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THE WAY TO GOD OR GOD'S WAY TO US:
THE THEOLOGIES OF EDWARD FARLEY
AND JAMES MCCLENDON
IN CRITICAL DIALOGUE

by

Thomas W. Harrington, B.A., M.Agr., M.Div.

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Marquette University,
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ABSTRACT
THE WAY TO GOD OR GOD'S WAY TO US:
THE THEOLOGIES OF EDWARD FARLEY
AND JAMES MCCLENDON
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Thomas W. Harrington, B.A., M.Agr., M.Div.

Marquette University, 2011

A lively theological debate in recent decades has been the dispute over theological method between "revisionist" and "narrativist" theologians. To explore and evaluate this debate I consider the work of "revisionist" theologian Edward Farley and of "narrativist" theologian James William McClendon, Jr. Farley's method calls, first, for an attempt to uncover faith realities that can be directly perceived, such as the faith community's efforts to remove ethnic boundaries, and, second, for an endeavor to examine how such realities indirectly demonstrate the existence of additional faith realities, such as the character of God. In contrast, McClendon's method calls for an attempt to ground doctrine in various sources, such as experience, community and the narrative of Christian tradition, but most especially in the narrative of Scripture, conceived of as the word of God.

An endeavor to address adequately their understandings of theological method requires not only a direct analysis of the methods themselves (set forth in chapters 1 and 2) but also an examination of how these methods may be applied in the construction of doctrine. Thus, (in chapters 3 and 4) I consider the manner in which Farley's and McClendon's methods inform their doctrines of God. Finally, (in chapter 5) in dialog with other commentaries on their work, I present an assessment and comparative evaluation of their theological methods and doctrines of God, demonstrating strengths and potential deficiencies in each case.

I conclude that there are some significant differences between Farley's and McClendon's projects. For instance, they vary from one another in how they conceive of the identity of Scripture. For Farley, the Bible is chiefly a text that the faith community has "made," and it is one means (among others) through which one can uncover the realities of faith; for McClendon, Scripture is primarily a text in which God speaks (through humans), and it is thus a text through which God can "find" us. Another related difference is in where they place authority as the basis for developing doctrine. Farley locates this authority chiefly with the contemporary ecclesial community, while McClendon places it primarily with the narrative of Scripture.

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I would like to thank Dr. Lyle Dabney and Dr. Pol Vandevelde. My classes with Dr. Dabney, in which we studied the Trinity, Pneumatology, and the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, as well as my classes with Dr. Vandevelde, in which we studied the philosophy of language and the thought of Husserl, were deeply profound experiences for me. They showed me, respectively, how theology and philosophy can be powerful and difference-making and worthy of the best efforts of one's life, and they both exemplify the creative type of scholarship that I aspire to emulate.

I also want to thank Fr. Philip Rossi. He gave me my first substantial introduction to the realm of theological method, as debated by the likes of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and David Tracy. When I read their works, I knew that I had found that aspect of theology that would be of crucial interest to me, most likely for the remainder of my theological career. Although there is not a direct correlation, the kinds of methodological issues with which these figures have grappled was what eventually inspired me to focus upon the work of Edward Farley and James McClendon.

Although my interaction with Dr. Ralph Del Colle has been comparatively limited, his input and direction, especially when I was first beginning my dissertation project, were quite helpful.

This project has also benefitted from my interaction with both Dr. Edward Farley and Dr. James William McClendon, Jr. Both Professor Farley and Professor McClendon, before his death in October 2000, were gracious enough to dialogue with me through personal correspondence. And, this correspondence allowed for at least an intended focus and clarity that would have been palpably lacking with this project otherwise.

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I would like to express appreciation to my parents, Dr. John and Beth Harrington, and to my brother, Clint Harrington.

Most of all, I would like to express gratitude to my wife, Susan, and to our children, Will, Joe, and Helen. My work as both full-time student and full-time pastor has often meant sacrifices with my family. But, they, by far, have been my greatest support. I will never be able to fully express just how thankful I am for them.

Dedicated to my grandfathers, both professors, both persons of unsurpassed character, both willing to give generously of their time and of themselves:

In loving memory of Dr. Marion Thomas Harrington and Dr. William Boyd Hunt.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS i

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1. EDWARD FARLEY'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD 8
Modern Theology's Reliance upon "the House of Authority:"
A Misguided Approach to Theological Method 9
The Crisis Faced by Modern Theology: Reality-Loss
Farley's Description of "the House of Authority"
The "founding axioms" of salvation history
and the principle of identity
The three loci of sacred Scripture, dogma,
and the institutional church
Farley's Critique of "the House of Authority"
Critique of sacred Scripture
Critique of the "founding axioms" of salvation history
and the principle of identity
Theological Method outside "the House of Authority:"
Farley's Theological Method of Ecclesial Reflection 21
Seeking Faith's Realities as They May Be Found
in the Faith Community
Retrieving faith's realities by means of phenomenological
theology and through participation
in the faith community itself
Is phenomenological theology able to bridge the gap
between the immanent and the transcendent?
The operative principles of phenomenological theology
Theological portraiture
An excursus on Farley's understanding of Schleiermacher's
notions of the "positivity of Christianity"
and the "essence of Christianity"
A Theological Eidetics of the Faith Community's Structures
of Language, Redemptive Existence, and Intersubjectivity
World, life-world, and faith-world
The faith community's structure of language

An excursus on Farley's understanding of "deep symbols"
The faith community's structure of redemptive existence
The faith community's structure of intersubjectivity
The Faith Community's Mediation of Realities:
The Basis for Christian Doctrine
The faith community as a determinate social world
Toward an intersubjective theory of appresentation
How the faith community mediates realities
Conclusion 78

CHAPTER 2. JAMES MCCLENDON'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD 83
Convictional Perspectivism 84
Towards a Definition of "Convictions"
Convictional Conflicts Are Eradicable: Convictional Imperialism
Convictional Conflicts Are Ineradicable: Convictional Relativism
Convictional Conflicts Are Partially Eradicable:
Convictional Perspectivism
"Perspectivism" roots in H. Richard Niebuhr
and Van A. Harvey
Understanding of the relationship between
words and things
Understanding of the possibility for dialogue between
differing convictional communities
Convictional perspectivism's approach to
interpreting religion
The way in which conviction sets may be justifiable
"Conviction sets" as "picture sets" and "speech acts"
as "language games"
Three Sources for Christian Convictions – Narrative, Experience,
and the Church 127
Narrative as a Source for Christian Convictions
Non-narrative and narrative sources for convictions
Within a Christian context, what counts as "narrative"
for McClendon
Guidelines for determining which narratives might be
most suitable for forming Christian convictions
Experience as a Source for Christian Convictions
The Church as a Source for Christian Convictions
The Hermeneutical Principle of "This Is That" and "Then Is Now" 142
Conclusion 146

CHAPTER 3. EDWARD FARLEY'S DOCTRINE OF GOD 150
How God Can Be Known 152
Speaking of God: Ciphers of Who God Is 158
How We Can Speak of God
A basis for a symbolics of God
From "attributes" to "ciphers"
Ciphers of Who God Is
Ciphers of redemption
Ciphers of creativity
Cipher of the Holy
The Trinity?
Thinking the Relation between the World and God:
A Paradigm of the Works of God 170
Situating the Paradigm between Metaphysical
and Anti-metaphysical Perspectives
The World: The Environment for the Works of God
Scientific world
Philosophical world
A scientific-philosophical description
of how "world" proceeds
Faith world
The Means: The Strategy for the Works of God
The Christian community as the "through-which"
of redemption
The person and ministry of Jesus as the "through-which"
of the Christian community
What the kerygmas of the New Testament reveal
about the significance of Jesus
God raised him from the dead
Christ died for our sins
God was in Christ
The Content: The Aim of the Works of God
Conclusion 199

CHAPTER 4. JAMES MCCLENDON'S DOCTRINE OF GOD 208
The Rule of God: Seeing God's Present Kingdom by Means of the Future
and the Past 212
Eschatology: The Future Christ Reigns Now
Salvation: A Process through which God Enables
Human Faithfulness to God's Rule
Clusters of salvific terms
Sin in view of salvation
Salvation as a process

Creation: Does God Suffer in God's Creative Actions?
Posing the question: Does God suffer in God's creative actions?
Assembling resources for a response: Science, Romans 8, and chaos
Formulating a response: God does suffer in God's creative actions
The Identity of God: A God of Sacrificial Self-Giving 236
The Atonement and the Person of Jesus Christ
The Atonement
The person of Christ
The Holy Spirit and the Church's Mission
The church
The Holy Spirit and the church's mission
The Biblical Narrative and God's Trinitarian Identity
Three spheres of force
Trinitarian categories
The displacement of biblical identifications of God
A narrative-based trinitarianism
Conclusion 284

CHAPTER 5. EVALUATION AND COMPARISON 297
A Critical Assessment of Edward Farley's Theological Method and Doctrine of God 300
An Evaluation of Farley's Critique of "The House of Authority"
An evaluation of Farley's critique of sacred Scripture
An evaluation of Farley's critique of salvation history
An Evaluation of Farley's Method of Ecclesial Reflection
To the realities themselves
Appresentation of "realities not at hand"
An Evaluation of the Development of Farley's Doctrine of God
The "reality at hand" of ecclesia and its redemptive efforts
The "reality not at hand" of the historical Jesus
The "reality not at hand" of God's character of divine empathy
A Critical Assessment of James McClendon's Theological Method and Doctrine of God 325
An Evaluation of McClendon's Theological Method
Convictional Perspectivism
Narrative, experience, and the church as sources for Christian convictions
"This is that" and "then is now"

An Evaluation of the Development of McClendon's Doctrine of God
The narrative of Scripture and a doctrine of God
The coherence of "conviction sets" and a doctrine of God
A doctrine of Christ informs a doctrine of God
Edward Farley and James McClendon in Methodological and Theological Conversation 352
Some Similarities Shared with Farley's and McClendon's Projects
The detachment of narrative from reality being perceived as problematic
Separation from traditional developments of certain doctrines
An emphasis on the suffering of God
A Consideration of How Farley and McClendon Might Critique Each Other
How Scripture should be approached and utilized for developing doctrine
How conceptions of God pertain to hope for the future
Conclusion 367

BIBLIOGRAPHY 372

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s one of the more lively debates within the context of North American Christian theology has been the dispute over method between representatives of so-called "revisionist theology" and "narrative theology." On the one hand, distinctive to theologies of "revision" (or "correlation"), whose representatives include David Tracy, Schubert Ogden, and Edward Farley, is not only the recognition that human religious experience and Christian tradition are theologically co-determinative, but also the insistence that the two must somehow be made to stand in a relationship that preserves their independence as well as their interdependence. Accordingly, for this group of theologians, theological method should resemble something like the following: theology is best understood as simultaneous reflection upon both the meanings present in common religious experience and the meanings present in the language of the Christian tradition (in particular, this tradition's classic religious texts). While Farley may be included with school of thought, he does vary somewhat with this description, in two ways. First, he emphasizes that the specific type of human religious experience he considers is not individual but communal or interhuman religious experience.[1] Second, while he examines both communal (interhuman) religious experience and the meanings present in

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[1]Farley indicates that "'religious experience' suggests the individual. But you will see in all of my books, starting with Ecclesial Man, that what is primary is the interhuman," as set forth in Edward Farley to author, 19 June 2000. Here, Farley refers to Edward Farley, Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975).

the language of the Christian tradition, he considers the former – communal (interhuman) religious experience – to be of the most significance, and he makes clear that the texts of the Christian tradition should be treated as resources (through which some of the realities of faith might be discovered) but not as authoritative documents (in and of themselves) for constructing theological doctrine.

The "narrative" group of theologians, on the other hand, whose representatives include Hans Frei, Ronald Thiemann, and James McClendon, has stressed that religious language is not the expression of prelinguistic experience but the means by which religious experience may even be possible. Therefore, this group generally avers, Christian theology should not begin with our experience today, and try to understand the Bible in light of our experience, but should let the Bible's language and narratives define the world, making sense of our lives in its terms. Accordingly, for this group of theologians, theological method should be akin to something like the following: theology is best understood as reflection first upon the meanings present in Christian religious language and then (only later) upon the meanings present in particular religious experience. While McClendon may be included with this school of thought (only, though, when it is broadly conceived as "narrative" theology – and not when it is identified with one of its larger subgroups, "postliberal" theology), and while his theological method reflects the various aspects of the above description, he would underscore the importance of seeking to establish the connection between the meanings present in Christian religious language and the meanings present in particular religious

experience; that is, he would not be content to simply stop with the meanings contained in language, in order to develop theological doctrine.

At the core of the disagreement, therefore, that these two types of theology have over the structure of theological method are different understandings as to what constitutes religious experience and religious language. And, near this core, are diverse notions of the nature of knowledge and truth. On most of these issues, "revisionist theologians" are closely aligned with the philosophical positions of figures such as Edmund Husserl and Paul Ricoeur, while "narrative theologians" are more closely related to the positions of such figures as Gilbert Ryle, John L. Austin, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In general, "revisionists" defend a "web of belief" (to borrow from W. V. O. Quine) that contains: the view that there is universal religious experience; a referential theory of language; an allegedly foundationalist theory of knowledge; and, a correspondence theory of truth. Yet, "narrativists" support a "web of belief" that includes: the view that there is only particular religious experience; a holistic theory of language; a non-foundationalist theory of knowledge; and, coherence and pragmatic theories of truth (although, McClendon and some other "narrativists" would seek to add correspondence theories of truth to this list). Pointing to these different "webs of belief" opens the way for an approximate statement of much of the problem to be addressed in this dissertation: Which theological method, the "revisionist" method with its "web of beliefs" or the "narrativist" method with its "web of beliefs," makes the stronger argument?

An endeavor to address adequately this problem, however, requires not only a direct analysis of the various methods themselves (as well as a treatment of their use of

particular philosophical resources) but also an examination of how they may be applied in the actual construction of doctrines. Various doctrines could be chosen for this task, but I will consider the doctrine of God, largely because it is a central – if not *the* central – doctrine of the Christian faith.

For this dissertation, on the "revisionist" side, I will focus on Farley. Some of his most substantial systematic work on the doctrine of God has been developed in Divine Empathy,[2] and in this monograph he offers an especially clear application of the Husserlian-based "revisionist" method he developed in his earlier works, Ecclesial Man and Ecclesial Reflection.[3] And, on the "narrativist" side, I will turn to McClendon.[4] His

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[2]Edward Farley, Divine Empathy: A Theology of God (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996).

[3]Edward Farley, Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975); idem, Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1982).

[4]When one understands "evangelical" in the broad sense as being a theological heir of the Radical Reformation (and not in the more narrow sense as being a recovering fundamentalist), McClendon may be described as an "evangelical-narrativist." This means, in part, that, strictly speaking, he is not a "postliberal-narrativist." McClendon has objected to the assertion that he might share affinities with postliberal thought: "Don't you have to be a liberal in order to become a post-liberal," as indicated in James William McClendon, Jr. to author, 3 May 2000. Yet, it is perhaps worth noting that McClendon also identifies certain aspects of his own non-foundationalist, J. L. Austin- and Wittgenstein-based method (which he, on occasion, refers to as "perspectivism") with that of the "postliberals," as set forth in James William McClendon, Jr. and James Marvin Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), revised as Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994), 187-88. In addition, Nancey Murphy points to the degree of similarity McClendon's method shares with that of the "postliberals," as shown in Nancey Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision," in Theology Without Foundations, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 249-50.

most significant work of systematic theology, Doctrine,[5] contains the development of several doctrines, most of which contribute to an overall doctrine of God, and these doctrinal efforts reflect the "narrativist" method he sets forth in Convictions, Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness.[6]

Both Farley's and McClendon's educational and career paths help to shed some light on their particular theological perspectives. Farley, a Presbyterian, graduated from Centre College (B.A.), in Danville, Kentucky, and then attended Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, where he received his B.Div. He pursued further studies in philosophical theology at Union Theological Seminary and at Columbia University, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1957. He has taught at DePauw University, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and, since 1969, as professor of theology at the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University. In addition, McClendon, a Baptist, graduated from the University of Texas (B.A.) and then attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received his B.Div. He continued with his studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received a Th.M., and again at Southwestern, where he earned his Th.D. in 1953. He taught at such institutions as Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, the University

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[5]James William McClendon, Jr., Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

[6]James William McClendon, Jr. and James Marvin Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), revised as Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994); James William McClendon, Jr., Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); idem, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); and, idem, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Witness (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

of San Francisco, and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, before concluding his career as a distinguished-scholar-in-residence at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Moreover, in light of the above discussion of the application of method and of the contributions of Farley and McClendon, I can now endeavor to more precisely state the problem to be addressed in this dissertation. By means of a direct analysis of their theological methods and of an examination of the application of these methods in their constructions of a doctrine of God, I will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their theological methods and the way in which their theological methods influence and shape their doctrines of God; also, I will compare Farley's and McClendon's methodological-theological projects with one another, in order to assess the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

In response to this problem I will first examine and evaluate the theological methods of Farley and McClendon. Here, I will give particular attention to the "webs of belief" present in their methods. That is, I will probe their methods for understandings of experience, language, knowledge and truth. Secondly, I will focus on the way in which these figures use philosophy as a resource for the development of their theological methods. Thus, for instance, I intend to explore Farley's use of Husserl's phenomenology as well as McClendon's employment of Austin's notion of speech-acts. Thirdly, I will analyze the way in which the two theologians apply their methods to constructions of a doctrine of God. Finally, I will compare Farley's and McClendon's understandings of theological method as well as their doctrines of God with each other.

In general, my work will be dialogical and dialectical in that I will engage Farley from McClendon's point of view, as well as, interact with McClendon's work from Farley's perspective. Thus, my intention is to allow each perspective to engage and challenge the other. I will explore (in chapters 1 and 2) Farley's and McClendon's understandings of theological method. Here, I will primarily limit myself to the way in which Farley develops his concept of method in Ecclesial Man and Ecclesial Reflection and to the manner in which McClendon develops his notion of method in Convictions, Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness. In addition, I will consider (in chapters 3 and 4) the application of Farley and McClendon's method in their constructions of a doctrine of God (chiefly for the purpose of being able to evaluate the "cash value" of their methods). Here, I will mainly limit my analysis to the manner in which Farley constructs this doctrine in Divine Empathy and to the way in which McClendon constructs it in Doctrine. Here also, I intend to set forth not an exhaustive but merely a preliminary exploratory analysis of their developments of this doctrine. Finally, (in chapter 5) I will present, in dialog with other commentaries on their work, an assessment and comparative evaluation of the two methods and of the two doctrines of God, demonstrating strengths and potential deficiencies in each case.

CHAPTER 1

EDWARD FARLEY'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD

In this chapter I endeavor to set forth and to begin to evaluate what Edward Farley considers to be both inappropriate and appropriate approaches to theological method. I begin by examining what he maintains theological method should not be. Here, he avers that most modern understandings of theological method have been misguided because they have gotten away from the pursuit of reality and have turned instead to a reality-detached "house of authority," with both its presuppositions – salvation history and the principle of (divine-human) identity – and its loci of authority – sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church.[7] Then, I examine what Farley maintains theological method should be. First, he argues that, in order to see realities, one must turn to faith's apprehensions, as they are found in the faith community. Second, he avers that the faith community has various structures that pertain to the relationship between faith and realities, structures such as: language, redemptive existence, and intersubjectivity. Third, he maintains that the faith community mediates realities which are present to those of the faith community and that these realities can become the basis for what might be referred to as doctrine.[8]

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[7]Edward Farley, Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1982), chaps. 1-7 passim.

[8]Farley sets forth his understanding of theological method primarily in Farley, Ecclesial Reflection, and in Edward Farley, Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of

Modern Theology's Reliance upon "the House of Authority:" A Misguided Approach to Theological Method

The Crisis Faced by Modern Theology: Reality-Loss

Modern theology, according to Farley, faces a problem. While it endures no loss of "theological language," it has suffered a loss of "correspondence between 'theological language' and 'realities.'"[9] In other words, the problem confronting theology is whether or not there are "realities . . . behind the language of . . . historical faith,"[10] that is, whether or not "believing in God" means anything more than "believing in God."[11]

Farley suggests that two different groups are responsible for bringing about this "loss-of-reality" problem. One group consists of certain members of the theological academy who press for "playing the games of intellectual inquiry by some very narrow rules,"[12] rules which insist that "realities" are reducible to "linguistic expressions." He identifies this group with "Wittgensteinian and hermeneutic theologies, . . . [within which] it is fashionable to emphasize language as *the* way in which the historical faith is available."[13] If "realities" may be reduced to "linguistic expressions," then, Farley

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Faith and Reality (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975).

[9]Farley, Ecclesial Man, 6. Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as EM.

[10]EM, 6.

[11]EM, 15.

[12]EM, 22.

[13]EM, 80. Farley does not specify, at least with this reference, who he feels constructs or holds to such Wittgensteinian and hermeneutic theologies. Yet, with regard

suggests, faith does not actually have access to "realities" themselves; that is, faith has access to doctrines of God but not to God. According to Farley, this group within the theological academy bears a significant but ultimately only a secondary level of responsibility for the "loss-of-reality" problem facing theology.

The group most responsible for the "loss-of-reality" problem, he maintains, hails not from the academy but from the church. Accordingly, "in contrast to the customary assumption that a religious community lags behind its *avant garde* intellectual leadership, we shall stress the opposite,"[14] that is, that "reality-loss" occurs from the church to the theological academy (and not vice versa). He is not particularly clear as to *why* "reality-loss" occurs *in this direction*; yet, he offers a compelling argument that "reality-loss" does, in fact, occur at the level or realm of the contemporary ecclesial community. For Farley, since much of the faith-world of Western Christendom is no longer a collection of small, face-to-face congregations within "a *provincial* social world [with a single] common . . . stock of knowledge,"[15] but is now a collection of large, anonymous pseudo-

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to hermeneutic theologies, he suggests, in one of his later works, that they are indebted to Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, as set forth in Edward Farley, Divine Empathy: A Theology of God (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996), 180.

[14]EM, 9.

[15]EM, 11. Regarding the concept of "stock of knowledge," Farley makes reference to the concept of "stock of knowledge at hand," as developed by the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz, Reflections on the Problem of Relevance, ed. Richard Zaner (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970), 66ff. Aron Gurwitsch interprets Schutz's notion of "stock of knowledge at hand" as "the sediment of the whole history of my life; it comprises what was passed on to me by those who taught me and whose teachings I accepted on the strength of their authority, as well as what I acquired through intercourse with my associates," as set forth in Aron Gurwitsch,

congregations within "a *pluralistic* social world [with] a number of competing stocks of knowledge,"[16] "the reality status of [such a matter as] redemption, its references and conditions, . . . [has become] compromised."[17] Thus, the church is responsible for "reality-loss" chiefly because it has acquiesced to or has been unable to resist the larger social world's recent turn from "knowledge" to "knowledges."[18] By allowing for the possibility of more than one type of knowledge, the church has established an atmosphere in which it is more difficult to have confidence about ecclesial realities.

Farley suggests that the ecclesial community was susceptible to giving credence to multiple stocks of knowledge because, for several centuries, it has permitted itself to submit to what he terms "the house of authority."[19] The faith community and, therefore, theology have so fallen under the sway of (that is, have become so reliant upon) various

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introduction to Collected Papers, by Alfred Schutz, vol. 3, Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy, ed. Ilse Schutz (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), xvii. Perhaps more significantly for the task at hand, this is one of several indications that Farley, who relies heavily upon Husserl in the development of his theological method, has been influenced, at least in part, by Schutz's understanding of Husserl, as I will show more fully below.

[16]EM, 11.

[17]EM, 12.

[18]Elsewhere, Farley argues that the church is culpable for "reality-loss" primarily since it has been unable to resist the larger social world's shift from modernism to postmodernism, as shown in Edward Farley, Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 65-73. Indeed, Farley here likens postmodernism to a disease that has had a "devastating effect . . . on our sense of and commitments to truth and reality," as set forth in Ibid., 61.

[19]Farley, Ecclesial Reflection, xiv. Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as ER.

authorities – such as sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church – that they have ceased to seek after the experiential realities on which these authorities are presumably based. According to Farley, this phenomenon is equivalent to the resident of a city perceiving the city not directly as a city-dweller (with her everyday experiences of the city) but indirectly through the perspective of the formal descriptions of a cartographer.[20] What is at stake, according to Farley, is that without going to realties themselves, the contemporary ecclesial community is left only with the prospect of having to choose from among multiple "authoritative" (but potentially distorted) notions of reality-apprehension. Unless the city-dweller examines the everyday life of the city, she is vulnerable to possibly misleading descriptions of the cartographer(s), or she takes the chance of being limited to a formalist (and probably superficial) understanding of the city. Similarly, if the starting point of the faith understandings of the ecclesial community is, for instance, not Jesus Christ but the doctrine of Jesus Christ (as indicated by sacred Scripture, institutional church teachings or other loci of the house of authority), the community risks being misled or being relegated to an empty (trapped-in-language) formalism.

Therefore, primarily because it sheds such significant light on Farley's understanding of the proper approach to theological method, I will examine both his description and his critique of "the house of authority."

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[20]Farley is here drawing upon a city-dweller / cartographer example developed by Alfred Schutz in his work Collected Papers, vol. 2, Studies in Social Theory, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 66-67, as shown in EM, 53.

Farley's Description of "the House of Authority"

Farley suggests that most contemporary theological work continues to make use of a long-standing (though, in his view, erroneous) theological method, which he refers to as a "classical criteriology,"[21] And, he holds that the main feature of classical criteriology is its reliance upon "the house of authority." Furthermore, he maintains that "the house of authority" has: two "founding axioms"[22] – a presupposition of salvation history and a presupposition of the principle of identity; and, at least three stratum that are built upon these founding axioms – sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church.

The "founding axioms" of salvation history and the principle of identity. The two presuppositions of "the house of authority" are salvation history and the principle of identity. Farley maintains that the first of these presuppositions, salvation history, "is present in some way in the religion of Israel, Judaism, and Christianity,"[23] and he holds that the three central aspects of its framework are: "corporate historical entities (not just individuals), their temporality teleologically interpreted, and the kingly deity who governs through causal interventions."[24] Most significant here, for Farley, is "the royal metaphor of God's relation to the world and the 'logic of triumph' of the salvation-

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[21]ER, 3.

[22]ER, 27.

[23]ER, 28.

[24]ER, 30.

history scheme."[25] Accordingly, he avers that, with salvation history, God allows most of "world history . . . [to] occur under the rule of the powers of evil. . . . But history ends with an exercise of God's sovereign kingship which overthrows the powers of evil and rectifies all wrongs."[26]

With the second presupposition, the principle of identity, Farley holds that this principle "affirms an identity between *what God wills to communicate* and *what is brought to language in the interpretative act of a human individual or community*."[27] Or, as he restates elsewhere, the principle of identity is an assertion of "the identity between *God's projected will* and *events in history*."[28] In other words, this principle affirms that there is an identity between what God wills and what humans do. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Farley argues, this identity used to occur between what God desired to communicate and the interpretations of the prophets of God's more immediate presence in theophanies, visions, and dreams.[29] However, within this tradition, especially as "the house of authority" began to take hold,[30] identity started to gradually shift from the original (authoritative) prophet to more secondary representatives – first to oral tradition; then to written deposit; then to definitive interpretation of the written deposit;

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[25]ER, 93.

[26]ER, 156.

[27]ER, 35, emphases mine.

[28]ER, 159, emphases mine.

[29]ER, 36.

[30]ER, 12-13.

and, finally, to the institutional protection of the definitive interpretation.[31] In addition, Farley maintains that, for those theologians operating under "the house of authority," "to believe and obey the secondary representative . . . [has become] to believe and obey God himself."[32]

The three loci of sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church. On top of the two founding axioms of salvation history and the principle of identity, Farley locates the stratum of the three loci of "the house of authority" – sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church. He holds that the first of these loci, sacred Scripture or "the Scripture principle,"[33] originated with Judaism,[34] but that, even in this case, there was no sense of more full-fledged sacred or "canonical Scriptures . . . [until later] synagogal Judaism."[35] Before then, for the religion of Israel, the "Torah story,"[36] for example, was not sacred Scripture but merely "an authoritative record of Israel's history."[37] However, with the Exile and the concomitant threat to their duration, Israel came to embrace "the

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[31]ER, 40-41.

[32]ER, 42.

[33]ER, 51.

[34]ER, 51.

[35]ER, 51.

[36]ER, 52.

[37]ER, 52.

Scripture principle."[38] Similarly, with Christianity, he argues that originally – before "the house of authority" was established – the early church "had a norm other than 'Scripture,' the living presence of the Lord and a nucleus tradition of early testimony to the Lord."[39] But, just as Judaism had done when their duration began to be threatened, the early Christian church also, largely due to an internal threat "created by a plurality of traditions,"[40] came to embrace "the Scripture principle." Therefore, by the second century, the church eventually ceased to treat the early Christian writings as simply "authentic human testimony to the Lord and to the events of origin of the ecclesial community,"[41] and it started to treat them as "inspired Scripture."[42] As Farley summarizes, "the Christian movement thus embraced the Jewish Scripture principle . . . as a new, divinely given canon of literature embracing the two epochs of revelation."[43]

With the second loci, dogma, Farley holds that faced with both the internal problem of the so-called heresies and the external problem of Hellenistic syncretism and pluralism, "the church's solution . . . [was the establishment of] *doctrina*. . . . The importance of this solution is that it took a written form whose status and function is that of a definitive commentary on Scripture. It [. . . became] the key unlocking the mysteries

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[38]ER, 10.

[39]ER, 71.

[40]ER, 71.

[41]ER, 72.

[42]ER, 73.

[43]ER, 73.

of the text."[44] Moreover, within the church, Farley argues that dogma has become "an officially sanctioned comprehensive proposition which articulates some article of faith and which has the character of *freedom form error*."[45] Accordingly, when this occurs, dogma, rooted in "the 'logic of triumph' of the salvation-history scheme,"[46] becomes an authority. In other words, "dogmas become criteria."[47]

Finally, with the third loci of "the house of authority," the institutional church, Farley argues that faced with the same internal problem of heresies and external difficulty of Hellenistic syncretism and pluralism, the church responded by developing "a definitive institution . . . [for itself, with] bishops as successors of apostles and deposits of apostolic tradition."[48] In addition, Farley holds that "the final step in this process is a new unit of divine-human identity. Because of his place in the succession, the bishop becomes an *authority.*"[49] Accordingly, the church came to have "a divinely instituted infallible institution whose articulations under certain specified conditions have the status of divine truth itself."[50] Therefore, Farley maintains, "with Scripture and dogma the

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[44]ER, 90.

[45]ER, 93, emphasis mine.

[46]ER, 93.

[47]ER, 96.

[48]ER, 101.

[49]ER, 101.

[50]ER, 102.

church too . . . [has become] an authority."[51] Furthermore, he is not seeking just to describe the Roman Catholic Church. To the contrary, he holds that "because Protestantism extended divine-human identity to the structures and living voice of the church itself, it has, like Catholicism, retained the three-location structure of the way of authority and falls within the framework of the classical criteriology."[52]

Farley's Critique of "the House of Authority"

Having described "the house of authority," Farley then offers a critique of it in reverse order, starting with the three loci of sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church and then turning to salvation history and the principle of identity. However, in addressing the three loci, he focuses the majority of his attention on sacred Scripture. Therefore, I limit my focus to just this critique and to those he makes of the two founding presuppositions of "the house of authority:" salvation history and the principle of identity.

Critique of sacred Scripture. Farley argues that, with the canonization process, the early church made the decision to grant authority to a certain collection of writings and to declare this collection *sacred*, which is "a great deal different from claiming divine authorship, inspiration, and identity."[53] Therefore, he holds that because the early church *had this choice* – to view this collection of writings "as 'sacred Scripture' . . . [or]

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[51]ER, 105.

[52]ER, 127.

[53]ER, 141.

as something else"[54] – this actually demonstrates that this collection of writings *cannot be sacred*.[55] In other words, he maintains that if this collection of writings were truly sacred, there would have been no human choice involved in the matter. Accordingly, Farley argues, that for the Christian faith, "*sacred Scripture is thereby abolished*."[56] Moreover, he holds that the early church wrongly placed its social identity in Scripture, when it should have been placed, instead, where it originally had been (when the church was birthed) – in a common "experience of salvation."[57] And, one consequence (among others) of this misplaced social identity, he avers, is that, under "the house of authority," the church has come to look upon Scripture "not . . . as narrative . . . but as an atomistic compilation of truths."[58]

Critique of the "founding axioms" of salvation history and the principle of identity. According to Farley, "essential to any salvation history view [whether Jewish or Christian, for example,] . . . is that God wills a definite end and accomplishes his will toward his creation."[59] Furthermore, as is implied, from the perspective of salvation history, God's causal intervention is so strong – so triumphant – that either (under a more

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[54]ER, 141.

[55]ER, 141.

[56]ER, 141, emphasis mine.

[57]ER, 147.

[58]ER, 151.

[59]ER, 156.

provincial salvation-history scheme) God willfully intends salvation to only a portion of humanity or (under a more universal scheme) God willfully determines not only all good human actions but also all evil human actions.[60] For Farley, this raises such overwhelming theodicy problems that the salvation history framework, in both its Jewish and Christian renditions, is completely discredited.[61]

With his critique of the axiom of the principle of identity – the principle which affirms that there is an identity between what God wills and what humans do – Farley argues that the supposed "discovery of identical meaning between our willed and accomplished aims is possible . . . [according to the claims of some] because of our own . . . [supposed] direct access to both sides, to our wishing for the apple and the act of eating the apple."[62] But, he further posits, since "we have no such direct access to God's acts of willing and actualizing, . . . the principle of identity . . . cannot be retained."[63] More specifically, Farley argues that the principle of identity fails because "identity between the divine will and creation is either a synthesis of *meaning* which is inaccessible or an identity between detailed states of affairs which violates the autonomy of creatures."[64]

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[60]ER, 156.

[61]ER, 156.

[62]ER, 165.

[63]ER, 165.

[64]ER, 165.

Thus, with his description and critique of "the house of authority," Farley has substantially illuminated that which he is arguing against as he sets forth his own understanding of theological method. It is to this understanding that I now turn.

Theological Method outside "the House of Authority:" Farley's Theological Method of Ecclesial Reflection

An essential feature of Farley's critique of theological method done under "the house of authority" is that it is a methodology that has become detached from the very realities which it seeks to address. Therefore, it is not surprising that a central tenet of Farley's own method is a constant call to return to the realities themselves.

In order to return to these realities, he argues, first, that the Christian theologian must seek to discover faith's apprehensions, as they may be found in the church (when the church is properly understood as a faith community). Next, he holds that the church has various structures that bear upon the relationship between faith and realities, structures such as: language, redemptive existence, and intersubjectivity. Finally, he avers that the church mediates realities which are directly present to those of the faith community and that these realities become the basis for what might be referred to as doctrine.

Moreover, throughout the development of his theological method, Farley draws extensively from several philosophical and theological figures. Most notably, he builds upon the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (explicitly so) and upon the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (not always as explicitly but, nevertheless, quite

significantly).[65] Accordingly, as Farley turns to and engages with the thought of these figures (and others), I will endeavor to examine these connections.

Seeking Faith's Realities as They May Be Found in the Faith Community

Farley argues that part of what is involved in returning to the realities of faith is an effort to locate faith's apprehensions as they may be found in the community of faith. This effort includes at least four components. First, he explores the conditions for "getting to" realities through phenomenological theology and by means of participating in the faith community itself. Second, he considers whether or not phenomenological theology is able to bridge the gap between the immanent and the transcendent (that is, between inner consciousness and external reality). Third, he unfolds the operative principles of his phenomenological theology. Some of these operative principles (and related features) include: the principle of positivity; apprehensions; realities (and their attendant *noemas*); and, the reflective method (with its concepts of bracketing, uncovering, and theological eidetics). Fourth, he sets forth his understanding of theological portraiture as a way to approach tradition not as an authority but as a historical resource. Especially in his development of these first three components, Farley is substantially indebted to Husserl;[66] therefore, in the process of examining these

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[65]Farley indicates that while "it may not . . . [always] be very clear, . . . Friedrich Schleiermacher is probably as determinative of my theological method as continental philosophy," as set forth in Edward Farley to author, 19 June 2000.

[66]Furthermore, Farley concurs with the Lutheran theologian, Theobald Süss, that Husserl's philosophy is well suited for constructive theological efforts, as set forth in EM, 33. Here, he cites Süss as follows:

components, I will attempt to show how Farley builds upon Husserl's work. Moreover, with certain aspects of the above operative principles (such as the principle of positivity), Farley shows a strong reliance upon Schleiermacher. Thus, after examining the above four components, I will offer a brief excursus on the way in which some of Schleiermacher's central theological concepts seem to impact Farley's comprehension of theological method.

Retrieving faith's realities by means of phenomenological theology and through participation in the faith community itself. In order to get back to the realities of the Christian faith themselves, Farley suggests that "the procedure called for is a procedure of turning back to the obscured or diminished realities and reflecting on them."[67]

> The only demand which Husserl makes is, as he occasionally expresses it, that Christianity possesses characteristic, genuine themes, that it therefore has its law in itself, in its own unique structures and essential forms. Theology obtains from this the task of clarifying these themes, structures, and essential forms and formulating Christian doctrine with regard to them [as set forth in Theobald Süss, "Phänomenologische Theologie," Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 5 (1963), 38-39; quoted in EM, 33].

[67]EM, 19. Farley's emphasis on examining or "turning back" to the realities themselves and reflecting on them clearly shows the influence of phenomenology, in general, and of Husserl, in particular, on his thought. "Zurück zu den Sachen selbst" ["return to the things themselves"] is a theme that recurs throughout much of phenomenology and especially throughout most of Husserl's works, beginning at least as early as his Logical Investigations, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970; reprint, 2 vols., Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 2000). For instance, in this work, he argues that "meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions – if by any intuitions at all – are not enough: we must go back to the 'things themselves,'" as set forth in Ibid., vol. 1, 252. However, for Husserl, this phrase – "return to the things themselves" – means not a return to literal objects but: for example, a return to essences as they reveal themselves through eidetic reduction involving the relationship between the *noesis* (the subjective act in an intentional experience) and the *noema* (the objective act in an intentional experience); or,

Furthermore, he argues that this can be accomplished through phenomenological theology, by which he means "that inquiry within theological prolegomenon which attempts to expose the situation in which realities are apprehended by faith."[68] That is, the analyses of phenomenological theology "do not establish the realities of faith's apprehensions; . . . [rather,] they are efforts to understand the conditions of those apprehensions whereby such reality-apprehensions are possibilities."[69] In addition, Farley seeks to clarify, on the one hand, "that phenomenological theology cannot itself restore faith's present-day reality-loss,"[70] but, on the other hand, that "faith's realities have not simply flown away; they have been obscured by a certain kind of human being, civilization, historical consciousness, all of which are attended by an insistence on playing the games of intellectual inquiry by some very narrow rules."[71] Therefore, he holds, "what phenomenological theology can do is to render explicit the contours, the essence, the modes of existence which lie present but hidden in . . . [faith's]

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for instance, especially in some of his later works, a return or a questioning back, through history, to other people's experiences of essences. Farley seems to have some of these Husserlian meanings in mind, as becomes more apparent with the continued development of his understanding of theological method, as I will endeavor to show below.

[68]EM, 19.

[69]EM, 21.

[70]EM, 22.

[71]EM, 22. With his reference to "playing the games of intellectual inquiry by some very narrow rules," Farley appears to have in mind Ludwig Wittgenstein and similar philosophers and those theological methodologies that have been influenced by this line of thought. However, Farley does not here specifically indicate who he feels holds or demonstrates these views.

apprehensions."[72] However, he is careful to stress that "the actual reality-apprehendings of a determinate community do not occur in the 'uncovering' analyses of phenomenology but in participation in the community itself."[73]

Is phenomenological theology able to bridge the gap between the immanent and the transcendent? Farley recognizes that a potential challenge to phenomenological theology is whether or not it can bridge the gap between the immanent and the transcendent or, to restate, whether or not it can reach, in a sense, from the mental (inner consciousness) to the physical (external reality). In order to probe this possible challenge, he offers a closer examination of the relationship between phenomenological theology and phenomenological philosophy, particularly as the latter was developed by Husserl.

Farley maintains that Husserl and other phenomenological philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur, "begin philosophical reflection . . . with the human being in his *pre-reflective intentionality*, . . . [and] to the degree that philosophy attempts

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[72]EM, 23.

[73]EM, 23. Although I do not here abundantly expound upon Farley's emphasis on the role of communal participation with reality-apprehendings, this is not in any way to minimize the importance that such communal participation has for Farley's understanding of theological method. In addition, his stress on communal participation in this regard reflects one of the significant ways in which Schleiermacher's theological method seems to be determinative of Farley's theological method, as the nineteenth century theologian similarly claims that "unless religious communities are to be regarded as mere aberrations, it must be possible to show that the existence of such association is a necessary element for the development of the human spirit," as revealed in Friedrich Schleiermacher, Brief Outline of the Study of Theology, ed. and trans. Terrence N. Tice (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), § 22, p. 12.

to find the key to being, nature, or reality by attending to the very structure of *pre-reflective directedness*, it is phenomenological philosophy."[74] Thus, a central feature of phenomenological philosophy is, according to Farley, the attention it gives to the pre-reflective intentionality of the human being or, more simply, the attention it gives to "intentional analysis."[75]

However, Farley concedes that with the call to intentional analysis, one can well argue that the harking of phenomenological philosophy for one to turn to the realities themselves can be interpreted (especially in its Husserlian versions) as a harking to turn "to the human subject himself."[76] To the degree that this argument might have merit, it is fair to ask, Farley suggests, whether or not "the Husserlian program eschews reality? [That is,] does Husserlian phenomenology turn away from existing, transcendent, and

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[74]EM, 26, emphases mine. Moreover, Robert R. Williams argues that Schleiermacher is, in this respect, a progenitor of phenomenological theology. For instance, Williams argues that, for Schleiermacher, "feeling is . . . the original, pretheoretical consciousness of reality," as revealed in Robert R. Williams, Schleiermacher the Theologian: The Construction of the Doctrine of God (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1978), 4. In addition, Williams holds that "Schleiermacher's theology is phenomenological in that he approaches the question of God and the entire doctrine of God through a reflective analysis of religious consciousness and its object," as shown in ibid., 5. I am indebted to Edward Farley for pointing me to Williams as one who could shed light on the potential connection between Schleiermacher and phenomenological theology, as set forth in Edward Farley to author, 24 July 2000. And, while I think Williams is on the right path which such a line of thought (although I would be inclined to explore the notion that Schleiermacher merely anticipates some aspects of phenomenological theology), investigating this potential connection is beyond the scope of this work.

[75]EM, 28.

[76]EM, 32.

objective references in favor of meant, immanent, and subjective appearances?"[77] If so, it may be that "phenomenological theology [as well] . . . inevitably transforms transcendence into immanence, the determinate into the universal, and theology into anthropology."[78]

In response to such potential queries, Farley holds that, at least for Husserl, "the region of the transcendental necessarily 'mirrors' the structures of the world;"[79] that is, "the structure of the world at large . . . [has been] repeated in the microcosm of human consciousness."[80] Yet, Farley ultimately acknowledges that "Husserl does little in setting forth the ontological grounds of this correspondence."[81]

The operative principles of phenomenological theology. Having introduced the concept of phenomenological theology and having addressed what may be referred to as its challenge of the transcendent, Farley next endeavors to depict the operative principles of his phenomenological theology. Part of the function of these operative principles is to

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[77]EM, 34.

[78]EM, 29.

[79]EM, 44.

[80]EM, 46.

[81]EM, 47. Farley makes this acknowledgment even after showing how "Ludwig Landgrebe, one of Husserl's early assistants, argues that the analyses in . . . [Husserl's] last period . . . involves a *potential* metaphysics," as set forth in EM, 46, emphasis mine. Here, Farley refers to Ludwig Landgrebe, "Phänomenologische Bewusstseinsanalyse und Metaphysik," chap. in Der Weg der Phänomenologie: Das Problem einer ursprünglichen Erfahrung (Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1963), 75-110.

help uncover what he terms "the theological given,"[82] since, with phenomenological theology, "the theological given precedes doctrines."[83] Thus, for example, in developing a theology of Jesus Christ, one begins not with the doctrine of Jesus Christ but with the "theological given" of Jesus Christ himself.[84] In short, part of the function of these operative principles is to assist in ensuring that "theology's object precedes and controls theology's method."[85]

One operative principle is what Farley terms "the principle of positivity."[86] The need for this principle emerges because "the methods and instruments of . . . [phenomenological theology are] oriented . . . toward universality, . . . [but they must] be applied to a historical, determinate subject matter."[87] Farley argues that "Pascal anticipates . . . [the principle of positivity] in his distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a distinction which is not between the false and the true but between a universal, speculatively apprehended entity

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[82]EM, 54.

[83]EM, 55.

[84]EM, 55.

[85]EM, 56.

[86]EM, 57.

[87]EM, 56.

and the God of a determinate . . . [or given] religious faith."[88] And, what Pascal anticipates, Farley more fully defines and illustrates, as follows:

> *Each general stratum undergoes transformation when it is incorporated into the strata more determinate than itself*. This, in brief, is the principle of positivity. To illustrate, being an American is transformed in the determinacy of being a black American. Being a black American undergoes transformation in the determinate situation of urban black youth.[89]

Thus, he holds that "what we have before us is a hierarchy of forms which range from the most general (those which characterize being as such) to the most restricted. The more general forms are *transformed* by the more restricted forms."[90] With this understanding of the principle of positivity, one can better see how, according to Farley:

> Both provincial and generic hermeneutics violate . . . [this principle]: *provincial hermeneutics* because it does not see itself as reflecting or participating in structures more universal than its own actuality; *generic hermeneutics* because it presupposes that more universal strata simply reappear unchanged in more

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[88]EM, 57. In his understanding of the principle of positivity, Farley clearly draws upon the manner in which Schleiermacher developed this concept. According to Robert R. Williams, "Schleiermacher embraces this principle when he writes that while the same generic features are present in religions, they are differently determined, that is concretely modified, in each," as revealed in Williams, Schleiermacher the Theologian, 12. Here, Williams points to the following argument made by Schleiermacher in The Christian Faith: "Each particular form of communal piety has both an outward unity, as a fixed fact of history with a definite commencement, and an inward unity, as a peculiar modification of that general character which is common to all developed faiths of the same kind and level," as set forth in Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Baillie, W. R. Matthews, Edith Sandbach-Marshall, A. B. Macaulay, Alexander Grieve, J. Y. Campbell, R. W. Stewart, and H. R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), § 10, p. 44; referenced in Williams, Schleiermacher the Theologian, 12. I will more fully consider Farley's understanding of Schleiermacher's conception of positivity in an excursus below.

[89]EM, 60.

[90]EM, 60, emphasis mine.

determinate levels. To illustrate, the resurrection of Jesus is another case of a 'rising god.'[91]

Two other operative principles of his phenomenological theology are "apprehensions" and "realities."[92] An "apprehension" is not a "sense perception . . . [but] an act which grasps realities directly or immediately,"[93] and "a genuine apprehension is not confirmed because it itself is that consciousness-act in which confirming evidence is grasped as evidence."[94] "Realities," according to Farley, "refer . . . to anything and everything which has the status of being over against us, and has the capacity to evoke from us an acknowledgment of that status."[95] That is, for him, a "reality" is "an entity

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[91]EM, 61, emphases mine.

[92]EM, 65.

[93]EM, 65. Here, Farley refers to the following passages within Husserl's work: Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 82-85, 379-403; idem, Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 57-58; idem, Formal and Transcendental Logic, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), chap. 4; idem, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 123-35; idem, Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 17-18. However, to be more precise, Husserl seems to actually argue that we perceive realities or things due to the essence(s) available in the relation between us and the things, as set forth in Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, 134.

[94]EM, 66-67.

[95]EM, 70. With his explanation of "reality," Farley does not cite Husserl, but, by "reality," Farley appears to have in mind not so much Husserl's concept of "Erlebnis," an inner, immanent mental experience of an intentional object (i.e., an object of intentional relation), as he does Husserl's notion of "Erfahrung," an outer, transcendent physical experience of an actual object (i.e., an object of the senses), as Husserl sets forth in

which has a certain (noematic) content, a certain unification and differentiation (essence), and which occurs in a certain mode of existence."[96] But, this latter definition requires another one: a "*noema*" is a "meant-object."[97] To illustrate, Farley indicates that "even a mirage house has the *noema*, the meant-object, house. However, unless we simply define reality as whatever a consciousness-act intends, the *noema* must be distinguished from reality."[98] Furthermore, Farley holds that not only would human bodies count as "realities," but so would "structures and processes of consciousness . . . and the structures of dependence between individuals and collectivities;"[99] and, he implies that all of these types of realities would also have *noemas*. In addition, Farley maintains that, unlike realities, *noemata* perdure; that is, he avers that a *noema* can "be retained whatever . . . [the corresponding] object's empirical fate."[100]

Edmund Husserl, "The Amsterdam Lectures on Phenomenological Psychology," trans. Richard E. Palmer, in Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 213-21.

[96]EM, 69.

[97]EM, 68. With his treatment here of *noema*, Farley does not cite Husserl. And, while it does seem to be the case that, in a certain sense, Husserl may be said to convey that a *noema* is a "meant-object," Husserl also clarifies (as Farley partially points to in EM, 79-80): that one does not perceive a *noema;* rather, a *noema* allows one to perceive, as set forth in Husserl, Ideas, 255-65; and, that there is a prescriptive or regulatory aspect to the *noema* (i.e., the *noema* of a table would indicate that a table cannot fly, etc.), as shown in Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 53-54.

[98]EM, 68.

[99]EM, 69.

[100]EM, 196.

Yet another operative principle of Farley's phenomenological theology is "the reflective method,"[101] a method that involves not only theological bracketing and uncovering but also theological eidetics.[102] Here, in general, Farley argues that "the method of phenomenological theology is primarily reflective. This reflection is not so much 'thinking about' an explicitly given totality as it is an attempt to penetrate and open up matters which are present but hidden."[103] This is perhaps a crude example, but if one were to phenomenologically reflect on a "page of printed matter, . . . [one would, with practice, begin to] encounter the . . . [present but hidden] essence 'page' and also the . . . [the present but hidden] essences 'white,' 'black,' and 'rectangular.'"[104]

Turning to the first aspect of the reflective method – theological bracketing – Farley maintains that since theological reflection can become easily sidetracked when it is first begun, "the procedure calls for a negative moment resembling what Husserl called the *epochē*."[105] It is "negative not in the sense of denial or repudiation but in the sense of

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[101]EM, 70.

[102]EM, 70-82.

[103]EM, 70. In his essay, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," Husserl appears to make a similar point, as he argues that phenomenology tries to penetrate to the being that language expresses," as set forth in Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," in Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 95-96.

[104]William T. Jones, A History of Western Philosophy, vol. 5, The Twentieth Century to Wittgenstein and Sartre, 2d ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1980), 269.

[105]EM, 71.

suspending, putting into brackets, or temporarily not taking into consideration."[106] And, with phenomenological theology, there are "two sorts of commitments or belief-systems in . . . [the] initial moment of theological reflection . . . [that must be suspended or bracketed in this manner]."[107] Those two sorts of commitments are *church authority* and *metaphysics*.[108] The former must be bracketed for reasons that have already been examined (under the above discussion of "the house of authority"); the latter must be bracketed, in part:

> Because the ways in which realities are apprehended in the particular historical faith will remain hidden if they are allowed to be realities only to the degree that they are translatable into the scheme in question. This is, of course, simply another way of expressing the principle of positivity. It presupposes a certain distinctiveness in such historical entities as religious faiths which reflect but also particularize (and sometimes explode) the ontological structures discovered by philosophers.[109]

Thus, according to Farley, "the theological epochē . . . is partly an *existential* act involving not just a temporary change of stance but a permanent attempt, perhaps always only an attempt, to put out of action the reality models which have shaped our consciousness, so that the specific realities of a determinate faith can appear."[110]

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[106]EM, 71. In one of his writings, Husserl describes the *epochē* as involving a bracketing of ontological commitments that we have in our natural attitude (that is, in our daily living), as shown in Edmund Husserl, "The Amsterdam Lectures on Phenomenological Psychology," 221-24.

[107]EM, 71.

[108]EM, 71-72, emphases mine.

[109]EM, 73.

[110]EM, 74. Here, Farley refers to Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, 71-73.

The second aspect of the operative principle of the reflective method is theological "uncovering" or "questioning-back."[111] Here, Farley maintains: (1) that "the everyday activities of the religious cultus . . . [i.e., going to worship services, caring for the poor, etc.] are founded in a 'world' . . . [i.e, a 'background'] that contains many strata; institutional, pre-institutional, intersubjective, subjective and experiential, and transcendental;"[112] and, (2) that this "world" or "background" "remains unexplored but offers itself as explorable."[113] Furthermore, he avers that what enables this exploration of this "world" (that he begins to identify as a "faith-world") is "a reflection which is a conscious second-order act that turns back, questions back to the accessible strata beneath the everyday acts of the cultus."[114]

The final aspect of the operative principles of the reflective method is "theological eidetics."[115] And, what Farley has in view here is a theological version of

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[111]EM, 75.

[112]EM, 77.

[113]EM, 77. However, Farley indicates that, in this regard, he breaks somewhat with Husserl, in that he does not advocate a questioning-back to a transcendental region (as Husserl would); rather, following Alfred Schutz, he advocates a questioning-back to a social world (in particular to the social world of what Farley will come to refer to as a faith-world), as shown in EM, 75. Farley does not here cite any particular work by Schutz, but he seems to have in view passages such as the following: Alfred Schutz, "Some Structures of the Life-World," trans. Aron Gurwitsch, in Collected Papers, vol. 3, Studies in Phenomenological Theory, ed. Ilse Schutz (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 116-32.

[114]EM, 77.

[115]EM, 79. As Farley indicates, "*eidetics* . . . refers simply to the . . . [phenomenological] method of essence inquiry," as set forth in EM, 80.

what Husserl terms "eidetic reduction."[116] To approach what Husserl means by "eidetic reduction," it can be helpful to contrast this type of reduction with a more superficial one that he refers to as a "psychological reduction." With a "psychological reduction," one endeavors to reduce things to their meaning or to their phenomena for "Erfahrung" (that is, for the realm of physical experience, where objects can be encountered through the senses). However, with an "eidetic reduction," one strives to reduce objects to their *eidos* or essence for "Erlebnis" (that is, for the realm of mental experience, where objects can be encountered through intentional relation). Thus, to illustrate these two concepts of reduction by way of paraphrase, a Husserlian-informed perspective would suggest that by reflecting upon, say, a hundred different tables (assuming that each table is different from the others in at least some way), one could conduct both a psychological reduction and a eidetic reduction. With the former type of reduction, one could: examine the physical tables; measure them according to the instruments suitable to various physical senses; conduct statistical analyses; and, posit sensory results appropriate to the realm of physical experience ("I find that these tables have an average height of x, an average color, on the color spectrum, of y, etc."). However, with the latter type of reduction, one could take into consideration *noetic* elements ("how am I intending these tables?") and *noematic* elements ("what rules do the "front sides" of these tables suggest about what the "whole table" should be?), and, in view of these considerations, through free variation, one could

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[116]Some of Husserl's clearest explanations of eidetic reduction can be found in Husserl, "The Amsterdam Lectures on Phenomenological Psychology," trans. Richard E. Palmer, in Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger, 213-53, and in idem, Ideas, 112-70, passim.

eventually isolate the invariant *eidos* or essence of "table" appropriate to the realm of mental experience ("I find, in the interplay between these various *noeses* and *noemata*, that this notion x of "table" is the essence of "table."). With this latter eidetic reduction, the *essence* of "table" would not be in the actual hundred different objects; nor would it be projected by this person's consciousness; rather, this essence of "table" would, in a sense, be "in between" the objects and this person's intentional consciousness.[117] A Husserlian-informed perspective would maintain that the second type of reduction, the eidetic reduction, is fuller and deeper because it gets to the core of what "table" is. Farley holds that this type of eidetic reduction (especially in its *noematic* components) can be carried out on realities found within the faith community – including the entire faith community itself. Thus, Farley maintains that, in theory, one could obtain the essence of ecclesia.[118]

Furthermore, Farley argues that with phenomenological theology, "under the principle of positivity, . . . [the essences or] the *noemata* with which we are concerned are *not* the universal essences of religious man *but* the more specific essences of a *concrete*

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[117]Ibid. Where *exactly* does Husserl locate these "in between" essences? I would argue that he places the essence between the *noesis* (the subjective aspect of an intentional experience, on the side of consciousness) and the *noema* (the objective aspect of an intentional experience, on the side of the thing); however, at least on occasion, Farley identifies the *eidos* (or the essence) with the *noema*, as, for instance, he indicates: "The essence or *eidos* in eidetic intuition and analysis is . . . a *noema*," as set forth in EM, 79. However, debating Farley's interpretation of this fine detail of Husserl's understanding of eidetic reduction is beyond the scope of this work.

[118]EM, 108.

and corporate *historical* existence."[119] In addition, he maintains that "theological eidetics may be a contemporary and phenomenological version of the nineteenth-century attempt to obtain the 'essence of Christianity.'"[120] However, Farley avers that, granted certain similarities (with these earlier efforts to obtain the essence of Christianity), his "theological eidetics differs from that program because, in its attempt to obtain the *eidos* or essence, . . . [theological eidetics] focuses on . . . the meant correlate of the consciousness-act which 'means' such entities from within."[121] Therefore, Farley suggests that the advantage theological eidetics has over earlier essence of Christianity programs is that theological eidetics enables the phenomenological theologian to uncover more fully and deeply what participants in the faith community "mean" by ecclesia and other faith realities.[122]

With his understanding of theological eidetics, Farley makes clear that he is also breaking from "both Wittgensteinian and hermeneutic theologies, . . . [where] it is fashionable to emphasize language as *the* way in which this historical faith is

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[119]EM, 80, emphases mine.

[120]EM, 81. And, here, perhaps more than anywhere else within the various components of his theological method, Farley demonstrates his reliance upon Schleiermacher. Accordingly, I will consider Farley's understanding of Schleiermacher's notion of the essence of Christianity in an excursus below.

[121]EM, 81, emphasis mine. Farley indicates that "the meant correlate of the consciousness-act" is the "*noema*," as set forth in EM, 81, which alone, Husserl implies, would provide a fuller, deeper essence than is possible through psychological reduction. However, it seems to me that with eidetic reduction, Husserl allows not only for consideration of the "*noema*" but also for consideration of the "*noesis*."

[122]EM, 81-82.

available."[123] He indicates that while he concurs with these theologies "that language has a certain priority as a bearer of the availability, we would argue that this formulation is subject to an unfortunate abstractness."[124] One reason he gives for this claim of "an unfortunate abstractness" is that the "historical faith has vehicles of availability other than its own language, namely, its cultic acts, institutional structures, and the like, which in any given present are available both to intuition and to the historian."[125]

Theological portraiture. Yet another way in which Farley describes the manner in which one may seek faith's apprehensions as they are found in the faith community is through a concept that he terms "theological portraiture."[126] According to his understanding of phenomenological theology, theological "reflection begins . . . already disposed by . . . tradition. *In brief, some view of ecclesiality is already at work in theology's prereflective situation*."[127] And, Farley suggests that this already given view of ecclesiality is neither a doctrine nor a "vague feeling of well-being, . . . [but something that may be described with a] metaphor . . . of a picture, less a photograph than an

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[123]EM, 80. Farley does not indicate in EM who he feels may be included among these hermeneutic theologians. However, as previously mentioned, in one of his later works, he implies that they are indebted to Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, as set forth in Farley, Divine Empathy, 180.

