Membership

Christian Reflection

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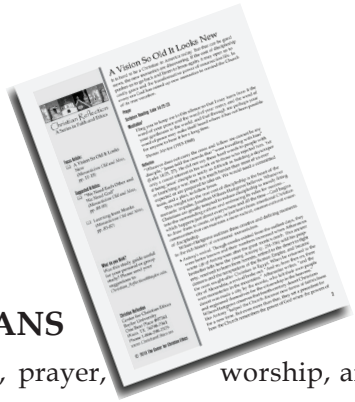

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Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

In the biblical image of the Church as the body of Christ, our life together is ideally rooted in mutual belonging, love, and obedience. Our contributors explore the nature of our membership in the Church and its implications for the Christian moral life.

In a seminal essay "Membership" in 1945, C. S. Lewis concluded, "Neither the individual nor the community as popular thought understands them can inherit eternal life, neither the natural self, nor the collective mass, but a new creature." He believed these new creatures are being prepared now for God's eternal kingdom through their membership in Christ's mystical body, the Church. On this high view of church membership, "there is nothing voluntary or occasional about the relationship," Norman Wirzba has noted. Rather, "each member is indispensible, [and] it is our care and responsibility for others that has the potential to turn mutual service into mutual celebration." In this issue our contributors explore the nature of our membership in the Church and its implications for the Christian moral life.

Of course, our modern individualist mindset can make it very difficult for us to live into the biblical image of the Church as the body of Christ, Michelle Lee-Barnewall notes in *Whose Body? Which Membership?* (p. 11). She studies this rich Pauline metaphor in its first-century context to show how our life together should be rooted in mutual belonging, love, and obedience.

C. S. Lewis rightly predicted that many modern people would confuse the biblical ideal of membership in Christ's body with either their banal participation in a social club or the deadening sameness of life within a collective; yet he believed that these two, opposite errors could not be further from the truth. Indeed, as Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale explain

in *Not Marching, but Dancing* (p. 19), Lewis staunchly affirmed that "the Church… alone can sustain the sort of membership in which human life is fulfilled." Though Lewis's church attendance at first "was half-hearted and out of duty," he discovered that "when we faithfully practice church membership in obedience to Jesus Christ, true transformation and joy will inevitably happen."

Wendell Berry can help us understand these points, Brent Latham suggests in *Membered and Remembered* (p. 27). Berry's remarkable stories about a quotidian fellowship of farmers in the fictional Port William, Kentucky, present a modern analog of the Pauline theme of membership in Christ. "The voluntarism and consumerism of our culture press us toward living as if we chose our membership and that choice made it ours," Latham observes. "Berry reminds us that membership comes to us as gift and chooses us by grace, eliciting and enabling our grateful choosing and giving as response."

The worship service (p. 48) by Elizabeth Sands Wise confesses our resistance to this mysterious membership in Christ's body—"our unwillingness to kneel, / our hands caked with our own mud, / our obsession with our own stories, our own problems"—and it celebrates the Trinitarian love that nonetheless draws us to one another. Her liturgy includes two new hymns by Jonathan Sands Wise, "One in Jesus" (p. 44) and "United by God's Grace" (p. 46).

Sometimes it is not easy to care for and encourage one another as members in Christ's body. "One of the most important, difficult, and neglected obligations we owe to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is mutual correction, which is the practice of giving and accepting counsel, admonishment, and rebuke as a form of spiritual rescue," Darin Davis writes in *Mutual Correction* (p. 57). He notes that we need "charity, humility, prudence, and courage" to give and receive correction faithfully and well.

Some people think that such commitments of membership are especially off-putting to emerging adults, the 18-to-25 year-olds who have moved past adolescence but not yet embraced adult roles and responsibilities. They are thought to be allergic to institutional religion. In *Are Emerging Adults "Spiritual but Not Religious"?* (p. 65), Patricia Snell Herzog questions these generalizations. Evaluating the membership implications of four kinds of emerging adults, she concludes, "One of the more tragic elements of American religiosity, in my opinion, is the extent to which most religious congregations do not offer anything—services, programs, or activities of any kind—that appeal to and are specifically designed to target emerging adults. … Perhaps then faith communities should be less concerned about whether emerging adults are SBNR and instead whether emerging adults are SUBR: severely underserved by religion."

Artists have explored the nature of church membership through the characteristic actions of members. In Laura James's *Sermon on the Mount* (cover), the disciples gather to listen to the teachings of Christ who strikes a cruciform pose. These listeners form a unified, balanced mass of color, yet "on closer inspection they are individuals…[and] no two figures in the

image are exactly the same," Heidi Hornik writes in *Gathered to Listen* (p. 38). Andrea da Firenze's fantastical fresco *Allegory of the Active and Triumphant Church and of the Dominican Order* highlights the teaching roles of members, she explains in *Working in Christ's Body* (p. 40).

It is very significant that our membership is in *Christ's* body. For Brigham and Martindale above, this fact explains how the "diversity [among members] is harmonious rather than cacophonous because it is ordered by Christ the Head, who gives the members specific purposes within the Church." For Amy Everett in *Tending Christ's Body* (p. 73), it suggests that "How we tend to each other (or not) as members of the same body, the body of Christ, is personal to Jesus Christ." She traces this insight through the biblical stories of Peter's restoration and Saul's conversion by the risen Christ.

In *Rethinking Re-Baptism: What It Means to Be a Member* (p. 77), Jim Somerville reflects on the mode and sequence of baptism, the practice by which we become members of the Church. He writes, "God loves us and wants us for his own. At some point we may be able to apprehend God's grace and accept it for the gift that it is. But these are two ends of a single continuum, and while some Christians focus on the *giving* of grace through infant baptism, others focus on the *receiving* of grace through believer's baptism."

In *How is the Body Ailing?* (p. 82), Jeff Cary reviews three diagnoses of the malaise of modern congregations—G. Jeffrey MacDonald's *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul*, Michael Budde's *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church*, and William T. Cavanaugh's *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*. "Each offers a strong call for a more robust ecclesiology within American Christianity, emphasizing especially the Church's holiness and catholicity," Cary writes. "None of these authors flinch in the face of the gravity of the American church's diseased state, but neither do they despair. Each speaks out of the conviction that there is hope for improvement, a hope born out of the conviction that the gospel is after all true, and therefore hopelessness is not a viable option."

"In recent years a counterintuitive idea has gained traction: perhaps people desire more rigor, not less, in their experience of church life," Debra Dean Murphy reports in *Mapping the Life Together* (p. 88). She reviews Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, which are classic sources of such thinking, as well as *A Shared Christian Life* by Ben Witherington III, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* by James C. Wilhoit, and the "Church Membership" pamphlet produced by the Ekklesia Project. Murphy concludes, "Maybe ancient, corporate disciplines like *lectio divina* or praying the Psalms or confessing our sins to one another have a renewed appeal in this age of digital loneliness. It might be, despite opinion polls and much conventional wisdom, that potential church members long for accountability and the demands (and joys) of discipleship."

Whose Body? Which Membership?

BY MICHELLE LEE-BARNEWALL

Although we recognize "the family of God" and "the body of Christ" are important biblical images for the Church, it is not so easy for us to grasp how the Church today should live into them. One reason is that we tend to view our membership from an individualistic mindset.

In his book, *When the Church Was a Family,* pastor and New Testament scholar Joseph Hellerman describes what happened one year when his family went on their annual vacation. Life had been a bit cramped in the 750 square-foot, two-bedroom, one-bathroom cottage in which Joe lived with his wife and two daughters. Since household repairs and remodeling were not among Joe's talents, the fifty-year-old house had become a bit shabby and worn-down; it still had an electrical system that would not allow them to run more than one appliance at a time.

The congregation that Joe pastored planned for five months to surprise the Hellermans with an extreme home makeover while they were gone. On their return, they discovered a remodeled, rewired, and reorganized house, the work of about twenty people from the church. In his book Joe recounts how moved he was by what they had done for his family. But in many ways, what happened was simply an outgrowth of what he and his church tries to teach and live. As he describes it, "The church is a family. We share our stuff with one another."[1]

Although we recognize "the family of God" and "the body of Christ" are important biblical images for the Church, it is not so easy for us to grasp what it means for the Church to live into them. One reason is that we tend to view things from an American individualistic mindset rather than the collectivist mindset of the culture in which the New Testament was written. Our mindset manifests itself in numerous ways, particularly in our assumption that personal happiness and fulfillment take precedence over the good of any group to which we belong, whether it be our family, congregation, nation, and so on.

Consider how we identify ourselves in casual conversation. When we go to a social gathering where we do not already know the other people, almost invariably the conversation turns to the question "So what do you *do*?" In our culture, we identify ourselves by our jobs and achievements. However, in Scripture people identify themselves by their family lineage. For example, Rebekah introduces herself as "the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor" (Genesis 24:24). Joshua, who leads the Israelites after Moses, is identified as the "son of Nun" over twenty times. Among Jesus' apostles, the two James are distinguished as one being the "son of Zebedee" and the other the "son of Alphaeus" (Matthew 10:2). Jesus himself is identified as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1) and even "the son of God" (Mark 1:1).

In ancient cultures people found their identity not in what they did, but in their family or other group relationships. What are the implications of this way of viewing ourselves? Among other things, it means that priorities are group-related. Loyalty to the group is more important than individual satisfaction, relational commitment more than autonomy, and corporate benefit more than individual gain.

LIVING AS A MEMBER OF A BODY

In Scripture the body of Christ is one of the most prominent images reflecting this group orientation.[2] For Paul, the body emphasizes the unity of the members. While we usually associate the figure with the spiritual gifts outlined in 1 Corinthians 12,[3] other references to the body do not address gifts at all. In 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, Paul discusses the unity of the body in the context of the Lord's Supper. He says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (10:17). He scolds the Corinthians for their disunity in the Lord's Supper, urging them to "wait for one another" (11:33) and warns them that partaking "without discerning the body" can lead to God's judgment (11:29). Although the latter reference to "body" is debated, it is likely a reference to the corporate body as well as Christ's crucified body.[4]

Since we generally focus on the image as a practical one in which every member has a spiritual "gift" and so a contribution to make to the whole

body, we tend to overlook the important underlying relational assumptions of the image. Significantly, Paul says the body is so intimately tied together that the members should "have the same care for one another" to the extent that "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

Ancient philosophers may provide more insight into the significance of what it means to be a body in this way. When they employ the body as an analogy for a group, they do not just show how various members contribute to the whole, but they also show how members are so closely knit together that they can feel each other's pains and joys. As the Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus explains, "in the case of unified bodies there is an affinity—if a finger is cut, the whole body is affected along with it."[5] The point of being a body is not simply that there are a variety of interrelated parts, but that each part is affected by what happens to the others.

Another interesting aspect of being a body is captured by the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*, which one scholar has described as the "recognition and appreciation of something as belonging to one."[6] *Oikeiosis* assumes that we will take care of something that belongs to us, but of course we must first recognize what those things are. We naturally take care of ourselves in the same way babies instinctively focus on their own needs. But as we grow and mature, we realize that others "belong" to us and so are part of our sphere of concern, such as when parents care for their children and not just themselves.

Paul recognizes that members of a body must realize that others are in their sphere of concern and so should be cared for because they belong to the same body. Thus, in calling the Christian community a body, he is also saying that believers' priorities should not be as individuals preoccupied with their own concerns, but as members of an important and defining whole: the one body in Christ. Their concern for one another should be a natural extension of their co-existence in the same body.

Believers' priorities should not be as individuals preoccupied with their own concerns, but as members of a defining whole: the one body in Christ. Their concern for one another should be a natural extension of their co-existence in the same body.

The benefit of focusing on our corporate identity is that we more naturally seek to care for those who "belong" to us than when we are simply commanded to help others. A friend illustrated this vividly to

me when I visited his apartment and he informed me that I did not need to take off my shoes upon entering. The reason, he told me, was that "since this apartment doesn't belong to me, I don't really care if it gets dirty." About a year later, after my friend moved into his newly built condo, he greeted me at the door with a request for me to take off my shoes, explaining that since it belonged to him, he wanted to take care of it. Now that my friend had an important incentive to keep his place clean, his behavior changed.

Such responses come naturally to us. In my class I sometimes play a little trick on an unsuspecting student. I ask someone who really likes their smartphone to take it out and tell the class about it. They usually gush enthusiastically about all of its features and capabilities. I ask if I can see it, and then proceed to walk away with it. The person, of course, is upset that I have taken their phone. I ask another student if he or she cares if I return the phone. I often get a fairly noncommittal answer, such as, "Sure, why not?" or "You probably should," although the volume of their answer does not nearly match the protest of the student who owns the phone. Invariably when I ask those first students why they care so much about getting the phone back (when the others do not seem to care as much), they reply, "Because it's MINE."

In the Church we are commanded to love one another. But is this simply a command, or is it also a reflection of how we should naturally act simply because the other members of the body belong to us? Would our care for one another change if we acted not only because Scripture commands us, but also because we deeply desire to take care of what is a part of us?

LIVING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

It is no coincidence that immediately after Paul's discussion of the body of Christ in chapter twelve, he gives his famous account of love (1 Corinthians 13). Elsewhere Paul also connects his discussion of the body of Christ with commands to love (e.g., Romans 12:3-13; Ephesians 4:1-4). One of the purposes of presenting the Church as a body is to show that the result of this corporate identification should be love for one another. Indeed, the use of spiritual gifts in the body is itself an expression of this love since all of them are to be exercised for the purpose of edifying others.[7]

Furthermore, Paul tells the Corinthians not just that they are a body, but that they are "the body of *Christ*" (1 Corinthians 12:27, emphasis added). The body belongs to Christ, and he is the source of the believers' unity. As Gordon Fee states, "Collectively in their common relationships to Christ through the Spirit, they are his one body."[8] One of the most important aspects of our corporate relationship in the Church is that it is not simply with others, but also with Christ. Therefore, when we consider our actions

towards one another, we should consider our union with Christ as well as our solidarity with one another.

An important implication of our unity with Christ can be seen in 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul warns against doing anything that would cause a fellow believer to "stumble." In this congregation some members erroneously believe it would be sinful for them to eat meat that has been offered to idols. The action itself is acceptable and not harmful, Paul explains, but because some members believe that they would commit idolatry by eating such meat, the other members who do not have the same scruples about the food should refrain from eating since their actions might encourage the "weak" believers to act against their conscience. To wound someone else's conscience in this way is sin, and in particular, a "sin against Christ" (8:13). An offense against another believer is an offense against Christ.

There is an important lesson here about the consideration we should show to fellow members of the body of Christ. At the Christian college where I teach there have been lively debates about Christian lifestyle: for example, about what types of clothing believers should wear, what types of movies and music they may enjoy, and in what contexts it might be acceptable for them to drink alcohol. These are certainly areas in which we can show proper sensitivity to another's conscience. Paul is not saying that we should never disagree with fellow believers about these things, or never offend them at all. Rather, Paul is talking about idolatry, or the way in which Christians impact others' relationships with God. In other words, by our actions are we causing others to focus more upon God, or are we encouraging them to pursue worldly idols instead? We should look more broadly at the overall tenor of our lives. What message are we conveying by our priorities and through our conversations? Are we encouraging others to seek God first, or do we give a message that jobs, hobbies, or leisure activities are more important? The point is not simply having correct doctrine, but using the truth to encourage and exhort others. Thus, Paul says, "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The body belongs to Christ, and he is the source of the believers' unity. Therefore, when we consider our actions towards one another, we should consider our union with Christ as well as our solidarity with one another.

Because we are members together in the body of Christ we have great hope that we can learn to care for and help one another, but we must admit that developing those relationships can be challenging. Differences in

personal experience and culture, sensitivities based on prior woundedness, and sinful tendencies are but a part of the things that make developing genuine relationships difficult. Thus, life in the body is for "those courageous Christians who stick it out through the often messy process of interpersonal discord and conflict resolution."[9]

The Christian community is characterized by a diversity of giftedness, ethnicity, gender, social status, and so on (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). The body of Christ reminds us that we are to be unified even while we maintain our various distinctions. Our goal is not uniformity, but a connectedness in Christ in which we care for one another, not because we are the same, but because we are similarly in Christ. While we naturally gravitate toward people who are like us and share our background and interests, we are called to love those who are different from us, even those toward whom we might have a natural antipathy.

While we naturally gravitate toward people who are like us and share our background and interests, we are called as members of Christ's body to love those who are different from us, even those toward whom we might have a natural antipathy.

Paul describes how Christ brought together people from two groups—Jews and Gentiles—that had been adversaries (Ephesians 2:11-22). Christ came to "reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility" (2:16). The Jewish Law forbade Jews from eating or intermarrying with Gentiles. As a result, Jews often had contempt for Gentiles, and Gentiles viewed Jews with suspicion and prejudice.[10] However, Paul exhorts them to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:1-3). Where they were formerly enemies, now they are to care for one another by the "love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (3:19).

In their relationships with one another, believers are to follow Christ's example. Thus, Paul urges the Philippians to "be of the same mind, having the same love" (Philippians 2:2) by imitating Christ,

> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not count equality with God
> as something to be exploited,

> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form, he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.
>
> *Philippians 2:6-8*

Unity in the Church is achieved not simply by the proper functioning of the gifted members, but when the members love one another as Christ loved them. It calls for an attitude that focuses not on the self, but on the good of others.

The body of Christ, therefore, speaks of more than the functioning of the parts. The unity of believers—bonded together, reconciled, loving one another—is to be the hallmark of the Christian community. Obedience to the "new commandment" that Jesus gave his disciples—"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another"—is how the world will know we are his disciples (John 13:34-35). This love does not simply mean a superficial "getting along" or a good working relationship, but rather the care, encouragement, and admonishment needed for the growth of the members and the intimate unity of the entire body. As Paul puts it:

> But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.
>
> *Ephesians 4:15-16*

NOTES

1 Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009) 146-147.

2 For an excellent discussion and application of the image of the family of God, see Hellerman's *When the Church Was a Family* and also *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001).

3 Other passages referring to the body and spiritual manifestations include Romans 12:4-8 and Ephesians 4:4-16.

4 Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, revised edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 59.

5 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*, 1.80, translated by Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

6 Gisela Striker, "The Role of *Oikeiosis* in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 145-167, here citing 143.

7 Thus, Paul says that one should pursue a gift such as prophecy, which edifies others, rather than tongues, which only edifies the tongues-speaker (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). He does not deny the benefit of personal edification, but when the community is gathered

together, the focus is on building up others. Thus, "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

8 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987) 617.

9 Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 1.

10 Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990) 142.

