on our behalf stagger our imagination and dissolve into impenetrable mystery.’[[237]](#footnote-237) Such a dramatic adjustment in focus will have an equally dramatic affect on evangelism, tying it tightly and appropriately to the inauguration of God’s reign on earth and rightly placing as its central task all activities that empower people to be firmly grounded in that reign and thus to ‘begin a new life as agents of reconciliation, compassion and peace.’[[238]](#footnote-238)

Brad Kallenberg provides interesting support for Abraham’s stress on initiation and the importance of fully grounding new believers in the reign of God that they might begin a ‘new life.’ Kallenberg rightly asserts that this ‘new life’ involves a dramatic change in social identity, the acquisition of new language skills, and ‘a paradigm shift that results in bringing the world into focus in a whole new way.’ All three of these elements involve ‘enculturation into community and into a community of a particular sort.’ Further, Kallenberg insists that,

The tracks for being a Christ-follower have already been laid by those who faithfully followed him before us. The conceptual language that the new believer learns to speak has been in circulation for two millennia. Moreover, to say that I have shifted paradigms is but an imprecise way of saying that I have changed allegiance from one community to another.[[239]](#footnote-239)

I believe stressing initiation into the reign of God significantly impacts evangelism because it moves the focus beyond a narrow emphasis on ‘saving souls’ toward the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth and the importance of seeing people firmly rooted in it. As such, evangelism moves into harmony with the gospel itself, which is, ‘as it has always been, a radical social challenge to the status quo of individualism.’[[240]](#footnote-240)

A word of clarification is necessary at this point. The kingdom of God, which Abraham is right to describe as having its own distinctive character and internal logic, should not, however, be seen as identical to the church.[[241]](#footnote-241) God works where God will, and with whom God will, whether within or beyond the church. One of the contributions of Wesleyan thought to theological conversation is the understanding of grace, specifically prevenient grace: the idea that God goes before me, preveniently working in places I have yet to go and within people I have yet to meet. A great mistake of much evangelistic effort is to fail to take the prevenient nature of God’s grace seriously, to fail to recognize how truly subordinate human beings, institutions, structures and constructs are in God’s movement of love in the world. A more developed view, offered by Abraham in later work, holds that ‘the work of the church in initiation is to point away from itself to a greater and more primordial reality, the kingdom of God.’[[242]](#footnote-242) He continues by proposing that the failure to distinguish between the church and the reign of God is a failure of ecclesiology:

It is to ignore the fact that *the church exists in and for service to the kingdom out of which it originated*. It is the church which is commissioned by the risen Lord to make disciples who will be initiated into the glorious reality of God’s reign on earth, a reality that is fully incarnate in Jesus Christ and made available through the work of the Holy Spirit. If it does not do this it is simply failing to be the church.[[243]](#footnote-243)

In discussing initiation into the kingdom of God, then, I believe it is important to recognize that while the reign of God may be most fully expressed in the church, it is not limited to that expression. Such a statement is necessary because of the ecclesiological failure Abraham suggests. For Christians immersed in the community of faith, it can be easy to limit one’s focus to the mission of the church in such a way that the church’s mission becomes confused with the greater reality of the kingdom of God. With such a narrowed focus, the church becomes the end toward which Christians work, rather than the inauguration of God’s reign.[[244]](#footnote-244) That being said, the role of the church cannot be ignored or downplayed. Evangelism is a practice firmly rooted in the context of the community of faith and it is within that context that it needs to be explored. Thus in discussing the concept of initiation into the kingdom of God, I do so recognizing the connected but not identical nature of God’s rule and the church.

Focusing the object of initiation on the kingdom of God, which as I have said has its own distinctive character and internal logic, is useful because it recognizes that initiation involves a complex web of reality that is at once corporate, cognitive, moral, experiential, operational, and disciplinary. Initiation into the kingdom of God is not only one of these; nor is it all of these strung together as a mere human enterprise driven by earthly passion and planning. It is all of these, set and bounded within the dramatic action of God that is manifest in Christ and fueled by the Holy Spirit.[[245]](#footnote-245)

Yet as one explores this more robust understanding of initiation, it is important not to view it as overly compartmentalized with a rigid demarcation between evangelism and, for instance, discipleship. Warner is correct in her assertion that biblical foundations and the life of the church are more complex.[[246]](#footnote-246) She perceptively points out that there is a significant interdependency in the lived practices of communities of faith.[[247]](#footnote-247)

Compartmentalizing evangelism is dangerous because it disengages evangelism from the life of the Christian community precisely at the point where the connection is most needed. If, for instance, evangelism is limited to proclamation, the responsibility of the evangelist stops when the proclamation has ceased. Abraham is firmly planted in the Wesleyan tradition when he emphasizes that initiation into the kingdom of God involves the initial grounding of believers: ‘The gospel must be handed over in such a way that those who receive it may be able to own it for themselves in a substantial way and have some sense of what they are embracing.’[[248]](#footnote-248)

This point is significant for an adequate understanding of evangelism. Abraham, Warner, Heath and others contribute by highlighting that evangelism is not a simplistic, singular event, nor is it limited to a specific moment. Evangelism is a process. This perspective contrasts longstanding views of evangelism as revolving around events such as revivals culminating in dramatic, emotive, moments of conversion.

Interestingly, in the period of the First Great Awakening there was room for a more process-oriented understanding of evangelism. Because ‘the sovereign God brought salvation to the depraved and helpless sinner,’ a process was involved.[[249]](#footnote-249) Jonathan Edwards outlined numerous steps eventually leading to conversion, a process that could last for months.[[250]](#footnote-250)

The Wesleyan revival, with its emphasis on the Society and class meetings to nurture evangelism, also operated from a process understanding. As time passed, however, this ‘hyper-Calvinism,’ which subsumed the human will completely under the activity of the sovereign God, began to give way, and the sovereignty of the individual became more prominent. Thus rather than emphasizing God bringing salvation to a person, an Arminian element was highlighted that allowed for divine grace to interact with the human will.[[251]](#footnote-251)

In the Wesleyan tradition, this shift can be seen in the Second Great Awakening. Where Wesley championed the class meeting, the Second Great Awakening pioneered the camp meeting, but in doing so ‘abbreviated, if not truncated, [the] Wesleyan message,’ boiling it down to ‘*free grace*, *free will*, and *conversion*. In the Wesleyan revival, conversion was seen as the *sign* of authentic faith; in the Second Great Awakening, conversion increasingly became the *goal* of faith.’[[252]](#footnote-252)

An unfortunate element of this shift has been in some cases a hyper-Arminianism in which evangelism becomes more focused on the transaction that takes place when ‘the sinner [asks] God for that grace which is immediately available.’ In this case evangelism becomes concerned with assuring people that ‘the moment the human will is activated, God responds.’ Grace then becomes much less a mysterious gift of God than a transaction dependent on the free will of the new believer.[[253]](#footnote-253)

An ‘evangelism of transaction’ is dangerous in its abridged understanding not only of evangelism, but also of what it means to become a Christian. Christians are not made overnight. As Chilcote and Warner contend, ‘God forms people into authentic disciples of Jesus, and we participate in that process through evangelism.’[[254]](#footnote-254)

George Hunter’s depiction of the Celtic way of evangelism is helpful in understanding the ‘process’ aspect of evangelism. He contrasts the ‘Roman’ model for evangelism, which in many ways parallels the transaction model, with the Celtic model. On the Roman side, ‘we explain the gospel, they accept Christ, we welcome them into the church! Presentation, Decision, Assimilation. What could be more logical than that?’ The Celtic model, on the other hand, provides a contrasting pattern:

(1) You *first* establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith. (2) Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship. (3) In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them to commit.[[255]](#footnote-255)

The historical emphasis on camp meetings and the goal of conversion notwithstanding, understanding evangelism as a process is an important element of the Wesleyan theological trajectory. Likewise, the concepts of intentionality and initiation move along that same arc and are crucial to a holistic understanding of evangelism that recognizes its multifaceted nature, that it is initiated by God rather than human beings and is done in concert with numerous other activities that are thoroughly linked to the specifics of varying circumstances. Although certainly not excluding proclamation, evangelism will also include a limitless array of activities, the governing principle being the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God.

**Moving Forward**

I have asserted that in sharing the good news of the gospel, it is unwise to assume that trust exists. History and culture have created a climate of mis-distrust that demands a thorough reevaluation of the evangelistic task. A holistic understanding of evangelism that does not sacrifice clarity or specificity is a helpful start for the current theological exploration. With that in mind, several affirmations can be made before turning to the task of building on current scholarship.

First, any definition of evangelism must be broad enough to be effective, yet clear enough to provide direction and accountability. Thus viewing evangelism as a polymorphous ministry governed by the concepts of intentionality and initiation is significant. Intentionality provides breadth because it offers the possibility that many things might be considered evangelistic, the determining factor being intent. It also provides clarity because there is a distinct basis for judging whether something is evangelism other than a vague, metaphorical conceptualization of proclamation. The concept of initiation is also crucial because it recognizes that the goal of all evangelistic activity is entrance into something new and different, which at the very least can be viewed as transformative.

The second affirmation is that love is paramount. In an age of mis-distrust, love is the crucial element that guards one’s intentionality from the danger of becoming overly pragmatic or utilitarian. Those who have not yet experienced the in-breaking of the reign of God are not targets they are people already deeply loved by God, within whom God’s Holy Spirit is already at work. Therefore love tempers one’s intentionality highlighting an awareness that God’s love is the foundation of all that God has done, is doing, and will do in, with, and through creation. It is the essence of who God is and how God relates. Thus love must be at the heart of all that one does in evangelism.

The third affirmation relates to the issue of initiation. If the goal of evangelism is initiation, what is it into which people are initiated? In answering that question it is crucial to remain firmly rooted in the fundamental theological horizon of the kingdom as announced by Jesus while at the same time recognizing that the reign of God can never be equated with human projects, institutions, constructs or structures. It will always be larger than human devices or designs. Although one may participate in the outworking of God’s kingdom in the world, one can never control it or place limits upon it. That being said, *participation* in the reign of God must be pivotal to any definition of evangelism, even as it is recognized that participation will always be limited by humanness.

In proclaiming that the kingdom was at hand, Jesus invited people not simply to *respond*, but to *enter into*. As followers of Jesus, Christians begin a lifelong journey of discipleship and spiritual growth, a journey that begins with the choice to receive the gift of God’s grace through faith and to align oneself with the kingdom of God that was inaugurated in Jesus of Nazareth, a kingdom that is radically different from the kingdoms of this world, a kingdom that is here, but not yet fully here, a kingdom that can be seen in the life of the Christian community, but is not limited to it, a ‘kingdom of peace and justice, of love and life, the consummation of God’s purpose of love with humanity…the undefeatable fulfillment of creation.’[[256]](#footnote-256)

I recognize that asserting that the focus of initiation on the reign of God risks limiting that reign through association with the earthly church; however, I believe that risk is offset by the value of recognizing the process-oriented characteristic of evangelism as well as the intrinsic nature of evangelism in the wide variety of lived practices of the community of faith. Shifting the object of initiation away from the reign of God risks missing the power of what has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ and the vital importance of deliberately aligning oneself with it – indeed, entering into it – throughout one’s lifetime.

If, as I have asserted, the focus of initiation is rightly seen as the kingdom of God, a question still remains: what is the nature of that kingdom? What is its distinctive character and internal logic? I believe answering these questions will significantly shape the posture one takes as one engages in evangelism. Further, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, I believe that answering these questions is crucial to forming a new, holistic, theological foundation to undergird evangelistic effort.

I began by asserting that it is crucial not only to develop a clear understanding of what encompasses evangelism, but also to ‘redeem’ it from the grip of past negative experience. There is a sense in which that ‘redemption process’ is bound up in moving beyond limited conceptualizations toward a broader understanding. In a climate of mis-distrust, discerning evangelism as a multifaceted process that moves toward the ‘holistic initiation of people into the reign of God as revealed in Jesus Christ’ offers a good beginning.[[257]](#footnote-257) Yet even with that good beginning, there appears to be something additional needed at a deeper level. Perhaps it is a theological rendering to undergird the practical understanding of this definition. Or perhaps it could be conceived as a ‘stance’ out of which one operates as one engages in this multifaceted process that moves toward holistic initiation. However difficult it is to frame, there appears to be ‘something more’ that is required. It is to this question of stance, or theological renderings, or ‘something more’ that we now turn.

Four

Restorative Witness: A New Theological Rendering

Much of the current literature related to evangelism is intent on providing renewed and expanded understandings about the nature of evangelistic practice. This can be viewed only as a positive development. The valuable nature of the discussion lies in its focus on infusing the practical with theological reflection. The sustained measure of internal self-criticism within the arena of practical theology that Abraham calls for appears to have begun in earnest.[[258]](#footnote-258) At the same time, however, the conversation remains focused on practice; there is still ‘extraordinary silence on the part of systematic theologians on the subject of evangelism.’[[259]](#footnote-259) It is my hope that the current discussion will in some way contribute to breaking that silence, offering a rendering of evangelism that speaks to *the theological stance that undergirds* its practice.

**Identity and Otherness: The Subtext of Evangelism**

N. T. Wright has often said that one element of judging the value of a scholarly work is its ability to contribute to academic areas other than the scholar’s own. In his book, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, Miroslav Volf has done just that in providing a surprisingly effective lens through which to explore the evangelistic task. Understandings of evangelism play no part in Volf’s volume; rather his focus is reconciliation (particularly under conditions of enmity), undergirded by a perceptive examination of identity and otherness. He convincingly asserts that full reconciliation cannot take place until people are willing to give themselves to others and readjust their identities to make space for them.[[260]](#footnote-260) To illustrate his understanding of reconciliation, Volf offers the metaphor of embrace. I believe that Volf’s metaphor and his backdrop for it hold great imaginative power, and it is upon this metaphor that I am building my theological understanding of evangelism.

A major assumption underlying evangelistic efforts is that there are people and groups outside the community of Christian believers who are to be engaged in such a way as to bring them into that community. That assumption rightly lies at the heart of the evangelistic task understood as being ‘oriented toward the reign of God.’ It is the idea that outsiders will be transformed into insiders that undergirds the goal of ‘initiating persons into an alternative community of God’s people who give themselves for the life of the world,’ which is, as I have previously claimed, the proper end toward which evangelism aims.[[261]](#footnote-261) Thus from the outset there is a sense of the insider and the outsider, the Christian and the other.

On the surface, this sense of a community that recognizes and deliberately commits to the reign of God, and a group that has yet to make such a commitment, is not inherently negative; rather, it is quite natural and honestly depicts the situation of God’s reign as being here, but not yet here. However, because human nature is fallen, people tend to privilege homogeneity and are wary of differences; therefore tension arises within understandings of the relationship between those within the community of faith and those not yet a part of it, often turning that relationship into a more confrontational ‘us’ and ‘them.’ In light of this, Volf’s metaphor of embrace is significant; and to get at the potential force this metaphor contains for evangelism, it is necessary to directly engage his ideas of identity, otherness and reconciliation.

Of particular importance for my use of the metaphor of embrace is Volf’s discussion of creation as a process of ‘separating-and-binding,’ which results in various patterns of interdependence, a process he terms ‘differentiation.’[[262]](#footnote-262) The process of differentiation that forms the individual identity is not simply a matter of the logic of opposition and negativity; rather, it involves a complex process of ‘taking in’ and ‘keeping out.’ ‘We are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.’[[263]](#footnote-263)

For the Christian, this identity-shaping process of taking in and keeping out has an additional layer that Volf terms distance and belonging, using the story of Abraham to illustrate. Abraham trusted God and departed from his homeland. (Gen. 12) It is both his trust and his departure that makes him the ancestor of all. In trusting God and departing, Abraham found himself belonging to a wandering community, strangers separated from their native soil. Yet this stranger Abraham, while bound to his wandering community, also found himself most completely bound to God; it was God who claimed Abraham’s ultimate loyalty. Because Abraham departed, God promised to make him the father of a single family, which would receive God’s blessing. (Gen. 12, 17)

Christians believe in the one God of Abraham. A significant point flowing from this is the belief that humanity in its entirety will receive God’s blessings. God’s covenant-with-Abraham-for-the-blessing-of-all signals that in keeping this promise, God plans to redeem the overarching situation of estrangement that affects every human being. (Gen. 3, 4, 11)[[264]](#footnote-264)

Abraham’s departure created distance, yet he continued to belong to a wandering community; in similar fashion, so Christians belong to a community or culture, but must also create distance from it. Volf rightly asserts that there is a reality more important than culture: God and the new world God is creating, a world where all will gather around the triune God.[[265]](#footnote-265) Like Abraham, who found himself most fundamentally bound to God, the Christian’s ultimate loyalty is to God, rather than to culture or place; this allegiance requires distance from one’s culture. On the other hand, it is this distance that enables the creation of space within individuals to receive the other.

Volf builds on his discussion of the formation of identity as a process of differentiation (the taking in and keeping out) and on his theme of distance and belonging by moving to an exploration of exclusion as a metaphor for sin. For Volf, sin, at its most basic, creational level, is to ‘put asunder what God has joined and join what God has put asunder.’[[266]](#footnote-266) If human identity is, as Volf cogently asserts, a melding of both separation and connectedness, both distinction and relationship, sin, as exclusion, is a ‘powerful, contagious, and destructive evil’ that disrupts that pattern of interdependence.[[267]](#footnote-267) It either, breaks connection and creates a stance of sovereign independence, or it erases appropriate separation in such a way that the other is no longer recognized as distinct, but rather as inferior and therefore requiring assimilation or subjugation.

Using the framework of ‘sin as the practice of exclusion’ is helpful because it ‘names as sin what often passes as virtue, especially in religious circles.’[[268]](#footnote-268) Volf perceptively highlights Jesus’ joint practice of renaming and remaking, which both strengthens the view of sin as the practice of exclusion, and provides a starting point for imaging reconciliation as embrace. Jesus renamed people and things that had been falsely labeled unclean, thus eradicating a distorted system of exclusion. (Mk. 7.14-23; Mk. 5.25-34 implicitly) Jesus also remade people and things. He took truly unclean things and made them clean through forgiveness, spiritual transformation and healing, thus tearing down barriers created by wrongdoing. (Mk. 5.1-20, Mk. 2.15-17)[[269]](#footnote-269)

In bringing the two metaphors, exclusion and embrace, together, Volf provides valuable insights on issues such as justice and truth, and a concept he calls ‘noninnocence’, all while appropriately grounding his discussion in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity as manifested on the cross of Christ. These are important facets of Volf’s overall argument, and I will return to them in greater detail; however, for now it is important only to highlight that the force of his use of the metaphor of embrace is found in the assertion that embrace, full reconciliation, cannot take place unless ‘in the name of God’s crucified Messiah, we distance ourselves from ourselves and our cultures in order to create a space for the other.’[[270]](#footnote-270) Further, this space making, this will to embrace, must be present before any judgment about others is made. The will to embrace is ‘absolutely indiscriminant and strictly immutable; it transcends the moral mapping of the social world into “good” and “evil.”’[[271]](#footnote-271)

From the perspective of evangelism, this initial overview raises several important questions. Building on Volf, might one ask, are Christians called to distance themselves not only from the particular societies within which they find themselves, but also from their faith culture, or more accurately, from their church culture, to make space for the other? Accepting that the will to embrace must be present before any judgments about the other are made, might one consider that the will to embrace must also precede all else undertaken in evangelistic practice? Further, might it be that this space making should be seen as an end in itself rather than as a means to achieve the greater goal of presenting the gospel? In other words, does the space created for embrace embody evangelistic practice in its ultimate fullness? I would answer yes to all of the above, and it is upon these assumptions that I wish to offer an adapted understanding of Volf’s metaphor of embrace as a metaphor to theologically ground the evangelistic task.

There are several reasons for beginning with these assumptions. First, as has been previously discussed, Western culture, especially in the U.S., is currently marked by a climate of mis-distrust, which significantly affects the church’s relationship with those beyond its boundaries. Some aspects of this mis-distrust are aimed at institutions in general; however, it is evident that the church has contributed to this sense of mis-distrust in very real ways. This climate highlights the gulf that presently separates those inside the church from those outside it. Distancing the self from the comfortable culture of the church, readjusting one’s identity, so to speak, makes it possible to gain an understanding of the perspective of the other and to begin bridging the gap of mis-distrust.

Furthermore, everyday experience confirms that to varying degrees humans have an innate ability to discern motives when dealing with others.[[272]](#footnote-272) In a climate of mis-distrust, that ‘radar’ is frequently more sensitive; thus love as a foundation for evangelistic practice is paramount.[[273]](#footnote-273) Moreover, one does not ‘love’ in order to ‘set the stage’ for evangelism, one loves because it is a foundation of the Jesus way, which makes it an end in itself. Volf’s assertion regarding reconciliation grounds the evangelistic task as well:

The will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.[[274]](#footnote-274)

Similarly, Heath effectively contends that it is in the context of the healing community of faith that evangelism takes place.[[275]](#footnote-275) As people first receive compassionate care and love, they are able to experience healing and are then drawn into the community of faith. Hunter also parallels this thinking, recounting the early Irish community’s practice of bringing individuals into the community before ever attempting to bring them into the faith.[[276]](#footnote-276) Both of these understandings point toward the sense in which the will to embrace precedes all evangelistic practice.

Although my use of the metaphor of embrace will be different from Volf’s for the obvious reason that I am discussing evangelism and he is discussing reconciliation, in a very real sense the two are deeply intertwined, and the metaphors can overlap in ways that might make them indistinguishable. Yet I am not asserting that evangelism is the same as reconciliation in the sense in which Volf uses the word. Nor am I asserting that reconciliation (again, in Volf’s usage) is the same as evangelism. Although his discussion is thoroughly grounded in the reconciliation with God made possible by the cross of Christ, Volf is focused primarily on human-to-human reconciliation. In this sense, reconciliation between two Christians is not evangelism.[[277]](#footnote-277) Conversely, in this same sense when a person engages in the evangelistic task with a friend who is not a Christian, with the fervent hope that the friend might recognize the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, that person is not engaged in reconciliation because the context is friendship. However, when one looks at the larger theological understanding of reconciliation with God, the boundaries between evangelism and reconciliation become fuzzier, and in a large degree, the metaphors blend into one another. (Col. 1.19-20, 2 Cor. 5.17-20)[[278]](#footnote-278)

One basis for proposing embrace as a theological stance to undergird evangelism is my contention that theologically, reconciliation with God (a distinguishing mark of the kingdom) is the ultimate goal of all evangelistic practice; thus evangelism is a part of reconciliation. Further, one cannot be fully reconciled with God without also being reconciled with others. In this sense the two usages of the metaphor of embrace overlap. Moreover, when Christians engage in evangelism from a posture of embrace, they are mirroring the reconciliation available through the self-giving of the divine Trinity. Once again, in great degree, the metaphors merge.

I believe this is one of the strengths of the theological rendering I am offering as it points to the holistic nature of Christian life and witness. These issues are irrevocably intertwined. However, other Christians may be less comfortable with the blurring of boundaries between the concepts of reconciliation and evangelism and believe it more helpful to have clearer understandings of the differences between them. As was previously mentioned, Abraham has said on more than one occasion that if everything is evangelism, then nothing is evangelism.

The point is well taken. It is important to have a clear understanding of what one is doing. On numerous occasions I have encountered Christians involved in specific acts of mercy, such as serving at soup kitchens or volunteering at homeless shelters, who consider themselves to be actively engaged in evangelism. Yet they readily admit that they avoid speaking explicitly with anyone about issues of faith, believing that the service itself is all that is necessary. If this self-reporting is true, then there is nothing to distinguish such service from many other secular or explicitly non-Christian organizations that also serve at soup kitchens and volunteer at homeless shelters. I would argue that such acts bring integrity to evangelistic practice; however, if issues of faith are consistently avoided, it then seems difficult to label this as evangelism.

Therefore, I believe the overlapping of embrace as a metaphor for reconciliation and for evangelism is not so problematic as to provide grounds to reject it. The need for a more holistic understanding of Christian life and witness is, in my perspective, of great enough value to risk the possible blurring of categories. Moreover, metaphors are valuable because they allow people to grasp meanings that in many ways are often deeper and more profound than can be expressed in plain language, or delineated by sharp boundaries of description. They often point to foundational things, things that are intuitive and emotive rather than literally expressive. Embrace as a metaphor is valuable for understanding reconciliation and evangelism, not because it describes the step-by-step practice of either, but because it points to the milieu of vulnerability and openness to the other that is required for both.[[279]](#footnote-279)

In conclusion, Volf chooses the metaphor of embrace because it brings together three interrelated themes to which he is profoundly committed. I share his commitment and believe they are foundational for evangelism as well:

(1) The mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity (the doctrine of God), (2) the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross for the ‘godless’ (the doctrine of Christ), (3) the open arms of the ‘father’ receiving the ‘prodigal’ (the doctrine of salvation).[[280]](#footnote-280)

For all of these reasons I assert that the space created for embrace embodies the theological stance that must undergird evangelistic practice if it is to be undertaken in its ultimate fullness.

Before I embark on a description of the metaphor of embrace, an additional clarification of usage is needed. I am writing from the perspective of a Christian in the United States and most of my critiques and assertions are directed to that context, though I hope they will also be helpful in other settings. With that in mind, the metaphor of embrace works well in the American cultural context (as it might also in an African environment). In other cultures such as Asian or North European, however, embrace might be too intimate; a handshake might be more appropriate.[[281]](#footnote-281) Recognizing these cultural differences, the importance of the metaphor is not its physicality, but ‘the dynamic relationship between the self and the other that embrace symbolizes and enacts.’[[282]](#footnote-282) Furthermore, my hope is that the weight of my proposal will be great enough that should the metaphor itself be problematic, one might remove it without consequence.

**Embrace: A Foundational Metaphor**

Embrace is an integrated movement with four consecutive stages flowing one from the other: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and then opening them again. Without all four elements, the embrace is incomplete. One cannot simply open the arms and wait, or embrace will never actually occur. Likewise, if one opens the arms, waits, then closes the arms but does not open them again, the embrace has been transmuted into an oppressive grip.[[283]](#footnote-283)

Stage one: opening the arms. Volf highlights four significant messages that open arms convey. First, open arms indicate a desire for the other, a signal that ‘I want the other to be part of who I am and I want to be part of the other.’ It points to the deeper truth that a void is created by the absence of the other, which generates desire, signifying that in some sense the other is somehow already present even before one’s arms are opened.[[284]](#footnote-284)

Open arms also signal that space has been created within the self for the other. Interestingly, it indicates that the self has moved out of itself toward the space of the other, but at the same time has withdrawn from its own boundaries to create new space. When arms are opened, ‘the self makes room for the other and sets on a journey toward the other in one and the same act.’[[285]](#footnote-285) Similarly, open arms indicate that a gap has opened within the boundaries of the self that will allow the other to enter. One can desire the other; one can create new space by withdrawing from the boundaries of the self; but if the boundaries of the self are not passable, embrace will be impossible.[[286]](#footnote-286)

Lastly, open arms are an invitation. Volf paints the picture of friends leaving the door open for one another: no need to knock, just a shout, ‘We're here!’ and come on in. Yet open arms are not only an invitation; they also offer ‘a soft knock on the other’s door.’ In the same way that they both signal a creation of space and a moving out, opening the arms also signals an invitation to come in and also a desire to enter the space of the other.[[287]](#footnote-287)

The messages of open arms are significant for the evangelistic task in the senses that Volf describes, but they also provide theological grounding for evangelism. Open arms point to the void created by the absence of some from the divinely promised one family of Abraham. They indicate that all are one in the Messiah Jesus, (Gal. 3.28) but that the ‘all are one’ is not complete without the other. Open arms signal that the one family of Abraham is not a closed set, that boundaries have been made passable and that there is an invitation to shared life, which flows in two directions. Ultimately, and possibly most important for evangelism, the inward making of space and the outward reaching toward the other reflect the activity of the triune God in creation, its continued care and sustenance, and in the overarching history of humanity. In signifying the stance in which Christians are to take in relation to those outside the church, open arms reflect the stance of the triune God toward all of creation.

Stage two: waiting. For open arms to lead to a full embrace, one must wait, reaching for the other, but not yet touching. This is a significant part of embrace. Open arms initiate movement toward the other, but it is not a movement that invades, or forces a response. It creates space within the self and moves beyond the boundaries of the self, but it does not cross the boundaries of the other. Rather it waits for a response from the other, a reciprocal opening of the arms.

Waiting can be difficult, especially in the practice of evangelism; but waiting is the exercise of self-control within the self ‘for the sake of the integrity of the other – the other who may not want to be embraced but left alone.’[[288]](#footnote-288) Although it may appear unbalanced, waiting with outstretched arms is not an act of powerlessness. Waiting holds within it an internal power not of coercion, manipulation or a forceful destruction of the boundaries of the other. Waiting holds within it the power of vulnerability and openness undergirded by expectant hope, a power that recognizes that without reciprocity, there can be no embrace.

From the perspective of evangelism, waiting creates space for the working of the Holy Spirit. When Christians move back from their own boundaries to make space for the other, open their arms, and wait in the power of expectant hope, they open themselves to the working of the Holy Spirit in the space between the self and the other. Waiting provides the opportunity for discernment on the part of the self and the other, a heightened awareness of what the Holy Spirit might be doing within the self, within the other and between the self and the other.[[289]](#footnote-289)

Stage three: closing the arms. This is the essence of embrace, but is impossible without reciprocity. As Volf makes clear, ‘It takes two pairs of arms for one embrace.’[[290]](#footnote-290) A full embrace is both active and passive; one holds and is held. There may be varying degrees of giving; however, each must enter the space of the other, make its presence known, and feel the presence of the other. Full embrace depends on such reciprocity.

Earlier in my ministry, I was responsible for a Sunday worship service that met in a local theater. Because it was unconventional, it was attractive to many people who had for a variety of reasons felt unwelcome in or disaffected by the church. Many were only nominally Christian; others were not Christian, but were interested in exploring faith. I ministered among these people for eight years, and many of them had a profound effect on me. As I sought to extend open arms to them, I felt their response, and it was often a surprising experience of ‘being held’ by them as much as my ‘holding them.’

Several years after beginning my current position, I encountered a woman who had attended regularly. As we spoke, she recalled that she was in a confused and unhealthy place in her life during those years and sensed that I knew this about her and in some ways disagreed with or even disapproved of some of the ways in which she was coping. She continued that this was actually a good thing because even though we might not have agreed, she felt there was a place for her no matter what. The security of that space had challenged her to seriously reevaluate her life. And, she added, it was important to her that despite our differences, I took her seriously and was always open to the possibility that she might have something to offer me. Embrace must always be reciprocal.

Besides reciprocity, what Volf describes as a soft touch is needed. The other is not gripped too tightly, nor does one melt into the other. In both of these situations, embrace does not exist either because the other is overpowered or because the self has been lost in abnegation. Either constitutes not embrace but exclusion. In full embrace, the identity of each self is both preserved and transformed, with each seeing both the self and the other in a new light.[[291]](#footnote-291)

The word evangelism evokes a negative response in no small part, I believe, to a lack of a ‘soft touch.’ It is common to hear stories of preachers who at the conclusion of their sermons invite people to make a commitment by coming forward to the altar while everyone sings a hymn, such as Just As I Am. The preachers, rather than praying with or otherwise making contact with those who have come forward, stand looking at all those who have not yet responded. At the conclusion of the hymn, they announce that everyone will sing the last verse again; to make sure that everyone who feels led has had time to respond. The discomfort is often palpable.

The tendency to recoil at stories like the above is not, however, an excuse for no touch at all. A full embrace requires contact. Thus invitations are very important. I know of people who have said it took them much longer to enter Christian faith because they were never actually invited to do so. A gentler touch might be for preachers to provide an opportunity to respond, but to also model that response at the altar in prayer.

Like waiting, a gentle touch also allows the other space to freely respond. Because it respects the integrity of the self and the other, it also allows space for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. That Christians believe in the Holy Spirit’s power to transform is not controversial; however, in undertaking evangelism, often it is assumed that the one being transformed is the other rather than the Christian. One evangelizes the gospel with expectant hope that the other might be transformed, at the bare minimum into a person who professes faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. At times the assumption goes a bit further and involves the other being transformed into a Christian resembling the self, thinking and believing in like manner. Thus recognizing the transformative power of embrace for both selves is crucial to the evangelistic task. In evangelism, the will to embrace must also always involve openness to the power of the Holy Spirit to continually work not only through the Christian toward the other, but also through the other toward the Christian.

Stage four: opening the arms again. For an embrace to be complete, the arms must always open again. Embrace never creates one fused body out of two; rather, the dynamic identities of each are preserved even as the imprint of each remains on the other. There is a circular movement to embrace:

The open arms that in the last act let the other go are the same open arms that in the first act signal a desire for the other’s presence, create space in oneself, open up the boundary of the self, and issue an invitation for the other to return. They are the same arms that in the second act wait for the other to reciprocate, and that in the third act encircle the other’s body. The end of an embrace is, in a sense, already a beginning of an embrace, even if that other embrace will take place only after both selves have gone about their own business for a while.[[292]](#footnote-292)

The circular nature of the movement of embrace mirrors the ongoing nature of evangelism. As previously discussed, the evangelistic task is more often a process than a specific act as people are loved, welcomed, and nurtured in faith. What is more, this circular movement points to the expectation that having experienced embrace, the other will go on to be a transforming person in the life of others. Inherent in embrace is the assumption of a transformative process of people becoming disciples, who will then make disciples, who will then make disciples…and so on.

This is significant for evangelism because in the context of the local church, frequently the focus quickly shifts from evangelism to discipleship. Churches reach out to others and seek to assimilate them through discipleship ministries that encourage spiritual maturity. This is not without merit and is, in fact, an important part of firmly grounding new believers in the reign of God. However, including the concept that having experienced embrace, one then moves out to embrace others is not always included in that discipleship.[[293]](#footnote-293) The preferable balance as churches guide those new to the faith would be to emphasize that embrace is not static, nor is it isolated. It is a dynamic process in which both selves are transformed and move outward as conduits of continued transformation.

Having described the metaphor of embrace, Volf raises three other issues that are important for a deeper understanding of the power of this metaphor for evangelism. The first is its grounding in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity as manifested on the cross of Christ. The second is the concept he terms ‘noninnocence,’ and the final issue is ‘double vision’, which Volf explicates in relation to justice and truth. We turn first to the self-giving love of the Trinity.

**The Self-Giving Love of the Trinity**

Vital to Volf’s and my use of the metaphor of embrace is an understanding of the self-giving love of the Trinity, especially as explicated by Jürgen Moltmann. For Moltmann, the creator God is a trinitarian community of persons who relate to each other in a relationship of reciprocity and mutual indwelling.[[294]](#footnote-294) God’s activity in creation provides a foundational vision for an understanding of embrace. Creation begins when the transcendent God, the source of creation’s being and life, makes room within Godself for the otherness of creation, a freely undertaken self-limitation of the infinite, omnipresent God to create something outside Godself.[[295]](#footnote-295) God’s kenotic, space-making, self-giving activity in creation is not only an integral part of the Christian message; it is also the model for that message. As the transcendent God makes room within Godself for the otherness of creation, so Christians make room within themselves for others, especially those others currently beyond the boundaries of the faith community.

Before continuing the discussion of Moltmann’s understanding of the self-giving love of the Trinity, a descriptive word is needed regarding the space-making, self-giving activity of God in creation and the replication of that activity in evangelism, specifically regarding the element of risk involved in both. One of the strengths of Wesleyan theology is, I believe, its commitment to ‘freewill theism,’ which affirms that ‘God has made a world with freedom, in which loving relationships can flourish. It is an ecosystem capable of echoing back the triune life of God.’[[296]](#footnote-296) This libertarian freedom (the ability to do otherwise) implies, however, that ‘God took the risk in creating such beings that we might choose to use our freedom to love or we might use it to sin.’[[297]](#footnote-297) Therefore while God may be ‘leading the world forward to the place where it will reflect more perfectly the goodness that God himself enjoys,’[[298]](#footnote-298) such activity comes at great cost; though ‘we cannot be saved without God’s help, God will not save us without our participation. God takes the risk that we will refuse to participate in his redemptive work.’[[299]](#footnote-299)

The implication for evangelism practiced from a stance of embrace is twofold. First, it is not a risk-free endeavor, quite the contrary; it is a stance that requires a willingness to risk hardship and rejection. Although Christians might initiate embrace by the opening of their arms, embrace cannot happen without the participation of the other. Therefore a stance of embrace extends freedom to the other, while at the same time undertaking risk for oneself.[[300]](#footnote-300) Moreover, in risking that the other might refuse one’s embrace, one does so knowing that the pain of that rejection must be born alone.

Second, it is not optional. The open theism reflected in much of Wesleyan theology emphasizes that God takes human beings seriously as covenant partners, co-workers through the power of the Holy Spirit in God’s leading of creation toward God’s intended purpose. This is a call to responsibility and obedience. Clark Pinnock summarizes the challenge aptly:

How will the poor be helped if we do not help them? How will the nations be evangelized if we do not tell them? We bear responsibility for much of what has gone wrong in the world and we can be the part of the solution. Creaturely decisions, as well as divine decisions, affect the course of history. Obedience is important to the realization of God’s purposes…Our action or inaction can influence another person’s relationship with God…Do people hear the gospel or not? It has been decided by God that they should hear and it is up to us whether they do.[[301]](#footnote-301)

Such responsibility and obedience are often costly when undertaken from a stance of embrace, as those toward whom one extends open arms may not be easy to embrace; it may feel foreign and disorienting, uncomfortable and even dangerous.

Returning to a trinitarian conception of God’s self-giving, Moltmann extends that understanding beyond creation to God’s self-donation on the cross.[[302]](#footnote-302) The fullness of Moltmann’s thought regarding the cross is a dual theme of Christ’s solidarity with victims and atonement for perpetrators.[[303]](#footnote-303) Volf draws heavily on Moltmann in this respect, stating, ‘Just as the oppressed must be liberated from the suffering caused by oppression, so the oppressors must be liberated from the injustice committed through oppression.’[[304]](#footnote-304)

It is impossible to understand the fullness of God’s self-giving love without both of these aspects. It is impossible as well to understand the holistic nature of Christian life and witness without these twin themes. The cross provides solid grounding for the metaphor of embrace because it includes both Christ’s self-giving love, which overcomes human enmity and the creation of space within Christ to receive estranged humanity. Like the circular nature of embrace, these two dimensions, the giving of self and the receiving of the other, are intrinsic to the internal life of the Trinity and therefore ground Christian life and witness.[[305]](#footnote-305)

Luke Timothy Johnson correctly asserts that a consistent aspect of the identity and mission of Jesus runs through the canonical Gospels. That consistent aspect is,

…the character of [Jesus’] life and death. They all reveal the same patterns of radical obedience to God and selfless love toward other people. All four Gospels also agree that discipleship is to follow the same messianic pattern. They do not emphasize the performance of certain deeds or the learning of certain doctrines. They insist on living according to the same pattern of life and death shown by Jesus.[[306]](#footnote-306)

Drawing on Johnson, Volf concludes, ‘the meaning of the ministry of Jesus lies at its ending, and the abbreviated story of the ending is the model Christians should imitate.’[[307]](#footnote-307)

At the core of Christian faith is the self-giving love that is both manifested on the cross and demanded by it. This core grounds the metaphor of embrace and provides the center from which embrace emanates. Because Christians are remade in the image of Christ through baptism, they receive a new center for their life and being. (Rom. 6.1-9) That new center is self-giving love, which was manifest on the cross and which ‘opens the self up, makes it able and willing to give itself for others and to receive others in itself.’[[308]](#footnote-308) This is so because, as Volf profoundly contends, ‘Inscribed on the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be its recipients *only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us*. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in.’[[309]](#footnote-309)

It must be reiterated that this self-giving love is not without cost, as the cross clearly shows. The cross is about the awfulness of sin, which implies that embrace is not an easy task Christians engage in comfortably with others who are similar in culture, attitudes, and background. In that case, embrace would be a cheap, feel-good concept with little resemblance to the self-giving love revealed through Jesus Christ and him crucified. Rather, embrace is a costly endeavor imbued with passionate vulnerability, risking humiliation, suffering and rejection in its space making and invitation. Further, while the subject of the atonement will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Six, it is important to note here that I do not intend the metaphor of embrace to carry the entire weight of any specific atonement theory; nor am I suggesting that atonement is equivalent to or an automatic byproduct of embrace. Christians are not the *source* of divine forgiveness through their stance of embrace. Rather, in deliberately taking that stance, they make space for the Holy Spirit to work in ways in which divine and human forgiveness might be experienced and extended.

A final element in the discussion of the self-giving love of the Trinity that is important for evangelism is best illustrated by Volf’s discussion of the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15.11-32), which I will briefly summarize. Volf focuses on the perspective of relationship because that is how each character is identified: father, son, brother. For Volf, the interrelated designations, for example, his father (v. 11), your brother (v. 27), signal that the identity of each of these characters is intimately connected to the identity of the others.

The intimate nature of the relationships makes the son’s breach with the family surprising. Taking all he had and setting off for a far country (v.13) makes it total. Volf describes the severity of this behavior as the son’s project to ‘un-son’ himself. In departing, the son was not engaged in ‘an act of separation required for the formation of a distinct identity, but an act of exclusion by which the self pulls itself out of the relationships without which it would not be what it is, and cuts itself off from responsibilities to others and makes itself their enemy.’[[310]](#footnote-310)

Paradoxically, by pushing others out, the son finds himself ‘away from himself,’ and likewise when he ‘comes to himself’ it is in remembering those to whom he still belongs: ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough to spare…’ (v. 17)[[311]](#footnote-311) For the son, the road to repentance begins with the memory of belonging. This memory of belonging is connected to the foundational element of relationship in human identity.

From the vantage point of an evangelism grounded in the self-giving love of the Trinity, all humans, others and the Christian, resemble the prodigal. Through Christ’s self-donation on the cross, space has been made within Godself to receive humanity back where it has always belonged, in fellowship with God. The Christian is the one who has acknowledged this state and returned to fellowship. For evangelism, the significant point is to recognize that though the Christian may be the one who has returned, the other still belongs. It is for the community of faith to be about the business of welcoming back.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Moving to the perspective of the father, one surprising element is that he allows the son to take ‘all he had’ and leave (v. 13) in the first place.[[313]](#footnote-313) For this discussion, however, the most significant element is that ‘the father who lets the son depart does not let go of the relationship between them.’[[314]](#footnote-314) That the father went out while his son was ‘yet at a distance’ (v. 20) indicates that he had kept the son in his heart all along: he had held the son in his memory even as he was ‘in a far country’ (v.13). It was this holding the son in memory that caused the father to respond with compassion, running to meet him, throwing his arms around him and kissing him (v. 20). Volf describes what I believe to be the significant point of the model of embrace for evangelism:

Without the father’s having kept the son in his heart, the father would not have put his arms around the prodigal. No confession was necessary for the embrace to take place for the simple reason that the relationship did not rest on moral performance and therefore could not be destroyed by immoral acts. The son’s return from ‘the distant country’ and the father’s refusal to let the son out of his heart sufficed.[[315]](#footnote-315)

The father’s unconditional acceptance of the son preempts the son’s strategy of return, which included confession first, then acceptance into service (vv. 18-19). That does not, however, negate the need for confession. Confession was necessary for a full embrace and the ensuing celebration to occur, but it is the order that is significant.

When evangelistic practice takes place from a stance of embrace, the possibility of relationship with the other is not contingent on moral performance. As the father kept the son in his heart while in a far country, Christians keep those beyond the boundaries of the church in their hearts so that when they return, Christians are not only waiting with open arms, but have gone out to meet them.

The son’s confession is not a requirement for his father’s acceptance; however, it is a significant part of the transformative outcome of the father’s embrace. The father preempts the son’s strategy for return a second time in the midst of the son’s confession. As he returned, the son had a vision of himself as a ‘son-not-worthy-to-be-called-a-son.’ (…treat me as one of your hired servants. v. 19) However, in the midst of the son’s confessing his wrongdoing, the father interrupts again (But the father said… v.22), transforming the ‘son-not-worthy-to-be-called-a-son’ into ‘son of mine.’ As Christians evangelize from a stance of embrace, they become conduits of God’s transformative renaming of those whose vision might possibly be ‘not-worthy-to-be-called-a-child-of-God’ into God’s beloved children.

The third component of the prodigal story involves the older brother. His response is instructive as a warning for evangelistic practice. The significance of relationship and the damage of exclusion can be seen again as the older brother shifts from viewing the prodigal as ‘his brother’ to ‘this son of yours’ (v. 30). Volf explains,

Unlike the father, the older brother did not keep the younger brother in his heart while this one was in a far country. He refused to readjust his identity to make space for a brother blemished by transgression; the brother’s transgression, not the memory of his former presence, has come to occupy the space vacated by the brother’s departure.[[316]](#footnote-316)

In response to the father’s embrace of the prodigal, the older brother now ‘un-sons’ himself. It is clear that the older brother refuses to be a brother-to-a-prodigal (this son of yours, v. 30); and because the father reestablishes a relationship with the younger son, he chooses to exclude himself from a relationship with the father. Again, Volf helpfully explains,

The younger brother has become a ‘non-brother’ because he was not the brother he should have been; the father has become a ‘non-father’ because he acted as a father should not – he failed to disown a rebellious son. (Deuteronomy 21.18-21)[[317]](#footnote-317)

It is important not to paint too negative a picture of the older brother because he is not operating out of an oppressive system that stifles life; rather, his demands are based a set of rules that make a great deal of sense for the maintaining of civil society (e.g. the one who works should be rewarded rather than the one who squanders).[[318]](#footnote-318) However, two issues are significant. First, while arguing with the father about upholding the rules, the older brother omits some important information. Although he may have ‘served’ his father (v. 29), doing so was also in his own best interest as heir. He claims that the prodigal devoured the father’s living, but what the younger brother squandered actually also belonged to the younger brother. Second and most important, the older brother projects onto the prodigal evil that he did not commit. The younger son is described in the story as having squandered his property, but no specifics are mentioned other than ‘dissolute living.’ The older brother, however, asserts that the younger brother has devoured his father’s property ‘with prostitutes.’ (v. 30)[[319]](#footnote-319)

The older brother’s reaction serves as a warning for evangelistic practice. It is easy to become overly focused on rules and moral categories; however, such a focus often leads to self-righteousness and the possibility of demonizing the other. I recall the funeral of a woman who had grown up in the church I was serving, but who had not been involved in many years. Her adult children, who had no obvious faith commitment, told me that she had left the church when she was made to feel unwelcome because she operated the bar that had been established by her father-in-law decades before. It was clear that the sense of being rejected by the church had affected not only the woman, but also her children.