[124]EM, 81.

[125]EM, 81.

[126]ER, 195. With his concept of "theological portraiture," which Farley presents in ER, he shows both a creative recapitulation and, in some ways, a further development of his notion of the "reflective method," which he had set forth in EM.

[127]ER, 195.

impressionistic painting."[128] That is, Farley holds that tradition (which he describes as a picture) comes to the theologian not as an unrevisable authority (i.e., as a photograph) but as a revisable resource (i.e., as an impressionistic painting). In addition, Farley argues, *reflection* on the already given material reference may be called a *portrait* (by which he means a "reflective theological painting" of a "prereflective impressionistic picture of ecclesial existence ");[129] thus, "the move from picture to portrait is the move from the prereflective to the reflective."[130]

Furthermore, Farley maintains that "the object (portrait) of theological portraiture . . . [is] a portrait of that total corporate historical phenomenon, *ecclesial existence,*"[131] and he holds that one may find "ecclesial existence . . . primarily in the depth sociality, the determinate intersubjectivity of the community."[132] Theological portraiture is not a work that one can hope to perfectly complete, but it is a task that should strive to grasp a unified "ecclesial existence" or "ecclesiality." As Farley claims:

> Portraiture is itself a constantly changing enterprise. It resembles an artist constantly redoing a portrait and even offering new portraits of a child who is growing up. We need not conclude from this metaphor, however, that the process of change in the history of Christianity is necessarily one of maturation. Further, the focus of the portrait is not on essence, a kernel in a husk. Yet the portrait does

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[128]ER, 196.

[129]ER, 196-97.

[130]ER, 197.

[131]ER, 197, emphasis mine.

[132]ER, 199. Farley indicates that his use here of "*determinate intersubjectivity* refers to the specifically ecclesial mutual intentions or ways of meaning through which participants in ecclesial reality are present to each other," as set forth in ER, 199.

> try to capture the unity, the interrelation of features. The result, if successful – the face staring out of the portrait – is ecclesiality.[133]

In sum, one of Farley's central concerns with this description of theological portraiture is to show that theologians may approach tradition not as an authority but more as a historical resource.[134] And, he argues, what makes this particular portraiture theological is that "ecclesial existence . . . [has already been] given as redemptive."[135] This process of questioning back to historically available faith apprehensions – a process that Farley describes not only as "theological portraiture" but also as "reflective method" – can also be seen through Farley's understanding of certain aspects of Schleiermacher's theological method; therefore, it is to this understanding that I now turn.

An excursus on Farley's understanding of Schleiermacher's notions of the "positivity of Christianity" and the "essence of Christianity." Another perspective from which to approach a key aspect of Farley's concept of theological method can be gained through an exploration of his understanding of Schleiermacher's notions of the "positivity of Christianity" and the "essence of Christianity" and of the role these notions have played in the larger Christian tradition. Therefore, I will examine the way in which Farley approaches these Schleiermacherean notions, especially through his most

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[133]ER, 204-205.

[134]ER, 201.

[135]ER, 216.

substantial treatment of them in his work, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education.[136]

In order to establish a context for his understanding of Schleiermacher's notions of the "positivity of Christianity" and the "essence of Christianity," Farley argues that throughout approximately the first seventeen centuries of the Christian tradition, "theology" (or "theologia") was primarily conceived of: as "an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God;"[137] as "a habit (*habitus*) of the human soul;"[138] or, as the pursuit of "a sapiental knowledge."[139] However, he further avers, with the eighteenth century, a shift occurred in which "theology" began to be thought of more as a "cluster of disciplines" than as a "*habitus*." This shift was significant because it revealed a move from an understanding of theology as "the theologian's pursuit of knowledge of God and of the wisdom that accompanies salvation" to an understanding of theology as "the doctrines of the faith."[140] In addition, along with this shift (and perhaps as part of it), Farley maintains that in the eighteenth century a new "fourfold pattern" for studying theology took hold, in which theology was arranged into four divisions,

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[136]Edward Farley, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1983; reprint, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001). Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Theologia.

[137]Theologia, 31.

[138]Theologia, 31.

[139]Theologia, 56.

[140]Theologia, 81.

consisting not only of three "theoretical" disciplines – Scripture, church history, dogmatics (of which Scripture was the cornerstone) – but also of an "applied" (or "practical") discipline – pastoral theology.[141] At the core of this development of the fourfold pattern, according to Farley, was that the "truths . . . [provided by Scripture became] theology's subject matter."[142] Thus, there are echoes here of Farley's argument, discussed above, of how at least the theological academy began to come under "the house of authority" – exchanging the pursuit of experiential realities for the pursuit of written authorities (i.e., Scripture and dogmatics) that (supposedly) speak to these realities.

As these changes were taking place in what "theology" meant and in the way that it was being studied, Farley holds that Schleiermacher offered two significant insights that bore directly upon these developments, one of which may be referred to as the "clerical paradigm" and the other as the "essence of Christianity motif."[143]

With the "clerical paradigm," according to Farley, Schleiermacher argued that theology was not, like philosophy, a "pure science" (which would seek to study "universal" matters) but, like medicine and law, a "positive science" (which would endeavor to study "specific, historical" matters),[144] for the purpose of training clergy.[145]

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[141]Theologia, 77-89 passim.

[142]Theologia, 89.

[143]Theologia, 85.

[144]Theologia, 86.

[145]Theologia, 88.

With this development of a "clerical paradigm," Farley sees both strengths and weaknesses.

One of the strengths, he holds, was that, in treating theology as a "positive science," Schleiermacher was simultaneously working to advance the notion that Christianity should be considered not as a *natural religion* but as a *positive religion*, that is, as a "religion which is institutional, public, traditional, even precritical."[146] In other words, Schleiermacher was advancing the idea of the "positivity of Christianity," of the idea that Christianity was a "concrete, historically rooted . . . religion."[147] In the case of Christianity, this historical rooted-ness was "in the given reality or fact of Jesus."[148] And, for Schleiermacher, this was profound because, for him, this meant that facticity of the historical Jesus ensured the validity of Christianity. Moreover, for Schleiermacher, this meant that "the authority of the Bible and Church teachings rests on the positivity of

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[146]Theologia, 98. Schleiermacher was by no means the first to conceive of Christianity as a positive religion, but he did so in a unique way. In contrast to G. E. Lessing, for instance, who "held that positive religion was merely a politically useful modification of natural religion," as set forth in Wolfhart Pannenberg, Theology and the Philosophy of Science, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1976), 246, Schleiermacher "explained natural religion as a mere abstraction drawn from positive religion," as shown in Ibid., 248. Thus, while for Lessing a positive religion was, at best, a secondary, fragmentary expression of (or towards) natural religion, for Schleiermacher, a positive religion, such as Christianity, was an original, grounding religion.

[147]Bradford Hinze, Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, ed. Susan Thistlethwaite, no. 82 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993), 25.

[148]Ibid., 22.

Christian ecclesial faith;"[149] that is, the authority of Scripture as well as "every legitimate doctrine must have its historical origin in Christ."[150]

While the "positivity of Christianity" was the great strength of the development of Schleiermacher's "clerical paradigm," Farley argues that one of its weaknesses was in establishing the teaching of clergy as the purpose of theology. More specifically, he avers that, while this goal did not create immediate difficulties, it caused catastrophic problems in the later history of the church, as, unfortunately, this clerical purpose came to be merged with the "fourfold pattern" for studying theology (which was developed before Schleiermacher but continued on – and was further embraced – after him). For instance, in the realm of theological education, he holds that this merger led to "the rationale for . . . [the teaching of] . . . each [theological] discipline . . . [being] not its *theological* character, its relation to Christianity or . . .[to the] Christian faith but its contribution to the training of professionals."[151] What became lost in this process, according to Farley, was the way in which "theology at one time meant . . . the sapiential knowledge which attended Christian life."[152]

In addition to the "clerical paradigm" (with its strengths and weaknesses), Farley maintains that the second significant insight that Schleiermacher offered – that also bore

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[149]Ibid., 202.

[150]Ibid., 220.

[151]Theologia, 128. Furthermore, Farley holds that this trend has continued up to the present day, especially in North America, as set forth in Theologia, 127.

[152]Theologia, 130.

directly upon the developments that were occurring in his era with regard to what "theology" meant and to the way that it was being studied – was the "essence of Christianity motif."[153] Farley argues that Schleiermacher set forth this motif, which presupposes the notion of the "positivity of Christianity," as part of a new "threefold pattern" for studying theology. Schleiermacher's threefold pattern consisted of three divisions: practical theology; historical theology (which called for the study of: Scripture, church history, and dogmatics); and, philosophical theology.[154] Farley holds that, with each of these divisions, Schleiermacher included the "essence of Christianity" motif "either as criterion appealed to or as a directly thematized subject of inquiry;"[155] however, he maintains that this was most especially the case with the third division, philosophical theology. Here, Farley avers that, for Schleiermacher, the "essence of Christianity" motif meant all that was most connected with "the determinate redemption of Christianity"[156] – or, as Schleiermacher puts it in The Christian Faith, "everything . . .

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[153]Theologia, 85. Although Farley does not here specifically cite Schleiermacher's works regarding the development of the essence of Christianity motif, he seems to have in view passages such as: Schleiermacher, Brief Outline of the Study of Theology, §§ 21, 23, 32, 49, pp. 12, 13, 19, 29-30; and, idem, The Christian Faith, § 11, p. 24 .

[154]Theologia, 90-93. Farley holds that Schleiermacher combined Scripture, church history, and dogmatics within the division of historical theology because "he saw all of them as parts of a historical attempt to fathom and provide detailed knowledge of the essence of Christianity," as set forth in Theologia, 108.

[155]Theologia, 93.

[156]Theologia, 93.

related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth."[157] As with his advancement of the notion of the "positivity of Christianity, Schleiermacher's development of the "essence of Christianity" motif was profound since, for him, this meant an "attempt to substitute historical inquiry for the appeal to . . . [biblical and doctrinal] authority."[158] That is, for Schleiermacher, the "essence of Christianity" was a new authority that the theologian could utilize to develop authentic Christian doctrine.[159] Furthermore, Farley holds that, according to Schleiermacher, the "essence of Christianity" must be correlated with "a fundamental ontological structure and requirement of the human being."[160] Indeed, he avers that Schleiermacher saw this as the core task of his philosophical theology.[161] In addition, Farley argues that, for

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[157]Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, § 11, p. 52.

[158]ER, 202. Yet, this has to be held in tension with Schleiermacher's view, which Farley recognizes, that "exegesis, church history, and dogmatics, . . . each in its own way, . . . contributes to a knowledge of the idea of Christianity," as set forth in Theologia, 92.

[159]ER, 201.

[160]Theologia, 93. Farley's central text for this assertion seems to be the following passage from Schleiermacher's Brief Outline:

> Insofar as one tries to make do with a merely empirical method of interpreting Christianity, he cannot achieve a genuine knowledge of it. One's task is rather to endeavor both to understand the essence of Christianity in contradistinction to other churches and other kinds of faith, and to understand the nature of piety and of religious communities in relation to all other activities of *the human spirit* (as revealed in Schleiermacher, Brief Outline of the Study of Theology, § 21, p. 12, emphasis mine; cited in Farley, Theologia, 93).

[161]Theologia, 93.

Schleiermacher, the "essence of Christianity" is "historical and therefore in process."[162] Thus, according to Schleiermacher, since "there is . . . [both] something fixed and something mobile about the nature of Christianity,"[163] "the essence of Christianity must continually be interpreted, evaluated, and reformulated so that the articulation of this essence can be developed."[164]

Farley further argues that as the Christian tradition continued to develop after Schleiermacher – while his notion about the training-of-clergy purpose within the "clerical paradigm" was, generally speaking, embraced – his notion about the "essence of Christianity" did not gain as much traction.[165] Farley holds that part of the fallout of the these developments is that there has been not only a loss of seeking to "grasp what is 'essential' [in Christianity] . . . and . . . [of endeavoring to] relate it to (human) reality"[166] – but also an opening of the way "to the older biblicism and supernaturalism."[167] In other words, he avers that while Schleiermacher pointed to the way in which the Christian tradition could have regained "theology" – as a "habitus" – as a human cognition of God, the Christian tradition has largely missed this opportunity and, therefore, has lost the

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[162]ER, 204.

[163]Hinze, Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey, 232

[164]Ibid., 231.

[165]Theologia, 114.

[166]Theologia, 108.

[167]Theologia, 108.

opportunity to once again grasp authentic "theologia." Therefore, Farley identifies his methodological task as an effort to encourage the Christian tradition to return to a Schleiermacherean endeavor to correlate the essence of Christianity (everything related to the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ mediated through the church) with human cognitivity in its prereflective and reflective forms.[168]

In short, Farley's comprehension of Schleiermacher's concepts of the "positivity of Christianity" and the "essence of Christianity" and of the way these concepts have functioned within the larger Christian tradition seems to offer a microcosm of Farley's overarching theological project. In particular, what can be seen in Farley's comprehension of Schleiermacher – the summons to turn away from a universal to a more specific, historical subject matter as well as the summons to turn away from an understanding of theology that endeavors to ground itself with a historically detached biblicism to an understanding of theology that seeks to connect the historical distinctiveness of Christianity with the way in which human cognition has been structured – can also be seen, in a more developed manner, not only with Farley's critique of "the house of authority" but also with his method of ecclesial reflection, in which the faith community attempts both to retrieve the buried but nevertheless historically available realities of faith and to relate these realities to human cognitive processes.

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[168]Theologia, 165-70.

A Theological Eidetics of the Faith Community's Structures of Language, Redemptive Existence, and Intersubjectivity

Having endeavored to demonstrate that, in order to see realities, one must turn to faith's apprehensions, as they are found in the faith community, Farley might then, ideally, endeavor to carry out "a full eidetics of ecclesia."[169] However, since the scope of such a project would be so vast, he determines, instead, to focus on "those components of ecclesia which bear on the problem of faith and reality."[170] He maintains that those components (or structures) of ecclesia (or the faith community) which most pertain to this problem are: language (especially images or symbols), redemptive existence, and intersubjectivity. Yet, in order to examine these structures in their proper context, one must first consider Farley's concepts of: "world," "life-world," and "faith-world."[171]

World, life-world, and faith-world. Alluding to Husserl, Farley argues that "world" is the entirety of all backgrounds and of all potential future acts and intentions,[172] and he suggests that since the "intention of a background and horizon is present prior to any actual perception, . . . the result is that *world* is 'passively pre-given.'"[173] Moreover,

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[169]EM, 108.

[170]EM, 108.

[171]EM, 85-105. Here, with regard to "world" and "life-world," Farley refers especially to the following passages within Husserl's work: Husserl, Ideas, 101-105, 147-49; idem, Cartesian Meditations, 61-62; idem, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, 48-53, 123-35, 343-83; idem, Experience and Judgment, 27-46.

[172]EM, 88.

[173]EM, 87, emphasis mine.

he holds that "life-world" is "the world in the sense of the common-sense world, the world of everyday life."[174] On the basis of these concepts, Farley, again alluding to Husserl, stresses that one's life-world "is comprised not just of things but of facts, and not just of facts but entities which exist . . . in graduations of importance."[175] Thus, for example, "the chair in my living room is not simply a thing with a certain shape and color. In my *life-world* it is present as expensive, as early American, as having been inherited from a revered ancestor, as being too frail to be used."[176]

With these Husserlian-informed sketches of what he means by world and life-world, Farley develops a concept of faith-world. Here he maintains that "faith has a 'world of its own;' . . . possesses a language of its own; . . . and has a community of its own."[177] However, he also argues that the faith-world is *not* "a world in the sense of one among many contiguous worlds that exist side by side."[178] There are two reasons for this. First, "faith tends to permeate the total life-world . . . [because the] faith community . . . [intends to] re-form the life-world after its own image."[179] And, second, "faith tends to be world-creating not merely in the sense of permeating any existing life-world; it calls

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[174]EM, 88.

[175]EM, 88.

[176]EM, 88, emphasis mine.

[177]EM, 101.

[178]EM, 102.

[179]EM, 103.

forth 'world' in the very special sense of *the* world, the one world."[180] Yet, Farley acknowledges, "in Western civilization where secularity has largely replaced the preceding religious world-view, faith is largely unsuccessful in actualizing its own *telos* toward world, and lives in fact in a schizophrenic state, being impelled to incorporate the very secularity which is its greatest threat and competitor."[181]

According to Farley, "the recovery of the faith-world helps partially to correct the usual individualistic treatments of faith, and reminds us that, when faith does occur, it tends to pervade and alter the life-world."[182] Yet, he argues, this intended correction leaves out "the very thing that carries faith in its world-pervading and world-creating propensity, namely a specific human community."[183] Therefore, he turns his attention to the specific human community of faith or, more precisely, to those structures of the community of faith that most pertain to the problem of faith and reality – the structures of language, redemptive existence, and intersubjectivity.

The faith community's structure of language. Farley argues that the community of faith has a "language of its own,"[184] and he maintains that this occurs because of three different reasons. First, the faith community (like any community) "necessarily involves

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[180]EM, 103.

[181]EM, 105.

[182]EM, 106.

[183]EM, 106.

[184]EM, 109.

ways in which human beings are reciprocally related by . . . everyday life activities, . . . and these activities involving reciprocal relationships are conducted, as Wittgenstein says, by means of the appropriate language games."[185] Second, the faith community has a language of its own, according to Farley, because language plays a role in the historical continuity of the faith community, as this community (like other communities) seems "to have a kind of instinct for survival which propels . . . [it] to a constant self-perpetuation."[186] Third, the community of faith has its own language since this community has the concern to redemptively alter human existence, and it appears "evident that language is an utterly indispensable component of this alteration."[187]

Having endeavored to show why the faith community has a language of its own, Farley then seeks to "find a way to identify the more enduring and constitutive dimensions of . . . [the] linguisticality of the community of faith."[188] Towards this end, he begins by setting forth the notion that between "the perceiving subject" (the act of consciousness) and "the perceived object" there is "the meant object" or "the *noema*."[189] Thus, Farley argues that "noematic analysis would appear to be a potentially fruitful tool in the hands of theologians, . . . [for] if faith involves human consciousness or is in some

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[185]EM, 109.

[186]EM, 110.

[187]EM, 111.

[188]EM, 112.

[189]EM, 112. Here Farley refers to Husserl, Ideas, 255-81, 359-78; idem, Cartesian Meditations, 31-55, as set forth in EM, 113.

way an 'act of consciousness,' it will have *noemata* which can then be propounded."[190] But, he holds that, so far, noematic analysis, as it has been practiced, has been too individualistic; therefore, he indicates that he intends to explore how it can be carried out in a more communal manner.[191]

Intending to point the way toward a more corporate understanding of noematic analysis, Farley argues that "there is an analogy between the . . . consciousness acts of an individual psyche and the cooperative and interdependent activities and co-intentions which characterize a particular social world."[192] And, in light of this, it must follow, he maintains, that "the corporate stratum like the individual one is *intentional* in structure. This means that it too is linguistically carried, that it has *meant objects* in necessary correlation with its social acts and its depth intersubjectivity."[193] Therefore, according to Farley, corporate *noemata* do exist. And, because they do, theological method and theological hermeneutics "must reach for the noematic dimension . . . [not only of individuals but also] of the community."[194]

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[190]EM, 113.

[191]EM, 114.

[192]EM, 115.

[193]EM, 115, emphases mine.

[194]EM, 116. In his treatment of the corporate or social aspect of *noemata*, Farley does not directly reference Alfred's Schutz's work. However, due to his numerous allusions to Schutz in EM, it seems likely that Farley here has in view Schutz's emphasis that "the social character belongs to the life-world essentially and intrinsically," as shown in Aron Gurwitsch, introduction to Collected Papers, by Alfred Schutz, vol. 3, Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy, ed. Ilse Schutz (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), xxiii. See also Alfred Schutz, "The Structure of the Social World," chap.

Farley holds that the language which carries the corporate intentions of the faith community is the language of *story* and *image* and that the language whose role it is to help make the corporate intentions relevant and comprehendible is *myth* and *doctrine*.[195] Here, he maintains that "myth itself is not the most original layer of religious imagery but the product of an attempt to translate such into the inclusive and objective world-view of a given age."[196] This shift from "story and image" to "myth and doctrine" occurs because "story and image are always in search of myth . . . [and doctrine], a way of being cosmologized into the objective consensus of an age and its world-picture."[197] For instance, "with the creation narratives of Genesis, . . . the prevailing Babylonian cosmology is appropriated in order to make understandable that the 'world' is the setting of the story of Yahweh and his people."[198] And, Farley avers, if one were to try to reach the corporate *noemata* reflected in these creation narratives, one would need to try get beyond the "second moment" of the (conscious, institutional) Genesis myth to the "first moment" of the (pre-conscious, pre-institutional) story and images behind the Genesis myth.[199]

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in The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 139-214.

[195]EM, 116, emphases mine.

[196]EM, 121-22.

[197]EM, 122.

[198]EM, 123.

[199]EM, 123-24.

With his treatment of story and image, Farley gives particular attention to the latter, indicating that the unique type of images on which he has focused are "*constitutive* images, meant correlates of a community's corporate intentionality and not the ever-changing and rich imagery that resides in the rhetoric of the leaders of that community in a given time."[200] Later in his career, he appears to refer to this type of images as "deep symbols."[201] And, his development of the concept of "deep symbols" reveals much about his understanding of theological method; therefore, I will turn to a more substantive exploration to the way in which he sets forth this concept.[202]

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[200]EM, 118.

[201]Edward Farley, Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996). Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Deep Symbols.

[202]One might wonder if this development in Farley's theological method also reflects a change in his theological method. I would argue that it does not reflect a change, at least not a substantive one. In some of his later works, such as Edward Farley, Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990), Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and Deep Symbols, he does turn to a broader base of philosophers, most notably Emmanuel Levinas as well as Martin Buber (and, to a lesser degree, Alfred North Whitehead and others); however, the central tenets of his theological method remain the same throughout all of these books. As Farley notes in an article in which he considers some of his own major works:

> I have always thought that theologians are better off as philosophical pluralists. This is because any specific philosophy is only one way to supplement and correct abstracting human experience. . . . If theology would probe the way things of faith modify actuality, it finds itself drawn to whatever may be useful for that purpose [as set forth in Edward Farley, "Reflecting on Some Reflections: A Third-Order Essay," Religious Studies Review 24 (April 1998): 153].

Thus, philosophy has primarily an instrumental (rather than a determinative) function in Farley's thought. In addition, some of his terminology (for the same or similar concepts) undergoes alterations, such as from "constitutive images" (in his earlier work, EM) to "deep symbols" (in his later work, Deep Symbols); yet, in general, these changes simply

An excursus on Farley's understanding of "deep symbols." Farley defines "deep symbols" as "the values by which a community understands itself, from which it takes it aims, and to which it appeals as canons of cultural criticism,"[203] and he indicates that they are "deep" since "they reside in perduring linguistic structures . . . [or master narratives] that maintain the community's very existence and . . . [since] they do not come and go with particular acts of speaking."[204] However, Farley argues that postmodernism now threatens to infect, discredit and perhaps to altogether remove deep symbols, including those of the Christian tradition, at least as they currently exist in industrialized Western societies.[205] Therefore, in view of this threat, Farley argues that the faith community should seek to reclaim these deep symbols.

In an effort to point to how a broad-based reclamation of deep symbols might occur, Farley addresses several significant deep symbols that currently (still) exist in Western culture, including: tradition, obligation, and hope. In each case, he examines not

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reflect an effort to use less formal (and more accessible) language.

[203]Deep Symbols, 3.

[204]Deep Symbols, 3.

[205]Deep Symbols, 1. Farley holds that "postmodern society is urban, commodity-oriented, pervasively bureaucratic, governed by anonymous relations, and subject more to images than reality . . . [and that] in postmodern society, the person is exposed almost from the beginning to multiple social worlds, multiple symbolic universes," as set forth in Deep Symbols, 11. In addition, he avers that "'postmodern' . . . [is] a term for the historical shift, the rise of a new epoch . . . [that] names a liberation into plurality (from provincialisms), relativity (from absolutisms), and difference (from the old frozen authorities)," as revealed in Deep Symbols, 12.

only what the particular deep symbol expresses but also how it is under a postmodern threat and how it might be restored.

For instance, he holds that the deep symbol of tradition conveys, among other elements, "*the experiences and insights of a specific people and time . . . [that] can be occasions for truth and wisdom ranging far beyond that people*."[206] Thus, tradition expresses the wisdom of past corporate human experience. Yet, he maintains that Western culture has been on the brink of becoming a "traditionless society," since the postmodern outlook has so contaminated corporate, media, political and other "powerful institutions that set the . . . dominant interpretive categories of everyday life . . . [that] the central function . . . of these institutions is . . . [no longer] the mediation of wisdom [of the past] . . . but the successful prosecution of the institution's distinctive aim."[207] In order for the deep symbol of tradition to at least be rethought (if not also restored), three things are required, according to Farley: "centering, sorting, and embodying."[208] "*Centering* . . . simply means grasping the god-term . . .[or deep symbol] itself, centering so exclusively on it that one presses past the caricatures, criticisms, and paradigms – the wrapping in which tradition comes to us – to grasp what tradition is."[209] "*Sorting* is a rethinking that disentangles tradition from the packages in which it is interpretively wrapped, from paradigms that have captured it but no longer work, and from social

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[206]Deep Symbols, 32.

[207]Deep Symbols, 37.

[208]Deep Symbols, 39.

[209]Deep Symbols, 39.

systems that would use it as an offensive weapon."[210] Thus, Farley's concepts of "centering" and "sorting" seem similar to his concepts of "bracketing" and "uncovering," as he indicates they should occur within the process of the reflective method. Finally, *embodiment* "is to think . . . [tradition's] wisdom as incarnated in the actualities of the present."[211]

In addition, Farley avers that the deep symbol of obligation expresses duty or responsibility from one human being towards another. To illustrate this deep symbol and to show how it suffers from postmodern influences, he argues the following:

> In the pages of . . . George Eliot and Charles Dickens, the power and reality of obligation is taken for granted, . . . [but] when we enter the social worlds of multinational corporations, the phenomenon of Madonna, or even a mental health clinic, we find ourselves on what seems to be a different planet. Even if obligation has not disappeared from these worlds, it is not the primary stuff that structures them.[212]

If the deep symbol of obligation is to have the possibility of being retrieved, what has to happen, Farley maintains, is that the faith community must "try to recall . . . something we experience, not just a hypothesis or theory or concept."[213] Thus, as with tradition, he argues that centering, sorting, and embodying must be employed in order to rethink obligation. "Centering" obligation involves, among other aspects, comprehending not only that "obligation draws us toward an *acknowledgment* of the other . . . [but also that]

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[210]Deep Symbols, 39.

[211]Deep Symbols, 41.

[212]Deep Symbols, 43.

[213]Deep Symbols, 47.

as obliged we are called to act, to be active toward the other."[214] Furthermore, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas,[215] Farley holds that centering obligation includes grasping that "the other as face . . . [or the other in its intrinsic vulnerability] . . . is the origin of obligation,"[216] and, alluding to Martin Buber,[217] he suggests that centering obligation involves comprehending that "obligation . . . originates as human beings exist in ongoing relation to each other."[218] "Sorting" obligation, Farley avers, means, in part, disentangling obligation from "the sphere of an ordering institution . . . [and taking it back to] the sphere of relation."[219] Also, "embodying" obligation, he argues, entails seeking to carry out obligation not just "in the coziness of our primary relations . . . [but also] in ever wider world environments."[220]

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[214]Deep Symbols, 48-49.

[215]Here Farley primarily refers to Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 113-18; idem, Ethics and Infinity, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 83-92; cited in Deep Symbols, 50-51.

[216]Deep Symbols, 50.

[217]Farley seems to chiefly have in mind Martin Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," chap. in The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays, ed. Maurice Friedman, trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965; reprint, Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 1998), 62-78; Buber is mentioned (but not cited) in Deep Symbols, 51.

[218]Deep Symbols, 51.

[219]Deep Symbols, 52.

[220]Deep Symbols, 54.

Moreover, Farley holds that the deep symbol of hope "finds its way into a variety of expressions: the kingdom of God, Messiah, second coming, . . . the new aeon."[221] Yet, as with tradition and obligation, Farley posits that "hope has little place in the way postmodern society confronts problems or understands the world. What currently makes more sense in such a society is planning, organizing, or predicting."[222] In order for the deep symbol of hope to be rethought, two potential solutions, according to Farley, must be avoided. The first is an objective solution; this solution holds, for instance, that "because of a passage in Revelation 21, because the millennium will take place, we hope."[223] The second is a subjective solution; this solution maintains, for example, that "my act of hope, my hopeful disposition, so orients me to action that my future is reshaped, and in some sense the kingdom of God comes."[224] He argues that both of these possible solutions are inadequate – "the objectivist view . . . [fails because it] reduces hope to a belief that something will come about in the future; . . . [and] the subjectivist view . . . [comes up short since] it reduces hope to subjective confidence and makes it an extension of human effort."[225]

Against these two potential but flawed solutions, Farley avers that a more reliable way for the deep symbol of hope to be thought is by turning to community, since "all

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[221]Deep Symbols, 95.

[222]Deep Symbols, 96.

[223]Deep Symbols, 97.

[224]Deep Symbols, 97.

[225]Deep Symbols, 97.

deep symbols arise within and guide the life of communities."[226] He acknowledges that "communities do not, of course, engage in acts of hoping."[227] Yet, he holds that they "are temporal entities; . . . [therefore,] they have a past and ways of keeping the past (tradition) alive, . . . [and] they also move into the future and have ways of symbolizing their future."[228] Thus, "the enduring gatherings of face-to-face relations we call communities symbolize and narratize the way we hope."[229] Accordingly, he argues that "religious communities . . . are called to hope, to rediscover and rethink hope in a situation in which the words of power are not confirmed or embodied in the larger society."[230]

Farley's concept of deep symbols – including his treatment of tradition, obligation, and hope – brings greater clarity to and further develops some of the aspects of his understanding of theological method. In particular, his notion of deep symbols more fully shows that the new authority he has in mind to replace "the house of authority" (with its loci of sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church) is communal experience or, more specifically, the experience of the faith community. That is, his highest authority or, to borrow his archaeological framework, his deepest authority for theological method seems to be the faith community's experience. In other words,

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[226]Deep Symbols, 97.

[227]Deep Symbols, 107.

[228]Deep Symbols, 107.

[229]Deep Symbols, 107.

[230]Deep Symbols, 112.

while he allows for the existence of such entities as deep symbols, master narratives (which, he argues, could be "grand paradigms" or, for Christians, "the Gospel"),[231] and doctrines,[232] he holds that it is not entities such as these that inform or serve as ultimately authoritative resources for the faith community or the experience of this community but just the opposite. He argues that the faith community or the experience of this community (or sometimes, more broadly, the interhuman) informs or functions as an ultimately authoritative resource for deep symbols, master narratives, and doctrines.

For Farley, deep symbols should not be changed lightly – and, in most cases, the faith community should vigilantly endeavor to preserve them – however, in the end, deep symbols or "god-terms originate as human beings have to do with each other in the distinctive sphere of the interhuman . . . [or in a particular community],"[233] since "it is the problems and phenomena of the sphere of the interhuman that provide much of the content of deep symbols; . . . in this way arise symbols that sort out the world, constrain certain kind of human acts, and set responsibilities."[234] Therefore, since they originate within the interhuman, "deep symbols . . . are relative to a particular community and thus are changeable,"[235] by, he implies, the particular community.

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[231]Deep Symbols, 6.

[232]Deep Symbols, 96.

[233]Deep Symbols, 21.

[234]Deep Symbols, 116.

[235]Deep Symbols, 3.

Likewise, he holds that master narratives, which exist together with deep symbols,[236] should perdure – and, generally speaking, the faith community should seek to protect these narratives – however, "the master narrative [for Christians], . . . the Gospel is neither an aggregate of ancient texts nor is it the content of most specific texts. And to leap from specific text to application surely bypasses the question of the real and the reality of the Gospel."[237] Where is this "question of the real" to be addressed? Farley suggests that it is to be addressed in "the world," that is, in "creation," by the community of faith.[238] And, if the faith community comes to discover an insight to the real in creation, then it may fix or revise the "ancient codes . . . [of the master narrative]."[239]

Similarly, Farley argues that doctrines also rest upon the deeper authority of the faith community's experience. For instance, he sets forth the following view with regard to the deep symbol of hope:

> The church of course has its doctrines of heaven, resurrection, and all that. But the power of those doctrines rests on hope as a word of power. To think that these doctrines are the reason we hope is to get the matter backward. We do not hope because we believe X, Y, or Z. We believe X, Y, and Z as expression of our hope. Accordingly, instead of exploring the doctrines of heaven, second coming, or life after death, I shall try to uncover the sense, the reality, the idea of hope.[240]

Thus, for Farley, doctrines rest upon deep symbols; and deep symbols, in turn, rest upon

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[236]Deep Symbols, 6.

[237]Deep Symbols, 70.

[238]Deep Symbols, 71.

[239]Deep Symbols, 90.

[240]Deep Symbols, 96.

reality; and, reality, in turn, as has already been shown, rests upon the faith community's experience (in the world).

Therefore, when it comes to relations among the faith community's experience, deep symbols, master narratives, and doctrines, Farley indicates that he intends to "privilege . . . the interhuman."[241] That is, among these relations, he argues for the privileging of human experience as it occurs within the community – or, more specifically from the Christian perspective, for the privileging of human experience as it takes place within the faith community. In other words, he argues that "deepest authority" should be granted to the experience of the faith community.

The faith community's structure of redemptive existence. However, in the context of his thesis that "faith's apprehensions occur pre-reflectively and by means of an enduring participation in a form of corporate, historical existence which . . . [he sometimes refers to as] ecclesia,"[242] Farley maintains that "ecclesia is that form of corporate historical existence whose origin and continuation is made possible by Jesus Christ, . . . [and] since Jesus Christ is the redeemer, ecclesia is both his instrument of redemption and the extension of his redemptive presence."[243] In light of this, Farley

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[241]Deep Symbols, 114.

[242]EM, 127.

[243]EM, 127.

further argues that to participate "in ecclesia means, therefore, . . . [to participate in] a modification of human existence toward redemption."[244]

Yet, in setting forth the notion that ecclesia is the instrument of Jesus Christ's salvific presence, Farley is not suggesting that humans have no role in the redemptive existence of the faith community. To the contrary, he holds that humans have the innate capacity: to respond to redemption;[245] "to distinguish good and evil;"[246] to refuse *"chaos"* (i.e., to refuse to willingly accept the effects of evil and disorder);[247] to refuse external determination by another (even if this refusal may not always be successful, as, for instance, with an unsuccessful attempt to refuse an act of murder);[248] and, to apprehend alienation.[249]

Among these innate human capacities, Farley argues that the refusal of chaos is paramount. In fact, he suggests that the "refusal of *chaos* . . . is the ultimate framework of man's endeavors,"[250] part of his "religious a priori."[251] And, he holds that "this refusal

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[244]EM, 128.

[245]EM, 130.

[246]EM, 134.

[247]EM, 133.

[248]EM, 134-37.

[249]EM, 140.

[250]EM, 133.

[251]EM, 133. The other part of man's "religious a priori" is his refusal of external determination, as revealed in EM, 139.

persists even when man's world picture is thoroughly secular and when there is an *intellectual* resignation to chaos, . . . [since] human consciousness is structured by a proclivity toward the anti-chaos, whatever that is."[252] When humans inappropriately handle this refusal of chaos, disrupted existence ensues.[253] For example, Farley maintains that "idolatry" occurs when man seeks "to secure himself against refused chaos and to transcend his vulnerability by means of something in his environment."[254] That is, stated conversely, he suggests that "idolatry" occurs when one attempts establish order through something of this world. Another way in which humans can inappropriately deal with the refusal of chaos is through what Farley terms "flight." "Flight" happens when one seeks to escape chaos by escaping "the world, . . . [with all of] its events, furnishings, and relations."[255]

Yet, Farley holds that with redemptive existence, both "idolatry" and "flight" can be overcome. "Idolatry," which he argues is more common in Western culture,[256] may be countered with "freedom," and by "freedom" he means "the modification of idolatrous existence toward an existence whose feature is a certain power over one's self-securing and its idols."[257] In addition, "flight," which he argues is more common in Eastern

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[252]EM, 142.

[253]EM., 139.

[254]EM, 143.

[255]EM, 144.

[256]EM, 146.

[257]EM, 146.

culture,[258] may be countered with "obligation," and by "obligation" he means, at least in part, the transformation of flight-ful existence toward an existence whose feature is a particular power in the direction of "mutual forgiveness and *agape*."[259]

The faith community's structure of intersubjectivity. In addition to having a structures of language and redemptive existence, the faith community, Farley avers, has a structure of intersubjectivity.[260] He begins his description of this structure by trying to clarify and locate the particular aspect of the faith community's intersubjectivity that he intends to examine. Along these lines, he makes a distinction between: (1) the surface "church" strata of the faith community, where participants consciously interact with one another; and, (2) the depth "ecclesia" strata of the faith community, where intersubjectivity happens pre-consciously.[261] To illustrate this distinction, he points to

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[258]EM, 146.

[259]EM, 148.

[260]While Farley does not cite Husserl's work in his development here of the concept of intersubjectivity, he seems to have in mind passages such as the following where Husserl sets forth his understanding of this concept: Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 89-151; idem, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, 108-10, 163-64, 178-86, 182-86, 252-55, 353-78. Moreover, with his stress on the communal aspect of intersubjectivity, Farley appears to have in view passages like the following where Schutz displays a similar emphasis: Alfred Schutz, "Foundations of a Theory of Intersubjective Understanding," chap. in The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 97-138.

[261]EM, 152. Here Farley states that he is "adopting Emil Brunner's convention, using ecclesia to mean the distinctive, corporate existence characterized by the presence of Jesus Christ, and church as our inclusive term," as set forth in EM, 152. In this regard, Farley refers to Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1953), 6, 10-12.

how in a marriage relationship there are: (1) "everyday conscious reciprocities . . . [between marriage partners];[262] and, (2) "an intersubjectivity in which the partners . . . [pre-consciously] intend each other as mates and possible parents."[263] After making this distinction, he indicates that he will be investigating intersubjectivity not at the level of "church" but at the pre-conscious depth level of "ecclesia."[264] Furthermore, he argues that this depth intersubjectivity of ecclesia is necessarily a "*determinate* intersubjectivity,"[265] since at this level of the faith community there occurs "the transposition of the universal structures of intersubjectivity (intending the other as self-transcending other, as personal body, etc.) into the specificity required by a particular relationship."[266]

Having at least somewhat situated the ecclesial intersubjectivity he intends to examine, Farley stresses that an intersubjective existence *comes before* redemptive existence.[267] Therefore, he holds that "we are prevented . . . from describing the rise of ecclesia as the generation of a sociality out of mere isolated individuals."[268]

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[262]EM, 152.

[263]EM, 152.

[264]EM, 152-53.

[265]EM, 152, emphasis mine.

[266]EM, 152.

[267]EM, 154-57.

[268]EM, 157.

Finally, he comes to his analysis of "ecclesial" intersubjective existence (which precedes – but also accompanies[269] – redemptive existence). Here one may see, he argues:

> That in ecclesia believers intend each other as human beings and therefore as self-transcending beings marked by the refusals of chaos and of external determination. And they intend each other as participants in disrupted existence, and therefore as retaining in some sense the modes of self-securing and flight and their intersubjective expressions. Thus, the religious a priori and the images of idolatry and flight are present in the co-intentions of ecclesial man. But these co-intentions are always present in and are modified by redemptive existence.[270]

In other words, he maintains that with ecclesial intersubjectivity (or co-intentionality), believers pre-reflectively intend each other as those who struggle between right and wrong in an imperfect world but who have hope of being modified through participation in redemptive existence.

Moreover, Farley suggests that what makes ecclesia's intersubjectivity distinct from the intersubjectivities of other communities is the unusual way in which non-ecclesia participants are present to ecclesia participants.[271] And, in order to set forth this strange uniqueness of ecclesia, he indicates that it is now necessary (in the course of his argument) to remove the brackets that he has heretofore placed on "the whole question of God and with it the issue of the role of God in bringing about redemptive existence."[272]

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[269]EM, 158.

[270]EM, 159.

[271]EM, 158.

[272]EM, 165. While Farley does not here (with his development of theological method) articulate how one can know God to be present "once the brackets have been removed," he does treat this theme directly with the development of his doctrine of God,

With these brackets off, Farley argues that "the most striking thing about ecclesia is that the presence of God has absolutely no existing social or ethnic conditions; . . . [thus] the breaking of necessary connections between the divine presence and divinely established (or permitted) social structures, always a possibility in Israel, is actualized in ecclesia."[273] Accordingly, "if ecclesia does not refer to any one social unit such as a nation, 'non-Christian' or the stranger beyond ecclesia takes on a very different status."[274]

Having established the locus of the divine presence as being unbound with regard to human social structures, Farley next turns to "the way in which the stranger is present in the co-intentionalities of redemptive existence."[275] Since the stranger, whoever she may be, not only shares the innate capacity to refuse chaos and external determination but also shares a disrupted historical existence, she has met "the only conditions for participation in ecclesia."[276] That is, Farley argues, ethnic conversion is not required as an additional condition in order to participate in ecclesia,[277] and this is the case because, from the perspective of the ecclesial community, God is not bound by social or ethnic constraints. Moreover, not only is ethnic conversion not required of the stranger, but

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especially as he sets forth this doctrine in his work, Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, as I will show below, in chapter 3, where I explore his construction of this doctrine.

[273]EM, 168.

[274]EM, 169.

[275]EM, 169.

[276]EM, 169.

[277]EM, 170.

ecclesia actually "adapts its social and institutional form to the home-world of the stranger and not vice versa."[278] Furthermore, Farley maintains that it is only after the stranger has been present in the co-intentionalities of redemptive existence thus far described that the ecclesial participant will then be "ready to recall the traditional language which purports to express ecclesia's uniqueness, the language of 'belief in Jesus Christ.'"[279]

The Faith Community's Mediation of Realities: The Basis for Christian Doctrine

A final major component of Farley's understanding of theological method is his development of the view that the faith community mediates realities which are present to those of the faith community and that these realities become the basis for what might be referred to as doctrine. However, before moving to the development of this view, he first carries out some additional contextual groundwork by setting forth both his conception of how the faith community may be conceived of as a determinate social world and his understanding of an intersubjective theory of appresentation.

The faith community as a determinate social world. The faith community, Farley argues, is one of many different types of determinate social worlds, all of which "mediate reality in ways unique to themselves."[280] However, drawing on Husserl,[281] he maintains

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[278]EM, 170.

[279]EM, 172.

[280]EM, 190.

[281]Farley refers to Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 133; cited in EM, 190.

that it is impossible to apprehend a determinate social world "in its concreteness,"[282] unless one *actually participates* in that determinate social world.[283] The point Farley makes here reminds me of an account of the children of a missionary family who, after being abroad for six years, return to their home country and, to their shock and dismay, find themselves completely out of touch with a culture that has "moved on" without them. Thus, while still citizens of their homeland, these children were no longer able (at least temporarily) to apprehend the determinate social world of their homeland, in its concreteness, because for six years (in the days before the internet) they had altogether stopped participating in their homeland's determinate social world. Moreover, Farley holds that determinate social worlds shape human consciousness, where "consciousness" is "the locus of perceptivity,"[284] by influencing "powers of perception."[285] For example, a determinate social world can so influence the perceptive powers of a slave that he may not see something "about slavery which contradicts his being."[286] Thus, Farley emphasizes that social determinacy does not just offer "a mere perspective on reality; . . . [rather, it also] is itself a way in which historical being has come to be."[287]

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[282]EM, 190.

[283]EM, 190.

[284]EM, 191.

[285]EM, 192.

[286]EM, 193.

[287]EM, 190-91.

Toward an intersubjective theory of appresentation. Having initially described how the faith community functions as a determinate social world, Farley intends to then demonstrate how ecclesia mediates reality; however, before he can pursue this he must first set forth the groundwork for an intersubjective theory of appresentation.[288] Therefore, I turn now to this groundwork, primarily by exploring the way in which Farley understands Husserl's notion of appresentation.

Farley maintains that appresentation is an aspect of human perception, and he holds that in order to perceive any object, one must "*mean* a unity of some sort."[289] Thus, for example, to perceive a house (as, perhaps, one is driving down a street) is not simply to receive an image of the front of a building that is in one's line of vision. Instead, one *intends* a total, unified house.[290] That is, "we fill out, in an analogizing act which owes its possibility to the imagination, the yet un-sensed portions of the object before us. These un-sensed portions are not directly presented but are appresent."[291] Furthermore, again relying on Husserl,[292] Farley argues that appresentation happens not only with the

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[288]Appresentation is another of Husserl's central concepts, and as Farley develops this concept, he refers especially to the following passages within Husserl's work: Husserl, Logical Investigations, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), vol. 1, 309-11, and vol. 2, 499-503; idem, Cartesian Meditations, 108-20; idem, Experience and Judgment, 31-39.

[289]EM, 196.

[290]EM, 196.

[291]EM, 196.

[292]Farley does not, at this particular point in his argument, directly cite Husserl's works, but he appears to have in view Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 108-20.

perception of objects like houses but also with the perception of the consciousness of another person. For instance, he holds that "the heard speech, bodily movements, and gestures of the other person appresent to us a personal body and consciousness like our own."[293] In addition, he maintains that "perception not only involves appresented aspects of the object before us but . . . [also] *appresented aspects of that object's environment*."[294] Thus:

> I perceive a given tree not as an isolated monad floating by itself in a vacuum but in connection with its field. . . . One cannot perceive a tree as a tree (conferring on it the sense *tree*) without at the same time intending the 'field' necessary to a tree, in which roots grow, on which weight rests, etc. Therefore, if I perceive only the branches of a tree outside my third story window, I fill out what remains in a twofold way. I complete aspects of the tree itself which are not directly presented to me, and I complete the context or field which tree requires.[295]

With this line of thought, Farley moves toward an intersubjective theory of appresentation. I will endeavor to show how he completes this theory in the next subsection.

How the faith community mediates realities. In view of his understanding of the faith community as a determinate social world and in light of his initial movement towards an intersubjective theory of appresentation, Farley then proceeds to demonstrate how ecclesia mediates reality. Towards this end, he begins by arguing that, within the

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[293]EM, 200.

[294]EM, 201, emphasis mine.

[295]EM, 201-202. There is a certain ambiguity, it seems to me, in Farley's understanding of appresentation – as to whether it stems primarily: from the subject (or from the intention of human consciousness); from the object (or from the *noema* of the object); or, from the relationship between the subject and the object.

faith community, a distinction has often been made between: (1) the "direct" mediation of reality (as with isolatable "religious experiences");[296] and, (2) the "indirect" mediation of reality (as with belief in God – by means of trust in Scripture and tradition).[297] Then he maintains that his phenomenological theology "continues but also alters this . . . [traditional "house of authority"] distinction between immediate and mediate modes of the presence of reality to faith."[298]

With phenomenological theology, Farley holds that a distinction should be made between: (1') direct apprehensions of "realities at hand" – but only as "these apprehensions occur in conjunction with the shaping effect of determinate intersubjectivity rather than . . . [in conjunction with] isolatable biographical 'experiences;'"[299] and, (2') indirect apprehensions of realities which are *not* "at hand" – *but only* as they occur through direct apprehensions of "realities at hand," since "*realities at hand . . . [can] appresent realities not at hand*."[300] Thus, with (1'), Farley conveys that, for phenomenological theology, *direct* apprehensions of "realities at hand" can happen, although not (as with the traditional approach) through isolatable religious

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[296]With "direct" mediations of reality, Farley indicates that he has in mind the type of isolatable religious experiences described in William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1985); referenced in EM, 51.

[297]EM, 207.

[298]EM, 207.

[299]EM, 208.

[300]EM, 208, emphasis mine.

experiences but only through the shaping effect of (or through the mediation of) the determinate faith community.[301] And, with (2'), he maintains that, for phenomenological theology, *indirect* apprehensions of "realities not at hand" can also occur – but only as they take place by means of *direct* apprehensions of "realities at hand;" thus, even with (2'), a *direct* experience of reality cannot be circumvented.

With this understanding of a phenomenological approach to mediations of reality, Farley endeavors to show how this approach may be appropriated to justify affirmations about specific religious events. For instance, he argues that justifying affirmations about the historical redeemer, Jesus Christ, may be made not simply and solely by appealing to Scripture or tradition[302] – but also by turning to "the realities-at-hand which faith apprehends; . . . [for these realities-at-hand] present not only themselves; . . . [they also] appresent other realities . . . [such as the historical redeemer]."[303] Moreover, he maintains that, with this process, one "begins . . . [an] exploration of the way in which faith grasps the historical redeemer by 'questioning back' or uncovering the pre-reflective levels of

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[301]Also, by indicating that a social entity – the faith community – mediates appresentation, Farley here more fully demonstrates his understanding of how appresentation is intersubjective. In this regard, Farley departs from Husserl, who holds that appresentation can be done alone (in other words, that it is not necessarily social), and turns more to Schutz's development of Husserl's notion of appresentation. Along these lines, Farley refers to Alfred Schutz, "Symbol, Reality and Society," chap. in Collected Papers, vol. 1, The Problem of Social Reality, ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 287-356; cited in EM, 202.

[302]EM, 216.

[303]EM, 217.

faith."[304] That is, he argues, one "must push beneath the strata of conscious piety, doctrine, and myth to the linguistic correlates of the modification of human existence toward redemption (to story and image), and to the pre-reflective co-intentions which utilize these images to constitute the other human being in ecclesia."[305] As this "pushing beneath the strata" occurs, one sees (among other things) that the human being's innate quality of "obligation expresses . . . conditions necessary for the mutual honoring of the other's self-determination."[306] This, in turn, allows one to see that the community of faith "can never *be* simply a white community, a black community, a national community, or a class community,"[307] which, in turn, permits one to see "a testimony to the one whose death and resurrection was the occasion of this negation . . . [of ethnic and social boundaries]."[308] In other words, Farley suggests that, through a process of "digging beneath" the "at hand" non-discriminatory actions of ecclesia, "the . . . ['not at hand'] historical figure who is the subject of . . . [the Christian] tradition is *appresent* to the

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[304]EM, 217. Although Farley does not here directly cite Husserl, his scare quotes around "questioning back" again suggest an allusion to one of Husserl's well-known concepts. For instance, in Cartesian Meditations, Husserl avers that we can get a sense of "the present" of historical figures and events by "questioning back," within ourselves, through the history of human experience, as set forth in Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 89-151 passim.

[305]EM, 217.

[306]EM, 217.

[307]EM, 219.

[308]EM, 219.

reality of ecclesia."[309] However, Farley cautions that Jesus Christ's "historicity is not 'proved' by the tradition alone or by appresentation alone. . . . [Rather,] the tradition's imagery, the participation in ecclesia, and the appresenting of obligation work together to appresent a historical rather than mythical figure."[310]

In this manner, Farley suggests that, along with numerous "realities at hand," various "realities not at hand" (such as the historical redeemer who removed ethnic and social boundaries) – which have been appresented by "realities at hand" (such as the "reality at hand" that ecclesia seeks to abolish ethnic and social boundaries) – can become the basis for what has traditionally been referred to as doctrine.

Conclusion

I have tried to show in this chapter that Farley has some definite and very well crafted ideas both about what theological method should not be and about what it should be. What it should not be, he argues, is what he terms the "classical criteriology" approach that would construct theological doctrines on top of a "house of authority," with its two founding presuppositions of salvation history and the principle of identity and its three loci of sacred Scripture, dogma, and the institutional church. Farley argues that this house does not stand largely because: (1) its founding axioms allow for both, with salvation history, an overly strong divine determinism, which leads to insurmountable theodicy problems, and, with the principle of identity, a misguided notion about the

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[309]EM, 219, emphasis mine.

[310]EM, 219-20.

capacity of humans to have direct access to God's acts of willing; and, (2) the first of the three loci, the Scripture principle, irrationally permits to stand the decision of the early church to treat Scripture as sacred, which leads to ecclesia having a misplaced social identity in Scripture (instead of where it should be, in a common experience of salvation).

In contrast, Farley avers that what theological method should be is a method outside of "the house of authority," a method that can be described as "ecclesial reflection." Drawing on Husserl and often alluding to Schleiermacher, Farley first seeks to show how, with this method, one can uncover faith's realities, the "theological given,"[311] as they may be found in the Christian faith community. In part, he holds that this can be accomplished by means of many of the operative principles of phenomenology. One of the central operative principles is the reflective method, which involves: bracketing both church authority and metaphysics; getting beneath the everyday activities of the church to the deep strata of the faith-world; and, theological eidetics, where one seeks to uncover the essences of faith's realities, as these essences occur between the *noemata* of (concrete, corporate, historical) faith realities and the *noeses* of the consciousness of various ecclesia participants. In addition to the operative principles of phenomenology, Farley argues that faith's realities can be uncovered through theological portraiture. This involves seeking the already given – but still revisable – ecclesial existence (or ecclesiality), which is available in "the depth sociality, the determinate intersubjectivity [or co-intentionality] . . . of the . . . [faith] community."[312]

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[311]EM, 54.

[312]ER, 199.

With these tools in hand, especially theological eidetics, Farley indicates, secondly, that he will show how these tools can be employed (in what amounts to an initial illustration of their use) by pursuing an eidetics of those structures "of ecclesia which bear on the problem of faith and reality,"[313] and he holds that those structures are language, redemptive existence, and intersubjectivity. With ecclesia's language, Farley argues that a theological eidetics uncovers the corporate intentions (or *noemata* or experiences) of the faith community (or of the interhuman) as these intentions have been made available through the language of story and image (or deep symbols) – and as these stories and images have, in turn, been conveyed through myths and doctrines. In other words, he holds that the phenomenological theological "archaeologist" must dig through the surface layer of myths and doctrines, in order to get to a middle layer of stories and images, in order to get to the deepest layer of the essence of corporate experiences (intentions, *noemata*) of the faith community. Next, with the faith community's structure of redemptive existence, he avers that a theological eidetics uncovers how Jesus Christ and participants in the faith community have worked to modify human existence toward redemption, especially with regard to helping humanity appropriately refuse not only chaos (by means of rejecting "idolatry" and "flight" in favor, respectively, of "freedom" and "obligation") but also such matters as external determination. Then, with ecclesia's intersubjectivity, Farley maintains that a theological eidetics – applied specifically to the depth ecclesia strata of the faith community, where intersubjectivity occurs pre-consciously – reveals: (1) an ecclesial existence where ecclesia participants intend each

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[313]EM, 108.

other as those who morally struggle but who have hope of being modified (towards a refusal of chaos and external determination, etc.) by means of involvement in redemptive existence; and, (2) the unique manner in which non-ecclesia participants are present to ecclesia participants – as those who are not required to undergo ethnic conversion in order to participate in ecclesia (since, with the brackets removed, we see that the God of ecclesia has no existing social or ethnic conditions).

Third, with the method of "ecclesial reflection," Farley maintains that the faith community, as a determinate social world, mediates realities which are present to those actively participating in the faith community and that these realities becomes the basis for what might be referred to as doctrine. He begins to develop this line of thought by arguing that active participants in ecclesia can experience not only *direct* apprehensions of *"realities at hand"* (as these apprehensions take place together with the formative effect of determinate intersubjectivity) but also *indirect* apprehensions of *"realities not at hand"* – only as they occur through direct apprehensions of "realities at hand," since "*realities at hand . . . [can] appresent realities not at hand*."[314] Therefore, he avers that one can have access to indirect apprehensions of "realities not at hand" only as they are mediated through direct experiences of reality. Next, he holds that this phenomenological approach to mediations of reality can be used to justify claims about particular religious events. For example, and most significantly, he holds that – assuming the availability of ecclesia's imagery and assuming active participation in ecclesia – the "at hand" non-discriminatory actions of the faith community appresent the "not at hand"

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[314]EM, 208, emphasis mine.

redemptive historical figure of Jesus Christ. Thus, Farley suggests that both "realities at hand" and "realities not at hand" (as they are obtained through "realities at hand") can become the grounds for what has commonly been known as doctrine.

With this examination of Farley's theological method of "ecclesial reflection," I will now, in chapter 2, turn to a treatment of McClendon's theological method. Then, in chapter 3, I will consider the way in which Farley employs "ecclesial reflection" toward the development of a doctrine of God. Finally, after a similar analysis of McClendon's construction of a doctrine of God in chapter 4, I will, in chapter 5, offer a more thorough evaluation of Farley's method and doctrine in dialogue with other commentaries on his work.

CHAPTER 2

JAMES MCCLENDON'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD

In this chapter I endeavor to set forth and to begin to critique the central aspects of James McClendon's theological method. In brief, these aspects are as follows. First, he argues, together with the philosopher James M. Smith, that individuals and communities develop convictions (and conviction sets) and that, as conflicts emerge among various individuals and communities, these convictions (and conviction sets) should be treated neither as completely eradicable nor as entirely ineradicable but, rather, as partially eradicable. As part of this argument, he defends (against both a hard realism and a hard relativism) a soft form of a communal, epistemological relativism. Second, he avers that there are at least three sources from which Christian convictions (and conviction sets) may be formed – narrative, experience, and community. Among these sources, he holds that the dominant one must be narrative, where "narrative" means primarily the Bible but also the Christian tradition (including biographies of believers within that tradition). Third, he sets forth a "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle, by which he means (at least in part) that Scripture "speaks to" the *present* Christian community. In other words, for him, Scripture does not just address disciples in the primitive (or future) church but directly addresses them in the church of "today" as well.

Convictional Perspectivism

A cornerstone of McClendon's theological method is his notion of the degree to which convictional conflicts among differing individuals or communities may (or may not) be eradicated. By "convictional conflicts" he means something akin to disputes over tightly-held, essential beliefs.[1] McClendon, along with Smith, sets forth his most extensive treatment of this notion in Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism;[2] however, McClendon further develops it in his three-volume Systematic Theology.[3]

In contrast to both (1) *convictional imperialists* – who maintain that "conflicts in beliefs among persons or communities are . . . *completely eradicable*"[4] – and (2) *convictional relativists* – who hold that "convictional differences . . . [are] an inevitable . . . [and] *ineradicable* . . . fact of human existence"[5] – (3) *convictional perspectivists*, with whom McClendon and Smith align themselves, argue that conflicts in beliefs are "expected, but not inevitable, fundamental but not ultimate, enduring but *not inherently*

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[1]James William McClendon, Jr. and James Marvin Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), revised as Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994), 5.

[2]James William McClendon, Jr. and James Marvin Smith, Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism; hereafter, all subsequent citations are to this revised edition, and references to it will be abbreviated as Convictions.

[3]James William McClendon, Jr., Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); idem, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); and, idem, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Witness (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

[4]Convictions, 8, emphasis mine.

[5]Convictions, 8, emphasis mine.

ineradicable."[6] That is, to restate in terms of communication: convictional imperialism leans towards monologue; convictional relativism towards silence or dissonance; and, convictional perspectivism towards dialogue. In short, according to McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism, one should construct theology at some point between the view that convictional conflicts are eradicable (the more dominating monologue of imperialism) and the view that they are ineradicable (the more isolated silence or dissonance of relativism).

Furthermore, in close conjunction with McClendon's and Smith's notion of the degree to which convictional conflicts among differing individuals or communities may (or may not) be eradicated is their view that theology should be developed within an epistemological framework that rests somewhere between a hard realism and a hard relativism. More specifically, they endeavor to show that while convictional imperialism embraces a hard realism and convictional relativism a hard relativism, convictional perspectivism embraces a soft (communal) relativism.[7]

Accordingly, a key aim of this section is to unfold where exactly for McClendon and Smith the dialogical and epistemological points of convictional perspectivism rest.