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Not Marching, but Dancing

BY LINDSEY BRIGHAM
AND WAYNE MARTINDALE

An ornery professor who went to church from no apparent personal desire, C. S. Lewis has much to teach us about the nature and practice of membership. He staunchly affirms that the Church has a place in the modern world because it alone can sustain the sort of membership in which human life is fulfilled.

On a summer morning in 1935, the newly-conscripted soldiers woke early. Dressed in uniform, eating identical food in equal proportions, held to one standard, they would spend the day training to act as a single body. This sameness was their strength and their safety, allowing them to battle with great efficiency and effect.

That same morning, miles away at a house nestled in the German forest, another group of men began their well-ordered day. Their birthplaces, ages, and experience varied, but they shared all of these for the enrichment of their common pursuit at the seminary. This day they would study, work, eat, and sing together, as they did daily.

Also on that morning in Oxford, England, a slightly balding, middle-aged professor made his way to the Magdalen College chapel for morning prayer. Once there, squeaking boots distracted him from the readings, and his patience was sorely tried by the music: organ was his least favorite instrument, and hymns he considered dismal. Their horrid sentimentality would surely have made John Milton turn in his grave! Before the last words of the benediction echoed and the after-church chatter began, he was out the door and back in the clear bright sunshine.

On this morning, in all these places, people gathered to work for a common purpose. They each sought a sort of membership, a coming together with others to share life in pursuit of a common goal. But in which contexts did true membership flourish? The soldiers of the Nazi Wehrmacht certainly achieved effectiveness. The seminarians at Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde have become renowned for their practice of Christian community. But that rather ornery professor who went to church from no apparent personal desire—the self-avowed "most reluctant convert," and also a most reluctant churchman—might actually have the most to teach us about the nature and practice of membership. In his writings and in his habits, C. S. Lewis staunchly affirms that the Church has a place in the modern world because it alone can sustain the sort of membership in which human life is fulfilled.

NOT A RELIC, BUT A REFUGE

This ecclesial emphasis did not sit easily with the mood of Lewis's times. In the latter decades of Lewis's career, attitudes toward the Church changed from reverence to irrelevance on both sides of the pond. The church in America became a social club, the church in Europe a cultural relic. In a 1955 poem called "Church Going," British poet Philip Larkin gives voice to the prevailing attitude when he speaks as a holiday bicyclist who stops inside an old church and reflects on its past glory and present ignominy. He notes the oddity of stopping at all, but asserts,

> Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
> And always end much at a loss like this,
> Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
> When churches fall completely out of use
> What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
> A few cathedrals chronically on show,
> Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
> And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
> Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?[1]

Larkin's faintly-mocking, elegiac attitude is by no means extinct today. Even those who do still stop in churches on Sunday morning often do so merely out of unthinking habit or tradition, not considering that the Church could offer anything significant. They value spirituality, but disassociate it from corporate gatherings, expecting to find it in solitude instead.

However, Lewis does not speak as the curator of a cathedral "chronically on show" when he argues for the necessity of the Church; rather, he addresses his comments precisely to the modern age. An astute analyst of his world, Lewis perceives that all attempts at membership outside the Church overemphasize either the individual or the collective, making true membership impossible.

Overemphasizing the individual makes membership impossible because it leads to a self-sufficient, self-centered confidence that regards other people

as largely irrelevant. As in Lewis's day, so in ours: this attitude underlies the countless magazine covers and TV commercials that highlight the story of someone who, by individual skill and determination, breaks free of barriers imposed by fear, expectations, or disabilities in order to reach a partly-predestined and partly self-defined potential. Such stories are problematic because they assume no one else—not even God—is needed for the individual's success and fulfillment. In Lewis's words, individualism begins with the assumption that "every individuality is 'of infinite value,'" relegating God to the position of "a kind of employment committee whose business it is to find suitable careers for souls, square holes for square pegs."[2] In the narrative of individualism, people become more valuable than God, who then exists to serve their needs and order their realities around them.

On the other hand, overemphasizing the collective undermines membership by leading to a callous insensitivity to the unique needs and gifts people carry. When individuals are massed in a collective, they are valued only for the characteristics that are useful in a greater system, while any unique traits that do not serve the system are ignored. Thus, in war, soldiers are mere cogs in a fighting machine; in consumer society, shoppers are only the desires associated with their social group; in party-politics, citizens are simply voters of a particular social class; in education, students are just empty receptacles ready to receive standardized curricula. As Lewis says, such a reductive way of viewing people is "an outrage upon human nature."[3] Like work on a factory assembly line, or perhaps like the training of Wehrmacht soldiers, it does not allow them to exercise the full range of abilities (physical, emotional, moral, spiritual) that make us human.

Lewis writes with great concern against individualism and collectivism because he sees that conditions of the modern world exacerbate them both: as he comments, "one error begets the other and, far from neutralising, they aggravate each other."[4] Our modern consumerism illustrates this: advertisements are created with a collectivist attitude by considering a group of potential consumers, isolating their habits and tastes, and then appealing to these uniform, de-contextualized tendencies—yet consumers are often motivated to heed advertisements by their individualistic longing to define themselves by brand names, to design the perfect life setting, to construct a unique life story. The family also suffers from both tendencies. The family

An astute analyst of the modern age, Lewis perceives that all attempts at membership outside the Church overemphasize either the individual or the collective, making true membership impossible.

should embody membership in that "Each person is almost a species in himself…. If you subtract any one member, you have not simply reduced the family in number; you have inflicted an injury on its structure. Its unity is a unity of unlikes, almost of incommensurables."[5] But the family has become the severest casualty of the modern world. On the one hand, it is undermined by each member's pursuit of individualistic independence (the teenager's rebellion, the spouse's workaholism); on the other hand, it is undermined by each member's collectivist tendency to view the others as mere representatives of a stereotypical class (oblivious parents, impossible children). Even half-a-century ago Lewis could declare, "If a really good home…existed today, it would be denounced as *bourgeois* and every engine of destruction would be leveled against it."[6] Thus, summarizing the dilemma of individualism and collectivism, Lewis states,

Lewis's Pauline vision of true membership, in which members are "essentially different from, and complimentary to, one another" provides an alternate, ideal vision of human community, opposed to both individualism and collectivism, in which human wholeness flourishes.

> I feel a strong desire to tell you—and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me—which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites…. He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one.[7]

We are left between Scylla and Charybdis, and Lewis asserts that we must "keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them."[8] We need a safe middle passage to prevent us from being continually tossed between the monsters—a passage that will allow each of us to function as a unique person, but in concert with other unique persons.

Lewis identifies this passage as *membership*, evoking Paul's metaphor of the members of the body. As he explains,

> The very word membership is of Christian origin, but it has been taken over by the world and emptied of all meaning. In any book on logic you may see the expression "members of a class." It must be most emphatically stated that the items or particulars included in a homogeneous class are almost the reverse of what St. Paul meant by *members*. By *members* he meant what we should call *organs*, things

> essentially different from, and complementary to, one another, things differing not only in structure and function but also in dignity.[9]

Membership provides an alternate, ideal vision of human community, opposed to both individualism and collectivism, in which human wholeness flourishes. Further, if Lewis states correctly that membership means participation in a body, then true membership needs a head. But any membership headed by merely human interests cannot endure. The membership's head must share in the body along with the other members; but, to carry the membership beyond time and transience, the head must also transcend the body.

Thus, Lewis turns to the Church. Far from nostalgically preserving the Church as an anachronism, Lewis presents the Church as the only context in which true membership can flourish, for its head is the incarnate God-man Jesus Christ. As "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," Jesus Christ also became "the head of the body, the church," who could "reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross," as Paul states in Colossians 1:15-20. When we enter the membership of the Church, we do not come merely because of family connections, shared interests, or personal conviction; ultimately, we enter the membership of the Church because we have become members of Jesus Christ. This means, as Lewis says, that "His presence, the interaction between Him and us, must always be the overwhelmingly dominant factor in the life we are to lead within the Body, and any conception of Christian fellowship which does not mean primarily fellowship with Him is out of court."[10] Expanding upon this theme, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declares,

> Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this…. One who wants more than what Christ has established does not want Christian brotherhood. He is looking for some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere…. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.[11]

Thus, because the headship of Jesus Christ sets apart the membership of the Church from all attempts to establish a membership outside it, persistently hopeful participation in Christ's mystical body proves the sanest response to the modern fragmentation of human wholeness.

BEING CHRIST'S BODY

Under the headship of Christ, the body's members are reassembled, their health is restored, and Spirit-life is breathed into their dry bones. As the body metaphor indicates, much of the vitality of the Church comes from the overwhelming diversity of its members. Lewis explains that "the Church

is not a human society of people united by their natural affinities but the Body of Christ in which all members however different (and He rejoices in their differences & by no means wishes to iron them out) must share the common life,"[12] for "all [are] necessary to the whole and to one another: each loved by God individually, as if it were the only creature in existence."[13] This diversity inspires Lewis to contrast the "monotonously alike worldlings" with "the almost fantastic variety of the saints."[14]

But this diversity is harmonious rather than cacophonous because it is ordered by Christ the Head, who gives the members specific purposes within the Church. The members do not collectively do the same thing, but neither do they each individually do their own thing: within the Church, their diversity becomes a means both to serve and to govern one another. Indeed, Lewis argues that the release from the equality of democracy into the order of authority is the most liberating aspect of membership:

> You have often heard that though in the world we hold different stations, yet we are all equal in the sight of God. … I believe there is a sense in which this maxim is the reverse of the truth. I am going to venture to say that artificial equality is necessary in the life of the State, but that in the Church we strip off this disguise, we recover our real inequalities, and are thereby refreshed and quickened. … Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live. Even in the life of the affections, much more in the Body of Christ, we step outside that world which says "I am as good as you."[15]

When diversity flourishes within the purposeful order of Christ's body, joy unlike any other joy in the world results. In his inimitable way, Lewis says, "It is like turning from a march to a dance."[16]

Now such lofty dreams of harmonious diversity and purposeful order in the Church may begin to sound naively idealistic, for they contradict many people's actual experience of church gatherings. Indeed, that phrase "church membership" causes many people to shudder for legitimate reasons. If we do not sense the euphoria of dancing rather than marching, has the Church failed?

Lewis's own experience addresses this very question and reveals a last distinctive of church membership. Lewis might in fact share the shudder at the idea of Church: he did not naturally enjoy it, and while he often waxes eloquent about the *idea* of Church, very rarely in his writings does he seem particularly enamored of any actual worship service. Yet he believed that all who claim to follow Christ are obligated to church membership. To be a Christian is to be part of Christ's body, and God has ordained that on this earth that body manifests itself in and through the Church. "The New Testament does not envisage solitary religion," he said: "some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted

in the Epistles. So we must be regular practising members of the Church."[17] This conviction came to him early. Before he had even fully converted, Lewis began to attend church regularly, for, as he said, "I thought one ought to 'fly one's flag' by some unmistakable sign. I was acting in obedience to a (perhaps mistaken) sense of honor."[18] However, he admitted:

> though I liked clergymen as I liked bears, I had as little wish to be in the Church as in the zoo…. To me, religion ought to have been a matter of good men praying alone and meeting by twos and threes to talk of spiritual matters…. Thus my churchgoing was a merely symbolical and provisional practice.[19]

Lewis could not have foreseen that his churchgoing, though a "symbolical and provisional practice," would begin to shape him and push him towards a fuller apprehension of Christianity. In letters exhorting others to attend church, he would later explain that the irritations themselves batter us into better shape as Christians:

> If people like you and me find much that we don't naturally like in the public & corporate side of Christianity all the better for us: it will teach us humility and charity towards simple low-brow people who may be better Christians than ourselves. I naturally *loathe* nearly all hymns: the face, and life, of the charwoman in the next pew who revels in them, teach me that good taste in poetry or music are *not* necessary to salvation…. Obedience is the key to all doors: *feelings* come (or don't come) and go as God pleases. We can't produce them and mustn't try.[20]

Lewis's first church attendance was half-hearted and out of duty. But when we faithfully practice church membership in obedience to Jesus Christ, true transformation and joy will inevitably happen. The marching can end, the dancing begin.

The obligatory nature of church membership means that, in some sense, those who faithfully participate in Church from duty may eventually receive more benefits from it than from any merely human sort of Christian fellowship. Lewis's seemingly half-hearted church attendance was no less (maybe more) a participation in membership than that of the seminarians at Finkenwalde, for when we faithfully practice church membership in obedience to Jesus Christ, true transformation and joy will inevitably happen. The marching can end, the dancing begin.

NOTES

1 Philip Larkin, "Church Going," 1955; reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Twentieth Century and After,* nineth edition, edited by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012), 2782.
2 C. S. Lewis, "Membership," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965), 118-119.
3 Ibid., 108.
4 Ibid., 119.
5 Ibid., 110-111.
6 Ibid., 107.
7 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), 185-186.
8 Ibid., 185-186.
9 Lewis, "Membership," 110.
10 Ibid., 112.
11 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* translated by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1954), 21, 26.
12 C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis,* Volume 3, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 68.
13 Ibid., 204.
14 Lewis, "Membership," 113.
15 Ibid., 113, 115-116.
16 Ibid., 116.
17 Lewis, *Letters*, 68.
18 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955), 233-234.
19 Ibid.
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Membered and Remembered

BY BRENT LAYTHAM

A word that Wendell Berry has been standing by for years is "membership." In his fiction about "the Port William membership," the Pauline theme of membership in Christ finds analog and overlap with a quotidian fellowship of farmers. From their stories we can draw lessons in church membership.

One of the themes that Wendell Berry has been standing by for many years is "membership." In Berry's fiction about "the Port William membership," the grand Pauline theme of membership in Christ finds analog and overlap with a quotidian fellowship of farmers. What we too easily describe in ethereal theologics as mystical union in Christ or gift of the Holy Spirit, he renders narratively as a community woven together by the earthy realities of "kinship, friendship, history, memory, kindness, and affection" (*Place in Time*, p. 193).[1] From the stories of Port William characters' membership, I draw lessons in church membership.

Berry's first membership lesson may be the most difficult: membership is a given that includes everything in God's kindly purposes. His character Burley once preached it this way, in the midst of their shared work: "Oh, my friends, there ain't no nonmembers, living nor dead nor yet to come. Do you know it? Or do you don't?" (*Hannah Coulter*, p. 97). Another time, he put it this way, "… we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain't in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't" (*That Distant Land*, p. 356).

The apparent difficulty with a claim like that is its universal horizon. If the sweep of membership is so encompassing, if everyone and everything is

membered, what possible work could the claim do, what significant difference does it make? Moreover, a church seeking membership lessons from Berry will stumble over this apparent transposition from ecclesiology to creation. Paul deployed the term to describe the inter relation of the Church in and to Christ; e.g. "we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). Berry has very nearly placed these exact same words on Burley's lips. Yet, Paul's claim seems to be universalized and naturalized into a description of creatureliness itself.

That transposition is acceptable and true, precisely as it reminds us that finally membership in the Church is not about maintaining exclusions of unbelievers and non-human creatures from God's redeeming work, but about becoming a foretaste of the inclusive renewal in Christ of "All of us. Everything." Put theologically, membership in Christ presupposes our shared origin as members with all creatures of God's very good creation (John 1:3), which includes our shared destiny in the renewal of all things (Ephesians 1:10).

Berry recently essayed this most encompassing sense of membership in the line "Much happiness, much joy, can come to us from our membership in a kindness so comprehensive and original."[2] His gesture toward happiness and joy takes us into the most difficult part of universal membership, which is not the intellectual work of properly relating redemption to creation. It is the affectional and practical work of dwelling in divine kindness, of rejoicing in God's delights, of knowingly receiving, enacting, and celebrating a given membership that crucifies our pretensions of choosing and controlling our belonging. In reminding us that we are woven into a belonging that precedes and grounds us, that produces and guides us, that beckons and blesses us, Berry is inviting us to acknowledge, receive, embrace, enact, and cherish all things through our *knowing participati*on in "a kindness so comprehensive." He is inviting us to share in Andy Catlett's transcendent vision that ends *Remembering*, of every creature singing their being as "one song, the song of the many members of one love" (*Three Short Novels*, p. 220). So the first lesson is that particular instantiations of membership, be they Berry's Port William farmers or your local church, should learn to rejoice in and sing with our given membership with everything in One who is comprehensive kindness and enduring, redeeming love.

Berry's second lesson is that membership is given before it is chosen, given because it cannot be earned. Let us begin with choice, the demigod of autonomous Western culture. Doesn't American Christianity mostly believe and practice church membership as something we choose? Modernity has infected us to value our own decisions and accomplishments too much and to value being given too little. Yet membership in Christ is given by the Spirit rather than earned or even chosen; receiving it involves working and choosing, but neither our decisions nor our determined effort could ever procure it. It is always gift.

Berry's fiction shows the subtle interactions of effort and gift, decision and grace, in the journey of outsiders into full membership. The novels *Jayber Crow* and *Hannah Coulter* are first person remembrances of being given membership in the fellowship of shared work, knowledge, conversation, and pleasure. Several of the short stories display Mary and Elton Penn receiving membership that brings them educational, emotional, and economic benefit. While Mary's response is overwhelming gratitude, Elton's is to resent and resist receiving what he cannot earn or choose. In a poignant story of being bequeathed a farm he cannot afford, Elton struggles against receiving a belonging that he cannot earn. He tells Wheeler Catlett "I want to make it on my own. I don't want a soul to thank" (*That Distant Land*, p. 283). Wheeler shows Elton (and us) that because land and love and membership are realities we did not make, they "can't exist at all except as gifts" (p. 288). So membership cannot be earned, nor in a sense even chosen. But when the gift of membership chooses us, we can choose it in response. "The way you got in…was by being chosen. The way you stay in it is by choice" (p. 284).

Plenty of American Christians take membership vows in full awareness that they have not earned their place in the Church. Yet the pervasive voluntarism and consumerism that distort our culture inexorably press us toward imagining and thus living as if we chose our membership (voluntarism) and that choice made it ours (consumerism). Berry's Port William stories are a bracing reminder that membership comes to us as gift and chooses us by grace, eliciting and enabling our grateful choosing and giving as response.

The voluntarism and consumerism of our culture press us toward living as if we chose our membership and that choice made it ours. Berry reminds us that membership comes to us as gift and chooses us by grace, eliciting and enabling our grateful choosing and giving as response.