Life is made up of a complicated mix of autonomous individuals interacting with one another that often leads to a great deal of moral ambiguity. Obsession with rules and rigid moral categories makes it impossible to account for that ambiguity, creating new polarizations and exacerbating existing ones.[[320]](#footnote-320) In such an environment, embrace is impossible and it is not difficult to understand why those beyond the boundaries of the church would respond with negativity and mis-distrust.

During the same years that I was responsible for the worship service that met at the local theater, a group of Christians planted a congregation in a lower income area of my community. The choice of location was strategic because the core group wanted to be deliberate about embodying the presence of Christ in an area where many faced economic, social and other life challenges, such as addictions and reentry to the community after prison sentences. Harvest Chapel has flourished in the years since its inception, remaining faithful to its original calling to be a compassionate presence for the people in that neighborhood.

I recall a conversation with a member of the larger, more affluent (yet aging and declining) congregation at which I served and that ‘sponsored’ the service in the theater. I commented that we might be able to learn some valuable lessons about evangelism by observing Harvest Chapel. His response was telling: Harvest Chapel was a church for ‘those’ people. We had a different group at our church. I understood in that moment why I was seldom successful at integrating those who attended the New Road service into the life of the ‘big church.’

A final word about the father’s response to his two sons is necessary to provide closure for the story and for a grounding of embrace in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity. As welcoming as the father was to the returning prodigal, it is important to note that the ensuing relationship was not exactly as it had been before. Because the father tells the older son, ‘all that is mine is yours’ (v. 31) it is clear that the prodigal will not get a second inheritance. The ring signals the father’s generosity, not a decision to give the younger son claim to all the property. The father’s love for the prodigal is unconditional, but does not negate or deny the past as though it was insignificant. Moreover, the father’s love for his older son also remains unconditional (‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’ v. 31), even though the dynamics were now different as both adjusted to the return of the younger son.

Evangelizing from a stance of embrace is not about offering ‘cheap grace.’ Confession is necessary; repentance is vital. However, evangelizing from a stance of embrace recognizes the proper place for confession and repentance. As Abraham asserts, ‘some things cannot be said until after other things are said.’[[321]](#footnote-321) Evangelism from a stance of embrace goes out to meet the other with open arms before all else.

That embrace is independent of any issues of judgment, confession or repentance may seem to disrupt the present order of things in the same way that the circumstances in the story appear to disrupt the assumptions of the older brother: that by welcoming the returning younger son, the father has abandoned a commitment to the order that underlies and sustains the household. What the father has actually done, however, is ‘re-order the order.’[[322]](#footnote-322) Rather than ignore the ‘must’ that exists in all rules, even good ones, the father inserts a new ‘must’: the must of embracing the returning transgressor. The reordered order now includes not only the ‘must’ of following the rules, but the ‘“must” of receiving back the one who has broken these rules. In addition to celebrating with those who are already “in” (“friends,” v.29), one must celebrate with those who want to return.’[[323]](#footnote-323)

Of special importance in the father’s ‘reordering of the order’ for my model is that ‘relationship has priority over all rules. Before any rule can apply, [the father] is a father to his sons and his sons are brothers to one another.’[[324]](#footnote-324) The difference between the approach of the older brother and the approach of the father is that the former uses moral categories through which to view the situation (his brother is bad for leaving/he is good for staying), and the latter uses relational categories (the prodigal was lost but now found, dead to him but now alive).

For the father, moral categories are not helpful. The older brother certainly is ‘good’ in the sense that he remained, worked and obeyed; but he is also ‘bad’ in the sense that he refuses to welcome his brother back. The prodigal certainly is ‘bad’ in the sense that he demanded his inheritance and left; but he is also ‘good’ in that he returns and confesses.[[325]](#footnote-325)

That relationship is prior to moral rules does not imply that moral behavior is unimportant; it is not. Volf astutely observes, however, that,

…moral performance may do something to the relationship, but relationship is not grounded in moral performance. Hence the will to embrace is independent of the quality of behavior, though at the same time ‘repentance,’ ‘confession,’ and the ‘consequences of one's actions’ all have their own proper place.[[326]](#footnote-326)

The priority of relationship over rules enables the father to passionately engage his sons, adjusting his own identity in relation to them and transforming their broken identities and relationships as well. He does not give up on rules and order, but would rather reconfigure them than give up on his sons, ‘whose lives are too complex to be regulated by fixed rules and whose identities are too dynamic to be defined once for all.’[[327]](#footnote-327)

As the story of the prodigal and his return home point to the self-giving love that characterizes God’s relationship with creation, so it is when one engages in evangelistic practice from a stance of embrace: one becomes a reflection of the self-giving love of God. In this sense it is crucial that Christians remember that relationship always trumps a rigid focus on rules. Christians must always be willing to ‘reorder the order’ so that the other might be received (or received back) into fellowship, in order that identities might be transformed and relationships healed.

From the perspective of evangelism, this reordering the order can be difficult because of the tendency to place moral categories above relationship (as I learned from my fellow church member’s attitude toward Harvest Chapel). It is far easier to welcome back with conditions than without. It is far easier to place others on a moral scale, make judgments about good and bad, and impose one’s own vision of how the ‘welcome’ should progress; but then that would not be a true welcome at all.

**Noninnocence**

It is easy for Christians to slip into the stance of the older brother, failing to recognize that all of humanity is contained within the prodigal; in other words that *all* humanity belong to the fellowship of the triune God, but sojourn in a far country until they return to be welcomed unconditionally on the basis of relationship rather than moral categories. This tendency highlights the need for Volf’s concept of noninnocence. He unpacks the meaning behind this important idea with the profound assertion that ‘in a world so manifestly drenched with evil, everybody is innocent in their own eyes.’[[328]](#footnote-328) This innocence is, however, a contrived innocence because the more accurate reality is that ‘in addition to inflicting harm, the practice of evil keeps re-creating a world without innocence. Evil generates new evil as evildoers fashion victims in their own ugly image.’[[329]](#footnote-329)

That Paul understood this absence of innocents is reflected in his assertion that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ (Rom. 3.23) His claim reflects the intertwined nature of wrongdoing committed and suffered, which binds both victim and perpetrator in the solidarity of sin (1 Jn. 1.8).[[330]](#footnote-330) This concept of solidarity of sin is disturbing, however, because ‘it seems to erase distinctions and unite precisely where the differences and disjunctions matter the most – where dignity is denied, justice is trampled underfoot, and blood is spilled.’[[331]](#footnote-331) It is disturbing because it appears to imply an equality of sin, and when all sins are equal, perpetrators do not have to be held accountable.

The solidarity of sin does not, however, imply the equality of sins.[[332]](#footnote-332) All are sinners (solidarity), but all sins are not equal. This can be clearly seen in the way that the prophets and Jesus addressed sin. For them, sin was always specific; concrete sins were never lost in ‘an ocean of undifferentiated sinfulness;’ condemnation was not cast upon anyone and everyone.[[333]](#footnote-333) Volf elaborates perceptively:

The aggressors’ destruction of a village and the refugees’ looting of a truck and thereby hurting their fellow refugees are equally sins, but they are not equal sins; the rapist's violation and the woman's hatred are equally sin, but they are manifestly not equal sins.[[334]](#footnote-334)

While all have sinned, there remain perpetrators who are the sinners and there remain victims who are the sinned against (their noninnocence notwithstanding).

Volf’s understanding of noninnocence is important because it guards against self-righteousness as well as the potential of inflicting evil in the name of supposed goodness.[[335]](#footnote-335) Especially in light of the current discussion, I believe a keen sense of noninnocence is valuable because it emphasizes that salvation never flows from a foundation of the moral assignment of blame and innocence.[[336]](#footnote-336) I agree with Volf that the question is not who is innocent and who is guilty; it is ‘how to live with integrity and bring healing to a world of inescapable noninnocence that often parades as its opposite.’[[337]](#footnote-337) Volf's answer:

In the name of the one truly innocent victim and what he stood for, the crucified Messiah of God, we should demask as inescapably sinful the world constructed around exclusive moral polarities – here on our side, ‘the just,’ ‘the pure,’ ‘the innocent,’ ‘the true,’ ‘the good,’ and there, on the other side, ‘the unjust,’ ‘the corrupt,’ ‘the guilty,’ ‘the liars,’ ‘the evil’ – and then seek to transform the world in which justice and injustice, goodness and evil, innocence and guilt, purity and corruption, truth and deception crisscross and intersect, guided by the recognition that the economy of underserved grace has primacy over the economy of moral deserts.[[338]](#footnote-338)

Applying Volf’s understanding of noninnocence to the evangelistic task necessitates the reminder that others ‘need not be perceived as innocent in order to be loved, but ought to be embraced even when they are perceived as wrongdoers.’[[339]](#footnote-339) Once again, embrace precedes all else. When one evangelizes, care must be taken to distinguish between God’s judgment in the eschaton and human judgment in the present. Additionally, evangelism from a stance of embrace begins not with the recognition of the other’s ‘lostness’ or sin; it begins, rather, with the recognition of the other’s ‘belongingness;’ that through the cross, space has already been made for the other; the father is already awaiting the prodigal’s return.

This is not to say that there is no place for discussions of sin; however, in an environment of mis-distrust, it is of paramount importance how those discussions are framed and when they occur. Abraham is again correct in his reminder that some things cannot be said until other things are said. Keeping one’s personal noninnocence firmly in mind is vital when addressing the issue of the sins of others. Moreover, as a white American engaged in evangelism, it behooves me to be very cautious about how I relate to outsiders given the cultural sins of which I am complicit by virtue of my nationality and race. It does not invalidate my interaction, nor does it disqualify me from the evangelistic task; but it does color my activity, and that alone is sufficient reason to be mindful of noninnocence.

I recall a recent conversation among academics regarding the question of whether there is such a thing as the ‘right’ use of power. Very quickly, a woman commented that this was a discussion that assumed one had power in the first place, which was not an assumption women or members of minority groups could automatically make. This comment resonated with me; however, the longer I listened, the more uncomfortable I became. I realized that the source of my discomfort was my inability to escape the category of ‘oppressor’ no matter how valid my inclusion in a category of ‘oppressed.’ I am a woman, yes. But I am also white, enjoy privileged economic status, and am a citizen of a country that is not hesitant to exercise its power on a global scale. In other words, my noninnocence is ever before me.

As Christians evangelize in a culture of mis-distrust, it is imperative that they keep their noninnocence ever before them, remembering with thanksgiving and humility that the economy of underserved grace has primacy over the economy of moral deserts.

**Double Vision**

From the outset of his discussion of the metaphor of embrace, Volf makes the twin assertions that justice and truth are impossible outside the will to embrace, and that full embrace is not possible until the truth is spoken and justice is done.[[340]](#footnote-340) Such an assertion, however, makes it necessary for him to distinguish between human justice and truth and God’s justice and truth.

Human justice and truth are always relative in the sense that in a culture where sincerity and autonomy are privileged, individuals will have their own sense of justice and their own view of truth.[[341]](#footnote-341) However, for Christians a foundational understanding is that humans are not God. In the arena of truth and justice, therefore, individual human truth (however real it may seem) cannot be the truth, nor can individual understandings of justice (however well intentioned they may be) ever be the justice. Human sin makes that impossible. Only God is able to contain perfect truth and justice.

In keeping with his contention that embrace requires that one make space within oneself for the other, Volf outlines a practice of ‘double vision’ to counter the particularity of both justice and truth. In the arena of justice, the classic Christian understanding is that God’s justice transcends all cultural construals of justice. In relation to this Volf rightly points out that the issue is not whether ‘God’s justice is universal, [or] whether God can infallibly judge between cultures irrespective of their differences. The question is whether *Christians* who want to uphold God’s universal justice can judge between cultures with divine infallibility.’[[342]](#footnote-342) I agree with Volf; the answer is they cannot. Therefore what is needed is double vision, or an ‘enlarged way of thinking,’ as Hannah Arendt has described it, which enables one to both enrich and correct one’s notion of justice and ideas about what is just or unjust.[[343]](#footnote-343)

Because human understanding of God’s justice will always be imperfect, and because of the human inclination to sin, people will always have a tendency to pervert justice even as they seek to do it. When people enlarge their thinking, they allow the voices and perspectives of others, especially those with whom they may be in conflict, to influence them in such a way that they are able to see justice from the other’s perspective, not just from their own. To continue the language of embrace, one makes space within oneself for the perspective of the other on the issue of justice.[[344]](#footnote-344)

In like manner, double vision is important when speaking of truth. The belief in an all-knowing God may engender the desire to search for truth, but the limitations of humanness should make people exceedingly cautious about asserting that they have found it. It is a matter of ‘knowing in part,’ or ‘seeing through a glass dimly,’ (1 Cor. 13.12) rather than knowing in full. It cannot be overstated; humans are not God. Human beings may know God, but they will never know all that God knows – at least not now. Human limitations make knowing the truth in full an impossibility; therefore it is important to practice double vision – the art of seeing the truth ‘from here’ and the truth ‘from there.’ To put it again in the language of embrace: being willing to make space within oneself for the truth of the other. In other words, I temporarily step outside myself in order to see myself from the perspective of the other; I cross social boundaries in order to inhabit the world of the other, using my imagination to understand both the other’s perception of themselves and their perception of me.[[345]](#footnote-345)

Double vision in the arenas of truth and justice is crucial for evangelism. Regarding truth, Christian faith hinges on understanding Jesus Christ as ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn. 14.6); in evangelistic practice this is often the core of the message proclaimed. However, it does not follow from this that there is no truth to be found anywhere else. Saying ‘yes’ to Jesus Christ does imply a ‘no’ to some things, but not to all things. There are elements in the truth of others to which Christians can say yes. Further, it does not follow from ‘Jesus is the way, the truth and the life’ that Christians will be able to fully comprehend the entire depth of that statement.

In evangelistic practice, it is imperative that Christians stand under the umbrella of the validity of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life; however, it is equally crucial that Christians make it evident that they understand that this is a truth that is larger than they are. Bosch describes this understanding well. It necessitates,

…an admission that we do not have the answers and are prepared to live within the frameworks of penultimate knowledge, that we regard our involvement in mission and dialogue as an adventure, are prepared to take risks, and are anticipating surprises as the Spirit guides us into fuller understanding. This is not an opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is however a bold humility – or a humble boldness. We know in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers but as envoys of peace; not as high pressure sales persons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord.[[346]](#footnote-346)

Bosch’s words are significant in an environment of mis-distrust. Moreover, as one proclaims Christ as the way, the truth and the life, one must remain aware that the way of this Christ is the way of the crucified Messiah of God – the one who is defined by self-giving love. Thus the evangelistic task must be implemented from a stance of embrace, marked by space making within the self, which allows the other to come in and respects the truth the other brings.[[347]](#footnote-347)

For evangelism, double vision in the arena of justice is equally crucial. Although not speaking directly to issues of justice, Jeffrey Conklin-Miller describes evangelism as leaning in two directions at once: into the world and into God. For Conklin-Miller, this ‘intercessory’ evangelism leans deeply into God through what is known in the Wesleyan tradition as the means of grace: Scripture, prayer and sacrament among others. In leaning toward God, one’s stance is firmly grounded in order to then be able to lean deeply into (but without ‘falling into’) the world: enlarging one’s thinking, making space within oneself for the ideas, perspectives, and understandings of others.[[348]](#footnote-348)

Volf is right in claiming that people ‘do not argue about justice (or anything else, for that matter) as disembodied and a-social “selves” suspended by some sky hook above the hustle and bustle of social conflicts. Social location profoundly shapes our beliefs and practices.’ He also correctly asserts that most people ‘stand in more than one place.’[[349]](#footnote-349) The question then is not whether Christians stand in a certain place as they understand justice, they do. At stake for evangelism is not *where* they should stand, but ‘*how* they should stand where they stand.’[[350]](#footnote-350) The concepts of double vision and Conklin-Miller’s leaning in two directions at once support an understanding of evangelism as grounded in the space-making process of embrace, where one’s thinking is enlarged by the encounter with the other.

**Can Embrace Bear the Weight?**

Having drawn extensively on Miroslav Volf in adapting the metaphor of embrace to the context of evangelism, it is important to note that his assertions are not without difficulty. Volf has undertaken a massive task. In reviewing *Exclusion and Embrace*, Ellen Charry writes that ‘Twentieth-century violence calls tribalism, individualism, and their confluence in the neo-Nietzschean will to power to account before the bar of Christian reconciliation. Love must temper the demand for justice. Volf calls on Christian theology to *reconstruct culture*.’[[351]](#footnote-351)

In addressing such a demanding task, one will find it not surprising that there are weaknesses in what Volf is offering. Charry rightly points out that his arguments are persuasive in theory, but translating them into practice is entirely different.[[352]](#footnote-352) That Volf recognizes this is suggested in his Preface when, reflecting on whether he could embrace a ‘četnik’ (the ultimate other for him as a Croat), he writes, ‘No, I cannot – but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to.’[[353]](#footnote-353)

Charry notes also that Volf fails to explore the issue of anger, which she asserts is ‘the emotion at the root of the inability or refusal to embrace.’[[354]](#footnote-354) Further, from Charry’s perspective Volf’s proposal appears somewhat Pelagian:

Embracing the other appears to be an act of will. In truth, however, such an ability is really a miracle that happens only by the grace of God. Reconciliation is the supreme work of God. Sin and the pyschic [*sic*] desire for revenge, the need to be vindicated are too deep in the human heart for victims to set aside lightly.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Volf appears aware of these issues at several levels. Though not dealing with anger directly, for example, his understanding of the Christian approach to nonviolence requires the belief in divine vengeance. Additionally, he allows that ‘consistent nonretaliation and nonviolence [may] be impossible in the world of violence.’[[356]](#footnote-356) Furthermore, he admits that final reconciliation is a ‘messianic problem [that] ought not to be taken out of God’s hands.’ In the meantime, however, he appears committed to exploring ‘*what resources we need to live in peace in the absence of the final reconciliation*.’[[357]](#footnote-357)

Although Volf’s understanding of reconciliation is not without problems, I do not believe the weaknesses are great enough to discount the significance of what he has offered. Further, the resources he offers regarding reconciliation are extremely valuable, despite their challenging nature. Moreover, when embrace as a metaphor and the various points that undergird it are shifted from the context of reconciliation in situations of enmity to the context of evangelism, the weaknesses are minimized.

At the beginning of this chapter I expressed my desire to offer a rendering of evangelism that speaks to the theological stance that undergirds its practice. Volf’s work provides a point of departure for that rendering. Moving from the specific context of reconciliation, I have adapted Volf’s metaphor of embrace so that it points to a *theological stance* rather than to a specific act (in Volf’s case, the act of reconciliation). I believe that the strength of the metaphor of embrace, grounded as it is in the relational activity of the Triune God and in a robust understanding of identity and belonging, makes it well suited as a foundation from which to engage the evangelistic task. It is not without risk; however, in undertaking evangelism from the stance of embrace, the integrity of Christian witness is strengthened and renewed, opening a wide space in which the Holy Spirit might work its transformative power.

Volf provides a starting point in exploring embrace as a metaphor to undergird evangelistic practice; however, it is important also to situate that metaphor in the broader context of the biblical witness. It is to this broader context that we will turn in the remaining chapters. If the practice of evangelism is directed toward the initiation of individuals into the reign of God as I have asserted, the theological stance of embrace that undergirds it must be firmly rooted in that reign. Therefore it is appropriate to ask, what is the nature of the kingdom of God? Further, if the core content of the gospel that one makes known in the context of evangelistic practice can be found in the biblical witness, the theological stance of embrace that undergirds it must be securely tethered to that witness, namely, to core events of the gospel message: creation, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, Pentecost, the ascension, and new creation. The following two chapters seek to root the stance of embrace firmly both in an understanding of the kingdom of God, and in seven pivotal events of the gospel witness, and in so doing strengthen it to bear the weight of evangelistic practice. We turn first to an exploration of the kingdom of God as announced by Jesus and to its inauguration as proclaimed by Paul.

Five

Restorative Witness in Light of the Kingdom of God

In discussing various understandings of evangelism, I asserted that the beginning point of any argument is crucial to the entire project. That assertion is especially significant as one develops a theological stance from which to practice evangelism. I stated that I stand with Abraham, Arias and others in grounding my model in the gospel of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus. This grounding is strengthened by an additional rooting in an understanding of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus and proclaimed by Paul. Choosing these interrelated beginning points raises the question, however, of what this kingdom actually entails. If one’s goal in evangelism is to initiate people into the reign of God, one must be very clear just what kind of reign it is.

The Synoptic tradition attests to Jesus’ emphasis on the reign of God; it was the message that launched his entire ministry: Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand! (Mt. 4.17, 23, 9.35; Mk. 1.15; Lk. 4.43, 8.1) Though they may not agree on the content and meaning of the kingdom, scholars of all perspectives emphasize the importance of the concept, for Jesus most assuredly, but also for first-century Judaism generally.[[358]](#footnote-358) Thus Abraham’s assertion that the reign of God was fundamental to Jesus’ theological stance within the Judaism of his time is hardly controversial. It was the horizon within which he and his followers conceived and carried out their first evangelistic activity.[[359]](#footnote-359) With that in mind, let us look first at Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom.

**Jesus and the Kingdom of God**

In turning one’s sights to Jesus, what initially emerges is that there is no unified way to comprehend him. The history of Jesus scholarship is long and winding; therefore discerning choices must be made regarding which material and approaches must have priority. Currently, Jesus scholars fall into two very general camps: those who view Jesus ‘in the framework of his eschatology and placed at the center of Judaism’[[360]](#footnote-360) and those who, beginning with a greater sense of historical skepticism, paint ‘a “non-eschatological picture of Jesus” in which Jesus becomes the advocate of a paradoxical existential wisdom influenced by Cynicism – a “Jewish Cynic” who, shaped by Hellenistic influences, moves to the periphery of Judaism.’[[361]](#footnote-361)

To be sure, no impenetrable boundaries mark these two very wide categories. Scholars often overlap ideas, whether in content or in form, and even debate among themselves about their placement within a particular school, the chronological development of the various approaches and, surprisingly, even the numbering of the different ‘quests.’[[362]](#footnote-362) While keeping this fluidity in mind, I have chosen to privilege the views of scholars in the first broad category, largely referred to as the ‘Third Quest.’ In general, Third Questers tend to emphasize a broader historical landscape, work to avoid atomistic readings of the Jesus tradition, privilege the perspective of first-century Palestine, and work toward a more comprehensive and holistic treatment that emphasizes the evidence as a whole. I believe these characteristics of scholarship are significant in creating a solid theological foundation for evangelism. Conversely, I believe that the scholarship of the other general category of scholars has contributed to the difficulties currently facing the church with regard to evangelism. Thus in choosing to privilege the views of Third Questers, I am at one and the same time hoping to provide correctives for certain problematic understandings and to move forward with a more balanced theological perspective to undergird evangelism.

With regard to specific scholars, though at times they do not agree, I find the arguments of N. T. Wright, James Dunn and Richard Hays especially helpful in providing both correctives and a way forward, and I will focus much of my attention on these scholars, with primary emphasis on Wright.[[363]](#footnote-363) In like fashion, because of their more holistic approach to the Pauline material, I have also chosen to focus predominantly on these three scholars in my discussion of the kingdom of God in Paul.

Much of this investigation rests on the assertion that the integrity of the evangelistic task is undermined by inconsistencies and imbalances in practice and theology. When the church proclaims an overly individualistic, spiritually privatized message emphasizing a heavenly afterlife and the salvation of souls, appearing to ignore issues of oppression, exploitation, war, poverty, hunger and disease, or even at times appearing to be complicit in them, evangelistic integrity suffers. Wright’s emphasis on the this worldly nature of Jesus’ message, his dramatically different approach to eschatology and apocalyptic language, and his use of the metaphor of return-from-exile as the overarching narrative for Jesus’ ministry provide a thought provoking-challenge to the temptation to oversimplify the reign of God, distilling it to a purely transcendental heavenly realm encountered after death, or a private, spiritual experience (however heartfelt), or the anticipated destruction of the cosmos foreseen by signs, wonders and cataclysmic natural disasters. As discussed, a good deal of evangelical theology in the U.S. can at times appear ambivalent in relation to creation and political injustice. Wright’s analysis is valuable in its potential ‘to awaken an often sleepy evangelical consciousness with regard to ecological, social and political concerns.’[[364]](#footnote-364) Further, Wright is specifically helpful in his ability to highlight the false separation of the kingdom and the cross, providing an importance balance:

The four Gospels are quite clear that the kingdom and the cross go together, but much of the later Western church has found that conjunction very, very difficult, and has often played kingdom theology off against cross theology, because it’s had one vision of reality about God making the world a better place and another vision of reality about God saving people from their sins, and never the twain shall meet. But both in canon and in real history they do meet. They belong together.[[365]](#footnote-365)

For his part, Dunn provides many valuable insights, notably in his emphasis on the oral Jesus tradition and the significant bridge that tradition plays in the transition from the time of faith in the human Jesus and his ministry and mission, to the time of faith in the risen Messiah Jesus. Dunn differs from Wright in many ways, especially in his reluctance to use any one grand narrative as the explanatory grid through which to view the ministry and mission of Jesus. These differences are valuable as his work provides a cautious balance to Wright’s often sweeping proposals.

Hays is helpful as well in his recognition of the ‘deeply felt desire for the postmodern recovery of canon and tradition as the necessary hermeneutical framework for understanding both Scripture and the world.’ With Wright, he is keenly aware of the need for ‘historical validation of Christian claims,’ acknowledging, again with Wright that, ‘without historical investigation of the factuality of the Gospels, the story is vacuous, not least at the level of concrete action in the world.’ I believe he complements and augments Wright and therefore adds a great deal to the current study in his assertion that ‘without the canonical form of the story, we [can] never get the historical investigation right in the first place.’[[366]](#footnote-366)

As valuable as Wright’s contributions to New Testament studies are, they are not without controversy, as will become evident. He has been criticized for his dependence on the narrative of ‘return-from-exile’ as the overarching story into which everything else fits;[[367]](#footnote-367) his approach to apocalyptic language has aroused the passion of much of the scholarly community; and his examination of Paul has inflamed more than a few conservative theologians.[[368]](#footnote-368)

Interestingly, the most detailed scholarly criticism comes from within the Third Quest itself, rather than from other schools of thought such as the Jesus Seminar, prominent in North America in the 1990s. Constructive criticism and productive disagreement have emerged from that group. In fact the two schools (Third Quest and the Jesus Seminar) have been lively conversation partners.[[369]](#footnote-369) However, the foundational differences in the way these two generalized groupings of scholars approach the historical task are so great as to make detailed criticism difficult to sustain. Thus their differences are better approached with broader strokes, focusing on more expansive issues such as the nature of the Gospels, the meaning and use of history, and even the role of history in the theological process.[[370]](#footnote-370)

Criticism from fellow Third Questers, on the other hand, has been more detailed and sustained, with general agreement on issues such as method and disagreement on issues such as individual exegesis, narrative theory and language. Despite the controversy and continued dialogue regarding Wright’s understanding of the Jesus tradition, I believe he puts forth a coherent and comprehensive hypothesis about how to approach the man Jesus that is a valuable addition to my overall exploration. Wright deals effectively and in great depth with the available data, and his assertions offer the opportunity for productive use in other related areas. For these reasons, I have chosen to adopt a Third Quest approach to the Jesus material and to make substantial use of Wright’s arguments as I explore Jesus’ understanding, as well as that of his first followers, of the kingdom of God.

**The Story Behind the Story: First-Century Jewish Understandings of the Kingdom**

Dunn aptly describes a basic characteristic of the Third Quest: ‘the conviction that any attempt to build up a historical picture of Jesus of Nazareth should and must begin from the fact that he was a first-century Jew operating in a first-century milieu.’[[371]](#footnote-371) Although it is widely accepted that there were diverse expressions of Judaism in the second-temple period, a basic worldview of Jews in the first century can be identified as a point of departure for the variety of expressions that are in evidence. The biblical witness was at the heart of this worldview: creation and election, exodus and monarchy, exile and return. These were the stories that fashioned the outlook of Jesus and his contemporaries. It was a worldview grounded in a this-world perspective. First-century Jews saw themselves as part of the chosen people of the one, true God, creator and ruler of the entire universe; yet this one God was not a god set apart, distant or inaccessible. Rather, this was a god whose activity was to be found in the real world, manifest and active in the history, the present and the future of Israel. As Dunn says, Israel’s God was a god of all three tenses: past, present, and future.[[372]](#footnote-372)

Especially in relation to the future tense, this worldview was one in which the future of all nations was intimately bound up with the future of Israel. As the chosen people of the creator God, it would be through Israel that God would ultimately be recognized as the true God over all, thus vindicating Israel as God’s chosen and bringing the nations of the world either into membership within the covenant or judgment outside of it.[[373]](#footnote-373)

Second Temple Jews saw themselves in the midst of a divine drama that was still unfolding. God’s covenant with Israel involved making her a mighty nation; however, the reality of first-century life was oppression by Rome, a puppet royal family, and corrupt and questionable Temple leadership. From the perspective of Second Temple Jews, the conclusion to Israel’s story had yet to take place in all its promised fullness; thus they continued to look for the climax, the coming of the kingdom of God, when Israel would be liberated and redeemed, when God would become king, recognized as the one true God and ruler of all the nations.

According to Wright, a significant element in the first-century Jewish worldview was Israel’s sense of continued exile, which he has described in great detail and with significant force in numerous contexts.[[374]](#footnote-374) This concept undergirds much, if not all, of his assessment about Jesus and his mission and ministry. Though many scholars share Wright’s view, there is not complete consensus and his assertions have often received strong responses at both extremes.[[375]](#footnote-375)

Dunn, who shares much in common with Wright, has referred to the return-from-exile theme as Wright’s ‘*idée fixe*’ and claims that it distorts his various arguments at different points.[[376]](#footnote-376) I believe Dunn’s detailed critique is perceptive, and it is important to question whether the return-from-exile narrative is strong enough to serve as an overarching grand narrative in the way that Wright uses it, or, more to the point, whether any unitary meta-narrative can be superimposed on such complex data in such a comprehensive way.[[377]](#footnote-377) On the other hand, Nicholas Perrin offers an insightful observation when he parallels the existence of an ‘essential ancient Jewish metanarrative, variations notwithstanding,’ to the existence of ‘the narrative of “the American dream,” variations notwithstanding.’[[378]](#footnote-378)

A full exegetical debate over Wright’s use of the return-from-exile theme is impossible in this context; however, in using Wright, I am not claiming wholesale agreement with the full sweep of his assertions, nor am I contending that his is the only way of understanding Jesus. Stephen Evans offers a pertinent reminder that the Spirit of God can produce faith without any particular apologetic arguments; more to the point: ‘God is alive and at work within human life in such a way as to make it possible for ordinary people to understand and believe the truth about Jesus of Nazareth even without the complexities of historical biblical scholarship.’[[379]](#footnote-379)

With that in mind, Wright’s thinking contains many elements that are valuable for the balance they bring to the formation of a foundational theological stance to undergird evangelism and the motif of return-from-exile is one of them. Acknowledging the existence of such an outlook is helpful not only for the light it sheds on Jesus’ first-century proclamation of the kingdom, but also in appropriating that proclamation as a foundation for embrace. The promises of God to which Israel clung in the first century are the same promises to which Christians cling today. The concept of the kingdom as here but not yet here, so common in the Christian experience, is complemented meaningfully by reflection on an understanding of a sense of existential exile – a sense of ‘having returned, but not yet fully returned.’ Further, from a theological perspective there seem to be fruitful parallels between a sense of existential exile and a sense of being a prodigal in need of a welcome home that lies at the heart of the metaphor of embrace and indeed, of the doctrine of salvation itself. With these thoughts in mind, I believe it is helpful to further explore Wright’s assertions regarding the worldview of Second Temple Judaism, including the return-from-exile theme.[[380]](#footnote-380)

For first-century Jews, the climax of their story, the coming of the kingdom of God, was still a future for which they longed. There were numerous symbols (to use Wright’s language) or pillars (Dunn) present that served to undergird, support and nurture this worldview, making it both visible and tangible and anchoring it firmly in everyday life. Wright describes these:

At the heart of Jewish national life, for better or worse, stood the Temple. All around, looking to the Temple as its centre, lay the Land which the covenant god had promised to give to Israel, which was thus his by right and hers by promise. Both Temple and Land were regulated by the Torah, which formed the covenant charter for all that Israel was and hoped for, and whose importance increased in proportion to one’s geographical distance from Land and Temple. Closely related to all three was the fact of Jewish ethnicity: the little race, divided by exile and diaspora, knew itself to be a family whose identity had to be maintained at all costs.[[381]](#footnote-381)

These four major symbols – Temple, land, Torah and identity – were ever present in Second Temple Jewish consciousness, giving structure and definition to their world. The Temple in particular was at the heart of Jewish life and identity, thoroughly integrating the religious, political, governmental, financial and economic aspects of life. The Temple was the dwelling place of God, the place of sacrifice and forgiveness, cleansing and restoration, both at the individual level through daily sacrifices and at the corporate level through the great festivals. At its most basic level, the Temple was the intersection of human and divine, the source of human well being and salvation, the very heart of Israel, ‘from which there went out to the body of Judaism, in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the living and healing presence of the covenant god.’[[382]](#footnote-382)

Land was a powerful image, symbolic and tangible. It belonged to the one true God, creator of the universe who had given it to Israel; yet now, as in the past, it was occupied by a foreign, pagan power that despoiled it with unfamiliar institutions and customs and oppressive authority and governance. As the nexus of divine/human encounter, the Temple was the source of holiness for all of Israel, and that holiness radiated outward to all the land anticipating that when the kingdom of God actually became a reality, the land was the place from which God would rule.[[383]](#footnote-383)

As a third major symbol or pillar undergirding Israel’s worldview, Torah was the opposite side of the Temple coin. If the Temple was the focal point of the divine/human relationship, Torah was the covenantal bond. Torah provided the road map for how to live as the people of God, providing boundaries and distinguishing Jews from their pagan surroundings by rituals such as Sabbath keeping, circumcision, and regulations related to food and purity. A massive amount of energy was expended on interpretation to keep this vital symbol relevant to all aspects of daily Jewish life. Devotion to Torah determined faithfulness, naturally leading to disagreement over what exactly that devotion entailed. It is not far-fetched to assert that most first-century Jews would agree that all should live according to Torah; it was the details of how that played out in everyday life, however, that provided the fodder for disagreement and the cycle of self-affirmation by one group and its corollary condemnation of others.[[384]](#footnote-384)

The final foundational symbol for the worldview of second-temple Judaism was identity or election. Israel’s self-understanding was that of having been selected from all the nations of the world to be God’s very own. As a chosen people, it was paramount that they be different, separate from all others. As a people frequently surrounded by hostile forces, whether in their own land or in exile, this understanding was a matter not only of self-identification as the people of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; it was also a matter of self-preservation. It was crucial to maintain a marked distinctiveness, a sense of purity, emphasizing ethnicity, family and national covenant membership through rites such as circumcision and Sabbath keeping and the extensive covenantal laws regulating food and ritual purity.[[385]](#footnote-385)

Israel’s sense of chosenness was a major element of the first-century worldview as well as a bridge idea to Christian theological understanding, and an integral element of a stance of embrace. Initiated by God through ‘electing grace’ (Deut. 7.6-8), Israel’s set-apartness was not an end in itself, but was for the ‘task of bringing salvation to the end of the earth.’ (Isa. 49.6)[[386]](#footnote-386) Because it was the means through which God intended to bless the whole world, Israel’s chosenness through electing grace is the foundation of the communal aspect of salvation.[[387]](#footnote-387) Wright aptly sums up the significance of this: ‘salvation is not simply God’s gift *to* his people but God’s gift *through* his people.’[[388]](#footnote-388) Having highlighted this in the previous chapter, and in anticipation of more discussion in the next, it is important at this point to underscore that Israel’s identity, this essential symbol to her overall worldview, stemmed from God’s promises to Abraham, promises that declared *both* that Israel would be blessed because she was God’s chosen, *and* that as Abraham’s descendants, through Israel a worldwide family would be created.[[389]](#footnote-389)

These four symbols – Temple, land, Torah and identity – served to ground the first-century Jewish worldview in a very this-worldly way. God was not distant or removed, watching from afar, but the one true God who had a physical place of residence – the Temple. When God returned to reign, it would not be in an otherworldly kingdom, but one whose place of governance was Israel’s holy land, the land that had been given to Israel through her covenantal relationship with God. When God returned to dwell in the Temple in the midst of God’s holy land, the true Israel – those who had shown themselves loyal through their observance of Torah and their commitment to living as the distinct and faithful people of God – would be vindicated at last, no longer in exile, no longer under the domination of pagan powers. The roles would be reversed; Israel would rule all the nations under the Lordship of God, and the powers that had for so long dominated her would finally be judged – either as worthy or unworthy of membership into the people of God.

Recognizing the this-world nature of the Second Temple worldview sheds light on first-century Judaism’s hope for the coming reality of God’s kingdom, which would be experienced in the context of God’s creation. Certainly there was room for one to creatively imagine the kind of radical changes creation might undergo under the power of God’s rule, and Scripture attests to that kind of creative imagination; however, the context remained God’s good creation. God would reclaim the entire world, and a reign of life would begin in which all of creation would finally reach the fullness of God’s intentions for it.

That the context of the reign of God in the Second Temple mindset was a renewal of original creation and God’s reclaiming of the entire world raises an interesting question of the relationship of understandings of the fall and new creation to the advent of the kingdom and the evangelistic task that is directed toward initiation into that reign. As has been discussed, in some quarters of Christian thought because of the fall, all of creation, including humanity, is totally depraved, with all connection to or image of the creator deformed beyond recognition. It is out this type of understanding that the language of ‘saving’ souls gains a great deal of its strength and this type of understanding is often the stance that undergirds the evangelistic task. For instance, Rick Marshall states, ‘God the Father sent his Son on a *rescue* mission for all humanity.’[[390]](#footnote-390) Rick Warren echoes this understanding when he asserts, ‘only people are going to last forever.’[[391]](#footnote-391) From this perspective evangelism involves proclaiming salvation *from* the world (very likely to a new heaven distinct from original creation), rather than salvation *for* the world (and the fulfillment of the promise of new creation in God’s restoration, redemption and transformation of original creation).

In contrast, a significant part of the first-century worldview, of which Jesus was a part, looked forward to the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness in the midst of *this* *world*. Although I will explore this element in greater detail in Chapter Six, it is worth briefly noting that the Wesleyan theological trajectory follows the first century arc, and this arc is significant for a theological stance of embrace.

In an environment of mis-distrust, where the church is at times viewed as focused inordinately on saving souls for the afterlife at the expense of care for whole persons in the here and now; and where it is perceived to be indifferent to or complicit in many ‘this world’ issues (e.g. environmental degradation, suffering, racism, sexism), it is helpful to be reminded of ‘creational’ conceptions of God’s kingdom and God’s intentions for humanity and the universe. Understanding salvation – the coming of God’s kingdom in all its fullness – as being rooted in creation colors the way in which one makes space within oneself for the *lived* *experiences*, perceptions, and understandings of the other and expands one’s expectations of the Holy Spirit’s transformative work beyond the limits of the interior.

Despite the rootedness in the physical world that characterized Second Temple Judaism’s understanding of the reign of God, over time it has become important to scholars to avoid associations with the concept of territory. For example, in explicating Jesus’ use of kingdom language, John Dominic Crossan has offered a ‘brokerless kingdom’ of radical egalitarianism.[[392]](#footnote-392) Other conceptualizations have included ‘the saving revelation of God Himself,’ and ‘God in strength.’[[393]](#footnote-393) Still others have insisted on a metaphorical rendering that points to God as ‘the unconditional will for the good’ and the kingdom as ‘the establishment of God’s ethical will.’[[394]](#footnote-394)

These conceptualizations are helpful; however, if they remain at a purely theoretical level, their overall usefulness is diminished. As Dunn appropriately points out, all notions of the kingdom of God must be understood in ‘the context of Israel's memory of its own monarchic past, of Jewish current experience under the kingship of others, and of the hopes of the faithful regarding God’s kingship for the future.’[[395]](#footnote-395) Dunn is correct because at its heart, Israel’s hope for the coming kingdom of God was a hope for a kingdom rooted in the physical world, God’s good creation.

In contrast to an inner or mystical hope that might be tied to some sort of metaphorical or conceptual kingdom, or to a hope related to questions of space and time or literal cosmology, Israel’s hope for the coming of God’s reign was concerned with the real-world realities of Temple, land, and Torah, with a strong focus on identity, economy and justice. Again, Dunn is on target when he asserts that this ‘hope for the future, however symbolic in expression, evidently looked for a tangible effect in the life of Israel.’[[396]](#footnote-396)

This understanding of the coming of the kingdom was certainly tied to an eschatological hope. However, the nature of that eschatological outlook was not altogether ‘otherworldly.’ It was rather an outlook that appropriated ‘cosmic’ imagery to describe realities experienced and confronted in real-world contexts in a way that pointed to the depth of the spiritual significance of those real-world realities, what Wright refers to as ‘investing historical events with theological significance.’[[397]](#footnote-397)

While not uncontroversial, the value of Wright’s emphasis on God’s creation as the context for Jewish eschatological hope is once again the balance that it provides. Western Christianity has often emphasized a Platonic realm of eternal bliss enjoyed by disembodied souls after the (often supernaturally cataclysmic) end of the space-time universe. Such an emphasis has at times led in numerous ways to a gross disregard for the present, which in turn has undermined the integrity of evangelistic practice.

My intention is not to dispute that Christianity is at its heart eschatological; nor do I wish to call into question the appropriateness of that outlook. I agree wholeheartedly with Moltmann that ‘from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.[[398]](#footnote-398)

The problem is not that the eschatological outlook is characteristic of the church; that is a sizable part of her glory and strength. The problem is the way the church, especially in the West, has proclaimed that outlook, more often than not emphasizing the grandeur of the end while ignoring the power of that outlook to revolutionize and transform the present. Thus Wright’s assertion that Christian eschatological hope has as its tap root the very this-worldly hope of first-century Judaism is a valuable word as it highlights the intertwined nature of God’s good creation and the coming of God’s kingdom, which in turn strengthens the theological foundation for a stance of embrace to undergird evangelistic practice.

With an understanding of the Second Temple worldview and its implications for comprehending the nature of the kingdom, we turn now to Jesus’ own understanding, keeping in mind that as a devout Jewish man of the first century, his outlook would have been shaped by this worldview. It would have provided both the fertile ground from which his understanding would grow as well as the context in which his transformative message would be received.

**The Story Transformed: Jesus’ Understanding of the Kingdom of God**

Dunn offers a helpful picture of the ‘characteristic’ Jesus, claiming that though ‘such a reconstruction does not guarantee the historical accuracy of recall of any particular saying or episode,’ it provides a better way forward than attempting to judge the historical authenticity of individual sayings in isolation.[[399]](#footnote-399) Dunn’s characteristic Jesus is one who,

…began his mission from his encounter with John the Baptist; a Jew who operated within Galilee, within the framework of the Judaism of the period and in debate with others influential in shaping the Judaism of the period; a Jesus who characteristically proclaimed the royal rule of God both as coming to full effect soon and as already active through his ministry; a Jesus who regularly used the phrase ‘the son of man,’ probably as a way of speaking of his own mission and of his expectations regarding its outcome; a Jesus who was a successful exorcist and knew it; a Jesus whose characteristic mode of teaching was in aphorisms and parables; a Jesus whose ‘Amen’ idiom expressed a high evaluation of the importance of what he said; a Jesus who reacted strongly against the apathy and disdain that his message frequently encountered.[[400]](#footnote-400)

Although Dunn is correct regarding the historical accuracy of any particular saying or episode, such a reconstruction provides a helpful starting point for examining Jesus’ understanding of the rule of God that he proclaimed. Very important is the framework of Judaism. When Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, he and his listeners would have the same basic context in which to hear those words: the entire storyline of Israel – creation and election, exodus and monarchy, exile and return with the same symbolic landscape – Temple, land, Torah and identity. Of equal importance is Dunn’s inclusion of debate with those who were influential in shaping the Judaism of the period.[[401]](#footnote-401) This highlights the point that in speaking about the reign of Israel’s God, Jesus was in fact retelling a familiar story, but in a thoroughly subversive way that redirected the entire plot, thus the ensuing debate and conflict.

Because first-century Jewish hope was symbolic in expression, but looked for a tangible effect in the life of Israel, kingdom language would have been perceived as pointing to God becoming king, a time when all of creation would finally be put in right relationship to the one true God, creator of the universe. (Pss. 10.16; 22.28; 29.10; 47.2-3, 7-8; 95.3; 103.19; 135.6; 145.13 among others) Thus the story through which Jesus’ listeners heard his message would include several key pieces: God was committed to Israel by an indestructible covenant, had a plan for the world, and would fully implement it. As the creator of all the earth, God was a promise keeper, not a promise breaker, and eventually God would vindicate Israel over her enemies, there would be a return from exile in the broadest sense of that concept (geographical and/or otherwise), creation would be restored, the covenant renewed, the true Temple reinstated, God would return to Zion, and all the nations would be judged and either welcomed or sent away. (Isa. 24.21-23; Isa. 52.7; Ezek. 20.33; Mic. 4.1-7; Zech. 14.9, 16-17)[[402]](#footnote-402) In other words, when people heard Jesus announce that the kingdom of God was at hand, it evoked the story of God's *reordering of the entire world*.