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[6]Convictions, 9, emphasis mine.

[7]"Embrace" may be too strong of a term here when it comes to convictional perspectivism "embracing" a soft (communal) relativism; more accurate, as I'll try to show below, might be something closer to "grudgingly embrace." A core issue, in this regard, is that while McClendon and Smith seek to include a theory of correspondence within convictional perspectivism, they concede that they do not have such a theory, as set forth in Convictions, 77. So, perhaps one could say that they "reluctantly embrace" a soft (communal) relativism or, as McClendon later implies, an "intermediate . . . relativism," as set forth in McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Witness, 52.

To this end I will seek to address the following questions. What do they mean by the term "convictions?" How do they understand the two poles – the poles of convictional imperialism and convictional relativism – between which they set their own view? Finally, how do they understand and develop convictional perspectivism?

Towards a Definition of "Convictions"

By "convictions," McClendon and Smith mean the beliefs of an individual or community about a topic or collection of topics – only in those cases where these beliefs *are firmly held*. More specifically, they define a "conviction" as "*a persistent belief such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before*."[8] Thus, a belief merits the status of "conviction," only if it meets the criteria of being both "persistent" and "significant." A "persistent" belief, McClendon and Smith argue, is a belief that is not just a long-lasting but that will be tenaciously held, even in the face of severe difficulties or attack.[9] Similarly, they maintain that a "significant" belief is one that "exercises a dominant or controlling role

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[8]Convictions, 5.

[9]Indeed, McClendon and Smith hold that "the most important convictions . . . are maintained even in the face of death," as posited in Convictions, 161. However, in arguing that "convictions" are persistent beliefs, McClendon and Smith do not mean that "convictions" are unchangeable, for they hold that "even one's most cherished and tenaciously held convictions might be false and are in principle always subject to rejection, reformulation, improvement, or reformation," as set forth in Convictions, 112. McClendon elsewhere refers to this latter perspective as his and Smith's "principle of fallibility," as shown in McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, 44, and in McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine, 472.

over a number of other beliefs held by . . . [its] believer, or . . . that governs (or corresponds to) broad stretches of . . . [his or her] thought and conduct."[10] Thus, a belief merits the status of "conviction," only if it is consistently held and if giving it up would substantially change the person (or community) holding it. Accordingly, it seems intuitive, at least in the contemporary western world, that beliefs concerning "one's favorite pizza toppings" (though not technically excluded by McClendon's and Smith's definition) would not typically qualify as "convictions," while beliefs concerning knowledge, truth, and God would.[11]

With this general understanding of "convictions," McClendon and Smith turn to some pivotal questions: When convictional differences or conflicts emerge among persons or communities, how should one regard these differences or conflicts? Are they completely eradicable, entirely ineradicable, or (a *via media*) partially eradicable? Furthermore – within this context of discerning the degree of (in)eradicability of convictional conflicts – which form of epistemology is most tenable: a hard realism; a hard relativism; or (another *via media*) a soft relativism?

Convictional Conflicts Are Eradicable: Convictional Imperialism

Among McClendon's and Smith's three theories about the nature of convictions, the one which espouses that convictional differences are completely eradicable is the theory they term "convictional imperialism." According to this theory:

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[10]Convictions, 87.

[11]Convictions, 6.

> The intractability of . . . [convictional] differences is said to be due to ignorance or perversity rather than to serious differences about what it means to be rational or humane or reverent or scientific. So if a Marxist and a Christian democrat (or a Buddhist mystic and a scientific humanist) do not now understand one another or if they now disagree on any fundamental question, such as the meaning of reasonableness, it is only because one or the other is (or both are) ignorant of some facts or incapable of thinking straight.[12]

In other words, while dismissing as trivial or uninformed any view that differs from his or her own, the convictional imperialist confidently maintains that given enough time, communication, and information, everyone (except for the incurably perverse and ignorant among us) should be able to surmount their convictional differences and come around to "the one right way of thinking."

For the convictional imperialist, this overcoming of differences is possible due to both empirical and rational factors. On the empirical side, the convictional imperialist maintains that "we all have spread before us the same evidence. The only question . . . is how to account for that common evidence."[13] Implicit here is that everyone has before them the same fundamental facts or things; all that remains is to correspondently connect the appropriate words to these things. On the rational side, the imperialist holds that reason itself is convictionally neutral.[14] That is, for the imperialist, there exists a common or universal rationality.[15] In both cases (the empirical and the rational), what counts as facts and what counts as reason should be self-evident to all, regardless of any

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[12]Convictions, 8.

[13]Convictions, 122.

[14]Convictions, 112.

[15]Convictions, 146.

particular presuppositions, and may therefore be described as universal and undebatable. For these reasons, convictional imperialism shows itself to rest upon an epistemology that I will refer to as a "hard realism."[16]

While McClendon and Smith place a broad range of figures under the convictional imperialist approach, from fundamentalist Christians,[17] on the one hand, to (at least implicitly) the correlational theologian, David Tracy,[18] on the other, they primarily set their sights (at least for purposes of illustrating this approach) on modern philosophers who champion science as the universally superior – and, ultimately, the only true – conviction set.[19] For instance, they argue that the way in which Karl Popper develops and uses his theory of falsifiability is a philosophical occurrence of convictional imperialism. According to Popper's understanding of falsifiability: 1) a theory is valid

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[16]I use "hard realism," rather than "soft realism," to describe the epistemology of convictional imperialism because McClendon and Smith portray the empirical and rational reasons for this approach to resolving convictional conflicts not as hypothetical postulates but as demonstrable facts. Furthermore, one could perhaps use here the language of "foundationalism" rather than "hard realism," as McClendon and Smith themselves do on occasion (see, for example, p. 10 of Convictions); however, I tend to use "hard realism" instead of "foundationalism" in part because I see merit in John E. Thiel's point that "foundationalism . . . is nearly always a pejorative label that nonfoundationalists give to philosophical positions found guilty in their court of criticism," as shown in John E. Thiel, Nonfoundationalism, Guides to Theological Inquiry, eds. Paul Lakeland and Kathryn Tanner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 2.

[17]Ibid., 10.

[18]Ibid., 187.

[19]See especially, "A Perspective on Nonperspectival Reason," Chapter Five of Convictions, where McClendon and Smith endeavor to refute convictional imperialism. See also the index entry for "imperialism" on p. 220 of Convictions, which sheds light on their intentions (of refuting convictional imperialism) in Chapter Five.

until it is falsified by empirical data; and, 2) the theory that is most susceptible to empirical scrutiny – but still stands – is the superior theory. Along with this understanding, Popper further holds, according to McClendon and Smith, that some theories, such as the religious one that "God is love," are not falsifiable (i.e., cannot be tested by empirical evidence) and are, therefore, "empty." McClendon and Smith argue that this is an instance where one can see convictional imperialism at work: science, with full certainty, setting the rules for themselves and for everyone else as to what counts as "valid" and as to what counts as "empty" (trivial, illusory).[20]

In addition to describing and illustrating convictional imperialism, McClendon and Smith seek to critique and refute it – largely on the basis that it cannot stand even by its own rules. For example, to Popper's theory of falsifiability, they ask whether this theory itself, in fact, contains "deep-seated (scientific) convictions . . . [that are not falsifiable]."[21] Here, McClendon and Smith have in view such scientific beliefs as: "the world has some order or other;"[22] and, "nature responds uniformly to uniform experiments."[23] To each of these they would pose: Where is or what would count as the

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[20]Convictions, 137-38. In their treatment of Popper's views, McClendon and Smith refer to Nancey Murphy, Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 53f. And, Murphy, in her analysis of Popper, cites Karl Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, trans. Popper et al. (New York: Harper Torchbook Press, 1965).

[21]Convictions, 139.

[22]Convictions, 139, citing Alastair McKinnon, Falsification and Belief (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton, 1970), chaps. 3-4 passim.

[23]Convictions, 145.

empirical evidence by which these beliefs might be tested? And, if there is no such evidence, should much of science (as it is practiced today) be considered, like religion, as not falsifiable and, therefore, "empty?" Also, McClendon and Smith argue that it is not self-evident that everyone has before them the same fundamental facts or things. For example, they argue that while some see the world as containing only "natural" facts (which, therefore, require only "natural" explanations"), others see the world as containing both "natural" facts and "supernatural" facts (that necessitate both "natural" and "supernatural" explanations).[24] Furthermore, McClendon and Smith challenge the assertion of convictional imperialism that reason can be convictionally neutral. They hold that this cannot be the case, since when one employs reason (whether in evaluating, criticizing, or judging), one employs it through "taking stances" or through "getting into positions" that reflect particular communal systems.[25]

Whether or not there are any theologians (or scientists) who might fairly be labeled "convictional imperialists," it is enough for now simply to note: (1) the central tenets of convictional imperialism – (a) an insistence that conflicts in fundamental beliefs are, with time, completely eradicable and (b) an insistence upon the use of a hard epistemological realism; and, (2) that these tenets are "other than" those to be found with "convictional perspectivism." For while McClendon and Smith are concerned to defuse

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[24]Here, McClendon and Smith refer to views of Michael Scriven, Primary Philosophy (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), and they argue that, for Scriven, it is a universal conviction that the only evidence we have before us is "natural" evidence, as revealed in Convictions, 122-23.

[25]Convictions, 112-113.

religious relativism, as the subtitle of Convictions suggests (and as I will show below), they seem to be just as concerned to defuse and distance themselves from a hard religious realism, as their argument against "convictional imperialism" suggests.

Convictional Conflicts Are Ineradicable: Convictional Relativism

According to McClendon's and Smith's second theory of convictions, "convictional relativism," one "regards convictional differences as an inevitable, ineradicable, and ultimate fact of human existence and denies the existence of any common element relevant to mutual understanding."[26] That is, with this theory, the convictional differences among communities are so great that the different communities "see, think about, and speak about different worlds,"[27] so that interpretations of facts and the understandings of reason in one community are completely different than they are in another community. Thus, the convictional walls dividing these communities cannot be scaled under any circumstances. Moreover, according to this theory, "human communities and their convictions are so constituted that interconvictional persuasion is impossible; indeed, even communication at any significant level along these lines is impossible."[28] Thus, the convictional relativist would picture convictional communities as permanently isolated convictional islands with no real hope of substantial dialogue with one another.

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[26]Convictions, 8.

[27]Convictions, 8.

[28]Convictions, 8.

McClendon and Smith appear to indicate that only a fairly narrow range of thinkers share affinities with "convictional relativism." For here, while they also have in view such figures as the reader response theorist Stanley Fish,[29] their primary focus is almost exclusively upon the later Ludwig Wittgenstein and especially upon the Wittgensteinians, Norman Malcolm and D. Z. Phillips.[30] In McClendon's and Smith's view, "while the Wittgensteinians are not explicit relativists, they appear to share the dilemma of all relativism: it implies a world in which we are hopelessly divided by high linguistic or conceptual walls from one another."[31]

Just as they do with "convictional imperialism," McClendon and Smith endeavor to critique and refute "convictional relativism." For instance, they inquire:

> How is it that the relativist, one who tells us all truth is relative, can expect us to believe that relativism itself is *true*? Perhaps relativism must be relativized as only the view of a jaded and discouraged community which has lost confidence in its own way? For as a general theory it seems to say (a) that it is (in general) true, and (b) that nothing is (in general) true – and both can't be the case.[32]

Accordingly, "convictional relativism," even according to its own rules, contradicts itself and is, therefore, self-defeating. For, if all truth is relative, how can one take seriously any truth claims, including those of relativism?

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[29]Convictions, 33-35.

[30]Convictions, 21-27.

[31]Convictions, 27. However, in one of his later works, McClendon suggests that Malcolm and Phillips have sometimes been unfairly characterized as hard relativists, as set forth in McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Witness, 264-69. Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Witness.

[32]McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, 346. Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Ethics.

As with "convictional imperialism," it is fair to ask whether or not there are any theologians (or scientists) who might justly be termed "convictional relativists." I suspect that there are very few – for, instead of recognizing various types of epistemological relativism, McClendon and Smith, at least with regard to their depiction of "convictional relativism" in Convictions, seem to reduce all types to only a most extreme variety of hard relativism. One observes this reduction, not least of all, through their use of absolute negatives – such as: "*hopelessly* divided . . . [convictional worlds],"[33] and "*impossible* . . . [interconvictional persuasion]"[34] – to describe relativism *in toto*.[35] Nevertheless, it is sufficient at this point to note: (1) the central tenets of this

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[33]Convictions, 27, emphasis mine.

[34]Convictions, 8, emphasis mine.

[35]In his later thought, however, McClendon offers a more substantive and nuanced description of some of the different types of epistemological relativism, as shown in Witness, 50-55. Here, he turns in part to the following article: Sarah Coakley, "Theology and Cultural Relativism: What Is the Problem?," Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosphie 21 (1979): 223-43; cited in Witness, 51. On one end of the spectrum, Coakley describes the hardest type of relativism as "relativism proper," in ibid., 227; and, this is very similar to the kind of relativism that McClendon has in view with his concept of "convictional relativism." Also, for the same type of self-defeating reasons to which McClendon points, Coakley refers to "relativism proper" as a "dead duck," in ibid., 233. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, Coakley indicates some softer types of epistemological relativism. For example, she mentions the frequent requirement of the social sciences that "social or historical or religious phenomena be studied at least in the first instance *in their own terms*," ibid., 226; cited in Witness, 51. Then, according to McClendon:

> Coakley . . . [goes on to] argue that while *of course* all truths appear in some context or other and thus have to do with something besides themselves, and while *of course* knowledge develops, grows, so that what was known at one time is relative to that time and not necessarily to an earlier or later one, and while *of course* what is true in one place (it's raining) may not be true in another so that its truth is relative to its place; . . . [yet, for McClendon,] none of these truisms adds

theory of convictions – (a) an insistence that convictional conflicts are entirely ineradicable and (b) an insistence upon the use of a hard epistemological relativism; and, (2) that these tenets are "other than" those to be found with "convictional perspectivism."

Convictional Conflicts Are Partially Eradicable: Convictional Perspectivism

With their third and final theory of convictions, "convictional perspectivism," McClendon and Smith hold that one regards "convictional conflict as expected, but not inevitable, fundamental but not ultimate, enduring but not inherently ineradicable."[36] Thus, with this theory, the one which McClendon and Smith defend,

> There are . . . common elements among differing sets of convictions, but to discover and use them in resolving conflict requires measures that cannot be limited along convictional lines. Persons or communities with different convictions will experience, think, and speak about their worlds differently, and these differences will not necessarily be the result of mistakes or character flaws. But neither are they walls or electronic scramblers, making communication, understanding, or even persuasion among worlds impossible.[37]

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up to relativism of the sort that challenges religious convictions (Witness, 51).

Moreover, McClendon avers that between these softer types of relativism that Coakley mentions and her "relativism proper" (or his "convictional relativism") "lies a real truth, and this intermediate reality of relativism is what Coakley believes needs to be discussed: What is the nature of actual 'frameworks'? What work is done in the discussion by 'true'? . . . Finally, how does all this bear upon the theological task?," as set forth in Witness, 52. McClendon concurs with Coakley's assessment, and he suggests that her notion of an "intermediate relativism" is similar to his concept of "convictional perspectivism," which he acknowledges is a kind of "cultural relativity," as shown in Witness, 52-54.

[36]Convictions, 9.

[37]Convictions, 9.

In other words, with "convictional perspectivism," they endeavor to chart a course between the above described "convictional imperialism" (with its "hard realism") and "convictional relativism" (with its "hard relativism").

There are several key aspects to the way in which McClendon and Smith chart this course. One is the manner in which they draw upon understandings of "perspectivism" as they are developed in the works of H. Richard Niebuhr and Van A. Harvey. A second is how they comprehend the relationship between words and things (and, concurrently, how they conceive of a soft, epistemological relativism). A third is how they understand the possibility for dialogue between differing convictional communities (that is, how they understand the manner whereby convictional conflicts may be resolved). A fourth is the particular way in which, relying upon John L. Austin's theory of "speech acts," they suggest convictional perspectivism should be applied in interpreting religion. A fifth is their argument for the manner in which "conviction sets" may be justifiable. And, a final aspect is the manner in which McClendon (this aspect is unique to him) holds not only that "conviction sets" can be re-conceived of as "picture sets" but also that "speech acts" can be re-conceived of as "language games."

"Perspectivism" roots in H. Richard Niebuhr and Van A. Harvey. To gain a richer understanding of how McClendon and Smith chart a course between convictional imperialism and convictional relativism it is helpful to examine some of the ways their theory of convictional perspectivism was influenced by the work of both H. Richard

Niebuhr and Van A. Harvey.[38] Therefore, in the paragraphs below, I will first sketch out some of the central "perspectivist" concepts developed by Niebuhr and Harvey, with a particular focus on their treatments of: relativism, correspondence between words and things, and inter-communal dialogue. Then, I will begin to state where McClendon and Smith stand in harmony with these concepts as well as where they break from them.

In The Meaning of Revelation, Niebuhr maintains that "there does not seem to be any apparent possibility of escape from the dilemma of historical relativism for any type of theology."[39] However, for him, "relativism does not imply subjectivism and scepticism. It is not evident that man who is forced to confess that his view of things is conditioned by the standpoint he occupies must doubt the reality of what he sees."[40] Thus, Niebuhr maintains that *historical relativism* and *the ability to have correspondence between words and things* are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

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[38]I am indebted to Terrence W. Tilley for starting me on the path of exploring the influence Niebuhr and Harvey had on McClendon's thought. McClendon's specific references to these figures are sparse, but those that are made certainly support Tilley's insight. This especially seems to be the case (as I will endeavor to show in more detail below) with McClendon's and Smith's treatment of Niebuhr's distinction between "inner" history and "outer" history, as shown in Convictions, 67; as well as the way in which McClendon and Smith point to Harvey's concept of a "perspectival image," as revealed in Convictions, 98. In addition, it is perhaps worth noting here that McClendon credits Tilley as being one of two figures (the other being Nancey C. Murphy) that "has probably written most clearly about me [McClendon]," as set forth in James William McClendon, Jr. to author, 3 May 2000.

[39]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1941), 12.

[40]Ibid., 13.

In this context, he proposes that there are really two types of history: (1) "outer" or "scientific" history; and, (2) "inner" or "poetic" history.[41] Taking as an example an occasion of "a man who has been blind and who has come to see," Niebuhr illustrates how these two types of history might be developed:

> *A scientific case history* will describe what happened to his optic nerve or to the crystalline lens, what technique the surgeon used or by what medicines a physician wrought the cure, through what stages of recovery the patient passed. *An autobiography*, on the other hand, may barely mention these things but it will tell what happened to a self that had lived in darkness and now saw again trees and the sunrise, children's faces and the eyes of a friend.[42]

While the "scientific case history" and the "autobiography" in this illustration describe the same event, the two histories offer different *perspectives* on this event – the former, an "outer" perspective, and the latter, an "inner" one. "Outer" histories are marked by: "dispassionate judgment;"[43] and, concern with "things," "propositions," and "objects;"[44] while "inner" histories are characterized by: "blind devotion;"[45] and, concern with "people," "selves," and "subjects."[46] In this light, Niebuhr avers, Christian revelation should be located within "inner" history (and not, as has often mistakenly occurred, in

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[41]Ibid., 44-52.

[42]Ibid., 44, emphasis mine.

[43]Ibid., 45.

[44]Ibid., 46-47.

[45]Ibid., 45.

[46]Ibid., 47.

"outer" history).[47] However, it need not be the case that with a given event, one history (either the "outer" or the "inner") must be said to have gotten it right and the other to have gotten it wrong. Rather, "the distinctions between the two types of history cannot be made by applying the value-judgment of true and false but must be made by reference to differences of perspective."[48]

Van A. Harvey largely concurs with and builds upon Niebuhr's views on "perspectivism;" however, at certain points, he significantly parts from them. Like Niebuhr, Harvey argues that theology should embrace historical relativism; yet, in The Historian and the Believer,[49] he disagrees with certain features of Niebuhr's proposal concerning "outer" and "inner" histories. For instance, against Niebuhr, he argues that many (or, perhaps, most) "outer" histories are not "disinterested histories."[50] In addition, looking to the way in which Niebuhr develops the notion that various histories can offer different perspectives on the same event, Harvey identifies two types of historical relativism, "Hard Perspectivism" and "Soft Perspectivism" and maintains that it is the latter which holds more promise.

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[47]With the term "revelation," Niebuhr does not mean "simply the Scriptures, but only Scriptures read from the point of view and in the context of church history," as set forth in Niebuhr, Revelation, 37.

[48]Niebuhr, Revelation, 46.

[49]Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1966; reprint, 1996).

[50]Ibid., 238.

The key difference, he argues, between these two "perspectivisms" is that "Hard Perspectivism" holds as "meaningless . . . [the] distinction between fact and interpretation in history,"[51] while "Soft Perspectivism" does not reject such a distinction.[52] More specifically, according to "Hard Perspectivism," one's view of the "facts" (whatever facts these may be) is so influenced by one's own hopes and desires that it is impossible to objectively speak to the "facts." Due to this impossibility, only "interpretations" – and not "facts" – are relevant for history. Part of the outcome of the "Hard Perspectivist" view, according to Harvey, is that self-transcendence is not possible; that is, since "human beings . . . [are unable to allow the] unpleasant truths [of "facts" to] . . . counter their treasured hopes and desires,"[53] they are not capable of entering "imaginatively into possibilities of understanding and valuation not their own."[54]

In contrast to "Hard Perspectivism," Harvey holds that with "Soft Perspectivism," one's view of the "facts" may be strongly influenced by one's own hopes and desires but not always to the extent that it is impossible to speak objectively to the "facts." To illustrate this, Harvey points to a hypothetical case of "a judge who is also the father of a son accused of a crime, . . . [and he maintains that] although many fathers would doubtless be prejudiced in the matter, not all necessarily would."[55] Thus, it is possible to

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[51]Ibid., 214.

[52]Ibid., 231.

[53]Ibid., 214.

[54]Ibid., 221.

[55]Ibid., 212.

imagine situations in which one with strongly held interests and concerns might still be open to unhappy "facts" that could, on occasion, override these interests and concerns. In view of this possibility, according to Harvey, not only "interpretations" but also "facts" are relevant for history. And, a corollary for him is that, with "Soft Perspectivism," self-transcendence is possible: since "human beings . . . [are able to allow the] unpleasant truths [of "facts" to] . . . counter their treasured hopes and desires,"[56] they are capable of entering "imaginatively into possibilities of understanding and valuation not their own."[57] With this capability to "imaginatively enter the standpoint of another,"[58] it follows that under "Soft Perspectivism" various different perspectives may "frequently overlap,"[59] so that "historians will agree at one level but disagree at another."[60] Accordingly, where dialogue among perspectives is not possible with "Hard Perspectivism," it is possible with "Soft Perspectivism."

A final aspect of "Soft Perspectivism," according to Harvey, is that the Christian theologian operating from within this perspective will, in seeking to interpret the meaning that events have for faith, show a strong preference for "public" (or "common") events over "private" (or "unique") events. The latter type of events should be shunned

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[56]Ibid., 214.

[57]Ibid., 221.

[58]Ibid., 240.

[59]Ibid., 241.

[60]Ibid.

because "there are no criteria for dealing with an event unlike any other."[61] This does not mean that the "unique" events of the faith must be rejected altogether, but it does mean "that we put question marks after stories of floating axes, suns standing still, asses talking, blood raining from heaven, supernatural births, walkings on water, and resurrections."[62] In contrast, "public" events should be embraced. When they are, the theologian "avoids special pleading and permits rational assessment so far as statements about the nature and origins of events are concerned."[63] Such a strategy, suggests Harvey, "has obvious advantages . . . [over 'Hard Perspectivism']."[64]

Having sketched some of Niebuhr's and Harvey's central "perspectivist" concepts, I can now begin to investigate where McClendon and Smith stand both in harmony and in disharmony with them. Looking first to Niebuhr, McClendon and Smith reject his "inner/outer" distinction, not least of all, on the grounds (identical to those of Harvey) that "outer" ("scientific") history is just as "shaped by human goals, drives, and convictions . . . as is 'inner' history."[65] However, McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism certainly follows Niebuhr's path of thinking (as I will explore in more detail in later sections) not only in regard to his assertion of the inescapability of at least a certain level of (soft) historical/epistemological relativism for constructing any type of

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[61]Ibid., 228.

[62]Ibid., 229.

[63]Ibid., 234.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Convictions, 67.

theology but also with respect to Niebuhr's (perhaps contradictory) assertion of the epistemological assurance persons may have in knowing how words correspond with things.

Turning now to Harvey, the distinction he makes between two types of relativism, "Hard Perspectivism" and "Soft Perspectivism," very closely resembles the distinction McClendon and Smith make between convictional relativism and convictional perspectivism. For instance, the position that only "interpretations" (read "words") – and not "facts" (read "things") – are relevant for history would be equally descriptive of both Harvey's Hard Perspectivism and McClendon's and Smith's convictional relativism. Similarly, the position that one's view of the "facts" (or "things") may be heavily affected by "interpretations" (or "words" or "language") but not always to the degree that it is impossible to speak objectively to the "facts" (or "things") would be just as attributable to McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism as it is to Harvey's Soft Perspectivism.

The same kind of similarities between Harvey (on the one hand) and McClendon and Smith (on the other) can also be seen in the area of inter-communal dialogue. For example, the position that, because self-transcendence is unachievable, people are not capable of entering imaginatively the standpoints of others and are, therefore, prevented from having dialogue with communities that possess different perspectives might be attributed just as readily to McClendon's and Smith's convictional relativism as it is to Harvey's Hard Perspectivism. And, alternatively, the position that, since at least some manner of self-transcendence is conceivable, people have the capacity to enter

imaginatively the standpoints of others and are, therefore, not precluded from having dialogue among communities with different perspectives is no less ascribable to McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism than it is to Harvey's Soft Perspectivism.

While much of McClendon's and Smith's understanding of convictional relativism and convictional perspectivism can be traced to Harvey's notions of Hard Perspectivism and Soft Perspectivism, this does not suggest that McClendon and Smith follow Harvey at every turn. Quite to the contrary, they explicitly reject many of the ideas reflected in Harvey's central methodological theses. In particular, their convictional perspectivist views are incompatible with Harvey's position that the Soft Perspectivist theologian will show a strong preference for "public" events over "private" ones in endeavoring to interpret the meaning that events have for faith. Among the "private" events to be shunned, Harvey lists "resurrections."[66] Far from an event after which one should "put question marks,"[67] McClendon suggests, for example, that the resurrection of Christ is essential to the construction of at least some Christian doctrines.[68]

With this brief consideration of "perspectivism's" roots in the works of Niebuhr and Harvey, we are now in a better position to explore in more detail how McClendon's

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[66]Harvey, The Historian and the Believer, 229.

[67]Ibid.

[68]McClendon, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine, 101. Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Doctrine.

and Smith's understanding both of *the relationship between words and things* and of *the possibility for dialogue between differing convictional communities* distinguishes convictional perspectivism from both convictional imperialism and convictional relativism.

Understanding of the relationship between words and things. Like the convictional imperialist, the convictional perspectivist, according to McClendon and Smith, must at least seek for correspondence between words (interpretations, language) and things (facts): "There is no easy appeal 'to the facts;' . . . [yet, if we] take truth seriously, [we must attempt to do so]."[69] That is, with convictional perspectivism, one should endeavor to justify words (statements, language, etc.) by showing how they correspond with facts (i.e., with things, objects, or reality-in-itself). Thus, for McClendon and Smith, one may "incautiously hold that valuations such as true and false do clearly apply to religious utterances – God either did lead Israel across the Sea of Reeds or did not."[70] (And, here, with "true and false," McClendon and Smith appear to mean "correspondently true and false.") However, while they rather tenaciously want to hold to some sort of correspondence, this ultimately remains only a hope for them. For, in the end, (and this appears to be a significant break with the imperialists) they concede that they "seem to have no *theory* of representation at all."[71] Yet, despite making this

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[69]Convictions, 159.

[70]Convictions, 77.

[71]Convictions, 77.

concession, McClendon and Smith do not altogether abandon efforts to show correspondence between words and things (which, if they were to abandon such an endeavor, might place convictional perspectivism in the same sphere as convictional relativism). Rather, these efforts merely begin to take on a different role – in perhaps two different ways. First, as McClendon and Smith further explore the development of convictions (and conviction sets), they come to place their main emphasis not upon correspondence between words and things but upon coherence among words (and other ways of justification) as the chief means by which to construct convictions. That is, with convictional perspectivism, on the "front-end" or "development-side" of convictions, McClendon and Smith come to turn chiefly to language.[72] Here, efforts to show correspondence between words and things are not eliminated, but these efforts appear to take on a secondary status. Second, however, as McClendon and Smith further explore the evaluation of convictions (and conviction sets), they suggest that convictions should be judged not only by their use of language but also by the practices that they yield. Thus, with convictional perspectivism, on the "back-end" or "evaluation-side" of convictions, they imply that seeking correspondence between words and things should at

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[72]Nancey Murphy traces the way in which John L. Austin influences McClendon and Smith in this regard, as set forth in Nancey Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision," in Theology Without Foundations, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 248-49. In particular, Murphy points to Austin's "move to shift attention from meaning as reference to meaning as use," as revealed in ibid., 248, so that for Austin – and, as they follow him here, for McClendon and Smith – "*use* is the primary category for analyzing language; *appropriate reference and appropriate expression are subordinate factors in that the use determines what counts as appropriate reference and appropriate affect*," as shown in ibid., 249.

least be pursued in order to judge the practices that convictions (and conviction sets) produce.[73]

Understanding of the possibility for dialogue between differing convictional communities. Still another central component in McClendon's and Smith's charting of a course between convictional imperialism and convictional relativism has very much to do with how they understand the possibility for dialogue between differing convictional communities. More like the convictional relativist than the convictional imperialist, the convictional perspectivist at least recognizes the existence of various different, yet potentially legitimate, convictional communities. (The convictional imperialist really just seems to see only one legitimate community, his or her own.) However, unlike the hard relativist, who holds that one cannot transcend one's own perspective (who holds that "my eyes are the only eyes") – and who, therefore, rules out the possibility of dialogue with other convictional communities – the perspectivist maintains that one can transcend one's own perspective (that "my eyes are not the only eyes") – and, accordingly, holds open the possibility of dialogue with various convictional communities.[74] That is, dissimilar to the hard relativist, McClendon and Smith concur with William Placher that "rational conversation . . . [between different convictional

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[73]Convictions, 42-45. Moreover, McClendon and Smith's emphasis here on practices seems to be in harmony with McClendon's placement of his book, Ethics, at the beginning of his three volume systematic theology.

[74]Convictions, 173.

communities] in fact always proceeds 'ad hoc': We find that we have this or that or the other in common (though not everything), and the conversation begins there."[75]

Thus far I have examined, in a general manner, McClendon's and Smith's understanding of convictional perspectivism, as well as the way in which it differs from convictional imperialism and convictional relativism. I turn now to a more direct analysis of their argument for how, using the perspectivist approach, one should interpret religion; however, in pursuing this analysis, I will have a particular concern to uncover those elements that are most relevant for McClendon's construction of theological doctrine.

Convictional perspectivism's approach to interpreting religion. In short, McClendon and Smith maintain that to interpret religion with the convictional perspectivist approach one should begin not with experience but with language. Here, in part, they associate their view with that of William James:

> For now we must indicate our own relation to William James, which focuses upon his link between saying and doing – between attending to what (religious or antireligious) speakers actually *say* as interpreted by what they actually *do*. We shall find that *the saying-doing distinction is not a sharp one: saying is in fact a kind of doing, and so the question becomes one of interpreting religion by attending to one kind of doing (namely, saying) as an important clue to all the rest*. In this regard if no other we are Jamesians.[76]

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[75]Convictions, 187. Here, McClendon and Smith are loosely drawing upon William Placher's monograph, Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989).

[76]Convictions, 42, emphasis mine.

Thus, to interpret religion, McClendon and Smith argue that one must begin – not with experience – but with "sayings," that is, with language. More specifically, one must begin with "communal sayings," since "it is in interpretive *communities*, not simply in solitary individuals, that we find characteristic religious speakers."[77]

However, McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism narrows the source for interpreting religion still further, as they indicate that the only type of communal sayings to which one may turn is the category of "speech acts." Here, drawing upon the speech-act theory of John L. Austin,[78] McClendon and Smith maintain that within a verbal situation there may be:

> (1) "phonetic acts" (i.e., "sounds");
>
> (2) "sentential acts" (i.e., saying a sentence in a language);
>
> (3) "speech acts" [i.e., making a verbal move (such as calling or explaining) that makes a difference – but that may or may not have an effect on other people or affairs]; and,
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> (4) "perlocutionary acts" (i.e., speech acts that do have an effect on other people or affairs).[79]

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[77]Convictions, 42.

[78]In particular, McClendon and Smith focus upon the following works by Austin: How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975); Philosophical Papers, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and, Sense and Sensibilia, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G. J. Warnock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). See also, Dan R. Stiver, The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol, and Story (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 80-86. Stiver offers a helpful introduction to the way in which Austin influences McClendon and Smith.

[79]Convictions, 51, 203.

In general, action in sense (4) is dependent upon action in sense (3), and so on; whereas there can be (1) phonetic acts without (2) sentential acts; (2) sentential acts without (3) speech acts ("we can just say sentences over like pupils in a reading class");[80] and there can be speech acts (3) without perlocutionary acts (4) ("in such cases there would be no effects to be listed").[81]

By focusing on "speech acts" (the third category or level of verbal acts indicated above), convictional perspectivism seeks to target the type of verbal act that, for the purposes of searching "for the significance of religious utterances,"[82] is substantial enough to count as meaningful (hence, something more purposeful than mere sentential acts), while remaining simple enough to be manageable (hence, something less far-reaching than perlocutionary acts). Thus, to borrow McClendon's and Smith's sports analogy of a referee calling a "time out," the convictional perspectivist would not be principally concerned either with the fact that someone has said the words "time out" (i.e., with the sentential level) or with the consequences of this expression, such as player and spectator reactions to the "time out" (i.e., with the perlocutionary level). Rather, the perspectivist would be interested primarily with the "difference-making" capacity that the referee's "time out" would have in a game (i.e., with the speech act level).[83] So, with

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[80]Convictions, 51-52.

[81]Convictions, 52.

[82]Convictions, 52.

[83]Convictions, 51.

convictional perspectivism, one can interpret religion through a particular type of communal sayings that may be termed "speech acts."

Yet, McClendon's and Smith's convictional perspectivism even further specifies the source for interpreting religion by indicating that one may look only to certain types of speech acts and not to others. Among the various types of speech acts that the perspectivist may consider are "requests," "confessions," and "explanations,"[84] but at least one type that may not be considered is "statements." One may not make use of this latter type of speech act, according to McClendon and Smith, because, in ordinary speech, making a statement requires being in a certain position of authority with regard to the subject matter of the statement;[85] and, "no human person is ever in position to make statements about the biblical God."[86]

To put convictional perspectivism's "speech-act-theory-for-interpreting-religion" to the test, McClendon and Smith analyze the conditions under which the "confession," "God led Israel across the Sea of Reeds," made by a hypothetical person named Aleph, could be a happy confession – that is, could be a "difference-making" speech act and not

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[84]Convictions, 52-56.

[85]To illustrate this point, McClendon and Smith offer an example concerning the preparation of financial statements: "While the treasurer or accountant may prepare such a statement, the office boy, even if talented, cannot (special position required)," as set forth in Convictions, 203.

[86]Convictions, 56.

merely a sound or a sentence.[87] The conditions for Aleph's "God led Israel across the Sea of Reeds" (henceforth, Aleph's utterance G) to be a happy confession are as follows:

> (1) Aleph must meet specific *preconditions*. For example, he must have knowledge of "a common language."[88]
>
> (2) Aleph must meet certain *primary* conditions. For instance, he must "issue a sentence (perform a sentential act) in the common language."[89] Also, there must be "a convention of the language to the effect that this sentence is a way of (performing the speech-act of) confessing."[90] Additionally, "in issuing this sentence the speaker . . . maintains *a certain stance*, to which the speaker is thereby committed."[91] Finally, "in issuing this sentence, the speaker displays, i.e., witnesses to, this stance."[92]
>
> (3) Aleph must meet specific *representative* or descriptive conditions. For example, in uttering "God led Israel out of the Sea of Reeds," he must "describe or represent the relevant state(s) of affairs with sufficient exactness to make it possible for the speaker to take up that stance . . . and to display it."[93] Thus, in this confession, the relevant states of affairs that "Aleph's G requires [. . . are]: in a certain historical context, a certain event (being led across the Sea of Reeds) has occurred to a certain people (Israel); . . . this event is attributable to the God acknowledged in this context; [and,] . . . this God exists."[94]
>
> (4) Aleph must meet particular *affective* or psychological conditions. For instance, he must have "a certain affect, namely, *awed gratitude*, and in issuing

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[87]Convictions, 62ff.

[88]Convictions, 57.

[89]Convictions, 62, emphasis mine.

[90]Convictions, 63.

[91]Convictions, 63, emphasis mine.

[92]Convictions, 63.

[93]Convictions, 63, emphasis mine.

[94]Convictions, 63.

> this sentence convey his possession of it to the hearer."[95] Also, "the speaker's intention in issuing this sentence is to use the language's convention for confessing, . . . and he intends the hearer to understand (by his use) that he is so using it."[96] Finally, the hearer of Aleph's sentence must (to some degree) "take up" what Aleph has said.[97]

To the extent that Aleph's utterance G meets these conditions, he makes a happy confession; he accomplishes a "difference-making" speech act.

There are potential difficulties with the third and fourth conditions, and McClendon and Smith themselves recognize a particular problem with the final one:

> Aleph cannot *happily* confess that God led Israel across the Reed Sea unless he is in position to do so. To be in position is among other things to possess the affect we have called grateful awe. Without that attitude neither Aleph nor anyone else can in this sense confess what God has done. The outsider cannot happily make that confession (without becoming in the act an insider to Aleph's confessing community), but the outsider cannot happily deny that God has so led Israel, either.[98]

That is, dialogue over Aleph's utterance G between Aleph's community and other communities with different convictions appears to be impossible because Aleph's confession, as well as his description of the relevant state of affairs (including, "this God exists") are "insider" affairs. Thus, McClendon and Smith lament, "so far, we seem to be led toward relativism."[99] But, this problem is perhaps resolved, they suggest, with the

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[95]Convictions, 63, emphases mine.

[96]Convictions, 63.

[97]Convictions, 63.

[98]Convictions, 73-74.

[99]Convictions, 74.

third condition, for this condition calls for the meeting of "representative conditions."[100] However, upon closer examination, this does not appear to be a very substantial resolution, since, as McClendon and Smith concede elsewhere, they seem "to have no *theory* of representation at all."[101]

Nevertheless, McClendon and Smith aver that there is a connection between *speech acts* and *beliefs* and that the conditions stipulated (i.e., primary conditions, representative conditions, and affective conditions) for determining whether a particular *speech act* is unhappy or happy may be employed (perhaps with a few alterations to the conditions but essentially using them as they are) for determining whether a specific *belief* is unhappy or happy.[102] Moreover, if the specific belief in view is both "persistent" and "significant" – that is, if the belief is a "conviction" – then the same basic conditions could be used to determine whether a particular *conviction* is unhappy or happy. In this manner, McClendon and Smith prepare the way for the notion that the unhappiness or happiness of a religious (or theological) conviction could be ascertained by the degree to which it might meet all (or some) of the relevant primary, representative, and affective conditions.

Furthermore, McClendon and Smith argue that since convictions never occur in isolation but always as part of a broader "conviction set," that which one must seek to determine the unhappiness or happiness of – in other words, that which one must

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[100]Convictions, 74.

[101]Convictions, 77.

[102]Convictions, 83.

endeavor to justify – is always a *set* of convictions.[103] In order to illustrate what a conviction set might look like, they provide the previously mentioned Aleph with the following hypothetical conviction set:

G "God led Israel across the Sea of Reeds,"

D "Jesus said, 'One thing is needful,'"

E "Jesus opened the blind man's eyes,"

J "God was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth," and

T "(This) God exists."[104]

Thus, with this hypothetical conviction set, McClendon and Smith indicate that along with "G," Aleph might hold: (1) some additional "*particular* convictions,"[105] such as "D" (read "the conviction that when you find yourself getting too busy, stop and take time to be in the presence of Jesus Christ");[106] and "E" (read "the conviction that Jesus Christ can work powerfully in your life");[107] (2) some "*doctrinal* convictions,"[108] such as "J" (read

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[103]Convictions, 91, emphasis mine.

[104]Convictions, 92.

[105]Convictions, 96, emphasis mine.

[106]Convictions, 93.

[107]Convictions, 93.

[108]Convictions, 97.

"the conviction that God works in Jesus Christ");[109] and, (3) some "*presiding* convictions,"[110] such as "T" (read "the conviction that God exists").[111]

Accordingly, as the hypothetical conviction set above appears to show, McClendon and Smith posit that a convictional schematism, with a hierarchy of convictional levels (ranging from lower-level "particular" convictions to higher-level "presiding" convictions), might be indicative (though not definitive) of at least a small portion of a typical religious (Christian) conviction set. And, they hold that if such a schematism has merit, then justification involves examining not only convictions but also the relations among convictions – all by means of the previously stipulated conditions (i.e., primary, representative, and affective conditions).[112]

In addition, McClendon and Smith hold that such an extensive process of seeking to justify a conviction set – a process that would consider both the convictions and the relations among the convictions – would have to consider the potential objection that this process would be impossible since "we can never surely know one another's thoughts or meanings."[113] To this potential objection, they acquiesce that one cannot have direct access to the thoughts of another (such as Aleph); however, they maintain that it is possible that one could have access to the linguistically shared convictions of the

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[109]Convictions, 94.

[110]Convictions, 97.

[111]Convictions, 96.

[112]Convictions, 97.

[113]Convictions, 99.

community or communities (such as Aleph's community or communities) of which another might be a member. That is, according to McClendon and Smith:

> Since each of Aleph's convictions acquires part of its significance form all the other members of his set and since every member of his set depends for its understandability upon the language of the community, we cannot understand Aleph or justify his set of convictions save by reference to the community to which he belongs. If he participates in more than one community, then we shall have to consider each. The understanding and justification of Aleph's convictions, then, are dependent upon the understanding and . . . the justifiability of the community's convictions. It is the community that is logically prior, however keen may be our interest in the individual and his or her personal faith.[114]

Therefore, before attempting to justify the conviction set of an individual, they argue that one must first endeavor to justify the conviction set of the community (or of the communities) to which the individual belongs. Accordingly, I will turn now to consider, in more detail, McClendon's and Smith's argument for the way in which conviction sets may be justifiable – primarily for the conviction sets of communities, but also (secondarily) for the conviction sets of individuals.

The way in which conviction sets may be justifiable. McClendon and Smith maintain that, whether one faces (or, implicitly, prepares for) intraconvictional or interconvictional encounters, there are both possible loci of justification as well as various social matrices of justification of which one may make use in order to determine (or, implicitly, to anticipate) the unhappiness or happiness of conviction sets.[115]

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[114]Convictions, 100-101.

[115]In some sense, these "loci" and "social matrices" of justification seem to further convey (or perhaps to supplant) what McClendon and Smith had previously expressed as Aleph's "conditions" (i.e., his primary, representative, and affective conditions).

First, they argue that there are various "widely accepted,"[116] though not universal,[117] loci of justification – such as "truth, consistency, rationality, *eudaimonia*, satisfaction, and righteousness"[118] – that one may apply towards seeking to demonstrate the sufficiency of any particular conviction set.[119] McClendon and Smith stress that since these loci are not universally accepted, not all of them have to be used in the process of justification. That is, they hold that "anyone can refrain from appealing to any one of these considerations without being inconsistent or absurd."[120] This appears to be in harmony with their view that while one must have at least some evidence in order to support (or justify) a conviction (or other beliefs), it is not necessary to have unlimited evidence.[121]

With the locus of "truth," they aver that "truth" should be approached as a broad criterion, with an allowance, for instance, that in some circumstances one might evaluate a conviction set with more of an interest in "'correspondence' between statement and fact, . . . [while in other circumstances one might be] more interested in 'performative' or in 'pragmatic' features of truth."[122] Furthermore, they maintain that "'true' and 'false'

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[116]Convictions, 106.

[117]Convictions, 154.

[118]Convictions, 154.

[119]Convictions, 106.

[120]Convictions, 155.

[121]Convictions, 85.

[122]Convictions, 155.

are not the only possible assessments, . . . [since] 'true' and 'false,' as Austin and others have reminded us, are members of a class of terms that includes also 'accurate' and 'careless,' 'rough' and 'exact,' 'fair' and 'hasty,' and a host of others."[123]

As for the other five representative loci mentioned, McClendon and Smith do not extensively develop what they have in mind with these concepts; nevertheless, they do shed some light on their understanding of them. For instance: with the locus of "consistency," they seem to have in mind a "coherent" notion of truth;[124] by "rationality," they appear to have in view broadly perceived conceptions of reason but not a universal notion, since, for them, reason is not "conviction-free;"[125] with "*eudaimonia*," they mean to ask whether the particular conviction set or "conviction in question contributes to living a good life;"[126] by "satisfaction," they mean to explore if "the life . . . produced . . . [by the conviction set is] really the most *satisfactory* life possible;"[127] and, with "righteousness," they seem to have in mind an examination of whether "the life that embodies . . . [the conviction set under consideration is] a life of justice."[128]

In addition to these loci of justification, McClendon and Smith hold that there are various social matrices of justification that one may employ as well in order to determine

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[123]Convictions, 158.

[124]Convictions, 106.

[125]Convictions, 183.

[126]Convictions, 107.

[127]Convictions, 107.

[128]Convictions, 107.

or to show the adequacy of conviction sets. They argue that this aspect of the justificatory process can be especially helpful in situations involving "sharply differentiated convictional communities, . . . [where] something more than a simple appeal to 'ultimate criteria' . . . [such as the six 'widely accepted' loci of justification (addressed in the above paragraphs) may be] required."[129] In particular, they suggest that this aspect of the justificatory process involves matrices such as "reform" and "interconvictional encounter."[130]

According to McClendon and Smith, "reformers are . . . confronted with the task of showing that the conviction set is *or can become meaningful,*"[131] and they often employ one or both of the following methods to accomplish this task: persuasive definition and paradox (or parable).[132] With persuasive definitions, reformers "propose a (more or less covert) shift in the descriptive force of a term of phrase while maintaining its affective force unchanged." As examples of this method, McClendon and Smith point to the manner in which the Apostle Paul sought to redefine what it meant to be a "Jew" (as entailing not compliance with circumcision and dietary regulations but "having faith like Abraham's faith");[133] and, they point to the way in which some contemporary theologians have endeavored to redefine what it means to be a "real Christian" (as

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[129]Convictions, 162.

[130]Convictions, 163-68.

[131]Convictions, 163.

[132]Convictions, 163-64.

[133]Convictions, 163.

involving "not so much one who goes regularly to church . . . as one who sides with oppressed peoples").[134] Furthermore, McClendon and Smith argue that with paradox (or parable), reformers seek "to bewilder, puzzle, and silence their hearers."[135] For instance, they maintain that Jesus used this method (with parables like "The Good Samaritan") to cause shifts in the meaning of such key concepts as "neighbor."[136]

Another social matrix of justification that McClendon and Smith investigate is the "interconvictional encounter." They argue that these encounters are "ones in which representatives of distinct convictional communities meet one another in such a way that one or both parties are thereby convictionally changed."[137] And, looking to William Christian,[138] they maintain that a central component of a successful interconvictional encounter is for representatives of convictional communities to seek substantial clarity regarding areas of disagreement (before looking for points of agreement).[139] As an example of how such an interconvictional encounter might take place, they suggest that if a Christian were to enter into a interconvictional encounter with a Jew, she would be more likely to achieve a substantially clear disagreement by issuing a confession like

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[134]Convictions, 163-64.

[135]Convictions, 164.

[136]Convictions, 164.

[137]Convictions, 166.

[138]Convictions, 166-67. McClendon and Smith primarily cite William Christian, Oppositions of Religious Doctrines: A Study in the Logic of Dialog among Religions (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).

[139]Convictions, 167.

"confession, . . . B, 'Jesus is the one whom God promised to send to redeem Israel,'"[140] than she would by issuing a confession like "confession, A, 'Jesus is the Messiah.'"[141] However, by achieving a clearer disagreement with confession B, McClendon and Smith hold that, as counterintuitive as it may seem, she would be more apt to obtain a successful interconvictional encounter (than she would have if she had issued the not-as-clear-to-both-parties confession A).[142] Along with representatives of convictional communities pursuing clarity with areas of disagreement, McClendon and Smith argue that another component of a successful interconvictional encounter occurs as "each member of the dialog . . . [seeks] to discover and to show how their original convictions . . . [are] related to their other convictions and to whatever each . . . [knows] to be the case about the world."[143]

The above considerations of McClendon's and Smith's notions regarding both the "widely accepted" loci of justification and the social matrices of justification have a bearing upon McClendon's understanding of theological method, since, for McClendon, the aim of theology is both to describe doctrine and to persuade others regarding the credibility of doctrine.[144] Or, as McClendon and Smith put it: "Our belief . . . [is] that

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[140]Convictions, 167.

[141]Convictions, 166.

[142]Convictions, 166-67.

[143]Convictions, 168.

[144]For instance, McClendon argues that "Christian doctrine should include a theory of dialogue that provides room both for inter-religious dialogue and for (non-imperial) mission aimed at conversion," as set forth in Witness, 301. See also: Witness,

theology not only is but ought to be prescriptive as well as descriptive; it must propose as well as describe."[145]

"Conviction sets" as "picture sets" and "speech acts" as "language games." In addition to developing together with Smith not only a notion of "conviction sets" (and of ways in which they may be used and justified) but also a notion of "speech acts," McClendon elsewhere, relying upon the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein,[146] re-conceives of these notions as "picture sets" and "language games," respectively.[147]

His impetus for the first of these re-conceptions, the one from "conviction sets" to "picture sets," is his view that the narrative of Scripture often expresses teaching, at least about some themes, through word pictures – and that these word pictures (which, as they are, stay the same and do not change) can be (and very often are) interpreted in different manners.[148] In light of these various interpretations of the "same" word pictures, McClendon draws upon a Wittgensteinian-informed idea of "picture thinking," by which

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55; and Doctrine, 48.

[145]Convictions, 185.

[146]With these developments, McClendon refers to primarily the following works by Wittgenstein: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3d ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968); idem, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967); idem, On Certainty, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1972).

[147]McClendon treats: the notion of "picture sets" especially in Doctrine, 75-77; and the notion of "language games" particularly in Witness, 249-60.

[148]Doctrine, 75.

McClendon means, in part, that "in certain circumstances, *every* seeing is a 'seeing-as.'"[149] Along these lines, McClendon points to Wittgenstein's use of a well-known duck-rabbit illustration that can be seen as a rabbit's head or as a duck's,[150] and, with his own rendition of this illustration, McClendon implies that different people (or communities) could see the same picture in different ways (or from different perspectives).[151]

With this understanding of "picture thinking" in hand, . . . McClendon suggests that, in particular situations – as with some of the various events described in Scripture – "what distinguishes those who believe in . . . [these events] from those who do not is not different chains of reasoning, but radically different **pictures** of how in general the world goes."[152] In this context, McClendon associates "pictures" with "convictions;"[153] thus, a particular "picture set" would be another way of expressing a particular "conviction set." Furthermore, just as he maintains that the sufficiency of "conviction sets" can be demonstrated through the application of some – though not necessarily all – broadly

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[149]Doctrine, 76. Here, McClendon refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 197.

[150]Doctrine, 76. McClendon has in mind the duck-rabbit illustration set forth in Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 194. Wittgenstein, in turn, cites Joseph Jastrow, Fact and Fable in Psychology (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), and he gives Jastrow credit for the original duck-rabbit illustration, as revealed in Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 194.

[151]Doctrine, 76.

[152]Doctrine, 77. By placing certain words in bold, such as "pictures" in this citation, I am following the style of text used in the book being referenced.

[153]Doctrine, 77.

adhered to loci of justification, like "truth, consistency, rationality, *eudaimonia*, satisfaction, and righteousness,"[154] so also does he imply that the adequacy of "picture sets" can be shown through the application of similar loci of justification.[155] In addition, just as he holds that one of the requirements for a belief to be a "conviction" is that it be significant,[156] he argues, again following Wittgenstein, that a substantial "picture," "once it is grasped, is '*enough to make me change my whole life*.'"[157]

With the second of these re-conceptions, the one from "speech acts" to "language games," McClendon makes an explicit connection between Austin's concept of speech acts and Wittgenstein's concept of language games.[158] While he holds that "Austin's account of speech acts is more exact and more readily displayed . . . [than Wittgenstein's

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[154]Convictions, 154.

[155]Doctrine, 77.

[156]Convictions, 87.

[157]Doctrine, 77. Here, McClendon cites Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, 57, emphasis McClendon's.

[158]Witness, 253. Although they both wrote on the philosophy of language at approximately the same time and in roughly the same place, and although Austin has often been referred to as a "Wittgensteinian," the extent to which the slightly earlier Wittgenstein (who lived from 1889-1951) directly influenced Austin (1911-1960) has been debated among scholars. Mats Furberg, for one, concludes that "there is, then, no need and no reason to suppose that Austin formed his basic ideas under Wittgenstein's influence," as set forth in Mats Furberg, Saying and Meaning: A Main Theme in J. L. Austin's Philosophy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 52. Nevertheless, the fact that there are abundant similarities between the thought of the two philosophers seems to be a matter upon which there is common agreement, which is not surprising since they were both working within the same milieu of early twentieth century British philosophy of language.

account of language games],” in his later work, both in Doctrine and especially in Witness, McClendon increasingly turns to the thought of Wittgenstein, not least of all, it seems, because of the relationship McClendon perceives between Wittgenstein’s thought and life.[159] Along these lines, relying upon Wittgenstein, McClendon argues that the “pictures” of a particular community need to be evaluated – not by some supposedly universally available “sense data”[160] – but by that same community’s own “language-games and practices,”[161] which is similar to the way in which McClendon and Smith maintain, looking to Austin, that one should seek to justify “convictions” (such as Aleph’s utterance G) only by means of the “speech acts” that a specific community (such as Aleph’s community) recognizes as being legitimate.[162]

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[159]McClendon recognizes that several scholars (such as William Warren Bartley III, James C. Edwards, Norman Malcolm, Brian McGuiness, and Hans-Johann Glock) either minimize or deny the view that Wittgenstein demonstrated any sort of authentic Christian faith, as set forth in Witness, 261-67; however, McClendon avers that Wittgenstein, during his service in World War I, “in reading Tolstoy’s *Gospel [in Brief]* . . . was converted,” as shown in Witness, 237; here, McClendon refers to Ray Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius (New York: Free Press, 1990), 115f. And, while acknowledging that Wittgenstein “was no ‘Christian philosopher’ and . . . offers us no ‘Christian philosophy,’” as revealed in Witness, 269-70, McClendon argues that, through his actions (over the rest of his life), Wittgenstein consistently demonstrated that his faith was genuine. For McClendon this is important, since he holds that Wittgenstein’s religious claims were shown to be authentic due to the practice of “*the Christian life Wittgenstein lived*,” as set forth in Witness, 269.

[160]Doctrine, 259.

[161]Doctrine, 257. Here, McClendon cites Wittgenstein: “Just as something is a blunder in a particular game and not in another,” as set forth in Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, 59.

[162]Convictions, 70-74.

Three Sources for Christian Convictions – Narrative, Experience, and the Church

In addition to arguing, from the vantage point of convictional perspectivism, that communities have sets of "convictions" or "pictures" and that these firmly held beliefs can be supported by appeal to criteria such as loci of justification or a particular community's language games, McClendon maintains that convictions (or pictures) must have their roots in some source(s) or context(s).[163] Moreover, he avers that "Christian convictions" may be found in at least the following three sources: narrative, experience, and the church,[164] and, he holds that the first of these, narrative, must be the primary source. In the sections below, I will examine the way in which he comprehends these three sources and the manner in which he feels they may be appropriated to form Christian convictions.

Narrative as a Source for Christian Convictions

McClendon argues that the main source for Christian convictions must be narrative. In an effort to unfold his understanding of this source, I will first briefly explore the distinction he draws between: (A) the view that convictions need not have any narrative sources and (B) the view that convictions must have at least some narrative sources. Next, I will, within the context of Christian convictions, endeavor to consider

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[163]James William McClendon, Jr., "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," Faith and Philosophy 3 (October 1986): 385.

[164]With the concept of "Christian convictions," McClendon has in view something different than "Christian doctrines," for he defines "doctrines" as "the formal, conceptual restatement of convictions," as set forth in James William McClendon, Jr., "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," Faith and Philosophy 3 (October 1986): 385.

how broad the concept of "narrative" is for McClendon. Finally, I will examine guidelines he gives for determining which narratives might be most suitable for forming Christian convictions.

Non-narrative and narrative sources for convictions. According to McClendon, for non-narrativists – whom he identifies, on occasion, as "decisionists,"[165] and, elsewhere, as "propositionalists"[166] – values, principles, propositions, and definitions can all be known apart from narratives. In fact, for many non-narrativists, stories or narratives are merely "local adaptations of . . . universal [understandings of values, principles, propositions, and definitions]."[167] The significant limitation of this view, McClendon avers, is that when one detaches theological and ethical convictions (infused as they are with values et al.) from narratives, these convictions "become sterile because they are ignorant of their own roots."[168]

Against the non-narrativist view, McClendon maintains that, for narrativists, there are no values, principles, propositions, or definitions that make any sense apart from a narrative context (whether or not one acknowledges this context). That is, for narrativists, values, principles, and similar entities depend upon narratives for their

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[165]Ibid., 388.

[166]Ethics, 340.

[167]McClendon, "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," 389.

[168]Ibid., 390.

meaning. To illustrate this narrativist perspective, McClendon points to the way different narratives might lead to distinct meanings for a term such as "self-sacrifice:"

> Nobody should be surprised if 'self-sacrifice' or 'love' turns out to have, in William James's homely phrase, a different 'cash value' for seventeenth-century Puritan armies intent upon overturning royal authority than it would for sixteenth-century Swiss Brethren, full of the discovery of a new way of life within the body of Christ. If in either case definitions of 'self-sacrifice' are developed, their meaning and force must depend upon the social world that is their context, and thus upon the imbedded narratives of that world.[169]

That is, the narratives of the more belligerent seventeenth-century Puritans and the narratives of the more pacifistic sixteenth-century Swiss Brethren would tend to generate markedly different definitions of concepts like "self-sacrifice." Thus, for McClendon, attending to the way in which theological and ethical theories (infused as they are with values) have their roots in particular narratives is what allows these theories to have any meaning at all.

Within a Christian context, what counts as "narrative" for McClendon. For McClendon, Christian convictions (including those of Christian ethics and theology) are "linked to (at least one) narrative, and that narrative is the Christian story: the story of Israel, and of Jesus called the Christ, and of the church that followed him."[170] In other words, he holds that *the narrative of Scripture* as well as *the narrative of tradition* combine to form a narrative source for Christian convictions.

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[169]Ethics, 340.

[170]Ethics, 388.