The third lesson grounds membership in shared soil and common place. Paul tells the Corinthians that spiritual gifts are given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). Berry reminds us that common good requires common ground; membership needs and belongs to a particular place. This does not renew an "edifice complex"; Christ's Church is certainly not a building. Indeed, Laura Milby (the preacher's wife) notices the profound disconnect between what goes on in the church building and her town's daily life. "It was as though the building…contained…a solemnity that the people…could neither inflect with the tone of their daily preoccupations nor transpose into their daily lives" (*A Place in Time*, p. 54).

Nonetheless, the body of Christ is a *placed* people, as indicated by the common New Testament custom of placing letters to the church in Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the saints in Ephesus, and so on. Thus, membership transpires on common ground, and the exercise of the various gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4) takes place in particular places. Modern mobility has trained us to be relatively indifferent to where we are, to treat places more like interchangeable widgets or consumer goods than like treasures to be cherished. This attitude infects church membership in a variety of ways, including churches that imagine themselves as essentially placeless and fail to care for the place where they are.

Berry's imaginative account of the membership *of Port William* offers to re-soil our souls and re-place our memories. He regularly reminds us how placed is our membership. Old Jack comes to belong to his farm "by the expenditure of history and work" (*Memory of Old Jack*, p. 164). Art Rowanberry's very "thoughts were placed and peopled" (*Place in Time*, p. 190). We live, work, converse, enjoy, suffer, and hope together in a particular place. Berry's vision of encompassing love invites us to see that the true requirement of membership is that such enactments transpire not only *in,* but *with* and *for* a particular place. His members do not just work *on* their farms; they work *for* and *with* them. Our church membership must learn to work in, with, and for its place.

The fourth lesson is that the gift of membership subsists in shared labors and loves. Hannah Coulter gets at this point when she says "Our life and our work were not the same thing maybe, but they were close" (*Hannah Coulter*, p. 89). Given the kind of work they shared—non-mechanized farming—conversation was not only possible but almost a necessary accompaniment. Past labors and co-laborers would be called into speech, making for "a sort of ritual of remembrance, too, when we speak of other years and remember younger selves and the absent and the dead—all those we have, as we say, 'gone down the row with'" (*That Distant Land*, pp. 313-314).

An obvious connection to the labors of the local church is seen when Mat Feltner led the cleaning of the cemetery each year (*Jayber Crow*, chapter 19). Church members who have shared the labor of cooking together, or building a Habitat house, will likely recognize having participated in similar "rituals of remembrance" as they worked, and Berry's fiction helps us to see the non-utilitarian value that attaches to such regular patterns of labor. But there is more even than that, glimpsed perhaps in Burley Coulter's narration of the same phenomenon: "It's a mystery how the voices gather. Our talk at row ends or in the barn or stripping room would call up the voices of the absent and the dead" (*A Place in Time*, p. 30). Church talk—around meals or service and especially in worship—is and ought to be a gathering up of voices in the mystery of God, so that their faith and hope is spoken again through us.

An even deeper lesson can be found in "rhymed labors," as when Hannah Coulter finds herself "at work and thinking of a person you loved and love still who did that same work before you and who taught you to do it. It is a comfort ever and always, like hearing the rhyme come when you are singing a song" (*Hannah Coulter,* p. 107). In the Church, members regularly find themselves engaged in labors of love—the work of worship and the works of mercy. However, we do not consistently feel such rhymes, but occasionally we may, especially when place and practice coalesce. Perhaps in kneeling at an old altar rail, or singing an old and favorite hymn, or praying an ancient prayer, we may experience the rhyme that Hannah Coulter names: us doing now in the same place what those with whom we are membered together in love did here before us and taught us to do. Perhaps the most obvious 'rhymes' of our Christian labor and love are the practices of baptism and communion. In baptism, we name new members in the present moment with the same words and actions that named us, and have named every Christian, rhyming all the way back to Pentecost. In communion, we are repeating words and actions that were given for precisely such rhymings, thereby remembering how we have been membered to one another week by week and generation by generation right back to Easter.

The fifth lesson is that because membership is strengthened by the gift of remembrance, it requires the presence of gifted rememberers. Because Paul never claimed to offer a comprehensive list of every possible gift of the Spirit (and comparing his various lists shows that he did not try to offer one), I suggest that remembrance is not *like* a spiritual gift but *is* one. Healthy membership requires that we have (and honor) rememberers, those who are gifted and trained to retain and retell our story, our history, our shared lives.

Because membership is strengthened by the gift of remembrance, it requires that we have (and honor) rememberers, those who are gifted and trained to retain and retell our story, our history, our shared lives.

Berry's stories regularly describe persons whose gift is remembering. "Uncle Isham Quail was a remembrer who had saved up in his mind everything he had seen and experienced and everything he had heard. In his latter years he seemed to live in all the times of that small place…" (*A Place in Time*, pp. 218-219). As with the mantle of prophesy passed from Elijah to Elisha, so this mantle of rememberer is a spiritual gift that can be passed from one generation to another. The elder Art Rowanberry passed it to young Andy Catlett over the years of their long friendship, through "so many days, so many miles, so many remindings, so much remembering and

telling" (p. 194). The result, visible when Andy had himself become "an old man, remembering an old man, once his elder and his teacher," was that Andy "has kept Art's mind alive in his own. Some of Art's memories Andy remembers" (p. 194).

We have been so afraid of traditionalism, we have become so addicted to advertisement's incessant trumpeting of the next new thing, that our sense of membership has become infected with a kind of 'gnosticism of the now,' a belief that the Church is nothing more than its instantiation at the present moment. We need rememberers exercising the gift of remembrance to "quote [the dead] in their own voices at appropriate times…[and] to call the absent into presence" (*Place in Time*, p. 231). We need gifted rememberers to keep alive in their minds the minds of our saints. Where this gift of *remembrance* has been rightly exercised, we too might feel the *re-membering*, feel "that a current of love traveled among [us], and joined [us] to one another, to those who were absent"—indeed to all that great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11) stretching from here to Ur of the Chaldees, from now back to Genesis 12.

The final lesson from Berry is that this full scope of membership that we can experience in hopeful remembering is already real, apart from our mentality. "If the dead had been alive only in this world, you would forget them, looks like, as soon as they die. But you remember them, because they always were living in the other, bigger world while they lived in this little one, and this one and the other one are the same" (*A Place in Time*, p. 110). The connection of the body of Christ through time is more than an historical fact, more even than our capacity to keep previous members 'alive' in our memories. What truly connects us, what makes this temporally extended membership truly real, is Christ's remembering—"the care of a longer love than any…have ever imagined" (*Three Short Novels*, p. 221). Whether we remember it or not (remember Burley's "Do you know it? Or do you don't?"), Christ remembers and so we are membered through time into a timeless love. We can take as paradigmatic Christ's answer to the dying thief's plea, "Lord, remember me," which evoked the promise "Today you will be with me in Paradise." So we live each day in "that company of immortals" (*Three Short Novels*, p. 326) because of God's faithfulness in Christ.

That said, this reality can be *realized* by us in and through our hopeful remembering. Several of Berry's characters experience transcendent visions that re-member the remembered, perfected and whole. Once, after a day working in the cemetery and remembering the dead there, Jayber saw "the community as it never has been and never will be gathered in this world of time…. I saw them all as somehow perfected, beyond time, by one another's love, compassion, and forgiveness as it is said we may be perfected by grace" (*Jayber Crow*, p. 205). Hannah Coulter, at the end of her long life of love and loss, tells and retells with restrained hope the story of "the whole

membership, living and dead" (*Hannah Coulter*, p. 158). Her mind becomes a sort of "room of love where the absent are present, the dead are alive, time is eternal, and all the creatures prosperous" (p. 158).

At the end of *A World Lost*, Andy Catlett remembers members who have died, seeing them "waking, dazed, into a shadowless light in which they know themselves altogether for the first time" (*Three Short Novels,* p. 326). The light is transformative, and "in it they are loved completely, even as they have been, and so are changed into what they could not have been but what, if they could have imagined it, they would have wished to be" (p. 326). Notice that Andy's remembering is not of a nostalgic past. It is clear-eyed about how much of our story is inextricably bound up with heartache, suffering, sorrow, and sin, mistakes made and evils chosen. In *A Place in Time* we learn that Elton Penn believed that "all apologies come too late…that apologies can't undo mistakes…" (p. 230). Andy reflected on that in light of learning that Elton's mother-in-law "years too late,…had been sorry, had repented of the hurt she had given and wished to take it back…" (*A Place in Time*, p. 236). From our perspective, this is "… all too late. 'Too late,' Andy could again hear Elton saying with the blunt finality of the world's mere truth" (p. 236). And with Andy we realize that our human history is an accumulation of "a limitlessness of heartache: of second thoughts too late, of the despair of undoing what had been done, of some forlorn hope, even, that could not be undone by despair or numbed by time" (p. 236). For Andy, "it seemed…almost a proof of immortality that nothing mortal could contain all its sorrow" (p. 236). And so "… he was thinking of heavenly pity, heavenly forgiveness, and his thought was a confession of need. It was a prayer" (p. 237).

The connection of the body of Christ through time is more than an historical fact, more even than our capacity to keep previous members 'alive' in our memories. What makes this temporally extended membership truly real, is Christ's remembering—"the care of a longer love than any…have ever imagined."

Berry's final lesson for us is of a remembering love that includes us in its forgiveness, of "a light that includes our darkness" (*Jayber Crow*, p. 357; cf. John 1:5), of a love that "overflows the allowance of the world" (*Jayber Crow*, p. 204) so that we will finally be "corrected and clarified" (*Three Short Novels*, p. 221). This lesson should come as no surprise to Christians, given our remembering Table prepared in the presence of enmity (Psalm 23), celebrated in the aftermath of betrayal and abandonment, sharing a body broken by our sin yet re-membered by "the care of a longer love" (*Three Short Novels*,

p. 221). In our practice of communion, whether high church or low, we share in that same transcendent vision of Jayber, Hannah, and Andy, that every dis-memberment is finally re-membered by that longest and original love, so abundant that it drowns our hells in its Heaven (*Jayber Crow*, p. 354). Membered together in this remembering meal, we dare to believe that such forgiveness is possible because in this moment, we actually receive it.

NOTES

1 In this essay I will make parenthetical references to the following works of fiction by Wendell Berry: *A Place in Time: Twenty Stories of the Port William Membership* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2013), *Hannah Coulter* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), *Three Short Novels: Nathan Coulter, Remembering, A World Lost* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2002), *Jayber Crow* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2000), and *The Memory of Old Jack* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1999).

2 Wendell Berry, "Caught in the Middle on Abortion and Homosexuality," *Christian Century* 130.7 (April 10, 2013), 22-27 and 29-31, here citing 31.

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Other Voices

What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of GOD.
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of GOD,
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.

T. S. ELIOT, ***"The Rock" (1934)***

The Christian is called not to individualism but to membership in the mystical body [of Christ]. … [T]he head of this Body is so unlike the inferior members that they share no predicate with Him save by analogy. We are summoned from the outset to combine as creatures with our Creator, as mortals with immortal, as redeemed sinners with sinless Redeemer. His presence, the interaction between Him and us, must always be the overwhelmingly dominate factor in the life we are to lead within the Body, and any conception of Christian fellowship which does not mean primarily fellowship with Him is out of court.

C. S. LEWIS, ***"Membership" (1945), in The Weight of Glory and Other Essays (1949)***

It is easy to miss the radical nature of Christian membership, particularly if we approach it from a modern, individualistic point of view. Membership is here reduced to one's voluntary and occasional participation in a group (as when I say I am a "member" of a club or national organization). The Pauline understanding of membership, much like the Johannine depiction of Jesus as the vine onto which his disciples are grafted, is much more organic and vital. If each person is joined to another like a limb is joined to a torso, then there is nothing voluntary or occasional about the relationship. For the limb to flourish it must draw its life from the whole body. To be cut off from the larger body, even momentarily, is to precipitate the member's death. Joined together, all the members of the body share a common life. Though need and nurture establish the relationships and each member is indispensible, it is our care and responsibility for others that has the potential to turn mutual service into mutual celebration.

For Paul it is imperative that the membership be the body *of Christ* rather than some other body. Why? Because it is Christ who manifests what

life really ought to be. Christ represents another order of life because unlike the life and death known through Adam, Jesus inaugurates a mode of living that joins people to heaven. Though Adam was a "living being," Christ is the "life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45) who leads humanity through death into resurrection life. Jesus overcomes the alienating power of death that sin is. Unless people participate organically in, rather than merely associate with, Jesus' life, they don't really know what it is to be alive. To be fully alive is to live sympathetically within the membership that the community is called to be, suffering with those who suffer and rejoicing with those who rejoice. It is to extend Christ's self-giving life in the world as the model for how life should be (Galatians 2:20).

NORMAN WIRZBA, ***Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating (2011)***

You cannot surrender to God a self you do not know. This was surely in the design of community that we might find ourselves in the mirror of that community. As we share the common life, one unredeemed area after another comes to light. The joy of involvement is interwoven with the pain of it.

ELIZABETH O'CONNOR, ***Call to Commitment (1963)***

The Christian community is an organic unity in which the members are vitally related to each other through participation in a common life. By love they are bound together in a mode of existence which is the antithesis of the individualistic mode of existence that constitutes the "world." Only in this mode do they exist as the creator intended humanity to exist.... This community is "Christ" in that it prolongs incarnationally the power of love that was the essence of his mission. It represents the saving force of Christ because in the world it demonstrates the reality of an alternative mode of existence in which humanity is not dominated by the egocentricity that provokes possessiveness, jealousy and strife.

JEROME MURPHY-O'CONNOR, ***Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting the Major Issues (2009)***

The instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man's self is not kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope. That is why horrible nations have horrible religions: they have been looking at God through a dirty lens.

God can show Himself as He really is only to real men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another, helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like players in one band, or organs in one body.

C.S. LEWIS, ***Mere Christianity (1952)***

Like the Baby Jesus, I need a 'holy family' to belong to. I need to belong to something bigger than myself. If I don't, then I run the risk of developing a sort of God-and-me spirituality with no support systems to hold me up when I am weak, no prophets to challenge me when I am wrong and no party-mates with whom I may celebrate the Lord's goodness in my life.

MARK E. THIBODEAUX, S.J., ***Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer (2001)***

[T]he church is not simply the place of our baptism. We are baptized not simply *in* the church, but *into* the church.... This is much more than church membership or a matter of confessional identity; it is an ecclesial way of being in the world.

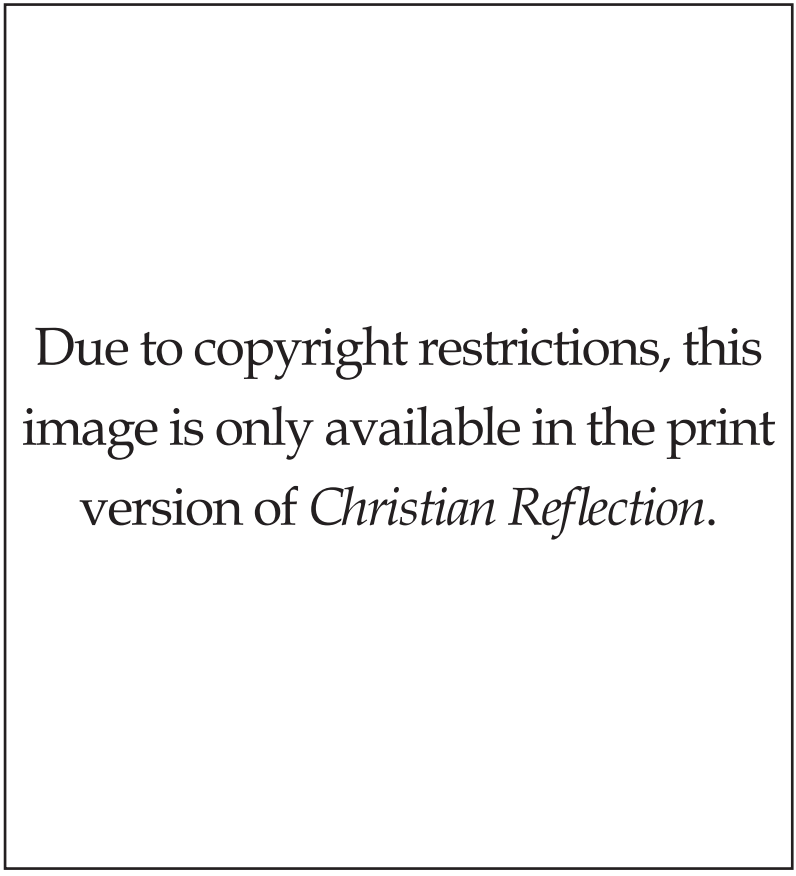
SUSAN K. WOOD, ***"I Acknowledge One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins," in Christopher R. Seitz, ed., Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism (2001)***

By "ecclesial solidarity" I mean the conviction that "being a Christian" is one's primary and formative loyalty, the one that contextualizes and defines the legitimacy of other claimants on allegiance and conscience—those of class, nationality, and state, for example.

Ecclesial solidarity means that the welfare of one's brothers and sisters in Christ makes special claims on one's affections, resources, and priorities. It means that the unity of the churches in visible and tangible ways is a key expression of Christian conviction and vocation, even in the face of centrifugal pressures and the demands of lesser, more partial communities and ideologies. It means that processes of Christian discernment and worship cross the divides of patriotism and other types of tribalism, making one's coreligionists the "to whom" we owe service, love and mutual support.

Ecclesial solidarity is not in conflict with the love and service that Christians owe their proximate neighbors, those with whom they live and work and interact on a regular basis. Taking care of one's non-local relatives need not, after all, invariably oppress one's next-door neighbors or work colleagues. It does, however, prohibit Christians from harming their non-local relatives on the assumption that one's neighbors always and inevitably present morally determinative claims on Christian allegiance, priorities, and actions.

MICHAEL L. BUDDE, ***The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church (2011)***



In Laura James's painting, ***Sermon on the Mount,*** the disciples gather in rapt attention around Jesus, who stands larger than life, with arms opened in a cruciform pose.

Laura James, SERMON ON THE MOUNT (2010). *Acrylic on canvas. 16.5"x 21". Used by permission of the artist.*

Gathered to Listen

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Matthew's Gospel describes the context of the Sermon on the Mount this way: "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them" (Matthew 5:1-2, NIV).[1] Laura James, a New York-born artist of Antiguan immigrants, depicts this scene as a lesson for the Church. The disciples, including but not limited to the twelve Apostles, left the crowds and gathered in a closer group to listen to Jesus' words. Similarly, we most effectively hear the gospel message in an intentional listening group, as members of the body of Christ.