One can thus imagine the initial response of Jesus’s listeners, waiting as they were for the climax of this story they knew so well. Yet there was something different in Jesus’ announcement; it was familiar, yet unfamiliar. It was the same story, but retold in strikingly different ways. The time of restoration was indeed at hand, but rather than simply being a renewed call to oppose the current version of oppression, this time of restoration was unfolding in and through a particular person – Jesus of Nazareth. It was more than a simple announcement of the advent of the kingdom; it was that same announcement *embodied in the person of Jesus*. And in embodying that announcement, Jesus invited others not just to join in God’s liberation of Israel, but to join him in an entirely new way of *being* Israel. This announcement of the advent of the kingdom, this new way of being Israel enacted by and embodied in the person of Jesus dramatically subverted the existing symbolic foundations of the worldview of all those who heard it, shifting the focus away from the defining symbols of Temple, land, Torah and identity and onto *himself* as the vehicle through which Israel would be restored and redeemed at the dawn of God’s kingdom. As will become clear, this shift in focus would be a crucial one as Jesus’ first followers sought to understand the nature of the rule of God that Jesus had inaugurated.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom, his invitation for those who heard him to join in a new way of being Israel, involved a combination of welcome and warning with a dramatic reinterpretation of all Israel held dear at the heart of both. The element of welcome is a crucial component of the biblical witness grounding the metaphor of embrace as a theological stance for evangelism.

The welcome that Jesus proclaimed was expansive. Everyone was invited to celebrate God’s great restoration. Such an unrestrained welcome shook the very foundations of the first-century Jewish worldview, with its emphasis on identity, purity and boundaries, and carried with it an element of warning. If all were welcome, then those who were depending on their own status as children of Abraham, assuming that status was all that was necessary to be included in God’s divine action, would need to seriously rethink things.

The expansiveness of this welcome and the implicit rejection of the traditional emphasis on boundaries were emphasized by Jesus’ teaching on the theme of eschatological reversal. Those who were humbled now would be exalted in the age to come. Those who were exalted now would be humbled in the age to come. The balance of welcome and warning was clear. All were welcome; status was not all that it appeared to be.[[404]](#footnote-404)

Through this lens of welcome and warning, Wright sees four specific activities inherent in Jesus’ kingdom message that I believe provide grounding for evangelism: invitation, welcome, challenge and summons. Jesus never simply announced the advent of God’s kingdom; he coupled it with an invitation to repent. It was not a limited invitation, all were welcome, all were potential beneficiaries of God’s expansive work in the world, all were invited to repent. These two activities, invitation and welcome, led directly into the third of Jesus’ activities as he announced the kingdom: challenge. People who responded to the invitation were challenged to be Israel in a new way, a redeemed Israel. This challenge involved a rethinking of behavior and action, a realignment of every aspect of life, including worldview. Finally there was summons. Those who came into contact with Jesus were summoned to follow, some in the context of their local communities, others all the way to the cross and beyond. This summons provided the embryonic manifestation of community that would in due time mature into the distinctive community of followers of the Jesus way that ultimately came to be known as the church.[[405]](#footnote-405)

The element of summons in Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom is integral to the metaphor of embrace, and Wright’s view regarding the response to Jesus’ summons and the forming of community is valuable. Historically, the church has not always held together the relationship between the personal and the corporate in a holistic fashion, which has in turn undermined evangelism in significant ways, especially in the Western context.[[406]](#footnote-406) Over the years, much evangelistic activity has focused on the individual as an isolated entity, as though that was the entire focus of Jesus’ message. I believe this is one element of the overall difficulty of evangelism from the Western perspective. Wright’s assertions, however, instill a helpful balance:

We have, in the last forty years, ‘discovered’ that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and even, according to some, Q and Thomas – had a great interest in ‘community’. It ought to be just as clear, if not clearer, that Jesus himself was deeply concerned about the social and corporate effects of his kingdom-announcement.[[407]](#footnote-407)

He adds, quite perceptively:

…the *corporate* meaning of the stories does not undermine, but actually enhances, the *personal* meaning for every single one of Jesus’ hearers. It is *individualism* and *collectivism* that cancel each other out; properly understood, the *corporate* and the *personal* reinforce one another.[[408]](#footnote-408)

Wright’s focus on the reinforcing relationship between the corporate and the personal in contrast to the individual in isolation supports a stance of embrace, and its value can be seen when one explores in more detail his overarching scheme of invitation, welcome, challenge and summons.

Jesus’ invitation for Israel to be Israel in a new way involved repentance; however, in addition to the personal aspect, the repentance Jesus preached also had a distinctly corporate dimension; it was what was required of Israel if she were to be fully restored.[[409]](#footnote-409) For Jesus, repentance was also an eschatological repentance, a political summons for Israel to abandon its revolutionary zeal, to abandon the agenda of violent revolt, and instead to embrace his agenda of ushering in an entirely different kind of kingdom than had been previously imagined while Israel had suffered under oppressive foreign rule. Rather than being ‘simply the “repentance” that any human being, any Jew, might use if, aware of sin, they decided to say sorry and make amends,’ it was a ‘single great repentance which would characterize the true people of YHWH at the moment when their god became king.’[[410]](#footnote-410) Further, repentance for Jesus focused on *obedience and loyalty to Jesus himself*. Thus Jesus’ overarching pattern of invitation, welcome, challenge and summons was in itself a call to repentance, a turning from an old way of being Israel to the new way that Jesus was inaugurating.

In this context there was not only an intimate connection between welcome and warning, but also between individual and community, and between community and Jesus. From Jesus’ perspective, the kingdom of God was manifest not simply within the context of individual experience, but also in the context of a communal reordering around himself as well.[[411]](#footnote-411)

Not inappropriately, over time the corporate concept of repentance has become less prominent while its personal meaning, intertwined as it is with the experience of conversion in which the individual’s relationship with God is transformed through an act of undeserved divine grace, has moved to the forefront. This shift is completely understandable, first because the personal dimension of repentance was well known in Judaism and contained in Jesus’ own teachings.[[412]](#footnote-412) Second, and more specifically, the shift is understandable in light of the experiences of Jesus’ first followers. Although insight into the ‘historical’ Jesus is important, it cannot be denied that one’s understanding is also rightly shaped by the memories of the first followers of Jesus after his death. Johnson describes this well:

The memory of Jesus after his death was inevitably selected and shaped by the experience of the church, above all by the experience of the resurrection, which was understood not as something that happened only to Jesus in the past but especially as something that touched those who worshiped him in the present. The memory of Jesus past could not but be affected by the experience of Jesus present. If there was a Jesus to remember, then, this was also a Jesus remembered through the influence of that power the Christians called the Holy Spirit.[[413]](#footnote-413)

Thus the understanding of repentance as personal is valuable and reflects both the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit from the past into the present and the continued unfolding of God’s reign. Further, it is the natural outgrowth of Jesus’ own call to repentance, a call he offered on his own authority and that involved abandoning one way of life and trusting him for another.[[414]](#footnote-414) Perrin is correct in asserting that for Jesus, ‘personal repentance, together with following Jesus, provided its own assurance for securing one’s lot in the resurrection.’[[415]](#footnote-415)

Once again however, the value of Wright’s analysis is to provide a reminder of the importance of the corporate and communal. Granted, for repentance to be corporate, the body must include people who have decided, quite likely on an individual basis, to swap the solidarity of one group for another. However, ‘the logic of the position is quite different from that of the lonely post-Enlightenment individual bent on a quest for private salvation. It is the logic of the promise to Abraham and his family.’[[416]](#footnote-416) Perrin clarifies: ‘To follow Jesus personally on his terms was to share in the hope of physical resurrection, which was also to participate in the corporate eschatological temple, even as it was being provisionally unleashed in the present through the ministry of Jesus.’[[417]](#footnote-417)

Connected to Jesus’ invitation to repent, with its individual and communal dimensions, were his welcome of sinners and the offer of forgiveness. Much has been written about the meaning of the designation ‘sinner,’ and though there is virtual unanimity regarding Jesus’ welcoming of and spending time with them, who these people were is the source of much contention.[[418]](#footnote-418) James Dunn’s insistence that ‘sinners’ was not an ‘absolute term’ is helpful, as is his observation that ‘sinner’ also ‘functioned as a *factional* term’ to denote ‘Jews who practised [*sic*] their Judaism differently from the writer’s faction.’[[419]](#footnote-419) In other words, sinners were ‘outcasts from a liturgical point of view.’[[420]](#footnote-420) For my purpose it is enough to recognize that Jesus offered an expansive and unrestrained welcome to those who were looked down upon in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. He spent much time with those whose standing as members of God’s chosen people was dubious at best, as well as with those who were, by virtue of their profession, for example, considered clearly in a class beyond the boundaries that marked the true Israel.[[421]](#footnote-421)

It is to these ‘sinners’ that Jesus extended his unreserved welcome, sharing table fellowship and apparently much joy. Imbedded in this welcome was the offer of forgiveness. Paralleling the personal understanding of repentance has been the development of traditional Christian understandings of forgiveness. Like repentance, forgiveness is seen as a particular experience: a gift given to individuals, transcending any specific historical context, experienced at any time, in any circumstance, thus the prominence of pietistic interpretations regarding a sense of forgiveness or abstract theological understandings regarding the fact of forgiveness or one’s belief in forgiveness. Again, these understandings are not without merit, and it is not my intent to imply that they should be discarded; however, the value of Wright’s argument is the balance it provides to the overarching individualistic emphasis in Western Christian thought.

In Wright’s view, forgiveness, like repentance, has a communal eschatological dimension. The exilic prophets (e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah) interpreted exile as Israel’s punishment for her sins; thus the forgiveness of sins was intimately bound up in the return from exile. When the kingdom of God dawned in its fullness, Israel’s sins would be forgiven and the land restored. Put the other way around, the end of exile – in the fullest sense of the word – signaled that Israel’s sins had been forgiven. This eschatological component is what made Jesus’ offer of forgiveness so dramatic. Rather than extending a miscellaneous, private blessing to individuals, in Wright’s words,

Jesus was offering the return from exile, the renewed covenant, the eschatological ‘forgiveness of sins’ – in other words, the kingdom of god. And he was offering this final eschatological blessing outside the official structures, to all the wrong people, and on his own authority…he welcomed people into his retinue as, by implication, part of the restored people of YHWH.[[422]](#footnote-422)

This was a subversive offer indeed – not because Jesus was offering a grace and mercy that was impossible for individuals to find within Judaism. Quite the contrary, there were ample ways to receive personal forgiveness within the existing system. The power of Jesus message lay not in the offer of a different kind of religious system, but in the offer of ‘a new world order, the end of Israel’s long desolation, the true and final “forgiveness of sins”, the inauguration of the kingdom of god.’[[423]](#footnote-423)

As hinted at earlier, Wright’s overall view of eschatology and apocalyptic, especially his thoughts about Jesus’s own eschatological understandings, are a flashpoint for controversy. It is impossible in this context to engage in a thoroughgoing evaluation of his arguments, but a few highlights are important. By way of reminder, Wright asserts that a historical and physical grounding of apocalyptic and eschatological language is necessary for full understanding, despite the use of metaphorical or cosmic imagery. For Wright such language was a means of investing historical events with theological significance, not to tell about the end of the physical world, the destruction of the cosmos, or the end of time as it is currently understood. At a general level he is criticized for seeming to leave no middle ground, for offering a false dichotomy between a historical view of apocalyptic and the more conventional ‘cosmic’ sense, as though they were mutually exclusive.[[424]](#footnote-424) This critique is sharpened when aimed at Wright’s view of Jesus’ eschatological understanding, which looks only toward the destruction of Jerusalem, not toward the end of the space-time continuum, and whose expectations for the future focus solely on his journey to Jerusalem and its ultimate destruction in 70AD. Wright remains silent on whether Jesus could have expected more than that.[[425]](#footnote-425)

Against the strong tide of Christian interpretive tradition Wright asserts that when Jesus spoke in the language of ‘return,’ he was not referring to a distant ‘second coming,’ but to the return of God that he saw as embodied in his own mission. One implication of Wright’s interpretation is that it becomes possible to take Jesus seriously as an apocalyptic prophet without having to confront the possibility that he might have been wrong – the destruction of Jerusalem vindicates him.[[426]](#footnote-426) However, Wright’s views also leave him open to significant and appropriate criticism.

In response to Wright’s claim that Jesus believed that the true enemy of Israel was not Rome, but a cosmic spiritual enemy, the satan, Paul Eddy poses this perceptive question, ‘If the real enemy is not a merely historical entity (Rome, Caiaphas), but rather a nefarious, cosmic, personal power, how can one expect a purely historical solution to sufficiently address the real problem?’[[427]](#footnote-427) Eddy's question is a good one, especially when reality demonstrates that evil is as much a part of the cosmic landscape as it has ever been – some might even say more. Eddy suggests a middle ground to resolve what he sees as a false choice (either history or the end of the space-time universe) in Wright's assessment: ‘Cosmic problems, it would seem, demand cosmic solutions, wherein the very structure of the world and its history, as it has hitherto been known, must be done away with, and a new cosmic-structural (not merely historical-political) order set in its place.’[[428]](#footnote-428)

Connected with the difficulty in understanding Jesus’ concept of eschatology is the presence of language describing the kingdom as ‘here-but-not-yet-here.’ On the one hand for Jesus, the kingdom was near, immanent, at hand. On the other it was something yet to come; it was to be entered into or sought. This is of a piece with the ongoing conversation about eschatology generally and the debate regarding Wright’s views more specifically. How is this dual emphasis to be understood? Dunn once again offers a balancing note when he asserts that,

Jesus was evidently quite certain that what God does/has done/will do is of far greater importance than anything contrived on earth…For him it was all-important to align individual and societal goals by that reference point. Jesus was certain that God had a purpose for his creation which was unfolding, indeed, was reaching towards its climax, and that his own mission was an expression of that purpose and a vital agency towards its fulfillment.[[429]](#footnote-429)

It is clear from the Jesus tradition that he was remembered as having emphasized both the ‘now-ness’ and the ‘not-yet-ness’ of the kingdom. It is a mistake to favor one over the other as Crossan has done in his explication of the sapiential kingdom, which ‘looks to the present rather than the future and imagines how one could live here and now within an already or always available divine dominion…It is a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future.’[[430]](#footnote-430)

It is not possible here to resolve the question of how Jesus’ present/future language of the kingdom is to be fully interpreted or to resolve the debate regarding views about Jesus’ eschatological understanding or use of apocalyptic language. Where Wright is concerned, Eddy’s question of theodicy looms exceedingly large and should be seriously considered. Moreover, Sanders helpfully observes that the issue is not ‘the role of “the end of the world” in Jesus’ view, but rather this: did he think that *God* was going to do something decisive in history?’[[431]](#footnote-431) Despite their differences, it would seem that Wright would hardly respond ‘No.’ Further, Dale Allison rightly recognizes from the outset the difficulty in discerning exactly what Jesus thought about cosmological states, insisting that ‘what really matters is…that he longed for, and lived in the light of, a radically new world that *only God* could bring.’[[432]](#footnote-432)

The above criticism notwithstanding, it remains important not to miss the value inherent in the challenge that Wright’s unique approach to eschatology provides. He properly asserts that eschatology (however it might be construed) was at the heart of Jesus’ preaching, which is valuable in its rejection of the tendency to overly envelop the kingdom in a shroud of existentialism.[[433]](#footnote-433) So too Wright provides a counterbalance to attempts to understand the kingdom in sapiential terms where one enters by ‘wisdom or goodness, by virtue, justice, or freedom’ as Crossan does.[[434]](#footnote-434)

Much of Christian thinking about eschatology and the kingdom revolves around the salvation of the individual. This salvation is disconnected from ongoing history in such a way that the individual might be living in any time or place. This is not without merit in itself and, I believe, is one of the miraculous ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in the world. However, the communal element that lies within Wright’s understanding of eschatology is helpful as a counterbalance to an individualism that, carried to extremes as it sometimes has in Western thought, atomizes people and denies the element of relationship that underlies faith in the triune God. Further, Wright’s views offset an individualism that has, as will soon be discussed, too often screened out an important concept foundational to Paul’s understanding of the significance of Jesus and the community that gathered around him: the promised uniting of the family of Abraham.[[435]](#footnote-435)

Although it may not be possible to completely understand the mind of the ‘average’ Second Temple Jew, Wright’s claim is a valuable contribution:

What mattered more than his or her own isolated, individual ‘salvation’ was the whole future direction of the purposes of YHWH for Israel and the world…what mattered was when and how the present evil age would come to an end and the new age be born.[[436]](#footnote-436)

Wright’s picture of Jesus provides a healthy reminder that even as Jesus responded to people who were looking for an individual ‘salvation’ for themselves, as I am certain many were, he responded with a ‘hope that fell within the larger picture of God’s future’ for all of Israel.[[437]](#footnote-437)

Having addressed the issue of Wright’s views on apocalyptic and eschatology, let us return to the issue of the forgiveness of sins for a brief summarizing word. As stated previously, the power of Jesus’ message lay not in the offer of a different kind of religious system, but in one of an entirely remade world where the true and final ‘forgiveness of sins’ would be a reality in the inauguration of the kingdom of God. What is significant here is that integral to Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom was an expansive welcome, including at its heart the forgiveness of sins. Thus by implication this unreserved welcome was a vital part of that kingdom. This may not appear dramatic from the vantage point of the twenty-first century; however, to the ears of many in the first century, it was a scandalous redefinition of the kingdom itself. Jesus was retelling the story in a way that shifted commitment from Temple and Torah to *himself*. It was as though he was standing on his own authority rather than that of any of the foundational symbols of the existing worldview; and in asserting that authority he proclaimed that all who put their trust in him were welcomed as part of the kingdom.

This welcome with its invitation to repent and its offer of the forgiveness of sins was not ‘cheap grace’ as they say, bereft of demand or trial. It came with a challenge. There could be no renewal of the covenant, no restoration of Israel, no fulfillment of the promises or realization of hope apart from the call to those who chose to give loyalty to Jesus to live as the *new covenant people* – to be Israel in a new way.[[438]](#footnote-438)

The call to live as the new-covenant people is not notably difficult in itself; but it can become contentious as it touches on the question of whether Jesus intended to found a ‘church.’ Wright and others astutely point out that Jesus did not intend to found a church because there already was one, namely Israel itself.[[439]](#footnote-439) What he did intend to do is to reform Israel by establishing ‘cells of followers, mostly continuing to live in their towns and villages, who by their adoption of his praxis, his way of being Israel, would be distinctive within their local communities.’[[440]](#footnote-440)

Jesus’ new way of being Israel would involve a dramatic change in behavior.[[441]](#footnote-441) The new-covenant people were to behave as if the kingdom was already fully present. Marked by nonviolence, they were to be a forgiving people with a strong sense of communal life. As ‘a boundary-shattering movement,’[[442]](#footnote-442) they were to share what they had, eliminate ethnic and national restrictions, and embrace the Jubilee principle of the forgiveness of debts in their life together. They were to be loyal to Jesus, focusing on him as the bringer of the kingdom. This new way of being Israel would be a sure sign of the kingdom as groups of people loyal to Jesus gathered together for encouragement, as they behaved as though they were members of the same family, as they shared a common life and practiced mutual forgiveness.

The final element in Jesus’ overarching scheme is summons. To follow Jesus presented an opportunity to become a character in the divine drama that was unfolding by living as a part of God’s redeemed people. One could follow in a variety of ways. Some were summoned to be loyal to Jesus in the context in which they found themselves. Others were summoned to physically leave their homes and families as they followed Jesus. There was a further summons to assist in proclaiming the dawn of the reign of God. It was a summons for mobilization with those loyal to Jesus following his example of telling the kingdom story and living in the kingdom way. And lastly there was a summons to take up the cross. Following Jesus was risky business, as it would have been for anyone involved in any kind of first-century subversive movement.

In all, Jesus’ understanding of the reign of God involved a complete overhaul of the existing foundational symbols of the first-century Jewish worldview. God’s rule was transformative, restoring wholeness and creating a new covenant community where immeasurable reconciliation was possible. For Jesus, this new covenant community was the sign that God’s kingdom was dawning; it stood in continuity with Israel as a source of renewal and restoration. As a sign of the kingdom, it was to be a nonviolent community where mutual forgiveness was practiced, common life and resources shared and economic debts forgiven in the spirit of Jubilee. As Jesus’ vision of God’s rule was embraced, boundaries would no longer be relevant as new-covenant communities engaged in a life together that would provide a light to all the nations. The life-shaping power of God’s rule provided a new vision for identity that led to the transformation of behavior. For Jesus, it was not simply about the *idea* of the kingdom; it was about the *task* of the kingdom. As signs of the kingdom, new covenant communities were to implement what Jesus had achieved. Wright describes it well. ‘The aim is not simply to believe as many true things as possible, but to act in obedience, implementing the achievement of Jesus while spurred and sustained by true belief.’[[443]](#footnote-443)

The exploration of Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom provides a solid basis on which to develop the theological stance of embrace as a foundation for evangelism. Perhaps the most significant is the communal nature of Jesus’ vision. Two aspects of this communal element are especially important. First, the assertion that the *nature* of the community Jesus envisioned is intrinsic to the reign of God. As previously stated, it was a community marked by mutual forgiveness, and the sharing of common life and goods, by nonviolence and the practice of reaching across boundaries. These characteristics are fundamentally relational, which places a significant challenge before an understanding of evangelism that has historically been undertaken didactically with its predominant focus being the individual saving of souls by leading people to belief.

Jesus’ vision of forgiveness, sharing, nonviolence and outreach is not something that can be accomplished by isolated individuals. Cultivating a life in the kingdom, in Jesus’ view, was not about cultivating a private spirituality. This understanding is integral to Wesleyan theology and stems from John Wesley’s view that ‘any model of spirituality that relied on the individual pursuit of holiness’ was inappropriate.[[444]](#footnote-444) For Wesley, the Christian community was ‘a living relationship’[[445]](#footnote-445) in which its members could not subsist ‘without living and conversing with others.’[[446]](#footnote-446) From the Wesleyan perspective, Richard Hays is correct when he describes the challenge for evangelism as a tremendous one for ‘a church hypnotized by Enlightenment mantras about the rights of the individual and wallowing in postmodern self-indulgence.’[[447]](#footnote-447)

From the standpoint of embrace, the Christian life centers on one’s relationship with the triune God; similarly, the evangelistic task is grounded in the kenotic self-giving of the triune God which results in relationship – between the self and God, the self and the other, and through the working of the Holy Spirit, the other and God. This process of relationship building must be lived out in community. Without accepting the whole of his assertions, Marcus Borg is insightful in his description of evangelism as emphasizing ‘*living within the Christian story*,’ a story that is lived in community.[[448]](#footnote-448) The Wesleyan perspective affirms this as well, seeing the good news of the gospel as something to be believed and embraced not as ‘the narrative of an individual but…[of] the body of Christ, whereby a personal story is graciously caught up in the larger story of salvation history.’[[449]](#footnote-449)

The second aspect of the communal nature of Jesus’ vision relates to the creation of an actual community of followers, which he viewed as being a sign of the dawning of God’s rule. Jesus was not the first dynamic preacher to gain a following in first-century Palestine, the point being that it is commonsensical that a prophetic leader would lead people, and that those people might one day become a community of some sort that might even continue with its own history. This, however, is different than equating the kingdom exclusively with the church. Such a comparison is not only anachronistic, but also significantly undermines the evangelistic task by muffling the dynamic nature of the kingdom with the heavy cloth of twenty-first-century institutionalism.

Recognizing this, Nicholas Perrin correctly identifies a strength of Wright’s vision as being the fact that in ‘casting Jesus as a prophet to Israel for Israel, Tom [Wright] has very clearly framed his saving intentions within the context of community.’ Perrin is also correct in asserting that in following Wright on this score, ‘we are much better poised to advance ecclesiology not as an extraneous afterthought to the dogmatic enterprise, but as integral to it.’ Though for some this might be discomfiting given the current culture’s general skepticism regarding ‘the ecclesiological traditions of Rome and Orthodoxy,’ I agree with Perrin that Protestantism generally, and I would add the United Methodist Church specifically, is ‘in the midst of [a] present-day ecclesiological identity crisis,’ which makes Wright’s challenge quite timely.[[450]](#footnote-450) Having begun as a ‘movement’ by a leader with no intention of forming a new sect, but rather to reform the existing church and ‘spread scriptural holiness over the land,’[[451]](#footnote-451) United Methodism has almost from the beginning struggled with its understanding of itself as an ecclesial body. Its structure of connectedness has been reflected upon more from a historical perspective than from a theological one and currently ecclesiology is one of the least well-defined areas of United Methodist doctrine.[[452]](#footnote-452) Even though the UMC would not deny the importance of the communal nature of Christian faith, I believe it is doubtful that it has any developed sense of *itself* as the integral communal context in which Jesus’ saving intentions are to be realized. From the perspective of evangelism, then, Wright’s challenge is helpful in addressing rampant individualism on the one hand and, in regard to the United Methodist Church, the theological confusion reflected in perceptions such as those of Jon Stewart mentioned earlier on the other.[[453]](#footnote-453)

Jesus’ vision of the kingdom, particularly as Wright explicates it, is very ‘this world grounded.’ Because God is the creator of all that is, God’s kingdom certainly transcends the confines of the physical universe; however, as Jesus envisioned and announced the dawn of that reign, the context was the historical present, the world as it is. Wright perceptively outlines the message of the canonical writers about Jesus:

They were saying that at one moment *in actual history* a great door swung open on its hinge, and the Creator of the cosmos declared that the way was now open into his remade creation. He was making all things new. The story of Jesus is about the real world, the actual space-time universe, not about the private spiritual experience of a specific group of people. The canonical story *is* the public story of the real Jesus and the real world, and to live within the gospel story – all that wonderful postliberal language about being the people of the story and so forth – is not to enter a private world, separated off from the rest of the space-time universe, but to enter the public world of space, time and matter, facing all its risks.[[454]](#footnote-454)

This kind of announcement had implications for the here and now.[[455]](#footnote-455) Borg correctly emphasizes that one of the ways Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom was ‘boundary-shattering’ was its emphasis on compassion: ‘Like the Spirit…compassion shatters boundaries. In short, the Jesus movement was a community of compassion, and to take Jesus seriously means to become part of such a community.’[[456]](#footnote-456) Such here and now implications challenge views of evangelism that appear more interested in the second coming than in the incarnation and significantly ground the metaphor of embrace as a theological stance to undergird evangelism, especially as that stance emphasizes the kenotic self-giving that lies at the heart of compassion.

Much can be gained by looking at Jesus’ understanding of the reign of God as a foundation for a theological stance of embrace to undergird evangelism. The Jesus tradition provides a beginning; however, an examination would not be complete without the views of his first followers, the exploration of which is our next task.

**The Community of the Messiah as Announced by Paul**

Just as Jesus was immersed in a first-century Jewish worldview, so were his first followers. They already believed in a god who was actively present in history, not just in the past tense, but in the present and future as well. Their God was involved in their personal and communal lives, had objectives and aims for the world, and was able to use human beings (whether they were aware of it or not) as well as the rest of creation to achieve those aims and objectives. As they heard his message, Jesus’ first followers hoped for the renewal of creation, a renewal that would have a very physical and concrete component, for instance in relation to issues of economy, justice and peace, with very tangible effects in the life of Israel.

Through the lens of Temple, land, Torah and identity, Jesus’ first followers heard him dramatically redefine all their foundational symbols in relation to himself. Loyalty and trust in him for forgiveness and restoration made the Temple no longer relevant.[[457]](#footnote-457) The land extended beyond any geographic or nationalistic borders to encompass the entire world. The covenant with God continued, now sealed by Jesus himself,[[458]](#footnote-458) and the boundaries of identity and chosenness were shattered by the expansive welcome and invitation that marked his entire ministry.

Even as these major symbols were redefined and given new meaning, the covenantal aspect of Israel’s monotheism was significant to the landscape of the first followers of Jesus. This covenantal monotheism was highly important in addressing the problem of evil, which Jesus’s first followers were keen to do. Focusing predominantly on the present and future, the primary question was this: given that evil exists in the world, what is God going to do about it? Israel’s covenantal monotheism provided an answer: God had called a special people – Israel – through whom God would act in some way within creation to eliminate evil and restore order, justice and peace to the world. In other words, Israel was God’s chosen means to restore and heal creation.[[459]](#footnote-459)

The sense of being God’s means of healing and restoration for creation was an important part of the worldview of Jesus’ first followers because it provided the foundation for their understanding of their relationship with the Gentiles. What happened to the Gentiles was bound up in what happened to Israel:

There was one creator god, who has chosen Israel to be his people, giving her his Torah and establishing her in his holy land. He will act for her and through her to re-establish his judgment and justice, his wisdom and his shalom, throughout the world.[[460]](#footnote-460)

That Israel would be the means through which God would reestablish God’s reign of shalom was rooted in the Second Temple sense of living in the midst of the story of God’s unfolding relationship with creation. For the early followers of Jesus, the story of Jesus was the climax of Israel’s story, which thus made it the climax of the overarching story of the entire world.[[461]](#footnote-461) With this as a foundational concept, the first followers of Jesus began shaping a new worldview.

People of the Way: an Emerging Worldview

As first-century Jews, the first followers of Jesus received his message through the lens of their unwavering belief that the one true God was the creator of the world and that Israel’s history was at the center of that world. It was this foundational understanding of Israel’s significance to the unfolding story of creation that led them to believe that what they had found to be true in their experience of Jesus the Messiah was true for the whole world. Thus early Christians were compelled not simply to remain in the context of Israel and her geographical and Torah-prescribed boundaries, but to announce the resurrection to the entire world. In this sense, the emerging Christian worldview was at its core missional.[[462]](#footnote-462)

Flowing naturally from the foundational first-century Jewish worldview of God’s relationship with creation as the context for the unfolding story around them was the view of early Christians that Jesus was the means through which the decisive end of the story might come into view. The Jesus event was not itself the *end* of the story, but the climax whereby one might finally see how the ultimate end might unfold. What remained was the final act of the drama in which all of creation would be brought into right relationship with its creator, with the redeemed Israel (in the form of the rapidly multiplying new communities of Jesus-followers) playing a vital role.[[463]](#footnote-463)

Other elements of the emerging Christian worldview can be evidenced in the behavior of Jesus’ first followers. First and foremost, they practiced regular communal worship that involved ritualistic activity. As early as the fifties of the first century, which is to say extremely early on, baptism and the Eucharist had become commonplace ritual acts, so much so that they could be taken for granted in discussion and correspondence. (Rom. 6.3-11, 1 Cor. 10.15-22) This sacramental activity grounded the experience of worship, which was at the center of the community’s life together. As they worshipped, the first followers of Jesus maintained their monotheism, emphasizing this commonality with Judaism. Yet their worship of the one true God, creator of the universe, was intrinsically connected to Jesus. While this reference to Jesus in the midst of creational monotheistic worship would prove to be an interpretive challenge for later theologians, it existed in practice from the very beginning and was an integral part of the early Christian worldview.[[464]](#footnote-464)

A clear ethical code also reflected in practical ways the emerging Christian worldview. From very early on, it was evident that Christians behaved differently from the rest of the culture. They did not engage in sexual immorality or expose their children. They also had a very different understanding of government, never seeking to overthrow it. Suicide was not practiced, nor was animal sacrifice. In contrast to the strongly ‘gendered’ aspect of society at that time, early Christians were a ‘community of equals’ in which women had accepted roles in leadership alongside men.[[465]](#footnote-465) Of significant note in a culture marked by the limitation of trust and affection to the circle of one’s family and close friends, Christians regularly crossed customary boundaries in offering their care to others. Furthermore, Jesus’ first followers had a different understanding of suffering and death. They were prepared to suffer and were willing to die rather than renounce their faith, which distinguished them from the rest of the culture and would soon be taken for granted as attributes of the followers of the Messiah Jesus.[[466]](#footnote-466) Along with actual differences in behavior, there was also an assumption of behavioral difference. Wright describes this perceptively:

When a Christian teacher is bemoaning the fact that his congregation is not pulling its weight morally, there is a sense of a norm, an accepted praxis, to which the people are being disobedient…Early Christians took it for granted that in the details of their behaviour they should be significantly different, in clearly defined ways, from their pagan neighbours.[[467]](#footnote-467)

As can be seen, the emerging Christian worldview was new, but not new. It did not appear out of thin air; rather it was firmly rooted in the soil of Second Temple Judaism.[[468]](#footnote-468) Yet at the same time it was also distinctively different. Jesus’ first followers saw themselves as the true people of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the redeemed Israel. They were ardently monotheistic, following the traditions of Israel that set them apart from their pagan neighbors; yet their loyalty to the crucified Jesus, their understanding of the divine spirit, and their deliberate transcendence of traditional Jewish and pagan boundaries set them apart even from the Jewish world. True to their Jewish roots, they saw the world as created by the one true God, whom they worshipped but whom the rest of the world did not recognize. But rather than await a future solution, they understood that Israel’s hope had been realized. Wright outlines the ultimate end of the story to which the emerging Christian worldview points:

The true God has acted decisively to defeat the pagan gods, and to create a new people, through whom he is to rescue the world from evil. This he has done through the true King, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, in particular through his death and resurrection. The process of implementing this victory, by means of the same god continuing to act through his own spirit in his people, is not yet complete. One day the King will return to judge the world, and to set up a kingdom which is on a different level to the kingdoms of the present world order. When this happens those who have died as Christians will be raised to a new physical life. The present powers will be forced to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and justice and peace will triumph at last.[[469]](#footnote-469)

The emerging Christian worldview, then, was in a very real sense a metamorphosis of the foundational first-century Jewish worldview. One of the key explicators of this metamorphosis was the apostle Paul. With great skill and care he subverted the story from within.[[470]](#footnote-470) He spoke as one thoroughly entrenched in the Jewish story, but as one who believed that the climactic moment had finally arrived.[[471]](#footnote-471) Again, the climax was not the ultimate ending, but it pointed to that ending. The end had arrived, but had not yet arrived. God’s spirit had been poured out in the Jesus event and was now accessible to all people. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s word was going out to all nations; Israel had been redeemed, transformed into a new covenant people made up of all types of persons without distinction. Because the redeemed Israel was vital to the final act of the drama in which creation would be brought into right relationship with its creator, the time was at hand to put into practice the great achievement God had wrought in Jesus the Messiah.[[472]](#footnote-472)

The covenantal promises were crucial to the emerging Christian worldview, and for Paul the most significant covenantal promise was the one that reflected the true purpose of Israel. God had promised to make Abraham a great nation in order to be a light to the world. Israel’s very chosenness was not for its own sake, but for the sake of the entire world.[[473]](#footnote-473) All of creation was in decay and in need of release from its bondage. Thus as Israel had experienced exodus from Egypt, the death and resurrection of Jesus was the climax that pointed to a greater exodus to come, when all of creation – the entire cosmos – would be liberated from its bondage to decay, futility and corruption.[[474]](#footnote-474)

The emerging Christian worldview has numerous implications for understanding the kingdom. Because tradition has placed Paul in the spotlight as the predominant mouthpiece of the first followers of Jesus, it is appropriate to turn to his insights about the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.

Paul: Climax and Kingdom

At the outset, one of the difficulties in understanding Paul is that he lived, so to speak, in three different worlds: the world of Second Temple Judaism that has already been described, the world of Greek or Hellenistic culture that permeated much of the Eastern Mediterranean region, and the world of the Roman Empire. Paul operated out of all three of these worlds, never abandoning any of them, but also never shying away from the task of sharply criticizing them.[[475]](#footnote-475)

It is possible also to add a fourth world in which Paul inhabited, that of ‘the called-out ones’ (εκκλησια – ekklēsia) – the family of the Messiah Jesus, which, for Paul formed a world of its own. For Paul, being ‘in the Messiah’ meant ‘embracing an identity rooted in Judaism, lived out in the Hellenistic world, and placing a counterclaim against Caesar’s aspiration to world domination, while being both more and less than a simple combination of elements from within those three.’[[476]](#footnote-476) The uniqueness of this fourth world could, for Paul, be traced back to Jesus himself and his all-encompassing work as Messiah.

I have stressed the importance of the overarching story of Israel as the backdrop and foundation for Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection, as well as for those who heard him and chose to follow him. The same holds true for Paul. In grasping Paul’s understanding of the reign of God, it is crucial to recognize that his intent was not to advance an isolated plan of salvation whereby individuals come into right relationship with God, a plan divorced from history and the created order and focusing only on the ‘immortality of the soul’ as in classical Greek understandings. Rather it was to describe how, through the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had fulfilled God’s promises at last.[[477]](#footnote-477) Wright aptly expresses Paul’s understanding of ‘salvation not as an ahistorical rescue from the world but as the transhistorical redemption of the world.’[[478]](#footnote-478)

This understanding of salvation is crucial in providing a conception of the kingdom of God to undergird the stance of embrace as a foundation for evangelism. For Paul, the kingdom will come in its fullness when all of creation (including but not limited to humanity) is redeemed. That is the end of the story that has arrived, but is also not yet here. For Paul, Christians are not to think of salvation in terms of escaping the world to a heavenly realm, but to be open to experiencing salvation in the midst of creation itself. Christians are not to live in the midst of creation with their eyes solely on the promise of eternal life that awaits them in a heavenly kingdom in the distant future; they live as part of the kingdom that is both here but not yet here, as visible signs of the great victory God has brought about in Jesus the Messiah.

At the heart of Paul’s understanding of the kingdom is a view of God as both covenantal and creator God, the two of which are inescapably intertwined. For Paul, something has gone terribly wrong with creation and with humankind itself. The covenant with Israel is somehow the answer to this ‘pervasive out-of-joint-ness.’[[479]](#footnote-479) At the same time, something has gone terribly wrong with the covenant, whether it be sin from within or oppression from without or a combination of both. Reclaiming God as creator is what is necessary to address this reality. In Paul’s view the kingdom rests on the dependability of the creator and covenantal God to act in harmony with God’s creating power and covenant commitment to restore the world to the Creator’s original intention.[[480]](#footnote-480) It is in this sense that the reign of God is a reign of justice; not justice in the abstract sense of the word, but justice grounded on the understanding that ‘because God is the creator he has the obligation to put the world to rights once and for all…this “justice” springs…from the creator’s obligation to the creation and from the covenant God’s obligation to be faithful to his promises.’[[481]](#footnote-481)

Connected to the entwined nature of creation and covenant is the understanding of relationship as a foundational element of the kingdom. As James Dunn correctly points out, for Paul ‘humans were created for relationship with God, a relationship which is the essence of human life, a relationship which gives humankind fulfilment of being, as creature (in relation to God) and as human (in relation to the rest of the world).’[[482]](#footnote-482) Yet there remains the sense that something is deeply amiss with both creation and the covenant. Dunn again fittingly asserts Paul’s thinking:

Humankind has made the mistake of thinking it could achieve a more satisfying relation with the world if it freed itself from its relation with God. It has turned from God and focused attention exclusively on the world, revolting against its role as creature and thinking to stand as creator in its own right.[[483]](#footnote-483)

Wright describes this as ‘the failure of human beings to be the truly image-bearing creatures God intended.’[[484]](#footnote-484)

For Paul, the Jesus story is the climax of and the solution to this story of broken relationship. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the restoration of creation and all the relationships within it has begun. In Jesus, God’s kingdom, the environment for the healing and restoration of relationship, has been inaugurated. When it comes in its fullness, reconciliation will be the order of the day – between God and creation and among creatures themselves. In this sense the reign of God is both covenant and creation fully renewed and restored. It is the renewed covenant because all humanity shares equally in it. It is renewed creation because God claims all of creation as God’s ‘holy land.’[[485]](#footnote-485)

As a foundational element of God’s kingdom, the renewal and restoration of both covenant and creation points to the continuity between the old and new.[[486]](#footnote-486) There is no disjointedness between old and new covenant, nor is there an abolition of the existing creation in favor of something entirely new. The covenant promises made to Abraham have not been replaced, but fulfilled. Similarly, creation has not be replaced but renewed and restored. This is significant for evangelism in as much as it points to the present world, creation as it is now known, being the environment for the kingdom, the environment for healing and restoration, the environment for reconciliation. When the reign of God comes in its fullness, creation as it is now known may be, no doubt will be, dramatically changed and renewed in ways human beings cannot possibly imagine, or at least in ways humans can only point to through the use of the most creative and illustrative, even cosmic language; but it will still be creation. It will still be this world.

If the created world then is the environment for the kingdom in all its fullness, it follows that it is also the environment for the kingdom that is here, but not yet fully here. The significance of this seemingly straightforward statement cannot be overstated. The kingdom is not something to be anticipated only in some distant time and foreign place. Participation in the reign of God is not an isolated, individualistic experience to which one looks forward with expectancy, much less with self-righteous assurance. Reconciliation, restoration and healing are not activities to be awaited, but to be put into practice now as visible, tangible signs of the transformative nature of the kingdom inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.

Paul’s unwavering belief that God had indeed wrought something earth shattering and life changing in the person of Jesus has at its core the Jewish concept of Messiah, a fact that is important for evangelism, but one that is often overlooked. Paul uses the Greek Χριστος (*Christos*) so many times (nearly 180 times in the writings attributed to him without dispute) that it often seems to be more like a proper name. This is astonishing because it indicates that in Paul’s time it was no longer controversial to claim that Jesus was Israel’s long-awaited Davidic Messiah.[[487]](#footnote-487) As remarkable as that is, its very existence, coupled with the ensuing focus on Χριστος as ‘the incarnate one’ or ‘God/Man’ or ‘one who reveals God,’ clouds a very important concept. It is clear that Paul uses Χριστος in a fresh and distinctive way; however, understandings such as ‘the incarnate one,’ or ‘God/Man’ or ‘one who reveals God’ (even as these remain valuable theological contributions), would have been foreign not only to the Jewish concept of Messiah, but also to the way Paul himself uses the word, however innovative that may have been.[[488]](#footnote-488)

Because the word Χριστος is simply the Greek word for the Hebrew ‫משיח‬ (*Mashiah*), which means Messiah, when Paul uses the word Χριστος, he is being true to his first-century Jewish roots and has in mind a royal Messiah.[[489]](#footnote-489) He is talking about Israel’s true king and by implication the world’s true king, the one who will be victorious over all the powers of evil in the world. This Messiah’s faith in God and faithfulness to God’s plan for creation is redemptive for the whole world. Because of his faithful obedience, an obedience that led to death on the cross, creation has been redeemed, and all (both Jews and Gentiles) are given ‘the promise of the Spirit.’ (Gal. 3.14) For Paul, Jesus as Messiah is the foundation for the renewed Temple placed in the context of the new Christian community – those who are ‘in the Messiah.’ God’s indwelling spirit invigorates individuals and the community as a whole and results in resurrection for those who are ‘in Jesus’; what is true of him becomes true of them. Wright describes the essence of Paul’s thought:

God’s plan for Israel and the world had come to its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth, Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord, in whom Israel’s destiny had been accomplished and in whom, therefore, Jew and Gentile alike could inherit the promises made to Abraham.[[490]](#footnote-490)

An implication of Paul’s focus on Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord that is significant for a solid theological stance for evangelism is hinted at above: the Messiah’s faithfulness. It is not surprising that Wright’s views in this area are part of a lively, ongoing debate; however, I believe his view is solid as well as helpful in understanding the kingdom of God, and it provides a strong foundation for embrace. Following Hays and others, Wright asserts that when Paul speaks of πιστις Χριστου (pistis Christou), his normal intent is to underscore the faithfulness of the Messiah to the purposes of God. He is not specifically talking about the faith by which one believes the gospel, thus becoming part of God’s renewed people. It is best to let Wright speak for himself on this point:

In Romans 3.2-3 Paul declares that Israel had been entrusted with God’s oracles; in other words, that Israel had been God’s chosen messenger to the nations. But Israel… had failed to understand God’s covenant purposes, and had sought to promote a covenant status for itself alone. What then is God to do? Is he to abandon the covenant and to decide, as so many theologians have proposed, on a drastically different ‘plan B’? By no means…God must stick to the plan. But that means that sooner or later he will require a representative Israelite who will be faithful, who will be obedient to God’s purpose not only for Israel but through Israel for the world…when the moment of unveiling arrives (3.21-22), what we see is God’s covenant faithfulness operating dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou, that is, through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. Precisely as Messiah, he offers God that representative faithfulness to the plan of salvation through which the plan can go ahead at last, Abraham can have a worldwide family (chapter 4), and the long entail of Adam’s sin and death can be undone (5.12-21) through his obedience, which as we know from 1.5 is for Paul very closely aligned with faith, faithfulness or fidelity.[[491]](#footnote-491)

Recognizing the significance of Jesus’ faithfulness is crucial to an understanding of the kingdom that is able to undergird the evangelistic task with greater integrity. For Paul, Jesus’ obedience and faith are vicariously efficacious and are central to Paul’s understanding of salvation and the inauguration of God’s kingdom. In recognizing the crucial nature of Jesus’ faithful obedience, one is not downplaying the importance of the individual response; rather, that response is placed in its proper perspective. Hays has done a great deal to explicate this position and notes perceptively:

Anyone who has heard the gospel story, as Paul understands it, should realize that we are justified not by anything that we do but by Jesus Christ…through the πíστις of Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us (Gal. 2:16, 20). That is the whole meaning (the dianoia) of the gospel.[[492]](#footnote-492)

In Jesus, the kingdom of God has triumphed over any and all kingdoms of this world. For Paul, this is a reality above and beyond the response of any particular individual, one that will come to fruition regardless of whether individuals choose to participate in that reality. Hays is helpful:

Because justification hinges upon this action of Jesus Christ, upon an event extra nos, it is a terrible and ironic blunder to read Paul as though his gospel made redemption contingent upon our act of deciding to dispose ourselves toward God in a particular way. The ‘grammar’ of Paul's gospel…places humanity in the role of ‘Receiver’…The logic of the gospel story requires that the deliverance of ‘those who believe’ depend not upon their knowing or believing but upon the action of Jesus Christ, who faithfully discharges the commission of God.[[493]](#footnote-493)

Again, however, this is not to minimize the need for a personal response on the part of each individual, but to put it in proper perspective. The human faith-response is integral; yet it is not the precondition for receiving God’s blessing. Instead ‘it is the appropriate mode of response to a blessing already given in Christ.’[[494]](#footnote-494) More important for a theological foundation for evangelism, human response is the,

…mode of participation in the pattern definitively enacted in Jesus Christ: as we respond in faith, we participate in an ongoing reenactment of Christ’s faithfulness…The gospel story is not just the story of a super-hero who once upon a time defeated the cosmic villains of Law, Sin, and Death and thus discharged us from all responsibility; it is also the enactment of a life-pattern into which we are drawn.[[495]](#footnote-495)

As might be expected, this understanding of the faithfulness of the Messiah has not gone unchallenged.[[496]](#footnote-496) Dunn especially rejects this position entirely, mounting a detailed argument grounded in the nuances of Greek translation. At issue is the way the Greek – πιστις Χριστου (pistis Christou) – is interpreted: either a subjective genitive reading (faith of Christ) or an objective genitive reading (faith in Christ). It is impossible in this context to fully elucidate the exceedingly detailed arguments of both sides of this issue; however, a few points are helpful.