One might expect that the latter part of this narrative source – the narrative of tradition – would receive scant attention from a Baptist theologian. To the contrary, however, McClendon makes ample use of this type of narrative, particularly through what he terms "biography as theology,"[171] which could, by way of introduction, perhaps be described as sort of a contemporary "lives of the saints." For instance, in his work, Biography as Theology, he employs biographies of Dag Hammarskjöld, Martin Luther

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[171]James William McClendon, Jr., Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 14. In his preface to this first edition of Biography as Theology, McClendon suggests that "biography as theology" should not fall within the realm of the narrative of tradition:

> There is currently a stir among students of religion about 'narrative theology' – the way or ways in which the ideas of religion may be expressed in story form. It seems likely that this book will be regarded as one aspect of that flurry of interest, and it will probably do no harm for it to be so regarded, unless it is therefore seen as an abandonment of serious inquiry into the *truth* of religious stories, or their adequacy to the facts. What I have done here, however, is not in any sense a bundling up of the several sorts of 'story theology.' For that sort of survey one must look elsewhere (Ibid., 7).

Yet, in his preface to the new edition of Biography as Theology, he indicates – presumably because the trend of "narrative theology" had progressed to the point that it more clearly showed that it did not altogether disallow "serious inquiry into the truth of religious stories, or their adequacy to the facts" – that "biography as theology" should perhaps fall within the realm of the narrative of tradition. A question he poses to his reviewers in the new preface reflects this revised stance: "Why so little recognition that *Biography as Theology* fell into the class of Christian doctrinal theology, displaying the task of biographical (and therefore 'narrative'?) theology by illuminating one Christian doctrine, the reconciling work of Christ?" as revealed in James William McClendon, Jr., Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology, new ed. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1990), ix.

Against the way I have here interpreted McClendon, one could argue that he places "biography as theology" not within the realm of the narrative of tradition but within the realm of experience. However, this may amount to splitting hairs, since, as I will show below, McClendon maintains that, at least in certain contexts, "we might see 'experience' as a narrative word," as set forth in McClendon, Doctrine, 461.

King, Jr., Clarence Leonard Jordan, and Charles Edward Ives as some of the main resources from which he constructs a doctrine of atonement.[172] Similarly, in Ethics, he makes use of biographies as resources to assist in the development of various ethical views: the lives of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards in the sphere of organic (or personal) ethics; the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the realm of communal (or social) ethics; and, the life of Dorothy Day in the sphere of anastatic (or resurrection) ethics.[173] He also incorporates biographies into his theological constructions in Doctrine, but to a lesser degree.[174]

For McClendon, *the narrative of tradition* is not limited to just "biography as theology;" he also looks significantly to the theological writings of such figures as: Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher, Bushnell, Rauschenbusch, Karl Barth, and H. Richard Niebuhr. However, his "biographies" play a substantial and somewhat unique role in his constructive endeavors.

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[172]James William McClendon, Jr., "Dag Hammarskjöld – Twice Born Servant," chap. in Biography as Theology, new ed., 24-46; idem, "The Religion of Martin Luther King, Jr.," chap. in Biography as Theology, new ed., 47-66; idem, "The Theory Tested: Clarence Leonard Jordan – Radical in Community," chap. in Biography as Theology, new ed., 89-113; and, idem, "Expanding the Theory: Charles Edward Ives – Theologian in Music," chap. in Biography as Theology, new ed., 114-141.

[173]James William McClendon, Jr., "Sarah and Jonathan Edwards," chap. in Ethics, 119-138; idem, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," chap. in Ethics, 193-212; and, idem, "Dorothy Day," chap. in Ethics, 279-99.

[174]In the preface to Doctrine, he indicates that he had intended to more fully incorporate biographies into this work, but he laments that "it was not to be – too much had to be reported and argued through and clarified, so that the biographical chapters have come to be only sections or paragraphs on Hans Hut and Roger Williams and Georgia Harkness and others," as set forth in Doctrine, 7.

While McClendon holds that *the narrative of tradition* should be a significant narrative source for Christian convictions, he argues that the primary narrative source must be *the narrative of Scripture*. For, according to him:

> The Bible does have some of the qualities of a mantra, of a code, of a classic. But that is not where its authority lies. Rather the Bible is for us the word of God written; . . . it is for us God speaking. . . . Such a claim made by a book upon a people is radical and unsettling – an authority subversive of all sorts of competing, other, human authorities.[175]

That is, McClendon holds that since – for Christians – the Bible is (through humans) "God speaking," the Bible is the *sine qua non* among all narratives. Moreover, he maintains that the Old and New Testaments have a unity that cannot be denied;[176] yet, he implies that Scripture itself suggests that within Scripture there is a certain ascendancy in authority (moving from lowest to highest): first, all of Scripture; then, the New Testament; and, finally, the crucifixion-resurrection accounts within the New Testament.[177] Hence, he claims, "the picture of the Lamb standing as one that has been slain – the picture of the crucified and risen one – is the master picture by which we can learn to see all the rest."[178]

However, with this "high view" of Scripture, McClendon does not suggest that the Bible should be read uncritically. To the contrary, he argues that "an indispensable

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[175]Doctrine, 464.

[176]Doctrine, 38.

[177]Doctrine, 198.

[178]Doctrine, 101.

feature of Bible reading in our day is the use of historical-critical exegesis."[179] He clearly rejects non-critical approaches, pejoratively associating them with "fundamentalist" readings of the Bible.[180] At the same time, looking to Hans Frei,[181] McClendon frowns upon approaches that "give up the . . . idea that the biblical narratives mean what they say . . . [in favor of efforts to] reconstruct . . . [a] 'scientific history' to which the narratives are said to refer – or . . . [to locate] some other more ingenious 'meaning' located beneath the surface of the text."[182] That is, he suggests that, by all means, historical-critical exegesis should be employed and that this approach will, of course, yield appropriate and helpful results, such as the presence of various layers or kerygmas within Scripture;[183] yet, he seems to further hold that these various layers or kerygmas should still be treated as meaning what they say and as being given to the churches by God,[184] or, more specifically, by the Holy Spirit.[185]

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[179]Doctrine, 35.

[180]Doctrine, 436.

[181]Ethics, 334. McClendon refers to Hans Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974), passim.

[182]Ethics, 334.

[183]Doctrine, 214.

[184]Doctrine, 40.

[185]Doctrine, 198.

Guidelines for determining which narratives might be most suitable for forming Christian convictions. While, within a Christian context, McClendon holds that one can and should turn to the narratives of Scripture and tradition as sources for developing Christian convictions, he also maintains that one must simultaneously be concerned to make use of "true" rather than "false" narratives and, where possible, of "more true" rather than "less true" narratives. Towards these ends, he suggests at least three guidelines.

The first guideline he sets forth is that one should examine whether or not the narrative under consideration aims for correspondent truth.[186] That is, one should inquire whether the narrative at hand is a "fictional narrative" (a narrative that does not seek to correspond with "external facts" or "actual history") or a "realistic narrative" (a narrative that does endeavor to correspond with "external facts" or "actual history"). In developing Christian convictions, McClendon avers, "realistic narratives" are much to be preferred to "fictional narratives." Thus, one may make use of the Gospels, since they endeavor to "tell a *true* story,"[187] rather than "a false or fictional one."[188] And, McClendon implies (though he does not make this explicit) that the same principle would pertains to "the narrative of tradition" as well. That is, he suggests, that more weight should be given, for example, to "realistic" biographies than to "fictional" ones.

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[186]McClendon suggests this guideline, while at the same time acknowledging that he has "no *theory* of representation," as revealed in Convictions, 77.

[187]Ethics, 340.

[188]Ethics, 337.

The second guideline he indicates is that one should examine whether or not (or the degree to which) the narrative under consideration is coherently true. More specifically, he argues that one should test the way in which (1) "character," (2) "social setting," and (3) "circumstance or incident" converge together within the narrative at hand. In the context of seeking to show how Christian convictions can be formed, McClendon holds that each of these three elements consist of certain features. For instance, using the Gospels (taken as a whole) as an example: (1) "character" would primarily be "the identity of Jesus Christ" but also "the identity of disciples" (past and present); (2) "social setting" would be "the kingdom or rule of God;" and, (3) "circumstance or incident" would be "the plot-line of salvation" and "the creation of disciples" (past and present).[189] To the degree that these three elements successfully hold together and cohere within the narrative under consideration, the narrative may be said to be "more true" or "less true," with the former to be preferred when considering which resources to use in the development of convictions.[190]

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[189]Doctrine, 40. McClendon's reason for including "present" disciples will become more apparent when I consider below his "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle.

[190]McClendon somewhat reflects these three elements, "character," "social setting," and "circumstance or incident," through the macro-structure of Doctrine. The three major parts of this work are: "Part I: The Rule of God" (read "social setting"); "Part II: The Identity of Jesus Christ" (read "character"); and, "Part III: The Fellowship of the Spirit" (read "circumstance or incident"). He does something similar (though more clearly) with the macro-structure of Ethics. The three major parts of this work are: "Part I: Embodied Witness" (read "character"); "Part II: Community of Care" (read "social setting"); and, "Part III: The Sphere of the Anastatic" (read "circumstance or incident").

The third guideline McClendon sets forth is that the narrative(s) under consideration should be continually submitted to "a tournament of narratives."[191] That is, narratives should be allowed, in some sense, to compete with one another, so that those narratives which point to the "more true" might become evident. To illustrate this point, McClendon examines what the realm of romantic literature conveys about sexual love. He takes under consideration a broad range of works in this genre, from twelfth-century *Tristan* poems, to Erich Segal's *Love Story*, to John Updike's *Marry Me* and *Couples*,[192] and he reaches the following conclusion:

> Stories of love can collide, and can obscure one another from view. We exist as in a tournament of narratives; nowhere is there a story-free 'love' to be discovered; our Christian hope lies rather in finding the banner of those true stories of love that will set us free from the less true and from the false.[193]

McClendon further argues that what holds for romantic literature should also hold for theological literature – and that even the narrative of Scripture must be allowed to joust with the various other theological narratives or "tales" that we encounter. Accordingly, from McClendon's perspective, whenever the Bible speaks, "its story not only supports and conserves, but challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves."[194]

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[191]Ethics, 149.

[192]Ethics, 140-45.

[193]Ethics, 149.

[194]Doctrine, 41.

Experience as a Source for Christian Convictions

A second source for Christian convictions, according to McClendon, is experience, or, more precisely, religious experience. However, the only type of religious experience that McClendon recognizes as having even a proximate or secondary authority for forming Christian convictions are those experiences that occur as a response to Christian narrative (Scripture and the Christian tradition) [as that narrative is interpreted within the context of the Christian community (the church)].[195] For McClendon, "to represent religious experience as an independent authority in its own right (the foundationalist move) . . . [would be a] logically and conceptually confused [endeavor],"[196] since, he avers, the religious community (or individual) is not "the hound" who seeks Christian narrative but "the hare" that is sought by Christian narrative.[197] So, while he acknowledges that one should turn to religious experience as an essential source for Christian convictions, he maintains that one may only authentically look to this type of experience as it happens in reaction to Christian narrative.

Moreover, recognizing that through the centuries "theologians . . . [have] construed Christian (or religious) *experience* in a variety of ways,"[198] McClendon seeks to clarify his particular understanding of religious experience by contrasting it with some ways in which others have understood this concept. For example, he argues that, "for the

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[195]Doctrine, 459-62.

[196]Doctrine, 462.

[197]Doctrine, 462.

[198]Doctrine, 459, emphasis mine.

young Schleiermacher, . . . [religious experience] had been the epistemically primitive awareness (Gefühl) of the whole, or the All, an awareness differently colored in different religious traditions but definitely the same in each."[199] Accordingly, McClendon continues, for Schleiermacher, "the primary reference of theology was *to the experience itself*, and theological statements (including those of Scripture as well as those of the *Glaubenslehre*) are always and necessarily secondary. Experience alone was authority, and even the grace of God only an inference from that."[200] Against this Schleiermacherean understanding of religious experience as an independent and primary source of authority for forming Christian convictions, McClendon maintains that, "apart from that triad [of experience, Bible, community], . . . Christian experience could not exercise even proximate authority."[201]

Having set forth his view that religious experience is a secondary authority for developing Christian convictions and having distinguished this view from others, such as Schleiermacher's, that would treat religious experience as a primary authority, McClendon further maintains that religious experience itself, properly understood, has a

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[199]Doctrine, 459. Here, McClendon refers to Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18-54.

[200]Doctrine, 461. Here, McClendon refers to Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Baillie, W. R. Matthews, Edith Sandbach-Marshall, A. B. Macaulay, Alexander Grieve, J. Y. Campbell, R. W. Stewart, and H. R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), § 3, pp. 5-12.

[201]Doctrine, 461.

narrative form.[202] More specifically, he holds that the experience of human response to God (i.e., to God's love, holiness, etc.) – as God has revealed Gods's self in Christian narrative – may be rightfully said to have a narrative form of its own. That is, he argues that "we might see 'experience' as a narrative word,"[203] since Christian experience may be said to become part of the ongoing Christian story. This is because "in Christian circles *to relate one's experience means* not to divulge a timeless intuition, but *to tell the story of one's journey in faith*."[204]

The Church as a Source for Christian Convictions

In addition to arguing that narrative and experience are sources for developing Christian convictions, McClendon maintains that the church is also a source for developing these convictions. With the concept of "church," he includes theologians; pastors and deacons; and, "members of the Christian body just because they *are* members,"[205] but, when considering the church as an authority for forming Christian convictions, he seems to have in mind not so much these people – and their stories and their teachings (which would both be included within his concept of "narrative") – as he

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[202]Doctrine, 459.

[203]Doctrine, 461.

[204]Doctrine, 461.

[205]Doctrine, 480. Moreover, in this context, with "church," McClendon has in view the "universal church," in the very broad sense of "the entire new people of God," as set forth in Witness, 335.

does the practices of the church.[206] As examples of practices of the church, he points to some of its various activities, such as its economic practices, its practice of prayer, its practice of evangelism, and so on.[207]

Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of the above discussion regarding experience, he holds that the practices of the church have "a proximate not an ultimate authority,"[208] for the development of Christian convictions. That is, he avers that the church is an essential but secondary source for forming Christian convictions – secondary, in part, because, in the most general sense:

> The church teaches by what it is and by what it does. All its practices interact with its teaching. . . . Yet there is an argument against founding doctrine upon any one of these practices, or any combination of them – or, as with Liberation Theologies, building it primarily upon the church's practice (*praxis*) vis-à-vis the wider society: Since each powerful practice is subject to distortion, even to demonic abuse, . . . doctrine based directly upon it is likewise liable to abuse.[209]

A more significant reason, though, according to McClendon, for why the church should be viewed as a proximate authority is because while "society [including the society of the church] . . . may take many forms, . . . it *must* be narrative to be a society."[210] That is, one cannot address the practices of the church, whatever they may be, apart from the narrative that describes them. Thus, for him, the practices of the church are a secondary

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[206]Doctrine, 34.

[207]Doctrine, 34.

[208]Doctrine, 477.

[209]Doctrine, 34.

[210]Ethics, 172.

authority. However, this is not to suggest that he maintains that the church is anything approaching an insignificant source for Christians convictions. Quite to the contrary, he argues that Christian convictions cannot be formed without having the church as one of its sources.[211] And, he holds, "the wise church, in the formation of its teaching [convictions], . . . looks to practices that resist perversion."[212] Nevertheless, for McClendon, the leading partner in the relationship between (1) "the practices of the church" (and the narratives that describe these practices) and (2) "the narratives of Scripture and tradition" is the latter, not the former, partner. Accordingly, for him, "theology [which is based upon 'the narratives of Scripture and tradition'] . . . is the mirror in which today's church is confronted with her potential convictions, the mirror which asks if in this set she recognizes herself not as she is but as she must be."[213]

Furthermore, as part of his treatment of the church and theological method, McClendon considers the long-standing theological discussion "about the 'essence of Christianity,' . . . [or] the problem of identifying what is irreducibly and normatively Christian."[214] Yet, drawing on the work of Walter Gallie and Stephen Sykes, McClendon maintains that "the *essence* of Christianity (or *real* or *authentic* Christianity) is itself 'an essentially contested concept,' one that by its very nature cannot be agreed on by all

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[211]Doctrine, 477.

[212]Doctrine, 34.

[213]Ethics, 35.

[214]Doctrine, 42.

sides."[215] Therefore, since "there *is* no universal agreement,"[216] he concludes that he is simply going to endeavor to make clear his own (perspectival?) view of the essence of Christianity.[217] However, for McClendon, the "essence of Christianity" is not a methodological resource for constructing theological doctrine; rather, for him, it is a theological product that emerges as a result of "doing theology."[218] Thus, while he values the pursuit of seeking to define "the essence of Christianity," since he holds that it can be a helpful means by which Christian theology can attempt to address contemporary culture,[219] "the essence of Christianity" is not, strictly speaking, part of his theological method.

The Hermeneutical Principle of "This Is That" and "Then Is Now"

Another essential feature of McClendon's theological method is his hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now." Whereas his views on how conviction sets may be justified and on how narrative, experience, and the church can serve as sources for Christian convictions might be said to have broader, more cross-

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[215]Doctrine, 43. McClendon refers to: Walter B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," chap. in Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 2d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 157-91; and Stephen Sykes, The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984), 251-56.

[216]Doctrine, 43.

[217]Doctrine, 44.

[218]Witness, 313.

[219]Witness, 310, 366.

denominational relevance, his notion of "this is that" and "then is now" is more particularly Baptist – or, as McClendon prefers (making use of a lower-case "b"), more particularly "baptist."[220] In fact, it is within his development of his "baptist vision" that he begins to point to what he means by the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutic principle:

> I call it "the baptist vision" after the sixteenth-century Christian radicals. Neither Catholic nor Protestant, spurned by both sides, they called themselves simply 'brothers and sisters,' or Täufer, 'baptists.' The baptist vision is the way the Bible is read by those who (1) accept the plain sense of Scripture as its dominant sense and recognize their continuity with the story it tells, and who (2) acknowledge that finding the point of the that story leads them to its application, and who also (3) *see past and present and future linked by a 'this is that' and 'then is now' vision, a trope of mystical identity binding the story now to the story then, and the story then and now to God's future yet to come*.[221]

McClendon declares that the third element of this "baptist vision" may otherwise "be expressed as a hermeneutical motto, which is a shared awareness of *the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community*."[222] In other words, by the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle, he means, in general: (1) that Scripture addresses or speaks to Christians in "*this* present church" just as much as it addressed them in "*that* primitive, first century church;" and, (2) that

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[220]Nancey Murphy indicates that McClendon uses the lower case "b" for "baptists" to denote a "broad and diverse stream of Christian life . . . [that] includes some contemporary Baptists, but also Mennonites, Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Pentecostals, Christian base communities, and others," as shown in Nancey Murphy, introduction to Theology without Foundations, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 18.

[221]Doctrine, 45, emphasis mine.

[222]Ethics, 31.

Scripture addresses or speaks to Christians *now* in "this present church" just as much as it will, *then*, in "the future, eschatological church." And, this aspect of McClendon's theological method has significant implications for the way in which he develops doctrine. For example, it leads him to form Christological perspectives such as the following: "This *is* that – the *Christ* who meets us now in worship is 'that same *Jesus*' who lived and died and lives again. Then *is* now – the Messiah who will return is also present now in succor and judgment."[223]

After setting forth his general understanding of the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle, McClendon then further unfolds what he means by the two motifs within this principal. For instance, looking at how the first motif of "this is that" might be applied towards the development of a doctrine of the church, he argues that this motif "requires that the reading method by which the first Christians once approached the Bible (a method they learned from the Bible itself) be again employed by Christians today so that their understanding of Christian community is framed, shaped, by that original bench mark of understanding."[224] Influenced by Lesslie Newbigin's book, The Household of God,[225] McClendon maintains that with this Bible reading method, a particular emphasis of the "baptist vision," one endeavors to read Scripture with the Holy

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[223]Doctrine, 385.

[224]Doctrine, 344.

[225]Here, McClendon refers to Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Friendship, 1954). McClendon especially draws on Newbigin's assessment of how Protestants, Catholics, and Pentecostals differ and agree in their approaches to ecclesiology, but McClendon claims that what Newbigin terms "Pentecostal" corresponds to his understanding of the baptist movement, as revealed in Doctrine, 335.

Spirit's "gift of *discernment*."[226] And, he avers, a result of seeking to apply such a method is that the "features [yielded from such a reading of Scripture] . . . are not fixities of canon law or tradition, but will if true be discerned independently as the living church reads afresh."[227] Therefore, "such a church is by nature *provisional*, subject to correction arising from further Bible reading."[228]

In addition, McClendon elaborates upon the second motif, "then is now" – and, as with the first motif, he does so in view of how it might be applied towards the development of a doctrine of the church. He holds, for example, that according to the "then is now" motif:

> The church on judgment day, the church that must give final answer only to Jesus the Lord, is already present – it is the church today. Thus the church sees itself not only in a frame of biblical narrative, but also in a frame of biblical expectation. It reckons that God has only begun to do what God will do.[229]

And here as well, with this motif, McClendon holds that one may see "evidence of the *provisional* nature of the present church: the church must change, for God is on the move, and the end is not yet."[230]

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[226]Doctrine, 343.

[227]Doctrine, 344.

[228]Doctrine, 344, emphasis mine.

[229]Doctrine, 344.

[230]Doctrine, 344, emphasis mine.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the main facets of McClendon's understanding of theological method. One key facet is his and James Smith's notion of conviction sets and of how one can seek to justify these conviction sets. To build towards this notion, they first define a "conviction" as a closely guarded and persistent belief that one (an individual or a community) holds about a significant matter – a belief that, on the one hand, would be something for which a person or a community might even be willing to die, but that, on the other hand (if new evidence were to prove sufficiently persuasive), could be altered or perhaps relinquished (but only at the cost of the individual or community holding it being substantially changed). Next, they distinguish among three different theories of convictions – imperialism, relativism, and perspectivism – and the various ways in which these theories approach convictional conflicts with individuals or communities. Between "convictional imperialism" – with its reliance upon a hard epistemological realism, and with its insistence that convictional differences are ultimately completely eradicable – and "convictional relativism" – with its dependence upon a hard epistemological relativism, and with its demand that convictional differences are completely ineradicable – McClendon and Smith argue in favor of "convictional perspectivism" – which employs a soft epistemological relativism, and which maintains that convictional differences are at least partially eradicable. Then, presupposing "convictional perspectivism," they maintain that the unhappiness or happiness of particular "conviction sets" (from which individual convictions are derived) can be determined (or anticipated) by ascertaining the degree to which these conviction

sets meet at least some – but not necessarily all – widely accepted loci of justification (such as truth and consistency) and various social matrices of justification (such as reform and interconvictional encounter). Also, McClendon later restates this argument essentially as follows: the unhappiness or happiness of particular "picture sets" can be determined (or anticipated) by ascertaining the degree to which these picture sets comply with the "language games" of a specific community.

A second key facet of McClendon's understanding of theological method is his view that all convictions must be grounded in some source(s) or context(s) and that Christian convictions, in particular, should be grounded primarily in narrative but also in experience and the church. By "narrative," he means both the narrative of Scripture and the narrative of tradition. With the first of these narratives, he argues that the Bible is "God speaking."[231] Therefore, while he stresses that this divine speaking occurs through humans and that Scripture should be read using the methods of historical-critical exegesis, McClendon maintains that the Bible should be the highest authority for forming Christian convictions. Moreover, McClendon suggests that the Bible itself indicates that certain parts of the Bible, such as the New Testament and especially the crucifixion-resurrection accounts within the New Testament, should be privileged. With the narrative of tradition, he has in view not only the writings of various theologians but also, uniquely, biographies. Furthermore, by "experience," he means the religious experience of communities and individuals, and, by "church," he has in view primarily church practices, such as its economic practices and prayer. While McClendon holds that

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[231]Doctrine, 464.

experience and the church are essential sources for developing Christian convictions, he clearly argues that they should have a secondary role next to narrative, especially the narrative of Scripture. More specifically, he implies that, in forming Christian convictions, one should consider religious experience and the church as significant resources – but only as these resources, in turn, are grounded upon and reflect the primary resource of Christian narrative.

Finally, a third key facet of McClendon's understanding of theological method is his notion of the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle. This principle, which is related to McClendon's view that Scripture is "God speaking,"[232] contains a mystical element that he acknowledges: "[The] . . . 'this is that' and 'then is now' vision . . . [is] a trope of *mystical identity* binding the story now to the story then, and the story then and now to God's future yet to come."[233] So, for example, he holds that, in a mystical manner, when the Gospel of John conveys Jesus' telling Peter to "feed his sheep" (in John 21), Jesus is not just saying this to his first century disciple; he is also ("this is that") directly (?) saying this to his disciples who exist two millennia later – as if they were "right there" by Peter's side. Similarly, McClendon maintains, that, in a mystical way, when the Book of Revelation expresses a vision of Jesus' telling John that he will give to the thirsty "drink without cost from the spring of the water of life" (in Revelation 21), this is not just a vision of something that Jesus will say to future disciples; he is also ("then is now") directly (?) saying this to his disciples who exist in

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[232]Doctrine, 464.

[233]Doctrine, 45, emphasis mine.

the present – as if they were "right there" by John's side. For McClendon, this hermeneutical principle underscores his view that, with spiritual discernment, Scripture continually speaks anew in a way that potentially subverts all other authorities.

With this analysis of McClendon's theological method that might generally be referred to as "convictional perspectivism," I will – following a treatment of Farley's doctrine of God in chapter 3 – turn to a consideration, in chapter 4, of the way in which McClendon makes use of his theological method in his construction of a doctrine of God. Then, in chapter 5, I will set forth a more complete evaluation of McClendon's method and doctrine in conversation with others who have offered commentaries on his work.

CHAPTER 3

EDWARD FARLEY'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

One of my main concerns in this dissertation is to explore the way in which two different types of theological methods (Farley's and McClendon's) inform and shape theological doctrines. Various doctrines could have been selected for this task, but I have chosen to consider the doctrine of God, largely because it is a central – if not *the* central – doctrine of the Christian faith. Therefore, in this chapter, I will strive to examine Farley's doctrine of God, with a particular concern to show how his understanding of this doctrine relies upon his theological method of ecclesial refection (which I treated in chapter 1).

The essential features of this theological method can be summarized as follows. Farley argues that the goal of ecclesial reflection is to uncover faith's realities as they can be discovered through the Christian faith community. This can be accomplished, in part, he avers, through a reflective method, in which one: brackets church authority and metaphysics; probes beneath the everyday activities of the church to the deep strata of the faith-world; and, uses theological eidetics to uncover the essences of faith's corporate realities (or experiences), as these realities occur within the deep strata of the faith-world. Moreover, he holds that within the process of a reflective method, active participants in ecclesia can experience both direct apprehensions of "realities at hand" and indirect apprehensions of "realities not at hand" – but only as these latter apprehensions occur

through direct apprehensions, because "realities at hand . . . [can] appresent realities not at hand."[1] And, he suggests that these realities can become the basis for what has often been referred to as doctrine.

With this understanding of his theological method, the task at hand, in this chapter, is to examine Farley's doctrine of God and to demonstrate the ways in which his development of this doctrine builds upon his notion of ecclesial reflection. My primary, thought not exclusive, resource for considering his doctrine of God will be his monograph on this topic, Divine Empathy: A Theology of God.[2] In this work, Farley develops this doctrine in three major parts. First, he briefly explores how God can be known. More specifically, he looks at how we can know what God means and how we can know that this meaning pertains to something that is real (i.e., to the actual God).[3] Second, he delves into the matter of how we can speak of God. That is, he investigates how we can have "a symbolics of God,"[4] and, here, within this investigation, he begins to set forth his notion of who God is: Redeemer, Creator, and the Holy One.[5] Third, he extensively addresses the issue of thinking the relation between the world and God. Or, more concretely, he constructs a paradigm of the works of God, and here he further

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[1]EM, 208.

[2]Edward Farley, Divine Empathy: A Theology of God (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996). Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Divine Empathy.

[3]Divine Empathy, 61.

[4]Divine Empathy, 82.

[5]Divine Empathy, chaps. 9-10 passim.

unfolds his notion of who God is.[6] In my analysis of Farley's doctrine of God, I shall proceed in the same order, considering: first, his notion of how God can be known; next, his concepts of how we can speak of God and who God is; and, finally, his understanding of the relation between the world and God.

How God Can Be Known

With the development of his theological method, Farley argues that the starting point for constructing doctrine should occur by means of the Christian community seeking to retrieve the essence of faith's realities (through noematic-noetic analysis). With this methodological starting point, as he approaches the development of a doctrine of God, Farley indicates that he wants to see if there is a way for the Christian community to discover how "God comes forth as God, thus evoking a meaning of God that is at the same time an evidence."[7] In other words, he intends to determine if there is a way, through reflection on faith's realities, for the Christian community to discover how God comes forth as God, so that we can know not only what God means but also that this meaning for God pertains to something real – that is, pertains to the actual God.[8] Farley acknowledges that the Christian community (at least in its current form) cannot directly experience God coming forth as God. However, he holds that the Christian community can directly experience the process of human redemption – and that this

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[6]Divine Empathy, 153.

[7]Divine Empathy, 61.

[8]Divine Empathy, 61.

experience (the process of human redemption) can, in turn, point to the one who enables the process of human redemption and to how this one comes forth.[9] And, this, of course, is an application of that aspect of Farley's method of ecclesial reflection, through which he indicates that faith community participants can experience indirect apprehensions of "realities not at hand" [in this case, the one who enables the process of human redemption and how this one comes forth] – but only as they occur through direct apprehensions of "realities at hand" [in this case, the process of human redemption], since "realities at hand . . . [can] appresent realities not at hand."[10]

Accordingly, Farley posits the thesis: that God does come forth as God to the Christian community as this community reflects on the reality of the process of human redemption (i.e., on the reality of the process of humans being "transformed in the direction of some good");[11] and, that the dynamic of God coming forth as God – through the process of redemption – not only allows us to know what God means but also gives us evidence for the reality of God.[12] More succinctly, what Farley works towards is the idea that, although the Christian community cannot directly experience God, it can directly experience the process of human redemption (i.e., transformation from evil to

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[9]Divine Empathy, 63-64.

[10]EM, 208.

[11]Divine Empathy, 62.

[12]Divine Empathy, 62-64.

good, in some sense), and this experience of redemption points to whatever or whoever might be the ground of redemption.[13]

Central to this thesis is Farley's understanding of the redemption process. He extensively unfolds his understanding of this process as part of his doctrine of anthropology in his work, Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition.[14] In this work, he maintains: (1) that there are three spheres of human reality – the individual (personal agent); the interhuman (interrelation); and, the social (institution); (2) that entities within each of these spheres are capable of experiencing corruption (in various ways); and, (3) that entities within each of these spheres have the potential to experience redemptive transformation.[15] For purposes of this chapter, I will consider only one type of redemptive transformation that Farley describes, the one from "idolatry" to "freedom," as it occurs in only one of the three spheres of human reality, the individual human agent.[16]

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[13]Divine Empathy, 63-64.

[14]Edward Farley, Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990). Hereafter, references to this work will be abbreviated as Good and Evil.

[15]Good and Evil, chaps. 1-16 passim.

[16]Good and Evil, chaps. 5-12 passim. Farley implies that the redemptive transformation from "idolatry" to "freedom" can also be conceived of in a more general way to refer to all types of redemptive transformation in all three spheres of human reality. Furthermore, he classifies some of the other particular types of redemptive transformation as follows: (1) in the individual sphere – (a) from "false historicity" to "creativity," (b) from "false hope and ennui" to "vitality," (c) from "lust for certainty" to "openness," (d) from "false skepticism and imperceptivity" to "participation," (e) from "false hedonism" (i.e., a consideration of my happiness alone) to "eudaemonic freedom" (i.e., a consideration of my happiness as well as everyone else's happiness), as well as (f)

The redemptive transformation from idolatry to freedom that can occur within the individual human agent takes place within the dynamics, Farley maintains, of the elemental passions that exist within each person and the way in which these passions may be adequately fulfilled only by an infinite, eternal horizon.[17] Since, as the Christian community knows from the faith realities which it retrieves, no *finite* resource can completely fulfill the elemental passions – which include "the passion of subjectivity,"[18] "the passion of the interhuman,"[19] and "the passion for reality"[20] – that which can adequately fulfill them, therefore, must be an inexhaustible, "*infinite* resource, an eternal horizon."[21] Unfortunately, though, since "human life is a mixture of satisfaction and sufferings,"[22] and because these sufferings lead to "discontent,"[23] humans will sometimes endeavor to end their discontent by "substituting a mundane good [at hand] . . . for the

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from "wickedness" (i.e., a desire to harm the enemy for my sake alone, with no respect for the enemy) to "prophetic resistance" (i.e., a desire to resist the enemy for the sake of the common good, with respect for the enemy); (2) in the interhuman sphere – (a) from "false dependence and cynicism" to "agapic passion," as well as (b) from "alienation" to "communion;" and, (3) in the social sphere – (a) from "subjugation" to "emancipation," as well as (b) from "self-absolutizing centrisms of institutions" to "social theonomy," as set forth in Good and Evil, 154-93, 198-208, 216-50, 259-80.

[17]Good and Evil, 97-112.

[18]Good and Evil, 101-103.

[19]Good and Evil, 103-106.

[20]Good and Evil, 106-108.

[21]Good and Evil, 112, emphasis mine.

[22]Good and Evil, 121.

[23]Good and Evil, 123-24.

eternal horizon,"[24] and this particular substitution may be described as "idolatry."[25] Furthermore:

> In idolatrous mood the human being would exact from these goods something they cannot deliver, a security against the tragic. In idolatrous mood the human being treats the selected goods *as if they were themselves the desired eternal horizon* rather than what they are – vulnerable, finite, and relative entities much like the human being itself.[26]

When the idolatrous mood consumes a human being – that is, when a human being persistently seeks a false securing through a mundane good at hand – a significant cost occurs. "To pretend that the idol can secure, the human being must deny its relativity and vulnerability and transform it into something absolutely good and powerful; . . . [and,] the human being . . . will do anything and everything . . . [to] guarantee the security of the idol itself, . . . [including] interhuman violence."[27]

However, humans can be redemptively transformed from seeking a false securing through an idol. Farley maintains that "the one thing that can undercut the drive for a false securing is . . . the actuality of genuine securing. And the one and only thing that can do that is the *desideratum,* the eternal horizon, incarnated into a *bonum adeptum,* an actual fulfillment."[28] Accordingly, he further argues, "if redemption does take place and

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[24]Good and Evil, 135.

[25]Good and Evil, 135.

[26]Divine Empathy, 66, emphasis mine.

[27]Divine Empathy, 66.

[28]Divine Empathy, 69. With the term, "*desideratum*," Farley means "the unfulfilled *desire* for God," and with "*adeptum*," he means "the fulfillment . . . of that desire," as treated in Divine Empathy, 69.

if its condition is a founding by the one and only thing that can found, the eternal horizon as actual, then redemption *is the basis* of the believer's belief-ful conviction of the actuality . . . of God"[29] – or of "the 'ground' of being (Paul Tillich) . . . [or of] the eternal Thou of moral experience (Martin Buber)."[30] In other words, the process of redemption allows the Christian community not only to know, at least to some degree, what God means – "God is the actuality through which redemption takes place"[31] – but also to be provided with evidence for the reality of God, since "in the actuality of redemption as an idolatry-reducing, freedom-giving founding, the nonpresentational God comes forth, not into presentation, but into the determinate designation of that which redemptively

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[29]Divine Empathy, 69, emphasis mine.

[30]Divine Empathy, 71. In response to those who might have questions about what actually takes place with this "founding," while Farley offers indirect suggestions by interposing (in this aspect of his development of the concept of how God can be known through redemptive transformation) various terms, such as "fulfill," "secure," "ground," and "redeem," in ways that are similar to his use of the term "found," he ultimately conveys that "there is no utterly specific answer to this 'what happens' question . . . [with 'founding']. Nothing discrete and actual can be summoned into the order of explanation or even experience that displays 'founding.' Instead, . . . we can only say that . . . the human being is engaged with that which is the meaning of things," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 71. Thus, Farley concedes that, in his view, this type of "founding" cannot be proven by "means of direct description," as shown in Good and Evil, 144. Furthermore, in response to those who might have concerns as to whether humans could be motivated to treat God Godself as idol – and, therefore, attempt to undertake any means possible (including acting violently towards others) to try to guarantee the security of God, as Farley suggest they do with (other) idols – he argues that when God has been appropriately conceived of as "that which breaks the hold of idolatry, there can be no idolatry of God," as demonstrated in Divine Empathy, 104. Also, he offers this clue: "The sacred . . . is the one reality not identifiable with the good of any particularity of place and time," as stated in Good and Evil, 272. Thus, Farley suggests that the sacred or God, when properly understood as radically other, is incapable of being secured by humans.

[31]Divine Empathy, 71-72.

founds."[32] Yet, Farley cautions that not too much should be claimed here. When a human being has been redemptively founded (or secured) by the eternal horizon as actual, this "does not mean that God comes forth into presentation or even that God is 'experienced;'"[33] rather, this means that God (or the "ground" of being or the eternal Thou of moral experience) is the "causality" through which redemption has occurred.[34]

Speaking of God: Ciphers of Who God Is

Having endeavored to show how God can be known through the process of redemption, Farley explores how one can speak about God, and he then begins to set forth at least some of his concepts about who God is through the means of "ciphers."

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[32]Divine Empathy, 69.

[33]Divine Empathy, 71.

[34]Divine Empathy, 71-72. In addition, with the conclusion of his treatment here on how God can be known through redemptive transformation, Farley indicates that aspects of this treatment share both similarities and differences with some of the features of Schleiermacher's understanding of redemption. For instance, Farley holds that what he means by the undesignated "*eternal horizon*" (or infinite resource) as the referent of the elemental passions is similar to what Schleiermacher has in view with his concept of the generalized "*Whence*" as the referent of absolute dependence. [And, here, Farley cites Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, § 4, p. 16.] However, Farley argues that a difference occurs in that where Schleiermacher would point to *utter dependence* "as the dynamics of the human being's pre-redemptive relation to an undesignated eternal, . . . [he would point, instead, to *desire* or *passion* as the dynamics of this relation]," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 72, emphases mine. Farley does not completely reject Schleiermacher's notion of dependence; rather, in his schema, he relocates it: "In my judgement, dependence becomes an explicit theme when the eternal horizon ceases to be a mere horizon and is manifest as the sacred, that which in some way does ground and fulfill the passions," as shown in Good and Evil, 113.

How We Can Speak of God

Farley argues that progress towards the possibility of speaking about God may be accomplished by seeking to "establish and justify . . . symbolic bespeakings of God,"[35] and he maintains that potential for symbolic bespeakings of God develop in connection with the way redemption occurs with the three spheres of human reality, the individual, the interhuman, and the social.[36] Furthermore, he avers that the path to speaking about God should be pursued in a manner that provides for the mystery and otherness of God to be retained. Along these lines, he develops a concept of "ciphers," and he suggests that they should be used in place of the more mystery-reducing "attributes" that have traditionally been employed to speak of God.[37]

A basis for a symbolics of God. According to Farley, the individual can be said to speak of God only in a very strange sort of sense. His starting point along this path is the assertion that speaking of God, if it is not to be entirely subjective, can only happen "if it is rooted in some kind of discernments."[38] And, in keeping with that aspect of his

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[35]Divine Empathy, 79.

[36]Divine Empathy, 82.

[37]Divine Empathy, 113-114. Farley argues that Schleiermacher was "a seminal figure . . . [in] denying that attributes express knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of God's nature (*Wesen*), . . . [at least, according to Schleiermacher, until] the experience of redemption through Christ opens up the way to attributive language," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 86. Here, Farley refers to Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, §§ 50-52, pp. 194-206.

[38]Divine Empathy, 95.

theological method which calls for the rejection of "the house of authority,"[39] he argues that discernments of the divine cannot be authentically provided simply by pointing to biblical citations. That is, "to cite an authoritative text from Ezekiel or the Gospel of John is not to answer the question but to repose it. How does it come about that Ezekiel and John discerned anything about God?"[40] For Farley, the only divine discernments that count are the ones that arise as the believing individual, as part of the larger Christian community, experiences the process of redemption – that is, as the believer perceives, to some extent, that only God could have been at work in a particular situation of redemptive transformation.[41]

However, even if such discernments are possible, Farley asks, "how is it that human beings assign any *content* to God given the fact that God is never as such a direct meaning referent?"[42] In response, he argues that, while the individual cannot directly experience God, "the human being . . . [can] experience an idolatry-breaking founding, . . . [and] a *content* arises here because only that specific fulfiller-founder (God) could found with respect to that specific freedom."[43] Yet, Farley stresses that, "in this situation

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[39]Farley offers an extensive description and critique of "the house of authority" in ER, chaps. 1-7 passim. I began to analyze his treatment of "the house of authority" in chapter 1 above, and I will set forth a more detailed evaluation of certain central aspects of it in chapter 5.

[40]Divine Empathy, 95.

[41]Divine Empathy, 95-97.

[42]Divine Empathy, 99, emphasis mine.

[43]Divine Empathy, 100, emphasis mine.

God is not the direct but indirect referent of an act of meaning."[44] Therefore, through the redemptive process, one may say that God is implied or appresented.[45] Yet, according to Farley, "if appresentations are at work here, they are of a very peculiar sort. . . . The most we can say is . . . that *the meaning act that leads to a symbolics of God* is something like appresentation."[46] Furthermore, the reason why a believing individual may endeavor to attribute to God – in an indirect or qualified way – a "content" that emerges from the redemptive process is because, he argues, "as world ground, God cannot be identical with that which is grounded,"[47] and "if redemption frees the human being from the hold of idolatry, the through-which of redemption cannot be one of the *finite* goods (idols) that exercised that hold."[48] In other words, Farley suggests that only something other than

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[44]Divine Empathy, 100.

[45]With the concept of "appresentation," as I discussed in chapter 1, Farley seems to mean a "filling-out" or a "unity-giving" intentionality that occurs through the relationship of the intending human consciousness with the *noema* of an object – an intentionality that is required in order to perceive any object. For instance, he may mean the kind of intentionality that would result in the intention of a whole house, even while actually only seeing the "front-side" of it. That is, the "back-side" of the house would be appresent, as set forth in EM, 196. Or, as Farley summarizes elsewhere, he may have in view that the "present aspects of things *appresent* other nonpresented aspects. The tree's facade appresents its other side, its interior, its root system, etc.," as shown in Divine Empathy, 99. Thus, it appears to me, as I have also previously indicated in chapter 1, that there is a certain ambiguity in Farley's understanding of appresentation – as to whether he holds that it stems primarily: from the subject (or from the intention of human consciousness); from the object (or from the *noema* of the object); or, from the relationship between the subject and the object.

[46]Divine Empathy, 101, emphasis mine.

[47]Divine Empathy, 101.

[48]Divine Empathy, 102, emphasis mine.

what is finite can redeem human beings from the finite; therefore, only the infinite can redeem, and the infinite can only be identified with the divine. Thus, he avers that it is the element of the infinite appresented to the believing individual through the retrieval of the redemptive process which permits a basis for at least a qualified symbolics of God.

Farley holds that, in addition to the individual sphere of human reality, the sphere of the interhuman (of interrelation with other human beings) and the sphere of the social (of institutions) can also be said to give rise to symbols of God. This is the case, he maintains, since these two spheres, "like individuals, . . . are open to redemptive change, . . . [and] if redemptive change does affect these . . . [two additional] spheres, they too indicate something about God and God's activity."[49] For instance, with the interhuman sphere, the Christian community observes redemptive transformation taking place from "alienation . . . [to] unrestricted agape, reconciliation, and communion,"[50] and with the social sphere, the same community observes redemptive transformation taking place from "self-serving, local politics . . . [to] justice that has no restriction."[51] In both cases, with both spheres, "the 'one and only' thing that summons [such redemptive transformations] . . . is what the religious community calls God."[52] And, to the extent that these transformations occur in the interhuman and social spheres, Farley maintains that a qualified symbolics of that one and only summoning power – that is, of God – emerges in

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[49]Divine Empathy, 109.

[50]Divine Empathy, 109.

[51]Divine Empathy, 110.

[52]Divine Empathy, 110.

connection with them,[53] where again, he implies, one understands that "God is not the direct but indirect referent of an act of meaning."[54]

From "attributes" to "ciphers." In addition to showing how progress towards the possibility of speaking about God may be accomplished by endeavoring to ground and support a symbolics of God in connection with the way redemption occurs with the three spheres of human reality, Farley argues that the path to speaking about God should be undertaken in a way that allows for the mystery and otherness of God to be retained. For him, this means, in part, that "attributes" should not be used to speak of God, since the manner in which attributes have traditionally been employed in theological undertakings has consistently allowed for the risk of "reducing God to one of the entities with which we negotiate in the everyday world."[55] So, instead of attributes, he proposes the use of "ciphers" to speak of God,[56] where "ciphers" may be understood as something

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[53]Divine Empathy, 110.

[54]Divine Empathy, 100.

[55]Divine Empathy, 113.

[56]Farley indicates that he is making use of Karl Jaspers's term, "cipher," as revealed in Karl Jaspers, Philosophical Faith and Revelation, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; reprint, London: Collins, 1967), part 4; and, as set forth in idem, Philosophy, trans. E. B. Ashton, vol. 3, Metaphysics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), part 1; cited in Divine Empathy, 113. Jaspers does not make the exact same contrast between "ciphers" and "attributes" that Farley does; however, Jaspers holds that in "thinking in ciphers, we think in the direction of Transcendence and hear its language, intensely but never entirely," as revealed in Karl Jaspers, Philosophical Faith and Revelation, 92. Thus, in his use of the concept of "cipher," Farley seems to have in view an understanding of "cipher" that is quite similar to the way in which Jaspers conceives of this notion. In addition, Farley avers that "'words of power' or 'deep symbols' are phrases that may communicate what Jaspers means by ciphers," as set

significantly less direct (or complete) than "attributes."[57] In other words, ciphers should convey at least a component of "a mystery yet to be fathomed."[58]

Ciphers of Who God Is

Farley avers that there are three overarching "ciphers that converge in the name God: redeemer, creator, and the Holy,"[59] and, he indicates that the first two of these overarching ciphers actually contain various sub-ciphers, so that it would be appropriate to speak of multiple ciphers of redemption and multiple ciphers of creativity. Furthermore, through his development of all of these major ciphers and sub-ciphers, he simultaneously provides an introduction to his understanding of what the Christian community means by God.[60] Finally, after treating these three overarching ciphers, he explores to what extent, if any, there might be a connection between these three major ciphers and traditional developments of the doctrine of Trinity.

Ciphers of redemption. Farley sets forth his concept of the overarching cipher of redemption in view of the three spheres of human reality. Thus, with the sphere of the individual, he argues that redemption means founding and that, through this founding,

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forth in Divine Empathy, 113.

[57]Divine Empathy, 113.

[58]Divine Empathy, 114.

[59]Divine Empathy, 112.

[60]Divine Empathy, 124.

"God comes forth . . . as the founder of being-founded."[61] Accordingly, the cipher of God manifest here is "the cipher of redemptive founding."[62] Next, with the sphere of the human relation, Farley holds that redemption means repentance and forgiveness breaking the corruptive power interhuman alienation,[63] and "that which calls the alienated into mutual reconciliation . . . is simply love."[64] Therefore, the Christian community "has sensed in the mysteries of human reconciliation a cipher of God, namely Creativity as reconciling love."[65] Then, with the third sphere of human reality, the social, he maintains

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[61]Divine Empathy, 125.

[62]Divine Empathy, 126. As discussed in the section above, by "founding," Farley draws on the notion that "being-founded" occurs, in a sense, when "the eternal horizon . . . locates the human being in the face of chaos," as set forth in Good and Evil, 144. However, he clarifies that, actually:

> The eternal horizon as such does not found since it is simply the term for the undesignated referent of the elemental passions. The eternal horizon founds . . . only in the form of actual presence, or in other words, the sacred. Being-founded occurs, then, in the presencing of the sacred, the creative ground of things (as shown in Good and Evil, 144).

Theologians working under "classical criteriology" or "the house of authority" might refer to this experience as "God saving the human being;" yet, in keeping with his method of seeking to phenomenologically describe the depth strata of corporate faith realities, Farley maintains that "in redemption human beings are founded not in the false securer (the idol) but in the one and only thing that can found, that which the elemental passions desired all along," as revealed in Divine Empathy, 125.

[63]Divine Empathy, 129.

[64]Divine Empathy, 130.

[65]Divine Empathy, 130. Farley indicates that he will "speak of Creativity (capitalized) when it is a term for God Godself, God as Creativity, and . . . [that he will] use uncapitalized terms to express God as creative, the creativity of God, etc.," as shown in Divine Empathy, 115. Moreover, as to why he here uses the term "Creativity," Farley reasons as follows:

that the Christian community sees justice taking place when redemption occurs within this sphere, and, correspondingly, the cipher of God revealed here is the cipher of justice.[66]

Not only does Farley identify three ciphers of redemption: founding, reconciling love, and justice, but he also maintains that these three ciphers "converge into a way of envisaging God in a name and that name is Spirit."[67] However, with the term "Spirit," he does not intend to make "a claim that God is a 'person' or personal;"[68] rather, for him, at least in this case, he merely endeavors to point to "that in which individual agency,

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> The facticity of redemption initially appresents God as the one who redemptively founds. *What* is this that founds? What is God as such? The answer must be some sort of world-pervading creative activity. God as such, the reality of God, is the Creativity on which the world depends (as set forth in Divine Empathy, 115).

Thus, he uses the term "Creativity" by first questioning back from the facticity of redemption to God as Redeemer, and then by further questioning back from God as Redeemer to God as Creativity. In other words, for Farley, the facticity of redemption, which is "at hand" for the corporate faith community, appresents God as Redeemer, who is "not at hand," and God as Redeemer further appresents God as Creativity, who is also "not at hand." However, this double or extended appresentation, so to speak, still seems to meet Farley's methodological criteria, since the starting point is with a reality (the facticity of redemption) that is directly present to the active faith community. In addition, it is in harmony with the method of "ecclesial reflection" that he uses the term "Creativity" here – and not a term such as "Father" (at least not as a primary term) – since terms like "Father" would more readily originate from overly speculative efforts under the "house of authority" than they would, Farley implies, from the shared experience of the faith community, as set forth in Divine Empathy, 115, 130, 149.

[66]Divine Empathy, 131.

[67]Divine Empathy, 132.

[68]Divine Empathy, 132.

interhuman reality, and sociality merge."[69] Moreover, he asserts that, in his usage here, the term or the name "Spirit" does not "contain a claim that God is a 'person' or personal,"[70] since, with the Christian community:

> The act of worship . . . [does not] require God as a personal entity. God is the worshipful precisely because God is not an entity alongside others whose psychology we can envision or linguistically express. We are content then to say that the ciphers of redemption (founding, love, justice) appresents the character of the Creativity we worship.[71]

With this assertion, part of Farley's intention seems to be to leave a space (or a mystery or a reverent distance) between the character of God and God Godself.

Ciphers of creativity. Farley discovers "three ciphers at work in the symbol or metaphor of (divine) creativity: empowering, eternality, and aim."[72] With the cipher of empowering, he means something that is short of complete determination but that is nevertheless a significant force. For instance, he argues that the Christian community observes with the individual redemptive process that human agents "are empowered . . . [but not determined] in their struggle amidst tragic finitude toward empassioned freedoms."[73] With the second cipher of creativity, eternity, he argues that this "is simply

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[69]Divine Empathy, 132.

[70]Divine Empathy, 132.

[71]Divine Empathy, 133.

[72]Divine Empathy, 138.

[73]Divine Empathy, 139.

the divine . . . time."[74] Finally, with the cipher of aim, he implies something less than the traditional attribute of providence but something more than "simply a random process."[75]

Cipher of the Holy. The cipher of the Holy is unique. On the one hand, "as with all ciphers, . . . [the cipher of the Holy is] born in human experience, . . . [but] the negative function of . . . [the cipher of the Holy] is to display the poverty of all ciphers."[76] This negative function includes showing the limitations of the ciphers of redemption and creativity.[77] However, the cipher of the Holy involves more than just this negative purpose. When viewed in connection with "how God comes forth as God in redemption, . . . [the cipher of the Holy points to a] divine otherness . . . [that] unswervingly aims to (creatively) redeem."[78]

The Trinity? With his treatment of the three overarching ciphers – redeemer, creator, and the Holy[79] – each of which appresent in different ways the character of the

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[74]Divine Empathy, 139.

[75]Divine Empathy, 140. Farley's understanding of "empowering" and "aim" is in harmony with his critique of the "house of authority's" founding axiom of salvation history, which, he argues, posits an overly strong divine determinism.

[76]Divine Empathy, 141.

[77]Divine Empathy, 141.

[78]Divine Empathy, 142-43.

[79]Farley indicates that "because of the facticity of redemption, . . . [these] names [and ciphers] . . . come forth in a certain sequence," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 124. Therefore, in contrast to theologians working under "the house of authority," who might often place creator first, Farley begins with redeemer.

divine, Farley inquires as to whether or not this endeavor might be an indirect path to a newly conceived construction of the doctrine of the Trinity.[80] To a certain extent, he acknowledges that his threefold naming of God shares some limited similarities with traditional constructions of the Trinity. For example, he indicates that "insofar as the trinitarian Symbol means a notion of internal differentiation in God, my analysis is in continuity with that Symbol."[81] Yet, with this particular example, he clarifies that what he has "not done is what trinitarian proposals try to do, namely, show that God's internally differentiated structure coincides with the threefold liturgical formula of Father, Son, and Spirit, a task that calls for great inventiveness and not a little bit of speculation."[82] In addition, he stresses that most efforts to construct doctrines of the Trinity are "like the Wandering Jew . . . eternally searching for a conceptual homeland,"[83] This is the case since:

> According to the ecumenical creeds, God is eternally structured by three hypostases (*personae*) whose distinguishability does not eliminate God's unity; . . . [and] if these are the minimal contents and distinctions of the doctrine, . . . [Farley finds] no author in the New Testament who thinks of God in that way, even those who think that God was incarnate in Jesus or that the sanctifying Spirit of Pentecost was divine.[84]

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[80]Divine Empathy, 144.

[81]Divine Empathy, 149.

[82]Divine Empathy, 149.

[83]Divine Empathy, 147-48.

[84]Divine Empathy, 145.

Therefore, Farley suggests that since the New Testament does not make use of such creedal terms as "hypostases," that "Trinity is a kind of blank tablet, an invitation for each new generation of interpreters to say what it means."[85] And, he indicates that his treatment of the three overarching ciphers – redeemer, creator, and the Holy – should not be construed as yet "another attempt to fill . . . [this] blank tablet."[86]

Thinking the Relation between the World and God: A Paradigm of the Works of God

After setting forth his concepts of how God can be known and of how we can speak of God, Farley then offers the final and most extensive aspect of his doctrine of God – his understanding of the activity or work of God in the world. He argues that "since we have no direct access to this activity, we can only think it by constructing a paradigm."[87] Therefore, he constructs a paradigm of the works of God, and within this construction he more fully conveys not only his concept of what God does but also his notion of who God is.

Farley maintains that a paradigm of the divine activity should involve an uncovering of three central components: (1) the divine aim (the purpose and the content of the works of God); (2) the divine strategy (the means through which the divine aim of God has been and should be carried out); and, (3) the kind of environment in which the

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[85]Divine Empathy, 147.

[86]Divine Empathy, 148.

[87]Divine Empathy, 216.

divine activity occurs.[88] In short, he argues: (1') that the divine aim is God's intention to empathize with and to redeem the world;[89] (2') that the divine strategy is "the objective (historical) mediation of redemption, . . . [accomplished primarily through] the event of the suffering messianic teacher;"[90] and, (3') that the kind of environment in which God's activity takes place is the "world" (broadly conceived), "creation," or "whatever is,"[91] as the "world" is perceived from a combination of scientific, philosophical, and theological perspectives.[92]

In the sections below, I will explore each of these three central components of Farley's paradigm of the works of God, and since he treats these components in reverse order I will as well. That is, I will first consider his notion of the divine environment; then, I will investigate his understanding of the divine strategy; and, finally, I will examine his concept of the divine aim. However, before moving to a consideration of these three components of Farley's paradigm, I will briefly analyze the manner in which he seeks to situate this paradigm between metaphysical and anti-metaphysical perspectives.

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[88]Divine Empathy, 175-78.

[89]Divine Empathy, 296.

[90]Divine Empathy, 178.

[91]Divine Empathy, 177.

[92]Divine Empathy, chaps. 13-16 passim.

Situating the Paradigm between Metaphysical and Anti-metaphysical Perspectives

With his construction of a doctrine of God and particularly with his development of a paradigm of the divine activity, Farley has a concern to appropriately place his efforts on a spectrum of metaphysical outlooks, ranging from the metaphysics often associated with "the 'theism' of the classical Catholic theology of God . . . [to the anti-metaphysics frequently allied with] the anti-theism of twentieth-century Jewish philosophy and negative and deconstructive theologies."[93] He argues that for proponents of the former outlook, "metaphysics is both possible and necessary for the theology of God . . . [and that for those] on the other side, . . . attaching metaphysics to theology is like throwing an anchor to a drowning person."[94]

Within this spectrum, Farley summarizes his own view as follows: "*Anti-theist critiques of metaphysics chasten and qualify but do not eliminate metaphysics*."[95] One of the main areas where the anti-theists chasten with some merit, he avers, is with the charge of "totality," in other words with the charge that metaphysics seeks to offer an explanation of everything.[96] Farley acknowledges the legitimacy of this charge for many different types of metaphysics, but he holds that this is not the type of metaphysics that he undertakes with his paradigm of the works of God. That is, he maintains that he employs "a generally descriptive metaphysics that makes no claim to 'explain' world

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[93]Divine Empathy, xv.

[94]Divine Empathy, 154.

[95]Divine Empathy, 290.

[96]Divine Empathy, 163-65.

totality."[97] Thus, for him, "while totality metaphysics . . . [is] incompatible with the theology of God, metaphysics as descriptive ontology . . . [is] not."[98] Moreover, Farley seems sympathetic with the view of some metaphysical theologians that "if we prefer coherent bespeaking of God to contradictory, vague, and muddled discourse, then a metaphysical explication is unavoidable,"[99] and, when it comes to the so-called "objectification" aspect of metaphysics, in which "metaphysical theologians . . . [supposedly] 'objectify' God,"[100] he implies that "objectification . . . seems to be as much a part of antimetaphysical as of metaphysical theologies of God."[101]

In short, Farley indicates that his paradigm of God's activity in the world does "contain a metaphysical element"[102] – but only the more tempered variety of a descriptive metaphysics that seeks to offer a coherent ontological explanation of the divine activity that can be known – and not of the more extreme version of metaphysics, such as a totality metaphysics, that would aspire to offer an exhaustive explanation of all divine activity.

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[97]Divine Empathy, 171.

[98]Divine Empathy, 172.

[99]Divine Empathy, 157. Although he does not treat their metaphysical views in detail, Farley here refers to process theologians such as John Cobb, as set forth in Divine Empathy, 156.

[100]Divine Empathy, 161.

[101]Divine Empathy, 162.

[102]Divine Empathy, 168.