Of course, speaking to a group is the most efficient way to get the word out. It takes far less time than speaking to each person individually. (Social media have proven this via Instagram, Twitter, Vine, and Facebook for the "older" generation.) But God's message, unlike the quick reading of a tweet, requires sustained attention, reflection, and meditation. Really listening to it requires that we be in a community of faith that guides our attention through a blend of living, working, and learning together.

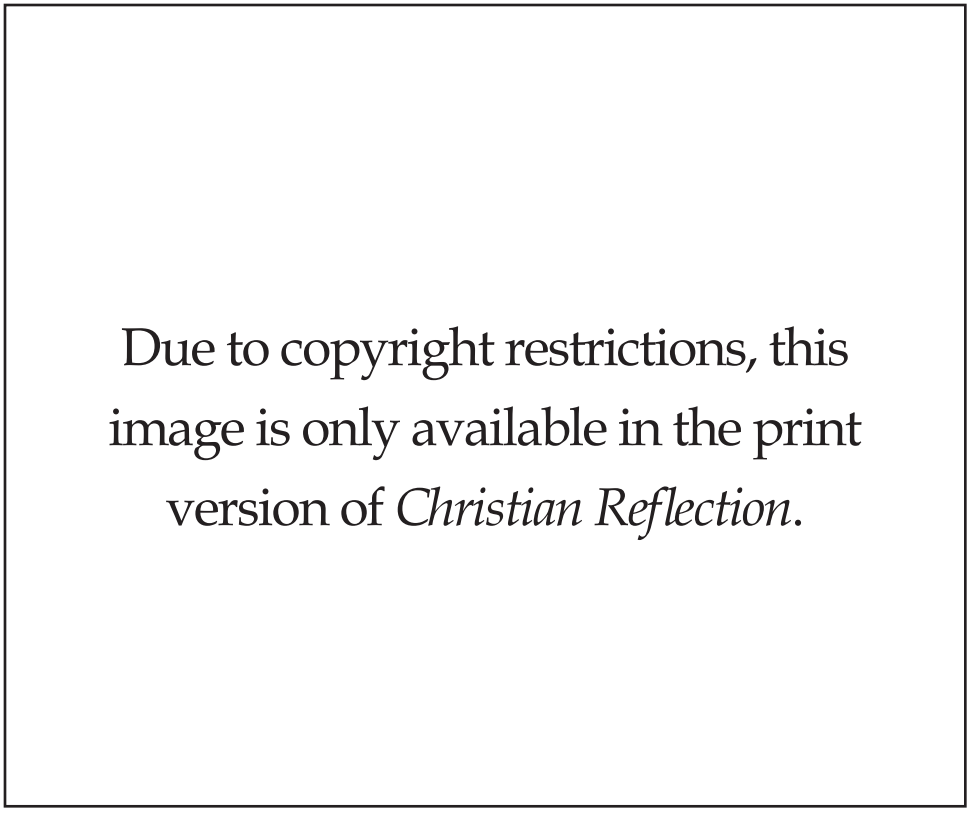
In James's painting, the disciples gather in rapt attention around Jesus, who stands in their midst larger than life, with arms opened in a cruciform pose. Though the disciples appear at first to be just a simplified, bright, balanced mass of color, on closer inspection they are individuals with varying facial characteristics, hairstyle, clothing type and color, and gesture or hand position. Despite the patterned repetition of these features, no two figures in the image are exactly the same. To notice this subtlety of diverse elements within James's unified and harmonious composition requires attentive study by the viewer, much like that required of disciples to discern the meaning of God's message.

To embody Christ's teachings, members of his Body perform different but complementary roles. "But this diversity is harmonious rather than cacophonous because it is ordered by Christ the Head, who gives the members specific purposes within the Church," Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale explain. "The members do not collectively do the same thing, but neither do they each individually do their own thing: within the Church, their diversity becomes a means both to serve and to govern one another."[2]

NOTES

1 THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

2 See Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale, "Not Marching, but Dancing," on pp. 19-25 in this issue.



In Andrea da Firenze's fantastical fresco, the Dominican friars participate in the body of Christ on earth and in heaven.

Andrea di Bonaiuto (fl. 1346-1379), *called Andrea da Firenze, Allegory of the Active and Triumphant Church and of the Dominican Order* (1366-1368). *Fresco. Chapter House or Spanish Chapel, S. Maria Novella, Florence, Italy. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library. Used by permission.*

Working in Christ's Body

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

The continuity of the Church triumphant is demonstrated in this Florentine fresco from the fourteenth century in the Dominican church complex of Santa Maria Novella. It is located in the Chapter House, or meeting room, adjacent to the nave of the basilica. Frescos on the other three walls further recognize and celebrate the Dominican order and the Church with scenes from The Passion of Christ, The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas, and The Life of St. Peter Martyr. Both Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Peter Martyr, or Peter of Verona (1205-1252), had been prominent members of the order in its early years.

The Dominicans are a religious order of mendicant friars founded by St. Dominic (1170-1221) and sanctioned by the papacy in 1216.[1] Dominicans and Franciscans, as preaching orders whose convents were within cities, spread quickly throughout Medieval Europe. The Dominicans were especially attractive to devout Catholics because they set up not only the First and Second Orders (for men and women), but also a Third Order for laypeople who wished to dedicate themselves to a religious life. St. Dominic and his followers for generations were scholars and preachers. The order was highly educated, and as powerful patrons of the arts its members influenced the iconography used in art and architecture.[2]

A rich merchant Buonamico (Mico) Guidalotti, upon his death, left 200 of the 700 florins needed to build the Chapter House between 1343 and 1355. The payment for its decoration resulted from the sale of a house valued at 65 florins, as stated in the will. The Guidalotti family was permitted to use the chapel for burial and to have masses said daily for the salvation of their souls.[3] Andrea da Firenze and his assistants frescoed the four walls of the Chapter House from 1366 to 1368.[4] It became known as the Spanish Chapel in 1566 when the Spanish wife of Cosimo I de' Medici, Eleonora da Toledo, enjoyed praying there as well as using it for various celebrations.

On the right wall of the Chapter House are allegorical scenes of the *Church Militant and the Church Triumphant*, where St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas are shown in five roles—as soldiers of the *militia Christi* who preach, defend, debate and expound the truth of the faith, and reconcile men. The worldly and ecclesiastical hierarchy is shown on the lower left of the fresco while the faithful enter paradise on the upper register. The not yet

completed main cathedral or Duomo of Florence, S. Maria del Fiore, is seen in the left foreground, though it is neither pink nor had Brunelleschi's dome been built yet. The bell tower is also on the wrong side of the Duomo; it is by the western façade not the eastern apse. The archbishop of Florence was a Dominican at the time. The reigning pope, Urban V, is enthroned in the center of this area and flanked by other church ecclesiastics. This represented the power of the Church on earth and the power of the Dominicans in Florence.

At the lower right, Andrea da Firenze depicts a fierce fight between a pack of wolves that are trying to snatch sheep and the black and white dogs that are protecting them (see detail on p. 42). This is a metaphor for the friars' struggle against heresy. Dominicans are often represented as 'hounds of the Lord,' since the Italian *Domini cani* puns on their name. Dominic's first biographer, Jordan of Saxony, related that St. Dominic's mother had a vision of giving birth to a black and white dog with a torch in its mouth. Both Jordan and other authors saw the dog as the symbol of the preacher, while its bark was the sacred doctrine. Pedro Ferrando, Dominic's second biographer, contrasted the barking of the dog with the image of the heretics disguised as wolves used here by Andrea da Firenze.[5]

St. Thomas Aquinas is shown holding an open book to the right of the dogs attacking the wolves. The book, an attribute shared by many saints (especially founders of religious orders), is particularly relevant to St. Dominic and the Order of Preachers, as scholarship was part of their vocation. St. Dominic encouraged his friars to study, and he introduced study as a means to the ministry of the salvation of souls.

In the center of the composition, St. Dominic directs the faithful from earth to heaven. St. Peter, holding the keys, awaits those kneeling at the gate waiting to enter heaven in the upper left (see detail on p. 43). Those souls in the earthly realm (found in the middle right of the fresco, making music and dancing) can only enter heaven by receiving penance. The figure

kneeling before a Dominican receives absolution just to the right of Dominic directing the faithful.

The Dominicans are present in both the heavenly and earthly realms of this fantastical fresco. They are not only working hard to protect God's sheep from heresy, they are also critical in getting the redeemed to heaven. The symbols of the four evangelists surrounding Christ (the angel for Matthew, winged lion for Mark, winged ox for Luke, and eagle for John) echo the importance the Dominicans place on scriptural teachings.

Though this fresco was created for the Dominicans and naturally highlights their particular mission and work, we are all part of the continuity of the Church that is depicted here. We all praise God and look towards the same Christ. Our membership in the Church, like that of the Dominicans, constitutes our participation in the body of Christ on earth and in heaven.

NOTES

1 Domingo de Guzmán (St. Dominic) was born to a noble family in Calervega, a village near Burgos, Spain, and was educated at university in Palencia.

2 Domingo Iturgaiz, "Dominican Order," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), *www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T023204* (accessed March 5, 2014).

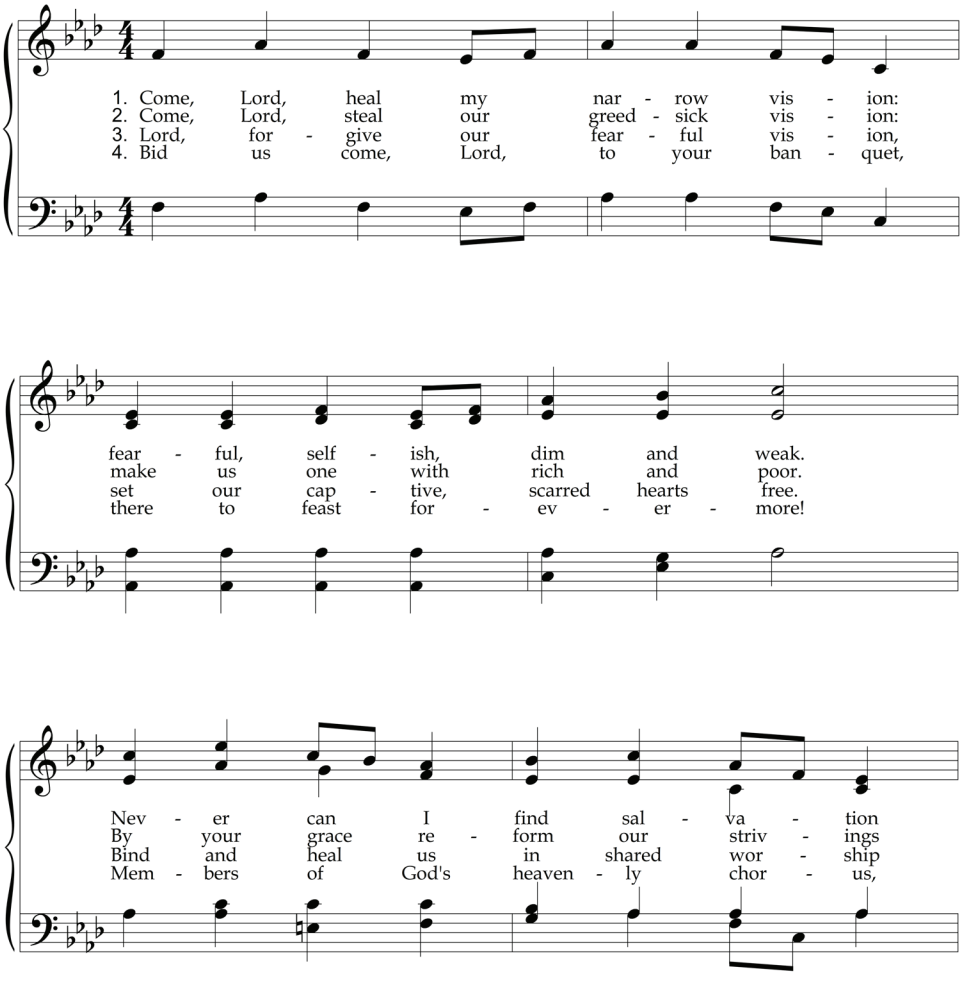
3 Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 137, 143-44.

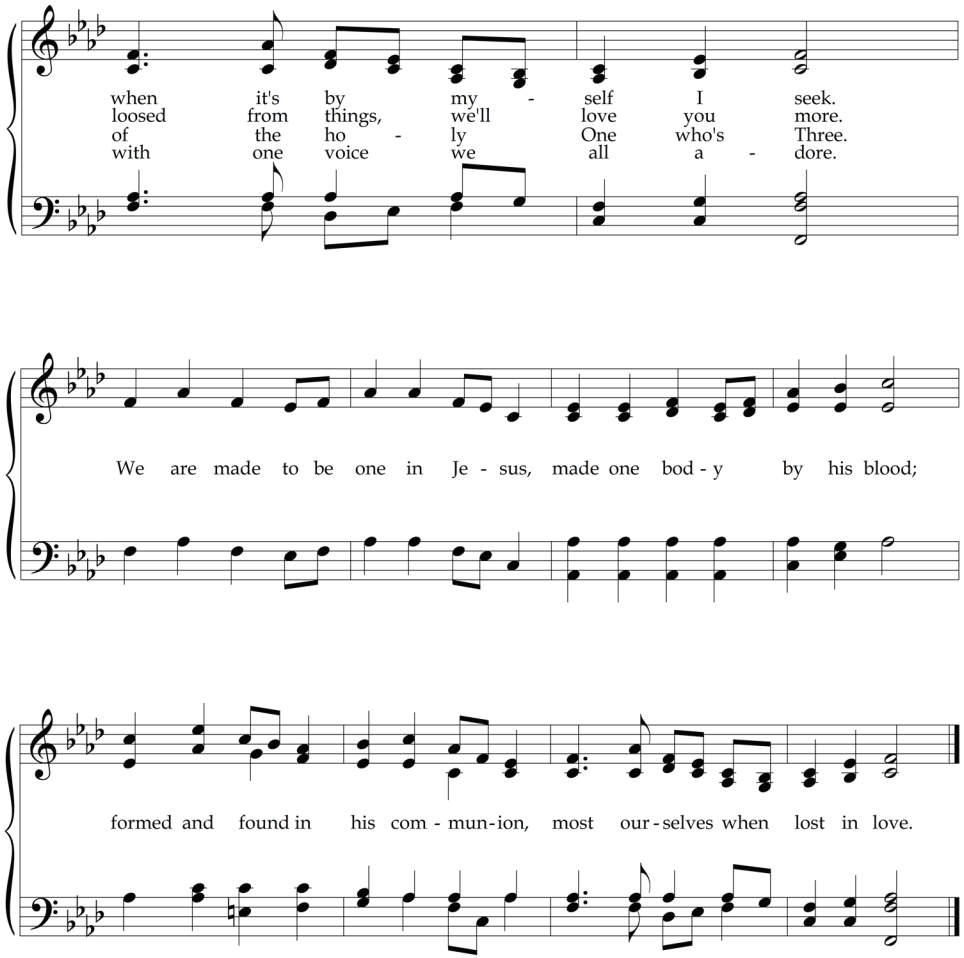
4 Musei Civici Fiorentini, Cappellone degli Spagnoli, *museicivicifiorentini.comune.fi.it/smn/CappelloneSpagnoli* (accessed March 5, 2014).

5 Iturgaiz, "Dominican Order."

One in Jesus

JONATHAN SANDS WISE SOUTHERN HARMONY (1835)

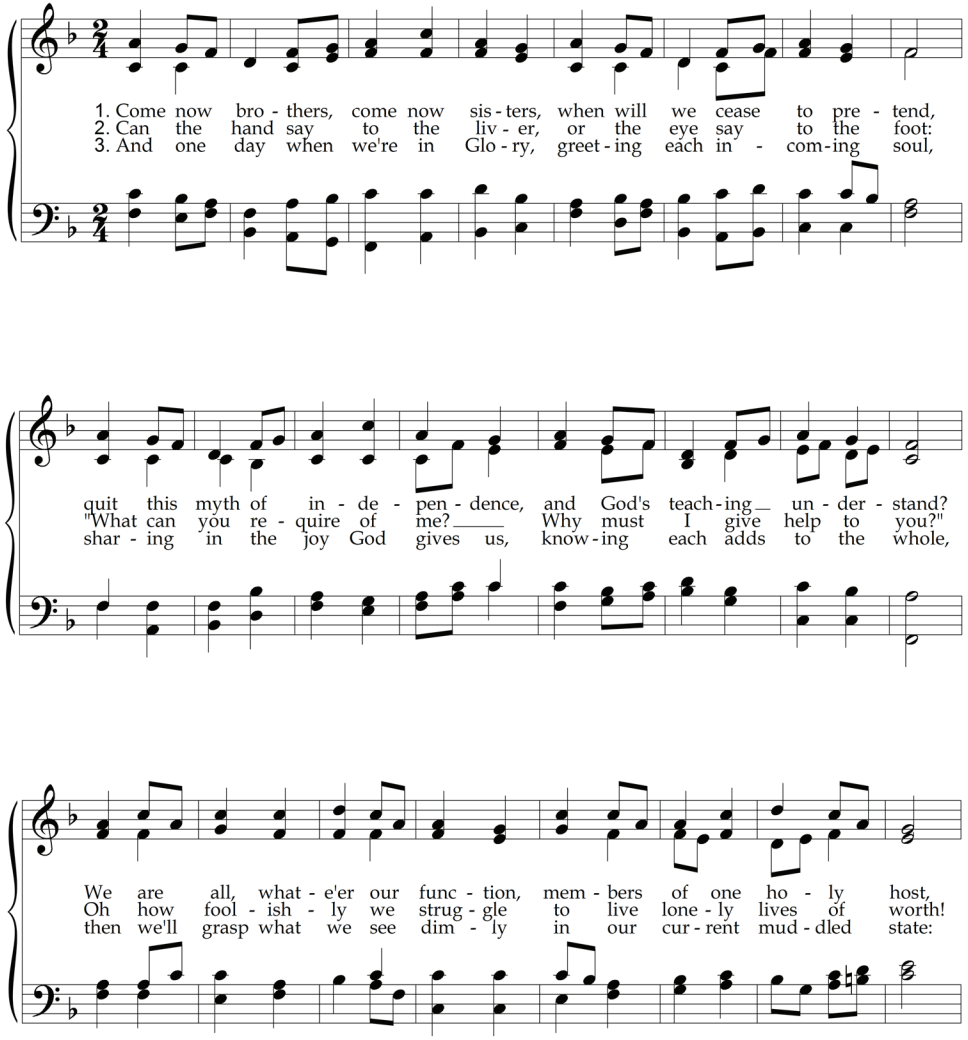


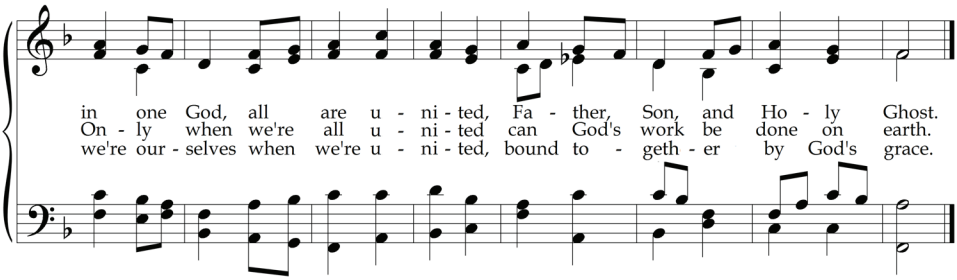


Tune: RESTORATION
8.7.8.7.D

United by God's Grace

JONATHAN SANDS WISE CHRISTIAN LYRE (1835)





Tune: PLEADING SAVIOR
8.7.8.7.D

Worship Service

BY ELIZABETH SANDS WISE

Prelude

"We Are One in the Spirit" (acoustic guitar)[1]

Call to Worship

Because we are one in the spirit,
we gather.
Because we are one in the Lord,
we gather.
Because we have been called to one another, to this community,
we gather.
Come, let us worship together.
Amen.