First, Dunn’s rejection of the reading ‘faith of Christ’ rests heavily on a commitment to a univocal sense of the phrase at every point, with grammatical argument as his basis.[[497]](#footnote-497) However, such complete emphasis on a univocal sense does not allow for the possibility that Paul’s language may be multivalent, metaphorical and rich with connotative complexity,[[498]](#footnote-498) a position for which there is also solid grammatical grounds pertaining to the phrase πιστις Χριστου (pistis Christou), as well as numerous other examples of Paul’s use of metaphor and analogy, such as his description of being crucified with Christ (Gal. 5.24, 6.14) or carrying the dying of Jesus (2 Cor. 4.10-12). In these examples, it is not that people mimic Jesus in a literal way, but that ‘there is significant metaphorical correspondence between the life-pattern defined by Christ’s death and the suffering experienced by those who are in Christ. The precise nature of this correspondence must be discerned in the contingent circumstances of each believing community.’[[499]](#footnote-499) Regarding the issue at hand, it may be quite likely that in some instances (e.g. Gal. 3.14) Paul is offering the reader more than one answer – yes, one receives the promise through Christ’s faithfulness, and yes, one receives it through one’s own faith.

On the other hand, while Dunn remains thoroughly convinced that Paul meant his listeners to understand the phrase in question as faith in Christ, he finds the theology behind the interpretation faith of Christ ‘powerful, important and attractive.’ Further:

For anyone who wishes to take the humanness of Jesus with full seriousness ‘the faith of Jesus’ strikes a strong and resonant chord. Moreover, as a theological motif, it seems to me wholly compatible with Paul’s theology; that is, not a component of Paul’s theology but consistent with other emphases.[[500]](#footnote-500)

That Dunn can appreciate the theological value of an understanding of the faithfulness of the Messiah points to its value to evangelism as well as to the seriousness of the argument over the grammatical issue itself. The textual evidence is ambiguous, thus the continued debate; however, that is not the only element spurring on the dialogue. The theological issues at stake are quite high within the debate itself, but especially in reclaiming a more holistic understanding of the kingdom of God. Hays has offered a sketch of these theological concerns, several of which are germane when seeking a theological stance for evangelism: (1) the relation between Christology and soteriology, (2) the incarnation, (3) experiential-expressive versus ‘narrative’ theology, and (4) the sacrificial nature of Christian obedience. Let us look briefly at each of these.

(1) The relation between Christology and soteriology – If evangelistic integrity is to be fostered, it is crucial to grasp how the death of Jesus can be understood as the source of salvation. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Six, however, it is important to note the great ambiguity here. There is no one theory of the atonement that the church has chosen to formally dogmatize, but developing an appropriate understanding is crucial for evangelism. For Paul, individuals are saved not by their own faithfulness; it is ‘not by our own cognitive disposition or confessional orthodoxy’;[[501]](#footnote-501) rather, the human faith-response is just that, a response. The Wesleyan understanding couches this response in the language of trust. In responding, one trusts that Jesus’ offering of himself on the cross was sufficient in and of itself.[[502]](#footnote-502) Significantly, this response of trust draws its very nature from Jesus’ own self-giving obedience.

(2) The incarnation – The significance of Christ’s self-giving obedience is grounded in a clear understanding that the one called ‘the Christ’ was in fact a particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Such a conceptualization of the incarnation with a clear grounding in the humanity of Jesus avoids any sense of Docetism, which in turn can easily lead to misunderstanding salvation and the kingdom of God as a rescue *from* the world rather than as the redemption *of* the world. Though not in its fullest sense, salvation is experienced now, in the midst of creation itself, not at some future date in some completely other, heavenly realm. God’s kingdom has in fact been established; it is here, albeit in incomplete form; therefore individuals do not live in a static state, solely anticipating eternal life in a distant heavenly kingdom; they live as dynamic participants of the new creation God has inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.[[503]](#footnote-503)

(3) Experiential-expressive versus ‘narrative’ theology – The theological value of recognizing Paul’s concept of the faithfulness of Jesus as foundational for everything else is that it avoids the temptation to emphasize the ‘salvific efficacy of individual faith’ by which the gospel is reduced to ‘an account of individual religious experience,’ or the more significant misstep of turning faith into ‘a bizarre sort of work, in which Christians jump through the entranceway of salvation by cultivating the right sort of spiritual disposition.’[[504]](#footnote-504) When understandings of salvation and the kingdom are rooted in the faith of Christ, one is able to move from a purely individual, interior emphasis toward a more balanced, holistic understanding that recognizes that salvation is not only personal, but that it also has important corporate, communal, and public characteristics as well.

(4) The sacrificial nature of Christian obedience – As I have asserted throughout, one way in which the integrity of evangelism is undermined is the perceived gap between proclamation and behavior, between what the church says it believes and the way the church responds to the lived realities of various people. I believe an emphasis on the faithfulness of Jesus, in which the connection between Jesus and the community of faith is highlighted, can provide a more tangible bridge. Evangelistic practice is a call to enter into the kingdom God, a kingdom defined by the faith-obedience of Jesus. The human faith-response, then, is not confined to a purely interior experience of the salvation of one’s soul, but includes embracing a life of costly self-sacrificial burden bearing as embodied by Jesus.

I have taken a significant-enough detour in the discussion of Paul’s understanding of the kingdom that one might be wondering if such a detour was in fact necessary. Though certainly a fair question, I believe the relevance can be initially seen in the discussion of theological issues raised by an understanding of the importance for Paul of the faithfulness of the Messiah.

To briefly summarize, in the outworking of various understandings of the nature of salvation and the kingdom, much of Western thought has accentuated the individual, emphasizing a Greek, especially Platonic, philosophy, which is easily imaged as amorphous, disembodied, individual souls hovering en masse around the throne of God in heaven. Although this image is not wholly wrong, as an *overriding* perspective it screens out an awareness of Paul’s vision of the kingdom as the restoration and redemption of creation and all that is in it (including but not limited to human beings). Thus rather than understanding the full nature of the kingdom as Paul does, as a new, reconciled creation – ‘the present cosmos renewed from top to bottom by the God who is both creator and redeemer’[[505]](#footnote-505) – it is associated more with some sort of swallowing up of the physical universe by a ‘spiritual,’ nonmaterial reality construed as heaven. If salvation marks one’s entrance into the kingdom of God, the danger of this thinking is that in salvation one gains entrance to a kingdom that is an entirely otherworldly phenomenon, unrelated to the present creation and to be experienced only after death.

But Paul has a very different understanding of the kingdom. However mind boggling it may be, however beyond one’s capacity to envision, even more difficult to describe, the kingdom is a very ‘this-world-reality’ that has been inaugurated in and through the life-transforming, earth-shattering work of Jesus the Messiah. Precisely as God’s Messiah, Jesus is the rightful king of all of creation, having successfully fought the ultimate battle with the forces of evil. As Messiah, he is God’s representative to Israel and to the entire world, and by his incarnation, life, death and resurrection he has fulfilled his mandate to bring deliverance and the Spirit to all who would receive it. Thus regardless of whether individuals, communities or nations realize it, Jesus is in charge of the cosmos, not just in some future time and disconnected place, but in the present time and in the present world. Those who would receive deliverance and God’s Spirit receive their own mandate, not to worship Jesus in the interior of their hearts with their eyes on some future life in heaven, but to actively put into practice visible, tangible signs of the kingdom God has inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.

For its part, a Wesleyan approach supports this rendering in its understanding of the Christian life as begun ‘in grace and freedom and…empowered to work by love.’[[506]](#footnote-506) This mandate ‘to work by love’ is communal in nature, and the individual, human faith-response, rather than being an end in itself or somehow completing a partial redemption initiated but not finalized by Christ’s faithfulness, is ‘both the response to a completed redemption and the purpose for which the redemptive action was initiated by God.’[[507]](#footnote-507)

A few additional words about Paul's understanding of Jesus as God’s Messiah are necessary to bring the overall discussion of his concept of the kingdom to a close. First, though Paul is not known for frequent discussion of the kingdom of God (in contrast to Jesus who spoke a great deal about it), this does not imply that he had abandoned this Jewish-rooted idea in favor of a new Hellenistic conception of the saving work of Jesus. For Paul, Jesus was indeed God’s Messiah, which made him rightful Lord of the entire world. He perceived his responsibility then, not as the proclamation of the kingdom in itself, but rather as calling all people, all nations, into loyal submission to Israel’s crucified and risen Messiah, the one who was the true Lord of all creation. Implicit in this was a deep understanding of what the kingdom looked like under the Lordship of Christ: ‘a worldwide community in which ethnic divisions would be abolished and a new family created as a sign to the watching world that Jesus was its rightful Lord and that new creation had been launched and would one day come to full flower.’[[508]](#footnote-508)

A final point relates to the world in which Paul proclaimed that message, a world in which the ideology of empire was ever present. The themes of freedom, justice, peace and salvation were not new to Paul, nor were they solely first-century Jewish concepts. These themes were everywhere apparent throughout the Roman Empire, woven into the ideology of empire itself and intimately connected to the person of the emperor. Because most people in the Empire assented to the idea that the emperor was ‘divine,’ it was the emperor who accomplished and guaranteed the values of freedom, justice, peace and salvation. This was the context in which Paul proclaimed his good news about the kingdom: the truth that there was one God, creator of the universe, who would be faithful to God’s promises, putting the world at rights and eliminating pagan oppression. This God had raised up a Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who was the world’s true king in contrast to the self-proclaimed status of Caesar. In the death and resurrection of the Messiah, one could see the unfolding of God’s saving justice and the launch of God’s new world, a new creation that was even now overwhelming the present creation with inescapable power.

This proclamation was an intricate combination of both radical political critique and serious Christian theology, which is often overlooked in traditional evangelistic practice that tends to separate the two in a false either/or dichotomy. Paul understood quite clearly that those to whom he preached lived in a world where something called salvation was readily available, but not without substantial strings attached. To obtain this salvation, people would be required to submit to its lord, Caesar, at all costs. In contrast, Paul was proclaiming a different Lord, with a different salvation.[[509]](#footnote-509) As people responded, what remained was for them to sort through how to live out this salvation in the daily practice of their lives, at every turn facing the pressure to succumb to the salvation that their culture was compelling them to embrace.

Thus, for Paul, the kingdom of God was inaugurated in the creation-transforming life, death and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the true lord of the entire world. The kingdom of the Messiah is here, but not fully here, yet it is overcoming the present creation with inescapable power. Those who are in the Messiah are conformed to the mold of his self-giving death and are part of his kingdom as visible and tangible signs of God’s victory in Jesus. They are to live as an unbounded community, thus providing a dynamic demonstration that the true God is acting to create a new version of humanity, a redeemed humanity, whose prototype is Jesus himself.

In offering embrace as a theological stance to ground evangelism, I have asserted that there has often been an unbalanced presentation of the gospel that has undermined the integrity of evangelistic practice. Drawn on a more balanced understanding of the kingdom of God, embrace emphasizes the unbounded nature of the community, takes seriously both its communal and individual aspects, and works to embody the self-giving nature of the Trinity as a demonstration of God’s continuing activity in the world.

Six

Restorative Witness in Light of

Seven Pivotal Events of the Gospel Message

Having explored understandings of the kingdom of God in Jesus and his early followers, I find it appropriate to turn to the overall gospel message to provide a solid theological foundation for embrace. I believe attending to the seven events of the gospel message outlined in the earliest Christian creeds strengthens embrace as a theological disposition to undergird evangelistic practice. As followers of Jesus continued to discern the depth of meaning of the Jesus event, these events were deemed to be cornerstones, pivotal to understanding the heart of Christian faith. These cornerstone events are creation, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost and new creation. When properly understood, these intertwined events impart wholeness to the Christian message, providing a level, so to speak, by which evangelistic effort, and its underlying theological foundations, might be judged. To point to the importance of these events, earlier I used the metaphor of evangelism as a substantial piece of art requiring various screws in order to be displayed correctly. The weight is too great to hang on only one, and if the screws are not correctly placed, the art will be uneven or even grossly skewed. However, if the screws are correctly placed – and the art is firmly attached to all of them, the art will hang as it should.

For instance, Harold Recinos rightly emphasizes the need for evangelism to take into account ‘the ethical-political dimensions of religious experience’ and to ‘remember that the witness of the church begins with those on the margins of society.’[[510]](#footnote-510) However, Recinos limits his discussion solely to the political/social arena with an emphasis on prophetic challenge. On the other hand, Scott Dawson’s anthology on evangelism gives little, if any, attention to issues in the political/social arena other than to provide various contexts for evangelistic practice. Rather, the focus is on the individual’s inward spiritual disposition.[[511]](#footnote-511) Both of these approaches are theologically important; however, neither is complete without the other. Similarly, I believe these seven events are crucial to a full proclamation of the gospel message, informing the theology of evangelism and restoring the necessary confidence, integrity and responsiveness to the power of the Holy Spirit, which undergirds all Christian witness.

As my research on these specific events has unfolded, dialogue partners have emerged at various points with whom I have found affinity and whose insights I believe hold great promise for a theological foundation for evangelism. Because Volf draws significantly on Moltmann, it is not surprising that Moltmann would surface as a source of insight for my exploration as well. Wright and Dunn continue to be extremely helpful, as well as Richard Bauckham, Douglas Farrow and Kirsteen Kim. In addressing these seven events, we turn first to creation.

**Creation**

Belief in a creating and redeeming God launches all that follows in Christian faith; thus an understanding of the nature of creation and this creating God is vital. The ongoing cultural debate over issues of creationism and evolution seemingly places science at odds with religion and might imply that the two disciplines are incompatible rather than more accurately depicting them as complementary.[[512]](#footnote-512) This ongoing cultural debate implies that the question of how creation came to be is of the utmost significance; however, Christian understandings of creation actually address much deeper issues.[[513]](#footnote-513) It is not that the question of ‘how’ is unimportant or inconsequential; indeed, Terence Fretheim is right in his reminder that ‘in giving shape to the content of the witness to God’s creative activity, the biblical writers made use of the knowledge of the natural world available to them in their culture.’[[514]](#footnote-514) The question of ‘how’ is undeniably an important question; however, it never stands entirely alone because in asking how, one is often led to ask ‘why?’ and ‘for what purpose?’ Those questions, significantly, lie beyond the domain of science, yet they do lie at the very heart of a Christian understanding of creation.[[515]](#footnote-515) As Moltmann has eloquently stated, ‘the sciences have shown us how to understand creation as nature. Now theology must show how nature is to be understood as God’s creation.’[[516]](#footnote-516)

To get at the questions of why and for what purpose I find it helpful to recall that the Christian worldview grew out of the first century Jewish worldview, which understood that there is one God who created the universe and made covenant with the Jews.[[517]](#footnote-517) Over the years, in discussing this creating and covenant-making God, numerous scholars have viewed understandings of creation as subordinate to theological reflection on redemption, as though God’s work in creation is only incidental to God’s more significant work of redemption.[[518]](#footnote-518) I believe this has been detrimental, especially to a holistic understanding of evangelism, because it narrows the focus of God’s activity to the realm of human life rather than including the comprehensive, all-encompassing nature of God’s activity in and intent for the whole of the created universe. Moreover, subsuming God’s creative activity into God’s redemptive activity implies a negative starting point for evangelistic effort: that of sin and the need for redemption,[[519]](#footnote-519) rather than a positive starting point: that of the goodness of creation, God’s loving desire to be in relationship with all that God has created, and to restore all creation to its intended wholeness. While not ignoring the human need for redemption, evangelistic practice must rest on an overt theological commitment to the goodness of creation, God’s faithfulness to it, and desire for its wholeness recognizing that God did not create for the sole purpose of redeeming; God redeems out of faithfulness to the loving relationship that is birthed when God freely creates.

For Christians, as for Jews, faith in God as creator is the intuited foundation for all that follows, providing the all-embracing framework for any talk about God.[[520]](#footnote-520) That God is creator of all that is lies at the core of God’s identity; it is the assertion that God is without peer or rival.[[521]](#footnote-521) Therefore, especially for evangelism, it is important to understand that it is the Creator God who redeems, rather than the Redeemer God who also creates.

Intertwined with an understanding of the redemptive work of the Creator God is the recognition that in creating, God makes space within Godself, withdrawing from God’s own boundaries, so to speak, to make space for something completely other than God: and that is creation. Further, God actively and kenotically enters into the space and time of that creation, transcending it, but yet engaging it and relating to it in a personal way. From the Wesleyan perspective, this understanding is reflected in John Wesley’s understanding of God’s ‘holy love,’ ‘a love that is energized in a freely chosen outward movement, that stoops down, as it were, and draws the relation, makes contact, and establishes fellowship.’[[522]](#footnote-522) Thus, from God’s first creative acts that thoroughly engage space and time, onward toward the hope of a new heaven and a new earth, God freely chooses to enter into the temporal history of creation, and the arrow of time is given meaning by God’s acts.[[523]](#footnote-523) (Psalm 118.24, Mark 1.15, John 7.6, 12.23)

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, one manifestation of God having freely chosen to enter into the temporal nature of this world is God’s choosing of Israel out of all the nations of the world to be God’s own people, intending her to be a light to all of creation. Thus creation is intimately connected to relationship and covenant. Rather than being a matter of isolated scientific analysis or purely philosophical or metaphysical argument, a Christian understanding of creation is a belief that the one God who made the world is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a God whose universality has from the beginning always been made known in the particular, the material and the historical.[[524]](#footnote-524) As creator and covenant God, God is the source of all creation and is irrevocably connected to its unfolding history, making it impossible to fully understand the world, the universe, all of creation, without reference to their intimate and essential connection to God.[[525]](#footnote-525)

Christian understandings of creation take this belief in the one God who has always been made known in the particular, material and historical a step further, placing Jesus Christ at the center. He is the means through which the Creator and covenantal God is supremely known. Colossians describes Jesus as the ‘image of the invisible God,’ (1.15) implying that Jesus is ‘the projection of God himself into the dimensions of space-time in a way that reveals his true nature.’[[526]](#footnote-526)

That the Creator God engages in the temporal nature of creation, even to the point of projecting Godself into the dimensions of space-time, is significant for any holistic theology of creation as it raises the issue of God’s commitment to the physicality of creation, its inherent goodness, and the question of the ongoing presence of evil. I will hold the first two for the moment and briefly address the third, the ongoing presence of evil.

Although centuries of Christian thought have addressed the problem of evil from the perspective of its origin, in a foundational sense, Christian commitment to the creating and recreating covenantal God rightly directs the focus toward the present and the future rather than solely backward to the past. Unfortunately, the persistent focus on the *origin* of evil has been both detrimental to and distracting from the evangelistic task.[[527]](#footnote-527) As in the discussion of the creating and redeeming activity of God, the focus on the origin of evil, which in evangelism tends to be expressed in descriptions of the fall of Adam and Eve and the nature of original sin, provides a negative and anthropocentric theological foundation for the evangelistic task, rather than a positive and theocentric one. Furthermore, such a focus blurs many distinctions, such as those between the overarching presence of evil and its expression in sin, or evil made manifest in human activity and evil evidenced in the randomness of natural disasters, devastating illness and accident. An anthropocentric emphasis on original sin in evangelistic practice seems to suggest an unwillingness to entertain the presence of mystery that is inherent in the presence of evil and randomness in the world. A theocentric focus, however, which emphasizes as its surest foundation the creating and recreating activity of the covenantal God, shifts one’s attention from the past to the present and future and underlines God’s activity as an agent of redemption.

Certainly questions of the origin of evil, the nature of human sin, and how one is to understand the randomness of the universe are theologically significant; however, as I have asserted earlier, Abraham’s reminder is correct: some things cannot be said until other things are said. Thus the evangelistic task is often better served by centering on the question, given the presence of evil in the world, what is the creator going to do about it?[[528]](#footnote-528) Wright correctly observes that ‘if there is an answer to the problem of evil it will include divine action within history, more specifically, within the history of the world as it has been affected by evil.’[[529]](#footnote-529) For Christians, the climax of creation is the inauguration of God’s kingdom through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Col. 1.15-20). It is through Christ that God has acted decisively within creation to eliminate evil and restore order, justice and peace.

Shifting the focus from the past to the present and future is valuable for evangelism because rather than approaching the issue statically, as though creation is somehow settled, this approach is dynamic and relational. An added value is the avoidance of a false dualism. Evil does in fact exist. It is real, powerful and dangerous. But it has been overcome and does not have the last word:

There is one God; he made the world, and is neither identified with it (as in pantheism and its various cousins) nor detached from it (as in dualism); he is in covenant with Israel; and he will, in fulfilling that covenant, reclaim and redeem his whole creation from that which at present corrupts and threatens it.[[530]](#footnote-530)

Deepening and extending this understanding is the Christian claim that the final redemption of creation has begun in Jesus Christ. The Shema is expanded to contain Jesus within it; he is included in the very identity of God: creator and sovereign over all things.[[531]](#footnote-531) (1 Cor. 8.6) Understanding the claim that the redemption of creation has begun in Jesus Christ is a crucial theological foundation for the practice of evangelism and highlights the issue of God’s commitment to the physicality of creation and its intrinsic goodness. For Christians, Jesus is ‘the human person on whom the destiny of the whole world hangs.’[[532]](#footnote-532) This means that ‘Jesus himself, the incarnate Son of God who in his risen and exalted humanity is still human as well as divine, has a future with the world which is really both his own and the world’s future.’[[533]](#footnote-533) Thus the redemption begun in Jesus Christ is not the process of being redeemed from creation, as though the existing creation was something that needed to be escaped or destroyed for a new creation to come into existence. Especially in the Wesleyan tradition, the redemption begun in Jesus Christ is the redeeming of creation, where all of creation (not only human beings) is perfected and restored to its intended integrity and wholeness and ‘the holy love of God reigns supreme.’[[534]](#footnote-534)

In addition to the belief that the redemption of creation has begun in Jesus Christ, recognizing God’s commitment to the physicality of creation and its intrinsic goodness is essential in itself for an understanding of creation and a strong theological foundation for evangelistic practice. Moltmann is helpful at this point because in his doctrine of creation he focuses on relationship: God’s relationship as creator, to the physical universe God has created (including humanity), and the human relationship to the rest of the created world.[[535]](#footnote-535) Moltmann parallels the Wesleyan belief that at the heart of the one and only true God’s activity within creation is the understanding that the transcendent creator God is also the immanent, ever-present enabling God.[[536]](#footnote-536) It is God’s Spirit that holds all creation together, keeping everything in life and leading all the creatures God has made into the future of God’s kingdom.[[537]](#footnote-537)

Moltmann draws on the Jewish understanding of shĕkīnâ, a term used in the Targum, to indicate the manifestation of the presence of God among people. God’s shĕkīnâ is said to rest in certain places (e.g. the Temple) or on certain people. Shĕkīnâ is the indwelling presence of God. It is the kenotic way in which God gives Godself away to God’s people, sharing their sufferings, joining them in their misery, binding Godself to them in joy and sorrow. For Moltmann, the purpose of shĕkīnâ, the spirit of the one and only true God, is to make all of creation the ‘house of God.’ He powerfully asserts that ‘the inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God.’[[538]](#footnote-538) Creation’s goal and future, Moltmann goes on to say, is the ‘transfiguring indwelling of the triune God in his creation, which through that indwelling becomes a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21).’[[539]](#footnote-539)

It is not insignificant that for Moltmann the shĕkīnâ is the indwelling of the triune God because it avoids pantheism and is valuable in grounding a theological stance for evangelism.[[540]](#footnote-540) Christians view creation not simply from the perspectives of its beginnings; they view it from the perspective of relationship and the interrelated life of God understood in the mystery of the Trinity that provides the pattern for the life of creation. As has been said, for Moltmann, the creator God is a trinitarian community of persons who relate to each other in a relationship of mutual indwelling. Thus, creation is viewed as an intricate community of reciprocal relationships.[[541]](#footnote-541) These relationships are ‘as primal as the things themselves’[[542]](#footnote-542) and ‘all living things – each in its own specific way – live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another.’[[543]](#footnote-543)

As outlined earlier, creation begins when the transcendent God, the source of creation’s being and life, makes room within Godself for the otherness of creation, a freely undertaken self-limitation of the infinite, omnipresent God, in order to create something outside Godself.[[544]](#footnote-544) God’s kenotic, space-making, self-giving activity in creation is not only foundational to the content of the Christian evangelistic message; it is the model for that message. As the transcendent God makes room within Godself for the otherness of creation, so Christians make room within themselves for others, especially those others currently beyond the boundaries of the faith community.

Even as the transcendent God creates, the Spirit as trinitarian Person is the immanent side of God’s presence in the world.[[545]](#footnote-545) Human beings experience the indwelling of the Spirit of God in history, albeit not in all its fullness. In Wesleyan parlance, it is the grace of the indwelling Spirit that allows for participation in and empowerment through the life of God. This grace is ‘wonderfully enabling; it is the salvific strength of the Almighty mediated to believers by nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit.’[[546]](#footnote-546) Evangelism grounded in a stance of embrace becomes a vehicle for the indwelling of the Spirit of God; and in the space created within the self and between the self and the other, the Holy Spirit is invited to act for the transformation of both the self and the other. Even though this and other experiences of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are presently incomplete, these experiences lead to the future hope that God will indeed ‘dwell entirely and wholly and forever in his creation, and will allow all the beings he has created to participate in the fullness of his eternal life.’[[547]](#footnote-547)

Creation (and with it the evangelistic task), then, is given an eschatological orientation, looking forward to the future inaugurated by the Messiah Jesus, when God will be all in all. As all of creation becomes more fully the ‘house of God’ through the shĕkīnâ of the triune God, the messianic promises to the poor and the hopes of the alienated are fulfilled and the world becomes ‘home’ – ‘the relationships between God, human beings and nature lose their tension and are resolved into peace and repose.’[[548]](#footnote-548)

Paralleling Wesleyan understanding, Moltmann valuably highlights the goodness of creation and God’s unwavering commitment to it, which on the whole I believe provides an important theological foundation for embrace. However, the details of his view are open to critique. While Moltmann seeks to avoid anthropocentrism, some theologians are unconvinced that he is successful. They claim his views are ‘earthbound’ and fail to engage the idea that the greater physical universe – not just the earth – is part of God’s creation.[[549]](#footnote-549) This is a valid critique, and one with which I agree. Further, taking this critique seriously adds additional strength to a holistic theology of creation as a foundation for embrace.

Additional critiques come from Third World and Pentecostal theologians. Third World theologians assert that Moltmann’s ecotheology is ‘heavily loaded towards European interests, and seeks to ally the church with a European environmental movement.’ Pentecostal theologians have criticized him for ‘a lack of awareness that there are many spirits, and of the need for discernment of spirits.’[[550]](#footnote-550) These critiques must be borne in mind as one draws on Moltmann’s theology as a foundation for embrace, especially in a Western perspective. Given the historical reality of the comingling of ‘European interests’ and evangelistic effort, it behooves anyone involved in evangelism to hear this and the Pentecostal critique clearly. Yet from the perspective of embrace as a theological stance for evangelism, it appears that these critiques are adequately addressed. As Christians evangelize from a stance of embrace, they stand as those keenly aware of their noninnocence, seeking to distance themselves from their own cultures and interests out of their allegiance to the one true God. This distance creates space in which to receive the other and to allow God’s Holy Spirit to move and act. In a stance of embrace, when space has been made, waiting is crucial. It is in this waiting that discernment becomes possible – discernment of the variety of spirits and discernment of the activity of God’s Holy Spirit within the Christian, within the other, and between the Christian and the other.

Criticism notwithstanding, Moltmann’s understanding of creation offers an integrating and holistic vision seeing God’s presence in all things and anticipating that no created thing will be left out of the new creation, which God will indwell in rest, joy and glory.[[551]](#footnote-551) This resonates well with the Gospel writers’ and Paul’s understanding of Jesus as having redefined the symbols of Temple and land around himself as discussed in the previous chapter. No longer is the shĕkīnâ of God limited to geography or specific location. In Jesus, God has inaugurated God’s ‘new creation.’

As Moltmann’s trinitarian focus is in harmony with Scripture and avoids pantheism, so does his claim that God’s presence in creation is not undifferentiated: evil is taken seriously but not equated with the divine, nor is God present in the same way in all things.[[552]](#footnote-552) That God’s presence is not undifferentiated is most clearly seen in Moltmann’s understanding of the cross and his emphasis on the eschatological movement of creation toward its goal when God will be all in all. In the cross of the Messiah Jesus, God has made all suffering God’s own. Bauckham eloquently describes Moltmann’s thought, ‘Suffering is suffering, evil is evil, and God’s presence in the crucified Christ and the sighings of the Spirit suffers them, in order to overcome them in his eschatological indwelling in joy and glory.’[[553]](#footnote-553) This awareness leads directly to Moltmann’s eschatological understanding of creation. God’s immanent presence now is the presence of his suffering and creative love moving God’s world toward its goal when God will be all in all.[[554]](#footnote-554)

A final aspect of Moltmann’s thought that is helpful is his binding of creation and Sabbath. From the very beginning, creation is in step with redemption as it points forward toward the Sabbath. It is only on the Sabbath that creation is complete, and in this sense it foreshadows the world to come. Moltmann meaningfully asserts that ‘the completion of creation through the peace of the Sabbath distinguishes the view of the world as creation from the view of the world as nature; for nature is unremittingly fruitful and, though it has seasons and rhythms, knows no Sabbath.’[[555]](#footnote-555) Because the final day of Sabbath rest is the point at which God’s goal in creation is fully achieved, it is the Sabbath that blesses, sanctifies and reveals the world as God’s creation. Thus in celebrating Sabbath, Christians recognize the world not simply as nature, but as God’s creation.

This is noteworthy because it requires understanding the world theocentrically rather than anthropocentrically. Creation does not culminate with humanity, nor does the rest of creation exist for humanity; rather, the culmination of creation is the Sabbath, when creation is completed and God rests to enjoy it. Yet to think of Sabbath merely as a day in which humans rest as God rested is to miss a significant portion of its meaning: Sabbath anticipates the eschatological goal of all God’s creative work, the final time when God will come to rest in God’s creation and all of creation will participate in God’s rest.[[556]](#footnote-556) With that in mind, to a great extent Sabbath focuses on the restitutio in integrum of creation: the restoring of integrity so that at least on every seventh day humans would deliberately refrain from intervening in the environment, allowing it to be ‘entirely God's creation.’[[557]](#footnote-557)

The peace found when one cultivates a celebration of Sabbath is first of all peace with God; however, ‘this divine peace encompasses not merely the soul but the body too; not merely individuals but family and people; not only human beings but animals as well; not living things alone, but also, as the creation story tells us, the whole creation of heaven and earth.’[[558]](#footnote-558) This is significant for embrace as a foundation for evangelism because it emphasizes the communal nature of creation, which includes the way in which Christians live among themselves, with God and creation; and it gives witness, even if in a partial way, to the peace of relationship anticipated in new creation.

Pulling these strands together is significant for the integrity of evangelistic practice. Frequently evangelism involves a decidedly anthropocentric and at times negative message, for example, when sin is proclaimed rather than the forgiveness of sin, or when redemption is reduced to an entirely individualistic, privatized experience. A more balanced understanding of creation following the Wesleyan trajectory emphasizes that redemption is a whole creation project, not simply an interior, human one. As God freely made space within Godself for creation, freely limiting God’s omnipotence,[[559]](#footnote-559) part of evangelistic practice is the act of limiting one’s own power to make space within oneself for the other. It includes recognizing that in the cross, God has taken into Godself even the experiences of suffering and evil, making nothing and no one beyond God’s inexhaustible love and transformative power. Therefore a stance of embrace as a foundation for evangelism is cognizant of the need for discernment, but not for final judgment, which is for God alone. Further, evangelistic practice gains integrity when Christians maintain a keen awareness of prevenient grace, recognizing that goodness, kindness, holiness, grace, divine presence, creating power, and even salvation itself are present before they ever arrive in a particular situation.[[560]](#footnote-560) Nothing and no one is to be denied the opportunity to participate in God’s loving, redemptive relationship with creation.

An additional benefit is that a faithful practice of Sabbath models in a sacred way a commitment to the environment that sees it not simply as nature, but as God’s own beloved creation. This modeling ensures the authenticity of the Christian proclamation of the good news. It also avoids the contradiction of proclaiming the goodness of creation and God’s desire to be in a relationship of wholeness with all that God has created (not only humans) while at the same time living with disregard for the environment or shirking the responsibility of Christians and others to be good stewards of it.

Lastly, the deliberate stillness of Sabbath practice which allows God’s creation simply to be, also parallels the stillness required in the evangelistic task, the waiting of embrace that allows others to reflect, experience and act on the gospel without relentless intervention. Celebrating Sabbath sacredly anticipates the redemption of the world by the one, true creator God, through whose shĕkīnâ all of creation is given life. This indwelling of God in creation has a future, messianic focus. When Christians celebrate Sunday as the feast of the resurrection, they are proclaiming the advent of God’s new creation where resurrection light permeates creation and all of reality. Thus in the communal enactment of Sabbath as the feast of the resurrection, redemption is embodied for others not merely as an individual, privatized experience, but as a creation-wide experience of wholeness and community. Salvation is the light that shines on all of creation as it groans under the weight of evil, securing the promise that all of creation (humanity included) will be restored as the world without end.

**The Incarnation**

Christian faith holds several concepts in tension: the earthly and the eternal, the particular and the universal, the temporal and the eschatological. The incarnation is about the earthly, particular and temporal, the recognition that without the man, Jesus of Nazareth, there would be no Christian faith. As Dunn succinctly states, it all began with Jesus.[[561]](#footnote-561) The simplicity of that fact belies the complexity of any discussion of the incarnation, a discussion that frequently tends toward the eternal, the universal and the eschatological; issues indicated not by the particular man Jesus of Nazareth, but by the titles given to him: Christ, Lord, Logos, for instance. Granted, such titles are important; they reflect that from the very first, Jesus was understood as being part of the very identity of God.[[562]](#footnote-562) Additionally, they state what Jesus is for faith. As Moltmann says, ‘in them, faith states what Jesus means for it, and what it believes, receives, expects and hopes about and from him.’[[563]](#footnote-563)

From its earliest thinking, the church has underscored the fullness of both aspects of Jesus’ being,[[564]](#footnote-564) insisting as Crossan rightly points out: ‘He was “wholly God” and “wholly man”…he was, in other words, himself the unmediated presence of the divine to the human.’[[565]](#footnote-565) In unison with the earliest church Fathers, Wesley asserts that Christ ‘was made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person.’[[566]](#footnote-566) Yet underlying these statements is the tension inherent in any understanding of the incarnation.[[567]](#footnote-567) This tension is challenging in any age; however, I believe that in the current climate of mis-distrust, it is especially important to recognize that though it is very valuable to explore the eternal, universal, and eschatological, and though those understandings are crucial to Christian faith, such emphasis has at times screened out conceptions of the earthly, particular, and temporal, enveloping the humanness of Jesus in a blanket of divinity. Rather than God becoming fully human in Jesus, Jesus is seen as a ‘Man who was more than man.’[[568]](#footnote-568)

Wesley’s teaching on the incarnation is a prime example of the eternal, universal, and eschatological screening out the earthly, particular, and temporal. While never actually denying Jesus’ humanity, there was clearly ‘hesitancy on Wesley’s part in his *genuine* affirmation of the human nature of Christ.’[[569]](#footnote-569) Scholars offer varying reasons for Wesley’s discomfort; however, regardless of the reasons, the result was a somewhat skewed understanding in which ‘[Wesley] allowed Christ’s human nature to be subsumed within the divine from the very beginning of the Incarnation.’[[570]](#footnote-570)

I agree with Maddox that Wesley’s consistent emphasis on the deity of Christ expressed ‘his conviction that *God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation*.’[[571]](#footnote-571) Again, this is not without merit; however, before one can fully understand the eternal, universal or eschatological, one must recognize that all those understandings have the same particular reference point, the man Jesus; a man with a specific history that included his unique ministry, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. It may be possible to talk about what it means to be the Logos of God, but it is impossible to know who the Logos of God is without exploring the earthly, particular, and temporal man Jesus. In other words, understanding is not complete if one focuses only on who Jesus is as divine; one also needs to understand who God is by focusing on who Jesus is as human.[[572]](#footnote-572)

Viewing the incarnation from that perspective leads to the profound insight that the crucified Jesus is the revelation of God; the pattern of humiliation and exaltation is a definitive revelation of who God is.[[573]](#footnote-573) Moltmann eloquently asserts this:

It is he, the crucified Jesus himself, who is the driving force, the joy and the suffering of all theology which is Christian. Since the time of the apostles, the history of faith and theology has been concerned with the mystery of the crucified Jesus himself; and it has been a history of permanent revisions, reformations and revolts, aimed at recognizing him for the person he really is and conforming to him by changing one’s own life and thinking.[[574]](#footnote-574)

Attempting to recognize Jesus for the person he really is (and thus gain a picture of who God is) has enormous implications for evangelism in an environment of mis-distrust. David Watson accurately underscores the fact that when ‘our historical investigations lead us to believe that Jesus taught a certain ethical way of living, regarding other people and regarding God, we will better understand the claim that Jesus makes upon our lives today.’[[575]](#footnote-575) In other words, in evangelistic practice, how Jesus is presented impacts the understandings of God and contours of the faith that people develop.[[576]](#footnote-576)

Theological explorations of what it means for the eternal Son of God to be incarnate in Jesus are not without value; explicating various understandings of ‘true humanity’ is not without merit.[[577]](#footnote-577) Yet what is at stake for evangelism in understanding the incarnation is the recognition that we need not look for another. (Matthew 11.2-3) As the climactic embodiment of God’s power and purpose, Jesus is God’s clearest self-expression, God’s last word.[[578]](#footnote-578) ‘The divine world above does not descend to earth in him, nor does man, seeking his identity, find himself in him. A new future for God, man and the world in their history together is being inaugurated.’[[579]](#footnote-579)

The incarnation gains import for evangelism when it is recognized that in becoming human, Jesus temporarily relinquished his exercise of the power of his nature as God as he walked as a man.[[580]](#footnote-580) Before ever mentioning a word about eternal salvation, the man Jesus entered into the real agony of the oppressed. This is a crucial recognition in an age of mis-distrust. Evangelism is strengthened when one maintains a profound consciousness of the unredeemed nature of the world, doing so without mistakenly viewing the church as an isolated island of redeemed souls in the midst of that unredeemed world, or mistaking God’s redemptive commitment to all of creation for an ethereal image of redemption focused only on human beings in a disembodied afterlife. Redemption does not take place in a purely invisible, interior, privatized sphere; nor can Christians ever cease to suffer over the unredeemed state of the world.

At the heart of the incarnation is the understanding that the Messiah Jesus is the one in whom and through whom God’s kingdom is inaugurated[[581]](#footnote-581) – a kingdom in which all are given the opportunity to participate. Therefore Christian faith that worships Christ as God but ignores his inaugurated future, a faith that understands the church as the kingdom and claims a consciousness of atonement, yet no longer suffers from the continued unredeemed condition of the world becomes only a shadow of itself. In an age of mis-distrust, it is at the intersection of the church’s consciousness of atonement and its awareness of the painful reality of the unredeemed condition of the world that evangelism gains its authenticity and integrity. This realization is most powerful for evangelism when, rather than embracing an excessive spiritualization and individualization of salvation, the church embodies, as Jesus did, ‘a specific realization of the human in regard to other persons, as their brother [or sister], as a human being who is for others and who wills to be with others.’[[582]](#footnote-582)

The ‘memory of the crucified’[[583]](#footnote-583) provides the form for the Christian life of faith, which in turn provides the shape for evangelism practiced from the stance of embrace. In the incarnation, Jesus’ identity is not simply fixed in eternity, but present in history, a history that includes the cross. It is not developed in isolation but in relationships of reciprocity, both with God and with other people, even those who have been marginalized and cast off.[[584]](#footnote-584) Thus evangelism that stands on a foundation of embrace must shed its power and enter into the realities of human existence, celebrating the joys, but also making an honest accounting of the misery, evil and suffering. In an age of mis-distrust, evangelism must not witness to a salvation that applies solely to the eternal situation of the human soul, or is related only to the fundamental existential situations of transience, finitude and mortality while the actual, practical human situations of real misery are ignored.[[585]](#footnote-585) Evangelism from a stance of embrace will heed Moltmann’s reminder that ‘to wipe out the metaphysical wretchedness of human beings does not automatically mean that their physical and moral, economic and social wretchedness is abolished too.’[[586]](#footnote-586) Such evangelistic practice will remain ‘close to the experience of the people [it] is engaged with and reflect a deep commitment to their well-being’ thus regaining its persuasiveness and integrity.[[587]](#footnote-587)

As has been discussed, in societies such as in the United States where religion has been declared to be private there is great temptation to understand the salvation inaugurated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the private salvation of the individual soul with no connection to the realities of the world. Succumbing to that temptation has led to a loss of integrity in evangelistic practice and to a gap between proclamation and behavior. Further, this leaves the economic, social and political sins of human beings not only without liberating criticism, but without the saving hope of the gospel. Yet evangelism, when undertaken from the stance of embrace, witnesses to the truth of the incarnation: ‘Salvation is whole salvation and the salvation of the whole, or it is not God’s salvation.’[[588]](#footnote-588)

**The Crucifixion[[589]](#footnote-589)**

Moltmann’s word about the importance of the ‘memory of the crucified’ to an understanding of the incarnation is an appropriate segue into a discussion of the death of Jesus. The coherence of Christian faith hinges on the cross of Jesus.[[590]](#footnote-590) Without it, one is left with little more than cheap grace and a happy ending. Even as it stands undeniably at the center of Christian faith, however, the proclamation of the cross has not always been a holistic one. This has often affected both evangelistic witness and the church’s ability to address the current situation of mis-distrust.[[591]](#footnote-591)

From the very beginning, the crucifixion of Jesus was a challenging event with which to come to grips, (1 Cor. 1.23) and it remains so even today.[[592]](#footnote-592) Currently, certain elements in Western culture make understanding the meaning of the cross especially difficult. Western societies continue to be marked by a vision of humanity ‘at last released from the empire of fate and from the enemies of its progress, advancing with a firm and sure step along the path of truth, virtue and happiness.’[[593]](#footnote-593) Douglas John Hall describes the North American context as the ‘officially optimistic society’ where the illusion of hope is sustained by trust in progress and faith in various symbols of success such as personal and material prosperity.[[594]](#footnote-594)

This infatuation with progress is not a purely secular vision but can be seen subtly coloring understandings of the church’s mission in the world. In 2008, the United Methodist Church, for example, amended its mission statement: The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.[[595]](#footnote-595) It is fully appropriate to assume that the statement takes for granted the power of God’s Holy Spirit as foundational for disciplemaking and world transformation; however, the statement at face value remains intriguing. Seen from the vantage point of modernity, the world, with all its fractures, can be repaired – the United Methodist Church can transform it.

Volf is correct, however, when he points out that the cross stands in stark contradiction to the illusion of progress, however subtle or overt it may be. The cross is a shocking reminder that evil is irremediable. ‘Before the dawn of God’s new world, we cannot remove evil so as to dispense with the cross.’[[596]](#footnote-596) The alluring promise of ‘official optimism’ to fix all that is broken cannot be trusted because it conceals the truth of the irremediable nature of evil. Granted, much progress has been made in the past century, and more is sure to come; however, it has not and will not come without a price, a price that often involves new brokenness in new places.[[597]](#footnote-597)

The difference between all that the cross stands for and all that present Western culture embodies creates a scandalous dissonance for the church. This dissonance has been great enough that at times it has resulted in the double error of giving in to the lure of the myth of progress, while at the same time proclaiming an overly privatized understanding of the cross with its emphasis on the interior, atoning affects for the individual believer. Historically, such a double error has allowed the church to passively exist (and evangelize) in such antigospel environments as slavery, colonialism, and the more oppressive forms of globalization.[[598]](#footnote-598)

Just as it is a mistake to allow Jesus’ humanity to become a mere veil for his divinity, so it is a mistake to privatize Jesus’ self-emptying on the cross, disconnecting it either from the self-emptying that marked his entire life or from the redemptive effects it affords for all of creation.[[599]](#footnote-599) The suffering of Jesus on the cross did not stem from my individual sin and private immorality; it stemmed from the very public actions of his life – his identification with the poor and the marginalized, his association with sinners and his challenging of the religious conventions and perceptions of his time. Those were the events that led to his death. Further, the event of the cross did not grow out of *my* *private* need for redemption; it grew out of *God’s covenantal purposes* for all creation, purposes initiated from the beginning through God’s covenant with Abraham.[[600]](#footnote-600)

This is not to minimize the significance of the atoning work of Christ on the cross in the personal life of the individual, nor is it to suggest that the cross is something less than divine atonement for sin. These are essential elements to any theology of the cross. However, they have received no shortage of emphasis. On the other hand, for the most sure foundation for a theological stance to undergird embrace, it is to crucial to emphasize that the cross is about more than individual, objectified sin; it is more than a private, juridical transaction.[[601]](#footnote-601) The cross stands at the center of God’s relationship with all of creation; it is the revelatory fulcrum on which God’s purpose of redeeming all of creation from evil rests.[[602]](#footnote-602) Moltmann is helpful:

The atoning Christ is the revelation of the compassionate God. Atonement whose purpose is the reconciliation of the hostile, sinful world, is the suffering form taken by God’s love for this world…This divine atonement reveals God’s pain. But God’s pain reveals God’s faithfulness to those he has created, and his indestructible love, which endures a world in opposition to him and overcomes it…[God] moulds and alchemizes the pain of his love into atonement for the sinner.[[603]](#footnote-603)

By too thoroughly interiorizing an understanding of atonement, layering it with objectifying, legalistic concepts, Christians immersed in atomized, individualistic cultures such as the West are hindered from recognizing the self-emptying nature of the Christian life to which they are called.[[604]](#footnote-604) Such intent focus on the personal atoning nature of the cross, on what Christ has done for me,[[605]](#footnote-605) often masks the defining nature of the cross, what I am to be for others.[[606]](#footnote-606) It masks the reciprocal nature of the triune God’s love for all of creation (which is the model for the Christian’s love) and implies that God is not affected by the activity of the world, whether in sharing the joy or bearing the pain. Yet the cross of Jesus reveals that the experience of suffering is contained within God’s own nature.[[607]](#footnote-607) It reveals a God who is intimately involved in the world, a God whose love is not just activity on others, but involvement with others in which God is moved and affected.[[608]](#footnote-608) The cross makes the truth that vulnerability to suffering is essential to divine love starkly visible. Moltmann’s description of the alternative is telling:

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything…But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.[[609]](#footnote-609)

Moving outward from an interior experience of the cross to an understanding of shared suffering provides a helpful perspective. The present, unredeemed state of creation does not fully correspond to God; it is a world subject to sin, suffering and death, which is made severely apparent in the cross. On the other hand, the resurrection points to the promise of a reality that *will* correspond to God. This is a profound contradiction. Yet the cross shows God present even in the midst of that contradiction. In God’s love, God embraces the very creation that does not correspond to God, and thus God suffers. God’s love is not simply active benevolence operating on humanity; rather, it is dialectical love that suffers as it embraces its own contradiction.[[610]](#footnote-610) In modeling the love of the triune God, Christians join God’s protest against all infliction of suffering, standing in solidarity with the suffering of others.[[611]](#footnote-611) Solidarity in this sense implies ‘sharing a common goal, communal identity, commiseration, and liberative work.’[[612]](#footnote-612) The consequences of such a holistic understanding of the cross for evangelism are significant because it provides a foundation of integrity, bringing word and deed into greater harmony.[[613]](#footnote-613)

Following from this is an understanding of the forgiveness that lies at the heart of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Again, at stake here is an understanding of forgiveness that includes but goes beyond that experienced by the individual in relation to God, which has often received the greater emphasis, especially in evangelistic practice.