The World: The Environment for the Works of God

With this perspective of a descriptive metaphysics, Farley holds that, since the "world" is where the works of God occur, any paradigm that endeavors to offer a comprehensive understanding of the divine activity must seek to show "what the world is and how it works."[103] Therefore, one of the major components of his paradigm of God's works is an account of the environment or the "world" in which these works occur. He argues that "the world is not reducible simply to what the various sciences . . . deliver to us, but . . . [that it is] also something available in broader discernments. Showing itself in these discernments are such features as eventfulness, autonomy, tragic structure, competition, and cooperation."[104] In order to convey this fuller sense of "world," he indicates that he will "use the term *world* without the article. World without the article is a term like being, time, space, history, or nature."[105] And, to offer further clarification, he compares "world" with "cosmos," suggesting that "like cosmos, world connotes a totality but, unlike cosmos, this totality is open-ended . . . rather than bounded."[106]

Furthermore, Farley maintains that "the complexity and very facticity of world overreach all specific, focused projects of research."[107] That is, for him, world is so vast and multifaceted that no one perspective – even the scientific perspective – is capable of

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[103]Divine Empathy, 216.

[104]Divine Empathy, 171.

[105]Divine Empathy, 183.

[106]Divine Empathy, 184.

[107]Divine Empathy, 217.

adequately addressing all the ways in which people know and participate in world. Therefore, in an attempt to more fully uncover world or the environment in which divine activity takes place, he offers treatments of various different perspectives on world. First, he sets forth separate treatments of the scientific and the philosophical perspectives on world. Then, drawing from both of these perspectives, he constructs a brief scientific-philosophical description of how the world proceeds. Finally, he sets forth a faith perspective on world. Accordingly, I will consider each of these developments in turn.

Scientific world. With scientific world, world consists, Farley argues, of three main spheres or systems: *cosmos*, *nature*, and *history*.[108] These systems may be "distinguished by the kinds of entities, behaviors, and even structures we find in them."[109]

Farley holds that "*cosmos* names the inclusive, astrophysically, and quantum and mathematically apprehended epochal system of space-time that began with the Big Bang."[110] In other words, "*cosmos* names what we sometimes call *the* world, the space-time aggregate of clustered galaxies."[111] Significantly, he notes, not only does cosmos change over time (in a directional manner), by way of both expansion and entropy,[112] but also, especially in the particle world, there seems to be "spontaneous activity toward

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[108]Divine Empathy, 177, emphases mine.

[109]Divine Empathy, 184.

[110]Divine Empathy, 177.

[111]Divine Empathy, 184.

[112]Divine Empathy, 188.

organization . . . [within cosmos] that resists explanation."[113] Therefore, for these and other reasons, he avers that there is an aspect to cosmos , particularly with its origins, that is incomprehensible and impenetrable to us.[114]

The second system of scientific world is nature. Here, Farley argues that "*nature* names the planetary ecosystem, the biosphere of living things as they are bound up with the nonliving conditions on which they depend."[115] Importantly, according to Farley, at different levels within nature, and even at the level of cellular activity, one can observe "various kinds of accidental or random events."[116] For example, a cell can "entertain novel contents;"[117] that is, it can appear to spontaneously respond or adapt when new elements have been introduced to it.[118] Thus, Farley holds that, as with cosmos, there is an aspect to nature that presents a boundary or a mystery to us.[119]

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[113]Divine Empathy, 190.

[114]Divine Empathy, 193. Farley rejects much of the notions of contemporary physicists, such as those of P. W. Atkins and Stephen Hawking, on matters pertaining to the origin of the universe. For instance, Farley indicates that "Hesiod's account of the origin of the world from chaos in terms of the struggle of the titans and their children makes as much sense to [him] . . . as the pretense . . . [of Atkins and Hawking] that 'nothingness,' 'dust points,' and 'quantum fluctuations' are exhaustively explanatory," as revealed in Divine Empathy, 191. Here, Farley refers to P. W. Atkins, The Creation (San Francisco, California: W. H. Freeman, 1981); and, to Stephen Hawking, A Brief History of Time: From the Big Band to Black Holes (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

[115]Divine Empathy, 177.

[116]Divine Empathy, 198.

[117]Divine Empathy, 198.

[118]Divine Empathy, 198.

[119]Divine Empathy, 205.

Finally, Farley maintains that history, the third system of scientific world, "names the sphere of activities that take place in connection with the human populations of our planet, activities made possible by the traditioning power of language and institutions."[120] In addition, he avers that several themes emerge when one endeavors to comprehend the unique historical passage of corporate human reality. For instance, with this historical passage, one observes: both continuity and newness; both conflict (of powers) and mutual respect; and, (especially when conceiving of historical passage as a series of distinct but overlapping histories) both patterns and directions.[121] Yet, as with cosmos and nature, Farley argues that "history is ambiguous,"[122] and, therefore, "has an underside of mystery."[123]

Philosophical world. In addition to the scientific perspective on world, Farley argues that there is also a philosophical outlook on world. In seeking to unfold this philosophical outlook, he turns to three sources, "common sense orientation, scientific inquiry, and philosophies of world,"[124] and he maintains that these sources yield three major themes and four basic elements of philosophical world.

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[120]Divine Empathy, 185.

[121]Divine Empathy, 210-13.

[122]Divine Empathy, 214.

[123]Divine Empathy, 215.

[124]Divine Empathy, 221.

For Farley, the three central themes of philosophical world are: chaos, order, and direction.[125] First, with chaos, he holds that factors such as indeterminancy – that is, the manner in which an entity can change its surroundings by the way it "responds to its environment, initiates action, and brings about the new"[126] – indicate "a chaos that is not simply an interdependent aspect of order."[127] Thus, it follows that "ultimate chaos is an uncreated obstacle that yields to ordering or creativity . . . but is not thereby eliminated."[128] Second, with regard to order, he maintains that "world is in some sense ordered,"[129] and he argues that this order is "the necessary presence of continuity, coherence, and systematic interdependence in whatever is actual."[130] And, third, with direction, he avers that "world contains directional processes that include the development of the conditions of life, the dispersal of energy, . . . [and] the teleonomic behavior of living entities."[131]

Furthermore, for Farley, the four basic elements that constitute philosophical world are: entities, relations, events, and environments. He maintains that each of these elements have certain unique features. For instance, entities are "collections of energy . .

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[125]Divine Empathy, 221.

[126]Divine Empathy, 222.

[127]Divine Empathy, 224.

[128]Divine Empathy, 224.

[129]Divine Empathy, 224.

[130]Divine Empathy, 225.

[131]Divine Empathy, 227.

. [that] are able to influence what is around them."[132] Relations constitute entities and enable both attraction and competition (and, therefore, suffering) to occur among them.[133] Events are "new and distinguishable states of affairs . . . [in the day-to-day lives of people]."[134] And, environments are "the systems of relations . . . in which entities and events are located."[135]

A scientific-philosophical description of how "world" proceeds. In addition to setting forth separate treatments of scientific and philosophical perspectives on world, Farley draws from both of these perspectives in order to construct a brief description of how world proceeds. To this end, he argues that the working of world involves four interrelated themes that "are present in sciences and philosophies of the world: entities, openness, tragedy, and cooperation."[136] First, he holds that world consists of *entities* that act in a certain manner.[137] For instance, he avers: that "to be an entity at all is to respond to the environment;"[138] that "entities always exist . . . in relation to and interdependent

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[132]Divine Empathy, 231.

[133]Divine Empathy, 232.

[134]Divine Empathy, 233.

[135]Divine Empathy, 233.

[136]Divine Empathy, 291.

[137]Divine Empathy, 291.

[138]Divine Empathy, 292.

with other entities;"[139] that "to be an entity at all is to exist in the mode of eros (need, desire, struggle);"[140] and, that entities "sense to some degree the perils and possibilities of their situation."[141] Second, he maintains that "*openness* is a term for the world's temporal proceeding into novelty."[142] In support of this notion, Farley points to "the indeterminacy of the particle world, the random character of the operations in microbiology, and the unpredictable complexities and ambiguities of history."[143] Third, he holds that "because the world is open (a flexible realm of spontaneous action and indeterminancy), it is also *tragic*."[144] Fourth, he argues that "'world' . . . also requires a kind of *cooperation*. That is, . . . it is comprised of entities and environments that have obtained a sufficient unity or synthesis of aspects to endure over a period of time."[145]

Moreover, according to Farley, "when . . . [one] puts these . . . [four] themes together, . . . [one sees that] we have a world made up of . . . spontaneously acting but vulnerable entities that exist in systems which themselves are ever threatened but that exhibit tendencies *in certain directions*; that is, *toward further syntheses, and toward the*

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[139]Divine Empathy, 292.

[140]Divine Empathy, 292.

[141]Divine Empathy, 293.

[142]Divine Empathy, 293.

[143]Divine Empathy, 293.

[144]Divine Empathy, 293.

[145]Divine Empathy, 294.

urge to unite with or cooperate with other entities and even types of entities."[146] In other words, Farley argues that the sciences and philosophies envision a world that is moving toward greater unity and cooperation.

Faith world. Farley holds not only that sciences and philosophies have a perspective on world but also that faith does as well. Moreover, he suggests that faith does not simply seek to "fill in the gaps" with whatever it might be that sciences and philosophies do not cover; on the contrary, he maintains that faith has an entire world orientation of its own.[147] This view reflects Farley's methodological principle of positivity, which is the principle that "*each general stratum undergoes transformation when it is incorporated into the strata more determinate than itself*."[148] Therefore, in light of this principle, "a *theology* of world cannot assume that world is synonymous with the aggregate of general features proposed by the sciences or ontology."[149]

Faith's starting point for constructing its notion of world is, according to Farley, with the Christian community's retrieval of redemptive experiences in the individual, interhuman, and social spheres of human reality. With this retrieval, it becomes evident, he holds, not only that world is presupposed by these three spheres but also that the redemptive activity of God is present within each of these spheres without any

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[146]Divine Empathy, 294-95, emphases mine.

[147]Divine Empathy, 236.

[148]EM, 60.

[149]Divine Empathy, 290.

restrictions. That is, the activity of the divine is not restricted or limited to any "territory, . . . stratum, . . . type of entity, . . . [or] environment."[150]

Furthermore, Farley holds that "this nonrestriction . . . [of God's redemptive activity in world] . . . has several implications."[151] For instance, one implication is that God "can be neither one of the world's entities nor the world totality itself, . . . [since] there would be no redemption at all if the redeeming power were some piece of the world."[152] In other words, if God works redemptively – throughout the entire world, without restriction – it follows, according to Farley, that God must, at least in some sense, be other than world (otherwise we would be left with a situation where that which is idolatrous or corrupt itself would be seeking to redeem that which is idolatrous or corrupt, which would be absurd). Another implication of the non-limitation of God's redemptive activity in world is that God "cannot be an alien to that world."[153] That is, if God works redemptively throughout all of the world (without limitation), then God must, at least to some degree, be involved in the happenings of world. Or, more precisely, God "must be the power or creativity of the world itself."[154] In view of these implications,

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[150]Divine Empathy, 240.

[151]Divine Empathy, 240.

[152]Divine Empathy, 240.

[153]Divine Empathy, 240.

[154]Divine Empathy, 240.

Farley argues that "the traditional symbol of this general relation of the world to God is world as *creation*."[155]

Farley then endeavors to unfold what, in his view, the Christian tradition has sought to convey with this symbol of creation. He maintains that the symbol of creation has simultaneously expressed not only world dependence on God but also world independence from God. He reasons that, on the one hand, "as something that is not God, has no absolute or ultimate status, and has its own reality, *world is independent*, . . . [and that, on the other hand,] existing because of divine creative activity, *it is dependent*."[156] Therefore, in terms of its relation to God, world is both independent and dependent. One of the implications of this dynamic, according to Farley, is that world "is

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[155]Divine Empathy, 241, emphasis mine. In addition, with regard to this aspect of his understanding of creation, Farley indicates that he differs somewhat with Schleiermacher's perspective. Schleiermacher, according to Farley:

> Assigns the doctrine . . . [of creation] not to the way piety is determinate under the conditions of redemption but to the general piety that redemption presupposes. He thus argues that the structure of utter dependence (piety) in the immediate self-consciousness is inseparable from the human being's sense of world entanglement. Thus, the individual's sense of dependence on God coexists with a sense that the whole world order depends on God (as shown in Divine Empathy, 241; and, here, Farley refers to Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, §§ 36-41, pp. 142-56.)

However, Farley states that he has "departed from this approach because of . . . [his own] privileging of redemption as the way God comes forth as God. Accordingly, . . . [for Farley,] the sense of the world as dependent on God comes not with the general structure of piety but with the transition of the human being from the hold of idolatry to freedom by way of being-founded," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 241.

[156]Divine Empathy, 242-43, emphases mine.

not simply determined by God;"[157] but, at the same time, neither is it completely separate from God's influence.[158]

Moreover, Farley argues that deeper reflection upon the world as the dependent-independent creation of God reveals at least four implied themes about the status of world, along two polarities. The first polarity is that world has the character of both mystery and significance. Here, with this polarity, Farley stresses that "because world is creation, it has the sort of significance something has that is valued or willed . . . [but that this significance] . . . of world does not . . . reduce its mystery."[159] That is, he emphasizes that since God intentionally created world, we know that world must have value; but, this value or significance does not mean that humans are capable of knowing everything there is to know about world. The second polarity is that world has the character of both goodness and tragedy. Here, he holds that "any world whose entities have the character of independence will have a tragic side;"[160] however, "a world entity is good insofar as its very constitution enables it to be receptive to the divine attempt to draw it into harmonious cooperation with others."[161] In other words, he maintains that, as an inescapable corollary of world's independence from the divine, there will always be a tragic element to world (as that independence is abused); yet, as an unavoidable corollary

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[157]Divine Empathy, 245.

[158]Divine Empathy, 245.

[159]Divine Empathy, 247.

[160]Divine Empathy, 248.

[161]Divine Empathy, 247-48.

of world's dependence on the divine, there will also always be an underlying element of good with world, since the divine works powerfully and creatively to influence (but not to determine) the entities of world to cooperate with each other. In short, while Farley allows for mystery and the tragic, he suggests that, because of God's redemptive activity, the Christian community can retrieve the reality that world-as-creation, has significance and goodness as its primary characteristics.

The Means: The Strategy for the Works of God

Thus far in my examination of Farley's understanding of the works of God I have considered one of three parts of his paradigm of the divine activity – that is, his notion of world as the kind of environment in which the activity of God occurs. This aspect of my examination has endeavored to show that, for Farley, while world is marked by mystery and tragedy, it is essentially a good and a valued-by-the-divine kind of environment that is moving towards greater unity and cooperation. In addition, in the following section of this chapter, I will endeavor to analyze a third part of this paradigm of the divine activity – that is, the divine aim of the works of God, which Farley argues, as I will strive to show, is God's intention to empathize with and to redeem world. The thrust of this present section, therefore, will be to explore what occurs "between" the divine aim to redeem, on the one hand, and the location (God's good and valued world) where this redemption occurs, on the other hand. In other words, I will consider in this section the second part of Farley's paradigm of the divine activity, the part having to do with the divine means or the strategy through which the redemptive aim of God will be carried out

in world. That is, I will consider what Farley argues actually takes place so as to bring about God's redemptive aim in world.

The Christian community as the "through-which" of redemption. Farley avers that the path to uncovering the divine strategy should be made by turning not to "the house of authority" but, instead, to the Christian community's retrieval of the divine strategy. As this community undertakes such a retrieval, it realizes that redemption "does not spontaneously generate in human hearts and societies."[162] On the contrary, it realizes that the "through-which of historical redemption (at least for the Christian movement) is the new community . . . [that] came about in the wake of Jesus' life and death"[163] – a community which is unique in that it offers "a universalized form of the faith of Israel"[164] – that is, a form of Israel's faith that "does not absolutely require the existence of any particular ethnicity but can be present to any and all."[165] In other words, Farley suggests that while the Christian community cannot observe redemption taking place spontaneously, it can observe redemption occurring as a result of its own activities, which includes the offer of redemption to all people.

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[162]Divine Empathy, 256.

[163]Divine Empathy, 256.

[164]Divine Empathy, 257.

[165]Divine Empathy, 258.

The person and ministry of Jesus as the "through-which" of the Christian community. Moreover, while the "through-which" of redemption (at least for Christianity) is the new community that arose with the ministry of Jesus, the "through-which" of this new community, Farley argues, is "the figure and activity of Jesus."[166] This is the case because the early faith community understood Jesus – not just as symbol but as a historical reality – to be the center and the "through-which" of its very existence.[167] This raises the issue of what was "the significance of the event of Jesus as Christ."[168] And, this significance, according to Farley, "turns on the use . . . of historical method toward the materials of the New Testament collection, which materials provide the only access we have to the event and figure of Jesus."[169] Accordingly, "this sets for the . . . [New Testament] interpreter the 'archaeological' task of determining what is primitive and what is late, what actually happened to Jesus and what did not, what Jesus actually taught or preached and what the kerygmas of the later community attributed to him."[170]

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[166]Divine Empathy, 256.

[167]Divine Empathy, 262-68.

[168]Divine Empathy, 253.

[169]Divine Empathy, 253.

[170]Divine Empathy, 254.

What the kerygmas of the New Testament reveal about the significance of Jesus. According to Farley, the kerygmas of the New Testament reveal much about the significance of Jesus.[171] For instance, he holds that the kerygmas, taken together, make the case that "the radicalism of Jesus is this 'innocent' life of faith and trust before God."[172] That is, he argues that the kerygmas present a portrait of Jesus as one who was genuinely unique in the way in which he so fully relied upon God – almost to the degree that we was essentially oblivious to the religious and political powers and institutions that surrounded him.[173] In addition, Farley maintains that the kerygmas "give expression to three fundamental Christological convictions,"[174] and he holds that these convictions may be summarized as follows: "'God raised him from the dead;' 'Christ died for our sins;' and 'God was in Christ.'"[175] These three convictions become the framework for the

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[171]Farley argues that "there seems to be no single kerygma which serves as the 'essence' of the variety of interpretations to be found in the New Testament. What we have instead is a variety of ways (kerygmas) of understanding Jesus' continuing, saving significance," as revealed in Divine Empathy, 268. As examples of the kerygmas that he could include, he indicates that "some distinguish very early ways of confessing Jesus (as eschatological prophet, as humiliated-exalted) from later themes of preexistence and incarnation," as shown in Divine Empathy, 267. However, he avers that "attempts to identify the kerygmas of the New Testament or the stages of christological thinking are legion," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 267, thus further indicating his understanding of the difficulty of drawing upon any one kerygma.

[172]Divine Empathy, 265.

[173]Divine Empathy, 275.

[174]Divine Empathy, 268.

[175]Divine Empathy, 268.

majority of Farley's understanding for what the kerygmas reveal about the meaning of Jesus.

With each of these convictions, he offers a two-step analysis. First, he briefly indicates his notion of how they are present in the various New Testament kerygmas, through the lens of a combination of historical method and theological method;[176] then, he offers a "theological reinterpretation . . . [of what these convictions express about the meaning of Jesus]."[177] With this theological reinterpretation, Farley's purpose is "to discover how the event of Jesus as Christ is the through-which of the new community and thus of redemption."[178] And, along these lines, he acknowledges that his reinterpretative endeavors involve a "speculative dimension,"[179] but he holds that this is unavoidable

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[176]Divine Empathy, 272. With the second of these methods, theological method, Farley does not seem to be entirely clear about what he means with this concept in this particular context. He uses the exact term, "theological method," only sparingly within this aspect of his constructive efforts, indicating, for example, that one may use this method to "ask about the significance . . . of . . . [an event] proclaimed . . . [in the New Testament kerygmas]," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 269. However, since he does not offer any explanation to the contrary, it seems most likely that he has in view his own theological method of ecclesial reflection. (Another possibility might be that he has in mind a general sense of New Testament theological method; yet, this would appear to be an improbable option.) In any case, by "theological method," in this context, he means something entirely different than the concept of "speculative theological reinterpretation" that he also employs in this phase of his constructive efforts (as I will show below).

[177]Divine Empathy, 272.

[178]Divine Empathy, 272-73.

[179]Divine Empathy, 273. Indeed, with regard to the "second step" in his "two-step" analysis (of the three fundamental Christological convictions contained in the New Testament kerygmas), Farley indicates that he does not use a method of theological "description," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 272; thus, at least in this aspect of his development of a doctrine of God, he conveys that he uses not a phenomenologically-based method of ecclesial reflection but a method of speculative reinterpretation.

since, in part, he does not feel that he can assume that the Bible or the Christian creeds "necessarily contain or express truth."[180] In addition, he maintains that his reinterpretative endeavors work "in synthetic fashion attempting to identify the way in which certain contents and symbolisms of the ancient historical event and figure [of Jesus] . . . are correlated with the conditions of redemption in the new community"[181] – again acknowledging that "this is surely . . . a kind of speculation."[182] Therefore, in the sections below, I will consider Farley's treatment of each of these three convictions, giving attention to this two-step analysis.

God raised him from the dead. The first conviction present in the various New Testament kerygmas, according to Farley, is that "the event of Jesus issued in . . . a victory powerful enough to give rise to the new community; . . . [and] the way the kerygmas expressed this conviction was to say that 'God raised him from the dead.'"[183] Farley maintains that the application of historical method to the kerygmas does not uncover with clarity "'what really happened' . . . [with the resurrection];"[184] however, he holds that theological method can allow us to ask about the meaning of the proclamation

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[180]Divine Empathy, 273.

[181]Divine Empathy, 273.

[182]Divine Empathy, 273.

[183]Divine Empathy, 268.

[184]Divine Empathy, 269.

of the resurrection in the kerygmas.[185] And, with the use of theological method, motifs such as the following emerge: the resurrection "vindicates Jesus' life and mission;"[186] it is "the presupposition of the rise of the new community;"[187] and, it "gives grounds for hope in the face of death."[188]

Moreover, through his theological reinterpretation of this conviction, "God raised him from the dead," Farley holds that Jesus was unlike any other in terms of his radical trust in God. This trust was so complete that Jesus essentially ignored "the paraphernalias of religious traditions."[189] It was this extreme trust manifested in Jesus' life and teaching, Farley argues, that created the possibility for "a universal form of the faith of Israel."[190] And, the manner in which the early faith community gave expression to this new faith, he further holds:

> Was to speak of an event that turned the despairing and defeated followers of Jesus into the nucleus of the new community, namely the resurrection of Jesus, followed by the coming of the Spirit. Whatever event of resurrection is in itself, it is present in the memory of the church as the catalyst of the new community.[191]

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[185]Divine Empathy, 269.

[186]Divine Empathy, 269.

[187]Divine Empathy, 269.

[188]Divine Empathy, 269-70.

[189]Divine Empathy, 275.

[190]Divine Empathy, 275.

[191]Divine Empathy, 276.

Therefore, Farley suggests that while there may be no way of knowing what actually occurred with the resurrection event of Jesus,[192] what can be retrieved is that this event – whatever it might have involved – was not only the means through which the early Christian community could give expression to the unique and radical reliance upon God that Jesus exhibited during his (earthly) life but was also the basis for the start of a new community that would seek to expand the faith of Israel across all ethnic boundaries.

Christ died for our sins. A second underlying conviction of the New Testament kerygmas is that Jesus died "for us;" yet, Farley argues that the application of historical method to the kerygmas does not show in any unified way "what the 'for us' means."[193] In fact, he suggests, that it is only within the larger context of the reversal of Jesus' suffering through the resurrection that we can have any reason to consider that Jesus' suffering itself has any significance "for us."[194]

Furthermore, with his theological reinterpretation of this conviction, Farley maintains that Jesus was unique because of the way in which he suffered for others. There is common consensus, Farley holds, that Jesus' life ended with a humiliating execution,[195] and he argues that this death was due, in part, to the almost innocent radical trust that Jesus demonstrated toward God and to his corresponding apathy towards

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[192]Divine Empathy, 269.

[193]Divine Empathy, 270.

[194]Divine Empathy, 270.

[195]Divine Empathy, 276.

existing political and religious authorities.[196] Moreover, according to Farley, the way in which Jesus suffered was unlike that of any other person in at least three ways. First, Jesus' suffering was a response to the suffering of his people – not because they were his people "but simply because they suffered."[197] That is, Farley suggests that a unique aspect of Jesus' suffering was his motive; he suffered for his people not out of some sort of ethnic loyalty but simply out of an empathy for the suffering that his people had to endure. Second, Farley avers that Jesus' suffering was unique since his empathetic love was not just internally felt but also publicly expressed.[198] As a result of this public expression, he further argues, Jesus' life "evoked a resistance so determined that it would be satisfied with nothing less than a humiliating execution."[199] Thirdly, he holds that Jesus' suffering was unparalleled because it helped to bring about the church, that is, "the new community of universal redemption."[200] And, it is along these lines, according to Farley, that one may claim "that 'Christ died for our sins.'"[201]

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[196]Divine Empathy, 265.

[197]Divine Empathy, 277.

[198]Divine Empathy, 277.

[199]Divine Empathy, 278.

[200]Divine Empathy, 278.

[201]Divine Empathy, 278.

God was in Christ. A third underlying conviction of the various New Testament kerygmas is that "'God was in Christ.'"[202] Farley implies that the employment of historical method to the kerygmas does not clarify what "God was in Christ" actually means.[203] Moreover, he avers that with the use of theological method, such (apparently accurate) themes as the following come forth:

> To say that he is God's anointed (Christ) is to voice the conviction that he is sent by God, that God is at work in his life and mission. To speak of him as emptying himself and taking on the form of a servant only to be exalted connects him with a divine preexistence, and to say that he is the Word that became flesh and lived among us is to say that his very existence embodies that which is divine.[204]

Yet, Farley stresses that the above themes "are not precise conceptual formulations of the meaning of 'God was in Christ.'"[205]

However, as he puts forth his theological reinterpretation of this final conviction, Farley argues that Jesus was (in a different way) unique because "God . . . [was] 'in' Jesus in whatever sense . . . [was] necessary to bring forth the new, universalized form of

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[202]Divine Empathy, 270.

[203]Divine Empathy, 270-71.

[204]Divine Empathy, 271.

[205]Divine Empathy, 271. For instance, Farley argues that "the notion of Jesus as *a* preexistent divine being . . . both mythologizes divine being and dehumanizes Jesus, . . .[and] it obscures what actually happened in the event of Jesus as Christ," as shown in Divine Empathy, 273. Thus, Farley implies that this is a case of theological method demonstrating a particular claim made by the kerygmas of the New Testament (i.e., that Jesus is a preexistent divine being) that a later moment of theological reinterpretation shows to be a false claim (since, with the "second step" of theological reflection, it becomes evident that Jesus could not have been a preexistent divine being).

the faith of Israel."[206] As to the meaning of "whatever sense was necessary," Farley holds that, since the kerygmas of the New Testament reveal that Jesus' "public activities took place in connection with his relation to God,"[207] God must have been "in" Jesus enough to lead him to publicly and consistently demonstrate empathetic concern "to *any* and *all* he met."[208] Farley reasons that a demonstration of empathetic concern to such a degree could only be accomplished by "the divine empathy;"[209] therefore, "Jesus . . . appears to . . . [have been] one with the divine empathy."[210] In other words, he maintains "that it is . . . in suffering empathy that God and Jesus are united."[211]

The Content: The Aim of the Works of God

In this section I will turn to a third part of Farley's paradigm of the works of God, the part in which he addresses the aim of the divine activity. In the sections above I explored his understanding of the other two parts of his paradigm. First, I examined his notion of "world" as an environment that, while containing aspects of tragedy and mystery, is primarily good and valued-by-the-divine. Then, I analyzed his understanding

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[206]Divine Empathy, 280.

[207]Divine Empathy, 281.

[208]Divine Empathy, 281, emphases mine.

[209]Divine Empathy, 281.

[210]Divine Empathy, 282. Furthermore, in this regard, Farley indicates somewhat of a connection with Schleiermacher's notion of "Jesus as the realization of God-consciousness," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 279-80.

[211]Divine Empathy, 283.

both of the Christian community as the "through-which" of the divine aim and of the figure and activity of Jesus as the "through-which" of the Christian community. Now, in this section, I will examine his concept of the aim of the divine activity.

Farley's concept of the aim of God's works is succinct but quite clear. He argues that the divine aim may be expressed with the concept of "divine empathy."[212] In order to unfold what he means by "divine empathy," he begins by turning, in part, to Edith Stein's work, On the Problem of Empathy,[213] and to the way in which she conceives of

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[212]Divine Empathy, 295.

[213]Edith Stein, On the Problem of Empathy, trans. Waltraut Stein (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964; reprint, Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989). This work is largely a revision of her dissertation of the same title, which she completed under Husserl in 1916. In addition, Stein either studied under or worked for Husserl, sometimes intermittently, from 1913 to 1918, as set forth in Donald Borchert, ed. Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Detroit, Michigan: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), vol. 9, 2d ed., s.v. "Stein, Edith (1891-1942)," by Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz. Furthermore, perhaps worthy of note is that while Farley heavily relies upon Husserl's phenomenological thought in the development of his theological method, as I have endeavored to show in chapter 1, he does not appear to consider Husserl's notions concerning religion in the construction of his doctrine of God. This is the case even though Husserl seems to have had some religious inclinations and even though some of his writings addressed religious topics. For instance, with regard to his religious inclinations, according to one scholar, while Husserl was "consolidating his philosophical vocation, he found himself attracted to Christ after reading the New Testament in 1882," as shown in Angela Ales Bello, The Divine in Husserl and Other Explorations, trans. Antonio Calcagno, Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. 98 (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2009), 70. Also, one of Edith Stein's biographers notes that Stein "learned that Husserl, on his deathbed, had turned back to God," as set forth in Waltraud Herbstrith, Edith Stein: A Biography, trans. Bernard Bonowitz (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1985), 78. In addition, in terms of his writings, Husserl addresses, for example, the need to suspend the transcendence of God as part of the process of developing a phenomenological perspective, as shown in Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, 173-74. While this is an admittedly thin example, there would be no call for such a suspension, of course, without the concomitant view that there was a transcendence of God to be suspended.

empathy as "a transcendentally based capacity to perceive the other in its experiencing (*Erleben*)."[214] Then, starting with Stein's notion of empathy, he goes on to make distinctions among empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love, as follows:

> Empathy is a transcendentally based capacity to perceive the other in its experiencing. . . . Sympathy . . . is not just a perception of but a participation in the life of the other. Compassion is a participation in the *suffering* or misery of the other. . . . Love is an unqualified suffering self-impartation of one's being to or for the sake of the other.[215]

Farley maintains that "as metaphors for the divine activity, . . . [these four concepts] tend to merge."[216] That is, when Farley employs the term "divine empathy," he intends to combine together: "participative suffering, self-impartation, perception of our experiencing, and compassion."[217]

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[214]Divine Empathy, 295; here Farley makes a general reference to Edith Stein, On the Problem of Empathy. Such a conception of empathy coheres with how one of the translators and interpreters of Edith Stein's works, Waltraut Stein (who is also Edith Stein's great-niece), argues that On the Problem of Empathy "is a description of the nature of empathy within the framework of Husserl's phenomenology as presented mainly in Volume I of Ideas," as shown in Waltraut Stein, preface to On the Problem of Empathy, by Edith Stein, trans. Waltraut Stein (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964; reprint, Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989), xiii. Moreover, Waltraut Stein adds the following helpful explanation to place On the Problem of Empathy in the proper context: "Many years after the completion of E. Stein's work on empathy, Husserl presented his Cartesian Meditations. . . . In this work, however, Husserl is emphasizing a somewhat different aspect of the problem of empathy; the *possibility* of the other rather than the phenomenological *description* of this other. Thus Cartesian Meditations is more in contrast with his earlier conceptions than similar to them. This also means that E. Stein's work on empathy is in contrast with Cartesian Meditations," as set forth in ibid., xiv.

[215]Divine Empathy, 295.

[216]Divine Empathy, 295.

[217]Divine Empathy, 296.

Moreover, Farley holds that the connection between Jesus and God sheds light on the nature of this divine empathy. Accordingly, he suggests that since Jesus so radically trusted in God and because Jesus demonstrated a *suffering* significant enough to serve as a catalyst for the launching of the new community of universal redemption, it follows that "the empathy of God is also a pathos, a 'fellow-feeling' that *suffers*."[218] In addition: just as Jesus' empathy was not just internally experienced but publicly conveyed,[219] so also the empathy of God "not only feels with another but would ease the other's suffering and promote the other's well-being;"[220] just as Jesus' empathy was without restriction,[221] so also the empathy of God "cannot say, 'thus far and no farther;'"[222] and, just as Jesus' empathy led to the *universalization* of the faith of Israel,[223] so also the empathy of God "is ever an operation of *enlargement*."[224]

Furthermore, Farley maintains that (1) divine empathy (as the divine aim) works through (2A) the event of the suffering of Jesus as the through-which of (2B) the new universalized community of faith (as the divine means) in a manner that impacts (3) world (as the divine environment) in the direction of greater unity and cooperation.

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[218]Divine Empathy, 295, emphasis mine.

[219]Divine Empathy, 277.

[220]Divine Empathy, 296.

[221]Divine Empathy, 282.

[222]Divine Empathy, 296.

[223]Divine Empathy, 273-76, emphasis mine.

[224]Divine Empathy, 296, emphasis mine.

Specifically, he holds that the divine empathy "pushes . . . [entities] toward synthesis and cooperation;"[225] or, more broadly, he avers that the divine empathy inclines and empowers "world process in directions of synthesis, cooperation, and novelty."[226] Moreover, he argues that, since these *creative* goals (synthesis, cooperation, and novelty) are so similar to God's *redemptive* goals [founding (with the individual); reconciling love (with the interhuman); and, justice (with the social)],[227] it must be that God's creative aim is the same as God's redemptive aim; and, therefore, it must be that "the God who redemptively comes forth as God is the Creativity that disposes the world."[228] Thus, Farley suggests that the central feature of God's creative and redemptive works is God's aim of divine empathy (where "empathy" is broadly understood as including "participative suffering, self-impartation, perception of our experiencing, and compassion"[229]) and, therefore, that the central feature of God's character is divine empathy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavored to demonstrate both Farley's understanding of the doctrine of God and the extent to which this doctrine stems from his theological

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[225]Divine Empathy, 303.

[226]Divine Empathy, 303.

[227]Divine Empathy, 125-31 passim.

[228]Divine Empathy, 300.

[229]Divine Empathy, 296.

method of ecclesial reflection. With his doctrine of God, he first seeks to show how God can be known by examining the process of redemptive transformation. Towards this end, he examines, for instance, within the individual sphere of human reality, how individuals can experience having their elemental passions fulfilled. Through this examination, he demonstrates that, while finite resources cannot genuinely accomplish this fulfillment, an *infinite* resource (or an *eternal* horizon) can. Then, he employs his methodological principle that realties-at-hand can appresent realities-not-at-hand, in order to argue that the reality-at-hand of the Christian community's direct experience of individuals having their elemental passions genuinely fulfilled appresents the reality-not-at-hand of God, where one conceives of God as the authentic eternal horizon or as the "causality" through which this fulfillment (or redemption or "founding") has taken place. Thus, he maintains that the faith community's experience of redemption not only allows for knowledge of what God means but also provides evidence for the reality of God.

Next, Farley explores how one may speak of God. He argues that one may do so only by grounding speaking of God in discernments that occur as the believer, as part of the larger faith community, recognizes that only the divine could have been at work in a specific situation of redemptive transformation. In addition, with these discernments, the believer can assign "content" to God, since only God could have redeemed (fulfilled or founded) in any of the three spheres of human reality, for example: from "idolatry" to "freedom" (in the individual sphere); from "alienation" to "communion" (in the interhuman sphere); or, from "self-serving politics" to "justice without restriction" (in the social sphere). However, in line with his theological method, he holds that this "content"

can only be appresented (or indirectly assigned) to God because God cannot be a direct meaning referent. In light of this criterion of only being able to indirectly assign content to God, Farley further holds that "ciphers" – which better allow for an aspect of mystery and otherness than (the more traditional notion of) "attributes" – are the symbolics that are most appropriate for speaking of God. Among the various ciphers, he suggests that there are three overarching ones (each of which come from human experience) that name God: redeemer, creator, and the Holy. For instance, with regard to the first of these major ciphers, redeemer, he maintains that God's redemptive activity in the three spheres of human reality manifests redemptive sub-ciphers of founding, reconciling love, and justice – and that, taken together, these three redemptive sub-ciphers may be said to converge, as a way of considering God, in the name "Spirit," which, since it is a non-personal name, leaves room for the mystery of God. Similarly, God's creative activity (which is known because of God's redemptive activity) shows creative sub-ciphers of empowering, eternality, and aim – none of which permit total divine determination. The third of these major ciphers, the Holy, is unique in that it demonstrates the limitations of all the other ciphers. Moreover, Farley avers that his threefold naming of God – as redeemer, creator, and the Holy – is similar to traditional understandings of the Trinity only to the extent of reflecting an internal differentiation in God and not to the degree of coinciding with the description of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Then, in view of his perspective that one cannot have direct access to the divine activity, Farley develops a paradigm of the relation between the world and God, maintaining that this paradigm should interweave three central features: (1) the type of

environment in which the divine activity occurs; (2) the divine strategy (the means through which the divine aim of God has been and should be carried out); and, (3) the divine aim (the purpose and the content of the works of God). In addition, he indicates that this entire paradigm will make use of a descriptive (but not a totality) metaphysics.

First, with regard to the type of environment in which God's works take place, he argues that "world" – by which he means something akin to the open-ended, unbound universe – is so vast that no one perspective has the capacity to adequately speak to all the ways in which it can be known. Therefore, he indicates that he will offer scientific, philosophical, and faith perspectives on world. With his treatment of the scientific and philosophical perspectives (which he considers first separately and then together), he concludes that, while they show that world presents such features as chaos, tragedy, and mystery, they also show that world presents entities that have been increasingly moving in the direction of greater unity and cooperation with one another. In addition, with his treatment of the faith perspective – which, in view of his methodological principle of positivity, he maintains has an entire world orientation of its own – he finds that it becomes evident that the redemptive activity of God is present in each of the three human spheres of reality without any restrictions. And, he maintains that two of the implications of this limitless divine redemptive activity are that God is other than world and that God cannot be alien to world – implications, therefore, that, taken together, have traditionally been referred to by the symbol of "creation." Accordingly, for Farley, from the faith perspective, "creation" simultaneously conveys that world is both dependent on God and independent from God; thus, world cannot be entirely determined by God (because world

is independent), but neither can world be completely separate from God's influence (because world is dependent). Furthermore, Farley implies that deeper reflection upon world as the dependent-independent creation of God shows (in harmony with scientific and philosophical perspectives) that while world demonstrates themes of mystery and tragedy, it chiefly demonstrates themes of significance and goodness.

Second, in terms of the divine strategy through which the redemptive aim of God will be carried out in the world, Farley argues that this "through which" is the authentic Christian community, that is, the community which is a universalized form of the faith of Israel, without any ethnic boundaries. Moreover, he maintains that the "through which" of this community is Jesus of Nazareth. This leads one to inquire, he avers, about the significance of Jesus. And, he holds that this significance (or uniqueness) can be found by examining *three central Christological convictions* that are contained in the kerygmas of the New Testament – by means of a two-step analysis, involving, first, a mixture of historical and theological method and, second, a speculative theological reinterpretation. Also, he notes that the second step of this two-step analysis involves not a method of phenomenologically-based ecclesial reflection but a method of speculative reinterpretation. However, he suggests that this methodological shift with this aspect of his doctrine of God coheres both with his view that the kerygmas of the New Testament provide the only access to person and activities of Jesus and with his view (which is in line with his rejection of the "house of authority") that one cannot presume that Scripture necessarily conveys truth.

With his examination of the conviction "*God raised him from the dead*," he concludes that Jesus was unique in terms of his radical trust in (or reliance upon) God – and that this extreme trust created the possibility for the universalization of Israel's faith. Also, he argues that the way the early church gave expression to both Jesus' radical trust in God and to how this trust enabled a new community without ethnic boundaries was to speak of Jesus' resurrection (whatever that event might have involved). With another conviction, "*Christ died for our sins*," he finds that Jesus was unique in how he suffered for others: by being motivated to suffer for others not out of ethnic loyalty but simply out of empathy; by empathetically loving others not just internally but also through public expression; and, by suffering for others to a degree that helped to inspire the beginning of the new faith community that came to be known as the church. Finally, with the third conviction, "*God was in Christ*," he finds that Jesus was unique in that God was "in" Jesus in "whatever sense was necessary" to enable him to publically show empathetic concern to all others that he encountered; thus, Farley concludes that divine empathy must have been "in" Jesus.

Third, with regard to the aim of the works of God, the final feature of Farley's paradigm of the relation between world and God, he holds that the divine aim may expressed with the concept of "divine empathy," where this empathy includes the notion of participative suffering and self-imparting love. Also, in view of the connection between Jesus and God, Farley argues that, like Jesus, God's empathy seeks to ease suffering and to promote greater unity and cooperation among all others. Therefore, he maintains that since God's creative goals (of greater unity and cooperation among all

entities, including humans, in world) are so similar to God's redemptive goals (of founding, with the individual sphere of human reality; reconciling love, with the interhuman sphere; and, justice, with the social sphere), it must be: that the redeeming God is also the creative God; that the main aspect of God's creative and redemptive actions is God's aim of divine empathy; and, that the main aspect of God's character is divine empathy.

Thus, throughout his development of a doctrine of God, Farley demonstrates, to a significant degree, that he builds upon his theological method of ecclesial reflection. Numerous examples of this reliance have been shown above, but, by way of summary, I will recapitulate some key components. For example, with his doctrine of God, he endeavors to bracket church authority. This is perhaps most clear in his bracketing of Scripture (as that which does "necessarily contain or express truth");[230] however, this is also apparent, for instance, in his bracketing of his understanding of the "house of authority's" founding principle of salvation history, as – with the development of his faith perspective on an entire world orientation (which is only possible because of his use of his theological method of the principle of positivity) – he stresses that since world is not only dependent on but also independent from the divine, we can know that, while God influences, God does not overly determine the entities of world. Farley also endeavors to bracket metaphysics. He does so effectively, until he begins to set forth a paradigm of the works of God – but, even here, he argues that he engages merely in a descriptive metaphysics.

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[230]Divine Empathy, 273.

While he does not use Husserlian terms such as eidetics, *noeses*, or *noemata*, Farley does seem to employ some of the concepts these terms reflect in the construction of his doctrine of God, as he seeks to "dig beneath" the everyday activities of the church to the deep strata of the faith-world and to use at least a form of theological eidetics to uncover the essences of faith's corporate realities (or experiences) that take place within these deep strata. This is evident, for instance, with his treatment of how God can be known, as he strives: first, to uncover the depth strata of redemptive transformation, by analyzing how individuals can have their elemental passions fulfilled only by an eternal horizon; and, second, to suggest that, through a process of discernment (where "discernment" could possibly be otherwise described as "a form of free variation"), individuals can distinguish between inauthentic eternal horizons and the authentic eternal horizon (where distinguishing "authentic" eternal horizon could perhaps be otherwise depicted as a form of uncovering the "essence" of eternal horizon).

In addition, Farley clearly makes use of his of methodological principle that, within the process of a reflective method, active participants in ecclesia can experience both direct apprehensions of "realities at hand" and indirect apprehensions of "realities not at hand" – but only as these latter apprehensions occur through direct apprehensions, because "realities at hand . . . [can] appresent realities not at hand."[231] An instance of his use of this principle is also apparent within that part of his doctrine of God in which he analyzes how God can be known. Here, he employs this principle to aver that the reality-at-hand of the ecclesia's direct experience of individuals having their elemental passions

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[231]EM, 208.

authentically fulfilled appresents the reality-not-at-hand of God, where one conceives of God as the genuine eternal horizon or as the "causality" through which this fulfillment has taken place.

With this investigation of Farley's doctrine of God and of how his development of this doctrine builds upon his theological method of ecclesial reflection, I will now, in chapter 4, turn to a similar treatment of McClendon's doctrine of God and of how his construction of this doctrine relies upon his theological method. Then, in chapter 5, I will more fully evaluate the way in which central aspects of Farley's and McClendon's doctrines of God have been formed by their respective theological methods. Also, I will offer a comparative analysis both of Farley's and McClendon's theological methods and of their doctrines of God.

CHAPTER 4

JAMES MCCLENDON'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

Having considered Farley's doctrine of God in the previous chapter, I will now examine McClendon's treatment of the same doctrine in this chapter. Also, as with my analysis of Farley's development of this doctrine, I will seek to investigate how McClendon's doctrine of God has been influenced and molded by his theological method – a method that might be summarized as "convictional perspectivism" (upon which I focused in chapter 2).

The main features of McClendon's theological method can be summarized as follows. First, together with James Smith, McClendon maintains that individuals and communities have "convictions" – that is, strongly held beliefs that are both persistent and significant. However, they determine not only that convictions always take place as part of a broader "conviction set" but also that, while one cannot have direct access the thoughts of an individual, one may have direct access to the linguistically shared convictions of communities. Therefore, McClendon and Smith chiefly come to focus on communal conviction sets (or on what McClendon, in his later works, alternatively refers to as communal picture sets) and on how they may be justified (and, implicitly, on how they may be formed). Furthermore, alongside these developments, they argue in favor of a certain outlook on communal conviction sets (and also on individual conviction sets as well as on individual convictions) that they term "convictional perspectivism" – as a

stance that falls in between outlooks that they term "convictional imperialism" and "convictional relativism."[1] Between these two extremes, they suggest that "convictional perspectivism" (which they describe as relying upon a soft epistemological relativism) conveys that various communities may have access to some – but not to all – of the same facts (or things) as one another and that various communities may have some – but not total – overlap in their perception of reason. Thus, for the convictional perspectivist, justification (and formation) of communal conviction sets would involve a matter of each community seeking to justify (or to found) their communal conviction sets on the basis of various loci of justification (such as truth, consistency, rationality, and satisfaction) that seem most appropriate to them in order for their conviction sets to be happy, with at least the hope that some – but probably not all – of these loci will be shared (in various ways) with other communities. For instance, some communities might employ loci of

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[1]On the one hand, "convictional imperialism" (which they describe as relying upon a hard epistemological realism) suggests that all communities have access to the same facts (or things) and that all communities perceive reason in the same manner. Thus, for the convictional imperialist, justification (and formation) of communal conviction sets would simply involve a matter of correspondently (and clearly) lining up all words with all things, so that it would become evident to all which communal conviction sets are true. Ultimately, therefore, for the convictional imperialist, there would be just one true collection of communal conviction sets; the other collections would essentially be illusions stemming from ignorance or perversion.

On the other hand, "convictional relativism" (which they describe as relying upon a hard epistemological relativism) implies that each community has access to its own unique facts and to its own unique reason (or, more precisely, to its own unique interpretations of facts and reason). Accordingly, for the convictional relativist, justification (and formation) of communal conviction sets, if necessary at all, would never be more than an internal matter for each community. And, ultimately, for the convictional relativist, there could conceivably be a near-endless multiplicity of collections of communal conviction sets that would be entirely incommensurable with one another, though, McClendon and Smith maintain, these various communities would have no way of knowing of this incommensurability.

correspondence and satisfaction, while others might favor loci of coherence and rationality. Ultimately, therefore, for the convictional perspectivist, there would likely be the potential for numerous communities to have collections of communal conviction sets which could each contain various degrees of truth. For McClendon and Smith, this means – coupled with their "principle of fallibility" (that is, the view that the conviction sets of one's own community may be wrong and are capable of revision or even rejection) – that, while a community might strive to maintain its conviction sets even to the point of being willing to die for them, questions regarding the truth of convictions should theoretically remain an open matter and that authentic dialogue (and potential for persuasion) regarding some – but not all – inter-communal commonalities is conceivable between two or more particular communities on an "ad hoc" basis.

Second, McClendon argues that Christian communal conviction sets (and, indeed, all Christian convictions) should be rooted in the following sources: narrative, experience, and the church. With the source of narrative, he has in view both the narrative of Scripture, which for him is the voice of God conveyed through humans, and the narrative of tradition, which for him includes various theologians throughout the history of the church as well as biographies. With experience, he means the religious experience of communities and individuals, and with the church, he primarily has in mind various ecclesial practices such as prayer. Among these three sources, McClendon avers that narrative, particularly the narrative of Scripture, should be the primary source for forming Christian communal conviction sets. Moreover, he maintains that experience and the church, while secondary, are nevertheless essential sources in this regard.

Third, McClendon sets forth a "baptist" hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now." Through this principle, he means that, in a mystical way, Scripture addresses (or speaks to) Christians in the present church – just as much as it addressed believers in the first century church – and just as much as it will address Christ's disciples in the future, eschatological church.

In view of this understanding of his theological method, my task in this chapter is to investigate McClendon's doctrine of God and to show how his construction of this doctrine stems from McClendon's concepts of: communal conviction sets (from the viewpoint of convictional perspectivism); three sources of Christian convictions – primarily narrative, but also religious experience and the practices of the church; and, the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle. My main resource for considering his doctrine of God will be his work, Doctrine, the second volume of his systematic theology.[2] Doctrine consists of three major sections: "The Rule of God;" "The Identity of Jesus Christ;" and, "The Fellowship of the Spirit," and, as the titles of these major sections reveal, McClendon constructs a doctrine of God throughout almost the entirety of this work. Also, while he states that none of the major parts of Doctrine

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[2]McClendon indicates that what he is actually striving to set forth in Doctrine is not the first-order task of "doctrine" (which are the shared communal convictions that preachers preach and Sunday school teachers teach) but the second-order task of "doctrinal theology," as set forth in Doctrine, 24. However, he also conveys that doctrinal theology "merges into the primary church practice is supports. Its near goal remains the same – declaring what the church must teach to *be* (here and now) the church," as shown in Doctrine, 48. Thus, because his understanding of the difference between "doctrine" and "doctrinal theology" is so slight, I will in this chapter, for purposes of simplicity, refer to what he develops in Doctrine as "doctrine" rather than as "doctrinal theology."

derive from another major part[3] – and, to a large degree, I concur with this statement – it is also the case that at least some of his most significant themes further build upon previously established constructive efforts. In particular, his concept of the identity of Jesus Christ (developed in Part II) assumes much of his earlier constructive efforts regarding the rule of God (set forth in Part I). Therefore, in my analysis of McClendon's doctrine of God, I shall – with the one exception of treating his doctrine of the Holy Spirit (which he develops in Part III) before examining his trinitarian concepts (which he sets forth at the end of Part II) – follow the same general pattern that he employs in Doctrine. That is, I will first consider his notion of the rule of God, where he treats eschatology, salvation, and creation. Then, I will analyze his understanding of the identity of God, including his doctrines of the person and work of Christ and his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, drawing on my study of McClendon's theological method in chapter 2, I will also attempt to show how his doctrine of God builds upon – and is shaped by – his theological method.

The Rule of God:
Seeing God's Present Kingdom by Means of the Future and the Past

As part of his theological method, McClendon holds, as has already been seen, that the beginning point for developing doctrine should take place primarily by means of turning to the Bible, where one understands Scripture as "the word of God written . . . [or as that through which] God speaks."[4] Within this context, McClendon discerns that

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[3]Doctrine, 327.

[4]Doctrine, 464.

Scripture sets forth the rule of God (or the kingdom of God) as the goal or "the end toward which everything . . . [such as creation and history] tends."[5] And, for him, this rule (or dominion) means, in part, that God is not distant from but is "immediately with his people."[6] Also, he holds that far from taking anything away from "human freedom, this dominion . . . [has] always stood over against oppression by earthly rulers."[7] Thus, McClendon perceives the biblical comprehension of God's kingdom to include the notions that God is near to God's people and that God seeks to liberate them.

With this general understanding of God's rule, he further argues that Jesus added the following three components to kingdom expectation:

> (1) Its **coming** was no longer indefinitely future, but was 'at hand' (Mark 1:15 par.), so that it could be 'entered'; (2) the **character** of the expected realm was to be a new order of interactive love – God's love to people, and people's love one to another, even to enemies (Matt. 5:1-12, 43-48), as exemplified by Jesus himself; (3) the **cost** of the kingdom, . . . was a cross, to be borne first by Jesus and then by all who were his.[8]

While each of these three components play a significant role in the development of McClendon's doctrinal tasks (as I will seek to demonstrate in the sections below), the first component, in particular – which maintains, that for Jesus, the rule of God was "at hand" – helps to shed light on McClendon's reason for underscoring the notion that

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[5]Doctrine, 66.

[6]Doctrine, 67.

[7]Doctrine, 67.

[8]Doctrine, 67. As previously indicated, by placing certain words in bold, such as "coming," "character," and "cost," in this citation, I am following the style of text used in the book being referenced.

God's kingdom is not just a future but also a present phenomenon. And, by a present phenomenon, he means present during Jesus' earthly ministry as well as present to Jesus' disciples two millennia later. In addition, McClendon takes this notion of a present rule of God, and he couples it with that aspect of his "baptist" (or "prophetic") vision which contains the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutic principle. Held together, these two concepts – the present rule of God and the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutic principle – form the basis for McClendon's view that, in order to grasp the full biblical meaning of the God's rule, "authentic Christian faith . . . [must] see the present [rule of God by] . . . construing the present by means of the prefiguring past (God's past) while at the same time construing it by means of the prophetic (future)."[9] Thus, to adequately endeavor to see God's rule now, the Christian faith must look to a time frame that covers God's activity from the distant past to the far future. Accordingly, for McClendon, the doctrines of creation, salvation, and eschatology are sister doctrines, all under the mother doctrine of the rule of God.[10] In light of this, I will briefly turn to his treatment of each of these doctrines, with the primary concern to explore how these work to shape his doctrine of God.

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[9]Doctrine, 69.

[10]Doctrine, 148.

Eschatology: The Future Christ Reigns Now

Under the mother doctrine of God's rule, McClendon "takes a cue from Jürgen Moltmann . . . [and] begins from the end – that is, he begins with eschatology."[11] And, as McClendon seeks to develop his doctrine of eschatology, he holds that, since "much of the New Testament teaching about the last things is expressed in word pictures,"[12] he will undertake his constructive efforts by looking to the various "end-pictures" that appear within the New Testament, "end-pictures" of such concepts as: the last judgement; Jesus Christ returning; resurrection; death; hell; and, heaven.[13] And, here (as discussed in chapter 2 above) McClendon draws upon a Wittgensteinian-informed idea of "picture thinking," by which McClendon means, in part, that "in certain circumstances, *every*

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[11]Carl E. Braaten, "A Harvest of Evangelical Theology," First Things 63 (May 1996): 48. Braaten has in mind Jürgen Moltmann's groundbreaking work, Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993), and Braaten argues that McClendon's move in starting his overall doctrinal construction with eschatology "is rooted in the Baptist experience of church as a Spirit-filled, mission driven community of eschatological expectation," as set forth in idem, "A Harvest of Evangelical Theology," 48. However, with the possible exception of William Boyd Hunt's monograph, "Redeemed! Eschatological Redemption and the Kingdom of God (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993), I am not aware of any other Baptist theologian who places such an emphasis on eschatology. In any case, McClendon recognizes the starting point he shares with Moltmann; however, he distances his work from that of the German theologian, arguing that "Moltmann's emphases [at least in Theology of Hope] . . . deal with the future, yet rarely with the end of history," as revealed in Doctrine, 74. And, perhaps worthy of note is that McClendon's Doctrine was published in 1994, two years before Moltmann's The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology was published in English in 1996.

[12]Doctrine, 75.

[13]Doctrine, 66-89 passim.

seeing is a 'seeing-as.'"[14] He draws on this idea of "picture thinking" in order to suggest that, in particular situations – as with end-time events such as the last judgment – "what distinguishes those who believe in . . . [events like] the last judgment from those who do not is not different chains of reasoning, but radically different **pictures** of how in general the world goes."[15]

With this understanding of "picture thinking" in hand, the "end-pictures" that McClendon addresses that most pertain to his overall doctrine of God are the biblical "end-pictures" of the last judgment and of Jesus Christ returning. According to him, the New Testament, in passages such as "1 John 4:17, Heb. 9:27; . . . [and] Jude 6,"[16] paints a picture set of the last judgment in which Jesus returns to judge human beings as "the King . . . of God's kingdom]."[17] Moreover, McClendon interprets other New Testament passages, like "'this same Jesus' . . . [in] (Acts 1:11 KJV),"[18] as a means of providing visual depth to this picture set by revealing "the continuity of the one returning with the

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[14]Doctrine, 76. Here, McClendon refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3d ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968), 197.

[15]Doctrine, 77.

[16]Doctrine, 78.

[17]Doctrine, 80. McClendon further argues that Jesus will judge the character-revealing actions of human beings, since "they reflect the *relation between those who are under judgment and that One* . . . [Jesus]," as set forth in Doctrine, 80. However, McClendon's primary point here is that Jesus judges as King.

[18]Doctrine, 82.

one they . . . [past and present New Testament readers] already know." [19] That is, he holds that the New Testament sets forth that "it is 'this same Jesus' . . . who will come in all his comings – in our Lord's day worship, in history's course as yet unfinished, at our last end, and at *the* last end, it is ever *Jesus* Christ who comes."[20]

One of the next key steps in the development of McClendon's eschatology is the way in which he combines this picture of Jesus returning to judge as King with the second half of the "this is that" and "then is now" baptist hermeneutical principle.[21] The second half of this principle – the "then is now" half – he restates, in this context, as follows: "disciples learn . . . to see . . . [the present] . . . under the form of the prophetic future, so that the future 'is' also coming *now*."[22] Thus, McClendon argues, from the perspective of Christ's disciples, the Jesus Christ who will be King in judgment is also the Christ who reigns *now*. And, for McClendon, it follows, therefore, not only that "Christ is the center of history,"[23] but also that he intends to advance in conquering the present world – although not through military might but through a suffering, sacrificial

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[19]Doctrine, 82.

[20]Doctrine, 82.

[21]McClendon sometimes refers to this entire hermeneutical principle as "the prophetic vision," as set forth in Doctrine, 92.

[22]Doctrine, 92. In addition, as part of this argument, McClendon seeks to address what is sometimes referred to as the problem of the delay of the Parousia. He counters this problem by suggesting that in the New Testament, "the time between what is near and the last things is *compressed* in order to give due weight to those last events. Without such foreshortening, what comes last might be perspectively projected into the far future and thus into insignificance," as shown in Doctrine, 90.

[23]Doctrine, 97.

love,[24] thereby to form "a new race of human beings, a race made of all races, a people made of all peoples."[25] Accordingly, the task of Jesus' disciples is to join him in this pursuit of growing his kingdom – and to do so in the same manner, "not by human conquest but by the radical politics of the cross;"[26] that is, by the same type of suffering, sacrificial love that Jesus has demonstrated.[27] McClendon acknowledges that this path is not an easy one for Christ's disciples to take since such "suffering for a righteous cause . . . can fail . . . and sometimes in the short run does fail."[28] However, he holds that these disciples can nevertheless maintain real hope because "in the heavenly realm the final outcome is certain, for there the Lamb has already passed his power to his people."[29]

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[24]Doctrine, 97-99.

[25]Doctrine, 98.

[26]Doctrine, 99.

[27]Doctrine, 98-99. The influence of the Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder (who McClendon would respectfully seek to include as a lower-case "b," "baptist" theologian) in this aspect of McClendon's constructive efforts is prevalent. He makes reference here to a sermon Yoder delivered "announcing 'the politics of the Lamb,'" Doctrine, 98, citing John Howard Yoder, "The Politics of the Lamb," in Seek Peace and Pursue It, Psalm 34:14: Proceedings from the 1988 International Bapitst Peace Conference, Sjovik, Sweeden, August 3-7, 1988, ed. Wayne H. Pipkin, by the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (Memphis, Tennessee: Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, 1989), 69-76. In addition, it is perhaps worth noting that in the preface to his work, Doctrine, McClendon indicates that Yoder's book, The Politics of Jesus, "changed his life," as revealed in Doctrine, 8. See John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

[28]Doctrine, 98.

[29]Doctrine, 98-99.