Congregational Hymn

"Let Us Bear Each Other's Burdens"

Let us bear each other's burdens
as we struggle on through life;
turn not on the erring members,
add not to their care and strife;
let our hearts beat kindly for them,
for this world with sin is rife.
If their burdens be so heavy
that they stoop beneath the care,
let us bear them, of our vigor,
help them as we well can spare.

Wipe away the tears of sorrow
falling from their weary eyes;
point them to a joy eternal
in the land beyond the skies,
ere their pining heart in anguish,
bitter, hopeless anguish, dies.
Sympathy and love can brighten
burdens that are hard to bear;
angels bright will help us nobly,
angels from the land so fair.

Wrap not close our mantles 'round us—
mantles dark, of selfish pride;
in our bosoms, gentle impulse
we'll not strive to crush or hide.
There's so much of good and evil
in this world so broad and wide,
much for willing hearts to shoulder,
much of good there is to do.
Then arise! Leave not the burden
bearing heavy on the few.

J. Van Namee (1881), alt.
Tune: ALL THE WAY

Community Prayer

O God, who hovered over the darkness
like a mother bird flutters her wings over her nest,
hover over us now and create something from nothing.

From our darkness of sickness, mourning, and disease,
from our worries about our communities and loved ones and finances
and futures and the myriad anxieties that cling to us,
from the incomprehensible tragedies of the world that make us wail and
tear our clothes and, sometimes, pray—

from even these darknesses,
create wholeness and healing, peace and rest
this morning, this Sabbath, as we gather together,
that we might look around us and still see your creative handiwork
and know that it is good.

O God of this community, have mercy upon us.

O God, who cried over Jerusalem,
who knelt to wash dusty, unclean feet,
who spit in the dirt when mud was what the blind man needed;

O God, who tells stories,
redeem our tears,
our unwillingness to kneel,
our hands caked with our own mud,
our obsession with our own stories, our own problems.

Teach us to be a community who cries together,
kneels together,
gets dirty together,
and tells your story together.

O God of this community, have mercy upon us.

O God, who came to comfort,
anticipating the pain of life in this world,
groan for us and with us.

We groan for those in the pews of this faith community
and for those on the streets of our physical community.

We groan for both the powerful and the powerless in our country,
for both the warlords and the war victims abroad;
for the invisible network of human traffickers
and for human slaves who make our lives possible;
and also for those who place themselves in danger
to work for peace and justice every day,
in every country, in every community.

Show us how we are most needed.
Teach us to be comforters,
to bear one another's burdens and the world's burdens
from our own safe homes,
and to pray without words
when the words of this world are simply inadequate.

O God of this community, have mercy upon us.
Teach us to be community. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12 and Matthew 5:1-11[2]

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

After he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: Blessed.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

Blessed.

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Blessed are

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit,

Blessed are the meek,

serve the Lord.

for they will inherit the earth.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Blessed are those who hunger

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

for they will be filled.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;

Blessed are the pure in heart,

do not claim to be wiser than you are.

for they will see God.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

for they will be called children of God.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.'

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Blessed are you.

Discipline of Silence

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

Wendell Berry[3]

Unison Prayer of Confession

Creator God,
we confess that we have not loved the poor in spirit,
the meek,
the peacemakers,
and those seeking justice among us.
Sometimes we have not even noticed them.
Forgive us.

Redeemer God,
we confess that we have not offered our gifts to our community;
we have conformed to the world,
and not loved what is good or hated what is evil.
Sometimes we have not loved at all.
Forgive us.

Sustainer God,
we confess that we do not know how to be members of a community;
we do not know how to overcome evil with good,
how to love our enemies,
how to be children of God.
Sometimes we do not want to be members of a community.
Forgive us.

Congregational Hymn

"One in Jesus"

Come, Lord, heal my narrow vision:
fearful, selfish, dim and weak.
Never can I find salvation
when it's by myself I seek.
We are made to be one in Jesus,
made one body by his blood;
formed and found in his communion,
most ourselves when lost in love.

Come, Lord, steal our greed-sick vision:
make us one with rich and poor.
By your grace reform our strivings—
loosed from things, we'll love you more.
Refrain.

Lord forgive our fearful vision,
set our captive, scarred hearts free.
Bind and heal us in shared worship
of the holy One who's Three.
Refrain.

Bid us come, Lord, to your banquet,
there to feast forevermore!
Members of God's heavenly chorus,
with one voice we all adore.
Refrain.

Jonathan Sands Wise (2014)
Tune: RESTORATION

Offertory

"We Are One in the Spirit" (solo or small group vocals)[1]

Testimony of Community[4]

Sermon

Response: A Prayer for Unity

O Trinity,
our God who is yourself Community,
who created us in your image,
teach us how to be united under the banner of your love.
Teach us how to walk in faith to love and serve you,
to love and serve one another.
Open our eyes and our hearts to see the needs of those
sitting beside us in the pew,
crossing the street in front of us,
sitting beside us in cubicles and classrooms.
And when we feel our temperatures rising,
our tempers flaring,
our compassion fading,
give us the courage to turn to you,
to ask for your grace, your patience, your love.
Remind us of your image in us,
and draw us to one another. Amen.

Communion

Congregational Hymn

"United by God's Grace"

Come now brothers, come now sisters, when will we cease to pretend,
quit this myth of independence, and God's teaching understand?
We are all, whate'er our function, members of one holy host,
in one God, all are united, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Can the hand say to the liver, or the eye say to the foot:
"What can you require of me? Why must I give help to you?"
Oh, how foolishly we struggle to live lonely lives of worth!
Only when we're all united can God's work be done on earth.

And one day when we're in Glory, greeting each incoming soul,
sharing in the joy God gives us, knowing each adds to the whole,
then we'll grasp what we see dimly in our current, muddled state:
we're ourselves when we're united, bound together by God's grace.

Jonathan Sands Wise (2014)
Tune: PLEADING SAVIOR

Benediction

May the peace of our creating, redeeming, sustaining God
go with each of us now
as we go together
into the parking lot, the streets, the community, the world—
members of one another,
known for our love.

NOTES

1 Peter Scholtes's text "We Are One in the Spirit" and tune ST. BRENDANS are copyrighted © 1966 by F. E. L. Publications, and now assigned to The Lorenz Corporation, 1991.

2 Pairing these well-known scripture passages allows us to see them, and our communities, in a new light: both our faith communities and our broader communities are places of healthy dependence—indeed, we are all dependent on one another—as well as the places where the gifts we each have to offer are given freely and without judgment. Though the passages are intended to be read by two unique voices (a man and a woman, a young person and an older person, two persons of differing nationalities or native tongues), the passages can also be read responsively, with the congregation reading the lines of bold print.

3 Wendell Berry, "The Loss of the Future," in *The Long-Legged House* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012 [1969]), 53-74, here citing 71.

4 Every congregation has key stories in its communal memory that define its community and what has been important to its members through the years. Often, those stories come amidst great tragedy and trial—a terminal diagnosis of a young member, for example, the death of a beloved deacon, or local or national tragedies. But joyous moments also color communal memories: weddings and baptisms, births and adoptions, new buildings and ministries, personal and church anniversaries. Indeed, both sad and happy occasions have the potential to draw members of a community out of themselves; they help members discover anew what it means to be a community because they provide opportunities for them to serve one another as Christ served his disciples. Therefore, memories of such occasions are essential to what it means to be a church.

Before the service begins, ask three or four (or more) members of the community if they would be willing to share what they consider to be some of these significant "moments" in the congregation's history and in their personal experiences as members of the community. Also, before concluding, ask others who are present if they would like to offer similar testimonies of when the church was "community" to them.

ELIZABETH D. SANDS WISE
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Mutual Correction

BY DARIN H. DAVIS

One of the most important, difficult, and neglected obligations we owe to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is mutual correction, which is the practice of giving and accepting counsel, admonishment, and rebuke as a form of spiritual rescue.

A student of mine came to see me recently to talk about friendship. He began by asking questions about the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas that we were reading in class, but soon he was asking questions about friendship in his own life.

He described a close friend who is abusing alcohol. The friend's academic work was beginning to suffer, and his relationships with family and friends were beginning to fray. My student was greatly concerned about his friend's drinking. "I am worried something terrible may happen," he told me. "I know I need to do something, but I am worried that if I say or do the wrong thing, my friend will turn against me, and then what?"

And then my student said, "People always talk about friends encouraging one another, but we don't talk much about correcting each other's ways. It seems like Christians hardly ever talk about that."

We all want encouragement from those around us, especially those who are close to us. We want a genuine pat on the back, a sincere word of exhortation, some sign that someone truly believes in us and wants us to do and be well. Indeed, encouragement is not simply something we want; it seems entirely necessary if we are to live and do well. No one is immune from times of trial and difficulty, and no one bears such hard times well on his own. Paul had Barnabas, and we, too, need people who inspire us, especially in hard times.

But in the context of friendship, family, and congregational life, we need a richer and more expansive understanding of encouragement. If we are actually trying to "put courage in" one another—or perhaps better understood, trying to open one another to God's redemptive grace—then we have to realize that encouragement includes mutual correction. This is one of the most important, difficult, and (as my student had recognized) neglected obligations we owe to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. By mutual correction I mean the practice of giving and accepting counsel, admonishment, and rebuke as a form of spiritual rescue. For Christians called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), mutual correction is a profound expression of charity: it is a way of loving others, who, like us, are prone to missteps along the path that God sets before us. Mutual correction helps us return to the "the narrow way."

Even the bare mention of mutual correction makes us nervous. Some of us immediately cue in our memories the smug "Church Lady" character named "Enid Strict" from distant episodes of Saturday Night Live. We worry that only snoops and moral busybodies care about moral correction, and that there is nothing "mutual" in the way they practice it. Moreover, mutual correction seems to run headlong into the view that Christians at all costs must never be "judgmental." But the Church Lady, though she made us laugh, is not the best model of moral and spiritual encouragement we can find. And the view that Christians ought not be judgmental is confused, self-refuting, and flies in the face of both Scripture and the historical teaching of the Church.

Yet there are good reasons for concern about how we are to offer mutual correction. It is complicated business, which if badly handled, can alienate those we care about the most—all in the name of trying to do something good for them. Feelings are likely to get hurt, sometimes irrevocably so. We fret about when and how to say what needs to be said.

And receiving mutual correction is rarely pleasant. We naturally recoil when told we are mistaken or doing something wrong. Having someone call our attention to our sinful, disordered self—that we are acting in ways incongruent with God's design and calling—will likely injure our pride, shock us, or anger us greatly. It is not the kind of message we happily receive.

Despite all of this, however, we must remember that we are called to help each other in times of moral distress. If our pursuit of faithfulness really is the most important thing—and if we see someone in dire straits, with their spiritual good in jeopardy—what good reason can there be for looking the other way? Likewise, we are called to receive mutual correction as well, no matter how painful it seems. While no one is perfect, this fact alone does

not release us from striving to be faithful. And since striving to be faithful is the work of the Church, so must mutual correction be a practice of the Church. If we rarely speak of it, let alone know how to carry it out well, the Church's spiritual wellbeing is seriously undermined.

So how can mutual correction be practiced in a way that is truthful, restorative, and truly encouraging?

First and foremost, mutual correction needs to be offered and received among friends. There are at least two reasons this is so. To begin, it is doubtful that we will receive well and embrace moral counsel or rebuke from persons we only casually know. Our first and legitimate reaction would likely be: what business is this of yours? Even when it is well-intended, such blind moral correction easily can make matters much worse. That is why we have no obligation to admonish everyone whom we suspect is in some state of moral disorder. We are called first to offer correction to those closest to us, for it is our duty to attend to their good in a special way. Only as the opportunity arises (and surely such cases will be rare indeed) should we be concerned with correcting those distantly related to us. We cannot go about trying to right the ways of the whole world.

But there is a second reason that mutual correction needs to be practiced among friends. Mutual correction requires a deep knowledge of one another's character, history, hopes, desires, fears, and struggles. This kind of understanding can only be among friends who truly know one another, who, as Aristotle phrased it, have "tasted the salt together."[1] No mere loose association with one another in so-called community can ground something as important as being able to look a friend in the eye and say: "I care about you enough to tell you that I am worried about you." Without truly knowing one another, we have no idea how even to approach one another, let alone how to receive counsel or rebuke.

Mutual correction requires a deep knowledge of one another's character, history, hopes, desires, fears, and struggles. This understanding can only be among friends who truly know one another, who, as Aristotle put it, have "tasted the salt together."

I think it is fair to conclude that unless mutual correction is offered and received among friends, we have little idea of how our moral and spiritual good might be restored.

But if friendship is the right home for mutual correction, what is required for its faithful practice? One way to answer this question is to envision the virtues that might sustain it. Four virtues deserve special attention: charity, humility, prudence, and courage.

When mutual correction is appropriately motivated, it arises from charity. We are called to help our friends in their time of spiritual peril because we love them, we love God, and we see their moral distress as something that thwarts their true happiness. The elimination of sin is a way of helping our friends live according to what God intends for their life; when we help them to see their present condition correctly, we remove an obstacle to their true happiness. When viewed as an act of love, offering and receiving correction can be clearly seen as fuller expressions of the encouragement we are called to give others. In other words, encouragement may mean saying to our friend not only "I believe in you," but also "Because I love you, I have to tell you that I think you are mistaken." Because we love our friends, we want to do all we can to help them. And because we realize that our friends love us, we must receive their correction with the same spirit it is offered.

It is helpful here to imagine cases in which love is not the root of mutual correction. I might, for instance, point out my friend's moral failings from self-serving motives, perhaps as a way to exercise my power by exposing her mistakes. In this way, if I can catch my friend in a mistake, then I will be able to use that fact against her when it is to my advantage. This is sheer manipulation, hardly the mark of a friendship. Or perhaps I am only too ready to point out the moral shortcomings of my friend because it shifts the attention towards her and covers my own, perhaps more glaring, moral weakness. Even as I seek to expose my friend's sins, I know that my own moral character is disordered, but I am only too eager to shift attention away from me and to my friend. But this is blinding self-deception.

Mutual correction also requires humility because it helps us be clear sighted about our own sin before we attempt to correct someone else. This has nothing to do with being in some kind of morally superior and justifiable position to offer correction to someone else. It has everything to do with the recognition that we cannot focus on our friend's trouble until we first truthfully acknowledge and confront our own sinfulness.

The virtue of humility properly orients our entire moral life. Humility is not false modesty or self-abasement, but rather a deep self-understanding and refusal to base our self-judgment on a winning comparison with others. Of course, in some ways we are different from others; we have comparative strengths and weaknesses. But humble people are neither puffed up by their superiority to other persons, in this or that particular respect, nor spiritually deflated by their inferiority to them, in this or that respect. Humble people—perhaps because they know that they and others are equally creatures of a

loving God—realize their true value does not depend on being better than others. In this sense, Bob Roberts explains, "humility is a psychological principle of independence from others and a necessary ground of genuine fellowship with them, an emotional independence of one's judgments concerning how one ranks vis-à-vis other human beings."[2] This freedom from comparisons allows us to act from an honest self-assessment.

The importance of humility for moral correction should be obvious. When we recognize our place in the created order involves deep equality with other human beings, and we understand how our own striving for God is compromised by sin, then we are likely to have a richer appreciation of the fragility of our own moral character and clearer awareness of the nature of our friend's trouble.

Without humility, we will find ourselves useless to offer any form of spiritual rescue to another. On this very point we do well to recognize that Jesus's teaching about not judging others in Matthew 7:1-5 is not a prohibition of moral correction, but a call to moral self-awareness. Jesus teaches that any attempt to right another's path presupposes that we ourselves have "removed the plank" from our own eyes. Recognizing the sin of our friend and how he might be helped first requires an extraordinary degree of self-knowledge about the condition of our own moral lives; humility helps bring about this clarity of vision. Humility also counters the vice of arrogance. If we are to look first to our own sin and orient ourselves properly to God, we are unlikely to become moral busybodies, constantly at watch for others' moral missteps, incessantly meddling in others' lives all the while unable to see the true state of our own moral character.

Mutual correction should flow from charity. We are called to help our friends in their time of spiritual peril because we love them, we love God, and we see their moral distress as something that thwarts their true happiness.

Next, because mutual correction can be so difficult and complicated, those who offer it must be led by prudence—the wise discernment that enables us to judge well in individual cases about what is to be done. There will always be a question about the manner in which such moral counsel and rebuke correction should be offered. Without careful discernment, one is likely to bungle the attempt to offer even the most soft-spoken advice to a friend. It is not difficult to imagine examples when a failure of prudence spoils efforts that are otherwise well intended.

Perhaps I think a friend is spending too much time with someone whom I know is trying hard to corrupt him, and that he has already, in the company

of this new friend, acted badly and seriously out of character. I want to tell my friend that I worry about him, that the person he is hanging out with, it seems to me, is seriously compromising his character. Sound as my counsel may be, and though it is motivated by charity, it has little chance of the intended effect if I offer it in a way that will embarrass or humiliate my friend. Indeed, prudence may dictate that in certain circumstances, I should not seek to correct my friend; I may well need to let silence speak. In particular, there may be instances in which admonishment might well lead the person being corrected to reject and resent all moral counsel. The risk is not simply that my friend may recoil from my efforts to rebuke him, but that he comes to detest goodness itself.