Volf profoundly describes Jesus’ suffering on the cross: ‘More than just the passive suffering of an innocent person, the passion of Christ is the agony of a tortured soul and wrecked body offered as a prayer for the forgiveness of the torturers.’[[614]](#footnote-614) He goes on to describe forgiveness as ‘the boundary between exclusion and embrace. It heals the wounds that the power-acts of exclusion have inflicted and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility.’[[615]](#footnote-615) In doing so it provides a valuable neutral space that people can use to either remain apart in so-called peace or come together and restore broken communion. Though remaining apart may feel like the only viable option, the implication of the cross is that God desires the real peace that is characterized by communion between former enemies. From the perspective of evangelistic practice rooted in a stance of embrace, the significance here is the emphasis on community, between God and humanity, and by implication between humans as well:

Read as the culmination of the larger narrative of God’s dealing with humanity, the cross says that despite its manifest enmity toward God humanity belongs to God; God will not be God without humanity…The cross is the giving up of God’s self in order not to give up on humanity; it is the consequence of God’s desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion.[[616]](#footnote-616)

Because God will not be God without humanity, so Christians cannot be in right relationship with God without desiring that same type of relationship with others and between others and God.

Again, the forgiveness and embrace inherent in the cross is not a truth claimed solely in the private realm of one’s own heart. Volf evokes Irenaeus’s beautiful image of the Trinity turning toward the world, whereby the Son and the Spirit are the two arms of God by which all humanity is made and taken into God’s embrace.[[617]](#footnote-617) Although the man Wesley was influenced by the overriding anthropomorphism of his day and the dominant atonement theories on offer, the Wesleyan theological trajectory arcs toward understandings of the cross that include both the personal and the communal. For Wesley, in dying, Jesus ‘was most fundamentally the Representative of *God*.’[[618]](#footnote-618) In representing God, Jesus also represented God’s holy and restorative love, a love that breaks down barriers and enables gracious reconciliation.

The implications for evangelism of moving beyond a privatized understanding of the cross cannot be overstated. To have integrity, the proclamation of the gospel can never be separated from the suffering of the world, from the rejected, marginalized, and outcast, or from the task of reconciliation. Volf’s reminder is correct:

Inscribed on the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in – even our enemies.[[619]](#footnote-619)

Moreover, it is a distortion of the gospel message to present it as though the individual soul stood alone without connection to the rest of creation.[[620]](#footnote-620) This is not to say that evangelism is to be absorbed into concepts of liberation or political theologies, or that it will produce some sort of ‘final’ reconciliation. Any final or ultimate reconciliation is possible only through the work of the triune God. Nor is it to say that even as those engaged in evangelistic practice from a stance of embrace yearn and struggle for reconciliation, the final reconciliation toward which they move is to be thought of only as something in the distant future of ‘eternal life.’ Rather, the final reconciliation embodied in the cross and toward which evangelism moves is better understood as the eschatological new beginning of this world[[621]](#footnote-621) in which all of creation – all relationships, all persons, all things – are made new.

**The Resurrection**

Even as the Western evangelistic proclamation has arguably been focused on Jesus having died for each person’s sin, without the resurrection, the cross is incomplete. The first followers of Jesus did not proclaim the cross in isolation; they proclaimed the cross in the context of the resurrection – the Messiah Jesus’ victory over the cross.[[622]](#footnote-622) It was not that Christ’s self-giving was insignificant. However, it was the resurrection that provided divine vindication; it was what made the good news a message of hope and joy; it was what made it good news.

Given the central place that the resurrection held in the proclamation of the early church, it would seem that affirming it would be less than controversial; however, both the range of scholarship[[623]](#footnote-623) and breadth of popular belief[[624]](#footnote-624) indicate that understanding the resurrection is not as straightforward as it might seem. Therefore decisions about one’s position must be made from the outset. I believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and believe that a robust understanding of resurrection provides a crucial foundation for embrace as a theological stance to undergird evangelism.[[625]](#footnote-625) When I say I believe in Jesus’ bodily resurrection, I am affirming the claims of his first followers – that Jesus was indeed dead, but that they had witnessed him alive again in a physically embodied state.[[626]](#footnote-626) Even more astonishingly, that they had witnessed him alive in a transphysical way – with ‘a body that was still robustly physical but also significantly different’ from his precrucified body (thus the various remarkable details contained in the reports of Jesus’ postresurrection appearances).[[627]](#footnote-627)

Emphasizing the bodily nature of Jesus’ resurrection is important because currently there is a broad alternative paradigm that appears to be widely accepted, both within academia and many mainline churches, the numerous dissenting voices notwithstanding.[[628]](#footnote-628) Examples of alternative understandings abound. Stephen Davis suggests that many theologians affirm the statement ‘Jesus is risen’ and even hold it to be an essential part of Christian proclamation; yet, ‘what "Jesus is risen" really means, they say, is "\_\_\_\_\_\_," where the blank is filled in with some statement that does not necessarily entail that a man dead for parts of three days lived again.’[[629]](#footnote-629) For example, Rudolf Bultmann asserted that ‘Faith in the resurrection is really the same as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross.’[[630]](#footnote-630) Similarly, Willi Marxsen goes to great linguistic lengths to provide an argument that shifts the focus from the event of the resurrection to the miracle of faith: ‘We must see exactly where the miracle lies. For the miracle is not the resurrection of Jesus, as one all too easily says; the miracle is the finding of faith.’[[631]](#footnote-631) This assertion bolsters his description of the resurrection as ‘an interpretation designed to express the fact that my faith has a source and that source is Jesus.’ This, in turn, leads Marxsen to conclude:

Faith which is lived includes hope, and without hope there is no faith at all. This is not, as some might think, because Jesus is risen (in the usual sense of the phrase) and my coming resurrection is hence assured. It is because Jesus of Nazareth offered this life as a possibility. Jesus is risen in that his offer meets us today and in that, if we accept it, he gives us this new life. I could equally put it this way: Jesus lived and gave a resurrection into new life even before his crucifixion. One could even say that Jesus was risen before he was crucified.[[632]](#footnote-632)

Despite the existence of alternative understandings of the resurrection, the fact remains that the first Christians proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead,[[633]](#footnote-633) an assertion that had a very concrete meaning for all who heard it – both for the pagans who denied it was possible and for the Jews who believed it was, but with major constraints.[[634]](#footnote-634) Yet for many theologians, the question of whether the resurrection happened, or how it might have happened, is not nearly as important as the question of what meaning the resurrection should have in the current age. Echoing Marxsen, Don Cupitt commented in dialogue with C. F. D. Moule that ‘what matters is not whether Peter saw Jesus alive then, but whether I see him alive now.’[[635]](#footnote-635) More significantly, Hans Küng insists that ‘all questions about the historicity of the empty tomb and the Easter experience cease to count beside the question of the significance of the resurrection message.’[[636]](#footnote-636) Apart from the historicity issue, there is a sense in which Küng is correct: the meaning one gives to the resurrection message is critical because it will greatly impact one’s life, the commitments one makes and the way one lives out those commitments. However, the wide range of meaning given the resurrection in scholarship indicates that without some sort of grounding, that meaning may or may not remain within the bounds of ‘Christian’ faith.

The writer Pinchas Lapide is an example. He firmly believes Jesus was bodily resurrected, saying, ‘the resurrection belongs to the category of the truly real and effective occurrences, for without a fact of history there is no act of true faith.’[[637]](#footnote-637) Interestingly, Lapide is a Jew; however, it might be said that he believes this central assertion of the first followers of Jesus even more strongly than some Christian theologians. Yet even as Lapide believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the meaning he places on it takes him in an entirely different direction, toward an understanding of Jesus as a great prophet belonging to the ‘praeparatio messianica,’ or, as Maimonides calls Jesus, a ‘paver of the way for the King Messiah.’[[638]](#footnote-638)

It is indeed important to ask what good it does to believe that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead. I believe that Lapide’s comment points to the most foundational answer to that question – the recognition that the meaning of the resurrection is inextricably linked to the historical event that the earliest Christians proclaimed. If Jesus was not bodily raised from the dead, then there appears to be little meaning to be discussed;[[639]](#footnote-639) yet, it is clear that the earliest Christians believed with every fiber of their being that something earth shattering and life transforming had actually happened – Israel’s God had in fact raised Jesus from the dead. They gave their lives defending that belief, and it was the reality of what they proclaimed that lay at the core of the meaning they gave it.

An additional observation from Lapide is helpful at this point:

I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way. Indeed, the four authors of the Gospels definitely compete with one another in illustrating the tangible, substantial dimension of this resurrection explicitly. Often it seems as if renowned New Testament scholars in our days want to insert a kind of ideological or dogmatic curtain between the pre-Easter and the risen Jesus in order to protect the latter against any kind of contamination by earthly three-dimensionality. However, for the first Christians who thought, believed, and hoped in a Jewish manner, the immediate historicity was not only a part of that happening but the indispensable precondition for the recognition of its significance for salvation.[[640]](#footnote-640)

Recalling that the first Christians thought, believed and hoped in a Jewish manner, as Lapide points out, is significant to understanding the meaning they gave to the resurrection. As has been discussed, thinking, believing and hoping in a Jewish manner first and foremost gave one a this-world perspective; thus resurrection was not a disembodied experience, a significant point when talking about salvation. First-century Judaism, with the exception of the Sadducees, had a basic belief in a *bodily* resurrection; however, it was not something that would happen to one person before it happened to everyone else.[[641]](#footnote-641) For Second Temple Judaism, resurrection was a future communal event, when God’s kingdom was finally a reality.

Just as resurrection was not something that would happen to one person before it happened to others, for first-century Jews it also did not signify ‘life after death’ as is often understood in popular culture and even in some scholarly writing.[[642]](#footnote-642) Resurrection, as it was understood in the first century, was a two-step process – ‘life after life after death’ as Wright puts it.[[643]](#footnote-643) Though there was a period of ‘nonbodily survival, requiring the gift of immortality,’[[644]](#footnote-644) reembodiment happened at the day of resurrection, on the day when all (or just the righteous, depending on the school of thought) would be raised together.

At the heart of this understanding of resurrection as life after life after death is the significance of embodiment. It was a physical, this-worldly understanding, rather than a spiritualized conceptualization. It was an affirmation that on the day of resurrection, when God’s kingdom would come in all of its fullness, all of creation, including human bodies, would be remade. It was an affirmation that when the one, true God acted to put at rights everything that was wrong in the world, it would not involve the abolishment of creation, but a recreation of it in all its glorious physicality.

This understanding of resurrection thinking in the first century provides an important lens through which to look at the meaning of the resurrection both for the early church and for Christians in the twenty-first century, particularly when formulating a theological foundation for evangelism. It is a reminder that when discussing resurrection, the first Christians were not talking about the ‘presence of eternity’[[645]](#footnote-645) or, in reference to Jesus, that he had ‘passed into the power of God.’[[646]](#footnote-646) What they firmly believed and boldly proclaimed was that the bodily resurrection of Jesus meant that he had been vindicated, clearly shown to be the Messiah through whom Israel’s hope had been fulfilled. For the first followers of Jesus, the resurrection was not simply about ‘life after death’ or the promise that all who believe will ‘go to heaven.’ Rather, it was about how, through the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had fulfilled God’s promises at last.

In proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, early Christians announced the inauguration of the new covenant. Jesus was not raised by his own power, but by the power of Israel’s God, the power of the covenant and creator God who was different from all other gods precisely because Israel’s God had always had the power to kill or make alive. The resurrection was the sign that God had been faithful to God’s promise, that God had finally shown Godself to be God, creator and true lord of the universe. In the resurrection, the climax of the unfolding story of Israel could finally be seen; the story had not ended, but God’s promised culmination of the story was now in view, and what remained was for the followers of Jesus to hold that view before them, boldly putting into practice the visible, tangible signs of God’s rule inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.

This is significant, given my concern for a holistic proclamation of the gospel that avoids overemphasizing an individualistic, spiritually privatized message in conjunction with a heavenly afterlife. However, it is important to be clear that I am not asserting that belief in bodily resurrection is *incompatible* with belief in ‘the departed believer’s immediate entry into the presence of the exalted Christ in heaven.’[[647]](#footnote-647) What is at stake for a firm theological grounding for evangelism is the assertion that entrance into the presence of the exalted Christ (going to heaven, so to speak) is not one’s *final* destination. Rather, ‘heaven and earth overlap and interlock, and are designed eventually to be joined together completely forever. [Thus] when believers go to be “with the Lord” at death (Phil 1:23), they will never again be separated from him, *but he will bring them with him when he comes to set up the further new reality, his new heaven-and-earth world*’ on the day of resurrection.[[648]](#footnote-648)

The point is significant for evangelism because frequently the focus shifts from the fulfillment of God’s promises in the resurrection of Jesus to his exaltation and enthronement. This shift removes the creational, physical, this-worldly element of God’s promise to make all things new and centers instead on a presentative eschatology,[[649]](#footnote-649) one that is interior, spiritual and completed rather than one that is inaugurated but still future facing. This is not to say that there is no redemptive value in the event of Jesus’ death and resurrection; nor is it meant to imply that the early church did not proclaim that as Messiah Jesus was in fact the true lord over all the earth; nor is it meant to diminish the significance of the sacramental life of the church. Again, the issue is a lack of balance that shifts the understanding of redemption from an all-creation affecting event to an individualistic, interior, private one. Like the privatizing of the self-emptying of Jesus on the cross, the resurrection becomes Jesus’ accomplishment of heavenly lordship recognized within the context of the church and its ongoing rituals.

Rather than maintaining the crucial connection between Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection by the power of God, spiritualizing the resurrection minimizes that connection. When the resurrection of Jesus is regarded as his spiritual exaltation and enthronement, it becomes associated with the divine aspects of the incarnation and the cross becomes little more than a brief stop on the road to heavenly lordship.

The physical nature of belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus provides a valuable connection to the all encompassing nature of God’s redemption of the cosmos: when God’s kingdom comes in its fullness, all of creation will be restored, not just humanity. In this important sense Wright is astute in recasting Irenaeus’ thought: the resurrection does not signal an ‘ahistorical rescue from the world’ but a ‘transhistorical redemption of the world.’[[650]](#footnote-650) Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus emphasizes that while that kingdom has been inaugurated, it has not yet come in all its fullness; there remains the ‘visible and painful experience of the unredeemed state of the world.’[[651]](#footnote-651) Thus even as Christians proclaim the resurrection, it is right to continue to expect something new, something that has not yet happened. Moltmann is perceptive in his description. Christians await,

…the fulfilment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfilment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in his resurrection, the fulfilment of the lordship of the crucified one over all things that is promised in his exaltation.[[652]](#footnote-652)

This has major implications for a theological foundation for evangelism in an age of mis-distrust. In the resurrection, future victory transforms present reality, even if that metamorphosis is not readily visible or apparent. The evangelistic task then is not simply to proclaim that Christ is risen, with eyes turned solely to the future afterlife and little attention to the world in its current state, but to ‘live the resurrection in the here and now and to be a sign of contradiction against the forces of death and destruction.’[[653]](#footnote-653) It is to make space within oneself for the other, and therefore space for the Holy Spirit of the resurrected Christ, living and relating with assured hope that God’s promise to make all things new is even now coming to fruition.

**The Ascension**

In my discussion of the incarnation, I asserted the value of maintaining the tension between the divinity of Jesus the Christ and the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Proclaiming the incarnate Son of God is important; yet it must not hide the particularity of the man Jesus. Maintaining that same tension in relation to the ascension is equally important, yet the particularity of the man Jesus provides a significant stumbling block. In Western culture, there appears to be an overriding desire for the universal, which in explorations of the ascension shows itself in the privileging of cosmology. Douglas Farrow describes this as the ‘need to make of “Christ” something other or more than Jesus.’ He goes on to assert, ‘Jesus-history has been made over into the manifestation of a universal principle or pattern, Jesus himself becoming the dispensable element.’[[654]](#footnote-654)

Grasping the implications of the ascension is a challenging prospect that has vexed the church throughout the ages. The difficulty becomes clear when one recognizes that understanding the ascension involves answering the basic question, ‘where is Jesus now?’ This is a basic but unsettling question because it points to the absence of Jesus; however, this is the point where understanding the ascension is most valuable in undergirding a theological stance for evangelism.

Dealing theologically with an understanding of Jesus’ absence, especially as it relates to the sacraments, has not been an easy task. Martin Luther’s sacramental realism resulted in his appealing to God’s limitless power; Jesus’ bodily ascension being a sign that he is above all, in all and beyond all. Therefore for Luther, Jesus was not absent, but present, not only in the Eucharist, but everywhere.[[655]](#footnote-655) John Calvin, on the other hand, rejected the idea that Christ was everywhere present.[[656]](#footnote-656) For him, the ascended Jesus was not everywhere, but was everywhere accessible, and thus the Holy Spirit was integral in resolving the problem of absence.[[657]](#footnote-657) In the context of the Eucharist, ‘by *virtue* (power) of the Spirit, our souls are joined to Christ, raised up to heaven where he is at the right hand of the Father.’[[658]](#footnote-658) For his part, Wesley followed Calvin in insisting on a bodily ascension, asserting ‘That he is not corporally present anywhere but in heaven, we learn from Acts 1:11 and 3:21. Thither he went, and there he will continue till the time of the restitution of all things.’[[659]](#footnote-659) Yet for Wesley, the Spirit does not raise the believer ‘up’ to Christ, ‘*the Spirit brings Christ to us*, expressing the grace and love of God toward us through the means of bread and wine.’[[660]](#footnote-660)

The debate has continued into the present with opinions offered on all sides, the scope of which is too great to do justice in this context.[[661]](#footnote-661) However, there are currently two main answers to this question, ‘where is Jesus?’ that can be briefly summarized. The first is that Jesus is everywhere. This line of thought follows from Origin though Augustine and tends toward an abstract focus on a ‘cosmic’ Christ whose spirit is everywhere present. On this view, a universal ‘ascension of the mind’ overshadows any understanding of a bodily ascension. This appeals to a twenty-first-century perspective as ‘the ascension strikes most moderns, including many Christians, as an embarrassing category mistake.’[[662]](#footnote-662)

Although not without merit in some aspects, the cosmic view of the ascension is problematic as a foundation for a theological stance to ground evangelism for several reasons. First, it dampens the force of New Testament eschatology such that past and future are merged into a timeless present. Further, it fails to engage in a frank way the real absence of Jesus.[[663]](#footnote-663) This failure is dangerous because it potentially inflates the doctrine of the church in ways that hide the discontinuity between the ascended Jesus and the ‘pilgrim members of Christ’s body.’ When such discontinuity is not adequately dealt with, talk of incarnational ministry on behalf of the church loses a great deal of integrity.[[664]](#footnote-664)

On the other hand, a second and I believe preferable way to answer the question ‘where is Jesus?’ is a bodily understanding of the ascension. This view draws heavily on Irenaeus’ insistence that ‘Christ has come in the flesh, has ascended in the flesh, and will return in the flesh.’[[665]](#footnote-665) Farrow highlights one merit of this understanding: it refuses to allow ‘the reduction of Jesus Christ to a principle or pattern, or the merging of his history with our history in a general synthesis, but instead insists on maintaining his distinct human identity even in his departure.’[[666]](#footnote-666) Edith Humphrey expands this idea. The ascension,

prevents us from visualizing Jesus’ victory as merely spiritual, and thinking of the incarnation in temporary terms…It prevents us from imagining the Christian hope in terms of immaterial existence and thereby devaluing the body. And it prevents us from confusing God the Son with a spiritual presence or confusing the church with Jesus. To understand the ascension properly reminds us forcibly of our status as creatures, and yet also hints that heaven and earth are ‘not so very far away from each other.’[[667]](#footnote-667)

Another value of a bodily understanding, especially for evangelism is its emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Farrow echoes the Wesleyan position when he rightly insists that the Holy Spirit ‘does not in fact present himself but the absent Jesus.’ It is the Holy Spirit that convicts the world about sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16.9-11) and unites Christians to the absent Jesus through word and sacrament. ‘The Spirit’s work is an infringement on our time, an eschatological reordering of our being to the fellowship of the Father and the Son, and to the new creation.’[[668]](#footnote-668)

A more cosmic understanding of the ascension is correct in asserting that Christians in the twenty-first century are not and can never be contemporaries of Jesus of Nazareth; however, in the Eucharist, those ‘who are not contemporaries of the historical Jesus can become so in the power of the Spirit,’ going ‘back’ to the future so to speak.[[669]](#footnote-669) This ‘back to the future’ orientation stems from the eschatologically determined cosmology of a bodily understanding of the ascension, a cosmology in which Jesus of Nazareth is the plumb line. T. F. Torrance describes this cosmology well: ‘The healing and restoring of our being carries with it the healing, restoring, reorganizing and transforming of the space and time in which we now live our lives in relation to one another and to God.’[[670]](#footnote-670) This sense of healing and restoring is echoed in the Wesleyan understanding of the differing work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. For Wesley, ‘through the Incarnate God…we are graciously reconciled, and through the Indwelling God…we are graciously empowered for our healing.’[[671]](#footnote-671)

A third significant element of a bodily understanding is that it that demands the priority of baptism and the Eucharist. Farrow is helpful:

Jesus ascends to the Father’s right hand in the sense that the whole of creation is reorganized around him. That reorganization is not something that works itself out within the terms of our own spatio-temporal processes, for ours is the very space and time that requires reorganization. Yet, it is a spatio-temporal process, since it is we ourselves who are made the objects of it and, with Jesus, its participants and beneficiaries. This is precisely what the sacramental foundations of the church attest.[[672]](#footnote-672)

Lastly, a bodily understanding of the ascension compels one to genuinely deal with Jesus’ absence every time one asserts his presence. The church exists both within history and contrary to history, thus it should feel and acknowledge the absence of Jesus most profoundly. Yet this acknowledgement of the pain of straddling two times, so to speak, turns one more fully toward the Parousia, which in turn reveals ‘not a pattern but a particular, namely, “this same Jesus,” who will come in like manner as he departed.’[[673]](#footnote-673)

I believe one of the reasons that people dismiss the ascension and deem Jesus’ whereabouts a nonquestion[[674]](#footnote-674) is that they begin at the wrong end of the event itself. In this sense, ‘our failure lies not in our inability to imagine how a body can flout what we have been told are the laws of space and time, but in our inability to imagine the wonder of heavenly glory.’[[675]](#footnote-675) Interestingly, imagining the wonder of heavenly glory is significant for evangelism as it enables us to participate in Jesus’ ascent, ‘not an ascent that leaves behind the world or that hopes to escape it,’ but one that ‘[offers] all up to the Creator and Redeemer of all.’[[676]](#footnote-676) This intercession on behalf of the world inherent in participating in Jesus’ ascent grounds the space making of embrace, which, in turn, grounds evangelistic practice.

As helpful as a bodily understanding of ascension may be, the question ‘where is Jesus?’ remains challenging because in the end it requires that Christians state,

…quite categorically that we do not know; that we cannot place him, spatially or temporally or materially or spiritually, with respect to ourselves; that he is not above us or ahead of us or alongside us or within us, even if each of these metaphors has something helpful to say about his actual relation to us.[[677]](#footnote-677)

Yet understanding the embodied nature of the ascension, including this challenge, is important for a theological stance of embrace to ground evangelism because it forces a posture of vulnerability in the admission that there are certain mysteries of the faith that are essentially unknowable, at least at this point in the history of creation. (Acts 1.1-10, John 16.12-33) Furthermore, the bodily ascension affirms that redemption is for the whole person and that one’s body is a valuable element of one’s personhood. Jesus’ ascension becomes a pattern for sanctification because it models a ‘mending-plus-glory’ whereby,

all of what we are has been assumed, and so it is not our bare redemption but our entire hallowing and exaltation that God has in mind…even our bodies and this world are not left unchanged.[[678]](#footnote-678) (Psalm 24, Eph. 2.4-10)

Finally, asserting Jesus’ bodily ascension provides a clear understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in this time between Jesus’ first and second coming. (John 16.12-15) ‘The Spirit begins here and now his inscrutable work of expropriating human beings, and the time and space of human beings, for the new creation which Christ has gone to prepare.’[[679]](#footnote-679) The Wesleyan perspective provides a helpful insight in its emphasis on the Holy Spirit as making the past event of Jesus a present reality. In the Wesleyan tradition, the Holy Spirit ‘is other directed and bears witness to the historical Christ and thereby makes effectual a living personal presence in a panoply of grace and benefits.’[[680]](#footnote-680) Thus as Christians engage in evangelism from a stance of embrace, they do so with an intense awareness of the movement of the Spirit, which casts light back toward Jesus of Nazareth and forward toward the fullness of the kingdom of God, new creation, that was inaugurated in him and through him. As they make space within themselves for the other, they also make space for the Spirit, anticipating the transformation begun in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The force of a bodily understanding of the ascension for evangelism lies in the realization that in addressing the *absence* of Jesus, the church is proclaiming that it really is looking for Jesus to come again with power and glory. The church sits at the crossroads of two histories containing two competing schemes for humanity: one of God’s making and one made with human hands. In the Eucharist the church proclaims that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again! The power of that proclamation lies in an understanding, however challenging, that admits that Jesus is not here now, yet in the context of that admission, lives in the expectant hope that he *really will* return. In the meantime, it straddles those two histories, confident that ‘heaven and earth overlap, interlock, collide, challenge one another’ and will finally be brought together when, in the fullness of time, all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Jesus the Christ.[[681]](#footnote-681) (Eph. 1.9-10)

**Pentecost**

The elemental force of God’s kingdom, the power that enables it to be fully here, even though it is not yet fully here, is the power of the Holy Spirit of the triune God, the shĕkīnâ of God that was present at and animates all of creation, empowered the Messiah Jesus, and was unleashed at Pentecost.[[682]](#footnote-682) Christians are able to continue Jesus’ mission of self-sacrificing love in the world only through the Spirit, which provides the boldness and courage necessary to live in the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom. From the Wesleyan perspective, it is the power that both inspires prophetic witness to Jesus Christ (Luke/Acts) and in-dwells in believers (John).[[683]](#footnote-683) Yet the Holy Spirit of God, while focused in Jesus Christ and concentrated in those who follow him, is not contained solely within the church, but is present, active and involved with all of creation in a life-giving way (Psalm 139.7; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Romans 8.1-27).[[684]](#footnote-684)

As with so much of Christian faith, there is the danger of misunderstanding in this arena. Despite increased interest in pneumatology at the close of the twentieth century, the influence of modern rationalism and materialism has largely made the term ‘spirit’ somewhat meaningless in current Western culture, associating it more with the psychological arena, paranormal activity, literature like the Harry Potter series, or even marketing strategies. Religious understandings of ‘spirit’ have been influenced by individualistic New Age movements to such a degree that ‘spirituality’ often simply indicates a form of self-expression. Kirsteen Kim rightly points out that in this kind of environment, ‘the biblical term “Holy Spirit” is divested of its profound scriptural meanings; it has lost its cosmic dimensions, and its connection with God the Father and Jesus Christ is very unclear.’[[685]](#footnote-685)

One source of difficulty is that until recently, theological interest in God the Son far outweighed theological interest in the Third Person of the Trinity. Further, the scientific concerns of modernity categorized discussions of the Spirit,

as metaphysical speculation and, as such, largely irrelevant to life on earth. So the Spirit was assigned to the realm of values, or to the human mind, or religious experience, and the link to divinity was obscured. Popular movements of the Holy Spirit attracted scholarly attention…but they were reduced to the level of religious phenomena and appeared increasingly personal or communal, and therefore of little relevance to wider society.[[686]](#footnote-686)

Not surprisingly given the mystery inherent in the life of faith, grasping the nature of God’s Spirit can appear as an overwhelming task, but it is a significant one for a theological stance to ground evangelism. In discussions of this facet of God’s nature, it is helpful to begin by recalling that any talk of the Spirit is simply an attempt to describe God’s presence and activity in the world.[[687]](#footnote-687) Early attempts to discuss the Spirit involved a focus on divine essence and origin. Augustine, for instance, understood the Spirit to be the unity or communion between the Father and the Son.[[688]](#footnote-688) He taught that this love (communion) was given to the church so that, for Augustine, the Holy Spirit was the soul of the church.[[689]](#footnote-689) This focus on the inner life of God (the unity of God) continued through Anselm and Thomas Aquinas.[[690]](#footnote-690) The Reformers, however, focused on the Spirit’s role in providing illumination for the interpretation of Scripture and sanctification in the life of the believer.[[691]](#footnote-691) For Wesley, the work of the Spirit ‘is intimately tied to revelation through which the presence of Christ is seen not simply as a past occurrence but also as a present *reality*.’[[692]](#footnote-692) Over time, these emphases stressed the importance of the individual relationship with God, and in some ways internalized understandings of the Spirit as ‘an element within our own personal psychological, intellectual or spiritual history.’[[693]](#footnote-693) Though internalized, this understanding of the Spirit was not without impact because its emphasis can be seen in a dynamic way in Protestant movements, such the Methodist revival in both Britain and the United States.[[694]](#footnote-694) However, a privatized and somewhat domesticated understanding of the Spirit currently remains in mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Methodist Church (in the U.S.), where there is often little expectation that the Spirit will be manifest in any outward or visible way. I am often reminded of this lack of expectation when I openly share times in my own life in which the presence of the Spirit has been tangible, visible and powerfully transformative, only to be met with shock, discomfort and incredulity on the part of not a few listeners.

In the modern period, secular understandings of the Spirit began to emerge that viewed the Spirit from the perspective of moral and spiritual values (Kant), psychological, interior or more subjective standpoints of the self (Schleiermacher), and philosophical understandings of cosmic forces and ‘ultimate reality’ (Hegel).[[695]](#footnote-695) Although earlier conceptualizations, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, limited the work of the Spirit to the Christian community or personal Christian faith, modern thought did not in theory limit the Spirit’s presence; however, it was assumed that the Spirit was tied to Western civilization ‘as representing the best ethical standards, the most developed consciousness, and the highest reaches of human development.’[[696]](#footnote-696)

This assumption can be seen in the modern missionary movement, which was dominated by a sense of the West’s responsibility for the rest of the world. From this perspective, the emphasis was on the missionary nature of the Spirit, the Spirit of mission so to speak.[[697]](#footnote-697) Although this is a valid understanding, it is only partial because the Spirit frequently becomes an ‘afterthought used to explain God’s activity in the church in connection with Jesus,’ rather than an equal person of the Trinity.[[698]](#footnote-698) It is as though the Spirit is an added ingredient or power which makes it possible to meet the goals of Christian mission; even though mission itself remains a ‘work’ to be achieved by organization and strategy determined by criteria entirely separate from any pneumatological reflection.[[699]](#footnote-699)

In contrast to this view is one asserted by John Taylor who rightly attempts to broaden perceptions, seeing God’s Spirit as ‘the elemental energy of communion itself, within which all separate existences may be made present and personal to each other.’[[700]](#footnote-700) While Jesus has a unique relationship with the Spirit, the ‘in-betweenness’ of the Spirit is ‘not enclosed, either in Christ or in his church, but exists between Christ and the other, between the Christians and those who meet them.’[[701]](#footnote-701) Broadening understanding in this way emphasizes the continuity of the triune God’s work in creation and redemption and dramatically expands mission to encompass all creation and all creativity.[[702]](#footnote-702)

Newbigin offers somewhat of a middle way in asserting that while the Spirit is present in the church it is not the property of the church. Mission then, is ‘not just something the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit.’ ‘The free, sovereign, living power of the Spirit of God’ is ‘the active agent…a power that rules, guides, and goes before the church.’[[703]](#footnote-703) While Newbigin would not be comfortable claiming that the Spirit is at work where the church is not present, he does maintain that,

…[the church] is not in control of the mission. Another is in control, and his fresh works will repeatedly surprise the church, compelling it to stop talking and to listen…the church can only be the attentive servant…The church is witness insofar as it follows obediently where the Spirit leads.[[704]](#footnote-704)

Such an understanding, while not as sweeping as Taylor’s, does recognize the prevenient nature of the Spirit and suggests that the Spirit’s work goes beyond the boundaries of the church in mission.[[705]](#footnote-705)

Although much of the above reflection focuses on intellectual conceptualizations of God’s Spirit, a contrasting, yet complementary understanding is one better described as an ‘embodied’ understanding. Best illustrated by the Pentecostal movement (which has its roots via the American holiness movement in Wesley’s Methodist revival), this view affirms that:

The same Spirit who animated the apostles at Pentecost continues to be actively, dynamically, and miraculously present both in the ecclesial community and in creation…[this] Spirit is a spirit who surprises us by continuing to speak, heal, and manifest God’s presence in ways that counter the shut-down naturalism of modernity.[[706]](#footnote-706)

Central to this conception is a radical openness to a God who exceeds the horizon of expectation, comes unexpectedly and is involved in something different or new. In many ways following the Wesleyan trajectory, from the Pentecostal perspective God’s Spirit is dynamically present in the whole of creation, undergirding the affirmation not only of the goodness of creation, but the goodness of the human body and the central claim that God cares about the physical bodies of human beings. For Pentecostals, the human person is an embodied spirit, always more than one’s body, but never less.[[707]](#footnote-707) Pentecostal theologians describe their worldview as sacramental because,

It emphasizes the goodness, necessity, and instrumentality of material elements: God’s Spirit is active through concrete and material phenomena. It is a gritty spirituality – one that affirms all the messiness and awkwardness of embodiment, because it is in and through such embodiment that God’s Spirit is at work.[[708]](#footnote-708)

And lastly, again, following a Wesleyan theological arc, for Pentecostals the Spirit empowers people for mission, undergirded by eschatological expectation stemming from the belief that ‘the rebirth of a person by the Spirit is the anticipation of the transformation of the cosmos.’ (2 Cor. 5.17; Rom. 8.21) ‘The person filled by the Spirit of God is impelled by that same Spirit to cooperate with God in the work of evangelism and social action in anticipation of the new creation.’[[709]](#footnote-709) In this way ‘the hospitality of God is thus embodied in a hospitable church whose members are empowered by the Holy Spirit to stand in solidarity and serve with the sick, the poor, and the oppressed.’[[710]](#footnote-710) Because God’s Spirit is a revolutionary force that always disrupts and subverts the status quo of the powerful, mission is ‘not only to announce and practice the forgiveness of sins, but also to restructure relationships between the rich and poor, between Jew and Gentile, between male and female, between the socially accepted and the socially marginalized.’[[711]](#footnote-711)

Traditional Wesleyan theology complements the discussion by focusing on the Spirit as the empowering presence of God: ‘the activity of God’s very Self in human life.’[[712]](#footnote-712) In this sense the Spirit is not an impersonal power that overrides human freedom, but rather, ‘the personal Presence of God’ epitomized in love. ‘Because love is something that exists in its truest sense only between persons,’ God’s Spirit is supremely personal.[[713]](#footnote-713) Further, this personal presence is an empowering presence going before all else and enabling one ‘to believe and love and serve God.’[[714]](#footnote-714) This personal presence empowers people to participate, albeit in a limited sense, in the life of God.

Though an extensive treatment of the theology of the Holy Spirit is not possible, this brief framing is important in developing a holistic conceptualization to ground embrace.[[715]](#footnote-715) The first issue of note, especially from a Wesleyan perspective, is the significance of the prevenient nature of the Spirit: God’s Spirit cannot be confined to the boundaries of the church, but instead moves within and beyond. Recognizing the prevenient nature of God’s Spirit is crucial for the evangelistic task because ultimately it is the Spirit that transforms and gives new life. Too often evangelistic efforts focus on strategies and programs, rely on rational argumentation, or adhere rigidly to particular biblical steps and fail to recognize the work of the Spirit, preveniently moving before, between and within those toward whom those efforts are directed.[[716]](#footnote-716) When the church is at its best, the Spirit is recognized to be the leading presence, active and effective apart from any human initiated action.[[717]](#footnote-717) The church, as well as individual believers live in step with the urging of the Spirit, reflecting for the rest of the world the concentrated, focused Spirit of the triune God and empowered for evangelism. The church falls short when it claims the Spirit for itself;[[718]](#footnote-718) or it overly privatizes the Spirit’s role, relegating it *solely* to the personal realm of divine-human or human-to-human relationships[[719]](#footnote-719) while ignoring its unifying work, binding love of God and neighbor in symbiotic interrelationship;[[720]](#footnote-720) or it fails to take seriously the power available through a wholehearted reliance on its leading.[[721]](#footnote-721)

A second issue of import, especially in the globalized context of current Western culture, can be seen in Kim’s correct assertion:

If the Spirit is all-encompassing or ubiquitous, the Spirit’s absence is difficult to contemplate, but only if there is acceptance of the possibility that there may be places or occasions that God’s Holy Spirit does not inhabit or endorse, is there the possibility of critical engagement with the world.’[[722]](#footnote-722)

Under the influence of modernity, the spiritual world of Western Christianity has been a simple one containing only one spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. All other spirits were consigned to the sphere of superstition.[[723]](#footnote-723) On this view, there is only God and human beings.[[724]](#footnote-724) Yet this reflects neither the worldview of the New Testament, nor the gestalt of human experience, which involves a daily struggle with powerful, often unseen, and apparently inexplicable forces.[[725]](#footnote-725) A full understanding of God’s Spirit involves taking seriously the existence of evil that stands in opposition to God, a stance that often conflicts with the dominant Western worldview.[[726]](#footnote-726) Dunn rightly asserts that ‘the New Testament world of demons and spirits is also the biblical world of the Holy Spirit…In abandoning the dimension of the demonic we may find that we have abandoned also the dimension of the Spirit.’[[727]](#footnote-727)

Postmodernity has revealed that religion and spirituality have a continuing role to play in the human experience of the world because rationality has been found to be not the only tool, nor necessarily the best tool to deal with the powerful, seemingly incomprehensible forces humans encounter in their lives.[[728]](#footnote-728) Therefore succumbing to the ‘demythologizing’ of the ‘spirits’ enforced by modernity risks continuing a perilous disengagement from the spirit world.[[729]](#footnote-729) Further, it risks losing a sense of God’s Spirit in one’s everyday life, the very place where one engages the struggle with those powerful, apparently inexplicable and often unseen forces.[[730]](#footnote-730)

Besides inappropriately narrowing the understanding of the spirit world, the modern conception of one spirit fails to take seriously the existence of other faiths that draw upon their own forms of spirituality.[[731]](#footnote-731) Connected to this monospirit perception is the pluralist model that while recognizing the existence of other faiths, attempts to unite them under one spiritual umbrella as simply different approaches to the same ultimate truth.[[732]](#footnote-732) Although the desire for peaceful acceptance is understandable, this view falls short by trivializing the various significant differences and contradictions that exist between religions. A better option might be to honestly recognize that religions are not all the same; there are in fact real and meaningful differences. However, fruitful dialogue and interaction takes this into consideration and recognizes that ‘we are *different* from one another, but we are not *distant* from one another.’[[733]](#footnote-733) I would add that such recognition is a crucial element in a theological stance of embrace.

Michael Welker offers an understanding that augments the recognition of differences that exist in a world of many spirits and many faiths. He insightfully claims that the spirit that has influenced Western culture has spread now worldwide. It is a spirit that seeks to flatten distinctives while uniformly codifying what is human, what is certain, and what is meaningful across societies and cultures. Though this spirit has been confused with the Holy Spirit, Welker stresses that it is not the Holy Spirit. He asserts that the mysteries of God and creation are too deep to be standardized; therefore it is futile to attempt to fit God into a homogenous metaphysical system. Because of this, Welker maintains that theology must function prophetically by distinguishing between God’s Spirit and the spirit of the world, constantly testing the spirit of the age against the Spirit of Truth as revealed in Jesus Christ.[[734]](#footnote-734)

His concept of the prophetic role of distinguishing between the Holy Spirit and the spirit(s) of the world points toward a final element crucial to a holistic understanding of the Spirit: discernment. In the increasingly pluralistic environment of Western society, it is imperative that Christians develop a sense of ‘discernment of spirits.’ (1 Corinthians 12.10) Rather than debating ‘*whether* or not the Spirit is at work among people of other faiths,’ the more pertinent question is ‘how to *discern* the presence and work of the Spirit among those who live outside the visible boundary of the church.’[[735]](#footnote-735) Such discernment must take into account both the possibility of the Spirit’s presence and the Spirit’s absence[[736]](#footnote-736) and must be directed toward both the church and the world. In line with the Wesleyan trajectory, Dunn correctly insists that mission as missio Dei involves taking part in the mission of God carried out by the Holy Spirit; (Romans 8.14-17) therefore, the initial step is to discern how the Spirit is moving in the world in order to become involved.[[737]](#footnote-737)

Discerning God’s Spirit among and in contrast to other spirits is understandably a difficult task, requiring divinely inspired wisdom. (I Corinthians 2; James 3)[[738]](#footnote-738) It requires openness because, as Scripture testifies, the Spirit is free to blow where it will, and Christians can ‘never be sure where the Holy Spirit is not.’[[739]](#footnote-739) Echoing the Wesleyan perspective, Stanley Samartha has astutely observed that ‘the claim that God’s presence is with us is not for us to make. It is for our neighbours to recognize.’[[740]](#footnote-740) Discernment is also both an individual and a communal activity that is always done in concrete rather than general terms. This is significant because it points to the provisional nature of discernment. Kim perceptively summarizes: ‘The Spirit of Christ cannot be captive to any of the spirits of the world. Discernment requires wide horizons, in view of the breadth of the Spirit’s mission; openness, because of the unpredictability of the Spirit’s movements; and humility, since the Spirit is the Spirit of Almighty God.’[[741]](#footnote-741)

One aspect of the significance of Pentecost lies in the power of the Spirit to enervate the fearful and hiding followers of Jesus so mightily that they were transformed into the body of Christ, the church. When the church lives in the power of the Spirit, it makes God’s love a reality as it engages the world, making justice and righteousness tangible, visible and operative. Engaging the world is a key part of the church’s existence as a distinct community and provides a foundation of integrity for evangelistic practice, yet such engagement and evangelism is severely hampered without a holistic understanding of the Holy Spirit. Evangelism rooted in a theological stance of embrace confidently relies on the prevenient nature of God’s Spirit and cultivates a discerning openness. In the context of Western culture, especially in light of globalization, postmodern influences and the pluralistic nature of society, a robust theology of the Spirit empowers Christians to relate to those outside the church both dialogically and relationally,[[742]](#footnote-742) making space within themselves for the other and for the presence of God’s Spirit, which leads, moves and transforms.

**New Creation**

For Christians, the future holds great sway. In revealing Godself to Israel, God made promises that opened up the future. Those promises culminated in God’s raising the crucified Messiah to new life. In Jesus’ resurrection, Christians are provided a foretaste of the divinely promised resurrection for all the dead, the new creation of all reality, and the coming of God’s kingdom of righteousness and glory. God’s promise is embodied in the history, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the resurrection entails the eschatological future of all reality.[[743]](#footnote-743) As Moltmann has so aptly stated, ‘From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.’[[744]](#footnote-744)

The Parousia, the oft used reference to the future to which Christians look forward, is a descriptor that has been both helpful and confusing in coming to a full understanding of what the new creation for which Christians hope actually entails. Because the Greek word has a range of meaning,[[745]](#footnote-745) and because of scholarly debate over the meaning of Jesus’ apocalyptic sayings (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13),[[746]](#footnote-746) its use has often limited Christian understandings of the future to the return of Christ as judge. Such an understanding, however accurate in part, misses the depth of Christian hope for the future of creation.

Eschatology, the doctrine of ‘last things’ or ‘the end of all things,’ is the word most used to describe the set of things connected to Christ’s return and Christian hope. Yet Moltmann is right to assert that the subject of *Christian* eschatology is not actually ‘the end’ at all. Christian eschatology is about ‘the new creation of all things’; it is ‘the remembered hope of the raising of the crucified Christ’; thus it ‘talks about beginning afresh in the deadly end.’[[747]](#footnote-747)

This remembered hope offering fresh beginnings is a confident and trustful hope in sharp contrast to secular hope, which is marked by general uncertainty about the future[[748]](#footnote-748) or dominated by the modern myth of progress.[[749]](#footnote-749) Remembered hope understands the limits of human planning, prediction and control and recognizes that ‘only God can supply a conclusion to real life, but only God will do so.’[[750]](#footnote-750) Christians ground their hope in God as beginning, end, source and goal and understand themselves to be living in the midst of a ‘story’ that is not yet completed but whose decisive chapter is the story of Jesus through whom God is accomplishing God’s redemptive purposes for all of creation.