Thus, for McClendon, eschatology and Christology are closely interwoven with one another. In other words, "the Christian doctrine of last things exists as part and parcel of the doctrine of Christ Jesus; its necessary pictures take doctrinal form exactly within the frame provided by his crucified, risen, ongoing history."[30] And, in this manner, McClendon indicates a general pattern to his constructive efforts – his doctrine of last things informs his doctrine of Christ, which, in turn (as I will seek to demonstrate below), informs his doctrine of God.

Salvation: A Process through which God Enables Human Faithfulness to God's Rule

According to McClendon, a second "sister doctrine" under the mother doctrine of God's rule is the doctrine of salvation.[31] He introduces this doctrine by laboring to show how clusters of salvific terms catachrestically emerge within the New Testament,[32] in order to indicate what "salvation" – or what "made 'new in Christ'"[33] – means. Among the various clusters of salvific terms he considers, he gives particular attention to three of them, loosely associating each of these clusters with specific salvific emphases he feels

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[30]Doctrine, 101.

[31]That is, McClendon holds that "salvation is . . . an eschatological or kingdom concept," as set forth in Doctrine, 105.

[32]McClendon holds that the New Testament frequently employs catachresis, that is, "the deliberate (as opposed to accidental or mistaken) use of language drawn from one sphere in order to indicate something in another sphere that eludes existing speech," as shown in Doctrine, 107. Moreover, he avers that the "sphere" from which the New Testament authors drew such language was "mainly . . . the Scriptures" . . . [or the Old Testament]," as revealed in Doctrine, 106.

[33]Doctrine, 109.

have been made by major Christian traditions.[34] Next, he explores the meaning of sin, in order to more fully show what salvation in Christ means. And, finally, in light of this broader notion of salvation, he seeks to demonstrate how the clusters of salvific terms relate to the process of salvation in the lives of individual believers.

Clusters of salvific terms. First, he argues that with the cluster of terms, "**just, justify, justification**," the New Testament authors drew upon the Old Testament concept of "JHWH's justice, . . . [that] consisted not in the 'rights' of modern jurisprudence but in *keeping or restoring right relations,* 'rightwising' between each and his or her neighbor, and (preeminently) rightwising relations between each and God,"[35] so that they could convey that one aspect of salvation is for Christ to enable "right relations" to occur both between believers and other people and between believers and God. McClendon loosely connects this cluster with what he believes has been a Protestant emphasis on salvation particularly involving "right relations uniting Christ . . . and Christians."[36]

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[34]In addition, while McClendon acknowledges that there is a corporate dimension to salvation, he intends to focus here on "what the new in Christ must mean to each . . . [individual follower of Jesus] today," as set forth in Doctrine, 109.

[35]Doctrine, 111-12.

[36]Doctrine, 109.

Second, looking to Rudolf Otto's work, The Idea of the Holy,[37] McClendon maintains that with the cluster of terms, "**sanctify, sanctification,** and **holy ones**,"[38] the authors of the New Testament drew upon the Old Testament notion that "that which is in contact with the Deity is by contagion holy,"[39] in order to express that another aspect of salvation is for Christ, with the Holy Spirit, to empower believers to become "holy ones" by placing them in contact with God.[40] McClendon associates this cluster with what he feels has been a Catholic stress upon salvation involving "the presence of Christ . . . [in the life of the believer]."[41]

And, third, he holds that with a cluster of terms including "**the way**,"[42] the New Testament authors drew upon such Old Testament notions as "the contrast of two ways (cf. Psalm 1),"[43] so that they could convey that still another aspect of salvation is for Christ to enable to believers to radically turn from "walking" or following in "man's

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[37]McClendon cites Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquire into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational, trans. J. W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 1-41 et passim, as shown in Doctrine, 114.

[38]Doctrine, 114.

[39]Doctrine, 115.

[40]Doctrine, 115.

[41]Doctrine, 113.

[42]Doctrine, 119.

[43]Doctrine, 117.

way" to walking in "God's way."[44] He loosely connects this cluster with what he believes has been a baptist emphasis on salvation involving abiding in "the new way of Jesus."[45]

With the retrieval of these clusters of New Testament salvific terms, McClendon does not intend to suggest "chronological steps in an *ordo salutis*;"[46] rather, his purpose is to "provide . . . alternate windows upon the new in Christ, . . . [that is, to point to various] ways of speaking the unspeakable gift of God in Christ."[47] In other words, he does not argue that, within the process of salvation: first comes justification; then comes sanctification; and so on. On the contrary, he holds that these clusters of salvific terms are simply different perspectives (among others) that the New Testament authors have used to try to describe various elements of the one process of what happens when one experiences newness in Christ.

Moreover, having assembled these clusters of salvific terms, McClendon then proceeds "to relate these three neighbor clusters to one another and to today."[48] Yet, before undertaking this task, he first turns to the matter of what sin means, so that he can more fully endeavor to show what salvation in Christ means. Accordingly, I will briefly treat McClendon's understanding of the doctrine of sin, and then I will examine the way

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[44]Doctrine, 118-19.

[45]Doctrine, 117.

[46]Doctrine, 116.

[47]Doctrine, 116.

[48]Doctrine, 121.

in which he endeavors to relate the above mentioned clusters of salvific terms to the process of salvation.

Sin in view of salvation. McClendon argues that Jesus, as fully human, lived "a life of **full faithfulness** . . . [in God],"[49] ultimately demonstrated by his submission to the cross,[50] and he holds that because he did so, Jesus "declared . . . [through the actions of his life and death] the true anthropology promised in creation."[51] That is, according to McClendon, by Jesus' actions of complete faithfulness, Jesus "proved himself true *anthropos* . . . that fulfilled the promise to Adam . . . and to Eve, . . . the promise that in their human family God's own image would appear (cf. Gen. 3:15)."[52] In light of this, McClendon avers, sin is not a "creaturely limitation, a necessary feature of our created

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[49]Doctrine, 123. McClendon more completely unfolds his understanding of Jesus' life of full faithfulness within his construction of a doctrine of atonement (which he undertakes in chapter five of Doctrine) – as I will examine below.

[50]Doctrine, 237.

[51]Doctrine, 124.

[52]Doctrine, 123.

sensuous nature;"[53] rather, Jesus' faithfulness shows that "*sin is whatever falls short of . . . the way of faithfulness to God's rule embodied in Jesus Christ*."[54]

McClendon goes on to work out further the details of his doctrine of sin;[55] however, the brief point indicated above – that sin is not an integral aspect of our created being but is, instead, whatever falls short of Jesus' full faithfulness to God – is perhaps enough to get to the core of McClendon's understanding of sin in relation to salvation.

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[53]Doctrine, 124. Here, McClendon references the following works, that, in his view, reflect such an understanding of "sin" as a necessary feature of at least some aspect of humanity: Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Baillie, W. R. Matthews, Edith Sandbach-Marshall, A. B. Macaulay, Alexander Grieve, J. Y. Campbell, R. W. Stewart, and H. R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), §§ 5, 79-80, pp. 18-26, 325-30; Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, vol. 3, The Positive Development of the Doctrine, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Clifton, New Jersey: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), 380; Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Existence and the Christ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), chap. 1; and, Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, vol. 1, Human Nature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 181.

[54]Doctrine, 124, emphasis mine. Though McClendon does not here explicitly refer to the work of Karl Barth, his understanding of sin in relation to Christ's faithfulness appears, in some ways, to echo similar conceptions found in Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 4, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, part 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 358-413.

[55]For example, he maintains that "original sin" is "not the teaching of Scripture," as set forth in Doctrine, 124. [And, elsewhere, he argues that "original sin" "must be replaced with the concept of social sin, which passes from generation to generation, but requires each generation to answer to Christ not for its ancestor's but for its own fault," as shown in Doctrine, 145.] Also, he avers that, when additionally nuanced, sin can be seen to contain the following three elements: (1) sin as "the vacant refusal of Jesus' offered way," as demonstrated in Doctrine, 130; (2) sin as a "rupture . . . [in solidarity among believers] in Christian community," as revealed in Doctrine, 132; and, (3) sin as a refusal to keep our various God-given drives from becoming too aggressive, which, when unchecked, can "destroy our bonds with nature and with one another," as set forth in Doctrine, 134.

With this concept of sin, if accurate, he intends to convey that "we must not identify human being with sinful being; we must not erect the doctrine of sin into a barrier to goodness not even Christ can overcome."[56] In other words, McClendon intends to express that – because the actions of the fully human Jesus demonstrated that sin is not an innate part of being human – we, the rest of humanity, while marred by sin, are not beyond redemption; because sin is not inherently a part of us, we have real hope of being made new in Christ. And, it is with this understanding of sin – as something that Jesus could and did overcome – that McClendon then proceeds to set forth his notion of how the previously assembled three clusters of salvific terms (regarding justification, sanctification, and "the way") relate to one another and to the present-day situation in which humans find themselves.

Salvation as a process. In setting forth his doctrine of salvation, McClendon argues that this doctrine "must relate all these . . . [cluster terms – having to do with justification, sanctification, and "the way" – and other New Testament salvific cluster terms as well] to the full reality to which each bears partial witness."[57] To a certain degree, McClendon carries this out, and in doing so, especially since he loosely associates his three central salvific clusters with major Christian traditions, he implicitly shows support for an ecumenical understanding of salvation. However, at the same time, he acknowledges that he gives priority to the cluster that shares the most affinity with his

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[56]Doctrine, 135.

[57]Doctrine, 135.

own baptist tradition – the cluster that emphasizes that salvation in Christ enables believers to radically turn to living in God's way.

In this vein, McClendon argues that salvation is a process involving at least four stages, with "limitless variation in detail . . . [for each believer's experience],"[58] and, in keeping with that aspect of his theological method which stresses that the practices of the church are a secondary but essential source for forming Christian convictions, he holds that this process can be described in connection with "a sequence of . . . [four] significant communal practices in the church . . . [that] mark the progress of the pilgrim on the Christian journey."[59] He terms the first stage "preparation,"[60] and he maintains that with this stage:

> Gospels as well as Epistles offer us the model of Jesus, and later of the apostolic missionaries, laboring long to ready women and men for the newness that God was sending among them in Christ. If today's preparation once again anticipates that newness, if it proceeds believing that by way of formation God is at work and will act to transform nascent disciples into faithful Christians, it will bear its fruit in due season.[61]

Also, he associates this first stage of salvation with the faith community's practice of teaching or instructing. At least in the baptist tradition, such a practice would often be carried out through such programs as "Sunday school."

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[58]Doctrine, 137.

[59]Doctrine, 137.

[60]Doctrine, 138.

[61]Doctrine, 139-40.

He refers to the second stage of salvation as "conversion," and he argues that this is "the turn of turns,"[62] brought about by "the God who is its source, the Spirit who is its companion, the Christ who is its goal,"[63] in which the pilgrim moves toward "the new way of Jesus, the new relation with God the Father and thus with all creation, . . . [and] the new selfhood born of the Spirit."[64] This stage in particular, therefore, reflects the three clusters of salvific terms (examined above) as well as the three major Christian traditions McClendon associates with these terms. He connects this second stage of salvation with the practice of baptism, albeit he seems to have in mind the baptist understanding of "believer's baptism."

He terms the third stage "following," and, here, arguing against "the revivalist tradition in America . . . [that] seemed to treat conversion as the end of the affair,"[65] he holds that the new way in Christ usually involves a lengthy spiritual trail and that the spiritual hikers who take it will sometimes become "footsore . . . [and will sometimes] falter."[66] However, he maintains that, through the faith community's practice of the Lord's supper, Christ can remind these hikers that "the climb is not *too* hard and that there is relief ahead."[67]

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[62]Doctrine, 140.

[63]Doctrine, 140.

[64]Doctrine, 140.

[65]Doctrine, 141.

[66]Doctrine, 141.

[67]Doctrine, 142.

Finally, McClendon refers to the fourth stage as "soaring,"[68] and he avers that salvific "soaring" involves "the task of recognizing vocations, acknowledging and encouraging gifts, and helping the gifted to see their role within the rule of God."[69] He associates this last stage of salvation with the ecclesial sign of "communal discernment"[70] – not so much in the "negative" sense of "dealing with notorious sin in the church"[71] – but more along the "positive" lines of the way in which, for example, the faith community works to discern and "select . . . [church] officeholders."[72]

Accordingly, with his doctrine of salvation, McClendon sheds additional light on his overall doctrine of God. Specifically, with this sub-doctrine of God's rule, he conveys the concepts: that God seekas to be present with, to guide, and to establish right relations with people; that Jesus of Nazareth was fully human and that, as such, was completely faithful to God; that God did not create human beings as necessarily sinful beings; and, that God enables the salvation of human beings to occur (as a process).

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[68]Doctrine, 142.

[69]Doctrine, 144.

[70]Doctrine, 142.

[71]Doctrine, 142-43.

[72]Doctrine, 143.

Creation: Does God Suffer in God's Creative Actions?

McClendon holds that the third "sister doctrine," under the mother doctrine of God's rule, is the doctrine of creation.[73] He develops this doctrine in several diverse and far-reaching ways;[74] however, my task will be to concentrate on those aspects of this doctrine that most bear upon his overall understanding of a doctrine of God. Along these lines, one of his main concerns, within his treatment of the doctrine of creation, is to explore whether or not God suffers in God's creative actions. Accordingly, I will focus chiefly here on his exploration of that theme.

Posing the question: Does God suffer in God's creative actions? By way of introduction to the doctrine of creation, McClendon turns to Revelation, chapter 4, and he argues that this "passage displays features that the Christian doctrine cannot surrender,"[75] for example: the notion that "**God is** . . . [not only] **the origin and source** . . . [of creation . . . but also the] **terminus or goal** . . . [of creation];"[76] and, the notion that "**creation is . .**

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[73]Doctrine, 148.

[74]For instance, McClendon explores challenges to the doctrine that have emerged with the shift to science (and away from theology) as an authoritative resource for the origin and destiny of the cosmos and challenges that have emerged in the wake of the increasing over-emphasis on humanity within this doctrine (to the neglect of the rest of creation), as set forth in Doctrine, 150-52. And, for example, he examines the issue of miracles and whether they are better conceived of as "breaking" natural law or as something more akin to instances of God acting "(where he is already present) to . . . [more] vividly display the divine intention for nature," as shown in Doctrine, 186.

[75]Doctrine, 149.

[76]Doctrine, 149.

. God's ongoing blessing."[77] Within this broad context, McClendon then, similar to the manner in which he set forth his doctrine of eschatology, turns to "available . . . biblical 'pictures' of creation, . . . [so that he can] relate these to the ongoing creative work of God."[78]

In considering biblical "pictures" of creation, McClendon looks to George Hendry's work, Theology of Nature, where Hendry "urges that five 'models of creation' be taken into account: molding, struggle, design-and-execution, expression, and generation,"[79] and McClendon examines each of these models in view of relevant scriptural passages. Yet, the second of these models – the one having to do with "struggle" – is the one most pertinent to the matter of whether or not God suffers in God's creative activities. Here, McClendon observes: first, that creation involves ongoing conflict between God and other powers, ranging from "Leviathan . . . [to] Satan;"[80] and, second, that all acts of creation "take . . . [their] toll upon the artisan."[81] And, in light of this latter observation, he poses the question: "In this vein, does God, too, find creation and suffering inseparable?"[82] In other words, if all creation involves

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[77]Doctrine, 149.

[78]Doctrine, 148.

[79]Doctrine, 161. McClendon cites George S. Hendry, Theology of Nature (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1980), chapter 8.

[80]Doctrine, 162.

[81]Doctrine, 162.

[82]Doctrine, 162.

suffering, should it not follow that the God also suffers in God's creative activities? For this to be case, though, McClendon suggests that one must also examine whether or not suffering can occur apart from such phenomena as "guilt . . . [and] punishment,"[83] phenomena which he implies could not be attributes associated with the creative activity of God. As a commentary on the possibility of guilt-free, punishment-free suffering, McClendon maintains that at least for the Anabaptist Radical Reformer, Hans Hut, suffering (in general) can be linked not with "guilt, suffering and punishment . . . [but simply with] *ongoing creation:* . . . [for] *to exist is to suffer*."[84] This leads McClendon to speculate that perhaps some suffering "might be related, not to past misconduct, but to creation's purpose and future glory."[85]

Assembling resources for a response: Science, Romans 8, and chaos. Up to this point in his examination of the particular biblical "picture" (or model) of creation as "struggle," McClendon has primarily sought to more clearly pose the question: "Does God suffer in God's creative actions?" In preparing to respond to this question, he draws upon several resources, including: (1) an evaluation of what contemporary science shows about the potential for God to interact with creation; (2) an interpretation of Paul's thought on creation in Romans 8; and, (3) an analysis of the relationship between "chaos"

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[83]Doctrine, 162.

[84]Doctrine, 163. McClendon refers to Hans Hut, Of the Mystery of Baptism, trans. Gordon Rupp, included as an appendix of Patterns of Reformation, by Gordon Rupp (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1969), 392-94.

[85]Doctrine, 163.

and God. He considers these various elements separately and then brings together the conclusions they yield, in order to form a unified answer to the above question regarding God's passibility in creation.

First, looking to the developments of recent science, McClendon argues that, against the science of the Enlightenment, which held that the course of nature works like a clock, that is, as a predetermined and contained sequence of events, the findings of contemporary science increasingly show that the elements of nature actually function in a more open-ended and interactive manner. For instance, he holds that recent cosmology has demonstrated that, with the so-called big bang, "the predecessors of the cosmos' present components at near-infinitesimal early time ($t=10^{-43}$ seconds) *interacted* to form the basic physical forces of nature."[86] According to McClendon, the extensive complexity of this interaction "is friendly to the proposal that God's method in ongoing creation was *interactive* from the first amid *interactive* primitive particles, long before there were living cells or animals to form cooperative intentions."[87] Furthermore, McClendon here suggests (but does not fully develop) the notion that the more one interacts with (and does not stay distant from) another, the greater potential one incurs to experience higher levels of pain.[88]

Next, McClendon turns to some of the Apostle Paul's thoughts on creation, as they appear alongside some of his other concepts in chapter 8 of his Letter to the

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[86]Doctrine, 166, emphasis mine.

[87]Doctrine, 166, emphases mine.

[88]Doctrine, 168.

Romans, and he discovers here some startling assertions. For example, according to McClendon, Paul's starting point in considering creation is not "the idea of a perfect creation later marred; . . . [rather,] his starting point is present Christian *suffering*,"[89] that is, the present suffering of both creation and of believers who, with Christ, suffer "the *excruciating* way of the cross."[90] McClendon maintains that, by taking such a starting point, Paul intends to convey that suffering is part of creation itself. However, from this follows a second startling Pauline assertion: the suffering of creation and of believers – which is a sharing in the suffering of the cross – is "the way to a *glorious* future."[91] Here, McClendon suggests that, for Paul, the suffering taking place in creation has a purpose – as believers (and creation?) share in Christ's suffering, they are enabled to share in his glory. And, from this follows still a third starling Pauline assertion. Looking to Paul's use of the verb, *sunergei*, in Romans 8:28, which McClendon translates as "synergizes" or "co-operates" in the phrase: "'in everything, . . . [God] co-operates . . . ["synergizes"] for good with those who love God,'"[92] McClendon implies that, for the Apostle, this means that God lovingly "co-operates" or "interacts" with believers (and creation?) in the process of moving from suffering to glory.[93]

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[89]Doctrine, 169, emphasis mine.

[90]Doctrine, 169.

[91]Doctrine, 169, emphasis mine.

[92]Doctrine, 169.

[93]Doctrine, 169.

Then, McClendon considers the relationship between "chaos" and God. In agreement with some of the biblical interpretations of Jon Levenson,[94] McClendon holds not only that God permits chaos to exist within creation but also, in view of "passages such as Psalm 74, Isaiah 51, and Isaiah 54," . . . [that we can perceive] post-creation . . . chaos . . . threatening God's elect people."[95] This leads McClendon to inquire (independently of Levenson) about "the reality-status of primeval chaos."[96] Rejecting the notions that either "chaos timelessly pre-existed creation . . . [or that] chaos . . . [is] within God himself,"[97] McClendon reasons that, in Scripture, "chaos" can be a symbolic description of "the . . . [divine] potter's struggle . . . to shape workable clay into a work of art."[98] In McClendon's view, this "is a struggle that encounters the 'evil' of hard work and variety in material, but not the evil of cosmic dualism."[99]

Therefore, McClendon's treatment of the above three elements seems to have yielded the following results: (1') contemporary science allows for the potential that God

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[94]In particular, McClendon refers to Jon Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1988).

[95]Doctrine, 170.

[96]Doctrine, 170.

[97]Doctrine, 170. He rejects the first of these notions on the basis that "'through . . . [Christ] all things came to be' (John 1:3)," . . . [and he rejects the second on the grounds that] "'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:2)," as set forth in Doctrine, 170.

[98]Doctrine, 170.

[99]Doctrine, 170.

is not distant from – but interacts closely with – the various elements of creation; and (separate from recent science), it appears self-evident that the more in-depth one interacts with another, the more susceptible one becomes to suffering; (2') in Romans 8, Paul argues that suffering is an aspect of creation itself but that, for the believer, this suffering leads to glory; and, he holds that God lovingly "interacts" with the believer in the process from suffering to glory; and, (3') that "chaos" is a means through which the Bible symbolically describes God's struggle to shape creation according to God's will.

Formulating a response: God does suffer in God's creative actions. With these results in hand, McClendon returns to the question: "Does God suffer in God's creative actions?" However, in doing so, he stresses that he intends to address only that aspect of God which involves "God's creative love, the love that sets out on the costly adventure of creation itself."[100] That is, he does not intend to treat here "that about God which is utterly reliable . . . [or] the qualities inherent in God's Godhood."[101] With this important clarification in view, and in light of (1') - (3') above, McClendon reaches the following conclusions about God's passibility in creation. First, he argues that because God has the "ability to enter into loving relations with what is outside God and by doing so to bring about changed circumstances in the world, . . . these changes, . . . *[since they] are*

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[100]Doctrine, 171.

[101]Doctrine, 171. He does, however, address this latter "reliable" aspect of God elsewhere (as part of his treatment of the identity of God in Part II of Doctrine), as I will show and examine below.

relational, . . . imply *change* not only for the world, but also *for God*."[102] That is, he holds that God cannot work towards authentic relational change without being genuinely open (or vulnerable) to change within Godself. Second, McClendon avers that "the changes involved in this world by the human adventure . . . entail the risk of further suffering: to love is to suffer, . . . and to love recalcitrant or rebellious or sinful creatures is costly suffering indeed."[103] Therefore, he suggests that God, in the "chaos" of the divine potter's struggle with often unwieldy human beings, not only experiences change but also suffers. Third, he concludes that God can and must suffer in God's creative actions because "the very act of creation on the part of an all-sufficient God involves a divinely necessary rejection, a deliberate surrender, . . . of the solitary hoarding of free existence."[104] That is, he maintains that God must suffer since God's creation of dependent creatures requires that God must give up a measure of independence that God otherwise would have had.

The Identity of God

After setting forth his understanding of the rule of God, along with its corollary sub-doctrines of eschatology, salvation, and creation, McClendon's remaining two major sections in Doctrine are "The Identity of Jesus Christ" (Part II) and "The Fellowship of

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[102]Doctrine, 171, emphases mine.

[103]Doctrine, 171. Here, McClendon refers to Rosemary Haughton, The Passionate God (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

[104]Doctrine, 171. Also, McClendon loosely cites Geddes MacGregor, He Who Lets Us Be: A Theology of Love (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

the Spirit" (Part III). Under "The Identity of Jesus Christ," in addition to developing a doctrine of the atonement and a doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, he also considers the way in which the Christian doctrine of God relies upon the biblical narrative – which, in part, leads him to explore how the Bible identifies God by means of trinitarian categories. Furthermore, under "The Fellowship of the Spirit," not only does he construct a doctrine of the church and a doctrine of Christian worship, but he also constructs (tightly interwoven) doctrines of the Holy Spirit and of the church's mission.

Since my primary concern is to examine his overall doctrine of God (and not to examine all the doctrines he develops in regard to the Christian faith as a whole), I will consider only those doctrines above that most pertain to this primary concern. Accordingly, I will first investigate his doctrines of the atonement and of the person of Jesus Christ. Second, I will analyze his doctrine of the Holy Spirit; however, since his development of this doctrine is so closely interwoven with his doctrine of mission, I will, in a more limited manner, analyze this latter doctrine as well. Also, because aspects of his doctrine of the church's mission rely upon his understanding of the church, I will very briefly investigate his ecclesiology (prior to treating his doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the church's mission). Third, I will examine his understanding of the manner in which the Christian doctrine of God depends upon the narrative of Scripture – and the way in which this leads him to explore how the Bible identifies God by means of trinitarian categories.

The Atonement and the Person of Jesus Christ

McClendon avers that "the identity of God as Christians know it is tied to the identity of Jesus Christ risen from the dead."[105] Thus, for McClendon, a key for understanding the identity of God is to understand the identity of Jesus Christ – and a key for comprehending the identity of Jesus Christ is to comprehend the work of Christ, most especially the work of the cross. Therefore, I will turn now to an analysis of McClendon's development of these doctrines, beginning with an investigation of his comprehension of the meaning of the cross.

The Atonement. Recognizing the longstanding difficulty the church has had in explaining the "shame . . . [of the cross],"[106] and in order to establish a context for his own constructive efforts, McClendon begins his treatment of the atonement with reference to three major strands of atonement theory in the Christian tradition, which reflects that aspect of his theological method that calls for a secondary but essential reliance upon the narrative of tradition. Then, he turns to various metaphors or "pictures" in the New Testament that endeavor to connect the cross with Old Testament concepts. Yet, after examining several of these metaphors, he determines that they do not cohere well with any of the main atonement theories. So, he next considers how these metaphors for the cross should be evaluated in light of their role in "the . . . [larger]

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[105]Doctrine, 193.

[106]Doctrine, 198.

gospel narrative."[107] And, he argues that the atonement theories from the Christian tradition should be treated as "*midrashim*" or as commentaries on the biblical story.

McClendon identifies three major strands of atonement theory in the Christian tradition as the "*evilward*," "*Godward*," and "*manward*" strands.[108] First, with the "evilward" strand, he has in mind what has sometimes been referred to as the "ransom" or "victory" theory of the atonement. He traces the development of this strand from Irenaeus through the Cappadocian Fathers,[109] and he argues that it is "evilward" because it conveys the notion that the purpose of "Christ's work . . . [was] to defeat the devil."[110] He maintains that the most significant limitation of this view, which he also refers to as the "'*Christus-victor*' type," . . . is that it . . . [makes it] all too easy . . . to confuse God's final triumph with the maintenance of military Christendom, losing sight of the nonviolent way of the cross."[111]

With the "Godward" strand, McClendon has in view the "satisfaction" or "penal" theory of the atonement. He sketches the development of this strand (and variations of it)

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[107]Doctrine, 226.

[108]Doctrine, 199-213. In addition, McClendon acknowledges that "the English word 'atonement' . . . [was] not coined . . . [until] the sixteenth century; . . . [however, he maintains that] using the word does not commit us to all that it has (sometimes) meant," as set forth in Doctrine, 199.

[109]Doctrine, 201-203.

[110]Doctrine, 209.

[111]Doctrine, 203.

from Anselm's Cur Deus Homo through the work of Hugo Grotius,[112] and he holds that it is "Godward" since it expresses the idea that the aim of the cross was to satisfy "God's honor or justice,"[113] by means of "God inflicting upon Christ, through evil hands, the infinite evil that was man's due."[114] He avers that the substantial weakness of this view "is that it drives a wedge of separation right into the Godhead, separating the roles of the Father and the Son in redemption. God demands justice; Christ pleads for mercy. That is a parody . . . [of this view], but it is a recognizable parody."[115] In other words, McClendon suggests that the limitation of the "satisfaction" view is that it can allow for an understanding of the cross, in which the will of God and the will of Jesus are (even ultimately) not aligned.

Finally, with the "manward" strand, he has in mind what is sometimes referred to as the "moral-influence" or "vicarious sacrifice" theory of the atonement. He traces the development of this strand from Abelard through Horace Bushnell,[116] and he argues that it is "manward" because it articulates the view that the goal of Christ's work was to prompt humans, by means of Christ's example of having "his heart burdened by . . . [the sin and sickness of others],"[117] to similarly show "sympathetic love . . . [to these same

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[112]Doctrine, 203-208.

[113]Doctrine, 209.

[114]Doctrine, 207.

[115]Doctrine, 208.

[116]Doctrine, 208-13.

[117]Doctrine, 211.

others troubled by sin and disease]."[118] He holds that the most significant limitation of this view is that it offers "no clear account of the fact of redemption prior to response on the part of its recipient. . . . Here, . . . the actual shape of Christ's death seems incidental to his mission rather essential to it."[119]

In view of his understanding of these three strands (and of their apparent limitations in addressing the "shame" of the cross), McClendon turns, as he does with the development of some of his other doctrines, to various metaphors or "pictures" in the New Testament – in this case, to those seeking "to link Jesus' death to Old Testament themes."[120] For instance, he argues that Paul and other Epistle writers look to Isaiah's description of a suffering servant, in Isaiah 53:8, where "'the prophet clearly sees an innocent Israelite who rescues his fellow Israelites from suffering by bearing their suffering himself.'"[121] According to McClendon, the New Testament writers apply this "description to Christ crucified, . . . [because] Isaiah's account of unjust punishment . . . [and] substitutionary suffering . . . spoke to them of Jesus."[122] In addition to this metaphor of substitution, McClendon also considers New Testament atonement

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[118]Doctrine, 211.

[119]Doctrine, 212.

[120]Doctrine, 229.

[121]Doctrine, 217. Here, McClendon cites John McKenzie, Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, vol. 20, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 134.

[122]Doctrine, 217.

metaphors of military victory, kinship, and sacrifice.[123] However, after a fairly extensive analysis of these metaphors, he concludes that "it is not possible to line up even one set of New Testament writers behind any one . . . [of the various 'theories of atonement' in the Christian tradition] without embarrassing anomalies."[124]

Accordingly, in an effort to uncover a more complete understanding of the cross, McClendon turns to "**the gospel story itself**,"[125] as it is set forth not only "in the Gospels and Acts, . . . [where] the narrative form is explicit . . . [but also] in the Letters, . . . [where] it is implicit."[126] And, he suggests that the gospel narrative is able to offer a fuller understanding of Jesus' death precisely because it sets his death "within its own longer story;"[127] or, in other words, he maintains that the gospel narrative more completely conveys the meaning of Jesus' death by situating both the "character" of Jesus and the "circumstance" (or "plot") of the cross within the "setting" of God's kingdom rule."[128]

Yet, in shifting to the gospel narrative as his primary resource, McClendon does not aver that either New Testament metaphors for the cross or atonement theories from

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[123]Doctrine, 217-226.

[124]Doctrine, 226.

[125]Doctrine, 227.

[126]Doctrine, 230.

[127]Doctrine, 228.

[128]Doctrine, 228. And, in the particular case of the "character" of Jesus, McClendon holds that "by offering a 'definite description' of Jesus, each Gospel functions to **identify** him," as set forth in Doctrine, 228.

the Christian tradition should be marginalized from constructive efforts. For instance, in terms of these metaphors, he argues that within the "evangel-narrative is the story that grounds the metaphors of the death of Christ. Slave-release and (crooked) justice, cosmic triumph and ultimate sacrifice, **all find their home** in the . . . [gospel] story."[129] That is, he implies that once these New Testament metaphors for the cross have been situated within the meta-narrative to which they also contribute, they should certainly be a significant resource for doctrinal endeavors. In addition, with regard to atonement theories from the Christian tradition, he holds that one may, "by taking a leaf from Jewish interpretive practice,"[130] essentially treat the atonement theories as *midrashim* – as narrative commentaries on the gospel story.[131] And, as with the New Testament metaphors, McClendon advocates for the use of "each of the great Christian . . . [atonement] *midrashim* . . . [in constructive efforts, since each of them] has its special thrust or force, worth a place in today's doctrine."[132]

Moving to the gospel narrative, and still looking to address the central issue of the reason for the cross, McClendon holds that this narrative conveys that when Jesus of Nazareth launched his ministry, he sought, through "nonviolent warfare, . . . to establish once more . . . the new rule of God."[133] According to McClendon, while this effort was in

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[129]Doctrine, 228.

[130]Doctrine, 230.

[131]Doctrine, 230.

[132]Doctrine, 232.

[133]Doctrine, 235.

harmony with the rule that God had tried to establish at least since Israel's origin,[134] it "of course . . . did not work. The enemies plotted; the disciples doubted. . . . He was executed, . . . [and] he was buried. . . . God was dead."[135] However, McClendon argues:

> The sequel both denied and affirmed what had gone before. It denied it: In the resurrection God raised Jesus Christ, that same one, up from the dead, alive with God forevermore. . . . The enemies did not prevail as they intended. The disciples, doubting, returned to follow him. The sequel also affirmed what had gone before: The resurrection was God's sign of self-identification with Jesus who had taken the nonviolent way of the cross. It was God's way, God's *only* way. . . . The chief obstacle to . . . [the faith of the disciples], the cross, became the chief content of their faith. God's rule, by the way of the cross, prevailed.[136]

In view of this interpretation of what the gospel narrative conveys about the meaning of the death of Jesus, McClendon restates the central features of his doctrine of the cross in terms of the three major strands of atonement theory [*midrashim*?] that he had previously identified as the "*evilward*," "*Godward*," and "*manward*" strands.[137] First, he holds that the Jesus story (of the gospel narrative) "clearly . . . displays the . . . devilward vector . . . [but that it does so] without the weakness of the (*midrashic) Christus-victor* teaching with its fateful link to military Christendom and it abjuration of nonviolence."[138] This restatement, then – in light of McClendon's interpretation of Scripture that Jesus genuinely endured the cross – cautions against forms of the

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[134]Doctrine, 234.

[135]Doctrine, 235-36.

[136]Doctrine, 236.

[137]Doctrine, 199-213.

[138]Doctrine, 236.

traditional "ransom" or "victory" view of the atonement that would permit the possibility that Jesus only pretended to endure the cross, so that the devil could be tricked.

Second, he avers that the constitutive story shows the Godward strand, "if (and only if) . . . [Jesus' story] is God's own story – if . . . we cannot exclude God from the action, but must see the Jesus story as exactly what God would do, exactly what God would be satisfied to do, on earth."[139] Here, McClendon indirectly points to what he understands to be a significant potential weakness of the traditional "satisfaction" or "penal" theory, that is, its capacity to permit an understanding of the death of Jesus in which God's will and Jesus' will remain at odds with one another (with implication that God forced Jesus, against Jesus' will, to finally go through with the cross). McClendon holds that, in contrast to this flawed notion, the constitutive story demonstrates that the cross "is God's own action on the scale of Jesus of Nazareth."[140]

Third, according to McClendon, the gospel narrative also displays the manward strand but with an emphasis (which is not present in the traditional "vicarious sacrifice" theory) that it is "only . . . [by] his full faithfulness enacted in the cross that . . . [Jesus enables his] disciples . . . [to change] from observers to participants."[141] That is, for McClendon, "the constitutive story has the objectivity, the given quality of God's prior action, that . . . [has not been an aspect of most "vicarious sacrifice" *midrashim*]."[142]

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[139]Doctrine, 236.

[140]Doctrine, 236-37.

[141]Doctrine, 237.

[142]Doctrine, 237.

Therefore, McClendon seeks to recover each of these three traditional atonement strands but in a manner that he feels more appropriately reflects the content of the gospel story. Moreover, he implies that a comprehensive doctrine of the atonement should seek to weave together the various strengths of each of these revised strands. However, since McClendon's understanding of the trinitarian identity of God, as well as his Christology and pneumatology, have so far not been addressed, it is difficult, at this point, to fully evaluate his doctrine of the atonement. Nevertheless, his development of this doctrine does appear to shed some additional light on his understanding of God. For example, he has here reiterated that God is a God who seeks to establish God's rule or kingdom. In addition, particularly with his restatement of the evilward, Godward and manward strands – in view of the constitutive story in the New Testament – he makes clear his perspective that Jesus of Nazareth and God were of the same purpose in willfully enduring personal suffering for the sake of others.

The Person of Jesus Christ. In developing his doctrine of the person of Christ, McClendon avers (in view of the hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now") that this must be a doctrine that considers Christ to be alive and present with his disciples today; otherwise, for him, this doctrine is not a doctrine that is faithful to the New Testament witness of the resurrection. Therefore, McClendon begins his Christology by examining the way in which it might be held that Christ is present (and capable of being known by his disciples) today. Then, he introduces the notion that the resurrection is the key to determining the identity of the present Christ. Next, he considers three major Christological models that have been developed within the

Christian tradition (what he describes as: the Logos model, the two-natures model, and the historical model), before finally proposing his own narrative Christological model, through which he restates and further develops his Christological perspective.

As he approaches a doctrine of Christ, McClendon holds that "the identity that Christian teaching must clarify for itself is not first of all that of a teacher who lived and died in long ago Palestine,"[143] rather, he maintains, it is the identity of a present "Risen One who confronts us here and now, today, in the common life of the church, . . . [with which Christian teaching must first be concerned]."[144] This matter of beginning with "Christ's present presence is . . . of the highest importance for theology,"[145] because, McClendon suggests, Christology would otherwise be of little relevance for contemporary Christians, for they "are not a people of antiquarian taste, roaming the relics of lost civilizations, looking for some 'light from the past' that might illuminate their weary minds, and (as it just happens) seizing upon a certain radical rabbi as most interesting of all."[146]

McClendon recognizes challenges to beginning a Christology with the present Christ, acknowledging, for instance, that "it may be contrary to what . . . [some] Christians think they know about life in this age;"[147] however, he argues that, according

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[143]Doctrine, 239.

[144]Doctrine, 239.

[145]Doctrine, 240.

[146]Doctrine, 239.

[147]Doctrine, 240.

to the narrative of the New Testament, "the Spirit's coming . . . [which is promised with Christ's ascension and launched through the Pentecost event] is the inward divine means by which the Christian community, and thus the individual disciple as well, are provided access to the present Christ."[148] That is, McClendon holds that the biblical narrative conveys that, through the Spirit, Christ is present to disciples today both corporately and individually. In addition, in holding to that element of his theological method that calls for a reliance upon the practices of the church, he specifies at least four spheres in which disciples can experience Christ's presence: worship, witness, (kingdom) work, and the word of Scripture.[149]

Not only does McClendon argue that Christ is present to his disciples today, he also endeavors to show in what sense these disciples can be capable of knowing the present Christ. Here, McClendon essentially expounds upon the difference between "knowing about someone" and "knowing someone," and he avers that the latter involves: (1) knowing someone (not in a secondhand but) in a firsthand way;[150] and, (2) knowing someone reciprocally, where "the other can properly claim to know us also."[151] And, it is in this sense of "knowing someone" in a firsthand, reciprocal fashion, that McClendon

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[148]Doctrine, 240.

[149]Doctrine, 240-42.

[150]Doctrine, 242.

[151]Doctrine, 243.

maintains authentic disciples can – through "worship, work, witness, . . . [and] word – . . . [know] the Risen One."[152]

Having sought to establish that Christology should begin with an understanding of Christ present to and knowable by his disciples today, McClendon then argues that exploring the meaning of the resurrection is central to determining the identity of this present Christ.[153] After a brief treatment of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances,[154] McClendon recounts his view that Jesus (uniquely) lived a life that was fully faithful to God's way and that this faithfulness ultimately led to his death; and, he argues that "where God is concerned, . . . [though,] even death's finality is not final. . . . The Jesus story is also the story of God's utter involvement. God acted. God raised Jesus from the dead 'on the third day.'"[155] Next, in light of this interpretation of the resurrection event, McClendon asks the probing question: "What . . . could that 'raising' be?"[156] In other words, he inquires: "What happened to the person of Jesus in the act of the resurrection?" To this query, McClendon introduces the argument that God "re-identified" Jesus, or,

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[152]Doctrine, 243.

[153]Doctrine, 244-50. And here, of course, it is evident that he is once again employing the "this is that" and "then is now" baptist hermeneutical principle.

[154]One of McClendon's main points here is that "the appearances . . . [as witnessed to in Scripture] give evidence: that in having to do with Jesus after Easter, the disciples were having to do *with God* as well; . . . [and, conversely,] that the One who was alive was the very one they had known, *Jesus of Nazareth*, that man," as set forth in Doctrine, 245.

[155]Doctrine, 247.

[156]Doctrine, 247.

more fully, he holds that, with the resurrection: "*God . . . identified the life of Jesus of Nazareth afresh with God's own life, so that from that time, and in accordance with an eternal purpose of God, the history of this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was to be counted identical with God's inner history, in such a way that in the knowing of Jesus Christ God could be truly known*."[157]

McClendon defers offering a more complete explanation of this argument about what happened to Jesus with the resurrection until after he has gleaned insights from his evaluation of some major historical Christological models (an analysis of which I will offer below), but here, as he introduces this argument, he presents a few brief clarifications that are helpful. For instance, with the concept of "a re-identified life," he explains that he has in view something akin to a "changed human life," arguing that this is not a far-fetched notion, since it is an everyday occurrence that "people . . . 'change their identities,' . . . sometimes changing inwardly as well."[158] Moreover, he holds that "if we believe in God, we believe in one who as the absolute right (as Creator) to identify . . . [and to re-identify?] each one of us."[159] One aspect along these lines that McClendon does not appear to explicitly clarify, though, is the degree to which Jesus was "re-identified." However, drawing from that portion of his interpretation of the post-resurrection appearances, in which he holds that the early disciples knew "that the One

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[157]Doctrine, 247.

[158]Doctrine, 247.

[159]Doctrine, 247-48.

who was alive was the very one they had known, *Jesus of Nazareth*, that man,"[160] one can infer that McClendon does not have in view a resurrection re-identification of Jesus that would have completely subsumed his previous identity. That is, McClendon suggests that with the resurrection re-identification of Jesus something of Jesus' pre-resurrection identity must have been maintained. However, McClendon does not appear to specify what exactly God "re-identifies" or "changes" within Jesus. Did God change Jesus' nature? And, if God did not change Jesus' nature, what about Jesus did God change? McClendon does not explain these matters.

Nevertheless, another clarification McClendon makes here, as he introduces this argument about Jesus' resurrection re-identification, is that "Jesus is not identified merely as one of God's children . . . but is re-identified, resurrected as *the unique sharer of God's own identity: for us, by this resurrection, the whole story of Jesus is God's own story*."[161] McClendon does not make explicit what he means with the terms "unique" and "whole" in this phrase; however, he suggests that while, with "other of God's children," part of their story might become God's own story, with Jesus, all of his story becomes God's story – and that in this way Jesus is unique from other followers (children) of God.

Even with this brief introduction to his concept of Jesus' resurrection re-identification, McClendon seems to anticipate that he will meet charges of "adoptionism." In response, he argues that he should not "be reckoned an adoptionist, . . . [since he holds that] Jesus' . . . [unique] Sonship is . . . what God intended for him even

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[160]Doctrine, 245.

[161]Doctrine, 248.

'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4)."[162] Therefore, McClendon suggests that his Christology should not be perceived as "adoptionistic" at least in the strong sense of "implying . . . . [that] 'God had to wait around' for someone like Jesus to appear so God could 'adopt' the lucky winner as his Son."[163]

McClendon next considers three substantial Christological models – the Logos model, the two-natures model, and the historical model – that have been developed within the Christian tradition, in further preparation for a proposal of his own narrative Christological model. I will not fully recapitulate the capable historical sketches that McClendon offers with each of these three models; instead, I will focus on the main points he makes with regard to each of them, giving particular attention to his perceptions of their limitations.

First, with the Logos model, pointing to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen as its primary developers, McClendon holds that some early "Christian apologists . . . saw in logos the very vehicle needed to explain the Jewish Messiah to pagans. Christ was the Logos incarnate – not actually the high God, yet truly divine."[164] He maintains that the limitation of this view, as it has been historically developed, is "the gap it opens between the (inaccessible) superordinate God and the accessible (but not fully divine) Christ."[165] That is, according to McClendon, this view has tended to treat Christ as

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[162]Doctrine, 249.

[163]Doctrine, 248-49.

[164]Doctrine, 252.

[165]Doctrine, 252.

"truly" – but not as "fully" – divine, thus relegating Christ to a "subordinate place."[166] Therefore, one can perhaps deduce from his assessment that McClendon seeks a model that allows for a concept of the full divinity of Christ.

With the two-natures model, McClendon indicates that, most simply stated, this model holds that "Christ has both a divine and a human nature;"[167] yet, he traces its development up through what he terms as "the resultant 'Definition' of the Council of Chalcedon (451)," which he summarizes, in part, as follows: "Christ . . . [is] perfect in manhood, perfect in Godhood, consubstantial (*homoousios*) both with the Father and with us, born of Mary (who is called *theotokos*), so that the two natures, divine and human, continue after the union, 'unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably' in one 'hypostasis' or self-identical person."[168] One of the issues this model could not or did not resolve, however, according to McClendon, was the matter of where Christ acquired his human nature. Did he acquire it "directly from God in a fresh creative act, or . . . [did he acquire it] indirectly through inheritance from his mother?"[169] Thus, one can deduce

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[166]Doctrine, 252.

[167]Doctrine, 254.

[168]Doctrine, 256. Here, McClendon cites both of the following resources: Richard A. Norris, Jr., The Christological Controversy (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1980), 155-59; and, Aloys Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, trans. John Bowden, 2d ed., vol. 1, From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451) (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1975), section 3.

[169]Doctrine, 256. With regard to the entity (or person) from whom Jesus acquired his humanity, McClendon mentions the views of Menno Simons and Pope Pius IX as examples of contrasting positions. According to McClendon, Menno held that "Christ must have acquired his human nature directly from God, merely passing through Mary as through a tube, . . . [while Pius IX established] the dogma of the 'immaculate,' that is,

from this assessment that McClendon seeks a model that will clarify whether Jesus received his humanity from a divine resource or a human source (or, perhaps, from both sources).

Finally, according to McClendon, a new model, what he terms as "the historical model," emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[170] Shaped by figures ranging from Hermann Samuel Reimarus to Johannes Weiss, this model, he argues, "seemed to place not pope or Bible, but historical research, in the seat of authority."[171] The great strength of this model (which, he argues, is the model that still prevails today, embraced by Wolfhart Pannenberg and others),[172] McClendon avers, is that it offers "a new appreciation of the human Jesus."[173] The weakness, however, according to him, is that it fails to allow for the divinity of Christ.[174] McClendon argues that this weakness is apparent, for example, in that strand within the historical model (the strand developed by David Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann) that seeks to treat the central biblical narrative as "myth" – where "myth" is understood not only as "a story of the gods (or of God) . . .

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sin-free, conception of Mary, . . . [in order to make room for the notion that Christ acquired his human nature from his mother]," as set forth in Doctrine, 257.

[170]Doctrine, 257.

[171]Doctrine, 257.

[172]Doctrine, 262.

[173]Doctrine, 262.

[174]Doctrine, 262.

[but also as] a story of events outside our time and space"[175] – thereby making "divine being" and "historical presence" mutually exclusive concepts.[176] Therefore, one can deduce from his assessment here that McClendon intends to pursue a model that will not rule out investigations into the divinity of Christ based upon pre-existing definitions of what constitutes such entities as history and myth.

Against the background of his understanding of these Christological models, and drawing upon his previous argument about God's resurrection re-identification of Jesus, McClendon sets forth his own narrative-based Christological model, a model that he eventually refers to as a "two-narrative Christology."[177] He begins the development of this model by examining the timing and the nature of the "self-emptying" described in Philippians 2:5-11. Here, he considers an exegetical observation of Origen on this passage "that 'some say' the self-emptying was the emptying of the soul of Jesus *after* it was enfleshed."[178] McClendon acknowledges that such an interpretation substantially differs from the long-standing view that the passage "speaks of a *heavenly* being who emptied himself (2:7) . . . [before taking human form],"[179] but he argues that the passage (or the early Christian hymn within it) is actually "not . . . about the pre-incarnate acts of God . . . [but about a juxtaposition of] . . . Messiah Jesus' earthly vicissitudes with the

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[175]Doctrine, 260.

[176]Doctrine, 260-61.

[177]Doctrine, 274.

[178]Doctrine, 266. Here, McClendon refers to Origen De prin. 4. 1. 32.

[179]Doctrine, 266.

vast claim of his Lordship – on earth, but also in heaven and over the nether world."[180] Not surprisingly, therefore, McClendon clearly favors the "some say" interpretation that Origen mentions, and he argues that if we read the Philippians passage in this manner – as conveying a self-emptying *after* Jesus' birth – then Paul must "refer here to a Jesus who might have been made a king (cf. Matt. 4:8-10 par.; John 6:14f), but who instead identified himself and his cause with servants and serfs, outcasts and victims, to a degree that led the authorities to arrange his death."[181] In other words, for McClendon, Jesus' self-emptying amounts to a series of decisions during his life and ministry not to succumb to the temptation to pursue secular glory, so that he could instead associate and identify with those on the margins of society.

With this understanding of Philippians 2:5-11, McClendon then inquires about what such an after-enfleshment self-emptying might mean for interpreting Paul's reference to Jesus' "'being in the form of God' (Phil. 2:6)?"[182] In response, drawing on the thought of Eugene TeSelle,[183] McClendon avers that "we must understand that 'the image of God' in Scripture is not a designated state but a task set, not an ontic level enjoyed but an ideal to be realized."[184] Therefore, McClendon equates the "form of God"

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[180]Doctrine, 267.

[181]Doctrine, 267.

[182]Doctrine, 267.

[183]Doctrine, 268. Here, McClendon refers to Eugene TeSelle, Christ in Context: Divine Purpose and Human Possibility (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975), 16-31.

[184]Doctrine, 268.

(in Philippians 2:6) with the "image of God" (in passages such as Genesis 1:26-27), and he suggests that for Jesus – and for all other humans as well – the image (or form) of God is not a state in which humans are born but a goal to which many aspire but only Jesus attained, because only Jesus completely followed God's way of the servant.[185]

Furthermore, McClendon holds that these concepts of Jesus' after-enfleshment self-emptying and of his eventual complete realization of the image of God (through his full faithfulness during his life and death) cohere with the biblical narrative's accounts of his birth and resurrection. For instance, with regard to Jesus' birth, McClendon argues that the "Gospel stories *do not say* or suggest that it is by virtue of this marvelous conception that Jesus was *divine*."[186] While McClendon allows that these stories suggest that "the Spirit as the human Jesus' divine Mother, conceived Jesus exactly when and as Mary conceived him,"[187] he rejects the notion that "the Holy Spirit is . . . presented . . . as a Jupiter-like father deity who impregnates a human mother."[188] In addition, in terms of Jesus' resurrection, returning to the argument he previously introduced, McClendon maintains that the resurrection of Jesus "is nothing less that God's *(re)identification of the entire early life of Jesus of Nazareth, from conception to its last breath, with God's*

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[185]Doctrine, 268.

[186]Doctrine, 270.

[187]Doctrine, 270. And, here, McClendon appears to address an element that he feels was missing in the two-natures Christology model (as discussed above).

[188]Doctrine, 270.

own immortal life."[189] Accordingly, following that aspect of his theological method that calls for the formation of conviction sets using various loci of justification (or loci of formation) such as coherence, McClendon suggests that if one can affirm the individual components thus far set forth as part of his narrative Christological model – that is, his understanding of the non-divinity-imparting birth of Jesus; his notion of Jesus' post-birth self-emptying to follow God's way of service; his concept of Jesus' gradual (and eventually full) achievement of the image of God; and, his idea of God's resurrection re-identification of Jesus with God's own life – it would seem that one should conclude that these various components harmonize with (or at least do not contradict) one another.

Thus far with his efforts in constructing a narrative model for Christology, McClendon has focused on how this model might appear within the boundaries of the Jesus story proper, from Jesus' conception through his resurrection. However, McClendon also seeks to explore how this same model can "hold up to" (or work within) the broader parameters of the entire "long biblical and postbiblical story whose *center* . . . is Jesus of Nazareth."[190] He begins this broader effort, which he now starts to refer to as a "two-narrative Christology,"[191] by arguing that the biblical story is actually "not one story, but two."[192] By this he means that, within the biblical narrative, one simultaneously sees both (1) an ongoing *story of God* reaching down to humans and (2)

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[189]Doctrine, 271.

[190]Doctrine, 274.

[191]Doctrine, 274.

[192]Doctrine, 274.

an ongoing *story of people* reaching up to God. For example, he maintains that, within the same portion of the biblical narrative: there is (1A) the account (or story) of "a Redeemer God who leads his people out of Egyptian slavery;"[193] while at the same time, there is (2A) the account (or story) of "the daughter of Levi who entrusts her babe with a Hebrew name to a little boat surely named Hope, and of a daughter of Pharaoh who withdraws from that same boat the infant she will in the Egyptian tongue name Moses."[194] His point with this example (and several others) is that with every single biblical episode there are "two points of view."[195] The first point of view expresses the story of "divine self-expense;"[196] the second point of view conveys the story of "human investment."[197]

In addition, McClendon avers that the fact that there are two stories (the story of God and the story of people) and not one indicates "the *failure and fragmentation* that have been a part of the creature's story."[198] That is, for all of God's reaching down to people with the first story and for all of humanity's reaching up to God with the second story, God and God's people never seem to completely meet each other. Yet, McClendon holds that both of these stories continue with Jesus of Nazareth. On the one

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[193]Doctrine, 275.

[194]Doctrine, 275.

[195]Doctrine, 276.

[196]Doctrine, 276.

[197]Doctrine, 276.

[198]Doctrine, 275, emphasis mine.

hand, the first story of divine self-expense – of God reaching down to humans – "is no new story when once again it focuses, this time upon . . . [(1B)] the cross as the ultimate power . . . of a God who all through the story has been reaching out, reaching down, to us."[199] And, on the other hand, the second story of human investment – of people reaching up to God – is also no new story when once again it concentrates, this time upon [(2B)] "Jesus, who against all odds, in what must have seemed the worst of times, lived a life of full faithfulness, fulfilled his mission and was fully rewarded by his heavenly Father."[200] Moreover, McClendon argues, because of his total obedience, even in submitting to the cross, all of which "God intended for him even 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4),"[201] with God's resurrection of Jesus, "the twoness of the . . . [biblical] story . . . converges completely, and we see a human story that God will without qualification acknowledge as his own."[202]

Thus, according to McClendon:

> The story Scripture tells is the story of God. It reaches it climax in Jesus risen from the dead. Concurrently, Scripture tells a moving human story that climaxes in the same resurrection. The two narratives, divine and human, are seamlessly one narrative throughout; though they may be distinguished for analysis, they cannot be separated without harm.[203]

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[199]Doctrine, 275.

[200]Doctrine, 275.

[201]Doctrine, 249.

[202]Doctrine, 276.

[203]Doctrine, 280.

And, in seeking to complete a theme he introduced as he approached this doctrine, McClendon emphasizes that it is "in, with, and under this story . . . [that] one meets its Lord and our own. Here one meets a Present Christ."[204]

With the development of his doctrine of Christ and his model of two-narrative Christology, McClendon has left some important questions still unresolved. Most significantly, he does not address what exactly God "re-identifies" or "changes" within Jesus with the resurrection. Nevertheless, in developing his Christology, he has shed further light on his understanding of how the biblical narrative conveys who God is through the telling of Jesus' own story. For instance, his Christology suggests that, in Jesus of Nazareth, God fulfilled God's intention to be able to fully reach down to a humanity that had been endeavoring to reach up to God. Also, his Christology implies that since Jesus was re-identified with God's own life, it follows that, in Christ, through the Spirit, God is present with Christ's disciples today in a firsthand, reciprocal manner.

The Holy Spirit and the Church's Mission

McClendon closely interweaves his development of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit together with his development of a doctrine of the church's mission. His intention is "to show that it is exactly by taking up the doctrine of God's Spirit in its relation to mission that we gain clarity about both questions, about our task (mission) and about God's holy nearness (Spirit)."[205] Therefore, while my chief concern is to examine his pneumatology

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[204]Doctrine, 277.

[205]Doctrine, 418.

in order to gain a more complete understanding of his overall doctrine of God, I will also need to consider his doctrine of the church's mission since he so closely connects this doctrine with that of the Spirit. Moreover, in order to address his notion of the church's mission, I will need, at least briefly, to consider his doctrine of the church. Accordingly, in my analysis, I will first offer a brief investigation of his ecclesiology; then, I will offer a combined examination of his doctrines of Spirit and mission.

The church. McClendon approaches his doctrine of the church by arguing that there are "three circles of Christian community (each inclusive of the next in order): First is the overarching *rule* of God; within it, the *people* (or *peoples*) of God; finally, the concrete gatherings – the (local) *churches* of God."[206] The first circle of Christian community – the rule or kingdom of God – he develops elsewhere as a meta-doctrine, which contains sub-doctrines of eschatology, salvation, and creation (as I have analyzed above). Here, he indicates that the remaining circles of Christian community – "the people of God" and of "the (local) churches of God" – should also be developed as sub-doctrines under the meta-doctrine of the rule of God, with the implication (as will become more clear below) that, because of the Resurrection-Ascension-Pentecost events, the people of God, working through the local churches of God, have been entrusted to work as partners with God to carry forward the rule of God.

The second circle of Christian community, according to McClendon, is the people (or peoples) of God. He argues that, according to the Apostle Paul, the people of God are

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[206]Doctrine, 362.

"an earthly, here and now *new creation*, a new people, whose character is to gather in assemblies, each original, each dependent upon the present Spirit, each gathered around the risen Christ."[207] Here, McClendon appears to have in view the entire present Christian community.

And, the third circle, he avers, is the local church or "the local *assemblies (ekklesiai)* of the peoples."[208] The local church, he holds, can take many forms, from "a storefront Pentecostal fellowship . . . [to] a timeworn ecclesial structure in place for a thousand years or more;"[209] yet, in every case:

> The rule of God requires church *members* subject to that very rule. The centrality of Jesus Christ demands church *leaders* led by Christ crucified and risen. The fellowship of the Spirit implies a *common life* whose practices suit, not this present age, but the age to come – a community at once redeemed and redemptive.[210]

Thus, for McClendon, the purpose of the local church is to help carry out the rule of God by acting redemptively towards others.

The Holy Spirit and the church's mission. With this understanding of the church in hand, McClendon sets forth his interwoven doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the mission of the church. His method of argumentation in developing these doctrines is to move back-and-forth between them, probing deeper into the nature of the Spirit and the

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[207]Doctrine, 364.

[208]Doctrine, 365.

[209]Doctrine, 366.

[210]Doctrine, 366.

nature of the church's mission with each pass. Accordingly, I will endeavor to follow the course of this back-and-forth argumentation in my analysis of his development of these doctrines.

McClendon introduces the doctrines of the Spirit and of the church's mission by arguing, in view of his concept (mentioned in the previous subsection) that the purpose of the local church is to act redemptively:

> That the church is a redemptive community only when and as its mission is determined by God the Spirit: God's Holy Spirit alone creates the church as a uniting and redemptive community. . . . Pentecost showed that one new human race, redeemed and reconciled to God and thereby joined into one . . . [people], was the mission goal of the Holy Spirit.[211]

Thus, in part, McClendon seeks to establish: (1) that the Holy Spirit determines the mission of the church; and, (2) that the mission the Holy Spirit has for the church is to work towards forming one people that is redeemed and reconciled to God. Furthermore, McClendon argues that the mission that the Holy Spirit has for the church is the exact same (com)mission that Christ has for the church: "the missionary task that the risen Lord entrusted to his own followers (Matt. 28:18-20, par.) . . . [is the] ongoing task . . . [of] discipling . . . all nations, that is, all peoples, all cultures, all human life."[212]

Not only does the Holy Spirit provide the church with its mission, but, according to McClendon, the Spirit also guides the church in carrying out this mission. McClendon introduces the notion of this particular type of guidance by turning to the New Testament

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[211]Doctrine, 418.