When Aquinas explains the role of prudence in moral correction, he turns to the step-by-step approach that Jesus teaches in Matthew 18:15-17. Because sin threatens both a person's conscience and his reputation, the first step of moral correction is to appeal to a friend's conscience. Accordingly, we should attempt to correct our friend in private before we involve others. If our friend does not respond to this confidential effort, it is advisable to involve a few others—preferably, other mutual friends—to help call his attention to the sin. Last, and only when all else has failed, such correction should be made in public. This last tactic is the riskiest option of the three, given the danger of alienating our friend so that he ends up turning away not just from our friendship, but from virtue altogether. In all of these steps, Aquinas counsels, "You need to preserve proper distinctions, observing appropriate times, places, and other circumstances, and do everything that you see to be helpful for reforming your brother…."[3] Prudence, therefore, is decisive: charity must be rightly directed towards the aim of helping our friend avoid sin and pursue goodness.

But even if charity, humility, and prudence animate mutual correction, still we must acknowledge just how hard it is simply to give voice to our concerns about a wayward friend. We may remain silent, painfully aware that something needs to be said or done. This was at the heart of my student's fear that "I know I need to do something, but I'm worried that if I say or do the wrong thing, my friend will turn against me, and then what?"

Courage, therefore, seems especially important to overcome the reluctance that may accompany mutual correction, for it allows us to follow reason by removing the obstacles that prevent us from doing what is required. Though courage is often understood as the virtue that combats physical fear in the face of dangers—the greatest of these being death—it applies to all manner of "difficult things," including instances of weakness, moments of indecision, temptation, and perplexity that pervade the moral life.[4] Seen this way, courage is the quintessential virtue for sustaining the Christian moral life's quest for true happiness. Without courage, the charity that rightly motivates our care and concern for a wayward friend may remain hidden, unexpressed. With courage, we can find the voice to speak up, even when it is difficult.

The story of Johnny Cash and June Carter, so brilliantly told in the film *Walk the Line*, is a powerful tale of friendship that offers a captivating example of just this kind of courage strengthening an effort of moral correction. Near the nadir of Johnny Cash's alcohol and drug abuse—when his prolific career was on hold and he was wandering aimlessly through his life—he goes to a bank, hoping to cash a crumpled $24,000 check for the money that he needs to pay the telephone company bill and get his car out of the shop. The bank refuses to cash his check, and in disgust, he tears up the check in front of the bank teller and then sets out on a "love walk" to see June Carter. With chemicals coursing through his veins, he walks for miles to see the woman he says he loves. Carter's career, tied so closely to Cash's success, is on hold because of his addiction. She is living with her parents, and her young children are with her. Cash has come to ask her to marry him. Carter comes out of the house and immediately sizes him up from head to toe. Sobered up somewhat from his walk, Cash's thinking is no clearer than it has been for months. He is adrift, yet he wants her to be his wife.

June Carter could have responded to Johnny Cash in a number of ways. She could have, quite reasonably, gone back inside the house with her children and shut the door and tried to ignore him. She could have, on the other hand, showered him with false encouragement, perhaps reassuring him that everything would be fine, that the tough times in his life would soon be over. She has good reason not to confront him: she and her children are financially dependent on him, and though he is a drug addict and alcoholic, he is still the famous Johnny Cash.

Her response to him is an example of how courage conquers the difficult things; indeed, June Carter's courage has to be enough for both of them. She looks him squarely in the eyes and asks him, "Where is my friend John? Did he get high? Is he incognito? Is he gone? 'Cause I don't like this guy Cash."[5] She calls him to a higher aspiration, a recovery of something he has perhaps forgotten or never realized. Indeed, in the context of the Christian faith they share, she is calling him to see what God truly intends him to be, to turn away from what has now taken hold of his life.

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June Carter is willing to do the hard work of friendship, even in a circumstance that involves great risk. Johnny Cash could have responded quite negatively to her forthright admonishment. He could have become

angry, perhaps violently so. He could have shunned both her and her rebuke, and eventually turned away from the good altogether. Certainly June Carter recognized the risks involved; perhaps she was afraid, though her forthright manner belies fear. Nonetheless, she showed courage that made possible this profound expression of love for Johnny Cash. In this instance, she showed him just how much she loved him and was committed to his good.

Later in the film, as Johnny Cash begins to recover from his substance abuse, he looks tenderly at June Carter and tells her that she must be an angel. She shakes her head and says simply: "I had a friend who needed help. You're my friend."[6]

Such friendship is a profound expression of real encouragement, for it opens us to God's love, which restores all of us, no matter how far we have strayed from his path.

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.3.

2 Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 83.

[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Question On Brotherly Correction*, a 2, in *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, translated by E. M. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211.

[4] See Aquinas's discussion in *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q 123, a 3.

[5] *Walk the Line*, directed by James Mangold (20th Century Fox, 2005).

[6] Ibid.

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Are Emerging Adults "Spiritual but Not Religious"?

BY PATRICIA SNELL HERZOG

The "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) category has been an interesting group for congregations to study despite its not being a statistical majority. Sociologically, however, it is far more intriguing to concentrate on the entire range and consider the membership implications of each of the four types of emerging adults.

Are American emerging adults—those young people who are between adolescence and adulthood—"spiritual but not religious" (SBNR)? The quick answer is yes and no. The longer answer is of course a bit more complicated. One of the great benefits of a sociological analysis is the categorization of complex phenomena. Emerging adult spirituality and religiosity is exactly that—a complex phenomenon. In fact, emerging adulthood itself is a complex phenomenon, fraught with multiple transitions and contradictions. Thus, I here complicate and simplify this question by offering instead the following typology of religious and spiritual combinations: RAAS (religious and also spiritual), RBNS (religious but not spiritual), SBNR (spiritual but not religious), and NRNS (not religious, not spiritual). The answer is that there are emerging adults in each of these four types, such that *some* emerging adults *are* SBNR and *others are not*.

SBNR emerging adults do not appear to compose the largest majority of emerging adults, nor do they appear to be particularly on the rise. However, they have gained a great deal of attention in popular and religious media for, I think, two primary reasons. One is that they offer a warning to those

in faith communities who think most emerging adults are religious (i.e. RAAS or RBNS), and two is that they offer some hope to those in faith communities who think most emerging adults are non-religious (i.e. NRNS). The SBNR category is thus a substantively interesting group despite not being a statistical majority. Sociologically, however, I find it far more intriguing to concentrate on the entire range and consider the membership implications of each of the four types of emerging adults.

RAAS: RELIGIOUS AND ALSO SPIRITUAL

Beginning with the category that most people of faith are familiar with, religious-and-also-spiritual emerging adults are what Christian Smith and I in *Souls in Transition: The Religious Lives of Emerging Adults* term "committed traditionalists." We write that these emerging adults

> embrace a strong religious faith, whose beliefs they can reasonably well articulate and which they actively practice. Personal commitment to faith is a significant part of their identities and moral reasoning, and they are at least somewhat regularly involved in some religious group.[1]

Based on our qualitative interviews and their connection to our broader nationally-representative survey sample, we estimate that this group may constitute only about fifteen percent or less of emerging adults. To some people of faith, this statistic can be quite startling. By nature of the principle of reference groups, most people regularly involved in faith communities interact with others who are regularly involved in faith communities, resulting in a belief most people of faith are committed traditionalists. However, that is not the case.

In our collective experiences interviewing emerging adults for the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), we as interviewers are consistently struck by how few and far between these RAAS emerging adults are. In fact, in the fourth wave of NSYR data collection—which we are still in the process of systematically analyzing—our sense during our debrief meeting was that they are even more difficult to find now than they were in the previous wave (perhaps now constituting less than fifteen percent). Maybe their membership will rebound once they move into later adulthood and have children, as other studies have suggested. However, even then many of them would seem to be tending toward some of the other categories I will describe further below. While it is too early to predict that entirely, my own suspicion is that this group is small and generally in a slow state of decline. That is partly because this category has a high bar for participation, which most emerging adults no longer have.

To be a committed traditionalist, it appears there are six "recipes" of social characteristic combinations that are necessary for maintaining a strong religious and spiritual faith throughout the emerging adult years. We found that four of these recipes call for strong parental faith. Thus, to the extent

that previous generations have declined in their regular service attendance, subsequent generations will decline in their participation as well, unless they have the ingredients of the other two remaining recipes. Even then, one of the remaining recipes still requires social support through other adult members of a congregation. This effectively means that all but one of the recipes for RAAS emerging adults require a strong religiously-committed social fabric, which we already know is rare and potentially fraying. In summary, it does not appear that RAAS emerging adults compose an entirely solid ground for persistent membership. Even to the extent that they do, faith communities would do well to support parents and other members of congregations to actively sustain and cultivate the faith of these emerging adults.

RBNS: RELIGIOUS BUT NOT SPIRITUAL

Another category that people of faith often encounter is emerging adults who are relatively religious but not entirely spiritual. These are the emerging adults that we in *Souls in Transition* labeled "selective adherents" and described as those who: "believe and perform certain aspects of their religious traditions but neglect and ignore others," are "less serious and consistent about their faith," and "compartmentalize their experiences" by "partitioning them into religious and various nonreligious segments."[2] RBNS emerging adults have typically been raised in religiously-attending households and often have adopted many tenets of their faith tradition—mostly, it appears, from the habit of regularly participating throughout their childhood. However, they do not seem to have the same level of personal spiritual connection to these practices. In many cases, it appears these emerging adults mostly continue to practice their faith due to their social commitments, not wanting to overtly "rock the boat" with their families by actively declining any aspects of their family religious heritage. Rather, they continue to practice certain elements, especially those which tend to conflict the least with other mainstream American values, and discard the rest.

It appears there are six "recipes" of social characteristic combinations that are necessary for maintaining a strong religious faith throughout the emerging adult years. All but one of the recipes for RAAS emerging adults (religious-and-also-spiritual) require a strong religiously-committed social fabric.

Similar to RAAS emerging adults, the existence and persistence of RBNS emerging adults seems to rest primarily on the shoulders of the parents and other social connections that exert pressure to continue overt religious practices,

at least sometimes. We estimate that roughly thirty percent of American emerging adults are already in this RBNS category. In addition, this group can act as a gateway for RAAS emerging adults to find their way to less committed forms as their involvement may waiver during their emerging adult transitions.

I personally find this group to be the one in need of most attention by faith communities, since the fact that they are still at least somewhat religiously active means that they are already from time to time within the walls of existing religious congregations. Most of what appears to sustain membership in these first two categories is their social connections to family or to people in faith communities. Thus, continuing their membership over time is especially contingent on not just getting them within religious walls but having something of substance offered once they are there to connect them to others within the congregation. This cannot simply be traditional forms of involvement designed in an era when people moved directly from adolescence to full adulthood. Marriage counseling, parenting classes, or any of the adult forms of programming that congregations typically offer do not appeal to most emerging adults, since many have not yet reached those stages. Furthermore, many do not find religious homes on college campus, and most emerging adults are past college for many years before settling down into later adulthood.

SBNR: SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS

Spiritual but not religious are what we in *Souls in Transition* called "spiritually open." We described these emerging adults as "not personally very committed to a religious faith" but "nonetheless receptive to and at least mildly interested in some spiritual or religious matters."[3] While this group receives a good deal of attention, our estimate is that only approximately fifteen percent of emerging adults are SBNR. Some studies claim that this group is on the rise, and we did see some evidence of increase from 2008 to 2012. However, as of yet it does not appear to be a rapidly growing category or a statistical majority.

Perhaps because of their appeal as a way to increase membership, many claims exist about SBNRs that result in a number of mixed messages about this group. Part of the confusion is that SBNRs are themselves not a unified group. They have many important differences. Despite these distinctions, there are some aspects of emerging adults that are common across the different types of SBNRs. For instance, most SBNR emerging adults do believe in some form of a higher power. They also typically find it to be less important to commit to any specific theological tenets regarding the nature of that higher power or other implications of believing in it for life choices. Many of these emerging adults did attend religious services at one point in time, often at least periodically with their family during childhood. However, they have since either lost interest in religion or specifically become antithetical to the religious approaches to which they were exposed.

Some SBNRs are quite hostile to organized religion as a whole and think that it is more ideal for people to hold personal spiritual beliefs that are not religiously tied. This kind of SBNR can view religious attendance as a sign of weakness, saying that they do not need a faith community to sustain their religiosity. Other types of SBNRs are people who have no antipathy to organized religion, but they also hold no commitment to any particular form of religiosity. This type of SBNR emerging adult finds at least some truth in many different types of religions and prefers to not get "bogged down" in the details of different theologies. They instead compile a universal version of spirituality that is perceived to transcend various world religions. Of course, in many cases this "detraditioned" spirituality is still highly Christocentric, often adhering to the Golden Rule philosophy of most mainline Protestant churches.

While the two previous categories (RAAS and RBNS) are mostly important for considering how to maintain membership, the SBNR category perhaps has the most appeal in terms of thinking about potential conversions, as they can seem "ripe for the picking," so to speak. However, it is important for faith communities to recognize that not all SBNRs are created equally. Some are spiritual and friendly to religions of all kinds, while others are spiritual and unfriendly to organized religions of all kinds. Appealing to these very different types of SBNRs requires treating them distinctly. To emerging adults who have had negative experiences with organized religion, it appears from our process of interviewing that they have strong desires to be heard and understood in their anti-religious stances. It could be that providing an understanding ear may help to ease the allergy to organized religion, but it is not entirely clear if that is enough. For many, they would likely need to be convinced that religious institutions are about more than simply increasing their numbers (or their dollars), as many of these SBNRs think of religious organizations as simply Ponzi schemes.

Most spiritual-but-not-religious (SBNR) emerging adults believe in a higher power. Many attended religious services at one point in time, but have either lost interest in them or become antithetical to the religious approaches to which they were exposed.

Another hurtle in appealing to this group of emerging adults is that even if they do not have strong reactions against organized religion, they often do not see the value of it. Many of them have come, for various reasons, to believe that they do not *need* a social community to sustain their faith. They often describe themselves as being able to sustain their personal

commitment without the aid of any outward forms of religiosity. While this type of SBNR does not have any problem with people participating in religious activities, they tend to "other-ise" religiosity and say that it is fine if "others" need religious communities, but they do not. Therefore, appealing to this brand of SBNR emerging adult would require somehow evidencing the ways in which a faith community can sustain a life of faith that personal spirituality cannot do alone. And again, as is the case for RBNS, they would likely need activities geared especially for emerging adults if they were to decide to participate.

A third type of SBNR that can be mixed together in mainstream conceptions with the previous two is those emerging adults who are quite friendly to religious tenets but see value in many or all existing world religions. These SBNRs are in many ways a "different animal" than those who are spiritual but antithetical to religion or those who are spiritual but indifferent to religion. They are instead pro-religion<u>S</u> with a capital S, meaning they believe in the existence of a higher power and think that nearly all religions are describing this same power. To this type of SBNR it is less important to know whether the higher power should be called God, or Allah, or the Universe, as it is simply to acknowledge that some sort of power exists and all human institutions of religion more or less describe this same energy. This type of SBNR shares a great deal in common with agnostics, but does not tend to have trouble saying that they know a higher power exists; rather they believe that religious organizations may not be able to fully understand the higher power and quibble over (mostly meaningless) misinterpretations of it. In this sense, these SBNRs can perceive faith communities as the blind men with the elephant, all having some true subjective experiences while also all being false in understanding the totality of the higher power. Attempting to grow membership by appealing to this type of SBNR would thus appear to require some sort of convincing argument as to how any one particular religion could better speak to the elephant as a whole, without simply sounding like one of the blind men believing it knows the elephant based off one part.

NRNS: NOT RELIGIOUS, NOT SPIRITUAL

Last but not least, another increasingly-recognized category is emerging adults who are not religious or spiritual. This group is often referred to as "nones," and many claim that NRNSs are on the rise. In *Souls in Transition*, we delineated three types of what I consider to be not religious or spiritual: "religiously indifferent," "religiously disconnected," and "irreligious."[4] Combining these three groups, about forty percent of emerging adults could be classified as NRNS. Of these, the most interesting for increasing membership is probably the religiously disconnected emerging adults. This is because, like the two types of SBNRs described above, the religiously indifferent and irreligious are already fairly antithetical to

considering religion as either interesting or good. These emerging adults have usually had long histories of finding religion to be something that specifically brought negative experiences or that was simply boring. They would be very likely to encounter any person of faith as someone who is different than themselves and to have engrained scripts for separating themselves from anything considered religious. That is not to say it is impossible to increase membership in these types of emerging adults, only that it would seem to require deep, sustained involvement and some sort of life-altering experience.

The third type of NRNS is somewhat different, however. Emerging adults who are religiously disconnected struck us as having shockingly low exposure to people of faith in any context. Somehow they have managed to exist in a relatively non-religious reference group without parents or anyone meaningful in their lives having any interactions with religious organizations. Of the NRNS, they therefore seem to be potentially the easiest to appeal to, as there is not necessarily something negatively patterned against organized religion, merely an absence. Of course, that initial absence does not exist in a vacuum, and it may be hard for these NRNSs to overcome the nonexistence of religion in all other aspects of their lives. Yet we did get the sense that for at least a handful of this already small group (approximately five percent of emerging adults), their religiosity may look quite different if anyone in their lives ever simply invited them to a religious activity.

CONCLUSION

In summary, are emerging adults SBNR? Yes and no. About fifteen percent are, but that group is distributed across three quite different types of SBNRs, with distinct implications for growth in membership rates. Religiously-disconnected NRNS also offer a potential for increasing membership. However, I think one of the main messages from the National Study of Youth and Religion research is the importance of focusing membership efforts first on the RAAS and RBNS. Religiously-attending emerging adults do not on the whole find that their faith communities have something to offer them during this unique life stage. While there are some notable exceptions, most emerging adults who do participate in religious communities find themselves to be in between the traditional

Religiously-attending emerging adults do not on the whole find that their faith communities have something to offer them during this unique life stage. While there are some notable exceptions, most who do participate in religious communities find themselves to be left out of traditional church programs.

programming offered for youth and that offered for more established adults through marriage, childrearing, and other later adulthood statuses.