Although the hope that lies at the heart of God’s story is vastly different, it has often been confused with the basis of secular hope, the modern myth of progress, which is an invention of the Enlightenment rather than a Christian construct, postmodernist critiques notwithstanding.[[751]](#footnote-751) The modern commitment to progress understands history to be constant movement into an unlimited future with inevitable and unlimited human improvement.[[752]](#footnote-752) It is a stance wedded to the understanding that by relying on reason and applying the lessons of science, humanity will be able ‘to deliver a new and improved world.’[[753]](#footnote-753) Unlike Christian hope, this worldview abandons transcendence in favor of a wholly immanent understanding of history, ‘a kind of faith in the process of history itself.’ Such a worldview minimizes the evil of the past and present and gives priority to the future. Any pain or suffering, evil or barbarism, can be justified in reference to future goals, whether those goals involve achieving a distant utopia, a sense of human perfection, or simply continuing the never-ending march of progress.[[754]](#footnote-754)

The past century and the opening years of this one stand as stark reminders of the gross emptiness of the myth of progress. The horror need not be recounted in detail, simple reference to general categories such as war, genocide, state and international terrorism, political torture, preventable starvation, and continued human trafficking will certainly suffice. Often in response to these horrors, postmodern culture has rejected the myth of progress,[[755]](#footnote-755) attempting instead to substitute scientific narratives, which, while offering explanation, fail to provide meaning.[[756]](#footnote-756) Yet, in the light of the horror of history, the future for which Christians hope is dramatically different from either the myth of progress or purely scientific narrative. The contrast is profound inasmuch as future history does not hold a privileged place over and against past history because ‘in the resurrection all the dead of all history will rise to judgment and life in the new creation.’ Thus ‘the countless victims of history, those whose lives were torture and those who scarcely lived at all, are not to be forgotten, but remembered in hope of the resurrection.’[[757]](#footnote-757)

That Christian eschatology is significantly different than the modern myth of progress is important in developing a theological foundation for evangelism because Christianity has often mistakenly been made to shoulder sole responsibility for much of the horror of modernity, resulting in a negative impact on evangelistic practice. History certainly shows that Christianity is not blameless; however, asserting that it is the ideological source of modernity is not only to misread history, but to misunderstand Christian hope itself. Thus for a strong theological foundation for evangelism, it is imperative that Christian eschatology be fully grasped.

Grasping Christian eschatology in all its fullness has oftentimes seemed overwhelming, and rightly so because it involves awakening creative imagination to surmount the limitations language imposes on such a great mystery. Two important but often misunderstood elements are eschatology’s transcendent and otherworldly nature. In his opposition to ‘revealed religion,’ John Gray attempts to present ‘a view of things in which humans are not central.’[[758]](#footnote-758) Ironically, that is an excellent description of Christian eschatology: a view of the future in which humans are not central. Humans are not central to eschatology because at its heart Christian eschatology is thoroughly theocentric. The triune God is at the center of all Christian hope for the future. As creator, God comes before all things and will bring all things to fulfillment at the time of Christ’s return. ‘[God] is the origin and goal of all history…[having] the first word, in creation, and the last word, in new creation.’[[759]](#footnote-759)

The thoroughly theocentric nature of Christian hope invites Christians to expand their world and open it to divine transcendence. It is worth noting that when Revelation, the book that most vividly and imaginatively portrays the future for which Christians hope, describes the theocentric nature of all reality, a reality that exists ultimately to glorify God, humanity is completely displaced from the center.[[760]](#footnote-760) Christian eschatology asserts that as creator of all things, God alone is worthy of absolute sovereignty because God alone is the source of all value, and all truth and righteousness reside in God’s very being.[[761]](#footnote-761)

This sovereignty, significantly, is nothing at all like the absolute sovereignty claimed by finite creatures on earth.[[762]](#footnote-762) Unfortunately, the assertion of God’s sovereignty envisioned in eschatology has often been misunderstood with the criticism leveled that such imaging sanctions authoritarian structures of power and domination among human beings.[[763]](#footnote-763) Although this has often been so, to the detriment of evangelistic integrity, it sadly stems from a complete misreading of scriptural references to God’s sovereignty, most notably, Revelation. Bauckham rightly points out that ‘far from legitimizing human autocracy, divine rule radically de-legitimizes it. Absolute power, by definition, belongs only to God and it is precisely the recognition of God’s absolute power that relativizes all human power.’[[764]](#footnote-764)

The value of the images of divine rule in Revelation lies in their ability to suggest the incomparability of God’s sovereignty.[[765]](#footnote-765) Rather than suggesting that the sovereign relationship between God and creation is to be a *model* for relationships between humans, the images imply that this aspect of God’s relation with creation is unique, *transcending* any and all other relationships.[[766]](#footnote-766) The critique misconstrues the concept of transcendence that grounds biblical imaging of God’s sovereignty. Real transcendence means that God transcends *all* creaturely existence. Thus God is not ‘some kind of superhuman being alongside other beings’; nor is the relation between God and the world in all respects comparable with relations between creatures; nor do all images of God function as models for human behavior. As ‘the infinite mystery on which all finite being depends, [God’s] relation to us is unique. We can express it only by using language and images in odd ways that point beyond themselves to something quite incomparable with the creaturely sources of our language and images.’[[767]](#footnote-767)

The Christian understanding of transcendence can also be a stumbling block to evangelism if it is misunderstood to imply that God is distant from creation rather than involved in and with it.[[768]](#footnote-768) ‘Transcendence requires the absolute distinction between God and finite creatures, *but not at all his distance from them*. The transcendent God, precisely because he is not one finite being among others, is able to be incomparably present to all, closer to them than they are to themselves.’[[769]](#footnote-769) Even so, however, at the heart of eschatology is the recognition that God is not now fully present in creation because evil and injustice presently obscure God’s glory, and the goodness of the physical world has been marred by environmental degradation.[[770]](#footnote-770) (Isaiah 24.4-6a) Nevertheless, Christians look to the future with confident hope, not rejecting the present world in an otherworldly dualism, but assured that evil has been overcome in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and when God’s rule comes in its fullness all of creation will be indwelt with the splendor of God.

Because God’s rule has not yet come in its fullness, because God’s glory is not yet fully manifest in the present world of environmental degradation, evil and injustice are of great concern to Christian eschatology. Yet far from undermining Christian hope, this reality emphasizes that Christians live in the midst of an open story that is not yet complete, a story that neither minimizes creation care nor justifies evil. Rather, because the Christian story is one of redemption, all of history and creation (not only individual humans) is to be redeemed: all the failure, wickedness, evil, suffering, destruction and death of history will be redeemed. Because of the centrality of the cross, there can be no whitewashing of history; rather, ‘the Christian story is open to all the cries and protests of those who suffer. It does not silence them or explain them away…By resisting premature closure, by keeping history open to the still future coming of God, Christian eschatology sustains our outrage against innocent and meaningless suffering.’[[771]](#footnote-771)

Because Christian hope exists in the midst of a story that has not yet reached its conclusion, it recognizes that the multitude of possibilities inherent in the future always require evaluation and choice; thus the future always holds the potential for the genuinely new and unpredictable. One can influence the future but never control it. Thus Christian hope involves both responsible action and trust in God, both acknowledging human limits and taking God’s transcendence seriously. It neither overreaches by attempting what can come only from God, nor remains passive by neglecting what is humanly possible. Rather, Christian hope ‘does what can be done for its own sake, here and now, confident that every present will find itself, redeemed and fulfilled, in the new creation.’ For Christians, ‘the final future is an invitation to hope for the ultimately satisfying end that only God can give.’[[772]](#footnote-772)

But what is the nature of this end for which Christians hope? Because it places its hope in the transcendent, triune God, whose very nature is completely other than all finite creatures, Christian hope looks toward a future that is ‘otherworldly,’ in the sense that it necessarily stretches, engages and enables the human imagination. This is not because the end toward which Christians hope is imaginary or to be understood as some spiritualized replacement of the physical cosmos as it exists right now, but because it is beyond the realm of human language to adequately describe.[[773]](#footnote-773) Dunn perceptively depicts the descriptive difficulty:

The language of our hope, and particularly our hope of heaven and of Christ’s coming again, shares a basic deficiency with all our language about the divine and the beyond. It simply cannot express a reality which goes beyond anything those who speak with human speech have experienced.[[774]](#footnote-774)

This ‘otherworldly’ aspect of Christian eschatology is a second element that has often been misunderstood to the detriment of evangelistic integrity specifically because of the tension inherent in Christian hope itself. Christians hope for a world to come that is not simply ‘a repristination of or set of adjustments to the here-and-now, but…a complete overhaul from the foundations up, an overhaul which will result in a decisively new and different order of existence.’[[775]](#footnote-775) Yet, notably within the Wesleyan trajectory, the world to come is not so discontinuous with the present world that it is unrelated to it.[[776]](#footnote-776) At creation God declared God’s handiwork good; God indwells that creation (albeit not in all fullness), and out of faithfulness to the relationship established at creation will redeem it. Moltmann’s reminder is correct:

On earth Christ was born; on earth stands the cross of Christ; and it is on earth that we may expect the deliverance of evil…Why? God the creator remains faithful to God’s creation as the redeemer too: God does not forsake the works of his hands (Ps. 138:8). God doesn’t give anything up for lost, and destroys nothing God has made. For God is God.[[777]](#footnote-777)

David Wilkinson expands and strengthens Moltmann’s position by attending not just to the Earth, but to the entire Universe: ‘The biblical passages do not see new creation as God’s ‘second attempt.’ Rather,

The empty tomb demonstrates that the physicality of this world does matter to God and will not be completely destroyed or discarded. Further, whatever the complexity of Paul’s discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15, his central understanding is that of transformation. Thus in terms of the future of the Universe we expect God’s action to involve transformation of the physical Universe rather than annihilation and beginning again.[[778]](#footnote-778)

Thus Christians hope not for redemption from creation but for the redemption of creation. (Rom. 8.19-22; Col. 1.19-20)

Unfortunately for evangelistic efforts, the Christian worldview translated to the rest of society is not always one of hope for the redemption of all creation. Often the otherworldly nature is offered as a threat of judgment, with Scripture being misused as though it were history written in advance, or presented as ‘eternal fire insurance’ or a spiritual escape route that can produce an attitude of indifference or passivity regarding the world in its present state. In contrast to this, rather than being indifferent to or passive toward the present, Christian faith transcends the limits of every human present. Rather than seeking a spiritual escape route, Christian faith looks forward to a time when the suffering, injustice, lack and loss that characterize so much of this life will cease; when ‘pain and loss [will] be redeemed and refashioned into something good and enduring.’ The hope that grounds Christian faith rests on a different set of values and goals; it ‘is a way of being in the world which refuses to submit to the lordship of the here and now.’ As Bauckham and Hart astutely note, ‘Faith sees a quite different purpose and end for this world than that which the world itself presents and points to. It appears as an oddity in history’s midst, therefore, seemingly unable to be accounted for, and apparently singing from a different hymn sheet from the rest of humankind.’[[779]](#footnote-779)

Engaging in the evangelistic task from a theological stance of embrace involves proclaiming Christian hope, not hope in the barren promises of the finite, but in God, through whom all things are possible. This hope is not a call to quietism or indifference; rather, it is confidence that ‘all the unfulfilled potential of history will somehow be taken up into fulfilment, all losses made good, all injustices set to rights.’[[780]](#footnote-780) Christian hope is faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, which makes the resurrection paradigmatic.[[781]](#footnote-781) Thus Christians live with the expectant hope of new creation, when all creation is transformed into an environment appropriate for that embodiment.[[782]](#footnote-782) (Rom. 8.9-11, 19-22, 23) Christians live, and evangelism takes place in the light of the resurrection. Therefore the task, among other things, is to identify in the present the ‘scattered acts of recreative anticipation of God’s promised future, as the same Spirit who raised Jesus from death calls into being life, health, faith and hope where there is otherwise no capacity for these and no accounting for them.’[[783]](#footnote-783)

A strong theological stance to undergird evangelism involves the recognition that Christians are not simply to identify these ‘scattered acts’ that direct hope toward God’s future; they must involve themselves in God’s activity as God’s Spirit imparts glimmers of new life redeemed in God’s future. In this way, evangelistic efforts are strengthened as the church becomes a place in the world, but not properly of the world, where Christians live full throttle in this life: committed to the goodness and value of creation and the meaningful yet gritty nature of human relationships, but with their sights firmly set on a horizon beyond. When the church becomes such a place, Christians model for others how to live in hope even in the midst of hopelessness. Though recognizing that only God can save, they remain faithful to the call to bear witness, becoming vehicles through which the world might know God, who alone provides genuine hope for the future.[[784]](#footnote-784)

Seven

Restorative Practice: Implications for Ministry

I have offered a Wesleyan theological interpretation of evangelism with the hope of informing not just the content of its practice, but also the theological stance that undergirds it. With that theological stance in mind, it is appropriate to turn to the realm of implications. How might various ministries of the church appear if implemented from the stance of embrace?

At the outset, it is important to reiterate the conviction that evangelism is to be embodied in all of Christian practice. Echoing the distinctively Wesleyan understanding that the gospel is for all, Heath rightly contends that ‘evangelism…is at the heart of all we believe and practice as Christians.’[[785]](#footnote-785) Therefore even as one engages in practices unique to and in the context of the community of faith, one does so with the hope-filled intent that all might have the opportunity to be initiated ‘into the holy life revealed in Jesus Christ, anchored in the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, yielded to the reign of God, for the transformation of the world.’[[786]](#footnote-786)

As has been discussed, for some this may be an uncomfortable blurring of the lines between Christian practices (for instance, between evangelism and discipleship, or between evangelism and the liturgical life of the church).[[787]](#footnote-787) However, I believe such a holistic understanding is valuable for two significant reasons: it more accurately reflects the interrelatedness of Christian practice in the lived experience of the church; and it recognizes the vital link between proclaimed word and lived practice that is necessary, especially in an environment of mis-distrust, if evangelism is to have integrity. When Paul mentored Timothy in the work of an evangelist, he was deliberate about instilling concern for the quality of life of the body of Christ. (I Timothy) Thus it appears from the beginning that there was a significant link between the church’s corporate life and the message it was proclaiming.

With that reminder in place, several points can be made with broad strokes before turning to specific areas of community life potentially affected by adopting the theological stance of embrace to undergird evangelism. These broad strokes involve the issues of identity, relationship and servanthood, and also a deeper issue that is intertwined in all of these. That issue is power.

**Identity**

To accept embrace as an appropriate theological stance for evangelism, one must accept the concept of identity and its correlate, otherness. For embrace to occur, two individuals, each with unique identities, are required. In addition to individual identity is an understanding of social identity. Humans are relational creatures and thus do not flourish in total isolation from others. As previously discussed, healthy individual identity derives from the awareness that one is ‘*both* separate *and* connected, *both* distinct *and* related.’ Identity develops as one becomes ever more aware that ‘the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.’[[788]](#footnote-788) It is this connected element of identity, the bridgelike nature of the boundaries that mark individual identity, that contribute to one’s social identity.

From the perspective of evangelism, an understanding of individual and social identity is important because in becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, one’s identity, both individual and social, is dramatically affected. From the Wesleyan perspective, conversion is a process that transforms the entire web of beliefs, connections and commitments that make up one’s identity. It is both gradual and instantaneous: gradual in the way in which God’s grace prepares individuals preveniently to be able to know and love God, and instantaneous because at some point it is as though a thick veil has been removed ‘and the believer finds himself or herself inhabiting a spiritual reality of which he or she was hitherto unaware.’[[789]](#footnote-789) Kallenberg likens it to looking at the drawn figure of a box that can be seen as 3-dimensional approaching the viewer in one of two directions. As one looks the box appears in a particular way; however, after spending some time focusing on it, the viewer finds that the box suddenly becomes 3-dimensional in an entirely new way (see Illustration 3).[[790]](#footnote-790)

Illustration 3

Conversion

‘Most Westerners instinctively see the figure above as a three dimensional box coming toward and down to the left of the viewer or as one coming toward them but up to the right. Once a viewer fixates on one of these aspects, she can force herself to see it under the other aspect. However, when this change of aspect dawns, it happens all at once: the figure doesn’t morph from one aspect to the other – it *leaps*.’[[791]](#footnote-791)

Without an understanding of both individual and social identities and the way they are transformed, those engaged in evangelism risk both misunderstanding and impatience with the overall process. Such impatience is detrimental in any circumstance, but especially in a culture of mis-distrust.

Further, because embrace entails two kenotic moves, the withdrawal of the self to make room for the other within oneself as well as moving out of oneself to reach toward the other, when one engages in evangelism from the theological stance of embrace, issues of identity become paramount. One must be clear in one’s own identity to avoid losing oneself in the process. That clarity involves, among other things, an authentic sense of one’s own faith commitment as well as a firm grasp of one’s place in the context of the kingdom as embodied by the community of faith. This is not to say that I must master all doctrinal and theological questions, nor is it to say my own faith experience cannot contain moments of doubt or crisis. It is simply to affirm the importance of a dynamic sense of one’s own spiritual journey and the vital sense of communal belonging that are crucial for healthy embrace. Further, such sensitivity to one’s own spiritual journey strengthens the authenticity of one’s presence, which is especially important in an environment of mis-distrust.

Corporately, issues of identity are equally important. As the church engages the world from a stance of embrace, it will follow the same pattern of making space within and reaching out beyond. This process must be undertaken with the community’s clear sense of its identity as the embodiment of the reign of God. Without such clarity, the church risks either losing sight of her identity altogether, for example when communal identity becomes enmeshed in the identities of other groups, or so diluting her communal identity that she becomes a mere shadow of the people of God.[[792]](#footnote-792)

Broadly speaking, the implications of embrace relative to the issue of identity on both the corporate and individual levels involve matters of time and personal investment. Making space within oneself for another requires that one see the world from the other’s perspective. This involves the concepts of double vision and noninnocence. It is not simply a matter of learning *about* the other; it is a matter of entering a realm of deepest empathy, imaginatively crossing the threshold into the world of the other. When I cross that threshold, I embark on a process of deep knowing, not only of the other, but of myself – seeing myself through another’s eyes.[[793]](#footnote-793) Such a process is risky business, for just as I might discover that the other is a difficult person to embrace, I might also discover thoughts, ideas or perceptions about myself that I would otherwise prefer not to face. Further, as with the entire process of embrace, one’s full personhood is made quite vulnerable. Having made space within myself, I wait with open arms, knowing that I may be ignored or even rejected; and should embrace occur, even as I hope for the presence of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, I recognize the disconcerting probability that I will be changed as well.

**Relationship**

Evangelism theologically undergirded by embrace highlights the value of relationship, especially relationship grounded on love as exemplified by trust, reconciliation, and mutuality. Again, time and personal investment are significant factors, certainly in the current situation of mis-distrust. It is via relationship that individuals can negotiate the process of transformation that takes them out of the community of unbelief and into the community of belief, a process that does not often take place overnight. Kallenberg’s image of relationship, specifically friendship, as ‘the handrail that assists one’s ascent into the new community’ is helpful.[[794]](#footnote-794) Drawing on this image, the question becomes this: Am I willing to sustain the commitment of time and energy long enough? Further, am I willing to immerse myself in the ongoing nature of embrace – willing, when my arms open at the end of one embrace, to keep them open to begin the next?

The issue of relationship inherent in embrace also raises the question of reconciliation. As I face outward from my community of faith, open to the possibility of embracing others, am I willing to engage in the embrace of reconciliation as well? At a more foundational level, is my community of faith reconciled within itself? Is it embodying embrace in its life together? Is it embodying embrace in its relationship with the communities that lie beyond its boundaries?

**Servanthood**

A third point that can be made with broad strokes involves the concept of servanthood, which is a grounding characteristic of Christian faith. The kingdom of God announced by Jesus is a kingdom marked by the axiom that those who would be great, must become as servants. (Mt. 20.26, Mk. 9.35, 10.43, John 12.26) Servanthood has marked the church from its beginning, with Christians offering themselves to others in significant and meaningful ways even to the present day. Embrace, however, offers a distinctive lens through which to view servanthood, especially in the Western context.

Servanthood, as it is lived out in current Western culture, can often be easily mistaken for volunteerism; however, volunteerism, though not a bad thing in itself, is *not* servanthood. To volunteer requires the relinquishment neither of control nor of power. When I volunteer at the local food pantry, for instance, I usually do so on a day and time that fits into my overall schedule. Generally speaking, the decision of when, where, and how to volunteer remains entirely up to me. There is always the option to say no. I am in control of how much I give, the way I give, and when and where I give. I maintain the power to determine how involved or uninvolved I become.

Servanthood, however, involves the relinquishing of power and control as one takes on a cruciform style of service. In the West, where resources are plentiful, it can be deceptively easy to give of one’s financial resources without engagement at a more personal level. Likewise, one can engage in hands-on service in a variety of ways while at the same time sacrificing very little. This is not to disparage those who give generously of their financial resources or those who actively engage in opportunities for hands-on ministry. It is to say that the theological stance of embrace casts a unique light on the concept of Christian service.

A ready example relates to the wide variety of feeding programs in which countless churches participate. I was recently asked to provide an evangelism consultation for a local church. A small church in rural Indiana, this congregation was actively engaged in an ecumenical community meal effort held twice weekly at the local community center. Several churches in this village rotated responsibility for preparing, serving and cleaning up after the meal. Because approximately sixty people generally attend each meal, there is a lot of work involved and it is laudable that this small church is so faithful in its service. However, because the meal is served buffet style and the preparation, service and cleaning responsibilities are significant, the only interaction between those who attend and those who serve is when the food is served and the plates cleared.

From the perspective of embrace, as important as serving in the context of this community meal is, it is not complete; it is not an embodiment of servanthood. When Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (John 13), his act of service was grounded on relationship – his relationship with God and his relationship with his disciples. It was not random, but contextual. Unfortunately there was a randomness to the community meal ministry. Other than the private relationship with Christ that congregants may (or may not) have brought to their service, there was no relational context with which to ground their activity. After the consultation, in my report to this congregation I recommended that they continue to serve at this meal, but that they also begin to attend the meal as fellow participants on evenings when they were not responsible, to share the meal and table fellowship with other attendees and thus build relationships of trust and mutuality.

Identity, relationship and servanthood are connected in the context of embrace because they necessitate a commitment of time and a personal investment. What is required is what Friedrich Nietzsche, in a different context, referred to as a ‘long obedience in the same direction.’[[795]](#footnote-795) While Nietzsche’s aphorism naturally lends itself to understandings of spiritual formation and Christian discipleship, in faith communities marked by a history of camp meetings and other evangelistic ‘events,’ such as those growing out of the Wesleyan tradition, it has not been as readily applied to the evangelistic task. Yet that is exactly what ministry undertaken from a stance of embrace would embody, ‘a long obedience in the same direction.’

**Power**

From the perspective of embrace, the crucial issue undergirding identity, relationship and servanthood that must be dealt with is the issue of power. Simply, power is the ability to do or act. Helen Bruch Pearson perceptively describes power as ‘the ability to achieve purpose.’[[796]](#footnote-796) In this sense, one’s power is diminished when control of one’s ability to do or act or achieve purpose, or one’s intentions to do or act or achieve purpose, is diminished. The degree of one’s real or perceived power shapes one’s identity both individually and socially. Likewise, relationships are also shaped by the balance of power among participants. In contrast, servanthood is undermined rather than shaped by issues of power. From the Christian perspective, the cruciform nature of servanthood implies a *divestment* of power.

Embrace as a foundational theological concept calls into question the exercise of power. This is not new, nor should it be surprising as the very nature of Christian faith, (based as it is on the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth) calls into question the exercise of power. However, embrace as a foundational theological concept sheds light on the exercise of power in the context of the community of faith itself, as well as in the context of the community as it faces outward toward those who are not yet a part of it.

In the most general sense, the implication for ministries undertaken from the perspective of embrace is the relinquishment of undue claims to power – those claims to power that undermine the rightful claims of power on the part of others. More provocatively, it might possibly also require at times the relinquishment of *any* claim to power. A delicate balance is required here. A stance of embrace does not imply self-abnegation or self-abasement; therefore each party involved in embrace rightfully retains her or his inner ability to achieve purpose (power). However, as the church in the West relates to the rest of the world, or as individuals in historically privileged groups relate to others, it is reasonable to ask whether there may be times when it is necessary to relinquish any claim to power, legitimate or otherwise, to provide the space necessary for embrace to take place.

After a broad discussion of the issues of identity, relationship, servanthood and power from the perspective of embrace, imagining how such a stance might affect specific ministries is not difficult. Space allows only discussion of a few strategic areas of ministry, namely, congregational life, leadership training, theological conversation, ecclesiology and evangelism.

**Congregational Life**

The theological stance of embrace impacts congregational life both from the perspective of its inward-facing communal life and its outward-facing activity in the world. Within the inner life of the community, embrace affects various relationships within the congregation itself and raises this pressing question: ‘As Christians, are we reconciled with each other?’ Embrace requires patience and commitment, a long obedience in the same direction in relation to those within the community of faith as well as those outside of it. When congregational life is a reconciled life (or at least one where reconciliation is a value toward which all strive), when members embody embrace within their communal life together, their witness to the wider world is dramatically strengthened.

An example of embrace as a foundation for a restorative witness can be seen in the congregational life of Jacob’s Well United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, a city plagued by racial struggle and divide. Jacob’s Well defines itself as a Christ-centered community of faith focusing its life together on three core values: reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reciprocation. Worship banners read, ‘Reconciliation: We don’t evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once, and got it all wrong. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God’s work of making things right between them. (2 Cor. 5.16-20)’ Its website explains the belief that Christ is encountered in each individual; therefore as a reciprocal community, ‘each person who walks in through our doors has value and something to add to the community.’[[797]](#footnote-797) In all my encounters with this multiethnic, economically diverse congregation, I am continually impressed by the powerful ways Jacob’s Well embodies what the kingdom of God looks like through their worshipping, studying, and serving life together.

In similar fashion, the grounding of embrace on a robust understanding of the kingdom and the seven pivotal events of the gospel message, as well as conceptualizing the evangelistic task as directed toward initiation, speak to the importance of a clear and confident communal identity as the people of God and individual identity as a Christ follower. Without a robust understanding of individual and communal Christian identity stemming from a balanced and solid understanding of the seven pivotal events, individual witness becomes confused and communal witness fails to offer value for the spiritual journey. For example, an exit poll of people who attended a seeker study from 2003-2006 at United Methodist churches indicated that United Methodists are perceived as not knowing what they believe or why they believe it. Notably disturbing were comments such as, ‘Methodists are all over the map. I spent almost a year finding out that they don’t have a clue what they really believe.’[[798]](#footnote-798)

In addition to internal relationships and individual/communal identities, a final implication of the theological stance of embrace for congregational life lies in the area of hospitality. The biblical notion of hospitality is similar in many ways to Christian servanthood because both involve the release of power, relinquishing control and willingly embracing vulnerability. Just as the language of servanthood often masks what is more accurately understood as volunteerism, the language of hospitality can often mask what is actually simple politeness, social convention or tolerance.[[799]](#footnote-799) Where politeness and social convention rarely make demands that go deeper than mere inconvenience or minor effort, biblical hospitality involves sacrifice, vulnerability and risk. Social convention and politeness encourage extending kindness to family or friends; yet biblical hospitality requires extending that same quality of kindness to strangers, those in need, ‘the “lowly and abject,” those who, on first appearance [seem] to have little to offer.’ Biblical hospitality and that practiced in the early church were significant in ‘transcending status boundaries and for working through issues of respect and recognition.’[[800]](#footnote-800)

This contrast is strikingly significant in relation to current understandings of tolerance and its value as a social virtue. Generally, tolerance frames respect in terms of individuals and privileges individual autonomy. Therefore tolerance ‘reduces us to silence and inactivity, because to add to and seek to change what others think is by definition intolerant.’ Further, this silence and inactivity stifles engagement with and concern for others in favor of simple acceptance of the other’s existence. On the other hand, ‘inherent within the Christocentric performance of hospitality is the call to welcome the stranger…to enter into relationship with, and accommodate, those who are different.’ Again, this differs from politeness and social convention because it involves welcoming those with the least status. ‘The imperative to welcome the weak and the vulnerable serves as a constant reminder to see and hear those members of society who are most easily marginalized, oppressed and rendered invisible.’[[801]](#footnote-801) A stance of embrace as a foundation for congregational life demands hospitality rather than tolerance, politeness, or adhering to social convention.

The ecumenical homeless ministry is a good example of biblical hospitality. Because most shelter programs for homeless people in the United States are geared toward single individuals, dividing men and women and housing them during the evening hours in multibed dormitory style facilities, it is difficult for homeless families to remain together. Moreover, these facilities do not generally provide care during the day. Thus homeless families have few options that enable them to stay together in the evening hours or to have a safe place to be with their children during the day. Family Promise meets the needs of homeless families by housing them together in church facilities throughout the community on a rotating basis. As a host church, my own congregation, for instance, houses a family (or multiple families) during assigned weeks during the year. Church members provide food and share evening meals. After the meal, church members remain to visit, play games or engage in other activities. One or two members remain overnight while families sleep together in church rooms prepared for them, using portable beds that are transported each week to the next church location. During the day, parents often work and children attend school; however, if those are not options, a day center with computers for job and housing searches, play areas for children, a kitchen and study rooms is available. Transportation is provided between churches, jobs, schools and the day center for those who have no access to it.

It is evident that a ministry like Family Promise requires a significant commitment on the part of churches hosting families. Effort is required to keep church buildings open and to decorate rooms, thus providing a feeling of home. Members undertake the risky task of building relationships with strangers through shared meals and time spent together in the evening hours. Yet it is this type of vulnerable, risk-taking effort that is required of congregational life based on the theological foundation of embrace.

**Leadership Training**

Leadership training is an area in which the implications of a theological stance of embrace are subtle, but no less compelling. The emphasis on relationship inherent in a stance of embrace holds great promise in spanning the gulf that often exists between commitments to evangelism and social action. Though evangelism is often connected with works of personal piety, the undertaking of a position of double vision and double justice enables Christians to recognize that building a relationship requires more than simply engaging in personal acts of mercy, such as serving at a local soup kitchen (even though such acts are laudable and an intimate part of the Christian life). The relationship building of embrace, the kenotic space making, requires an entering into the life of the other. This act of ‘entering into’ holds with it the hope of recognizing the systemic issues at play in the life of the other and the demand for social action in response to those issues.

Leadership training from a stance of embrace, given its grounding in a holistic understanding of the gospel message, requires emphasis on the distinctively Wesleyan commitment to an intimate intertwining of personal and social holiness; dedication to an understanding of salvation that involves the whole person, not simply the soul; and importance given to the concept that the new creation to which the kingdom of God points involves the transformation of all of creation, not simply eternal life in a heavenly home.

Further, that same leadership training requires an emphasis on a strong communal identity as a people proclaiming the advent of the reign of God and embodying the distinctive characteristics of that reign. From the perspective of embrace, neither social action nor evangelism stands alone. Though similar in many respects to social action undertaken by those outside the church, social action from the Christian perspective is undertaken *in the name of Jesus Christ*, which sets it apart from other activities. The context is always the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, and the subtext is the invitation to all people to experience that in-breaking for themselves.

An additional implication of a stance of embrace for leadership training relates to the gulf that frequently exists between lay and clergy. Questions regarding power that the model of embrace raises in a general way come into focus when asked in the context of lay/clergy training. If one acknowledges the priesthood of all believers (2 Peter 2.9-12), it appears that adequate biblical and theological grounding should be available to all Christians, not just those entering professional ministry. Although it can be argued that this grounding is available in the context of local church ministries (especially from a historical perspective as it relates to Methodism), it can equally be argued that it has been inadequate, at least in the U.S. during the last half of the twentieth century. Further, it is legitimate to ask whether the creation of a ‘professional clergy’ has, in the long run, contributed to the weakening of spiritual knowledge and depth on the part of the laity, and quite possibly also the clergy.

My intent is not to argue for the elimination of professional clergy; however, the kenotic nature of embrace sheds a specific light on understandings that place clergy at the center of congregational structure. The theological posture of embrace points to kenosis as an identifying mark of both the individual Christian and the body of Christ, but many, if not most, Western Christians do not view their individual identity or the church in terms of kenosis. And neither are seminarians nurtured in a way that would lead them to view their vocations as essentially kenotic. From the Wesleyan perspective, this is unfortunate because of ‘the historic Methodist model of kenosis.’ The Methodist movement in its early manifestations, with its emphasis on holiness of heart and life that combined personal piety and social activism, was fundamentally a posture of kenosis. The class and band meetings were powerful in their ability to form Christian disciples, and the leaders of those classes and bands were unpaid laity.[[802]](#footnote-802)

The kenotic understanding inherent in embrace raises several significant issues that merit further reflection. Constrained by space, I can offer only observations and raise questions; it will remain for others to engage in further study and dialogue.

Professional ministers are currently often separated from others by virtue of their position and training. Because most professionally trained clergy are not bivocational, they are removed from environments that might provide natural avenues for interaction and relationship building with those outside the church. Likewise, the internal demands of local churches in terms of time and energy often further isolate clergy.[[803]](#footnote-803) How might understandings of clergy leadership and the training of professional clergy be strengthened if greater emphasis were placed on relationship and kenotic self-giving? How might understandings of the role and responsibility of the laity be envisioned?

In a similar vein, a stance of embrace emphasizes double vision and double justice. Nevertheless, seminary training often places aspiring clergy in a context removed from the perspectives not only of those outside the church, but also of those outside the dominant cultural context of the seminary. For example, in Hispanic and Latino communities in the United States, indigenous bivocational pastors without professional degrees frequently provide ministerial leadership in denominational and nondenominational contexts and often quite successfully. On the other hand, in the United Methodist Church the norm is that ministerial leadership will engage in seminary training: a three-year master of divinity degree followed by at least three years of additional work toward ordination. When Hispanic/Latino individuals undertake United Methodist seminary training, the predominantly Anglo culture of the seminary can replace (at least for a time) the ethnic culture from which they have come.[[804]](#footnote-804) Does this, albeit temporary cultural replacement, raise the possibility that in some instances Hispanic/Latino pastors might be ‘Anglo-cized’ and that a gap will be created between the pastors they are trained to be and the pastors the people in their original context need them to be? Further, what assumptions are being made about the context for which the United Methodist Church is preparing its leaders? What issues of power are evidenced by the socioeconomic barriers created by the requirement for higher education and the additional work required for ordination?

A stance of embrace requires a secure sense of identity in Christ on the part of individuals and also the community of faith. This identity is grounded in the seven pivotal events of the gospel message as well as in a robust understanding of the kingdom. Yet many people, both lay and clergy, have either a superficial understanding, or if they have a more in-depth understanding, it produces a less-than-holistic approach to the gospel. How might this be rectified in the context of clergy training and lay spiritual development? What issues of power would need to be addressed if lay people were to be both challenged and provided the opportunity to move their spiritual understanding to depths normally associated with the educated clergy?

**Theological Conversation**

Theological conversation is another area where the implications of a stance of embrace are subtle yet compelling. The way in which Christians engage each other and those outside the church is crucial to their embodiment of what it means to be part of the in-breaking of the kingdom. How one speaks of sin, healing, restoration or reconciliation, for example, impacts how those outside the church hear, receive, and hopefully lay claim to the gospel message.

A delicate balance is necessary at this juncture. Embrace requires a confident sense of one’s identity in Christ and the community of faith. As I stand with open arms, I stand firmly on the foundation of the seven pivotal events of the gospel message – a foundation dramatically larger than myself. That is the source of my integrity and strength as I seek to share the gospel. Yet my open arms indicate a respect for the truth that the other brings with them to the encounter. That is the implication of double vision and double justice. The message is not that the other has no truth, but that the Truth (with a capital *T*) of the living God is larger than any human truth (with a small *t*).

Further, when the stance of embrace undergirds theological conversation, there is an awareness of the varying ways that people come to know God. From the Wesleyan perspective, one aspect of the effect of sin is noetic, the inability to fully know God.[[805]](#footnote-805) Yet redemption and more specifically the Wesleyan concept of sanctification involve progress toward knowing God more fully and rightly.[[806]](#footnote-806) Moreover, the Wesleyan understanding of conversion involves both an emphasis on process and a recognition of an ‘aha!’ moment.[[807]](#footnote-807) In other words, when one engages in theological conversation from the perspective of embrace, one does so recognizing the potential for movement on the part of the other from one identity to another, from a nonbelieving worldview to a believing Christian worldview. This movement involves both process and immediate transformation.

Thus at this point one encounters the need for another delicate balance. The Christian identity and worldview comes with its own language and practice, often unintelligible to those outside the community of faith. Therefore there is a need for ‘translation.’ Yet because even the most basic words have deeper meanings than their simple definitions might imply, in the context of theological conversation, transformation from one identity to another requires a deeper understanding than simple ‘translation’ often affords. God’s grace, for instance, may be ‘translated’ as love, but until it is experienced as expansive forgiveness and unconditional acceptance, as mirrored by the practice of the community of faith, it will not be known at its true depth.

From a stance of embrace, theological conversation must attend to that deeper level, with ramifications at both the individual and communal level. Kallenberg is right to assert, ‘It is the pattern of the believing community’s relationships that embodies the story of Jesus in concrete terms that outsiders can comprehend.’ Further, any individual efforts of embrace ‘will not make complete sense to unbelievers who don’t have a clue what difference Jesus makes for the way Christians live with one another.’[[808]](#footnote-808) The significance of this is even more acute in an environment of mis-distrust.

Similarly, the mutuality of embrace implies that as I enter the world of the other, I also make space in my own world for the other. As a Christian, that ‘world’ is the community of faith. To make space in my faith world for the other requires a willingness not only to make the language and practice of the church understandable at a surface level, but to make it understandable also at the experiential level. The difference between the two can be likened to the difference between learning another language in a school environment and learning another language via an ‘immersion’ experience in an environment where the other language is spoken. While learning in school provides a good foundation, understanding the depth of the language and achieving fluency occur more readily when one is immersed in the environment of that language.

An anecdotal example is helpful. When they were very young, all three of my children learned the word ‘sock.’ They came to understand that the word corresponded to the article of clothing that was placed on their foot before they put on their shoe. Interestingly, my two older children also found socks to be extremely irritating. They did not like the way socks felt inside their shoes; the slightest fold or wrinkle was a disaster of colossal proportions. Thus not only did they come to understand the neutral and surface meaning of sock – an item of clothing worn between the foot and the shoe – their experience of socks led them to a deeper and more uniquely personal understanding. Socks were very irritating things to be avoided at all costs and thrown off if at all possible.

An implication of this process of deeper translation is that Christians must become conversant in their own language. Embrace as a theological stance is meaningless if it is not rooted firmly in an understanding of the kingdom of God and the seven pivotal events of the gospel message. This is not to say that Christians must have perfect mastery of explanations or exhaustive knowledge. Rather, it points to the need to participate in ‘the grammar of the language,’ to participate in ‘the form of life of the language’s speakers.’[[809]](#footnote-809) Further, it involves being able ‘*to reflect Christianly*.’[[810]](#footnote-810) To this end, George Lindbeck is correct to point to the need for more and better knowledge of the Bible, but equally important is a commitment to a certain way of reading it: ‘as a Christ-centered narrationally and typologically unified whole in conformity to a Trinitarian rule of faith.’ He rightly insists that to read it any other way ‘is not to read it as Scripture but as some other book.’[[811]](#footnote-811) Developing the ability to reflect or think Christianly is not solely a matter of Scripture, but of the entire canonical heritage of the church. In other words, one learns to live and think Christianly by being ‘mentored by the tradition’ and thus ‘formed so as to live out a particular kind of life – namely, one that God intends humans to live.’[[812]](#footnote-812) Christians must become conversant in their own language to open their world to others in embrace in ways that enable the other to grasp that language and fully enter into it as well.

**Ecclesiology**

It is my hope that the discussion of embrace as a foundational stance for evangelism will renew conversations regarding ecclesiology at depths not possible in this context. A few words, however, are in order. As a theological disposition, embrace raises questions regarding such topics as reconciliation within the body of Christ, understandings of power, the nature of servanthood, and the importance of social identity, making the need for further exploration exceedingly apparent. Further, the concept of embrace implies the kenotic self-giving that must lie at the heart of what it means to be the church, also a topic in need of further exploration.

Grounding embrace in a robust understanding of the kingdom and the seven pivotal events of the gospel message, as well as conceptualizing the evangelistic task as directed toward initiation, imply the importance of a clear and confident communal identity as the people of God. Without a robust understanding of communal Christian identity, individual witness becomes confused, and communal witness fails to offer value for the spiritual journey. Moreover, without a clear and confident communal identity as the people of God, it becomes difficult to maintain the balance necessary for the type of kenotic self-giving that does not lose itself by ‘melting’ into the other. Further, I have offered embrace as a posture to ground evangelism in large part because I believe it provides theological balance to a witness that has often privileged the individual at the expense of community. A major implication of this is the call to reevaluate the role of the community in the salvific experience of faith, and also the salvific aspects of initiation into the reign of God as experienced in the church.

Up to this point, I have sought to speak to a wider audience; however, there are ecclesiological challenges that I believe are best discussed in the context of the United Methodist Church in the U.S. It may be that other faith traditions are experiencing or have experienced similar challenges, but without intimate knowledge, it would be inappropriate to speak on their behalf. As a United Methodist minister, however, I believe I am qualified to speak to this context. For United Methodists in the U.S., I believe the issue of a robust understanding of communal Christian identity raised by a theological understanding of evangelism grounded in embrace poses a most significant challenge.

The UM Church has always perceived itself to be ‘connectional,’ but the past fifty years have seen that concept understood in little more than organizational terms. Also, even at the level of organizational understanding, the idea of being a connectional body of Christ is foreign to all but the most engaged laity. Further, UM connectionalism has more often been explicated historically in relation to John Wesley rather than theologically, resulting in an inability to hold together the relationship between the personal and the corporate dimensions of faith in a holistic fashion. In turn this has led, I believe, to an ‘ecclesial identity crisis.’ With little attention paid to exploring the role of the community in the salvific experience of faith, or the salvific aspects of initiation into the reign of God as experienced in the church, the UMC appears to be operating out of ‘a notion that views the church as little more than a loose association of the equivalents of Jesus’ Facebook friends.’[[813]](#footnote-813)

Earlier I referred to the perception that United Methodists ‘don’t have a clue what they really believe.’[[814]](#footnote-814) This is troubling from the perspective of both embrace and UM ecclesial identity. Lindbeck rightly asserts that ‘Church doctrines are communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question…they indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community.’[[815]](#footnote-815) Lindbeck further asserts this belief:

To disagree with Methodist, Quaker, or Roman Catholic doctrine indicates that one is not a ‘good’ Methodist, Quaker, or Roman Catholic. Someone who opposes pacifism, for example, will not be regarded as fully what a member of the Society of Friends should be. If this conclusion is not drawn, it is evident that the belief has ceased to be communally formative, and it is therefore no longer an operational doctrine even though it may be continue to be a formal or official one.[[816]](#footnote-816)

This raises the urgent question of whether the doctrinal heritage of the UMC in the U.S. continues to be communally formative; and if it is no longer communally formative, could the current decline of the UMC in the U.S. in some ways be connected to that fact? Further, from the perspective of embrace, regardless of the connection with decline, without a confident and clear communal identity, one’s ability to make space for the other within one’s own world is undermined.

I have no thoroughgoing response to the challenge that I believe is facing the United Methodist Church; however, I believe the theological stance of embrace has a great deal to offer all faith communities in its ability to shine light on the significance of the community of faith to the evangelistic task. Further, I believe the canonical theist position,[[817]](#footnote-817) when coupled with a renewed emphasis on the Wesleyan theological trajectory, complements embrace and provides a strong voice in addressing ecclesial challenges, especially by focusing on the church as a means of grace and the soteriological function of its canonical heritage. The Wesleyan trajectory points generally to grace as ‘empowerment for initiation into and living out participation in the life of God.’[[818]](#footnote-818) In this sense the means of grace are understood, however mysteriously, to be vehicles of grace, and ‘by participating in these means…individual believers and the church as a whole are changed through an inner working of God’s Spirit.’[[819]](#footnote-819) From the canonical theist position, ‘God intends the church to use the canonical heritage bequeathed to it by the Holy Spirit expressly for the formation of persons into the image of Christ.’[[820]](#footnote-820)

Grounding embrace on a robust understanding of the kingdom and the seven pivotal events of the gospel message, as well as conceptualizing the evangelistic task as directed toward initiation, imply the importance of a clear and confident communal identity as the people of God. Such grounding also challenges Christians to examine their understanding of the church and its role in God’s soteriological activity in the world. The benefits of this challenge will be seen, however, only when Christians generally (and United Methodists specifically) are willing to engage in substantial discussions regarding the connection between the personal and communal aspects of salvation as well as the here-but-not-yet-here aspect of the kingdom of God as evidenced in the church.

**Evangelism**

The implications for evangelism of claiming embrace as a theological stance are great and underlie the discussions of implications in other areas of ministry along with the general conversations regarding identity, relationship, servanthood and power. However, the most significant implication on which all others rests is that embrace is not a strategy for *evangelism*; it is a strategy for the *kingdom*. It is part of the working out of God’s presence in the world, part of the revelation of Jesus’ victory over evil. In contrast to Volf’s use of the metaphor, embrace is not an isolated interaction between individuals or groups, however ongoing that interaction might be; rather, for evangelism there is a larger story going on behind embrace: the story of God’s unfolding redemption of all creation. This is significant in an environment of mis-distrust, where the Christian message can easily become distorted or misunderstood and evangelism seen as a targeting, intrusive activity. Evangelism undertaken from a stance of embrace asserts that embrace, rather than being a strategy, is itself at the core of God’s kingdom agenda. Because it is the way in which God relates to all of creation; it is the way in which Christians relate to the world as they seek to make the gospel known. Embrace as a theological foundation for evangelism, then, models God’s activity in the world and makes itself available as a channel of that activity. Thus in opening one’s arms and creating space within oneself for the other, space is also created for the working of the Holy Spirit. And then, while the Christian waits, God works.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project I asserted my belief that in the millennia since the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, much of the church, especially in the West, and more specifically in the United States, has not always proclaimed the gospel in a holistic way, frequently emphasizing the individual at the expense of community; heaven or some other image of the afterlife at the expense of responsible stewardship of all of God’s good creation; and the salvation of individual souls for eternal life at the expense of the just and merciful care of whole persons, both now and in the age to come. Over time, such a partial message has led to the unhealthy existence of the church in antigospel environments, such as slavery, colonialism, postmodern imperialism, and such. Rather than proclaim the gospel for transformation, the church has often operated in deliberate partnership or unconscious complicity with powers at work in those settings. For churches in a Western context, this has led to an atmosphere of mis-distrust, a loss of integrity, and a crisis in evangelism requiring new understandings and continued reflection.