[212]Doctrine, 424. Moreover, McClendon maintains that with "the Great Commission, . . . [Jesus] teaches a missionary existence for the disciples based not on 'superiority' but on obedience," as set forth in Doctrine, 423.

image of "a door."[213] Informed by Eduard Schweizer's interpretation of Acts 16:9 as an occasion where "'Paul is prevented by the Spirit from doing missionary work where he really wanted to,'"[214] McClendon argues that this is an instance of the Spirit guiding the church in carrying out its mission – in this case by "closing" a door in a particular direction Paul himself wanted to go, so that Paul would take a different direction, a direction that the Spirit wanted him to take. In this manner, McClendon suggests that the Spirit guides the church (past and present) in carrying out its mission – not only by "closing" some doors and "opening" others but also by indicating that the "open door" may be different in different contexts.[215] Thus, in contemporary Latin America, the "open door" might include a Spirit-led sensitivity to political and economic liberation, while in contemporary North America, the "open door" might involve a Spirit-led sensitivity to "spiritual barrenness."[216] However, in none of the regions of the world, according to McClendon, "are disciples themselves required to make a way for the gospel to enter. Instead, their task in each is to find and faithfully to follow the way of the providential God, in obedience to Christ the commander, in the strength of the indwelling Spirit."[217]

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[213]Doctrine, 428.

[214]Eduard Schweizer, The Holy Spirit (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1980), 76; quoted in Doctrine, 428.

[215]Doctrine, 428-29.

[216]Doctrine, 429.

[217]Doctrine, 430.

Yet, when it comes to more fully comprehending "the Spirit's exact will (God's will) for present kingdom tasks,"[218] including the church's mission to form one people that is redeemed and reconciled to God, looking to the New Testament image of "a door" alone is not sufficient; instead, what is required, according to McClendon, is to look more closely at the work of the Spirit at Pentecost. At Pentecost, he argues, "the mighty force present in Jesus and his Way is released to waiting disciples and thereby to nations waiting unawares. At Pentecost, via the Spirit, the historic involvement of the Risen One with the wide world begins."[219] And, in view of the "this is that" and "then is now" baptist hermeneutical principle, as it was for the early disciples, so it is "for disciples today: Pentecost is here, waiting to be claimed as they claimed it."[220] McClendon means not that contemporary disciples should expect tongues as of fire to alight upon them anew but that they should expect "God's own Spirit . . . [to still] occupy, master, . . . [and] equip each resurrection witness for her or his assigned task of witness to Messiah Jesus as each witness finds his or her proper place in God's long history of salvation."[221]

In addition, McClendon holds that from the New Testament account of Pentecost and from related accounts, one can glean certain themes about the nature of the Holy Spirit. First, these accounts show, he argues, that "the Spirit *is missionary*."[222] In other

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[218]Doctrine, 431.

[219]Doctrine, 431.

[220]Doctrine, 432.

[221]Doctrine, 432.

[222]Doctrine, 432.

words, "that mission toward ecstasy – the multiplicity of earth's peoples not conformed to another, but at one with one another in the oneness of God – is shown at Pentecost to express the character of God's Holy Spirit."[223] This leads McClendon to deduce that "the Spirit is a *missionary*, as Jesus is a missionary, as Torah's *Adonai* is a missionary God."[224] Second, he avers that these New Testament passages reveal that "the Spirit accepts . . . [disciples as] *partners*."[225] That is, he holds that the Spirit takes on Christ's followers as co-workers, guiding and empowering them to complete God's kingdom tasks.[226] Third, McClendon argues that the biblical narrative shows that the Spirit guides the "*gathered* disciples."[227] Here, while acknowledging that the activities of God are in no manner "confined to gathered congregations,"[228] he maintains that it is nevertheless the case that "when the world mission of Jesus . . . [was] launched, the disciples' community, . . . [both past and present, was] chosen as ship's company to the Spirit, and Christian community life (thus empowered) . . . [began to] take on a crucial role in

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[223]Doctrine, 433.

[224]Doctrine, 433.

[225]Doctrine, 433.

[226]Doctrine, 433.

[227]Doctrine, 433.

[228]Doctrine, 433.

history."[229] Thus, "the gathered community, for all its frailty and fallibility, . . . [has] become the Spirit's agency for the world mission of the gospel."[230]

With this fuller understanding of the nature of the Spirit, McClendon then seeks to more adequately uncover the goal of the Spirit's mission for the church (that is, to more sufficiently uncover the goal of forming one people that is redeemed and reconciled to God). In order to do so, he avers, one must begin by endeavoring to address the matter of God's basic purpose. Here, McClendon agrees with Karl Barth that "'[the] . . . primal and basic purpose of . . . [a God who in his love is sovereign] is to impart and reveal Himself – and with Himself His glory.'"[231] McClendon acknowledges that, on the surface, an essential purpose of showing one's own glory would seem to "ill become a God of love;"[232] however, he holds that, "in a strict biblical sense 'God's glory' means God's character of divinity *emanating to the creature*, so that human beings, as they are 'glorified' (cf. Rom. 8:30), come to share God's own character; *they become godlike*."[233] Therefore, McClendon suggests that God's purpose in revealing God's glory is not just self-serving but also a gift God gives to God's human creatures so that they can become

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[229]Doctrine, 433.

[230]Doctrine, 433.

[231]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart, vol. 2, The Doctrine of Creation, part 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 140. quoted in Doctrine, 440.

[232]Doctrine, 440.

[233]Doctrine, 440.

like God. In addition, drawing on the work of Jonathan Edwards,[234] McClendon argues that this ultimate plan of God's – to impart God's self and God's glory – is "one that begins as God undertakes to give himself away and that reaches its goal *as human selves answer God's gift with consenting, self-giving love toward one another and supremely toward God's own holy being*."[235] In other words, McClendon further builds his argument here to claim that God's purpose in showing God's self and God's glory involves God's glory emanating to people so that they can become godlike and freely respond to the gift of God's glory – by loving God and loving others. Accordingly, it follows, for McClendon, that the goal of the Spirit's mission for the church would seem to be for followers of Christ to help others experience "the gift of the Spirit whose intimate presence grants ecstasy in God and fellowship with others."[236] What remains for him is to explore whether or not the narrative of Scripture confirms this hypothesis.

McClendon conducts this exploration by turning, in part, to Paul's use of the term "*koinōnia*" in 2 Corinthians. Maintaining that "the strong sense of *koinōnia* throughout the New Testament is participation *with* someone *in* some common engagement,"[237]

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[234]Here McClendon refers to both of the following works: Jonathan Edwards, The End for Which God Created the World, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8, Ethical Writings (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989); and, Jonathan Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8, Ethical Writings (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), as revealed in Doctrine, 440.

[235]Doctrine, 441, emphasis mine.

[236]Doctrine, 441.

[237]Doctrine, 443.

McClendon argues that Paul's employment of *koinōnia* in the phrase, "'the fellowship [*koinōnia*] of the Holy Spirit' (as presented, e.g., in 2 Cor. 13:14) . . . [points to] participation *in* nearness to God *with* others in whom the same Spirit works."[238] Along these lines, McClendon argues that Paul, with his use of the concept of "*koinōnia:*"

> Neatly designates the characteristic work of the Spirit, drawing believers Godward (i.e., Christward) and in the same act drawing them into fellowship or congress with one another. And since that work, that achievement, is the goal of the entire divine mission – the goal of creation, of the cross, of the consummation – the Spirit's work, . . . seen by eyes focused on mission, expresses Divinity's own ultimacy, God's inner nature, laid open to reverent and awe-struck human gaze.[239]

Thus, McClendon holds that Paul provides confirmation that the goal of the Spirit's mission for the church is for Christ's followers to work towards all people having unity or "intimacy with God and with one another in God."[240]

Furthermore, in a final step in the development of his doctrines of the Spirit and of the church's mission, McClendon seeks to investigate what sort of "unity" or "intimacy" this is that the Spirit works to accomplish both between humans and God and among fellow humans. In order to get to the core meaning of this particular type of unity, McClendon relies upon the thought of "Russian philosopher Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov."[241] According to McClendon, Solovyov, concerned by the manner in which

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[238]Doctrine, 443.

[239]Doctrine, 443.

[240]Doctrine, 441.

[241]Doctrine, 447. Throughout this discussion of unity, McClendon refers to Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, "Beauty, Sexuality, and Love," in Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought, ed. Alexander Schmemann (New

unrestrained human egoism – since it resists cooperation with others – can be a hindrance to gaining knowledge, maintains that only a certain kind of love can genuinely "force egoism to sacrifice itself to the beloved other, leading (at least in this case) to an unforced and real unity."[242] And, Solovyov holds that of all the various kinds of human love, including "mystical love, parental love, . . . [and] sympathetic fellowship,"[243] "only sexual love (*erōs*) . . . [is capable of forcing egoism to sacrifice itself in this way]."[244] Moreover, according to McClendon, for Solovyov:

> The beloved 'other' that can liberate our individuality from the blinders of egoism must correspond to the whole of our individuality: the other must be as real, as concrete, and as objective as we ourselves are, and at the same time *must differ from us in every way* so as to be really 'other.' Now this just describes the characteristic object of sexual love; sexual union strives for a total fusion of self with the alternate other.[245]

A complication emerges, though, McClendon avers, with this line of thought, since, in practice, the ecstatic aspect of sexual love is often short-lived, and this complication would seem to suggest "that the erotic dream of total self-giving is only illusory."[246]

Yet, McClendon suggests that Solovyov sees hope that this dream is not illusory because of "the long human evolutionary experience: Once art, science, civil society, the

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York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 73-134, as set forth in Doctrine, 447.

[242]Doctrine, 447, with a reference to Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, "Beauty, Sexuality, and Love," in Ultimate Questions, 108.

[243]Doctrine, 447.

[244]Doctrine, 447.

[245]Doctrine, 447-48.

[246]Doctrine, 448.

control of natures' forces seemed each to be . . . only farfetched dreams, but these have one-by-one been realized;"[247] therefore, as humans continue to advance, the potential for sustained total self-giving might become more of a realistic aspiration. But here, in this latter case, according to McClendon, Solovyov argues that this "task . . . [involves] the realization of the truly human and . . . [that] this . . . will be the realization of the image of God (Gen. 1:27) in a union of pure love . . . in the material world."[248] Along these lines, McClendon concurs with Solovyov's view that the ecstatic aspect of sexual love can become more enduring, even on this side of the eschaton, as God enables humans to evolve more completely into the image of God. Or, more specifically, transitioning from Solovyov's terminology to his own, McClendon argues that:

> In short, conjugal or sexual love cannot realize what it fleetingly glimpses short of the transformation that is . . . the end of the Spirit's mission. Just as one is married to a spouse and (ideally) finds in her or him an 'other' who is 'all,' and for whom sacrifice is *altogether appropriate*, every social organism must be for its members an 'other' and an 'all' that, as Christians know, can be supported only by sacrifice, by taking up a cross.[249]

Thus, McClendon suggests that the unity (or intimacy) the Spirit seeks to accomplish – not only between all humans and God but also among all fellow humans – is a mutual posture of sacrificial self-giving that seems not strained but altogether natural.

In addition, according to McClendon, the term "Solovyov coins . . . for this relation . . . [of sacrificial self-giving] between each and all . . . is 'syzygic' – from Greek

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[247]Doctrine, 448.

[248]Doctrine, 448.

[249]Doctrine, 448-49, emphasis mine.

syzygia, sexual congress, conjunction,"[250] and, for Solovyov, "'syzygy' speaks of full unity achieved without the cancellation of the individual. No participant is absorbed . . . into the whole, yet none flourishes in isolation, . . . but each interacts in love."[251] Therefore, McClendon argues that "what Solovyov intends by 'universal syzygy' is in fact . . . [nothing else] than the unity of the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 3:1-13)."[252] Moreover, McClendon stresses that such unity cannot be obtained by human effort alone (or even mostly); to the contrary, he argues that "the mission of the Spirit achieves syzygic unity precisely by confronting each living human being with the reality of life in the risen Christ, displaying the way of his cross, accepting the uniqueness of each, and inviting from each a response that can be made only by the power of the Spirit of love."[253]

In constructing his doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the church's mission, McClendon provides additional insight into his doctrine of God. For example, he identifies the Holy Spirit as "God the Spirit . . . [or as] God's Holy Spirit,"[254] thus suggesting the view that, at least to some degree, what can be said of the Spirit can be said of God. Accordingly, he further implies that the Spirit, and therefore God, guides the church (and works with disciples of Christ as partners) in carrying out the church's

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[250]Doctrine, 449.

[251]Doctrine, 449.

[252]Doctrine, 449.

[253]Doctrine, 449.

[254]Doctrine, 418.

mission to help others experience the gift of the Spirit – whose intimate presence grants a syzygic unity (of sacrificial self-giving) with God and with one another.

The Biblical Narrative and God's Trinitarian Identity

In addition to setting forth his doctrine of the atonement, his two-narrative Christology, and his doctrine of the Holy Spirit (considered together with his doctrine of the church's mission), McClendon also develops a doctrine of God. However, his chief purpose (within this particular aspect of his larger project of setting forth Christian doctrine) is not to offer a comprehensive doctrine of God but, more modestly, "to show the dependence of the Christian doctrine of God upon the narrative we call gospel."[255] That is, he intends to demonstrate that God's identity is known through the biblical narrative. Along these lines, begins his construction of a doctrine of God by examining the manner in which the Bible identifies God, and he does so according to two different arrangements – first according to three historic moments and, then, according to trinitarian categories. Next, he endeavors to demonstrate how, throughout the history of the Christian tradition, the efforts of many, including even well-intentioned Christian thinkers, have often caused these biblical identifications of God to become displaced. Finally, in response to such displacement, he sets forth his understanding of "a narrative-based trinitarianism."[256]

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[255]Doctrine, 281.

[256]Doctrine, 320.

Three spheres of force. McClendon first considers the way in which Scripture identifies God by means of the arrangement of "three historic moments or spheres of force, the *organic,* the *corporate*, and the *anastatic*."[257] Starting with the last of these spheres, the anastatic moment, he argues that the biblical narrative portrays God as "**a pioneer, a trailblazer of destiny**."[258] He bases this identification of God on his interpretation of such passages as Exodus 3:14. In this passage, he maintains that since "the Hebrew verb . . . [upon which the divine name (in this instance) has been based] is imperfect and causative,"[259] the phrase often rendered as "I am that I am" should actually be rendered as: "'*I will be what I will be*,' . . . [or] more freely, . . . [paraphrasing as:] '*I will always be ahead of you. Find Me as you follow the journey*.'"[260] Thus, for McClendon, the Bible portrays God as an initiating and guiding "eschatological presence."[261] Part of what this entails, McClendon further argues, is that God, rather than sin, sets the agenda for transformation throughout the history of the world. In fact, he holds that this is so much the case that, "in a sinless world, God would still be the God of

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[257]Doctrine, 285. He indicates that he follows this arrangement in order "to condense the rich . . . [biblical] data . . . [about God] without mutilating it," as shown in Doctrine, 285. Moreover, McClendon first develops these three spheres in Ethics, 62-67. There he argues that the organic, corporate, and anastatic have to do, respectively, with: "part of the natural order; . . . part of a social world; . . . and . . . part of an *eschatological* realm; . . . [or, to restate, they have to do, respectively, with:] the *body,* the *social,* and the *resurrection,*" as set forth in Ethics, 66.

[258]Doctrine, 285.

[259]Doctrine, 285.

[260]Doctrine, 285, emphases mine.

[261]Doctrine, 285.

change, still be the God of adventure, and transformation and adventure would be God's typical gifts still."[262]

Moving to the second sphere of force, the corporate (or social) moment, McClendon maintains that Scripture shows God to be "a covenanting God, one who promises *ongoing companionship* and who keeps every promise . . . [to God's people]."[263] Here, for example, McClendon has in view the way in which some biblical translations "render . . . [the Hebrew word] *chesed* . . . [as] 'unfailing love,' as in Psalm 63:3."[264] In other words, he holds that, with this sphere, the Bible portrays God not as one who whimsically "comes and goes" in God's dealings with God's people but as one who stays with them "as a resident missionary."[265]

Then, with the third sphere of force, the organic moment, McClendon avers that the biblical narrative presents God as Creator – not just as the one who began the universe but also as the one who remains "creatively *present*."[266] McClendon holds that particularly this latter type of on-going present creativity is implicit, for instance, in the Gospel of John's accounts of Jesus' "wine miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11) . . . [and of his]

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[262]Doctrine, 286.

[263]Doctrine, 286, emphasis mine.

[264]Doctrine, 286.

[265]Doctrine, 286.

[266]Doctrine, 287.

raising of Lazarus (11:1-45)."[267] These events and others combine to show that "in early Christian belief, God is 'ruler of all nature.'"[268]

Trinitarian categories. After exploring the manner in which the biblical narrative identifies God as "God the Adventurer, God the Companion, and God the Powerfully Present One,"[269] by means of the anastatic, corporate, and organic spheres of force (which, in turn, appear to loosely share affinities with, respectively, with his doctrines of eschatology, salvation, and creation), McClendon continues his construction of a doctrine of God by investigating the way in which Scripture identifies God by means of a second arrangement – trinitarian categories.

Beginning with "God in Christ,"[270] McClendon focuses primarily on the use of the term "logos" in the Prologue of John's Gospel. He holds that John identifies "Jesus, that flesh-and-blood human being . . . [as] the pre-existent *logos* of God;"[271] however, McClendon suggests that "logos," in fidelity to the Septuagint's "translation of Hebrew *dabar*," . . . [should here be] associated . . . with the *speaking, the word of God* in Hebrew Scripture."[272] By defining "logos" as "the speaking of God," McClendon suggests that

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[267]Doctrine, 287.

[268]Doctrine, 287.

[269]Doctrine, 290.

[270]Doctrine, 288.

[271]Doctrine, 288.

[272]Doctrine, 289.

the "logos," while pre-existent, was something other than a personal pre-existing being. However, this notion of a non-personal pre-existent logos as "the speaking of God" coheres well with several of McClendon's other Christological perspectives [such as: his understanding of the non-divinity-imparting birth of Jesus; his notion of Jesus' post-birth self-emptying to follow God's way of service; his concept of Jesus' gradual (and eventually full) achievement of the image of God; and, his idea of God's resurrection re-identification of Jesus with God's own life]. Moreover, with this understanding of "logos," McClendon implies that he can still make the fairly high Christological claim that "Jesus . . . is the word at human scale. This refers not to the lesser sign of the wonderful birth of Jesus . . . but to the sign of signs, the life, death, resurrection of . . . the unique only God."[273]

Turning next to the trinitarian category of "God as Holy Spirit,"[274] McClendon argues that the New Testament never fully presents God's Spirit as the "later Christian writings . . . [would, as] a 'distinct divine person;' . . . [however,] what the New Testament does do . . . is to broaden and deepen the biblical idea of *God* so that God's true role as Trailblazer and Co-conspirator and Divine *Dynamis* is conveyed."[275] Furthermore, McClendon suggests that the identification of God's Spirit in this manner – as God's power – is evident (though in different ways) both with regard to the Spirit's relationship with Jesus and in terms of the Spirit's relationship with the church. For

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[273]Doctrine, 289.

[274]Doctrine, 290.

[275]Doctrine, 291.

instance, with the first of these relationships, McClendon maintains that "the Gospel writers . . . present God's Spirit . . . as the *dynamic divine aid* to Jesus during his earthly ministry."[276] In addition, with the second of these relationships (between the Spirit and the church), he holds that, in some sense, according to the New Testament authors, "God's Spirit had become the Spirit of Jesus Christ."[277] To illustrate (and, by way of illustration, to clarify) the way in which the New Testament shows this, McClendon points to the account of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7, and he maintains that "Stephen sees the glory . . . of God and Jesus seated in the place of authority. Yet he does not see *the Spirit, for the Spirit, intimate enabler, was within him,* allowing Stephen to see the vision of Jesus in his place and to die a faithful death."[278] Therefore, McClendon suggests that the notion of "God's Spirit becoming the Spirit of Jesus Christ" means that, with the birth of the church, one of the primary purposes of the Spirit became to empower disciples to connect with the risen Christ.

Finally, with the trinitarian category of "God as Father,"[279] McClendon holds that, like other ancient near eastern nations:

> The Hebrews . . . knew God as the originating father of their peoplehood, but there were two significant differences: (1) JHWH was an *adoptive* father. There

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[276]Doctrine, 291, emphasis mine.

[277]Doctrine, 291.

[278]Doctrine, 291.

[279]Doctrine, 290.

> was no hint here of sexual procreation. And (2) this adoption was a liberation; precisely, it was redemption from Egyptian bondage.[280]

Furthermore, McClendon argues that "'Father' was Jesus' chosen word for God . . . [and that] Jesus appropriated both . . . [of] these elements of the . . . [early Hebrew understandings of God as Father]."[281] That is, according to McClendon, "Jesus' Father was the familiar divine *friend* awaiting the cry of the human heart;"[282] and, "Jesus' Father was the *liberator* from bondage, . . . [which] included religious bondage, political bondage, social and cultural bondage, and the bondage of one's own sin."[283]

The displacement of biblical identifications of God. In both of the above ways, therefore, by means of the three spheres of force and in view of trinitarian categories, McClendon endeavors to show how, in part, the Bible identifies God; yet, he argues that throughout the history of the church these scriptural identifications of God have often become displaced. For instance, he holds that even with "the second and later centuries, . . . the 'Father' Jesus knew as intimate and as liberator was assimilated in Christian speech to father Zeus, the maintenance God of things-as-they-are."[284] Moreover, he

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[280]Doctrine, 292.

[281]Doctrine, 292.

[282]Doctrine, 292-93. It is perhaps worth noting that even though McClendon denies an adoptionistic Christology – at least in its more whimsical variations – he here appears to come quite close to creating theological space for JHWH, in some (softer, less capricious?) sense, to have been an adoptive father to Jesus of Nazareth.

[283]Doctrine, 292.

[284]Doctrine, 293.

maintains that this trend continued and grew through the centuries, so that, by the seventeenth century, even "Christians of good intent, . . . [such as Leonardus] Lessius and . . . [Marin] Mersenne,"[285] in their particular case because they "treated . . . [atheism] as only a philosophical issue rather than a religious one,"[286] "pushed the *narrative* of God's identity into second place – where it was lost to sight."[287]

A narrative-based trinitarianism. In response to this increasing displacement of the biblical identifications of God, McClendon argues that "the biblical heritage must reject a theism that discards the story of God,"[288] and as a contribution towards maintaining this story, McClendon sets forth (or, at least, introduces) "a narrative-based trinitarianism."[289] He begins by arguing that the biblical story of God, of which he offers a brief summary,[290] "drives us . . . to a trinitarian expression of the doctrine . . . [of

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[285]Doctrine, 310.

[286]Doctrine, 309. McClendon here refers to Nicholas Lash, "When Did the Theologians Lose Interest in Theology?," in Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 134-36. In addition, as part of McClendon's analysis of Lessius and Mersenne, he points to Michael J. Buckley, At the Origins of Modern Atheism (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987), 33, 65-66, et passim.

[287]Doctrine, 310.

[288]Doctrine, 310.

[289]Doctrine, 320.

[290]Doctrine, 319.

God].”[291] He recognizes, however, that there are various “objections to trinitarianism.”[292] And, as he addresses what he considers to be three significant such objections, he further begins to unfold how a narrative-based trinitarianism might appear.

The first objection he considers is that trinitarianism minimizes the “wholeness [of God,] . . . implying tritheism.”[293] McClendon concedes that “there are indeed forms of the doctrine of the Trinity that are vulnerable to . . . [this] failing.”[294] However, those trinitarian doctrines that insufficiently emphasize the wholeness of God are in direct opposition, he argues:

> To the . . . [biblical] story that the . . . [trinitarian] doctrine is set to conserve, a story in which one God, over against all earth’s gods, is Israel’s Redeemer: ‘Hear, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord our one God’ (Deut. 6:4). That oneness is not fractured but *deepened* in the chapters of the story that reaches its climax at Calvary and opens to all peoples at Pentecost.[295]

Thus, he suggests that when the development of a trinitarian doctrine gives appropriate attention to the scriptural narrative, not just an understanding of God’s “threeness” but a fuller, richer comprehension of God’s “oneness” should come forth as well.

The second objection is that trinitarianism “forces the free, dynamic language of Scripture into a mold, asking of the Bible what it will not yield, namely, the doctrine of

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[291]Doctrine, 319.

[292]Doctrine, 319.

[293]Doctrine, 319.

[294]Doctrine, 320. He lists, as an example of a work that displays such vulnerability: Leonard Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Trinity (Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, England: James Nisbet and Company, 1943).

[295]Doctrine, 320.

later centuries."[296] To this objection, McClendon replies that it should be immediately acknowledged "that the trinitarian doctrine as such does not appear in Scripture. Rather, 'Trinity' was invented in order to encode and protect what does appear in Scripture, the one God who is truly Israel's Father, truly eternal Word, truly life-giving Spirit."[297] In addition, McClendon does not see a difficulty with such a trinitarian "encoding of the biblical narrative of God, . . . provided . . . [that] it is recognized as just that – an encoding meant to return us to its . . . [scriptural] source."[298]

The third objection he considers is that "trinitarianism with its names Father, Son, Holy Spirit provides gods of gender rather than the God beyond gender, thus relegating itself to the past."[299] In part of his reply, McClendon holds that those who make such objections "would be correct to insist that alongside the traditional terms others may be inserted: 'Parent' as well as Father; 'Child' as well as Son."[300] That is, he allows that there are legitimate social reasons to "protest the classic 'images' of God the Father and the Son as gender-biased."[301] However, with the remainder of his reply to this objection, he avers that "in fidelity to Scripture (where *pater* and *huios* are repeatedly part of the

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[296]Doctrine, 319-20.

[297]Doctrine, 320.

[298]Doctrine, 321.

[299]Doctrine, 320.

[300]Doctrine, 321.

[301]Doctrine, 321. Here, McClendon makes reference to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

New Testament texts) these others . . . [i.e., other terms such as 'Parent' or 'Child'] must appear alongside, not instead of, the classic terms, and in honest acknowledgment that the proposed substitutes have their own defects."[302]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavored to explore both McClendon's understanding of the doctrine of God and the extent to which this doctrine builds upon his theological method. As part of his doctrine of God, he first endeavors to show how, according to the narrative of Scripture, God's activity within creation occurs through the rule of God (or the kingdom of God) – which is a present rule but, at the same time, a rule that spans from the distant past to the far future. In view of this broad span, McClendon posits that the doctrines of creation, salvation, and eschatology may be perceived as sister doctrines under the mother doctrine of the rule of God.

With his doctrine of eschatology, following those aspects of his theological method that call for constructing doctrine through conviction sets (or picture sets) and for utilizing the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle, McClendon turns to the New Testament "end-pictures" of the last judgment and of Jesus Christ returning, and he argues that the Jesus Christ who will be king at the last judgment is the same Jesus Christ who lived in first century Nazareth and the same Jesus Christ who reigns in the present. Thus, it follows, for McClendon, both that Christ is the one on whom history centers and – since Christ is the resurrected Lamb who was slain – that Christ intends to

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[302]Doctrine, 321.

form a new people (his kingdom) by means of his own sacrificial love and the sacrificial love of his disciples. Accordingly, McClendon's doctrine of last things informs his doctrine of Christ; specifically, it presents Christ as one who rules not by force but by self-sacrifice and as one who expects his disciples to follow this example.

Next, with his doctrine of salvation, McClendon holds that because Jesus of Nazareth, as fully human, was completely faithful to God this shows that sin is not a necessary feature of humanity and that people, therefore, have real hope of being made new in Christ – in at least three specific ways: being made new in terms of restoring right relations with others and especially with God (which McClendon identifies as a Protestant emphasis); being made new with regard to becoming holy (a Catholic stress); and, being made new in terms of turning from "humanity's way" to "God's way" (a baptist emphasis). In addition, McClendon maintains that these three ways of being made new in Christ – justification, sanctification, and "the way" – represent not an *ordo salutis* but different aspects of the one process of salvation, a process that is unique for each person but that typically involves the following four stages (in connection with four related church practices): preparation (in connection with the practice of instruction); conversion (baptism); following (the Lord's supper); and, soaring (communal discernment). Thus, McClendon's doctrine of salvation further illuminates, in particular, not only his conception of Jesus, as one who, as fully human, was completely faithful to God, but also his understanding of God, as one who seeks to establish right relations with people and who enables the salvation of humans to occur.

Then, with his doctrine of creation, again in keeping with his theological method of endeavoring to develop doctrine through reliance upon conviction (or picture) sets, McClendon examines the biblical pictures: of creation involving ongoing conflict between God and other powers; and, of creation taking a toll upon the artisan. This leads McClendon to pose the question: Does God suffer in God's creative actions? In formulating a response, he considers three resources – contemporary science; Romans 8; and, an examination of the relationship between "chaos" and God. He avers: (1) that contemporary science describes the elements of nature as being not predetermined and contained but interactive; (2) that, according to Paul in Romans 8, not only is suffering part of creation itself, but suffering is also the way to a glorious future for creation and believers – and God cooperates with believers in the process of moving from suffering to glory; and, (3) that "chaos" in Scripture is symbolic of God's creative struggle to shape creation into a work of divine art. Furthermore, McClendon's assessment of these three resources leads him to conclude: that, since God relationally interacts with the world in God's creative activity, not only the world but also God changes; and, that God suffers throughout these changes, both "artistically," as God seeks to mold recalcitrant human beings, and in terms of God surrendering some of God's own independence, as God sacrificially releases some of God's existence to dependent creatures.

In addition to attempting to demonstrate how the divine activity within creation occurs through the rule of God, McClendon, secondly, endeavors to set forth the identity of God as one who sacrificially gives of God's self. Towards this end, McClendon develops several doctrines that inform this identity either directly or indirectly, including

doctrines of: the atonement; the person of Christ; the Holy Spirit and the church's mission; and, God's trinitarian identity.

With his doctrine of the atonement, McClendon begins by considering three major strands of atonement theory that have been set forth within the Christian tradition, strands which he terms the evilward, the Godward, and the manward. Yet, he argues that each strand contains significant flaws. For instance, the evilward (ransom or victory) strand interprets the cross as Christ's defeat of the devil but does so in a way that allows for a militaristic type of Christianity. Similarly, the Godward (satisfaction or penal) strand understands the death of Christ as an effort to satisfy God's honor or justice but does so in a manner that permits the will of God and the will of Jesus to be at odds with one another. Also, the manward (moral influence or vicarious sacrifice) strand interprets Christ's work as an example of how to show sympathetic love for others but does so in a way that portrays Christ's death as incidental. With these three strands (and their limitations) in view, McClendon moves to biblical pictures, such as the suffering servant, that the New Testament writers use to establish metaphors, like substitution, to render the meaning of the cross. However, he avers that none of these scriptural metaphors align well with the above three strands of the Christian tradition. Therefore, he turns to the story of the gospel itself, and he maintains that this narrative demonstrates that the main reason for the cross (verified by the resurrection) was to more fully establish God's rule (or kingdom) through non-violent means. Then, he restates his understanding of the purpose of the cross through the three major strands of atonement theory, treating them in this case as *midrashim* (or as narrative commentaries). Thus, with the evilward strand, he

argues that Jesus' death still defeats the devil but in a way that lends itself to a non-violent rather than to a militaristic Christianity; with the Godward strand, the cross is no longer at odds with – but is exactly what God would do; and, with the manward strand, Jesus' full faithfulness in his death is not incidental to but that which enables the love that Christ's disciples show to others. In addition, McClendon's doctrine of the atonement further illuminates his conception of God, as through his development of this doctrine he not only reiterates that God is a God who endeavors to establish God's rule, but he also stresses that Jesus of Nazareth and God were of the same purpose in suffering self-sacrificially for others.

Next, with the development of his doctrine of the person of Christ, McClendon examines three major Christological models that have been developed within the Christian tradition (the Logos model, the two-natures model, and the historical model); however, finding shortcomings with each of these models (either because they do not adequately allow for the full divinity of Christ or because they are vague regarding from whom Jesus acquired his humanity), he sets forth his own "two-narrative Christology," first by considering the Jesus story proper and then by turning to the entire biblical narrative. With the Jesus story proper, he begins by arguing that the "self-emptying" described in Philippians 2 refers to a certain emptying of Jesus' soul that occurred, not before, but after Jesus was born. Thus, he maintains that this "self-emptying" points to Jesus' ongoing persistence in rejecting the pursuit of worldly fame in favor of the pursuit of identifying with those on the margins of society, a choice that eventually led to his death. In taking this latter path, McClendon further avers, Jesus was completely faithful,

during his life and death, in following God's way of the servant – thereby exhibiting a degree of faithfulness not attained by any other human being. And, due to this complete faithfulness (which, according to McClendon's interpretation of Scripture, was not accidental but intended by God from before the beginning of the world), in the act of Jesus' resurrection, God re-identified Jesus with God's own life. Then, in turning from the Jesus story proper to the entire biblical narrative, McClendon further develops his two-narrative Christology by arguing that the scriptural story is not one story but two; it is simultaneously both the story of God reaching down to humans and the story of people reaching up to God. Throughout most of the biblical narrative these two stories fail to completely meet each other, but with Jesus of Nazareth they fully converge, bringing together God and humans in the person of Jesus Christ. In addition, McClendon holds that because of the event of Pentecost, this same Christ is present to his disciples today – in a firsthand, reciprocal fashion – through the church practices of worship, (kingdom) work, witness, and (the reading of) the word of Scripture. Thus, McClendon's Christology provides a more complete understanding of his notion of God. For example, his Christology conveys that, through Jesus, God accomplished God's own intention to completely meet the humanity that had been seeking to fully encounter God. Furthermore, his Christology expresses the view that because Jesus was re-identified with God's own life, it follows that, in Christ, through the Spirit, God endeavors to be present with people today in a firsthand, reciprocal manner.

Then, with his interwoven construction of doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the church's mission, McClendon argues that the Holy Spirit, or "God the Spirit,"[303] determines the mission of the church, where one conceives of the church as the entire Christian community as it gathers in local assemblies. This mission is for the church to work towards forming one people (from among all peoples) that is redeemed and reconciled to God. The Spirit guides the church in carrying out this mission both by "opening" and "closing" various doors of opportunity that may or may not coincide with human intent and (in view of the hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now") by continuing to make available to Christ's disciples today the power of Pentecost. In addition, relying upon the thought of both Karl Barth and Jonathan Edwards, McClendon considers the Spirit's mission for the church from the vantage point of God's basic purpose, which he maintains is to manifest God's glory – a glory that emanates to people, helping them to become godlike, as they freely respond to the gift of God's glory by loving God and loving others. From this vantage point, it follows that the Spirit's mission for the church, as McClendon holds Paul corroborates through his use of *koinōnia* in 2 Corinthians, is for Christ's disciples to help others experience the gift of the Spirit, so that they can also have a unity with God and with one another in God. Moreover, in an effort to unfold the nature of this unity, McClendon turns to the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov and avers that, similar to the unity accomplished in sexual love, the unity disciples can have with God and with one another in God may be described as "syzygy" – a full unity, without cancellation of the individual, accomplished

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[303]Doctrine, 418.

through sacrificial self-giving and made possible only by the power of the Spirit. Therefore, McClendon's doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the church's mission also allow for a more full comprehension of his doctrine of God. Especially as he identifies the Holy Spirit as "God's Holy Spirit,"[304] he conveys that, at least to some degree, what can be said of the Spirit can be said of God.

Furthermore, with his treatment of how God's identity can be known through the narrative of Scripture, McClendon begins by considering the way in which the Bible describes God according to two separate arrangements: three spheres of force (anastatic, corporate, and organic) and trinitarian categories. First, with the three spheres of force, McClendon maintains that Scripture shows God as: (1) the God of forward-looking change (with the anastatic sphere), in a sense so strong that, even in a world without sin, God would still be the adventurous God of transformation; (2) the God of constant companionship (with the corporate sphere), who remains alongside of us; and, (3) the God of an ongoing, creative, powerful presence (with the organic sphere). Second, he examines the manner in which the Bible portrays God by means of the trinitarian categories, "God in Christ," "God as Holy Spirit," and "God as Father." With "God in Christ," McClendon argues that "logos" in the Prologue of John's Gospel should be understood – not as a pre-existent, personal "Christ" but – as a pre-existent, non-personal "speaking of God," an interpretation that aligns well with several of his other views, including the perspective that Scripture does not indicate that divinity was imparted to Jesus at his birth. Next, with "God as Holy Spirit," he holds that the New Testament sets

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[304]Doctrine, 418.

forth the Spirit – not as a separate divine person – but as God's dynamic power, a power that assisted Jesus of Nazareth during his time on earth and a power that enables disciples (past and present) to connect with the risen Christ. Then, with "God as Father," he avers that the Bible portrays Yahweh as a father who adopts (or befriends) and liberates his people – perfectly and fully so, he suggests, as "Father" to Jesus of Nazareth. This interpretation of "God as Father," therefore, would appear to support the view that McClendon constructs a Christology that contains at least an element of adoptionism – although, perhaps, of an eternally intentional (and not a capricious) variety. In addition, McClendon suggests that, when the Christian tradition has gotten away from scriptural identifications of God, erroneous doctrines about God's identity have emerged – doctrines that (in his view) convey such flawed perspectives as: Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of a pre-existent, personal Christ; the Holy Spirit as a separate divine person within a Trinity of three distinct persons; and, God the Father as a biological Father. Accordingly, to avoid what he regards as misunderstandings, McClendon calls for a "narrative-based trinitarianism,"[305] by which he means a trinitarian expression of the doctrine of God that is based upon the narrative of the Bible. A narrative-based trinitarianism, he argues, would allow for, among other benefits, an emphasis on the wholeness of God – who at the same time is a God of adventurous transformation, constant companionship, and powerful presence.

Therefore, through his construction of several doctrines, all of which contribute to an overarching doctrine of God, McClendon shows that he relies upon his theological

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[305]Doctrine, 320.

method, a method that I have sometimes referred to as convictional perspectivism. Many examples of the manner in which he builds upon this method have been demonstrated above; however, I will summarize here some of the main components. McClendon endeavors, for instance, to develop several of his doctrines by setting forth communal (or narrative?) conviction sets (or picture sets) that have primarily been based upon the narrative of Scripture (either directly or indirectly), all from the perspective of a baptist community. This endeavor is evident with his initial levels of doctrinal development, as, for example, in order to begin to construct his doctrine of eschatology, he looks to New Testament "end-pictures" of the last judgement and of Jesus Christ returning. Moreover, this endeavor is apparent with his more final levels of doctrinal development, as, for instance, in order to consolidate the construction of his narrative Christological model, he assembles a conviction set that includes all of the following conviction-based sub-doctrines (each of which, he would argue, has been biblically informed): the non-divinity imparting birth of Jesus; Jesus' post-birth self-emptying to follow God's way of service; Jesus' gradual (and eventually full) achievement of the image of God; and, God's resurrection re-identification of Jesus with God's own life. In addition, McClendon seeks to form communal conviction sets on the basis of various loci of justification; although, he appears to primarily rely upon the locus of coherence. This is evident with his construction of the above narrative Christological model and also with his development of a doctrine of God in view of the trinitarian category of "God in Christ." In this latter case, he avers that a non-personal pre-existent logos as "the speaking of God" coheres well not only with the just mentioned Christological sub-doctrines but also with the

trinitarian notions of Spirit, as a non-personal dynamic power, and of Father, as one who adopts and liberates his people. Through efforts such as these, McClendon implies that he has prepared for dialogue between his baptist community and other convictional communities, where at least the locus of coherence (if not other formation-justification loci as well) might be shared between them on an "ad hoc" basis.

Furthermore, with his theological method, McClendon seeks to construct all of his doctrines (that, in turn, inform his doctrine of God) by rooting them in one or more of the following sources: narrative (both the narrative of Scripture and the narrative of tradition); experience; and, the church. Instances in which the development of his doctrines draw upon the narrative of Scripture would be too many to list. In fact, he appears to build everyone of his major doctrines primarily upon the biblical narrative. He also relies fairly extensively upon the narrative of the Christian tradition. For example, he turns to Karl Barth's and Jonathan Edwards's understandings of the basic purpose of God, as part of his development of his pneumatology. However, much of McClendon's dependence upon the narrative of tradition is not as a foundational source, in a strong sense, but more as a secondary source of confirmation for what the narrative of Scripture already appears to show. This is evident, for instance, through his argument that the atonement theories from the Christian tradition should be treated as "*midrashim*" or as commentaries on the biblical story. As far as the source of experience, by which McClendon means religious experience, this seems to be a source that he uses quite sparingly. Yet, Hans Hut's apparent experience of suffering (as something that can occur simply as part of existence itself), upon which McClendon draws for his doctrine of

creation, may be one such instance. Moreover, with regard to the source of the church, by which McClendon means especially the practices of the local church, this does seem to be a source that he turns to with at least some frequency. For example, with his doctrine of salvation, he looks to the church practices of instruction, baptism, the Lord's supper, and communal discernment – as marks of the various stages of the process of salvation; and, with his doctrine of the person of Christ, he considers the church practices of worship, (kingdom) work, witness, and (the reading of) the word of Scripture – as means through which the Spirit provides access to the present Christ.

In addition, McClendon seeks to develop his doctrines in view of a baptist hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now." This admittedly mystical endeavor is apparent, for instance: with his eschatology, as he argues that the Jesus Christ who will be king in judgment is the same Jesus Christ as the first century Jesus of Nazareth and the same Jesus Christ who reigns now; and, with his pneumatology, as he maintains that Pentecost is here today, just as it was two millennia ago, so that even now, as in the first century, the Holy Spirit occupies and equips each disciple for the task of carrying out his or her mission.

With this examination of McClendon's doctrine of God and of how his construction of this doctrine stems from his theological method, I will now, in chapter 5, strive to set forth a more extensive evaluation of certain key aspects of the way in which Farley's and McClendon's doctrine of God have been shaped by their respective theological methods. I will also analyze the persuasiveness of these doctrines of God. That is, I will seek to address such questions as: "Given Farley's and McClendon's

different theological methods, to what extent do they contribute to (or yield) compelling doctrines of God?”

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND COMPARISON

By way of introduction to the evaluation and comparison that I will offer of Farley's and McClendon's theological methods and doctrines of God in this chapter, I will set forth, in rather broad brush strokes, a few general observations on their respective projects. One observation is that they each display what might be described as both conservative and progressive tendencies. For instance, a conservative leaning in Farley's project comes forth through his staunch rejection of the multiple symbolic universes of postmodernism (in favor, implicitly, of holding onto the one real universe of modernity),[1] while a progressive tendency appears in his rejection of Scripture-as-sacred (in favor of turning primarily to faith realities themselves and, secondarily, to Scripture-as-a-field-of-evidence).[2] In addition, a conservative tendency in McClendon's project manifests itself through his view of the Bible – as that through which God speaks "today" (in resistance to a view of the Bible as something less than God's word), while a progressive leaning emerges through his postmodern allowance that there can be multiple and equally legitimate loci of justification for beliefs (in resistance, implicitly, to the modern notion

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[1]Farley's overall rejection of postmodernism is perhaps most clearly articulated in Deep Symbols, 8-12, 61-65.

[2]More specifically, Farley suggests that he has sought to displace the notion of Scripture as an "authority" with the notion of Scripture as a non-authoritative "field of evidence," as set forth in ER, 179.

that there can be only one primary locus of justification for beliefs, the locus of correspondence).

A second observation, which to some extent overlaps a portion of the first, is that Farley (with his general methodological and theological posture of "the way to God") and McClendon (with his general methodological and theological posture of "God's way to us") both seem quite earnest in their efforts to help steer their readers towards an authentic encounter with God, at least as far as they hold that God can be known. For Farley, this effort is particularly evident: through his implicit call for "theology" to return to its original practice of pursuing knowledge of God rather than continuing on the more recent path set for it (starting in the eighteenth century) of pursuing knowledge merely of faith's doctrines;[3] and, through his call to desist from conceiving of Scripture as sacred, since, in his view, the "Scripture-as-sacred" perspective causes people to erroneously "stop" at a supposedly all-authoritative Bible rather than looking "past" what is, in actuality (in his view), a non-authoritative document that potentially stands as an obstacle to the present realities of the faith, which ultimately appresent God or, as he more often argues, the character of God. Moreover, for McClendon, this effort to help his readers have a genuine encounter with God is especially apparent by means of his call to approach Scripture as authoritative, since in his view, God would speak to people through the Bible, as "the hound . . . [seeks] the hare,"[4] in order to establish an indwelling relation with them.

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[3]Theologia, 31-81 passim.

[4]Doctrine, 462.

These observations show in part, I would argue, that an assessment and comparison of Farley's and McClendon's projects (as initially addressed in the previous four chapters) should seek to avoid facile caricatures in which the views of either figure are portrayed as either "simply conservative" or "simply progressive" or as either "simply against encountering God" or "simply for encountering God." In actuality, both Farley and McClendon set forth complex (in some ways conservative, in some ways progressive) methodological and theological developments that ultimately have as their purpose assisting others to authentically encounter God, at least as far as they maintain that God can be known.

Accordingly, in the following sections, I will endeavor to evaluate Farley's and McClendon's methodological and theological constructions in a manner that does not blunt the complexities of their positions and that acknowledges the overall positive intent of both of their efforts. First, in dialogue with other critical perspectives on his work, I will assess Farley's theological method and doctrine of God, giving particular attention to the impact his method has had on this doctrine. Next, in similar dialogue with other critical voices, I will separately assess McClendon's theological method and doctrine of God, providing like attention to the impact his method has had on this doctrine. Then, in view of these assessments, I will directly compare Farley's and McClendon's projects to each other.

A Critical Assessment of Edward Farley's Theological Method and Doctrine of God

In this section, I will assess Farley's project in three parts. First, I will examine his argument regarding "the house of authority" and his call for its destruction; second, I will evaluate some of the central features of the theological method he advances, which he refers to as "ecclesial reflection;" third, I will consider his development of a doctrine of God, with a special focus on how it has been shaped by his theological method.

An Evaluation of Farley's Critique of "The House of Authority"

Within Farley's description and critique of "the house of authority," while he also addresses the loci of dogma and the institutional church as well as the founding axiom of the principle of identity, the more substantial issues seem to be his treatment of the locus of sacred Scripture and of the founding axiom of salvation history; therefore, I will consider each of these latter issues in turn.

An evaluation of Farley's critique of sacred Scripture. With his concept of the locus of sacred Scripture, Farley argues that, by the second century, the early Christian church, because of internal threats "created by a plurality of traditions,"[5] made the choice, after considering its options, to start treating Scripture no longer as a mere record of events – but as an inspired, sacred and authoritative collection of documents. Moreover, he holds that the fact that the church had a choice in this matter shows that the this collection of documents cannot be sacred and, therefore, that one should not consider the Bible to be authoritative for the church or for developing Christian doctrine. If Farley

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[5]ER, 71.

is correct in this assessment, then, as Geoffrey Wainwright notes, "just about all classical Christian theology . . . would prove to have been grossly mistaken, certainly from the viewpoint of method and in all probability from the viewpoint of substance also;"[6] and, as David Pellauer remarks, "Christian thinkers . . . [would] have simply been wrong for centuries now."[7] In other words, in calling for the abolishment of Scripture-as-sacred, Farley makes no small claim; he would overturn almost two thousand years of tradition.

In response, one could endeavor to argue against this call for abolishment by considering both intra-biblical and extra-biblical evidence. In terms of an intra-biblical pursuit, one could (1A) consider some of the claims that Scripture makes about itself – claims such as: "all scripture is inspired by God;"[8] and, "the word of God is living and active"[9] – and (1B) attempt to show how such verses demonstrate that Scripture is sacred (or, perhaps, "God-breathed") and, therefore, authoritative. However, even if a clear connection between (1A) and (1B) could be demonstrated, a counter-argument to such an endeavor could be made that (1') considering what Scripture claims about itself is self-

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[6]Geoffrey Wainwright, review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, and of A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom, by Avery Dulles, in Theology Today 40 (July 1983): 200.

[7]David Pellauer, review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, and of Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education, by Edward Farley, in Religious Studies Review 10 (July 1984): 247.

[8]2 Tim. 3:16 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). However, a more literal translation of "θεόπνευστος" in this verse might be rendered as "God-breathed" (rather than as "inspired by God").

[9]Heb. 4:12 NRSV.

referential and, therefore, cannot be considered as legitimate evidence. To this counter-argument, a response could be made: that (2) assuming the legitimacy of some coherence theories of truth, the various truth claims within the overall narrative of Scripture appear to cohere well with each other; thus, the Bible's self-referential claims have merit; or, that (3) assuming the legitimacy of some pragmatic theories of truth, the various truth claims within the overall narrative of Scripture seem to lead to behavior (among Christ's disciples) that is generally in keeping with this narrative; thus, the Bible's self-referential claims have merit.

Furthermore, with regard to an extra-biblical pursuit, one could (4) attempt to call into question Farley's underlying assumption that the fact that the early church had a choice in the matter as to whether or not Scripture should be considered inspired or sacred necessarily leads to the conclusion that the Bible cannot be sacred. It seems that drawing so strong a conclusion would likely involve infusing concepts such as "inspired" or "sacred" with a notion of something akin to "that which cannot be resisted." That is, Farley suggests that if God had inspired Scripture or if God had somehow caused Scripture to be sacred, God could not also have given humans enough freewill to resist viewing the Bible as inspired or sacred. In other words, as William Thompson observes, Farley seems to set forth "an either/or alternative. *Either* one accepts the house of authority . . . [including the notion that Scripture is sacred], . . . *or* one accepts human freedom and historicity and thus 'demotes' the traditional vehicles."[10] In response,

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[10]William Thompson, review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, and of The Continuity of Christian Doctrine, by R. P. C. Hanson, in Horizons 9 (Fall 1982): 377.

Thompson maintains that "some theologians deny this alternative,"[11] and he implies that it is possible that God could have set about actions that caused the Bible to be sacred, while at the same time granting humans enough freedom to resist accepting the Bible as such.[12]

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation for me to offer an exhaustive response to Farley's view that Scripture should not be approached as sacred or authoritative, but were I to offer such a response, it would be along the lines of (1) - (4) above. In any case, much hinges, it seems, on whether Farley appropriately rejects the notion of Scripture-as-sacred. If he is correct, then, as Wainwright and Pellauer have suggested, certainly the method and likely also the content of much of Christian theology through the centuries has been misguided. However, it should be remembered that in seeking to abolish Scripture-as-sacred as part of the larger removal of "the house of authority," Farley's intention is to remove an obstacle to authentic encounter with God, at least as far as he holds that God can be known. In addition, it seems intuitive that Farley's rejection of Scripture-as-sacred would probably be well received by much of contemporary culture, for whom belief in the concept of a divinely inspired, authoritative text would, at least at first glance, appear about as rational as belief in a Santa Claus who actually lives at the North Pole. Accordingly, I am sympathetic with assessments, such as David Jaeger's, that one of the strengths of Farley's project is "his formidable effort to maintain

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

dialogue between theology and the . . . [current] Western intellectual climate."[13] This does not mean that I agree with Farley's rejection of Scripture-as-sacred, but I acknowledge that arguing for the authority of the Bible in the current culture is, at a minimum, an uphill battle.

An evaluation of Farley's critique of salvation history. Another significant matter within Farley's description and critique of "the house of authority," is his treatment of what he refers to as the founding axiom of salvation history. With this concept, he holds that the church has traditionally used royal imagery to describe God's relation to creation in a manner that depicts God triumphing over all evil, at least eventually at the end of time. In addition, he avers that the church has presented this triumph as being so forceful that human freedom, in any substantive sense, has been completely suppressed.[14] Thus, Farley argues that one should consider the salvation history framework to be discredited. Several scholars have appreciated certain aspects of Farley's argument along these lines. For instance, James Buckley suggests that Farley appropriately seeks to replace "the monarchical God of classic theism . . . [with a God] who acts in history in ways that . . .

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[13]David Jaeger, review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, in Theologische Zeitschrift 43 (1987): 389.

[14]Farley primarily addresses the concept of salvation history in terms of the issue of God's sovereignty. However, there are a variety of other issues that have surfaced in recent discussions about salvation history, issues such as "whether the use of salvation history has been crippled by a distorted or myopic christocentric interpretation of history," as set forth in Bradford Hinze, "The End of Salvation History," Horizons 18 (1991): 238. Hinze identifies this and several other issues directly related to salvation history in ibid., 227-45.

[protect or preserve] human subjectivity in nature and history."[15] Moreover, Wendy Farley contends that "her father's outright rejection of sovereignty models and monarchical imagery . . . [has been] his most valuable legacy."[16] I agree that the salvation history model, as traditionally conceived in Christian theology, can and has been abused in a way that portrays human freedom as much too limited, and I would argue that this, in turn, has often been used by those with ecclesially-endorsed power to suppress marginalized people groups. Yet, it seems that this is again an instance of Farley unnecessarily presenting a stark "either/or" alternative – with the only options being, in this case, that either one accepts the notion of salvation history or one accepts human freedom.[17] I would maintain that the salvation history framework could be modified (in a direction away from a highly deterministic sense), so that this framework and human freedom need not be mutually exclusive. However, Farley will not entertain such potential compromises; rather, he "admonishes that a theologian can live inside or

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[15]James J. Buckley, "Revisionists and Liberals," chap. in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, ed. David F. Ford, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 92.

[16]Gary Dorrien, The Making of American Liberal Theology, vol. 3, Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1950-2005 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 348. Here, Dorrien refers to Wendy Farley, "*Divine Empathy* and *Deep Symbols*," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, by Edward Farley, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, by Edward Farley, in Religious Studies Review 24 (April 1998): 147-52.

[17]Thompson, review of Ecclesial Reflection, 377.

outside the house of authority, but not both. To quit the house is to leave behind the foundational materials on which it was built."[18]

An Evaluation of Farley's Method of Ecclesial Reflection

Having rejected "the house of authority" as a viable resource for constructing Christian doctrine, Farley sets forth his own method of ecclesial reflection, through which he calls for a turn directly to the realities of faith themselves as they can be found in the faith community. This process, he argues, requires the use of theological portraiture or theological eidetics, a core feature of which is the phenomenological tool of appresentation. Below, therefore, I will evaluate both Farley's notion of turning to the realities of faith themselves and his understanding of theological appresentation.

To the realities themselves. One of the key principles of Farley's theological method is to turn to the realities of faith – not through Scripture-as-sacred, dogma, and the institutional church – but as they may be directly ascertained in the faith community. In order to illustrate this principle, he considers a person who might desire knowledge of a city. Generally speaking, this person has two choices. She can obtain a map from a cartographer and seek to gain knowledge of the city simply by studying the map, or she can go to the city herself and, as a city-dweller, seek to gain knowledge of the city through her own direct experiences and perceptions.[19] Farley argues against the first

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[18]Dorrien, The Making of American Liberal Theology, vol. 3, Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1950-2005, 337.

[19]As previously indicated in chapter 1 above, Farley here makes use of a city-dweller / cartographer example developed by Alfred Schutz in his work Collected Papers,

choice, since it is difficult to know if the cartographer has provided an accurate map – and, even if an accurate map has been made available, it can only provide, at best, a superficial knowledge of the city. Thus, he maintains, the second choice – the one of direct contact as a city-dweller – should be taken because it is more reliable and because it yields more substantive results. In light of this argument, one would expect that the development of Farley's theological method would point toward unmediated realities. Indeed, he argues at one point that with the apprehension of a reality, "the object is given immediately."[20]

However, as Gordon Kaufman observes, when Farley "turns to the actual execution of his program, we find him analyzing images and stories and concepts throughout, all of them taken as *mediating* the realities of faith."[21] Kaufman continues: "It is clear that what he is doing here is *interpreting symbols*, not simply reading off some phenomenological 'givens' in their bare givenness. Where the 'givens' are words and images there is no *bare* givenness at all."[22] Kaufman's criticism along these lines seems to have merit.[23] For instance, Farley elsewhere maintains that one must "dig beneath" the

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vol. 2, Studies in Social Theory, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 66-67, as shown in EM, 53.

[20]EM, 66.

[21]Gordon Kaufman, review of Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality, by Edward Farley, and of Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology, by David Tracy, in Religious Studies Review 2 (October 1976): 11.

[22]Ibid., 12.

[23]In addition, Mark Kline Taylor echoes Kaufman's criticism, as he argues that with Farley's "appropriation of Christian mythos and symbol even for effecting true

"second moment" of the (conscious, institutional) Genesis myth, in order to get to the "first moment" of the (pre-conscious, pre-institutional) story and images behind the Genesis myth,[24] in order to get to the (still deeper) reality that "the 'world' is the setting of the story of Yahweh and his people."[25] Moreover, when he applies his method towards an investigation of the meaning of "the event of Jesus Christ,"[26] he holds that this meaning "turns on the use . . . of historical method toward the materials of the New Testament collection, which materials provide the *only* access we have to the event and figure of Jesus."[27]

What should be made about this apparent contradiction in Farley's project between his claim that the realities of faith can be directly experienced in an unmediated manner and his practice of seeking these realities through narratives and symbols? I would argue not only that, through this practice, Farley is tacitly acknowledging that at least some of the realities of faith are mediated through stories and images, but also that, through this apparent contradiction (between claim and practice), he is pointing to a tension in a shift in authority (or in power) that he hopes to make in the dynamics among:

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judgment, one wonders if there might be a softening of the phenomenologist's claims for privileged access to theological realities," as set fort in Mark Kline Taylor, "Truth and a Phenomenology of Tradition," review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, in The Journal of Religion 64 (April 1984): 227.

[24]EM, 123-24.

[25]EM, 123.

[26]Divine Empathy, 253.

[27]Divine Empathy, 253, emphasis mine.

(A) "the contemporary ecclesial community;" (B1) "the narratives and symbols of the Bible and the Christian tradition;" (B2) "the actions and structures of the institutional church;" (C) "the realities of faith;" and, (D) "contemporary doctrines."

All of these entities, (A) - (D), are present (to one degree or another) both in the "old house" of authority against which he argues and in the "new house" of authority for which he argues; yet, Farley clearly suggests that the two houses have structured – and have placed authority among – these same entities in substantially different ways. With the "old house" (to which he refers as "the house of authority"), most of the power has been placed with (B1) and (B2). And, in this "old house," (B1) - (B2) "tells" (A), "the contemporary ecclesial community," through "atomistic" truth claims,[28] what (C), "the realities of faith," are, and these become the basis for (D), "contemporary doctrines," that (A) constructs. However, with the "new house," the house that Farley champions with his theological method of ecclesial reflection, most of the power has been placed with (A), "the contemporary ecclesial community." And, in this "new house," (A), "the contemporary ecclesial community" (or its representative theologian), "discovers" (or "uncovers") (C), "the realities of faith," either in *an unmediated manner*, through direct contact with creation, the world, or nature;[29] or, in *a linguistically mediated manner*, through (B1), "the narratives and symbols of the Bible and the Christian tradition;" or, in

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[28]ER, 151.