One of the more tragic elements of American religiosity, in my opinion, is the extent to which most religious congregations do not offer anything—services, programs, or activities of any kind—that appeal to and are specifically designed to target emerging adults. It is rare that religious congregations even acknowledge the life stage of emerging adulthood and how it differs from the needs of adolescence and adulthood, let alone offer something specifically for this life stage. The trouble then is that there are many emerging adults already in faith communities all over the country who still think they should keep coming, at least sometimes, and yet find very little designed for and connecting them when they do come. It should not be surprising then that over time some emerging adults may move from RAAS to RBNS, and some from RBNS to SBNR. Perhaps then faith communities should be less concerned about whether emerging adults are SBNR and instead whether emerging adults are SUBR: severely underserved by religion.

NOTES

1 Smith, Christian with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 166.
2 Ibid., 167.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 168.

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Tending Christ's Body

BY AMY EVERETT

When we receive the grace of fellowship with Christ, the spirit of Christ calls us to tend to and feed one another. How we tend to each other (or not) as members of the same body, the Body of Christ, is personal to Jesus Christ.

The body of Christ has many members, and the disciple Peter is certainly one of the more action-oriented ones. We see this in the third and final post-resurrection story in John 21:1-19. After the disciples have fished all night with no yield, a stranger on the beach encourages them to cast their net again. To the disciples' surprise, "they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish" (v. 6). John recognizes the stranger on the shore as the risen Jesus and exclaims to Peter and the others, "It is the Lord!" (v. 7) Hearing this good news, Peter jumps into the sea and swims to Jesus while the other disciples bring in the boat and the net loaded with fish.

After the disciples and Jesus share breakfast, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter, with increasing angst over Jesus' repeated questions, answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Each time Peter answers in the affirmative, Jesus follows with the command, "Then feed/tend my sheep" (vv. 15-17). Peter had denied Jesus three times before Jesus was crucified. In these exchanges, Jesus restores Peter's fellowship with him. Jesus teaches Peter that if he loves him, then Peter will take care of the brothers and sisters with whom he shares this fellowship.

Peter's professed love of Christ was bound to his love for Christ's people. Our fellowship with Christ is bound to our care for one another. We are mutually interdependent members of the Body of Christ. As the Apostle Paul explains, "If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Paul's conversion story in Acts 9:1-19 reveals a great deal about our mutual interdependence as the Body of Christ; his first lesson of Christian faith is the inter-abiding love between Christ and his disciples. When he was known as Saul, he had been "breathing threats and murder against disciples of the Lord" (v. 1) and proactively preparing to bring those disciples bound to Jerusalem. But on his way to Damascus a bright flash of light from the sky stops Saul in his tracks and a voice from heaven asks, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (v. 4) Trembling on the ground, Saul pleas, "Who are you, Lord?" and the voice answers, "I am Jesus, *whom you are persecuting*" (v. 5). Saul's persecutions of the Church were personal to Jesus.

Saul was not just conspiring against a band of misguided Jews, but against Jesus the Christ, now exalted in heaven, and yet present with and within his disciples. No wonder Paul could later say to the Athenians that we "live and move and have our being" in Christ (Acts 17:28), because he learns this truth in the unforgettable moment he hears the voice of Jesus speaking to him on the road to Damascus.

In one of his parables Jesus points toward this post-resurrection relationship that unites him with his disciples. He imagines the Son of Man, who "comes in his glory" to judge the nations, saying, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Christ is present in and among his gathered community of disciples, the Church, the body of Christ.

After Saul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ, he cannot see for three days and must rely on the disciple Ananias to lay hands on him, restore his sight, and baptize him. Ananias knows and fears Saul's reputation, but, at the Lord's instruction, he helps Saul anyway. Ananias, a member of the Body of Christ, abides with Christ, hears his instruction, and obeys. He calls Saul "brother," affirming that against all odds that the Lord has bound them as members of a common family (Acts 9:10-17).

Our biological ties to family are so strong that they certainly shape who we are. We forget, however, that being a member of the body of Christ gives us new, ever-expanding familial loyalties. When my grandfather lowered my mother into the water at her baptism, he said, "I baptize you my little daughter and raise you my sister in Christ." We often say "blood runs thicker than water," but our baptismal waters reverse the flow, and we, like Paul and Ananias, become brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus touches on this truth when he asks, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and pointing to his disciples, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my

brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:47-50). Jesus' claim is not exclusive to Mary and his brothers, but is radically inclusive of all who would repent and follow him.

In my Baptist tradition, a belief in the autonomy of the local church tempts us to narrow our Christian family to the members of our local congregation. However, the Christian household extends far beyond the bounds of our local communities and chosen denominations. Just a quick search for churches around my neighborhood reveals a rich diversity of denominations: Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Non-Denominational, Pentecostal, and so on. In spite of the many differences among us and against all odds, our baptism in Christ binds us as members of one body. When we recite together "I believe in the holy, catholic church" from the Apostle's Creed at the church where I serve, we counteract this tendency to limit our embrace of those with whom we share fellowship in Christ.

With this catholic perspective in mind, our local communities are important workshops of faith where we learn, remember, and practice our dependence on Christ and interdependence on one another. Just as denominations have differences among them, people in our local communities have diverse personalities, opinions, virtues, vices, and needs, and Christ calls us to tend to each person with love.

To address divisions within Corinthian church, Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ. He explains,

> those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect.... God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.
>
> *1 Corinthians 12:23-25*

In my Baptist tradition, belief in the autonomy of the local church tempts us to narrow our Christian family to the members of our local congregation. But the Christian household extends far beyond the bounds of our local communities and chosen denominations.

This teaching is consistent with Jesus' instruction that "the least among all of you is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). You will recall that Jesus says this to the disciples who are arguing over which of them is the greatest and most

worthy of praise. Jesus and Paul are not saying that we should pity the "least" among us, but that we should not consider ourselves to be more deserving of God's love than anyone else. This will free us to tend to and care for each member of the body of Christ.

In Christian faith, difference and disagreement can be sources for celebration because they give the occasion to depend on Christ for unity and fellowship. As we consent and cooperate with his presence and action in our lives, we serve one another and advocate for each other's interests above our own. Against all odds, when we submit in service and love to one another, we come to know the grace of fellowship beyond difference and dislike. Conversely, when we know the grace of fellowship in Christ, we see with the eyes of Christ and submit to and serve one another in humility. When we love Christ, we tend to one another. When we tend to one another, we love Christ.

In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus says: "This is my body," "This is my blood," "Do this in remembrance of me" before the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-20, Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). But in the Gospel of John, rather than those words of institution, Jesus instructs the disciples, "So, if I, your Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (13:14). When Jesus teaches his disciples to wash one another's feet, just as when he instructs Peter to "feed/tend my sheep" and when he confronts Saul on the road to Damascus, Jesus is pointing to the same important truth: our fellowship with him is always bound to our fellowship with one another.

In receiving the grace of fellowship with Christ, the spirit of Christ calls us to tend to and feed each other one another. How we tend to or do not tend to each other as members of the same body, the body of Christ, is personal to Jesus Christ.

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Rethinking Re-Baptism: What It Means to Be a Member

BY JIM SOMERVILLE

God loves us and wants us for his own. At some point we may be able to apprehend God's grace and accept it for the gift that it is. But these are two ends of a single continuum, and while some Christians focus on the giving of grace through infant baptism, others focus on the receiving of grace through believer's baptism.

I had been pastor of First Baptist Church in Richmond, VA, for exactly two days when I learned that we did not welcome members from other denominations, at least not without re-baptizing them. It was at the regular Tuesday morning staff meeting, when we were reviewing new members. I looked at the card one of them had filled out and saw a note penciled in the margin: "Needs to be baptized."

"What is this?" I asked.

The staff member who had penciled the note said, "Well, she is coming from a Methodist church."

"So?"

"So…it's our policy to baptize people who have not been immersed."

And that is how it started—a two-year campaign to change our membership policy so that committed Christians from other denominations could join First Baptist Church without having to be "re-baptized."

At least, that is what I called it.

But other people didn't. When I asked my predecessor why the church re-baptized Christians from other denominations he said, "Because they have not been baptized yet. They have only been sprinkled!" And that was

the first of several conversations about the Greek word *baptizo*, and how it means "to plunge under water, almost violently" (my predecessor was not the only one to point that out). But that was only half the argument. In addition to the *mode* of baptism there was the matter of *sequence*. "Believer's baptism" as understood by most Baptists, was by *immersion* (mode) *after* a profession of faith (sequence). And as they understood it, believer's baptism was what set Baptists apart from other kinds of Christians—Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians, for example—who (as they put it) "sprinkled a little water on a baby's head and called that baptism." And even if it were, they asked, "How could it be *believer's* baptism? The child does not know its own name yet, much less the name of Jesus!"

While these arguments made good sense when we were talking about how Baptists make converts, they did not make sense when we were talking about Pam—an English woman who came to know Christ as a university student when she spent a summer working at an Anglican Church day camp. After getting to know some Christians and learning what they believed, she told the priest she wanted to be baptized, and after questioning her at some length to determine her sincerity, he scheduled her baptism for the following Sunday morning. During that service he poured water over her head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a time-honored mode of baptism known as *affusion*. Pam was so enthusiastic about her newfound faith that after graduation she went to the mission field in Africa, where she met and married an Anglican priest. The two of them moved to Richmond in the mid-1980's and began to attend First Baptist. When Pam asked about joining the church, she was told that she would need to be baptized.

"But I have been baptized," she replied.

"Have you been immersed?"

"Well, no…."

"Then you have not been baptized!"

Her baptism had come in the right sequence (after a profession of faith), but not in the right mode (by immersion), and for that reason she was denied membership. Rather, she was denied full membership. Pam was welcomed as a "Watchcare Member," and informed that she could enjoy all the privileges of membership except: she could not vote in church business meetings, she could not serve on any decision-making committee, and she could not serve as a deacon or a trustee.[1] Again and again she was encouraged to be immersed by people who wanted to nominate her as a deacon, or a trustee, or a committee member. "Come on," they urged, "what's the big deal?" But for Pam it was a big deal: to be re-baptized would be to repudiate her previous baptism. She felt just as strongly about her experience of affusion as they felt about their experience of immersion, and it raised the question: How important is the mode?

Practically speaking, is there any real difference between being plunged under water and having water poured over you? If we were speaking practically, the answer would be no, but baptism is not a practical matter, it is a symbolic matter, and for Baptists the symbol of immersion is important. They refer to Romans 6:3-4 in which Paul says:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Baptism thus becomes a drama in which we identify with Christ by participating—symbolically—in his death, burial, and resurrection. And, practically speaking, immersion serves that purpose better than affusion. Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian minister, calls immersion a "better symbol" than the alternative, and adds, "Going under symbolizes the end of everything about your life that is less than human. Coming up again symbolizes the beginning in you of something strange and new and hopeful. You can breathe again."[2]

But earlier in the same essay Buechner admits, "Baptism consists of getting dunked or sprinkled. Which technique is used matters about as much as whether you pray kneeling or standing on your head."[3] And although Paul speaks of baptism as a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection in Romans 6, to the Corinthian Christians he describes it as a symbol of coming clean: "You were washed," he says to those former wrongdoers, "you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:11). "If it is washing that we are talking about," Pam might ask, "can I not get just as clean by taking a shower as by taking a bath?" Well, yes, practically speaking, but when it comes to baptism we speak symbolically, and for Baptists the symbol of immersion is important. Even so, if we can recognize that Paul himself thought of baptism in more than one way, we might be able to comprehend why there is more than one mode of baptism among the many Christians of the world.[4]

For Baptists the mode of immersion is important. Even so, if we recognize that Paul himself thought of baptism in more than one way, we might be able to comprehend why there is more than one mode of baptism among the many Christians of the world.

And this brings us to the matter of sequence. Is it critical that we believe *before* we are baptized? Or is it possible to do it the other way around? Pam had done it the "right" way, but there were other Watchcare members in the church who had grown up in Christian traditions where infants were baptized by sprinkling and later confirmed, usually around the age of twelve or thirteen. Kevin, for example, shared his story in a public forum, telling the church that when he was confirmed in the Methodist church of his childhood he had a powerful experience of God's grace, and an almost palpable sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit.[5] Like Pam, he did not want to repudiate that experience by being re-baptized. As the conversation continued at First Baptist Church, I began to think about a "continuum" of grace in which we recognize that even before a child is born—and before she has done one thing right or wrong—God loves her and wants her for his own. At some point—maybe around the age of twelve or thirteen—that child may be able to apprehend God's grace, and accept it for the gift that it is. But these two things are simply the two ends of a single continuum, and while some Christians focus on the *giving* of grace through infant baptism, others focus on the *receiving* of grace through believer's baptism.

In the end, I asked the deacons if we could change our membership policy to allow committed Christians from other traditions (those who had been both baptized and confirmed) to join the church without being re-baptized. The deacons formed a sub-committee that studied the matter for more than a year, eventually coming back with a recommendation to change the membership policy. That recommendation was discussed at length in two subsequent deacons' meetings, but when it was put to a vote, 80% of those present voted in favor of it, shocking some of our members who feared we "wouldn't be a Baptist church anymore." Plans for a church-wide vote in late spring of 2010 were put on hold until the early fall, both to ensure good attendance at the meeting and to let tempers cool down a bit. Several public "listening sessions" were held during this time simply to let members say what they needed to say. And then, on September 19, 2010, after an hour of discussion in a packed sanctuary, the church voted to approve the change in our membership policy by a solid two-thirds majority.

We did not have a stampede of people coming down the aisle to join the church under our new policy as I might have hoped, but the very next week Kevin came forward to join the church as a full member, and a few weeks later Pam did the same. Neither of them was required to be immersed.

Both have turned out to be extraordinary members.

NOTES

1 In other words, a Watchcare member could participate in all church activities, even communion, but could not participate in decision-making.

2 Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, revised and expanded edition (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993 [1973]), 6.

3 Ibid.

4 I have heard of Christians in the Sahara Desert baptizing new believers in sand because they did not have water. The *Didache*, also called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,* in the late first century or early second century recommends baptizing in running water. "If this be not obtainable, then other water is allowed, cold rather than warm; if only a small amount is available, then pour water thrice upon the head." (Quoted in J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965], 103). Apparently the mode is not the main thing.

5 This was during the first of two "Holy Conversations" held at First Baptist Church to discuss the issue of baptism and church membership. I had simply asked those who had come to our church from other traditions to talk about their experience of becoming Christian. This was Kevin's response.

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How is the Body Ailing?

BY JEFFREY W. CARY

Many people today believe that the church in America, in almost all its expressions, is suffering; the Body is ailing. The three books under review here provide both diagnosis and treatment. Each offers a strong call for a more robust ecclesiology, emphasizing especially the Church's holiness and catholicity.

Many people today believe that the church in America, in almost all its expressions, is suffering; the Body is ailing. Despite a widespread agreement concerning the fact of illness, careful studies given to pathology and course of treatment are still needed. The three books under review here can be read as attempts at both diagnosis and treatment. Each offers a strong call for a more robust ecclesiology within American Christianity, emphasizing especially the Church's holiness and catholicity. None of these authors flinch in the face of the gravity of the American church's diseased state, but neither do they despair. Each speaks out of the conviction that there is hope for improvement, a hope born out of the conviction that the gospel is after all true, and therefore hopelessness is not a viable option.

In *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2013, 264 pp., $16.99), G. Jeffrey MacDonald locates consumerism as one of the most pressing cancers ailing the body of Christ. His thesis is simple: congregations catering to consumerist audiences have a severely reduced capacity to facilitate substantial transformation of character, a task he places at the core of the Church's mission. The Church does not exist to satisfy consumerist desires but to transform the desires of its "customers," a task he repeatedly labels "saving souls." Using numerous concrete examples along the way, MacDonald demonstrates how low-cost catering to superficial consumer demands has left churches impotent to

facilitate genuine transformation and, instead, has them creating niche interest groups rather than anything approaching genuine catholicity. MacDonald is not bashful in his diagnosis or in naming names along the way, placing several specific churches and church leaders under the microscope.

There is nothing especially unique in MacDonald's critique of ecclesial consumerism. What is perhaps novel is his proposal for treatment, which noticeably does not include seeking to eradicate the disease. In his view, consumerism is so deeply established that the Church must work within the structures of consumerism to return the Church to its mission of transforming desires. He appeals primarily to the laity to use their leverage as consumers to demand activities, classes, and sermons that will actually lead to transformation. As his primary example, he highlights the laity in the ancient church who bore much of the burden for the integrity of the Church and who chose their leaders on the basis of who could lead them to become more virtuous.

Aside from perhaps too selective and simple a reading of the ancient laity's role, MacDonald's appeal for congregants to use their consumer leverage to force change is questionable. First, MacDonald's proposal assumes a substantial enough number of people whose desires are well ordered to leverage this kind of change. Yet according to his argument, that is precisely what the disease of consumerism seems to have made impossible, though he suggests there are growing numbers of people expressing such concerns. Second, one might ask what it means for consumers to use leverage, which is the language of coercion, including an implied threat: "If you don't do it my way, I'll leave." If the goal of Christian living is transformation into the image of Christ, as MacDonald repeatedly asserts, shouldn't the means to the goal fit the character of the goal itself? Must we capitulate to the language and practice of consumerism by taking an "if you can't beat'em, join'em" strategy?

Aside from these questions about method, MacDonald's is a strong call for substantial change. He expresses hope that American Christians could respond positively to a message of costly sacrifice as the path to transformation, since they know high-cost sacrifice in so many other areas such as sports and long work hours. He wisely includes the warning that a high-cost orientation does not necessarily lead to transformation; it sometimes leads to prideful legalism rather than hearts that bear the fruits of the Spirit. Still, he believes it is important for churches to call for more costly sacrifice as an antidote to the corrosive effects of consumerism.

Although many are diagnosing the disease of ecclesial consumerism, and at a far more nuanced level, MacDonald's book still has a role to play. First, it is written for a lay readership and could prove useful in guided reading groups within a congregational context. Second, it is peppered with anecdotes, statistics, and stories illustrating not only diseased churches but churches effectively limping toward healing. Third, it concludes in a hopeful key that the cancer may not be terminal, which is important for those who believe the gospel is true.