Tensions permeate all aspects of Christian faith: immanent/transcendent, earthly/eternal, particular/universal, human/divine, personal/communal, temporal/eschatological. The church at its best holds these tensions together meaningfully and creatively, always aware of the looking-through-a-glass-darkly nature of spiritual understanding. I believe that embrace as a theological posture provides a foundation for evangelistic practice that recognizes the importance of these tensions and works to maintain balance between them.

Evangelism engaged from a stance of embrace is empowered to make known that the gospel of Jesus the Messiah is good news for all creation. As Christians embody embrace, they work and wait with expectant hope that those outside the church will come to know a God who is steadfast and faithful in keeping God’s promises; a God who desires that no one be left out of the one family of Abraham; a God who shares with humanity all that it means to be human; a God present through the Spirit within and among believers, going before them into the world and working through them for redemption; a God who is working, even now, to eliminate evil and bring to fruition the justice and peace of the kingdom inaugurated in Jesus of Nazareth. As Christians embody embrace, they work and wait with expectant hope that those outside the church will come to understand the good news for their future as they encounter the hope of eternal life: first in the presence Christ as he is now seated at the right hand of God, and finally in resurrected bodies when he returns to establish God’s kingdom in a world transformed and remade into new creation – a world where all of creation (not only humanity) is redeemed and restored to its intended wholeness.

Evangelism engaged from a stance of embrace takes seriously that the gospel is not a message to be privatized, but that it has been entrusted to the body of Christ. Christians are to make it known to the world through their communal life: through their embodiment of Jesus’ expansive welcome and invitation; their solidarity with the poor and suffering; through the creation of unboundaried communities where the presence of the Holy Spirit of Jesus can be met and experienced in communal sacramental life; through their proclamation; and as they live as witnesses to the faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth through their own faithful obedience to the one who sent him.

I have entitled this project ‘restorative witness’ because I believe that in a climate of mis-distrust, embrace as a theological foundation has the potential to restore wholeness to the Christian message, integrity to evangelistic practices, and reconciliation in relationships. With a restored witness, it is my hope that the body of Christ will be empowered to more fully enact what God has inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah, making known to the world the whole-creation nature of salvation.

Restorative Witness

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1. ‘Evangelism’ and ‘evangelization’ are widely used throughout the literature and often denote similar if not identical concepts. I use ‘evangelism’ because it is used most commonly in the contexts that I find myself. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. William Abraham, ‘A Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter’ [1994], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Abraham has suggested that ‘as a serious experiment in theology, Wesleyanism is over.’ That may be true. However, I believe that the term still has value not because it exists as a systematic approach, but because it emphasizes and brings together certain understandings of theology and practice in ways not always as apparent in other traditions. William Abraham, ‘The End of Wesleyan Theology’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40, no. 1 (2005), 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf., Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1988), 379 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a comprehensive outline of scholarly progression in Jesus studies, see Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM Press, 1996/1998) Cf., N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I am indebted to David Wilkinson for this metaphor. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I am not asserting that the importance of trust is *unrecognized*; the extensive literature on evangelistic work in cross-cultural environments attests to that. My assertion is that in the Western context, the *actual* *existence* of trust is taken for granted, rather than being explicitly explored. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Annette Baier, ‘Trust and Antitrust’, *Ethics* 96, no. 2 (1986), 234 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bart Nooteboom and Frédérique Six (eds.), *The Trust Process in Organizations: Empirical Studies of the Determinants and the Process of Trust Development* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003), 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ‘Trust and Distrust’, in J. Scott and G. Marshall (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 670 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ‘Trust and Distrust’, 670 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sztompka, *Trust*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Joel Sobel, ‘Can We Trust Social Capital?’, *Journal of Economic Literature* 40, no.1 (2002), 148 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf., Thomas de Zengotita, ‘On the Politics of Pastiche and Depthless Intensities: The Case of Barack Obama’, *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* 13, no. 1 (2011), 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Sztompka, *Trust*, 11-14 Cf., Reinhard Bachmann, ‘Trust and power as means of coordinating the internal relations of the organization: a conceptual framework’, in *The Trust Process in Organizations: Empirical Studies of the Determinants and the Process of Trust Development* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003), 58-74 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bachmann, ‘Trust and power’, 59-62 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sztompka, *Trust*, 11-14 Cf., Marek Kohn, *Trust: Self-interest and the Common Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sztompka, *Trust*, 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Against Giddens, *Consequences*, 83-88 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* [1953], (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 27 Cf., John Howard Yoder, ‘A People in the World’, in M. Cartwright (ed.), *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 65-101 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Sztompka, *Trust*, 41-48 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sztompka, *Trust*, 42-43 Cf., Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1995), 33-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Sztompka, *Trust*, 41-48 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Sztompka, *Trust*, 46-48 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gary Becker, ‘Human Capital’, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics* (Library of Economics and Liberty, 2008), <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/HumanCapital.html> (17 July 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 10 Cf., Robert Putnam, ‘Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital’, *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995), 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Fukuyama, *Trust,* 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Fukuyama, *Trust,* 281 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 10-11 Cf., Putnam, ‘Bowling Alone’ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Howard Gardner, Jessica Sara Benjamin, Lindsay Pettingill, ‘An Examination of Trust in Contemporary American Society’, *Working Papers* (The Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government), 6, [www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/research/publications/papers/2006/1\_trust.pdf](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/research/publications/papers/2006/1_trust.pdf) (3 April 2007) Cf., Hugh Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, On Politics (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Fukuyama, *Trust*, 51 Cf., Putnam, ‘Bowling Alone’ Fukuyama depends on Putnam for some of his statistical analysis. Caution is advisable because of debate regarding cause and effect. For a reasonable critique of Putnam on this topic, see Sobel, ‘Can We Trust Social Capital?’ For the current purpose, however, it is valuable simply to recognize the trend toward a decrease in trust without entering into the cause and effect debate. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Scott Appleby, ‘The Church at Risk’, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Dallas, TX, 13 June 2002, *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/appleby.shtml> (4 July 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cf., Russell Hardin, ‘Distrust: Manifestations and Management’, in R. Hardin (ed.), *Distrust* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004) 6, 9 Hardin views trust as ‘encapsulated interest,’ asserting, ‘I trust you because I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously…That is, *you encapsulate my interests in your own interests.*’ Conversely, distrust is ‘grounded in a reading of the other’s motivations toward oneself, typically including the other’s interests.’ (emphasis original) On Hardin’s reading, regarding those beyond the church, it seems prudent to ask whether they perceive their interests to be encapsulated by or at odds with those of the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Recognition of the importance of culture is not new. Cf., Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. D. Cooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 297 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cf., Bosch, *Transforming Mission*,294 Cf., Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1-3 Cf., Andrew Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Against Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 70, 78 Asserting the Enlightenment was a ‘counterrevolutionary project’ to control an earlier, radical movement termed the ‘revolutionary plane of immanence,’ the authors claim this movement, rather than the Enlightenment itself, has had the largest impact in shaping movements and counter-movements of thought even up to the present. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For a more extensive review, see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 262-345 Cf., Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 71 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History* [1837], trans. Robert Hartman (New York: Macmillan, 1954) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 171-238 Cf., Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 159-236 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Walls, *Cross-cultural Process*, 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Coorilos Geevarghese, ‘Towards and Beyond Edinburgh 2010: A Historical Survey of Ecumenical Missiological Developments since 1910’, *International Review of Mission* 99, no. 1 (2010), 8 Cf., Jose Miguez Bonino, ‘Latin America’, in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16-43 Bonino describes a ‘rigorist conception of evangelisation [*sic*]’ in which ‘the “Indians” had to be defeated, controlled and dominated in order to be evangelised. [*sic*]’ 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Cf., Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 1-25 This myth continues to hold great allure as evidenced by US President Barack Obama who, in his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech referred to a ‘fundamental faith in human progress that must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey.’ ‘Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech’, *NYTimes.com* (9 December 2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/world/europe/11prexy.text.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1> (31 July 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 124 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1963], trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 3, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 127 (emphasis original) The authors correctly recognize that the colonial world never completely conformed to this simplistic dialectical structure. Rather, ‘reality always presents proliferating multiplicities.’ Their argument, however, is that where ‘*reality is not dialectical, colonialism is.*’ 128 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. William Bivin, ‘Mother-Tongue Translations and Contextualization in Latin America’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (2010), 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Jacques Matthey, ‘From 1910 to 2010: A Post Edinburgh 2010 Reflection’, *International Review of Mission* 99, no. 2 (2010), 259 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Darrell Guder, ‘Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission’ [1994], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 175 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1995), 93 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 298 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cf., Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* [1912] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 130 ‘What makes a belief true is a *fact*, and this fact does not…in any way involve the mind of the person who has the belief.’ Modernity eventually challenged this understanding of scientific knowledge. Cf., Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* [1958] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vii-viii, 95-100, 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Cf., George Marsden, *Fundamentalism & American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 51 Cf., Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, trans. L. P. Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 31 Cf., Newbigin, *Foolishness*,50, 65-94 Newbigin counters both Bultmann and the inerrancy argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 49 Cf., Guder, ‘Incarnation’, 174-175 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Hippolyte Taine, (*Taine’s Notes on England*, trans. and introduced by Edward Hyams, London, 1957) as quoted by Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe, from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 215 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Horst Althaus, *Hegel: An Intellectual Biography,* trans. Michael Tarsh (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 220 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 267 Cf., Newbigin*, Foolishness*, 95-123 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), 37 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Brown, *Death*, 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 230 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. William Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 236 Cf., Dana Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 48-52 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 237 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Lamin Sanneh, ‘The Yogi and the Commissar: Christian Missions and the African Response’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15, no. 1 (1991), 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 237 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Kenneth Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 144 Cf., Sanneh, ‘The Yogi’, 2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 12-13 Since the mid-twentieth century there has been widespread decline in nearly all of U.S. society’s major institutions, a trend shared by virtually all the advanced nations of the world. Cf., Globescan, ‘GlobeScan Report on Issues and Reputation’, *Globescan.com* (2005), <http://www.globescan.com/rf_ir_first.htm> and <http://www.globescan.com/rf_ir_pessimism.htm> (18 July 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Republic of Ireland, Child Abuse Commission, *Executive Summary* (2009), <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/> and <http://www.childabusecommission.com/rpt/pdfs/CICA-Executive%20Summary.pdf> (30 March 2010) Cf., Rachel Donadio and Alan Cowell, ‘Pope Offers Apology, Not Penalty, for Sex Abuse Scandal’, *The New York Times* (20 March 2010) [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/world/europe/21pope.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/world/europ/21pope.html) (14 August 2010) Cf., *The Boston Globe,* ‘Spotlight Investigation: Abuse in the Catholic Church’, <http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/> (23 October 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Delia Gallagher, ‘Church forces out Haggard for “sexually immoral conduct”’, *CNN.com* (2006) <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/11/03/haggard.allegations/index.html> (26 August 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Baylor University, ‘Executive Summary’, *Baylor Clergy Sexual Misconduct Study*, <http://www.baylor.edu/clergysexualmisconduct/index.php?id=67406> (23 October 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 25 Cf., Harry Lee Poe, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 82 In enumerating the various scandals that unfolded in the evangelical world during the 1980s, Poe asserts that ‘the emerging postmodern generation did not reject the moral authority of the only exposure to Christianity they ever had. *They never encountered any moral authority from that source*.’ (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in J. M. Robson (ed.), *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill: Essays on Politics and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 223 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Cf., Poe, *Christian Witness*, 85 Poe provocatively asserts that because of the social upheaval of the 1960s, the ‘postmodern generation has not so much rejected the authority of tradition. Instead, they have *never been a part* of the living tradition’ in order to reject it. (emphasis added) This claim is given anecdotal strength by Jon Stewart’s satirical comment in response to Chelsea Clinton’s marriage: ‘Being a Methodist is easy. It’s like the University of Phoenix of religions: you just send them 50 bucks and click “I agree” and you are saved.’ ‘The Wedding of the Decade of the Century of the Millennium*’*, *TheDailyShow.com*, Episode #15096 (2010) <http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/?term=chelsea+clinton+wedding&start=0> (9 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Adam Seligman, ‘Modernity and Sincerity: Problem and Paradox’, *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* 12, no. 1 (2010), 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 181-204 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Gallup, *U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion at Low Point, www.Gallup.com* (2012) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155690/Confidence-Organized-Religion-Low-Point.aspx> (16 July 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 41-90, 181-204 Cf., Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 73-209 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 115 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Public Religion Research Institute Webpage, *Survey: Climate Change and Evolution in the 2012 Elections,* 2012, <http://publicreligion.org/research/2011/09/climate-change-evolution-2012/> (16 July 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Cf., Michael Vlatch, ‘What Is Dispensationalism?’, *TheologicalStudies.org* (2010) <http://www.theologicalstudies.org/dispen.html> (26 August 2010) Cf., Marsden, *Fundamentalism* [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. The impact can be seen in the popularity of the *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic fiction by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins: translated into 28 languages with over 63 million copies sold. *LeftBehind.com*, <http://www.leftbehind.com/01_products/browse.asp?section=Books> and <http://www.leftbehind.com/05_news/viewNews.asp?pageid=542&channelID=17> (26 August 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. In the U.S. the impact on the whole by the message of a few can be seen in the compelling need of some faith communities (and individual Christians) to explain to the larger culture that ‘not all Christians believe in this way.’ The public behavior of Pat Robertson often elicits this response. For example, in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti (12 January 2010), Robertson said that Haitians had made a ‘pact with the devil’ and have been ‘cursed’ ever since. *CBSNews.com*, ‘Pat on Haiti’ (2010), <http://www.cbsnews.com/2300-100_162-101-2.html?tag=page> (26 February 2010) Don Miller’s ‘A Response to Pat Robertson’s Comments about Haiti’ reflects the tendency of the mainline to feel compelled to explain that Robertson does not speak for all Christians. *DonMillerIs.com* (2010) <http://donmilleris.com/2010/01/13/1513/> (26 February 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Robert Thomas, ‘The Rationality, Meaningfulness, and Precision of Scripture’, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2004), 175-176 <http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj15h.pdf> (26 August 2010) Cf., LaHaye, *Revelation*, 117, 149, 214 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. LaHaye, *Revelation*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 39 Wesley describes ‘natural man’ in the context of total depravity because he is utterly without the grace of God. However, it soon becomes evident that ‘natural man’ is a logical abstraction with no correspondence to lived experience. Rather, drawing on John 1.9, Wesley claims, ‘Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world.’ This more nuanced understanding shifts the emphasis from the total depravity of humanity to the magnificent graciousness of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Collins, *Scripture Way*, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Collins, *Scripture Way*, 44-45 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. LaHaye, *Revelation*, 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Regarding the privileging of men, a vast amount of literature is devoted to the affects of sexism in general and of subcategories such as institutional, interpersonal and unconscious sexism. When women hold positions in secular society such as prime ministers, cabinet secretaries, senators, physicians, lawyers and professors but are separated, silenced, barred from ordained leadership or made invisible in the context of churches adhering to rapture theologies, it is intuitive that there would be at least some sense of hesitancy on the part of at least some women in relation to a system that overtly and unapologetically values men over women. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Cf., *2008 US Religious Landscape Survey*, which found that 78.4% of adults in the US are self-described Christians of which 26.3% are self-described evangelicals. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *PewForum.org* (2008), <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> (31 August 2009) Against *Barna.org* (2006) ‘Significant Growth in Born Again Population’, (1April 2010) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/157-barna-survey-reveals-significant-growth-in-born-again-population?q=born+again+statistics> 45% of all US adults meet Barna’s criteria for being ‘born again’ The success of the *Left Behind* series suggests at least a substantial popular affinity with the ‘born again’ position. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 181-204 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 37, 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 58 Cf., Fukuyama, *Trust*, 283-287 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. John Wesley, ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’ [1765], in A. Outler and R. Heitzenrater (eds.), *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 372 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Wesley, ‘Scripture Way’, 373 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Cf., Daniel Florian, ‘Unreasonable Faith: Reasonable Thoughts on Religion, Science, and Skepticism’, *UnreasonableFaith.com* (2010),<http://unreasonablefaith.com/> (15 August 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 23 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Wright, *Justification*, 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Wright, *Justification*, 23-24 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Wright, *Justification*, 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 58 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 67-70 Ironically, it is in the context of relationship that God works for transformation; yet the sense of mis-distrust engendered by feeling targeted, inhibits the very relationships and environments that would be conducive to that transformation. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. This is not new. Cf., Lynn White, Jr., ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis’, *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967), 1207 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. LaHaye, *Revelation*, 136 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Cf., Douglas Lee Eckberg and T. Jean Blocker, ‘Christianity, Environmentalism, and the Theoretical Problem of Fundamentalism’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 4 (1996), 343-355 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Cf., Douglas Moo, ‘New Testament Eschatology and the Environment’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006), 449-488 Cf., Scott Sabin, ‘Whole Earth Evangelism’, *Christianity Today* (July 2010), 27-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Craig Sorley, ‘Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions: How Discipleship into a Biblical Worldview on Environmental Stewardship Can Transform People and Their Land’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 3 (2011) 137-143 [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Elaine Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 111, n. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 185 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. It is important to emphasize that all denominational expressions, including the Roman Catholic and the wide range of Protestant and independent churches, have contributed to the painful nature of these examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Susan Henking, ‘More Than a Quarter Century: HIV/AIDS and Religion’, *Religious Studies Review* 34, no. 3 (2008), 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Jerry Falwell is purported to have said that ‘AIDS is not just God’s punishment for homosexuals; it is God’s punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals.’ *BrainyQuote.com*, Xplore Inc (2010) <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jerryfalwe388900.html> (6 September 2010) The connection of HIV/AIDS to divine punishment remains a prevalent idea as seen in the variety of instances where church leaders attempt to dispel that sentiment. Cf., ‘Questions and Answers about HIV/AIDS’, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (2007), <http://www.usccb.org/comm/q&aabouthiv-aids.pdf> (6 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Henking, ‘Quarter Century’, 134 [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Geeta Rau Gupta, ‘Gender, Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: The What, the Why, and the How’, *XIII International AIDS Conference*, Durban, South Africa, 2000, 2-3 <http://www.ispusida.org.mz/index.php/por/content/download/584/2950/file/GenderSexHIVDurban.pdf> (6 September 2010) Cf. ‘Gender Inequalities and HIV’, *WorldHealthOrganization.int* (2010) <http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/> (6 September 2010) Cf., ‘Fact Sheet: Gender and HIV/AIDS’, *Global Crisis - Global Action: United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS*, New York, New York, June 25-27, 2001 <http://www.un.org/ga/aids/ungassfactsheets/html/fsgender_en.htm> (6 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Janis Hutchinson, ‘AIDS and Racism in America’, *Journal of the National Medical Association* 84, no. 2 (1992), 119, 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI condemned the use of condoms despite research indicating they significantly reduce the spread of HIV. Benedict asserted that AIDS is a tragedy ‘that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which even aggravates the problem.’ Riazat Butt, ‘Pope claims condoms could make African Aids crisis worse’, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/17/pope-africa-condoms-aids> (6 September 2010) Cf., Daniel Williams, ‘Pope Rejects Condoms As a Counter to AIDS’, *WashingtonPost.com*, 23 January 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A29404-2005Jan22.html> (6 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. *The Washington Times*, ‘German Sex Abuse Scandal Reaches Pope’, 12 March 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/mar/12/german-sex-abuse-scandal-reaches-pope/> (30 March 2010) Cf., *The Times* (London), ‘“You'd have thought they would have watched him like a hawk”’, and ‘Signature on letter implicates Pope in abuse cover-up’, Saturday, 10 April 2010, No 69918, 4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Baylor University, ‘Executive Summary’ [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Baylor University, ‘Executive Summary’ [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Faith Trust Institute, ‘Sexual Violence FAQs’, *FaithTrustInstitute.org* (2010) <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/sv-faqs> (8 September 2010) Statistics vary depending on the exact nature of what is being measured. Cf., Rape Victim Advocacy Program, ‘Sexual Assault Statistics’, *RapeVictimAdvocacyProgram.com* (2010) <http://www.rvap.org/_docs/pdf_documents/sexual%20assault%20statistics.pdf> (9 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence website, ‘Domestic Violence Facts’ (2010) <http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf> (9 September 2010) Domestic violence is defined as ‘the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. NCADV website, ‘Domestic Violence Facts’ [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Cf., Candler School of Theology, Emory University, ‘Master of Divinity Degree Requirements’, 2010, <http://www.candler.emory.edu/ADMISSIONS/mdiv_requirements.cfm> (9 September 2010) Cf., Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist Univeristy, ‘Master of Divinity’, 2010, <http://www.smu.edu/Perkins/FacultyAcademics/degrees/mdiv.aspx> (9 September 2010) Cf., Asbury Theological Seminary, ‘Master of Divinity’, 2010, <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/degrees/master-of-divinity> and <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/sites/www.asburyseminary.edu/files/2009-10catalog.pdf> (9 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. George McKinney, Jr., ‘Not an Easy Road’, in T. George and R. Smith, Jr. (eds.), *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Susan Davies and Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee, ‘Introduction: What is Racism?’, in *Ending Racism in the Church* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Margaret Farley, ‘Sexism’, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (Detroit: Thomson-Gale, 2003), 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Ann Cudd and Leslie Jones, ‘Sexism’, in R. G. Frey and C. H. Wellman (eds.), *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, vol. 26 (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 102 *eBook Collection*, EBSCO*host* <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/ehost/detail?sid=30918389-c69d-4553-ae24-4da0b9ef30ff%40sessionmgr15&vid=1&hid=9&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=nlebk&AN=90368> (29 August 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Cf., Louis Schoen, ‘Case Study: Minnesota Churches’ Anti-Racism Initiative’, in *Ending Racism in the Church*, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. The Methodist Protestant Church had separated in 1830 over several issues, including the representation of laity and the episcopacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 407 [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Norwood, *Story*, 407 [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Cf. The United Methodist Church baptismal liturgy: ‘Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?’ *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 88, 96, 100, 111-112 Cf., ‘The United Methodist Constitution’, Articles IV and V, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. This continued struggle is not limited to mainline denominations but is also challenging the emerging church movement. Cf., Soong-Chan Rah and Jason Mach, ‘Is the Emerging Church for Whites Only?’, *Sojourners* 39, no. 5 (2010), 16-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Cf., Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995) Cf., Amy Oden, (ed.), *In Her Words: Women's Writings in the History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. The literature is vast; however, several works are well known for their treatment of this subject. Cf., Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Cf., Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson (eds.), *Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook of Christian Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Cf., Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Torjesen, *Women*, 9-87, 155-176 Cf., Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [1983] (New York: Crossroad, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Cf., Laceye Warner, *Saving Women: Retrieving Evangelistic Theology and Practice* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007) Cf., Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds.), *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women’s Religious Writing* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) Cf., Paul Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* [1993] (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Cf., Linda Green, ‘Clergywomen Break New Ground in Large Churches’, United Methodist News Service *UMC.org* (3 October 2008) <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=lwL4KnN1LtH&b=2433457&ct=6059105> (30 September 2010) According to this report, ‘there are 85 United Methodist clergywomen serving as lead pastors in one of the denomination’s 1,172 U.S. churches with 1,000 or more members. In all, there are 7,073 active clergywomen serving one of the 34,398 United Methodist churches in the United States.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. *Ep. Alexander 1* as quoted in Torjesen, *Women*, 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Kohn helpfully highlights that ‘Speech that speaks to our deeper feelings demands trust.’ That one would desire to be valued regardless of one’s race or gender seems to intuitively fall within the realm of ‘deeper feelings.’ Yet, as Kohn also asserts, ‘Words are cheap signals that slash the cost of manipulating others.’ Taken together, Kohn’s statements underline the damage done when the church’s words and behavior are not in harmony. *Trust: Self-Interest and the Common Good*, 40-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Cf., Andrew Walls, ‘The Great Commission 1910-2010’, in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 19 Cf., Dana Robert, ‘The Great Commission in an Age of Globalization’, in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 39 Cf., Dudley Woodberry, ‘Terror, Islam and Mission: Reflections of a Guest in Muslim Lands’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 1 (2002), 2-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Marta Aldrich, ‘Changing Demographics Will Affect Church Funding’, *United Methodist Newscope* 35, no. 41 (12 October 2007), 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Sanneh, *Whose Religion*, 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Walls, ‘Great Commission 1910-2010’, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Sanneh, *Whose Religion*, 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Walls, ‘Great Commission 1910-2010’, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Walls, ‘Great Commission 1910-2010’, 19 Cf., Walls, *Cross-cultural Process,* 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 36 Cf., Woodberry, ‘Terrorism’, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Robert, ‘Great Commission’, 39-40 [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Sanneh, *Whose Religion*, 3 Cf., Enoch Wan, ‘Rethinking Missiology in the Context of the 21st Century: Global Demographic Trends and Diaspora Missiology’, *Great Commission Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2010), 7-20 Wan offers ‘diaspora missiology’ as an alternative paradigm taking into account the shift of Christianity to the global south and the dramatic demographic changes that are currently underway worldwide. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, I.1, trans. John Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Cf., Abraham, *Logic*, 9 Cf., James Logan, ‘Offering Christ: Wesleyan Evangelism Today’, in *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 119 Cf., Dietrich Werner, ‘Evangelism from a WCC Perspective: A Recollection of an Important Ecumenical Memory, and the Unfolding of a Holistic Vision’, *International Review of Mission* 96, no. 382/383 (2007), 184 [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. In the United Methodist Church, an example is the deliberate procurement of funding for E. Stanley Jones professorships in evangelism at the 13 UM seminaries and schools of theology around the world. Foundation for Evangelism website, <http://foundationforevangelism.org/grants/e-stanley-jones-professors/> (30 September 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Cf., Elaine Robinson, *Godbearing: Evangelism Reconceived* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 39 Cf., Abraham, ‘Theology’, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. David Bosch, ‘Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today’ [1987], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 4-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 9 (emphasis original) Cf., Paul Chilcote and Laceye Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism*: *Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), xxvi [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Abraham, *Logic*, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Abraham, *Logic*, 17 Against Robinson who claims Abraham’s focus on the kingdom reflects a selective use of Scripture and unduly privileges eschatology. *Godbearing*, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 89 Cf., Harold Recinos, *Good News from the Barrio: Prophetic Witness for the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Arias, *Announcing*, xv [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 16 Cf., Orlando Costas, ‘Evangelism and the Gospel of Salvation’ [1974], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 41 Cf., Lesslie Newbigin, ‘Evangelism in the Context of Secularization’ [1994], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. This follows the work of Tertullian, for whom the kingdom exists wholly in the future, at the end when ‘God will resurrect and judge the entire human race, and those to be saved will be with God forever’ in contrast to those who are destined for eternal punishment. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 36-49 [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Justo González uses Adolf Harnack to illustrate: ‘the kingdom of God comes by coming to the individual, by entering into his soul and laying hold of it.’ Thus, the kingdom is entirely a question of ‘God and the soul, the soul and its God.’ Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 56 as quoted in Justo González, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, rev. ed. 1999), 115-116 [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Cataclysmic apocalyptic understandings draw on Dispensationalism. Cf., James Stitzinger, ‘The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation’, *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13, no. 2 (2002), 149-171, <http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj13e.pdf> (1 October 2010); Political perspectives originating with Irenaeus, take ‘history with utmost seriousness and [understand] eschatological fullness…as history’s transformation and fulfillment.’ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 67; Church growth perspectives are reflected in the World Council of Churches document, ‘Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation’*,* which states, ‘It is at the heart of the Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community.’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 2 (April 1983), 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Scott Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 18 I am not convinced Jones makes a meaningful distinction. Cf., James Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 97 Charlesworth prefers ‘God’s Rule.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Arias, *Announcing*, xvi [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Cf., James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1, *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 388-390 [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Arias, *Announcing*, 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Admittedly, the word ‘love’ can be corrupted or its meanings confused. Walter Klaiber helpfully asserts that what binds the wide variety of New Testament writings together is ‘the certainty that “God is for us.” The reality of God’s proexistence reaches human need in its entire complexity and breaks through the power of sin which draws its power from the isolation and egocentricity of humankind.’ *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism*, trans. H. Perry-Trauthig and J. Dwyer (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Cf., Patrick Vaughn ‘Evangelism: A Pastoral Theological Perspective’ [1995], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 269 [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Cf., John Wesley’s description of God’s *holy love*. For Wesley, ‘in its most basic sense, it is neither love without holiness, nor holiness without love, but both resplendently together.’ Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 22 Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* [1981], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 57-60 [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Arias, *Announcing*, 89 (emphasis added) Cf., Robinson, *Godbearing*, 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Abraham, *Logic*, 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Jones, *Evangelistic Love*, 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Cf., Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, ‘For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith’, *The Cape Town Commitment*, *The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization* (2010), [http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#p1](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#p2-1) (19 March 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. While The Third Lausanne Congress sought to make these boundaries more fluid, it reiterated that the primary documents of the Lausanne Movement (the *Covenant* and the *Manila Manifesto*) ‘clearly express core truths of the biblical gospel and *apply…to our practical mission* in ways that are still relevant and challenging.’ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, ‘Preamble: The Cape Town Confession of Faith’, *The Cape Town Commitment*, *The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization* (2010), <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#preamble> (19 March 2011) (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, ‘The Lausanne Covenant’, *International Congress on World Evangelization* (1974) <http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html> (17 October 2007) (emphasis added) While I do not support a rigid delineation of social action and evangelism, John Stott’s reminder is appropriate: the Covenant was drafted at ‘a Congress on *World* *Evangelization*. It is striking, therefore, that Christian social responsibility should have been discussed at all, let alone so much.’ ‘The Significance of Lausanne’ [1975], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 307 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. ‘The Lausanne Covenant’(section 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. ‘The Lausanne Covenant’ (section 4) Cf., ‘For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith’ (Part 1, Section 10b) Cf., Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, ‘Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment’, *Lausanne Occasional Papers, no. 21* (1982) <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-21.html> (21 October 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Micah Network, ‘Micah Declaration on Integral Mission’, *MicahNetwork.org* (2001) <http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf> (19 March 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. ‘For the Lord We Love: The Cape Town Statement of Faith’ (Part 1, Section 10b) Cf., ‘Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment, *Lausanne Occasional Papers, no. 21* [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 9 Cf., Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 317 Cf., Ronald Sider, ‘Evangelism, Salvation, and Social Justice’ [1975], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 201 Conversely, a sizable segment of the Christian community in the U.S. is untroubled by this dualism. For examples of privileging eternal concerns over temporal concerns see Scott Dawson (ed.), *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Abraham, *Logic*, 44 Cf., Stephen Neill, ‘If everything is mission, then nothing is mission.’ *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1959), 81 as quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 511 Cf., Stone, *Evangelism*, 46-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Stone, *Evangelism*, 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Abraham, *Logic*, 72 Cf., Poe, *Christian Witness*, 116 who attributes the fascination with the church growth movement to Enlightenment empiricism. Having accepted that ‘scientific knowledge is the real knowledge’ the church brought empiricism into its theology and methodology. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 415 [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Bryan Stone, ‘New Church Development’, in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 179 Cf., Philip Kenneson and James Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Warner, *Saving Women*, 265 [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. A Google search on ‘church growth’ returned 1,290,000 results including such resources as: The Church Growth Institute, Ephesians Four Ministries, *Churchgrowth.org* (2010), <http://store.churchgrowth.org/epages/ChurchGrowth.sf> (28 October 2010);

     Church Growth, Inc, *Churchgrowth.net* (1977-2005), <http://www.churchgrowth.net/> (28 October 2010); and Church Growth Today Research and Consulting, *Churchgrowthtoday.org* (2004), <http://www.churchgrowthtoday.org/> (28 October 2010). These organizations offer services such as attendance campaign packages (Church Growth Institute), ‘trained church shoppers’ (Church Growth, Inc.), and strategic planning software (Church Growth Today). Additionally, Donald McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970) remains a mainstay in church growth literature, available in its third print edition and e-reader format. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. I use the phrase ‘unstable theological grounding’ to indicate with Abraham, the ease with which church growth tenets are embraced by competing and often conflicting doctrinal traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Cf., Robert Schreiter who raises interesting questions regarding a possible fundamental shift in evangelical theologies of mission. ‘From the Lausanne Covenant to the Cape Town Commitment: A Theological Assessment’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (2011), 88-92 [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Bosch, ‘Evangelism’, 11 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Abraham, ‘Theology’, 19 Cf., *Logic*, 95 Evangelism is ‘that set of intentional activities…governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Cf., Eddie Fox and George Morris, *Faith Sharing: Dynamic Christian Witnessing by Invitation* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996) Cf., Jones, *Evangelistic Love* Cf., Heath, *Mystic Way* [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Dana Robert, (ed.), *Gospel Bearers,* *Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 9 Cf., Warner, *Saving Women,* 279 [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Warner, *Saving Women*, 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Warner, *Saving Women*, 278 [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Stone, *Evangelism*, 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Stone, *Evangelism*, 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Abraham, *Logic*, 95-98 Against Jones, *Evangelistic Love,* 18, 73, 99-118 who follows Abraham’s basic definition, but shifts the focus of initiation from the kingdom of God to ‘*Christian discipleship* in response to the reign of God.’ (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Abraham, *Logic*, 98 Against Robinson, *Godbearing*, 50-51 who believes the shift to a theocentric focus unduly privileges the transcendent. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Abraham, *Logic*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. In the argument contained in *Logic*, Abraham can be rightly criticized for blurring the distinction between the church and the kingdom of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. William Abraham, ‘On Making Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ’, in C. Braaten and R. Jenson (eds.), *Marks of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 160 [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Abraham, ‘On Making Disciples’, 160-161 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Cf., John Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 1-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Abraham, *Logic*, 103 Cf., Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, who approaches the idea of initiation from the perspective of a change in identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Warner, *Saving Women*, 277 Warner criticizes Abraham and Jones for overly compartmentalizing evangelism and discipleship. Cf., Robinson, *Godbearing* who singles out Abraham. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Warner, *Saving Women*, 277 Cf., Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 47-89 Cf., Heath, *Mystic Way*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Abraham, ‘Theology’, 29 Cf., Logan, *Offering Christ*, 123 Logan notes that alongside preaching, the class meeting was an essential rather than optional component of the Wesleyan revival. Wesley was known for his phrase ‘Follow the Blow!’ which emphasized his belief that ‘awakening souls without providing follow-up nurture and discipline (i.e., the class meeting) was playing into the hands of the devil.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Bill Leonard, ‘Evangelism and Contemporary American Life’ [1980], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Jonathan Edwards,‘A Work of God: The Distinguishing Marks’ [1741], in R. L. Bushman (ed.), *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 121-127 [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Leonard, ‘Evangelism and Contemporary American Life’, 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Logan, ‘Offering Christ’, 116 (emphasis original) Cf., Albert Outler, *Evangelism & Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Leonard, ‘Evangelism and Contemporary American Life’, 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Chilcote and Warner, *Study of Evangelism*, xxvi [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 53. Cf., John Westerhoff, ‘Evangelism, Evangelization, and Catechesis: Defining Terms and Making the Case for Evangelization’ [1994], in P. Chilcote and L. Warner (eds.), *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Arias, *Announcing*, 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Abraham, ‘Theology’, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Abraham, ‘Theology’, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 29 Hereafter referenced in footnotes as ‘Volf.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Chilcote and Warner, *Study of Evangelism*, xxvi [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Volf, 65 Cf., Cornelius Plantinga, Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Volf, 66 (emphasis original) Cf., Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* [1987], trans. N. Russell (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 4th ed. 2007) 5-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Cf., Wright, *Justification*, 55-77 Cf., N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 215-279 Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 340-346, 529-530 [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Volf, 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Volf, 66 Significantly, Volf neither asserts that exclusion is the most basic sin, nor that it lies at the bottom of all sins. Rather, exclusion as a metaphor for sin names what infuses most sin. 72 Cf., Plantinga, *Not the Way*, 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Volf, 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Volf, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 528-532, 605-607 [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Volf, 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Volf, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Cf., John Greco and John Turri, ‘Virtue Epistemology’, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2011) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/epistemology-virtue/> (31 March 2011) Such innate perception is considered by virtue epistemologists such as Ernest Sosa to be a ‘faculty-virtue’ contributing to intellectual well being or flourishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. As previously noted, there are also ample theological warrants for this regardless of the cultural climate. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Volf, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Hunter, *Celtic Way*, 47-55 Cf., Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 47-89 [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Cf., Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992) Schreiter poignantly outlines the need for reconciliation *within* the Christian church. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Cf., Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 130 Schreiter blurs the boundaries substantially when he suggests that reconciliation might be ‘one way of defining [the church’s] mission in the world today.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. For a helpful discussion of metaphor in theological discourse, see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2nd ed. 2007), 18-37 [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Volf, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. For Volf, the metaphor of a handshake could easily be substituted for embrace; what the metaphor is pointing to is ‘the whole realm of human relations in which the interplay between the self and the other takes place.’ 140 Cf., Z. D. Gurevitch, ‘The Embrace: On the Element of Non-Distance in Human Relations’, *The Sociological Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1990), 187-201 [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Volf, 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Volf, 141 If the arms are not opened, the embrace paradoxically becomes exclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Volf, 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Volf, 141-142 [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Volf, 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Volf, 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Volf, 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. For a discussion of the necessary role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, see John Wimber and Kevin Springer, Power Evangelism (Ventura: Regal, 2nd ed. 2009) Cf., Schreiter, who stresses the importance of waiting as ‘an active capacity,’ which opens one ‘to God and God’s reconciling grace.’ *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry,* 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Volf, 143 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Volf, 143-144 Cf., Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 31-46 [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Volf, 145 [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. The silence regarding the cyclical nature of the evangelistic process is apparent in much of the current conversation regarding discipleship. When Christian ‘practice’ and developing congregations marked by ‘porous monasticism’ are emphasized, the focus appears to be inward, despite the attention given to fluid boundaries. For an example of a valuable reimagining of congregational discipleship, which is also interestingly silent on evangelistic practice, see Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Cf., Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 109-129 Coakley’s discussion of Gregory of Nyssa is helpful in understanding the various nuances that exist in the use of trinitarian language such as ‘community’ (verses communion) and ‘persons.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 109 Cf., Clark Pinnock, whose description of the Trinity is significant: ‘The Trinity depicts a relational God who is ontologically other and a dynamic world that has real value. As internally social and self-sufficient, God does not need the world but creates it out of the abundance of his rich inner life. This makes God free to create and respond to the world, free to be gracious and take the initiative where necessary.’ ‘Systematic Theology’, in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Pinnock, ‘Systematic Theology’, 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Pinnock, ‘Systematic Theology’, 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 160 Cf., Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 163-167 Cf., Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 54-58, 151-153 Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 12-16 Interestingly, while not engaging in outright contradiction, there is considerable disagreement between Maddox and Collins regarding subtler details of Wesleyan historical theology on these matters. That disagreement does not, however, alter the essential agreement that risk is involved in divine-human and human-human relations. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. The importance of this point stems from my belief that in the practice of evangelism, generally speaking, Christians have not always been disposed to give freedom to the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover,* 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Cf., Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* [1992], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 129-138 [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Volf, 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Volf, 127-128 Cf., Coakley, *Powers*, 3-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Luke Timothy Johnson, The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 158 (emphasis original) Cf., James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005), 15-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Volf, 24 Cf., Wright, *Victory*, 607 [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Volf, 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Volf, 129 (emphasis added) Volf addresses the gender issues raised in this approach to kenotic self-giving and the Trinity, 167-190 Cf. Coakley, *Powers* [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Volf, 158 [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Volf, 158 Volf correctly indicates that the point of the memory of belonging is independent of any discussion of the idiomatic usages of the phrase ‘came to himself.’ (e.g. ‘came to his senses’) or language implying a certain re-discovery of the proper self, as is commonly mentioned in numerous commentaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Cf., Richard Hays, whose provocative study of Gal. 3.1-4.11 asserts that Paul is describing a representational Christology in which Jesus’ own faith is also salvific, not only an individual’s faith *in* him. *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1 - 4:11* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 2002), specifically 106-111, 141-162, 209-229 Against James D. G. Dunn, ‘Appendix I: Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ’, in R. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1 - 4:11* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 249-271 While Dunn disagrees on the issue of biblical translation and interpretation, he affirms its *theological* value. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. See Sirach 33.19-23 for a more traditional answer to the son's request. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Volf, 159 [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Volf, 159 [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Volf, 161 [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Volf, 161 Cf., Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 2: Chapters 13-24* in R. Phillips and P. Ryken (eds.), *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2009), 154-156 [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Interestingly, the two brothers base their expectations and demands on the same logic: the prodigal expects to be received back only as a hired hand and the older brother demands the same. Volf, 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Volf, 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Volf, 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Abraham, January 2010 (informal conversation) [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Volf, 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Volf, 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Volf, 164 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Volf, 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Volf, 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Volf, 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Volf, 79 Schreiter foreshadows Volf’s assertion with his apt question, ‘How do you seek reconciliation with someone who does not think he has done anything wrong?’ *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry*, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Volf, 81 Cf., Marjorie Suchocki, who correctly asserts: ‘To break the world cleanly into victims and violators ignores the depths of each person’s participation in cultural sin. There simply are no innocents.’ *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 149 [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Cf., Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Volf, 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, who appears to be striving for the same concept, but takes a less straightforward route by asserting the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt. Niebuhr’s juggling of sin and guilt seems unnecessarily awkward, as ‘all sins are equal’ does not necessarily follow from ‘all have sinned.’ Similarly, ‘neither is innocent’ does not necessarily lead to the conclusion ‘the sins of both are equal.’ *Human Nature*, vol. 1, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 219-227 [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Volf, 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Volf, 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Cf., Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 71 Wink rightly asserts that solidarity in sin frees us ‘from delusions about the perfectibility of ourselves and our institutions.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Cf., Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 238 [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Volf, 84 [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Volf, 84-85 (emphasis original) Cf. Michael Welker, God the Spirit, trans. by J. F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 48 Welker is correct in contending that social moralism ‘confuses God’s reality with the constitution of moral market.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Volf, 85 (emphasis original) Against, Elaine Pagels, The Origin of Satan (New York: Random House, 1995), xvii, 179-184 Pagels asserts that the dominant view of Scripture and Christian tradition suggests a rigid demarcation of ‘children of hell’ (Mt. 23.15) and the demand to ‘love your enemies.’ (Mt. 5.44) Volf contrasts her view by recognizing that these two appear together in the Gospel because ‘the story of the cross is about God who desires to embrace precisely the “sons and daughters of hell.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Volf, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Seligman, ‘Modernity’, 53-61 [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Volf, 198 [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought [1954] (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 220-221 Drawing on Kant, Arendt describes enlarged thinking as being the way one ‘transcend[s] [one’s] own individual limitations.’ It is thinking that requires the presence of others and makes ‘sharing-the-world-with-others’ possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Volf, 213 [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Volf, 250-253 [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489 [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Cf., Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith*, 143-176 [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Jeffrey Conklin-Miller, ‘Evangelism: Leaning Toward Both God and World,’ in A. Thompson, (ed.), *Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon press, 2011), 41-51 [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Volf, 207 [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Volf, 208 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Ellen Charry, review of *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), by Miroslav Volf, in *Theology Today* 56, no. 247 (1999), 248 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Charry, ‘Review’, 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Volf, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Charry, ‘Review’, 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Charry, ‘Review’, 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Volf, 304-307 [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Volf, 109 (emphasis original) While Volf does not believe it is the task of humans to accomplish final reconciliation, the issue is of great importance to him. Cf., Miroslav Volf, ‘The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition’, *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (2000), 91-113 [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Cf., Charlesworth, *Historical Jesus,* 97-104 Cf., Bruce Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus’ Announcement of the Kingdom* (Freistadt: Verlag F. Plöchl, 1979) Cf., John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 223-302 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 383-487 Cf., Wright, *Victory*, 145-474 [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Abraham, *Logic*, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, n. 100, 85 Cf., Wright, *Victory*, 3-124 Cf., John Dominic Crossan, ‘What Victory? What God: A Review Debate with N. T. Wright on *Jesus and the Victory of God*’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 3 (1997), 346 [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Methodological disagreements exist within the Third Quest. I prefer the approach outlined by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard Hays, ‘Seeking the Identity of Jesus’, in B. Gaventa and R. Hays (eds.), *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 1-24 However, Wright’s points regarding the role of canon and tradition in the historical investigation of Jesus are significant and cannot be ignored. For valuable expanded dialogue see Richard Hays, ‘Knowing Jesus: Story, History and the Question of Truth’, in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 41-61; N. T. Wright, ‘Response to Richard Hays’, in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 62-65; and N. T. Wright, ‘Whence and Whither Historical Jesus Studies in the Life of the Church?’ in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 115-158 [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Paul Eddy, ‘The (W)Right Jesus: Eschatological Prophet, Israel’s Messiah, Yahweh Embodied’, in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Wright, ‘Whence and Whither Historical Jesus Studies’, 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Hays, ‘Knowing Jesus’, 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 472-477 [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Cf., John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Cf., Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) Cf., Robert B. Steward (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Marcus Borg, ‘An Appreciative Disagreement’, in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 227-243 [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 85-86 Cf., E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985) Cf., Markus Bockmuehl, ‘God’s Life as a Jew: Remembering the Son of God as Son of David’, in B. Gaventa and R. Hays (eds.), *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 60-78 [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 392 Cf., E. P. Sanders, ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, *Reflections* (Winter/Spring, 1992), 8-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Sanders, ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Cf., Wright, *NTPG* Cf., Wright, *Victory* [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Cf., Maurice Casey, ‘Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God*’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 69 (1998), 95-103 Contra Craig Evans, ‘Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel’, in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 77-100 [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 145 Cf., Luke Timothy Johnson, ‘A Historiographical Response to Wright’s Jesus’, in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 206-224 [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 470-477 [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Nicholas Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology and Kingdom Ethics: Ever the Twain Shall Meet’ in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1996), 326, 321-355 Cf., Gaventa and Hays, ‘Seeking the Identity of Jesus’, 17-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. For a thoroughgoing explication of Wright’s understanding of first-century Judaism’s worldview, see *NTPG*, Part III, 145-243 [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Wright, *NTPG*, 224 [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Wright, *NTPG*, 226 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 287-288 [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Wright, *NTPG*, 226-227 [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 291-292 [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 289-290 Cf., Wright, *Victory*, 398-400 [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 290 [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. A word of caution is necessary as understandings of ‘electing grace’ in conjunction with ideas regarding ‘bringing salvation to the end of the earth’ have been a major influence on western evangelistic efforts, often with less than positive results. Cf., Jerald Gort, ‘Distress, Salvation and the Mediation of Salvation’ in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 208 [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Wright, *Justification*, 238 [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 236 [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Rick Marshall, ‘Know the Difference: Christianity Is Not Just a Religion’, in S. Dawson (ed.), *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others For Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 30 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Rick Warren, ‘Your Testimony: Sharing Your Life Message’, in S. Dawson (ed.), *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 225-416 [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Chilton, *God in Strength*, 283, 287 Cf., Leonhard Goppelt, *The Ministry of Jesus in Its Theological Significance*, vol. 1, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. J. Alsup, ed. J. Roloff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 272-276 [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 390 [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 392 Cf., Sanders, ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Wright, *Victory*, 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* [1965], trans. J. W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Dunn, *New Perspective*, 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Dunn, *New Perspective*, 76 Against Crossan, *Historical Jesus,* Crossan’s Jesus is a Mediterranean Jewish peasant philosopher. Against Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), Mack’s Jesus is a Hellenistic sage. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Against E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993) Cf., Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* Sanders does not believe Jesus came into major conflict with the religious leaders of his day. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Cf., Sanders ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. For a thoroughgoing explication of Wright’s understanding of Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom, see *Victory*, Part II, 145-474 [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Wright, *Victory*, 226-243 [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Wright, *Victory*, 245-246 [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’ 100, 102 Perrin notes that he had been ‘hermeneutically conditioned to read Scripture as God’s saving Word to me as an individual rather than – what I believe it is today – God’s saving Word to the Israel of God, even the church.’ I believe this hermeneutical conditioning has produced what Perrin describes as ‘a notion that views the church as little more than a loose association of the equivalents of Jesus’ Facebook friends.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Wright, *Victory*, 246 Cf., Sanders, ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, 6 While addressing a different issue, Sanders’ assertion is relevant: ‘It is not reasonable to think that the disciples formed a movement that had little or nothing in common with the views of their leader.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Wright, *Victory*, 246 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Cf., Dale Allison, ‘Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E. P. Sanders’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987), 57-78 Against Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 106-113, 203-205; *Historical Figure*, 230-237 [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Wright, *Victory*, 251 Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 107-108 Perrin correctly points out the weakness in Wright’s emphasis on corporate repentance: ‘If…Jesus’ [*sic*] directed his message to Israel as a whole as it stood at its own national crossroads, calling the question as to whether the nation should persist in or desist from its violent militancy, and if, too, the nation’s failure to comply with Jesus’ invitation would result in negative consequences (so far as we know) strictly on a corporate level, then there is no sense in which Jesus’ eschatology has any direct bearing on the individual’s response to Jesus.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Wright, *Victory*, 246-258 Cf. Allison, ‘Jesus and the Covenant’ [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 499 Cf., Goppelt, *The Ministry of Jesus*, 77-138 Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 108-109 [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Johnson, ‘*A Historiographical Response*’, 222 [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Cf., Allison, ‘Jesus and the Covenant’ [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 109 Following Wright, Perrin provides a helpful reminder that ‘resurrection…was not simply a personal event but a corporate reality, the culmination of God’s temple purposes, which were already being realized in the present through Jesus’ kingdom preaching.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Wright, *Victory*, 256-257 [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Cf., Joachim Jeremias, *The Proclamation of Jesus*, vol. 1, *New Testament Theology,* trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1971), 109-112 Contra, Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 176-180, 182, 385 n. 14 Cf., John Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2, *A* *Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 149, 211-212 Cf., John Meier, *Companions and Competitors*, vol. 3, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 28-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 529-530 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. George Wesley Buchanan, *Jesus: The King and His Kingdom* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 198-206 [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Wright, *Victory*, 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Wright, *Victory*, 272 Cf., Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 111-112, 119-121, 142 While differing dramatically from Wright, Schüssler Fiorenza parallels him in an unexpected way, seeing Jesus’ dramatically different vision of reality and human community as a deliberate subversion of the dominant structures of his time and offering a new world order that was ‘already experientially available.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Dale Allison, ‘Jesus & the Victory of Apocalyptic’ in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999) 134 Cf., Dale Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 152-171 Cf., Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* [1892], ed. and trans. R. Hiers and L. Holland (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 101-105 [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Contrast Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 110 who views Jesus as understanding the destruction of the temple ‘not as the eschatological terminus but as a milestone marker which demonstrated that the eschaton was underway.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’ 110 Perrin agrees that Jesus is vindicated; however, he breaks with Wright in seeing the destruction of the temple as marking the end of exile. Rather, it marks ‘only that the return from exile was underway, even as a resurrected creation was slowly taking shape through the expanding impress of the preached kingdom.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Eddy, ‘(W)Right Jesus’, 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Eddy, ‘(W)Right Jesus’, 47-48 [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 465 Cf., Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 158-159 [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 292 Cf., Schüssler Fiorenza, 105-154 *In Memory of Her*, who while acknowledging that Jesus’ kingdom language contains a future dimension bereft of death and suffering, places greater emphasis on the this-worldly transformation of Jewish life. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Sanders, ‘Jesus: His Religious “Type”’, 7 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Allison, ‘Jesus & the Victory of Apocalyptic’, 129 (emphasis added) Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 110 ‘While Tom’s [Wright’s] Jesus confines the eschaton to the events of A.D. 70, I believe that these same realities were for Jesus a kind of down payment of the eschaton; they were the dawning beams of light that the exile stood to be reversed and that the kingdom was both here and on its way.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Against, Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 198-199 Perrin sees the kingdom ‘not as “a single identifiable event which every man experiences at the same time,” but as something “which every man experiences in his own time.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 292 [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. N. T. Wright, ‘Whence and Whither Pauline Studies in the Life of the Church?’ in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 265-272 [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. N. T. Wright, ‘In Grateful Dialogue: A Response’ in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 257 [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Wright, ‘In Grateful Dialogue’, 257 [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Cf., Allison, ‘Jesus and the Covenant’ [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Wright, *Victory*, 275 [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Wright, *Victory*, 276 Cf., Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 158-159 n. 23 While differing substantially from Wright, Borg agrees that Jesus’ teaching ‘indicates a concern with the community of Israel’ and that ‘an alternative vision of community is central to Jesus, whether or not he “founded” a community himself.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Cf., Borg, *Jesus*, 153 Borg points out the ‘remarkable social radicalism’ of the early communities of Jesus. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Borg, *Jesus*, 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Wright, *Victory*, 660 [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Maddox, *Responsible Gra*ce, 209 [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns of Church Renewal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 209 [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Richard B. Hays, ‘Victory over Violence: The Significance of N. T. Wright’s Jesus for New Testament Ethics,’ in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s* Jesus and the Victory of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Borg, *Jesus*, 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Collins, *Theology*, 237 [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Collins, *Theology*, 245 [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Scott Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 246 [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Stewart described the UMC as the ‘University of Phoenix of religions’ (see Chapter Two, n. 91) [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Wright, ‘Whence and Wither Historical Jesus Studies’, 136-137 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Cf., Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 103 [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Borg, *Jesus*, 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Wright might possibly say the Temple became irrelevant because Jesus ‘became’ the temple. Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 891 who speaks of a ‘continuity of fulfillment.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Cf., Allison, ‘Jesus and the Covenant’, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Wright, *NTPG*, 251-252, Cf., Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 27-50 Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) 336 Crossan insists that the kingdom of God is ‘the will of God for Israel and therefore for earth.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Wright, *NTPG*, 279 (emphasis original) Cf., E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 206-212 Cf., E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief: 63 BCE – 66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 265-270 It must be noted that while there is consensus that the fate of the Gentiles was tied to that of Israel, that does not imply agreement on what *type* of fate Jews expected the Gentiles to actually experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Wright, *NTPG*, 373, Cf., Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, xxix [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Ben Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery*, vol. 16, *Good News Studies* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986) [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Wright, *NTPG*, 396-403 Cf., James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1989), ix Dunn describes the crucial element of the first Christians’ self-understanding as being ‘*the meaning of Jesus*, of what he had said and done, together with what the first Christians understood him to be and to have been, to be doing and to have done.’ (emphasis original) Cf., Meyer, *Early Christians*, 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Wright, *NTPG*, 361-362 Cf., Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4 Bauckham argues that the early church took up ‘the well-known Jewish monotheistic ways of distinguishing the one God from all other reality and [used] these precisely as ways of including Jesus in the unique identity of the one God as commonly understood in Second Temple Judaism.’ Cf., Richard Hays, ‘The Story of God’s Son: The Identity of Jesus in the Letters of Paul’ in B. Gaventa and R. Hays (eds.), *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008) 199 Hays sees the account of Jesus as ‘Lord and Redeemer of the world’ firmly rooted in Paul’s letters, rather than being ‘a late doctrinal invention of the church in the second or third century.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Deborah Rose-Gaier, ‘The Didache: A Community of Equals’, paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, 25 November 1996 as referenced in Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 371 Cf., Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 223-226 Cf., Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 160-236 [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Wright, *NTPG*, 364-365 Against Arthur Droge and James Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992) 138-140 [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Wright, *NTPG*, 363 Cf., Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 127-131 [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Wright, *NTPG*, 445-447 Cf., Crossan, *Birth of Christianity,* xxxiii Crossan refers to Christianity as emerging ‘out of the matrix of biblical Judaism and that maelstrom of late Second-Temple Judaism.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Wright, *NTPG*, 370 [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Cf., Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 49 Hays perceptively points out that ‘Paul was formed deeply by his reading of Scripture…We should give Paul and his readers credit for being at least as sophisticated and nuanced in their reading of Scripture as we are.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 123-130 Cf., Hays, ‘The Story of God’s Son’, 186-187, [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Wright, *NTPG*, 406 Cf., Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 717-722 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels*, 130-132 [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 719 [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Wright, *NTPG*, 406-407, Cf., Hays, ‘The Story of God’s Son’, 184-186 [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 3-6 Cf., Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 52-88 [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. Wright, *Paul*, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Cf., Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 6 Cf., Hays, *Conversion*, 164-169 Cf., Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 81-107, 236-238, 420-423 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels*, 154-156 [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Wright, *Paul*, 12 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 101, Cf., Wright, *NTPG*, 260-268, Cf., Sanders, *Judaism*, 263-267 [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels*, 154-155 Wright, *Justification*, 64-71 [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Wright, *Paul*, 26, Cf., Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 237-248 [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Wright, *Paul*, 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Wright, *Paul*, 36-39 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels,* 153-162 [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels*, 153-156 Cf., Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 197 [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Wright, *Paul*, 40-42 [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Wright, *Climax*, 41-55 Cf., Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 197-199, 206 Cf., Hays, *Conversion*, 119-142 Cf., Douglas Campbell, ‘Romans 1:17 - A Crux Interpretum for the Pistis Christou Debate’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994), 265-285 [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. Wright, *Paul*, 44-47, Cf., Hays, *Conversion*, 48 Cf., Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels*, 148-164 [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Wright, Paul, 47 Cf., Hays, *Conversion*, 119-142 Cf., Luke Timothy Johnson, ‘Rom 3:21-26 and the Faith of Jesus’, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1982), 77-90 Cf., Sam Williams, ‘Again Pistis Christou,’ *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987), 431-447 [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 211 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 211 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 211 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 211 Cf. Johnson, ‘Rom 3:21-26’, 83 Johnson describes this mode of participation as ‘that acknowledgement of God’s claim on the world (and on one’s life) which is the opposite of idolatry. It refers to that responsive hearing of God’s word which allows his way of making humans righteous to be the measure of reality, rather than human perceptions.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Cf., David Hay, ‘Pistis as “Ground for Faith” in Hellenized Judaism and Paul’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 3 (1989), 461-476 Cf., Arland Hultgren, ‘The Pistis Christou Formulation in Paul’, *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1980) 248-263 [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Cf., Hultgren, ‘The Pistis Christou Formulation in Paul’ [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Johnson, ‘Rom 3:21-26’, 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ,* 297 [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Dunn, ‘Appendix 1: Once More’, 269 [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 293 Cf., Campbell, ‘Rom 1:17’, 273 [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. John Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ [1738], in A. Outler and R. Heitzenrater (eds.), *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. Cf., Williams, ‘Again Pistis Christou’, 445 ‘God gives what was promised on the basis of Christ-faith – that faith, we might say, which Christ created as a way of being in the world – to those who make his way their own.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 293 [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Collins, *Theology*, 205 [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 224 [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. Wright, Paul, 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Cf., Johnson, ‘Rom 3:21-26’, 84 ‘As idolatry begins with the refusal to acknowledge God's claim to glory as creator (Rom 1:18-23) and leads logically to the attempt to establish one’s place in the world (righteousness) on one’s own terms (Rom 10:3), so faith begins in the recognition of being God’s creature and leads to accepting his way of making humans righteous before him (Rom 3:21-26). So fundamental an orientation of human existence can have as its object only God himself.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. Recinos, *Good News from the Barrio*, 46, 62 [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Dawson, *Complete Evangelism Guidebook* [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Cf., John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, *Questions of Truth: Fifty-one Responses to Questions about God, Science, and Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) Cf., David Wilkinson*, God, Time and Stephen Hawking: An Exploration into Origins* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. David Wilkinson, ‘Worshipping the Creator God: the Christian Doctrine of Creation’, in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 15-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Terence Fretheim, God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 27 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. Wilkinson, *God, Time and Stephen Hawking*, 133 Cf., Polkinghorne and Beale, *Questions of Truth*, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* [1985], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 38 Cf., David Hall, ‘Does *Creation* Equal *Nature*? Confronting the Christian Confusion about Ecology and Cosmology’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2005) 781-812 [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. Cf., Francis Watson, ‘Genesis before Darwin: Why Scripture Needed Liberating from Science’, in S. Barton and D. Wilkinson (eds.), *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23-37 Watson insightfully notes, ‘Scripture purports to tell us only what we most need to know; it does not tell us everything that we might wish to know or that we are capable of knowing even without it.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. Cf., Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1, trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 2nd ed. 1962), 136-139 Cf., Horst Deitrich Preuss Old Testament Theology, trans. L Perdue, J. Mays, C. Newsom and D. Petersen (eds.), vol. 1, *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 226-39 Cf., Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (London: SCM, 1992), 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Cf., *Lausanne Covenant*, Sections, 3, 4, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Fretheim, *God and the World*, xvi Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 19-48 Cf., Langdon Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 1-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. Bauckham, God Crucified, 9-13 Cf., David Wilkinson, ‘Creation Accounts in the Old Testament’, in Creation and the Abrahamic Faiths (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 1-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. Collins, *Theology*, 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. Wilkinson, *God, Time and Stephen Hawking*, 120 Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. Cf., Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 28-50 Cf., N. A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 178-91 [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Wilkinson, ‘Worshipping the Creator God’, 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Wilkinson, ‘Worshipping the Creator God’, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Cf., Vincent J. Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 41-49 [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Wright, *NTPG*, 251 [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. Wright, *NTPG*, 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. Wright, *Climax*, 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 25-42 [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 118 [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 118 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. Collins, *Theology*, 324-327 Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 252-253 [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. Cf., Fretheim, God and World [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Collins, *Theology*, 13-14, 23-24, [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. This contrasts pantheism (God is everything and everything is God). Cf., Michael Levine, ‘Pantheism’, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/pantheism/> (1 July 2011) Cf., Aruna Gnanadason, ‘Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God’s Body in an Age of Environmental Violence’, The Ecumenical Review 57, no. 2 (2005) 159-170 Cf., Sallie McFague, ‘God’s Body, Our Home: Intimate Creation’, Christian Century, 13-20 March 2002, 36-45 [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. Moltmann, God in Creation, xiv (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xiv [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Moltmann is unapologetically *panentheistic.* (God and the world are inter-related but not the same) John Culp, ‘Panentheism’, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/panentheism/> (7 July 2009) The difference is small but significant. Moltmann’s view is not without detractors; however, I believe his decidedly trinitarian conceptualization overcomes most objections and is extremely helpful. Bauckham rightly points out that Moltmann’s version of panentheism is a ‘way of expressing an intimacy of relationship between God and his creation, which does justice both to the divine immanence in creation and to the divine transcendence beyond creation.’ Richard Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann (London: T and T Clark, 1995), 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. Bauckham, *Theology*, 185 [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 109 Cf., Ilia Delio, ‘Is creation eternal?’, *Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (2005), 279-303 Cf., Ilia Delio, ‘Theology, metaphysics, and the centrality of Christ’, *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2007), 254-273 [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. Bauckham, *Theology*, 185 Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Collins, *Theology*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. Moltmann, God in Creation, 5 Cf., Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum 7*, trans. P. Blowers and R. Wilken, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 45-74 [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. David Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (New York: T and T Clark, 2010), 29-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007), 63-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. Bauckham, *Theology*, 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Pantheism contains a problematic belittling of evil as exemplified by Epictetus’ assertion that ‘there is nothing intrinsically evil in the world.’ *The Manual (Enchiridion) of Epictetus*, 27, trans. P. Matheson (1916), *SacredTexts.com* (2011), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep102.htm> (26 June 2011) Significantly, not all agree that Moltmann avoids pantheism. It is very likely that Wright would lump Moltmann’s view with ‘pantheism and its cousins’ (n. 527), as might Wilkinson. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Bauckham, *Theology*, 244 [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Bauckham, *Theology*, 245 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. Moltmann, God in Creation, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. Bauckham, *Theology*, 190 Against Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 252-271 Against John Taylor, The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit in Christian Mission [1972] (London: SCM Press, 2004), 25-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. Moltmann, God in Creation, 277 [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 277 [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 50-55 Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 26-33, 37-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, ix [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 25-42 Cf., Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 105-135 [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology [1974], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. Cf., James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Christology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 48-54 Cf., Hilary of Poitiers, ‘On the Trinity’, 9.38, in M. Edwards (ed.) *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,* New Testament vol. 3, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. Crossan, Historical Jesus, 424 [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. John Wesley, ‘A Letter to a Roman Catholic’ [1749], in A. Outler (ed.), *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 494 [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. Cf., Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 9 ‘The problem of how it is possible to think of God or the Son of God become man cannot be discussed independently of the problems of how to think of God, how to conceive of personality, how to conceptualize the relation between spirit and matter, between “time” and “eternity.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. H. May and Bruce Metzger (eds.), ‘Introduction to the Gospel According to John’, in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1977), 1286 Cf., John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 370 [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
569. Collins, *Theology*, 95 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
570. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
571. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 117 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
572. Cf., Bauckham, God Crucified, 45-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
573. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 46 Cf., Kornel Zathureczky, *The Messianic Disruption Of Trinitarian Theology* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2009), 156 <http://lib.myilibrary.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/Open.aspx?id=249372&loc=&srch=undefined&src=0> (3 July 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
574. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
575. David Watson, ‘The Jesus of History and Canon: Some Thoughts on Interdisciplinary Scholarship’, in Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 241 [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
576. Cf., Hans Küng, On Being a Christian, trans. E. Quinn (London: Collins, 1974) [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. Cf., Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered,* Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1-71 <http://lib.myilibrary.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/Open.aspx?id=81583&loc=&srch=undefined&src=0> (3 July 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
578. Dunn, Christology in the Making, 262 Cf., Richard Bauckham, Knowing God Incarnate, vol. 6, Grove Spirituality Series (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1983), 3 Against John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2nd ed. 2006), 99-111 Against Thomas Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 19-33 [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
579. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 98-99 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. Hilary of Poitiers, ‘On the Trinity’, 9.38, 235, Cf., Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 118-153 [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. Zathureczky, *Messianic Disruption*, 159-163 Cf., Paul van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part 1: Discerning the Way* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 78-86 [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Jon Sobrino, ‘Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God’, in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 128 [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. Bauckham, Theology, 207 [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. Cf., Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* [1982] (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 36-37 [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
586. Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions [1989], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. Sharon Thornton, *Broken yet Beloved: A Pastoral Theology of the Cross* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 45 Cf., Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. Space allows highlighting of only the theological elements of atonement and the cross that affect the integrity of evangelistic practice. However, the literature on traditional views of atonement is vast and more recent alternatives are available. Cf., Oliver Crisp, ‘Non-Penal Substitution’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 4 (2007) 415-433 Cf., Robert Daly, ‘Images of God and the Imitation of God: Problems with Atonement’, *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 36-51 Cf., Denny Weaver, ‘Atonement and (Non)Violence’, Epworth Review 36, no.1 (2009), 29-46 Cf., Tom Stuckey, ‘The Crown Jewels of Faith’, *Epworth Review* 36, no. 1 (2009), 47-57 [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. Cf., Moltmann, Crucified God; Trinity and the Kingdom; Way of Jesus Christ; and Spirit of Life Cf., James D. G. Dunn, New Testament Theology: An Introduction (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 25-26 and Theology of Paul, 208-210 Cf., Macquarrie, Jesus Christ in Modern Thought, 400-403 Cf., Volf, *Exclusion*, 22-28 [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. Cf., Walter Altmann, ‘A Latin American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering’, in Y. Tesfai (ed.), *The Scandal of a Crucified World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 75-86 Cf., Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* [1988] (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008) 53-57 Cf., Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, ‘For God So Loved the World?’, in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30 Cf., Steve Chalke, ‘The Redemption of the Cross’, in D. Tidball, D. Hilborn and J. Thacker (eds.) *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 34-45 Cf., Joel Green, ‘Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?’, in D. Tidball, D. Hilborn and J. Thacker (eds.) *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 153-171 [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement: Christ’s Healing for Sinners, Victims, and the Whole Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), xi [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. Steven Lukes, The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat: A Comedy of Ideas London: Verso, 1995, 29-30 Cf., A. C. Grayling, What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live (London: Phoenix, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Lima: Academic Renewal Press, rev. ed., 2001), 5-26 [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. The Book of Discipline, 87 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Volf, *Exclusion*, 27-28 [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. Walter Benjamin’s famous reflection on Paul Klee’s painting, Angelus Novus, is a profound illustration. The angel of history, with his back to the future and propelled by the wind of the storm of progress, looks back toward the past and sees ‘one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet…while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.’ Illuminations: Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt (ed.) (London: Pimlico, 1999), 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. Cf., Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, 21-39 Cf., Pedro Negre Rigol, ‘Popular Christology – Alienation or Irony?’, in J. M. Bonino (ed.), *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 66-71 [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. Cf., Park, *Triune Atonement*, 37-108 Cf., Christian Kettler ‘The Vicarious Beauty of Christ: The Aesthetics of the Atonement’, Theology Today 64, no. 1 (2007), 14-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. Cf., Wright, *Justification*, 92-96 [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. Cf., Wright, *Justification*, 79-108 Cf., Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 128-133 [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 135,136 (emphasis original) Cf. Bauckham, *Theology*, 10-13 Cf., Lisa Sowle Cahill, ‘Quaestio Disputata The Atonement Paradigm: Does It Still Have Explanatory Value?’, *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 418-432 [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Edith Stein described her understanding of the cross as a ‘living, real, and effective truth. It is buried in the soul like a seed that takes root there and grows, making a distinct impression on the soul, determining what it does and omits, and by shining outwardly is recognized in this very doing and omitting.’ As quoted by Marian Maskulak, ‘Edith Stein and Simone Weil: Reflections for a Theology and Spirituality of the Cross’, Theology Today 64, no. 4 (2008) 446-447 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. Cf., Howard Marshall, ‘The Theology of the Atonement’, in D. Tidball, D. Hilborn and J. Thacker(eds.) *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49-68 Cf., Garry Williams, ‘Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms’, in D. Tidball, D. Hilborn and J. Thacker (eds.), *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 172-191 [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. Thornton, *Broken yet Beloved*, 17-18 Cf., Chalke, ‘The Redemption of the Cross’, 36-37 Cf., Green, ‘Must We Imagine’, 166-167 [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. The Korean understanding of *han* adds a meaningful dimension. Cf., Park, *Triune Atonement*, 39-42 [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. Bauckham, *Theology*, 49 Cf., Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 131-140, 163-167 Cf., Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 105-108, 249-261 [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 222 [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. Thornton, *Broken yet Beloved*, 14 Thornton asserts, ‘*cross-resurrection* is the central symbol of the way things are and the way things will be. It engages all of life’s hopes and certainties, failures and ambiguities – and opens up everything.’ (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. Bauckham, *Theology*, 12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. Park, *Triune Atonement*, 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Cf., James Cone, God of the Oppressed, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), 45-53, 117-118 Cone argues that the abstract formulas of traditional substitutionary understandings of atonement separate salvation from ethics. Cf., Lynnette Mullings, ‘The Message of the Cross is Foolishness: Atonement in Womanist Theology Towards a Black British Perspective’, in D. Tidball, D. Hilborn and J. Thacker (eds.) *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 313-328 [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. Volf, *Exclusion*, 125 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. Volf, *Exclusion*, 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. Volf, *Exclusion*, 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. Volf, *Exclusion*, 128-129 [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 109 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. Volf, *Exclusion*, 129 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. Cf., Recinos, Good News from the Barrio, 48, 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Jürgen Moltmann, The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology [1995], trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), xi [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection and the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 243-248, Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 826-828 Cf., Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. I. McLuskey, F. McLuskey and J. Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 3rd ed. 1960), 180-181 [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. Cf., Stephen Davis, Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 34-35 Davis divides scholars into two categories with subgroups within each. (1) Jesus was raised from the dead: (1a) ‘bodily resurrection’ (1b) ‘spiritual resurrection’ (2) Jesus was not raised from the dead: (2a) skeptics/nonbelievers (2b) mainly Christian thinkers with more reductive theories. Cf., Peter Carnley, The Structure of Resurrection Belief (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. Cf., N. T. Wright, ‘Response to Markus Bockmuehl’, in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 231-234 Wright asserts ‘for many Christians today, “resurrection” is just a fancy way of saying “disembodied heaven.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. Against Michael Goulder: ‘The tale of the resurrection of Jesus has no dependable basis, and is not worthy of serious consideration.’ ‘Did Jesus of Nazareth Rise from the Dead?’, in S. Barton and G. Stanton (eds.), Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden (London: SPCK, 1994), 66 Against Crossan: ‘I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life.’ quoted by Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 258 [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 861 Cf. Wright, *Resurrection*, 9-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. Wright, Resurrection, 477-478 [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. Wright, Resurrection, 7 Wright outlines six components of this paradigm. [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Davis, *Risen Indeed*, 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. Rudolf Bultmann, ‘New Testament and Mythology’ [1953], trans. R. H. Fuller, in Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, (London: SPCK, 1972), 41 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1970), 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. Marxsen, *Resurrection*, 143, 184 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. Cf., James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 132-133 ‘The fact remains that the conclusion to which they came was that it was Jesus himself who had encountered them…despite all ambiguities and differences of conceptualization, all those listed were convinced that it was the same reality which they had all experienced – an encounter with one over against them – and that one the same Jesus crucified, dead and buried some days or weeks previously.’ Cf., Dunn, Jesus Remembered, 876-879 [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. For an extensive survey of pagan and Jewish understandings of the meaning of resurrection, see Wright, *Resurrection*, 32-200, Cf., Jon Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. C. F. D. Moule and Don Cupitt, ‘The Resurrection: A Disagreement’, *Theology* 75, no. 628 (1972), 512 [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 379 [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, [1977], trans. W. Linss (London: SPCK, 1983), 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Lapide, *Resurrection*, 152 [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Cf., Markus Bockmuehl, ‘Did St. Paul Go to Heaven When He Died?’ in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 211 [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. Lapide, *Resurrection*, 130 [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. Cf., Levenson, Resurrection, ix, 1-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. Cf., Maurice Wiles, ‘A Naked Pillar of Rock,’ in S. Barton and G. Stanton (eds.), Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden (London: SPCK, 1994), 116-127 [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Wright, *Resurrection*, 31 Cf., Bockmuehl, ‘Did St. Paul Go to Heaven’, 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. Wright, ‘Response to Markus Bockmuehl’, 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 26-32 [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Wright, *Resurrection*, 209 [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
647. Bockmuehl, ‘Did St. Paul Go to Heaven?’, 213 [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
648. Wright, ‘Response to Markus Bockmuehl’, 232-233 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
649. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 157-159 [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
650. Wright, *Paul*, 12 (emphasis original) Cf., John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 143 Gray’s critique is important for evangelism: ‘Jesus promised the resurrection of the body, not an afterlife as a disembodied consciousness. Despite this, the followers of Jesus have always disparaged the flesh. Their belief that humans are marked off from the rest of creation by having an immortal soul has led them to disown the fate they share with other animals. They cannot reconcile their attachment to the body with their hope of immortality. When the two come into conflict it is always the flesh that is left behind.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 229 [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 229 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 515 [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 256 Cf., Macquarrie, Jesus Christ in Modern Thought, 409 ‘The ascension cannot be given any historical dimension.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. Martin Luther, *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood: Against the Fanatics* [1527], in E. Rupp and B. Drewery (eds.) *Martin Luther* (London: Arnold, 1970), 132-135 <http://www.cas.sc.edu/hist/faculty/edwardsk/hist310/reader/antifanatics.pdf> (11 July 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church*, vol. 2, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1958), 282 [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. Calvin, *Tracts*, 558-559 Cf., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* vol. 2, J. McNeill (ed.), *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17, 1359-1428 [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 129 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. John Wesley, ‘Popery Calmly Considered’ as quoted by Runyon, *New Creation*, 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. Runyon, *New Creation*, 130 Cf. Collins, *Theology*, 259-262 Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 202-205 [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. For an extensive history of varying views, see Farrow, *Ascension*, 15-254 [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Wright, ‘Response to Markus Bockmuehl’, 231 [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. Cf., Hugh Kerr, ‘The Presence of the Absence’, *Theology Today* 43, no. 1 (1986), 1-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. Robert Imbelli, review of *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), by Douglas Farrow, in *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 768 [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. Imbelli, ‘Review’, 768 Cf., Farrow, *Ascension*, 41-85 [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. Farrow, *Ascension*, 257 [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. Edith Humphrey, ‘Glimpsing the Glory: Paul’s Gospel, Righteousness and the Beautiful Feet of N. T. Wright’, in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.) *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. Farrow, *Ascension*, 257 [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. Farrow, *Ascension*, 258 [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. T. F. Torrance, Space, Time and Resurrection (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 91 [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. Farrow, *Ascension*, 264 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. Farrow, *Ascension*, 265 [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. Leslie Houlden, ‘Beyond Belief: Preaching the Ascension (II)’, *Theology* 94, no. 759 (1991), 177 [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. Brian Horne, ‘Beyond Tragedy: Preaching the Ascension (I)’, *Theology* 94, no. 759 (1991), 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. Humphrey, ‘Glimpsing the Glory’, 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Farrow, *Ascension*, 267 [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Humphrey, ‘Glimpsing the Glory’, 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. Farrow, *Ascension*, 270 [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Collins, *Theology*, 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. N. T. Wright, ‘Response to Edith Humphrey’, in N. Perrin and R. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 181 [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Taylor, Go-Between God, 25-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. Cf., Collins, *Theology*, 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 15-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 2 Cf., James Smith, ‘Thinking in Tongues’, *First Things* 182 (April, 2008) <http://www.firstthings.com/print.php?type=article&year=2008&month=03&title_link=003-thinking-in-tongues-36> (6 June 2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 120 Cf., Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. Augustine, ‘On the Trinity, 5.11’, in J. Elowsky (ed.), *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. Augustine, *Sermon of Saint Augustine for the Feast of Pentecost,* *Catholicism.org* (2005), <http://catholicism.org/st-augustine-pentecost.html> (14 July 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. Anselm, *Proslogium*, trans. S. Deane, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 2nd ed. 1962), XIII, 74-75 Cf., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 11.1-4, in A. Pegis (ed.), *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1948), 62-69 [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. Alasdair Heron, The Holy Spirit (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. Collins, *Theology*, 121 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. Heron, *Holy Spirit*, 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 97-146 [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. Bosch, Transforming Mission, 113-114 [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. William Burrows, ‘A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation’, in *Mission in Bold Humility* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 25 Cf., Kirsteen Kim, ‘Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch’s Theology of Mission?’, in Mission: An Invitation to God’s Future (Sheffield: Cliff College Publishing, 2000), 103 [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. Taylor, *Go-Between God*, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. Taylor, *Go-Between God*, 181 [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. Taylor, *Go-Between God*, 36-40 Against Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 378, 382-385 [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. Newbigin, Open Secret, 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Smith, ‘Thinking in Tongues’ Cf., Amos Yong, ‘The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Encounter’, *Missiology: An International Review* 35, no. 1 (2007), 55-73 [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. Smith, ‘Thinking in Tongues’ [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
708. Smith, ‘Thinking in Tongues’, (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
709. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ‘Spirit, Reconciliation and Healing in the Community: Missiological Insights from Pentecostals’, *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (2005), 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. Yong, ‘Spirit of Hospitality’, 63 Cf., Smith, ‘Thinking in Tongues’ [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. Yong, ‘Spirit of Hospitality’, 63 Cf., Kärkkäinen, ‘Spirit, Reconciliation and Healing’, 46-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 120 [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
713. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 120 [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
714. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 120 [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
715. For a comprehensive overview of theologies of the Holy Spirit, see Kim, Holy Spirit [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 128-133, 138-141, 146. Cf., Stone, *Evangelism*, 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. Taylor, *Go-Between God*, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
718. Walter Kasper, *That They May All be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns and Oates, 2004), 99-100 [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
719. Welker, *God the Spirit*, 43-44 [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. Cf., Wimber and Springer, Power Evangelism [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 150 [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
723. Cf., Christoffer Grundmann, ‘Inviting the Spirit to Fight the Spirits? Pneumatological Challenges for Missions in Healing and Exorcism’, *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (2005), 51-73 [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
724. Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
725. Cf., Yong, ‘Spirit of Hospitality’, 56 Cf., Grundmann, ‘Inviting the Spirit’, 61-66 [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 124-149 [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. James D. G. Dunn, The Christ and the Spirit: Pneumatology, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. Kim, Holy Spirit, 152, Cf., Grundmann, ‘Inviting the Spirit’, 63-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 7 Referring to spiritual powers, Wink asserts: ‘They are never more powerful than when they are unconscious. Their capacities to bless us are thwarted, their capacities to possess us augmented.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. Kim, *Holy Spirit*, 152 [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
731. Cf., Thomas Thangaraj, *Relating to People of Other Religions: What Every Christian Needs To Know* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 31-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
732. Cf., Thangaraj, *Relating to People*, 75-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. Thangaraj, *Relating to People*, 88 [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. Welker, *God the Spirit*, 40-41, 84-98, 279. Cf., Peter Rollins, How [Not] to Speak of God (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2006), xv [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. Stanley Samartha, ‘The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths’, in E. Castro (ed.), *To the Wind of God’s Spirit: Reflections on the Canberra Theme* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), 59 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. Cf., Yong, ‘Spirit of Hospitality’, 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. Dunn, Pneumatology, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. Cf., Kim, Holy Spirit, 168-169 Cf., Dunn, *Pneumatology*, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Michael Oleska, ‘The Holy Spirit’s Action in Human Society: An Orthodox Perspective’, International Review of Mission 79, no. 315 (1990), 331 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. Stanley Samartha, ‘Milk and Honey – Without the Lord?’, National Christian Council Review 101, no. 12 (1981), 670 [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. Kim, Holy Spirit, 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
742. Yong, ‘Spirit of Hospitality’, 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-742)
743. Bauckham, *Theology*, 9 Cf. John Thiel, ‘For What May We Hope? Thoughts on the Eschatological Imagination’, *Theological Studies* 67 (2006), 529-535 [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
744. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
745. *Blue Letter Bible*: ‘parousia,’ meaning ‘presence’ (2 Cor. 10.10; Phil. 2.12) especially ‘presence after absence,’ also ‘arrival’ (but not ‘return,’ unless given by the context), as in 1 Cor. 16.17; 2 Cor. 7.6-7, and Phil. 1.26. Applied to the Coming of Christ in 1 Cor. 15.23; 1 Thes. 2.19; 3.13; 4.15; 5.23; 2 Thes. 2.1, 8; James 5.7; 8; 2 Peter 1.16; 3.4, 12; 1 John 2.28, *Blueletterbible.org*, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=getTopic&topic=Parousia&entry.x=41&entry.y=1> (2 August 2009) Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 758 In the Jesus tradition, ‘parousia’ occurs only in Mt. 24.27, 37, 39. In the early Patristic literature, it was used for Christ’s return, but not exclusively; however, in modern theology it means invariably the Second Coming of Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
746. Cf., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 724-762 Cf., Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 238-264 Cf., Wright, *NTPG* 459-464; *Victory*, 339-368, 510-519 Although these scholars disagree on much, Dunn's comment regarding the ‘language of hope’ provides some common ground: ‘To take it literally is not to take it seriously; on the contrary, it is to diminish it. If ever we think we have grasped the reality of heaven in the words we use to describe it, we are to be pitied not commended.’ *Christology*, 424-439 Against LaHaye, *Revelation*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
747. Moltmann, *Coming of God*, xi [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
748. Dunn, *Christology*, 425 Cf., Gray, *Straw Dogs*, 161 Cf., Geoff Mulgan, ‘High Tech and High Angst’, in S. Dunant and R. Porter (eds.), The Age of Anxiety (London: Virago, 1997), 1-19 Cf., Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
749. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against H*ope, 1-25 [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
750. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 33 In a succinct but effective critique of the postmodern tendency to reject all metanarratives (26-35), Bauckham and Hart rightly point out that although postmodernism asserts the end of story itself, the human inclination to narrative as an innate vehicle for discerning meaning may be deconstructed, but never replaced. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
751. Bauckham and Hart correctly point out that Christian theologians bear some responsibility for instigating the postmodern critique, having often assimilated Christian eschatology into liberal progressivism. They assert that this ‘uncritical theological endorsement of modernity’ has badly backfired; I would add that it has also had disastrous consequences for the evangelistic task. *Hope Against Hope*, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
752. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 7, 37-38 Cf., Wilkinson, who stresses that the limited focus of this view on the individual, society, or even the Earth offers ‘false hope.’ *Christian Eschatology*, 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-752)
753. Grayling, *What is Good?*, 131 Contrast Gray, *Straw Dogs*, 4 who sharply counters the myth of progress: ‘To believe in progress is to believe that, by using the new powers given us by growing scientific knowledge, humans can free themselves from the limits that frame the lives of other animals. This is the hope of nearly everybody nowadays, but it is groundless. For though human knowledge will very likely continue to grow and with it human power, the human animal will stay the same: a highly inventive species that is also one of the most predatory and destructive.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
754. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-754)
755. Cf., Gray, *Straw Dogs*, xi, 155 ‘Today liberal humanism has the pervasive power that was once possessed by revealed religion. Humanists like to think they have a rational view of the world; but their core belief in progress is a superstition, further from the truth about the human animal than any of the world’s religions.’ Gray provides a more accurate understanding of progress: ‘Science enables humans to satisfy their needs. It does nothing to change them…There is progress in knowledge, but not in ethics. This is the verdict both of science and history, and the view of every one of the world’s religions…History is not progress or decline, but recurring gain and loss. The advance of knowledge deludes us into thinking we are different from other animals but our history shows that we are not.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-755)
756. Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology*, 1-22 Cf., Polkinghorne and Beale, *Questions of Truth*, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-756)
757. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 39-40 [↑](#footnote-ref-757)
758. Gray, *Straw Dogs*, ix [↑](#footnote-ref-758)
759. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-759)
760. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-760)
761. Wilkinson, ‘Creation Accounts’, 1-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-761)
762. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
763. Cf., Altmann, ‘A Latin American Perspective’, 75-86 [↑](#footnote-ref-763)
764. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-764)
765. Cf., Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 47-54 [↑](#footnote-ref-765)
766. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-766)
767. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-767)
768. Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, ‘Christian Hope: Messianic or Transcendent? A Theological Discussion with Joachim of Fiore and Thomas Aquinas’, *Horizons* 12, no. 2 (1985), 333 Moltmann criticizes Thomas’s ‘finalistic metaphysic,’ which emphasizes a disconnected ‘unmoved mover’ and replaces new creation with ‘the bliss of the pure spirits in the hereafter.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-768)
769. Bauckham, *Revelation*, 46 (emphasis added) [↑](#footnote-ref-769)
770. Cf., Douglas Moo, ‘New Testament Eschatology’, 459-462 Cf., Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-770)
771. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 40-41 Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, ‘The Presence of God’s Future: The Risen Christ’, *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 4 (2006), 582 [↑](#footnote-ref-771)
772. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-772)
773. Cf., Moo, ‘New Testament Eschatology’, 458 [↑](#footnote-ref-773)
774. Dunn, *Christology*, 433 Cf., Thiel, ‘For What May We Hope?, 520 Cf., Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-774)
775. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 79-80 [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
776. Cf., Moo, ‘New Testament Eschatology’, 464-465 Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 253 Cf., Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology*, 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-776)
777. Moltmann, ‘The Presence of God’s Future’, 588 Moltmann echoes John Wesley’s commitment to the deliverance from evil occurring in the context of the physicality of new creation. Collins, *Theology*, 325 [↑](#footnote-ref-777)
778. Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology*, 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-778)
779. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 82-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-779)
780. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-780)
781. Moltmann, ‘The Presence of God’s Future’, 578 Cf., Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology* 89-114 Against LaHaye, *Resurrection* whose dispensationalist perspective places Christ as only one part of world history. [↑](#footnote-ref-781)
782. Moo, ‘New Testament Eschatology’, 462 Cf., Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-782)
783. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 70 [↑](#footnote-ref-783)
784. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-784)
785. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 13 Cf., Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 54 Cf., Stone, *Evangelism*, 47, 49 Cf., Warner, *Saving Women*, 278 [↑](#footnote-ref-785)
786. Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 40, n. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-786)
787. Jones, *Evangelistic Love* [↑](#footnote-ref-787)
788. Volf, *Exclusion*, 66 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-788)
789. Henry Knight, ‘The Transformation of the Human Heart: The Place of Conversion in Wesley's Theology’, in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-789)
790. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 27-29 Kallenberg views conversion as a process involving shifting paradigms, though while ultimately happening all at once (for instance in an ‘aha!’ moment), requires time to develop the foundations necessary for that moment to occur. [↑](#footnote-ref-790)
791. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 27-28 [↑](#footnote-ref-791)
792. Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith*, 174-175 In the context of interfaith relationships, Cracknell insists, ‘Christians, particularly in the Western churches, need to find a new self-confidence for their mission…It is not only perfectly proper for them to bear witness to their Christian faith among people of other faiths; it is imperative that they do; otherwise they are not contributing to the conversation. Indeed, if they are silent or diffident this will be profoundly disappointing to their partners, who characteristically expect Christians to be as genuine and as committed as they themselves are.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-792)
793. Cf., John Dunne, who articulated a process of ‘passing over and coming back’ to describe shifting one’s standpoint to that of another and then returning, often not unchanged, to one’s own. As discussed in Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith*, 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-793)
794. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
795. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886], 100 *PlaneteBook.com*  <http://www.planetebook.com/ebooks/Beyond-Good-and-Evil-2.pdf> (17 July 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
796. Helen Bruch Pearson, *Do What You Have the Power to Do: Six Studies of New Testament Women* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992), 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-796)
797. Jacob’s Well United Methodist Church, <http://jacobswellmemphis.org/Jacobs_Well/about.html>, (7 December 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-797)
798. Robin Russell, ‘Too Bland for Our Own Good?’, *Good News*, January/February 2011, 20-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-798)
799. Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 147-151 [↑](#footnote-ref-799)
800. Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-800)
801. Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 147-148 [↑](#footnote-ref-801)
802. Heath, *Mystic Way*, 132-133 [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
803. Heath offers a thought-provoking proposal for missional congregations led by bivocational pastors. *Mystic Way*, 134-135 [↑](#footnote-ref-803)
804. This is not to imply that UM seminaries are unable to provide adequate multicultural experiences; nor is it to imply that the experience of ‘seminary culture’ is limited to ethnicity. My point is that although UM seminaries are for the most part relatively diverse in regard to students, faculty and staff, from the Hispanic/Latino perspective, they remain predominately Anglo environments. This is statistically supported: there are approximately 8 million UM’s in the United States, of which only approximately 60,000 are Hispanic/Latino (less than 1%), but 15% of the U.S. population as a whole is of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-804)
805. John Wesley, ‘Original Sin’ [1759], in A. Outler and R. Heitzenrater (eds.), *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 329 [↑](#footnote-ref-805)
806. The Wesleyan understanding of this process is decidedly relational. Collins, *Theology*, 289 [↑](#footnote-ref-806)
807. Collins, *Theology*, 15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-807)
808. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-808)
809. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-809)
810. Charles Gutenson, ‘The Canonical Heritage of the Church as a Means of Grace’, in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 253 (emphasis original) [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
811. George Lindbeck, ‘Scripture, Consensus and Community’ in J. Buckley (ed.), *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
812. Gutenson, ‘Canonical Heritage’, 253 [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
813. Perrin, ‘Jesus’ Eschatology’, 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
814. Russell, ‘Too Bland’, 20-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
815. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [1984], (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-815)
816. Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
817. For a brief outline of canonical theism, see William Abraham, ‘Canonical Theism: Thirty Theses’, in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 1-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-817)
818. Gutenson, ‘Canonical Heritage’, 248 [↑](#footnote-ref-818)
819. Gutenson, ‘Canonical Heritage’, 248 [↑](#footnote-ref-819)
820. Gutenson, ‘Canonical Heritage’, 248 [↑](#footnote-ref-820)