In *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church*, Theopolitical Visions 11 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 204 pp., $22.00), Michael Budde diagnoses another deteriorating disease in the American church: ailing allegiance. This book is a collection of occasional essays and lectures that come together coherently around the organizing theme of "ecclesial solidarity." Ecclesial solidarity names "the conviction that 'being a Christian' is one's primary and formative loyalty, the one that contextualizes and defines the legitimacy of other claimants on allegiance and conscience" (p. 3). Budde's contention is that the American church has allowed itself to be subordinated, especially by the state, such that it has come to play a domesticated chaplaincy role at best. Baptism should mark entry into a new kind of people along the lines of an ethnic group (e.g., 1 Peter 2:9) whose primary allegiance is to Christ. American Christianity, however, has allowed baptism to become spiritualized and subsumed under supposedly more fundamental allegiances such as patriotic or ethnic ties. Budde's central argument is that Christianity will become increasingly irrelevant unless it reclaims its distinctiveness according to which the "borders of baptism" delineate a transnational people who stand in the world as a prototype of reconciled humanity; in other words, it is an argument for catholicity.

For many Christians, national solidarity would trump ecclesial solidarity. Michael Budde says one of the most pressing ecclesiological concerns right now is the "converting of the baptized" so that being a disciple trumps being a citizen of the state.

Budde broadly sketches his vision of ecclesial solidarity in the opening two chapters. The remaining chapters seek to flesh out this vision through a variety of issues facing contemporary American Christians such as immigration, politics, racial makeup of churches, corporate practices, and several others.

Two chapters illustrate how he specifically applies "ecclesial solidarity." Chapter five deals with the question of immigration. Budde reports on a bill passed by the Oklahoma legislature in 2008 that made it illegal to knowingly transport illegal immigrants and made it more difficult for them to get jobs or receive governmental services. He then relays the story of a Catholic bishop who wrote a letter to the churches in his diocese rejecting the bill as immoral and informing these churches that their diocese would make available all its charitable resources to suffering illegal immigrants as if to Christ himself. And in the case that illegal

immigrants with children were arrested, the church would take responsibility for the welfare of their children. Budde concludes:

> Things like this serve as a vivid reminder that when it's self-aware, the Church is larger than any nation, more diverse than any region, more deeply rooted in the life of the poor than any other entity that would claim us. In a global perspective, it's the Church that is truly the polity that makes one out of the many (*e pluribus unum*, and all that); states, countries, ethnicities, tribes, and classes look like sectarian enclaves in comparison. (p. 89)

There are many Christians in this situation for whom national solidarity would trump ecclesial solidarity. As a result, Budde says one of the most pressing ecclesiological concerns right now is the "converting of the baptized" so that being a disciple trumps being a citizen of the state.

In a related way, chapter ten takes up the topic of treason. Americans have been formed to give unreflective assent to the notion of patriotic loyalty to country, doing almost anything to avoid the charge of treason. Budde points out that the earliest Christians did not think of Rome as being *their* empire, and although relieved when not being persecuted, they certainly were not surprised by charges of treason when they came. Budde asserts that a Church seeking to be faithful to the gospel knows that "'treason' is an irremovable possibility of a robust ecclesiology that 'seeks first the Kingdom'" (p. 164).

Like MacDonald, while Budde's diagnosis is sobering, his prognosis is hopeful. He believes that the contemporary scene of advancing globalization is leading to an increased transnational consciousness and changing notions of sovereignty as it relates to states. These transnational movements may serve to loosen nationalist tendencies that have crippled proper Christian allegiance, and they may provide new opportunities for American Christians to rediscover a more catholic social identity whose borders are as wide as the transnational borders of baptism.

Similar to Budde's book, William T. Cavanaugh's *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011, 208 pp., $18.00) is a collection of previously published articles that come together beautifully around a tightly organized thesis. Over the breadth of these essays, Cavanaugh argues against the commonly held notion that secularization has led to a decline in religion. He argues, instead, that devotion traditionally located within the Western church has slowly migrated to the nation-state which took over and secularized theological concepts and constructed itself as a kind of savior capable of demanding ultimate allegiance. Over time, the nation-state

effectively subordinated the Church, relegating the Church's proper influence to the realm of "religion" (understood as that which is spiritual and private), whereas the state oversees the "political" realm. Cavanaugh adamantly rejects the separation of religion and politics as separate spheres governed by separate entities, because it has led Christians into a confusion of primary allegiance. Similar to Budde, Cavanaugh argues repeatedly and in various ways that the Church is its own form of visible politics and must not allow itself to be subordinated under a nation-state that (mistakenly) presents itself as being more universal in scope.

One of Cavanaugh's great strengths is that his diagnosis of the Church includes a careful history of the disease's inception and progression. Cavanaugh courageously challenges established and highly revered claims and myths about the modern nation-state. The best example of this counter narration occurs in the opening chapter entitled "'Killing for the Telephone Company': Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good." The nation-state is often said to have arisen naturally out of society and to maintain a limited role within it, part of which is to protect and promote the common good. Cavanaugh shows through careful historical analysis that the modern state did not arise naturally out of the pursuit of the common good but rather was constructed through the centralization of power by dominant groups who violently gathered resources for themselves from the general population. The state then created "society" by absorbing rights and responsibilities that once belonged to a variety of special groups and creating artificial boundaries, increasing its sovereignty over a monolithic space and presenting itself as the keeper of the common good that could demand sacrifice of those within its bounds benefitting from that service. But as Cavanaugh argues, the nation-state cannot possibly be the keeper of a truly common good. He urges an alternative vision along the lines of Augustine's "two cities," according to which Church and state are two cities mapped not onto space but onto time.

In Cavanaugh's view, the American church must assert its own political identity by resisting the artificial borders and idolatrous claims to universality (i.e., catholicity) made by states. Several times throughout these essays he returns to the point that the early church chose the term *ekklesia* to describe itself rather than words that indicated particular groups within a larger whole, such as *koinon* or *collegium*. The term *ekklesia* has its roots in God's history with Israel, who served as the primary and visible location of God's saving action within the world. Most of Israel's history did not occur in the form of a state in any recognizable sense. Cavanaugh is eager to suggest that in presenting itself as an alternative and visible political reality, the Church is not withdrawing from the world but serving it as a sign of salvation history, partly by reminding the worldly state of its contingent nature.

Clearly, Cavanaugh's is a strong ecclesiology that emphasizes the visibility of the Church's distinct presence in the world. How does such an ecclesiology take seriously the fact of obvious human sinfulness in the

Church, preventing a triumphalist account? Cavanaugh is very sensitive to this important question, and in what is perhaps the most theologically stunning essay in this collection (the penultimate chapter), he seeks to integrate the visible holiness of the Church with its sinfulness in a way that does not simply leave them pulling in opposite directions. He seeks this integration by locating the Church's existence within Chalcedonian Christology that rejects Monophystism (which risks overwhelming Christ's divinity with his humanity) and Nestorianism (which risks separating Christ's divinity and humanity). Chalcedon affirms that Christ fully assumed our sinful humanity without diminishing his divinity, the drama of salvation and the overcoming of sin being played out in one person. How does this impact the Church's self-understanding? Cavanaugh argues that since the Church is the body of Christ (though not Christ himself), its mission is through its visibility. What it makes visible is not purity; that is often lacking. Yet the Church must not resign itself to sinfulness, as if holiness belongs to it only by anticipation. Chacedonian Christology provides a way of addressing sin that does not negate visible holiness. The Church's holiness is visible precisely in repentance for its sin; the Church plays the role of sinful humanity but does so in hope of redemption, making visible the ongoing drama of salvation.

These three books send out a refreshingly strong call for the church in America to face several key facets of its ailing condition. While they are firm, these authors successfully avoid the shrill and snarky tones that often carry this message. Rather, theirs is a call for a robust ecclesiology that is guided by a genuine hope that the church in America can respond to the call to return its full allegiance to the one true and living God.

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Mapping the Life Together

BY DEBRA DEAN MURPHY

Our life together in Christ need not be measured in terms of numerical growth, clever programming, or congregational busyness. The resources reviewed here share the conviction that membership in the body of Christ is a gift to be received and nurtured, and that faithfulness in our common life will not always look like success.

For fifty years, the narrative of decline has dominated the discourse of "church membership" in North America. Decades of loss in oldline Protestantism (the *hemorrhaging* of members, numerical *freefall*—pick your jarring metaphor) have been understood primarily as a matter of negative accounting. The dreary statistics have motivated a range of strategies for upping the numbers: television advertisements, marketing campaigns, church-in-a-pub, and a host of others.

The decline in church membership has many roots, many reasons. There is no shortage of studies, no dearth of opinion on the myriad causes—cultural and ecclesial—for the current state of affairs. A commonplace assumption, more implicit than overt in the conversation, is that expecting too much of potential church members is a deterrent, a disincentive, a turn-off. *Enticing* would-be members, however, with everything from coffee bars and stadium seats to denim-clad pastors and multiple worship "styles," is deemed a sure way to attract and retain the discriminating church shopper/consumer/potential member.

In recent years a counterintuitive idea has gained traction: perhaps people desire more rigor, not less, in their experience of church life. Maybe ancient, corporate disciplines like *lectio divina* or praying the Psalms or confessing our sins to one another have a renewed appeal in this age of digital loneliness. It might be, despite opinion polls and much conventional

wisdom, that potential church members long for accountability and the demands (and joys) of discipleship.

Two deceptively slim volumes by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* and *The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004, 234 pp., $21.00), have long been weighty resources for those with such hunches. In *Life Together,* Bonhoeffer made public the theology that undergirded the experiment at Finkenwalde—a covert seminary for training Protestant pastors, established by the Confessing Church in 1935, and shut down by the Gestapo less than two years later. *Life Together* was enormously popular from the beginning, undergoing three additional printings in its first year of publication (1939). English-speaking Christians were also voracious in their appetite for Bonhoeffer's wisdom on Christian community. While illuminating "the day together," "the day alone," "service," and "confession and the Lord's Supper," Bonhoeffer also exposed and named and attended with pastoral care to such hazards of community as "disillusionment," "pious wishful dreaming," and "internal poisoning."

In this recent critical edition of these classic works (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 5), textual issues that plagued many of the early (and not so early) English translations (of *Life Together,* especially) have been addressed. And since all of Bonhoeffer's writings have been included in the *Works* translation project, there is consistency "throughout the corpus, with special attention paid to accepted English equivalents of technical theological and philosophical concepts" (p. viii). Moreover, the editor's introductions to both *Life Together* and *Prayerbook* (written by Geffrey B. Kelly) and the afterwords to the German editions offer rich insight on the historical context of these works and on particular textual issues within them. For instance, Kelly describes in some detail the origins of the Brothers' House within the seminary at Finkenwalde and how Bonhoeffer "had to fend off accusations that he was catholicizing the seminarians" (p. 20). And he also notes the challenges of "consistently rendering into English Bonhoeffer's German terminology and capturing as closely as possible his style of writing" (p. 21). He does this in part by explaining the difficulties (and recounting the earlier failures) in translating *Gemeinschaft* and *Gemeinde* (rendered in this volume as "community" and "congregation" respectively), and by describing one of "the thorniest of all problems faced in this book…the issue of gender-inclusive language" (p. 22).

In the Afterword to *The Prayerbook,* Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr remind contemporary readers of the need in Bonhoeffer's Germany "to fight for the value of both the Old Testament and the Old Testament people of God within the Christian church" (p. 178). And they elucidate a key feature of Bonhoeffer's treatment of the Psalms: that all prayer is christologically mediated. "Christian prayer," they write, "is not a natural self-expression directed to God, an uttering of spiritual needs, but rather a way to God. Only Jesus Christ can go this way. … He himself prays the Psalter in the humanity he has assumed" (p. 180).

But it is the power of Bonhoeffer's own vision of Christian community and of the life of prayer that most makes this volume a treasure for those who care deeply about what it means to be members of one another in the body of Christ. "Like the Christian's sanctification," Bonhoeffer says, "Christian community is a gift of God to which we have no claim. Only God knows the real condition of either our community or our sanctification. What may appear weak and insignificant to us may be great and glorious to God" (p. 38). For pastors and laypersons and congregations exhausted by their efforts to *create* community, to project strength and significance for the sake of growth in membership, Bonhoeffer's words are a restorative balm—gentle permission to stop the frenetic striving to accomplish a task not given to us. And when Bonhoeffer writes of the gifts of daily disciplines such as silence—"real stillness, really holding one's tongue" (p. 85)—his wisdom serves not only the growth in maturity of the individual but that of the community as well.

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In *Prayerbook,* Bonhoeffer, true to his christocentric hermeneutic, challenges our interpretive narcissism: "If we want to read and to pray the prayers of the Bible, and especially the Psalms, we must not, therefore, first ask what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ" (p. 157). When we do this, we discover that the Psalter "is the prayer of the human nature assumed by Christ" and "it can become our prayer only because it was his prayer" (p. 160). After offering some preliminary observations about the Psalms (their authorship, musicality, and centrality in worship), Bonhoeffer classifies the psalms according to the themes of Creation, the Law, the History of Salvation, the Messiah, the Church, Life, Suffering, Guilt, and Enemies. In regard to this last theme, he notes the "shocking frequency" with which psalms of vengeance "penetrate the entire Psalter" (p. 174). His insights are remarkable:

> God's vengeance did not fall on the sinners, but on the only sinless one, the Son of God, who stood in the place of sinners…. So the psalm of vengeance leads to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God that forgives enemies. I cannot forgive the enemies of God by myself, only the crucified Christ can; and I can forgive through him. So the carrying out of vengeance becomes grace for all in Jesus Christ. (p. 175)

A Shared Christian Life by Ben Witherington III (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012, 200 pp., $14.99) is a recent contribution to the cottage industry of books on Wesleyan spirituality. Designed for small group study, the book's two parts—Spirituality as Life in the Body of Christ and The Individual Context: the Believer as a Member of the Body—address Witherington's concern to "get away from certain unhelpful models of spiritual formation and practice" (p. ix). These include "extreme monastic models of piety" which are not conducive to "the normal Christian life" (p. x)—a phrase that appears several times in the book. Other dangers include individualism, self-centeredness, and an obsessive regard for feelings in gauging one's spiritual health.

A Shared Christian Life makes extensive use of John Wesley's observations and recommendations regarding spiritual formation for individuals and communities, including Wesley's familiar advice on the means of grace (prayer, scripture study, holy communion—avail yourself of them often!), and his perhaps lesser known views on "the wilderness state" and its dangers for thwarting wholeheartedness in Christian living. This state is not the dark night of the soul of St. John of the Cross—a condition, Witherington contends, that Wesley found "unbiblical." Rather, according to Wesley, "the want of striving, spiritual sloth…keeps your soul in darkness" (p. 63).

A quibble with Witherington's thesis: In the book's introduction, he warns against the kinds of advice in the literature of spiritual formation "that promote extreme introspection, individual isolation and individualistic seeking, spiritual athleticism of various kinds, and even spiritual navel-gazing of a sort" (p. viii). More than once, and perhaps unintentionally, he seems to equate such tendencies with monasticism past and present, striking a dismissive tone when he (mis)quotes Shakespeare to report that "it seems almost as if ordinary Christians are being told 'get thee to a nunnery' if you want to be truly spiritually formed" (p. viii). Witherington does not want to discourage the earnest disciple—fair enough. But Methodism historically has valued the gifts of the church catholic—including the varied riches of monastic spirituality—for understanding and living the shared Christian life.

"Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period." So argues James C. Wilhoit in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008, 240 pp., $23.99). Writing, he says, as an evangelical and out of his experience teaching Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College, Wilhoit's aim is to "set forward a curriculum for Christ-likeness grounded in the gospel and the grace that makes it possible" (p. 205). The book bears many of the marks of a pedagogical framing of

formation: graphs, tables, charts, and other visuals, and a detailed, wide-ranging account of what Wilhoit calls "the four Rs" of spiritual formation: receiving, remembering, responding, and relating. We receive "the healing, vitalizing, sustaining, and strengthening grace of God" through a stance of openness/brokenness—"a disciplined 'showing up' to meet God" (p. 57). We remember that we are God's beloved through "a willing humility to learn" (p. 104). We "respond to God's gospel of love and forgiveness with love and service to God and to those around us" (p. 147). And we are designed "to live and grow in relationship with [our Creator] and in human community" (p. 177).

One might take issue with some of Wilhoit's claims that seem to lack nuance—for example: "Spiritual formation is at the heart of [the church's] whole purpose for existence" (p. 15). And while his urgency is warranted, given the sad state of substantive formation efforts in most churches, his "lifelong course of study designed to promote spiritual transformation" can feel at times a bit too tidy and prescriptive (p. 50). Here Bonhoeffer's admonition in *Life Together* comes to mind: "The existence of any Christian communal life essentially depends on whether or not it succeeds at the right time in promoting the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God's reality" (p. 45). Yet *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*—vast in its vision and execution—is deeply rooted in Scripture, generous with its many interlocutors, and rich in wisdom born of experience and a love for the Church.

The "Church Membership" pamphlet produced by the Ekklesia Project (*www.ekklesiaproject.org*) deals practically and specifically with "the great adventure" of becoming part of a congregation or parish. Written in an accessible style by John McFadden and David McCarthy, this brief document is dense with wisdom on a range of matters that newcomers to the faith and seasoned Christians alike can benefit from. Noting that Christian community is called and gathered by God (not established or sustained by us), McFadden and McCarthy spell out what this calling looks like:

> We are called to depend upon one another. We are called to a way of *peace* where we reject vengeance, not returning violence for violence. We are called to a way of reconciliation, taking the first step to peace with our enemies. We are called to *love*—not just a sentimental 'feeling good,' but a love that can heal broken relationships and resist injustice. This is the kind of love that stands with victims of abuse, the kind of love that fills us with passion for the good things in life. This is the love that moves us to extend hospitality to our neighbor. We have been called by God to a common life, in God's name and not our own. This is a daunting, breathtaking, and wonderful call. (p. 4)

The pamphlet also looks at some of the failures surrounding church membership: that, statistically, nearly half the people who join a local church will drift away within two years; that many new members never succeed in moving into a deeper experience of Christian community (this second failure explaining much of the first). In noting these realities, McFadden and McCarthy outline five disciplines, five "habits of faith" by which we "learn to see ourselves and the world through God's eyes" (p. 5): corporate worship, friendship, service to the community, housekeeping, and Christian ministry in the world. Their discussions of friendship and housekeeping, especially, are rich with insight and describe practices that are rarely well attended to in the discourse of church membership.

Our life together in Christ need not be measured in terms of numerical growth, clever programming, or congregational busyness. The resources reviewed here, in their various ways, share the conviction that membership in the body of Christ is a gift to be received and nurtured, and that faithfulness in our common life will not always look like success. With Bonhoeffer we pray that each Christian community would understand itself as "part of the one, holy, universal, Christian church, sharing through its deeds and suffering in the hardships and struggles and promise of the whole church" (*Life Together*, p. 45). And with the apostle Paul we trust in the one whose "power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

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