[29]Deep Symbols, 71. See also EM, 66.

an other-than-linguistically mediated manner,[30] through (B2), "the actions and structures of the institutional church." Thus, (C), "the realities of faith," gleaned from one or more of these three sources become the basis for (D), "contemporary doctrines," that (A), "the contemporary ecclesial community," constructs. Moreover, since, with the "old house" perspective, (A) submits to the authority of (B1) - (B2), in order for (B1) - (B2) to "tell" (A) what (C), "the realities of faith," are, it follows that (B1) and (B2) remain essentially unchangeable. But, because, with the "new house" perspective, (A) looks to (B1) - (B2) – as well as to creation, the world, or nature – as resources in which (C), "the realities of faith," can be "discovered," it follows that (B1) and (B2) can be altered, for if (A) comes to uncover an insight into (C) in creation,[31] then it may fix or revise the "ancient codes . . . [of (B1) - (B2)]."[32]

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[30]As shown above in chapter 1, Farley argues that the "historical faith has vehicles of availability other than its own language, namely, its cultic acts, institutional structures, and the like, which in any given present are available both to intuition and to the historian," as set forth in EM, 81.

[31]Deep Symbols, 71.

[32]Deep Symbols, 90. In the section below, where I evaluate the development of Farley's doctrine of God, I examine his use of "divine ciphers" for speaking of God. Generally speaking, divine ciphers are similar to divine attributes; although, for Farley, divine ciphers should be considered much less certain and much less directly applicable to God than has typically been the case with the way in which divine attributes have been construed in the Christian tradition. Moreover, in light of the discussion below regarding Farley's use of divine ciphers, one might wonder where these ciphers would factor into the above description of the structure of Farley's "new house" of authority. I would argue that to place divine ciphers within this structure, one would first have to subdivide (C), "the realities of faith," between (C1), "the realities of faith-at-hand," and (C2), "the realities of faith-not-at-hand." Then, since for Farley, not even a description of (C2) is possible without (C1), it must be the case that divine ciphers would hover, in terms of structure, somewhere within the realm of (C2). In other words, for him, the most that (B1) - (B2) – as well as creation, the world, or nature – can present are (C1), "the realities

Therefore, the apparent contradiction between Farley's claim that the realities of faith can be directly experienced in an unmediated way and his practice of seeking these realities through narratives and symbols becomes, upon further reflection, both less tangled and more understandable. It becomes less tangled, because (even though some of his claims for unmediated experience are so strong that they can easily lead to the kind of consternation Kaufman experiences with the apparent inconsistency of Farley's position) Farley eventually makes clear, as he develops his project, that he allows for both unmediated and mediated experiences of faith realities. Moreover, the seeming contradiction becomes more understandable, since, if he places too much emphasis on seeking the realities of faith through narratives and symbols, *he risks* his "new house" emphasis – of narratives and symbols existing as (somewhat significant, though not authoritative) resources through which the contemporary faith community can "discover" the realities of faith – *being misperceived as* an "old house" emphasis – of narratives and symbols existing as authoritative documents that "tell" the contemporary faith community about the realities of faith.

However, while this apparent contradiction has perhaps become less tangled and more understandable, other difficulties, I would maintain, have emerged, particularly with regard to his understanding of the "old" and "new" houses of authority. First,

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of faith-at-hand," such as direct experiences of redemption; then, (C1), "the realities of faith-at-hand" can (indirectly show or) appresent (C2), "the realities of faith-not-at-hand," such as the character of God; and, the divine ciphers come into play in that they can describe some of these realities of faith-not-at-hand – and, in so doing, they can contribute to a doctrine of God, one of the doctrines that forms a central part of (D), "contemporary doctrines."

Farley's depiction of the "old house" seems to be of a residence in which few, if any, would actually claim to dwell. Along these lines, I find persuasive Avery Dulles's assessment that Farley's "abolishment" of the "old house" "reads like a caricature built out of the worst tendencies of a now discredited theology."[33] What contemporary theologian would agree that she has come to regard the Bible "not . . . as narrative . . . but as an atomistic compilation of truths?"[34] Or, what theologian would agree that, at least in worship, Scripture does not point beyond itself to God, at least as far as God may be known?

Second, it appears that Farley has yet again unnecessarily set forth a fairly rigid "either/or" alternative – with the two options being here that either one accepts all of the structure of the "old house" or all of the structure of the "new house." This alternative would rule out the possibility that one could simultaneously accept much of what historical criticism has shown about the Bible and still approach the Bible as authoritative, a possibility that does not seem too far-fetched.

Third, as part of his understanding of the "new house" of authority, Farley maintains that the faith community can discover at least some of the realities of faith either in a completely unmediated manner, holding that an "object . . . [can be] given immediately,"[35] or in an other-than-linguistically mediated manner, holding that the

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[33]Avery Dulles, review of Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method, by Edward Farley, in Theological Studies 44 (March 1983): 144-45.

[34]ER, 151.

[35]EM, 66.

"historical faith has vehicles of availability other than its own language, namely, its cultic acts, institutional structures, and the like."[36] However, it seems that "cultic acts, institutional structures" – or any other reality – would have no sense or meaning at all to us without language. Therefore, I would argue against Farley, in this instance, that language is inescapably the way in which the historical faith and all faith realities are available to us.

Fourth, with his notion of (what I have termed) the "new house" of authority, Farley calls for a substantial shift in the placement of authority (or power) – from where it had been located, with the "old house," in Scripture-as-sacred, dogma, and the institutional church – to a new location, with the "new house," in the contemporary ecclesial community. And, a potential difficulty with this shift, as David Pellauer notes, is what might happen if the faith community "miscarries and does so badly,"[37] as it seeks to uncover, through theological portraiture or theological eidetics, the realities of faith? Moreover, if one places authority primarily with the current ecclesial community, what forces are in place to ensure that the theology generated by this community remains distinctly Christian, even if this community "is perceived or experienced as redemptive, and even if it endures?"[38] Pellauer argues that it is questions such as these "that keep the . . . [old] house of authority standing – or . . . [that] at least . . . give many a convenient

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[36]EM, 81.

[37]Pellauer, review of Ecclesial Reflection, and of Theologia, 247.

[38]Ibid., 250.

excuse not to leave the old, familiar home."[39] Farley might respond: that the faith community, as well as Christianity itself, is not static but is in an ongoing process of development; and, that with his principle of positivity he has been at methodological pains to try to ensure the uniqueness of the Christian faith community. However, without a narrative or an institution as a guide, it seems that the placement of authority primarily with the contemporary ecclesial community ultimately gives this community license to develop theology in any direction in which it so desires, with no mechanism to correct its course should it veer away from that which has so far kept Christianity unique among various worldviews.

Appresentation of "realities not at hand." In addition to his call to turn to the realities of faith themselves, another key principle of Farley's theological method is his appropriation of Husserl's concept of appresentation, through which Farley maintains that "realities at hand" (such as "the reality at hand" that ecclesia seeks to abolish ethnic and social boundaries) can appresent various "realities not at hand" (such as the historical redeemer who initiated the removal of ethnic and social boundaries – and, ultimately, the transcendent as God). Robert R. Williams views this notion of appresentation as a major strength of Farley's methodological project, since, from Williams's perspective, it permits Farley to "prevent a Feuerbachian reduction of theology to anthropology and a reduction of the transcendent to human autonomy."[40] Yet, Williams implies that this

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Robert R. Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, by Edward Farley, and of

aspect of Farley's method eventually permits only silence when it comes to the transcendent, since "appresentation cannot bridge the gulf between finite and infinite."[41] However, Williams further suggests that this appears to be unproblematic for Farley, since, with his doctrine of God, Farley will argue that "the proper position is that God is beyond affirmation and negation."[42] While I agree that Farley's doctrine coheres with his method in this regard, I cannot help but wonder, if one's God is beyond affirmation and negation, can that God be a God that is worthy of worship?

An Evaluation of the Development of Farley's Doctrine of God

As part of his doctrine of God, Farley considers many relevant matters such as: how God can be known; how one can speak of God; and, the world in which God works. However, the heart of his doctrine of God has to do with the interconnectedness he finds among ecclesia (i.e., the Christian faith community), Jesus, and God. To restate this central thrust in very general terms, he maintains, in keeping with his theological method, that (1) ecclesia and its redemptive efforts to abolish ethnic and social boundaries is a "reality at hand" that appresents (2) the "reality not at hand" of the historical Jesus, as one who, with a radical trust in God, empathetically and publically suffered for all others, which worked to launch a universal form of the faith of Israel, where ethnic and social boundaries would be removed – who, in turn, appresents (3) the "reality not at hand" of

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Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, by Edward Farley, in Religious Studies Review 24 (April 1998): 144.

[41]Ibid., 145.

[42]Ibid. Williams refers here to Divine Empathy, 103.

God's character being one of divine empathy in all of God's creative and redemptive works. Because they represent the core of his doctrine of God, I will evaluate each of these three features below.

The "reality at hand" of ecclesia and its redemptive efforts. In approaching "ecclesia" as that which appresents Jesus, who, in turn, appresents the character of God, Farley means by "ecclesia" not the institutional church but something akin to Emil Brunner's sense of "the distinctive, corporate existence characterized by the presence of Jesus Christ,"[43] in other words, what might be described as the Christian faith community, in general. Moreover, he maintains that theological eidetics, applied to the depth ecclesia strata of this faith community, uncovers the unique manner in which non-ecclesia participants are present to ecclesia participants – as those who are not required to undergo ethnic conversion in order to participate in ecclesia. Therefore, as one phenomenologically observes ecclesia, it becomes evident, according to Farley, that ecclesia actively strives to abolish ethnic and social boundaries.

A struggle I have with this aspect of Farley's theological project is that even a casual observation of much of what might count as present day ecclesia would seem to show a people working for just the opposite of abolishing ethnic and social boundaries. Martin Luther King Jr.'s well-known statement about Sunday morning being the most

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[43]EM, 152. Here, Farley refers to Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1953), 6, 10-12.

segregated time in America appears no less applicable today than when he first made it.[44] Accordingly, Gordon Kaufman seems to offer an appropriate criticism that Farley presents not an actualized but an "idealized vision of *ecclesia*."[45] That is, while Farley sets forth "an imaginative vision of what human reality *might* be and should be: it is difficult to see how anyone could hold it to be simple and straightforward phenomenological description of anything that now exists (except as an ideal)."[46] This is a significant potential weakness in Farley's development of a doctrine of God, in my view, because if his notion of "ecclesia" is closer to an ideal entity than to an actual one, how can "ecclesia" be said to be a "reality at hand?" Moreover, especially with an idealized ecclesia, it seems, apart from the "old house" of authority, that a "historical redeemer" might be posited by – but would unlikely be a necessary given of – the fact that there is a community that seeks to abolish ethnic and social boundaries. And, if the "historical redeemer" is more likely posited than given, this would appear to be a tacit acknowledgment of a strong idealism.

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[44]Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech given at Western Michigan University Read Field House, on 18 December 1963. Archives and Regional History Collections, Western Michigan University Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

[45]Kaufman, review of Ecclesial Man, and of Blessed Rage for Order, 12.

[46]Ibid.

The "reality not at hand" of the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, after setting forth his notion of ecclesia, Farley offers a treatment of the historical Jesus that presents a very compelling figure:[47] one who lived a life of a radical, "innocent" trust in God; one who sought to expand the faith of Israel across all ethnic boundaries; one who was unique in his empathetic suffering for his people, being motivated, not by ethnic loyalty, but merely by the fact that others suffered; one whose empathetic suffering was not only felt but also publically expressed, resulting in his humiliating death; and, one whose exemplary life gave "rise to a new community,"[48] a community that was also committed to expanding the faith of Israel across all ethnic boundaries by means of empathetic suffering for others.

With such a view of Jesus, Farley clearly avoids presenting him as any sort of "triumphalist monarch,"[49] as might occur with a Christology carried out under the "old house" of authority. To the contrary, according to Farley, as Gary Dorrien observes:

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[47]And, interestingly, while rejecting Scripture-as-sacred, Farley's Christology draws from "the materials of the New Testament collection, which materials provide the only access we have to the event and figure of Jesus," as shown in Divine Empathy, 253. However, since he maintains that one cannot assume that the Bible "necessarily contains or expresses truth," as indicated in Divine Empathy, 273, he acknowledges that his constructive efforts with this doctrine involve a "speculative dimension," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 273. Moreover, he concedes that with this speculative dimension he departs from his theological method of phenomenological "description," as revealed in Divine Empathy, 272.

[48]Divine Empathy, 268.

[49]Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 146.

> Jesus was open to the divine empathy, which opened him empathetically to his companions and acquaintances. His empathetic concern for others took on the risk of being exploited and violated; it was apparently unrestricted, accepting whatever came from caring for others. Thus he appeared to be 'one with divine empathy,' which inspired the ideal of the divine-human union that defined the Christian movement. The redemptive faith of Israel was ethnic and national. In the name of Jesus, Christianity became a universal religion of the union of divine and human empathy.[50]

Thus, as Robert Williams notes, Farley's "Christology is in the liberal anthropological tradition of Schleiermacher and Tillich."[51] However, Williams also maintains that Farley's Christology departs from this tradition in one particular regard: "[For Farley,] . . . whatever way God is in Jesus is not an exception to the way God can be in other human beings."[52] Thus, for Farley, the uniqueness of the event of Jesus (unique primarily in the sense as that which prompted the emergence of the new faith community) appears more accidental than intentional. While this limited and accidental uniqueness allows Farley to successfully avoid such problems as an overly-monarchical (and, therefore, overly-deterministic) messiah, it comes at the price of not being able to acknowledge that the event of the historical redeemer has anything to do with God's initiative, which seems to be a steep price when Farley also wants to claim that the empathy of God "would . . .

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[50]Dorrien, The Making of American Liberal Theology, vol. 3, Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1950-2005, 348.

[51]Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 146. Furthermore, in chapter 1 above, I discuss some of the ways in which Farley's theological method is deeply indebted to Schleiermacher.

[52]Ibid. Although Williams does not here cite Farley, he seems to have in view Farley's claim that: "whatever way God . . . [was] 'in' Jesus . . . [was] not an exception to the way God can be 'in' or present to other human beings," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 280.

[seek to] ease . . . [our] suffering and promote . . . [our] well-being."[53] In addition, especially since his understanding of the event of Jesus involves a speculative dimension, and since he perceives this event taking place as an accident of history, it appears to be a bit of stretch to maintain, as Farley endeavors to do, that God or the character of God could be a given of the fact that there was once a man who sought to abolish ethnic and social boundaries by empathetically and publically suffering for others. And, if God or the character of God is merely posited and not a given (of the fact of the historical Jesus), this would seem to be a further implied acknowledgment of a strong idealism in Farley's theological project.[54]

The "reality not at hand" of God's character of divine empathy. Finally, in close connection to his understanding of the Jesus of history, Farley sets forth his specific doctrine of God. He argues that since Jesus so completely trusted in God and that because the effect of Jesus' suffering for others was so profound that it prompted the start of the new community of universal redemption, it follows that the character of God must include a redemptive divine "empathy," where empathy consists of "participative suffering, self-impartation, perception of our experiencing, and compassion."[55] In addition, Farley holds that because the cosmos demonstrates an empowerment of "world

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[53]Divine Empathy, 296.

[54]A counter-argument to the claim I am making here might be that every theological interpretation of the identity of Jesus includes a speculative dimension. I would not dispute this. My point is simply that this particular aspect of Farley's project appears *especially* speculative.

[55]Divine Empathy, 296.

process in directions of synthesis, cooperation, and novelty,"[56] and since these creative tendencies are so similar to God's redemptive tendencies, it must be the case that God's creative purposes are the same as God's redemptive purposes. Thus, the key component of God's creative and redemptive actions – and, accordingly, the key component of God's character – is divine empathy.

Moreover, this description of God's character harmonizes with the three overarching ciphers that, Farley argues, "converge in the name of God: . . . [the ciphers of] redeemer, creator, and the Holy."[57] The first two of these ciphers, redeemer and creator, emerge in each of the three spheres of human reality (the individual, the interhuman, and the social).[58] Thus, for example, in terms of the first cipher of redeemer:

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[56]Divine Empathy, 303.

[57]Divine Empathy, 112. Farley holds that these ciphers (where "ciphers" are understood to be somewhat like attributes but significantly less direct than them, in order to leave adequate room for mystery) come from indirect discernments of the divine, as these indirect discernments occur not through Scripture-as-sacred or through the creeds-as-authoritative – but through the believing community's apperception that only the divine could have been at work in particular, "at-hand" situations of redemptive transformation, as set forth in Divine Empathy, 95-114. Here, to a certain extent, Farley seems to reflect Schleiermacher's notion that "theology is a positive science, whose parts join into a cohesive whole only through their common relation to . . . *a particular way of being conscious of God*," as shown in Schleiermacher, Brief Outline of the Study of Theology, § 1, p. 19, emphasis mine. However, this similarity between Schleiermacher and Farley cannot be pressed too far, since the former also maintains that "all . . . [dogmatic] propositions which claim a place in an epitome of Evangelical (Protestant) doctrine must approve themselves both by appeal to Evangelical confessional documents, or in default of these, to the New Testament Scriptures, and by exhibition of their homogeneity with other propositions already recognized," as demonstrated in idem, The Christian Faith, § 27, p. 112. Thus, Schleiermacher appears to give more weight to Protestant confessional statements and to the Scriptures than would Farley.

[58]As mentioned in chapter 3 above, Farley offers a detailed treatment of these three spheres of human reality in Good and Evil, chaps. 1-16 passim.

as the faith community observes *individual* redemption – that is, as it observes the process of being-founded[59] – it senses, through appresentation, "the cipher of redemptive founding;"[60] as it detects *communal* redemption – such as the process of repentance and forgiveness overcoming alienation among human relations – it perceives (or, better, apperceives) the cipher of "Creativity as reconciling love;"[61] and, as this community notices *social* redemption – such as the process of corporate justice taking place – it senses the cipher of (redemptive) divine justice.[62] Moreover, after making similar arguments with regard to the second cipher of creator,[63] Farley holds that as ecclesia observes instances of holiness taking place within "human experience,"[64] it senses, again through appresentation, the cipher of divine holiness, which functions, in part, "to display the poverty of all ciphers,"[65] including the limitations of the ciphers of redemption and creativity.[66] In addition, Farley avers that these limited divine ciphers (limited in that, ultimately, they indirectly describe not God but merely certain aspects of God's

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[59]Good and Evil, 139-53.

[60]Divine Empathy, 126.

[61]Divine Empathy, 130. As noted in chapter 3, Farley indicates that he "speaks of Creativity (capitalized) when . . . [he intends to use it as] a term for God Godself," as set forth in Divine Empathy, 115.

[62]Divine Empathy, 131.

[63]Divine Empathy, 137-41.

[64]Divine Empathy, 141.

[65]Divine Empathy, 141.

[66]Divine Empathy, 141.

character) are appropriate, since they permit a mysterious (or reverent) distance between the character of God (something that we can at least partially know) and God Godself (something that we cannot know).

With this understanding of God, as one whose character centrally involves a participative suffering or empathy with God's creation, and as one who is substantially "other" than – and not directly knowable by – creation, several potential strengths of Farley's doctrine of God seem evident. For instance, apart from a reliance upon the "old house" of authority, he has endeavored to chart a course from a direct observance of the Christian faith community (acting redemptively to overcome ethnic and social boundaries) to an indirect observance of the Jesus of history (whose actions of empathetic suffering on behalf of others led to the founding of this faith community) to an indirect observance of the character of God (a character of participative suffering with God's creation). For those who share Farley's antipathy for the "old house" of authority (and it seems intuitive to me that, especially in the contemporary culture of the West, there are multitudes who do share this antipathy), Farley has charted as compelling a course for "the way to God" as could be constructed. Next, with his emphasis on God's character involving participative suffering with God's creation, Farley has potentially offered a significant corrective to theologies of God that portray God's character as impassible and triumphalist (which, in turn, can easily lead to all sorts of related difficulties, particularly with regard to human freedom and the problem of evil). Also, with his stress on the otherness of God (accomplished especially through his development of the cipher of the Holy), Farley has sought to move his doctrine of God in

a direction where God will be perceived not simply as a larger and more powerful creature among other like smaller and less powerful creatures but as a unique and unknowable Creator, separate from all creation. Wendy Farley maintains that this is perhaps one of the most significant contributions of her father's doctrine of God, for "without negation, God becomes a being among beings, and, as too often happens, this being functions to shore up the power of 'his' followers."[67]

However, the very strengths of Farley's doctrine of God also point to some of its potential weaknesses. For example, through his stress on God's character involving participative suffering with God's creation, Farley, as Robert R. Williams observes, "does tend to underplay not only the divine enjoyment of creativity but . . . [also] the comic dimension of redemption."[68] In fact, were it not for a few comments in some of his footnotes about the presence of joy in the divine activity, such as, "if God is not a sheer indifference, there is something like a divine enjoyment that marks the tone of Creativity, possibly even the dominant tone,"[69] Williams further remarks that "Farley's position

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[67]Wendy Farley, "*Divine Empathy* and *Deep Symbols*," a review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, by Edward Farley, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, by Edward Farley, in Religious Studies Review 24 (April 1998): 147.

[68]Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 146.

[69]Divine Empathy, 306, n. 1; quoted in Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 147.

would border on agnosticism and stoicism."[70] In addition, with his emphasis on God's otherness and on our inability to know God – even the act of worship, he argues, requires only the character of God and not "God as a personal entity"[71] – his position would seem to leave to the faith community with a God that is essentially not present.

Nevertheless, as Paul Lakeland perhaps aptly summarizes: "those committed to . . . [the] house of authority will be uncomfortable with . . . [Farley's overall methodological-theological] process and . . . [his] conclusions; . . . [however,] for the rest of us, Farley's work suggests not only how unnecessary those authorities are, but how without them God emerges in the experience of redemption – at once both less surely known and yet more reassuringly encountered."[72]

A Critical Assessment of James McClendon's Theological Method and Doctrine of God

In this section, I will assess McClendon's project in two parts. First, I will examine some of the central features of the theological method he advances, giving particular attention: to his notion of "convictional perspectivism;" as well as to his understanding of narrative, experience, and the church as three sources for Christian convictions; and to his concept of the "baptist" hermeneutical principle of "this is that"

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[70]Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 147.

[71]Divine Empathy, 133.

[72]Paul Lakeland, review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, by Edward Farley, in Theological Studies 58 (September 1997): 560.

and "then is now."[73] Second, I will consider his development of a doctrine of God, with a special focus on how it has been shaped by his theological method.

An Evaluation of McClendon's Theological Method

Convictional Perspectivism. A crucial aspect of McClendon's theological method is his and James Smith's argument for (1) "convictional perspectivism" – a view according to which one holds to a soft epistemological relativism and maintains that differences regarding convictions (or regarding significant and persistent beliefs) are at least partially eradicable; that is, a view that falls between: (2) "convictional imperialism" – according to which one holds to a hard epistemological realism and maintains that differences regarding convictions are, ultimately, completely eradicable; and, (3) "convictional relativism" – according to which one holds to a hard epistemological relativism and maintains that differences regarding convictions are completely ineradicable. Then, McClendon and Smith further develop their *via media* of convictional perspectivism by indicating that the unhappiness or happiness of particular "conviction sets" (from which individual convictions are derived) can be determined (or anticipated) by ascertaining the degree to which these conviction sets meet at least some

[73]As mentioned in chapter 2 above, Nancey Murphy indicates that McClendon uses the lower case "b" for "baptists" to denote a "broad and diverse stream of Christian life . . . [that] includes some contemporary Baptists, but also Mennonites, Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Pentecostals, Christian base communities, and others," as shown in Nancey Murphy, introduction to Theology without Foundations, 18.

– but not necessarily all – widely accepted loci of justification (such as correspondent truth; coherent truth; pragmatic truth; and so on).[74]

What McClendon and Smith most particularly seem to be pursuing here, therefore, in their argument for "convictional perspectivism," is an effort to liberate the development and justification of convictional beliefs (and, for McClendon, also the development and justification of theological doctrines) from the restraint of those views (such as "convictional imperialism") which posit that only correspondence theories of truth may be appealed to in seeking to develop and justify convictional claims, while at the same time avoiding a swing, to the other end of the pendulum, to those views (such as "convictional relativism") which seem to posit that – for purposes of dialog and persuasion among different communities – all potential theories of truth are of little, if any, value in seeking to develop and justify convictional claims. Accordingly, McClendon and Smith seek to "defuse" both hard religious epistemological realism and hard religious epistemological relativism.

Between these two poles of "convictional imperialism" and "convictional relativism," McClendon and Smith suggest that, with "convictional perspectivism," one may (or a community may) employ one or more theories of truth – or one or more "loci of justification" – on an "ad hoc" basis, according to what might best suit one's present

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[74]Convictions, 106-7. Also, as examined in chapter 2 above, McClendon elsewhere, drawing on the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, restates this argument essentially as follows: the unhappiness or happiness of particular "picture sets" can be determined (or anticipated) by ascertaining the degree to which these picture sets comply with the "language games" of a specific community. McClendon examines the notion of "picture sets" especially in Doctrine, 75-77; and, he treats the notion of "language games" particularly in Witness, 249-60.

or anticipated justificatory concerns.[75] Moreover, they imply that since these theories or loci are not universally accepted,[76] neither all of them – nor any one of them in particular – have to be used in the process of developing or justifying convictions (or conviction sets).[77] That is, they hold that "anyone can refrain from appealing to any one of these considerations . . . [i.e., certain theories of truth or particular loci of justification] without being inconsistent or absurd."[78] Or, conversely stated, they maintain that while one must have at least some evidence in order to support (or justify) a conviction (or other beliefs), it is not necessary to have unlimited evidence.[79] However, in apparent contradiction to this "ad hoc" outlook of "convictional perspectivism," McClendon and Smith suggest that the convictional perspectivist must always at least endeavor to show correspondence between words and things, in order to develop and justify convictions (or conviction sets).[80] Yet, while they rather tenaciously want to hold to some sort of correspondence, they acknowledge that they "seem to have no *theory* of representation at all."[81]

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[75]Convictions, 187. Here, McClendon and Smith are loosely drawing upon William Placher's monograph, Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989).

[76]Convictions, 154.

[77]In this regard, McClendon and Smith rely upon the speech act theory of John L. Austin, as examined in chapter 2 above.

[78]Convictions, 155.

[79]Convictions, 85.

[80]Convictions, 159.

[81]Convictions, 77. With the concept of "representation," McClendon and Smith mean, for example, "the sense in which religious convictions (or for that matter, literary

Therefore, McClendon's and Smith's understanding of the role of correspondence theories of truth within "convictional perspectivism" appears to contain at least some ambiguity. In view of the emergence of postmodernism in contemporary Western culture, I wonder if their argument along these lines might be strengthened, if they were – especially for purposes of inter-communal dialogue or persuasion – to allow for two phases of justification: with a first phase consisting of all relevant loci of justification (such as coherent truth, pragmatic truth, and so on), except for correspondent truth; and, with a second phase consisting of correspondent truth, where possible and when additional dialogue or persuasive endeavors have been deemed necessary. It seems, on an "ad hoc" basis, that there would often be a cornucopia of decisive material to cover just with phase one, so that moving to phase two, for purposes of inter-communal dialogue or persuasion, might seldom be necessary – except, perhaps, until one were otherwise completely convinced that he or she should "embrace" the conviction sets of a new community.

Narrative, experience, and the church as sources for Christian convictions. Another central aspect of McClendon's theological method is his argument that narrative, experience, and the church should be three of the main sources for forming Christian convictions or doctrines. In the actual development of his doctrine, at least with his development of a doctrine of God, while the latter two sources, experience (where

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texts that express such convictions) can tell us the truth about heaven and earth, or conversely fail to do so," as set forth in Convictions, 35; or, more broadly, they indicate that "representation" can be defined as "description . . . [or] reference," as revealed in Convictions, 60.

"experience" means the religious experiences of communities and individuals) and the church (where "church" chiefly means church practices, such as prayer), function to some extent in his constructive efforts, it is the first source, narrative (where "narrative" means the narrative of Scripture and the narrative of the Christian tradition), that carries the majority of the burden for these efforts. Moreover, within the source of narrative, while the narrative of tradition does play a role in his constructive pursuits, it is the narrative of Scripture, in the sense of "God speaking,"[82] that clearly dominates these pursuits.

All of the emphases he places on these various sources as he develops his doctrines are largely in keeping with what he claims he will stress as he sets forth his theological method; yet, the rather heavy weight he places upon Scripture in his actual doctrinal developments, including his doctrine of God, would still likely strike many as overwhelmingly significant emphasis. For some of McClendon's critics, this type of emphasis on the Bible would seem to be a strength, because, as Douglas Ottati remarks, it allows him to "work from a strong confidence in the sufficiency of revelation;"[83] however, for others, such as Terrence Tilley, this type of emphasis would appear, in some regards at least, to be a weakness.

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[82]Doctrine, 464.

[83]Douglas F. Ottati, "Four Recent Interpretations of Christian Ethics," review of Systematic Theology: Ethics, by James William McClendon, Jr., Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics, by Oliver O'Donovan, Ethics: Volume One, Basic Elements and Methodology in a Ethical Theology, by Trutz Rendtorff, and Sacramental Ethics: Pastoral Identity and the Christian Life, by Timothy F. Sedgwick, in Religious Studies Review 16 (April 1990): 105.

In his essay, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," Tilley makes a distinction between what he terms "pure intratextualism" and "dirty intertextuality,"[84] where the former concept contains the notion that Christianity has really had only one text, the Bible, in which textual interpretation occurs, and where the latter concept includes the idea that Christianity "has always had a multiplicity of canons and texts in which textual interpretation takes place."[85] For "pure intratextualists," among whom Tilley includes McClendon (as well as Hans Frei and George Lindbeck), one "presumes easy access to a privileged framework which is already given . . . [a framework often identified as] 'the' Christian Scripture . . . [and which is] immune from shaping by ongoing conversation."[86] However, for "dirty intertextualists," with whom Tilley aligns himself, one "presumes that no privileged framework is available,"[87] and one holds "that even the text to be interpreted . . . [including Scripture] is in part given as a function of the context of interpretation, not as a pure text."[88] In addition, Tilley argues that, because of their view that "Christianity . . . [and its central documents are] something found, not made,"[89] "pure intratextualists" perceive religious documents, like Scripture,

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[84]Terrence W. Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," Modern Theology 5 (January 1989): 87-111.

[85]Ibid., 102-103.

[86]Ibid, 105.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., 108.

[89]Ibid., 103.

as "agents" that perform actions of identification, such as the action of identifying the person of Christ.[90] But, he suggests that, due to their view that "the community of Christians *chooses* . . . [its central] documents,"[91] "dirty intertextualists" perceive this community and its "members as agents, . . . since . . . [Tilley maintains] the power of agency . . . [actually and] finally resides with those who constitute the documents as agents."[92]

Thus, Tilley implies that McClendon, as a "pure intratextualist," inappropriately grants too much authority to Scripture as a resource for Christian doctrines (or convictions) and not enough authority to the Christian community, which, in Tilley's view, has the power to choose Scripture as a resource. Whether McClendon or Tilley is more correct in this matter hinges, it seems, on how one understands and identifies Scripture. Is it primarily to be identified as a document through which God speaks to us, as McClendon avers, in which case it would be more of a document in which God "finds" us than a document which the faith community has "made?" Or, is it chiefly to be identified as a document that the Christian community has assembled and that is open to "shaping by ongoing conversation,"[93] as Tilley suggests, in which case it would be more of a document that is "made" by the faith community than a document in which God "finds" us?

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[90]Ibid., 99, 110.

[91]Ibid., 110.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid., 105.

Another challenge to McClendon's understanding of Scripture as the primary resource for forming Christian convictions has been suggested by Douglas Ottati.[94] Ottati wonders what McClendon would do if he found a non-Christian narrative to be "more true" than the Christian narrative of Scripture on a particular topic. If so, would McClendon be willing to go as far as to question the veracity of at least a portion of the biblical narrative?[95] More specifically, Ottati makes the following argument:

> May a non-Christian interpretation of a circumstance or reality (e.g., a Jewish interpretation of the holocaust or a scientific interpretation of the interdependence of the ecosystem) disclose significant truths that are obscured by our received understanding of the Christian perspective? If so, is it then a work of faithful truthfulness to revise our received understandings of the Christian perspective, to revise our received estimate of the biblical narrative on which our perspective rests, or even to call into question some aspect of the biblical narrative itself? Attention to matters such as these . . . would make for a more comprehensive account of how the perspective of the Christian community relates to other similarly prominent, historically and socially generated perspectives.[96]

McClendon, as Ottati observes,[97] does maintain that any narrative under consideration as a resource for Christian convictions or doctrines, including the narrative of the Bible,[98] should be continually submitted to "a tournament of narratives."[99] That is, McClendon holds that the narrative of Scripture and other narratives should be allowed,

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[94]Ottati, review of Ethics, by McClendon, 105-10.

[95]Ibid., 108-9.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Ibid., 108.

[98]Doctrine, 41.

[99]Ottati, review of Ethics, by McClendon, 108. Here, Ottati refers to Ethics, 149.

in some sense, to compete with one another, so that those narratives which point to what is "more true" might become apparent. In addition, McClendon also indicates that he, along with James Smith, adheres to the notion that all of his convictions – including, it would seem, his convictions regarding the authority and truth of Scripture – "might be false and are in principle always subject to rejection, reformulation, improvement, or reformation."[100] Thus, to Ottati's questions, McClendon would appear to aver that, at least in theory, if he were to discover a non-Christian narrative that was found to be "more true" than the Christian narrative of Scripture on a particular topic, he would be willing to go as far as to question the veracity of at least a portion of the biblical narrative in relation to that particular topic. However, in practice, this would likely be no small concession for McClendon to make; and it could, as his and Smith's definition of "conviction" suggests, make his theology "*significantly different . . . than before*."[101] McClendon has such a high view of Scripture, holding, for instance, that "we can make *full sense* of biblical narrative only when we see its implied narrator not as the human author (who, to be sure, is fully involved at his or her own level), but as the very God of whom Scripture speaks,"[102] and he so heavily relies upon the Bible – as "God speaking"[103] – in the construction of his doctrine, that if he were to concede a lack of

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[100]Convictions, 112. McClendon elsewhere refers to this latter perspective as his and Smith's "principle of fallibility," as shown in Ethics, 44, and in Doctrine, 472.

[101]Convictions, 5.

[102]Doctrine, 40-41, emphasis McClendon's.

[103]Doctrine, 40.

veracity of even a portion of the scriptural narrative, it would seem that conceivably his entire theological project might have to begin again from scratch. So, while there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of McClendon's call for even the Bible to be submitted to a tournament of narratives, I would imagine that he would fight quite tenaciously to preserve his view that "Scripture is the tale God tells."[104] Furthermore, while McClendon allows that any of his views might be fallible, I would also suspect, as Ottati implies, that McClendon's tenacity on this matter might worry some who would seek an account of how McClendon's perspective might "relate to other similarly prominent, historically and socially generated perspectives."[105]

"This is that" and "then is now." Still another central feature of McClendon's theological method is his hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now." With this principle, he means that, in a mystical manner, the Bible addresses Christians in "*this* present church" just as much as it addressed them in "*that* primitive, first century church" and that the Bible addresses Christians *now* in "this present church" just as much as it will address Christ's followers, *then*, in "the future, eschatological church." Some scholars perceive this aspect of McClendon's theological method as persuasive. For instance, Stanley Hauerwas maintains that, with his "this is that" and "then is now" principle, "McClendon forces us, in effect, to become better readers of the Gospel so that

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[104]Doctrine, 40.

[105]Ottati, review of Ethics, by McClendon, 109.

we might see in our reading that we are ourselves already characters *in* the story."[106] However, others, such as David Wayne Layman and Willie James Jennings, maintain that there are potential faults within this hermeneutical principle of McClendon's.

For example, David Layman, in an article criticizing both McClendon and John Howard Yoder, avers that, with this hermeneutical principle, McClendon effectively seeks to bypass church history.[107] That is, Layman holds that "despite McClendon's assertion that he does not intend 'a denial of the facts of history, nor a rejection of their significance,' he *does* intend to jump back to the apostolic era in a 'single bound' of mystical solidarity, thus establishing an *immediate* relationship with the Jesus of the apostolic faith."[108] Furthermore, relying upon the thought of John Williamson Nevin,[109] Layman argues that because McClendon intends this jump back, he "leaps over the

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[106]Stanley Hauerwas, "Reading James McClendon Takes Practice: Lessons in the Craft of Theology," chap. in Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy, publication of the Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postcritical Key Series, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Ochs (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 1997), 181.

[107]David Wayne Layman, "The Inner Ground of Christian Theology: Church, Faith, and Sectarianism," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 27 (Summer 1990): 480-503.

[108]Ibid., 490. Here, Layman cites Ethics, 30.

[109]Layman particularly has in view here: John Williamson Nevin, Vindication of the Revised Liturgy, Historical and Theological, part 2, Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy, reprinted in Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., and George H. Bricker, eds., Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Pickwick Press, 1978), 376-80.

history of the church, . . . [and by doing so he] denies that God is present and active in that history."[110]

McClendon, in an article written together with John Howard Yoder, offers a response to Layman's criticism.[111] The thrust of McClendon's and Yoder's response is that they and Layman have in view different understandings of "catholic church." Thus, after distinguishing among three senses of "catholic church" – (catholic$_1$), a whole or well-rounded individual church; (catholic$_2$), all the church or the ecumenical church; and, (catholic$_3$), the Roman Catholic Church[112] – McClendon and Yoder maintain that Layman has in mind catholic$_3$ (as a path towards achieving catholic$_2$) and that they and the "baptist" tradition have in mind catholic$_1$ (as a path towards achieving catholic$_2$), where catholic$_1$ could be restated as "the baptist vision that understands our relation to the *present* Christ and to one another in the *present* Christ."[113] McClendon and Yoder indicate that whether the "baptist" tradition is in fact a catholic$_1$ tradition is beyond the scope of their essay, yet they hold that it is a legitimate "question for history (and for historians)."[114] In other words, the heart of McClendon's and Yoder's response is that they have a significantly different understanding of "church" than Layman does, so that

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[110]Layman, "The Inner Ground of Christian Theology," 492.

[111]James William McClendon, Jr. and John Howard Yoder, "Christian Identity in Ecumenical Perspective: A Response to David Wayne Layman," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 27 (Summer 1990): 561-80.

[112]Ibid., 562-63.

[113]Ibid., 579, emphases mine.

[114]Ibid., 573.

when Layman mentions "church history," he has missed what McClendon and Yoder (and perhaps the "baptist" tradition as a whole) have in view with the concept of "church."

I cannot dispute McClendon's and Yoder's claims, at least as they set them forth in the above mentioned article. However, in his overall theological project, especially in his monograph, Doctrine, while McClendon certainly appeals to an understanding of "church" as the local church (or as catholic$_1$),[115] he also appeals to what Layman may have in view with (catholic$_3$) church history.[116] Although, in making these latter types of appeals, McClendon often treats the narrative of (catholic$_3$) church history not as an authority that can offer entirely new doctrine beyond what has been presented in the Bible but more as a collection of commentaries – or as what he sometimes refers to as a collection of *midrashim*[117] – that expound upon or seek to clarify the doctrine already set forth in Scripture.

It is along these lines of interpreting McClendon as offering more of a *midrashim*-type treatment of church history that Willie Jennings critiques McClendon's "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle.[118] That is, in contrast to David Layman's

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[115]See especially Doctrine, 361-72.

[116]See, for example, how McClendon turns to what seems to be (catholic$_3$) church history as part of his developments of a doctrine of the atonement and a doctrine of the person of Christ, as set forth in Doctrine, 199-213, 250-63.

[117]Doctrine, 230.

[118]Willie James Jennings, "Recovering the Radical Reformation for Baptist Theology: An Assessment of James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Doctrine," review of Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine, by James William McClendon, Jr., in Perspectives

critique, Jennings faults this principle not for the way in which it might permit one to "leap over" church history but for the manner in which it may allow one to "pit the narrative of scripture" against "the narrative of a church learning to think through its own life over the centuries."[119] In other words, for Jennings, "it is *not* the case that McClendon fails to recognize classical doctrinal themes; . . . *nor* does he ignore doctrinal developments;"[120] instead, he places the narrative of the Bible in an adversarial relationship with the narrative of tradition. Moreover, Jennings maintains that "it is problematic and not entirely fair . . . [for McClendon] to call, ... [for example,] the history of . . . [the] church's reflection on Christ's saving reality mere 'theory' while in contrast contending that the scriptures offer a nontheoretical self-explanation."[121]

While Jennings, in my view, offers a more focused critique of McClendon's hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now" than does Layman, I would argue that much of the merit of Jennings's objection (similar to the merit of Terrence Tilley's objection, discussed above) depends upon whether one should identify the narrative of Scripture and the narrative of church tradition as narratives through which God speaks in unlike manner, as McClendon maintains, or as narratives through which God speaks (or does not speak) in like manner, as Jennings suggests. If McClendon is correct, then it would seem appropriate to conceive of Scripture as "nontheoretical" and

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in Religious Studies 24 (Summer 1997): 181-93.

[119]Ibid., 190.

[120]Ibid.

[121]Ibid., 191.

of church tradition as "theoretical;" however, if Jennings is correct, then it would seem appropriate to conceive of both the Bible and church tradition as "theoretical." Yet, even if one were to side with McClendon on this specific point, I would argue that McClendon's project could more adequately allow, as Jennings suggests, for the positive contribution that the narrative of church tradition has made to historical and contemporary understandings of Christian doctrine. That is, I agree with Jennings's implication that, at least on occasion, McClendon seems to overly amplify those instances where tradition has gotten it wrong, while unduly minimizing those instances where tradition may have gotten it right.

An Evaluation of the Development of McClendon's Doctrine of God

With his development of a doctrine of God, McClendon argues how God can be known both through God's reign or kingdom work (in the future, in the present, and in the past) and, more specifically, through the salvific work of Jesus Christ and the ecclesial and missional work of the Holy Spirit. Also, in each of these regards, his application of various aspects of his theological method becomes apparent, to a greater or lesser degree. For instance, he rather extensively applies his hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now" in his development of doctrine of the rule of God (especially with his treatment of the reign of Christ but also as he sets forth his notion of God's passibility in God's ongoing activity of creation); yet, he makes only limited use of experience and the church, for example, as sources for constructing a doctrine of God. However, in the paragraphs below, I will limit my evaluation of McClendon's development of a doctrine of God to just a few representative components. First, I will

assess the way in which he employs the narrative of Scripture to construct this doctrine. Next, I will evaluate the manner in which he endeavors to establish the coherence of various "conviction sets" or "doctrine sets" towards an overall doctrine of God. Then, I will assess the way in which his doctrine of Christ informs his doctrine of God.

The narrative of Scripture and a doctrine of God. One aspect of his theological method that McClendon extensively and consistently applies is his use of the narrative of Scripture, where one conceives of Scripture as "God speaking,"[122] as a primary resource for developing all of his doctrines, which, in turn, inform his doctrine of God. For those who reject the notion of Scripture understood in this manner, McClendon's entire theological project might seem to be misguided. However, for those such as Robert Barron, McClendon's heavy reliance upon Scripture-as-God-speaking enables him to construct a doctrine of God that is both appealing and appropriate, precisely because it makes this doctrine more of an "insider" affair.[123] To emphasize this point, Barron contrasts the approach of theologians such as McClendon and Hans Urs von Balthasar with more progressive approaches:

> The liberal theologian is like someone standing outside of Chartres Cathedral pointing excitedly at the drab gray of the windows and trying to convince people to come in and see them. The problem is that the windows come to life only when they are seen from within the Cathedral, which is to say, from within the worship and practice of the Christian community. Both McClendon and

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[122]Doctrine, 464.

[123]Robert Barron, "Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.," Modern Theology 18 (April 2002): 267-76.

> Balthasar want their readers *inside* Christian action before they either speak of Christian teaching or seek a conversation with the wider culture.[124]

If one presupposes that Scripture is an authoritative resource, Barron provides a helpful illustration to show the way in which the rich imagery of the biblical narrative allows theologians like McClendon and Balthasar to construct vivid and compelling kataphatic theologies of God as one who is present to and can be known by humanity. In the case of McClendon's theology, this seems to be why some, like Ralph Wood, in reviewing McClendon's work, Doctrine, are able to conclude: "Repeatedly I found myself asking, 'How could one read this book and not want to become a Christian?'"[125] The question, though, is whether or not McClendon claims too much authority for Scripture, so that, as Terrence Tilley suggests, one might be left with "doing nothing but 'playing Bible land,'"[126] and, therefore, whether or not McClendon claims too much about the extent to which God can be known.

The coherence of "conviction sets" and a doctrine of God. Another aspect of his theological method that McClendon amply employs towards developing a doctrine of God is his effort to show a strong coherence (which is one type of what he terms "loci of justification")[127] of various sets of his "baptist" doctrine (where he understands

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[124]Ibid., 269.

[125]Ralph C. Wood, "James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Doctrine: An Appreciation," review of Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine, by James William McClendon, Jr., in Perspectives in Religious Studies 24 (Summer 1997): 199.

[126]Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," 95.

[127]Convictions, 106-7, 154-62, 177-79.

"doctrine" as a subset of his notion of "convictions")[128] that either directly or indirectly support his overall doctrine of God.[129] For example, with the development of his "two-narrative" Christological model, he endeavors to demonstrate how the following set of sub-doctrines harmoniously cohere together: the non-divinity imparting birth of Jesus; Jesus' *post-birth* self-emptying to follow God's way of service; Jesus' gradual (and eventually full) achievement of the image of God; and, God's resurrection re-identification of Jesus with God's own life. Similarly, as he moves toward constructing his narrative-based trinitarianism, he attempts to show how another particular set of sub-doctrines cohere well together. In this instance, in an effort to emphasize the one-ness or unity of God, he maintains that a non-personal pre-existent logos as "the speaking of God" coheres favorably not only with the just mentioned Christological sub-doctrines but also with his trinitarian notions of Spirit – where McClendon conceives of Spirit as a non-personal dynamic power – and of God the Father – where he conceives of God the Father as one who adopts and liberates his people.

These endeavors to justify various doctrines and, ultimately, his doctrine of God, by seeking to demonstrate how well his doctrines cohere together, seem to reflect some

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[128]Barry Harvey, "Doctrinally Speaking: James McClendon on the Nature of Doctrine," Perspectives in Religious Studies 27 (Spring 2000): 39. As Harvey observes, for McClendon, "doctrine" functions as one type of or as a subset of "convictions." Or, as McClendon indicates elsewhere, one conceives of "doctrines" as "the formal, conceptual restatement of convictions," as set forth in James William McClendon, Jr., "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," Faith and Philosophy 3 (October 1986): 385.

[129]He implies that the more adequately he is able to show this coherence, the more equipped he will be to pursue "ad hoc" dialogue, concerning understandings of God, with non-"baptist" communities, who have in common at least this particular loci of justification.

of the key principles of McClendon's "convictional perspectivism," such as the notion that various (but not necessarily all) theories of truth and other "loci of justification" may be used to support the doctrines (or convictions) of a particular community and the notion that at least partial inter-communal dialogue is possible on the basis of potential overlapping loci of justification among particular communities. In addition, this type of "perspectivism" puts McClendon's theological project at odds both with hard epistemological realists (who McClendon refers to as "convictional imperialists"), who would insist on only and always using a correspondent theory of truth to justify doctrines (and convictions),[130] and with hard epistemological relativists ("convictional relativists"), who would maintain that dialogue among various communities is not tenable, due to incommensurable truth claims. However, this application of McClendon's "convictional perspectivism" towards a doctrine of God would seem to hold promise in a contemporary culture that is increasingly embracing postmodernism.

A doctrine of Christ informs a doctrine of God. In Doctrine, McClendon's main work (as the title appropriately indicates) on theological doctrine, his chief purpose is to set forth a "baptist" understanding not just of a doctrine of God but also of many of the major doctrines of the Christian faith; nevertheless, the various doctrines that he develops in this work – eschatology; salvation; creation; the atonement; the person of Christ; the

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[130]In this manner, McClendon reflects John L. Austin's desire to break free from correspondence-only means of justifying truth claims, for as Austin indicates: "It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, . . . which it must do either truly or falsely," as set forth in John L. Austin: How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1.

Holy Spirit and the church's mission; and, God's trinitarian identity – combine together to either directly or indirectly inform his notion of God and of God's identity. From his treatment of these various doctrines, he comes to some of the following findings about the identity of God: God is one who reigns over the cosmos and over humanity, though not by force but by self-sacrifice; God is one who seeks to establish right relations between Godself and people; God is one who suffers both in God's redemptive actions and in God's ongoing creative actions; God is one who ultimately completely "meets" humanity through the person of Jesus Christ; God is one who, as Spirit, works through God's people, the church, to bring others into full "syzygic" unity with God and with one another; God is one and whole – and is, at the same time, the God of adventurous transformation, constant companionship, and powerful presence. In sum, his primary conclusion about God's identity, through his construction of these various doctrines, is that God is one who sacrificially gives of God's self.

There are many aspects of McClendon's doctrine of God that could be evaluated along these lines. However, rather than examining each aspect, I will, instead, offer a representative assessment of the manner in which his Christology informs his doctrine of God.

Beginning with his eschatology and shaped by his hermeneutical principle of "this is that" and "then is now," McClendon presents a fascinating picture of Jesus Christ as the one will be king at the last judgment being not only the same Jesus Christ who lived in first century Nazareth but also the same Jesus Christ who reigns in the present. Also, as part of this mystically-informed, eschatological picture of Christ, McClendon

argues that he is one who has been, is, and will be in the process of growing God's kingdom through the means of his own self-sacrificial love and the self-sacrificial love of his disciples.

Then, with his particular development of a doctrine of Christ, McClendon sets forth – against the traditional Logos, two-natures, and historical models – his own "two-narrative Christology." Here, to briefly recapitulate my summary of his treatment of this doctrine presented in chapter 4 above, he maintains, in part, that the "self-emptying" described in Philippians 2 refers to a certain emptying of Jesus' soul that occurred *after* Jesus was born. Thus, he argues that this "self-emptying" points to Jesus' ongoing persistence in rejecting the pursuit of worldly fame in favor of the pursuit of identifying with those on the margins of society, a choice that eventually led to his death.

With this understanding of Philippians 2:5-11, McClendon then inquires about what such an after-enfleshment self-emptying might mean for interpreting Paul's reference to Jesus' "'being in the form of God' (Phil. 2:6)."[131] Drawing on the thought of Eugene TeSelle,[132] he avers that "we must understand that 'the image of God' in Scripture is not a designated state but a task set, not an ontic level enjoyed but an ideal to be realized."[133] Therefore, McClendon equates the "form of God" (in Philippians 2:6) with the "image of God" (in passages such as Genesis 1:26-27), and he suggests that for

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[131]Doctrine, 267.

[132]Doctrine, 268. Here, McClendon refers to Eugene TeSelle, Christ in Context: Divine Purpose and Human Possibility (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975), 16-31.

[133]Doctrine, 268.

Jesus, and for all other humans as well, the image (or form) of God is not a state in which humans are born but a goal to which many aspire – but only Jesus attained, because only Jesus completely followed God's way of the servant.[134]

Furthermore, McClendon holds that these concepts of Jesus' after-enfleshment self-emptying and of his eventual complete realization of the image of God (through his full faithfulness during his life and death) cohere with the biblical narrative's accounts of his birth and resurrection. For instance, with regard to Jesus' birth, McClendon argues that the "Gospel stories *do not say* or suggest that it is by virtue of this marvelous conception that Jesus was *divine*."[135] While McClendon allows that these stories imply that "the Spirit, as the human Jesus' divine Mother, conceived Jesus exactly when and as Mary conceived him,"[136] he rejects the notion that "the Holy Spirit is . . . presented . . . as a Jupiter-like father deity who impregnates a human mother."[137] In addition, in terms of Jesus' resurrection, McClendon avers that – due to Jesus's complete faithfulness in following God's way of the servant (which, according to McClendon's interpretation of Scripture, was not accidental but intended by God from before the beginning of the world)[138] – God re-identified Jesus with God's own life, starting with the time of Jesus' resurrection.

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[134]Doctrine, 268.

[135]Doctrine, 270.

[136]Doctrine, 270.

[137]Doctrine, 270.

[138]Doctrine, 249.

Moreover, he further develops his two-narrative Christology by arguing: (1) that the scriptural story is simultaneously both the story of God reaching down to humans and the story of people reaching up to God and (2) that, with Jesus of Nazareth, the two stories fully converge, bringing together God and humans in the person of Jesus Christ.[139] In addition, McClendon holds that because of the event of Pentecost, this same Christ is present to his disciples today – in a firsthand, reciprocal fashion.[140]

Furthermore, McClendon argues that "logos" in the Prologue of John's Gospel should be understood – not as a pre-existent, personal "Christ" but – as a pre-existent, non-personal "speaking of God."[141] Also, he avers that the Bible portrays Yahweh as a father who adopts (or befriends) and liberates his people – perfectly and fully so, he suggests, as "Father" to Jesus of Nazareth.[142]

Thus, McClendon's Christology provides a more complete understanding of his notion of God. For instance, his Christology shows that, through Jesus, God accomplished God's own intention to completely meet the humanity that had been seeking to fully encounter God. Furthermore, his Christology expresses the view that because Jesus was re-identified with God's own life, it follows that, in Christ, through the Spirit, God endeavors to be present with people today in a firsthand, reciprocal manner.

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[139]Doctrine, 274-77.

[140]Doctrine, 243, 274-77.

[141]Doctrine, 288-89.

[142]Doctrine, 290-93.

A strength of McClendon's Christology, as Robert Barron observes, is that his "two-narratives" model seems to offer advantages over some of the more traditional Christological models, such as the two-natures model and the historical model. For instance, in comparison to the two-*natures* model, Barron argues that McClendon's two-*narratives* model "gives an infinitely richer account of a person or thing than does an abstraction such as 'nature,' . . . [since] however we nuance and tweak the terminology, 'natures' inevitably sound mutually-exclusive and contrastive; . . . [whereas] narrative, like music, qualifies well for . . . [the Christological] task, . . . [for] a single story can operate simultaneously on a variety of levels without contradiction."[143] Moreover, in comparison to the historical model, Barron further maintains that McClendon's two-narratives model "corrects the liberal-historical approach whose excessive emphasis on the humanity of Jesus turns the life and career of Christ into a kind of idol."[144] I concur with Barron's assessment of these particular advantages of McClendon's Christology.

Yet, there appear to be some possible disadvantages of McClendon's treatment of this doctrine as well. For instance, some scholars, such as Willie Jennings, raise the criticism that McClendon's "defense against the charge of adoptionism is unconvincing."[145] I agree with this criticism, but only to a certain extent. For, on the one hand, McClendon suggests that, since he holds that Jesus of Nazareth's unique role as

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[143]Barron, "Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.," 272.

[144]Ibid.

[145]Jennings, "Recovering the Radical Reformation for Baptist Theology: An Assessment of James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s Doctrine," 191.

God's Son "is what God intended for him even 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4),"[146] his Christology should not be perceived as "adoptionistic," at least in the strong sense of "implying . . . . [that] 'God had to wait around' for someone like Jesus to appear so God could 'adopt' the lucky winner as his Son."[147] Thus, McClendon would seem to at least partially refute the type of criticism that Jennings levies here. However, on the other hand, the combination of several of McClendon's Christologically-related arguments – that "logos" in the Prologue of John's Gospel should be understood as a pre-existent but non-personal "speaking of God;" that Yahweh should generally be conceived of not as a biological but as an adoptive father; that there was no emptying of the eternal Christ's power with Jesus' birth; that no element of divinity was imparted to Jesus with his birth; and, that Jesus gradually achieved the full image of God during his life and death – would appear to show that McClendon develops a Christology that contains an element of a soft adoptionism – although, perhaps, of an eternally intentional (and not a whimsical) variety.

Moreover, even if it contains merely a soft adoptionism, the way in which McClendon constructs his Christology has led some, such as Thomas Finger, to question whether his "Christology adequately stresses . . . [the] divine initiative which McClendon also finds important. . . . [That is, Finger wonders if McClendon's Christology can] fully affirm that God came to us in Christ; that God's own self fully bore our sorrows, rather

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[146]Doctrine, 249.

[147]Doctrine, 248-49.

than doing this somewhat indirectly, through a mere man?"[148] I feel that Finger has identified a significant weakness or at least an inconsistency in McClendon's overall doctrine of God. For while McClendon would like to stress that God is one who, as part of God's rule, takes the initiative to sacrificially give of Godself, in order to establish right relations between Godself and people, an adoptionistic perspective (even a soft one) would seem to call into question just how strong this initiative has been. In addition, as McClendon suggests (and Finger observes),[149] if Jesus of Nazareth were only a man, even a perfect man, but not also God (at least until God's resurrection of Jesus and simultaneous re-identification of Jesus with God's own life), this would mean that, for McClendon, merely a man, and not a God-man, was crucified. If this is the case, then, as McClendon further indicates, the cross is only "what God *would do*;"[150] thus, it is not what God Godself actually *did*. Not only would this line of thought seem to exclude some of the stronger theories of the atonement (such as the Anselmian notion of a superabundance of merit),[151] but it would also call into question the extent of God's

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[148]Thomas Finger, "James McClendon's Theology Reaches Completion: A Review Essay," review of Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, by James William McClendon, Jr., and of Systematic Theology, vol. 2, Doctrine, by James William McClendon, Jr., and of Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Witness, by James William McClendon, Jr., in The Mennonite Quarterly Review 76 (January 2002): 126.

[149]Ibid.

[150]Doctrine, 236, emphasis mine.

[151]I have in view here what has sometimes been referred to as Anselm's "superabundance of merit" argument in Cur Deus Homo. With this argument, he holds, in part, that since the sin of killing a God-man would be greater than all other sins in the history of the world combined, the God-man's life would "overcome all sins, if it is given for them," as shown in Anselm, Why God Became Man, in A Scholastic Miscellany:

willingness to suffer in God's own self for humanity (something for which McClendon does want to argue).

For these and other reasons, some may be uneasy with certain aspects of McClendon's doctrine of God as well as with his overall methodological-theological process. Yet, for others, McClendon's work, as Robert Barron observes, has the advantage of offering a doctrine of God from "within the Cathedral."[152] That is, despite some potential limitations, particularly what the soft adoptionism within his Christology appears to convey about his doctrine of God, McClendon develops a vivid and compelling theology of God – as one who is present to and can be known by humanity.

Edward Farley and James McClendon in Methodological and Theological Conversation

In an endeavor to bring Farley's and McClendon's methodological and theological projects into conversation with each other, I will begin by noting some ways in which aspects of their respective projects appear to share similarities with one another. Then, in a somewhat speculative manner, I will hypothetically consider how they might critique one another.

Anselm to Ockham, ed. and trans. by Eugene R. Fairweather, The Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1956), 164.

[152]Barron, "Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.," 269.

Some Similarities Shared with Farley's and McClendon's Projects

The detachment of narrative from reality being perceived as problematic. One similarity they share is the notion that the detachment of narrative from reality is problematic. Though they approach this notion in different ways – and though Farley's approach to it is more evident – this does appear to be an area of some common ground for them. For Farley, one of the major problems facing contemporary theology is a loss of reality.[153] To paraphrase his argument along these lines, he suggests that much theological work, for at least the last two hundred years, has turned to perceived authoritative texts, such as Scripture and the creeds of the church, and has simply stopped there, instead of seeking the realities "behind" these texts or the realities to which these texts point. His response to this problem involves: (1) a Husserlian-informed call for theologians to go directly to the realities themselves, apart from any narrative; and, (2) a plea for theologians, to the extent that they need to turn to texts (the Bible, church creeds, etc.) at all, to treat such texts not as authoritative ends-in-themselves but as fields of evidence (or as more or less a neutral means) through which actual realities can be recovered.[154] For McClendon, while he suggests that there can be no access to reality apart from narratives,[155] and while he and James Smith allow that they have no theory of

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[153]EM, 9-13.

[154]ER, 178-79.

[155]James William McClendon, Jr., "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," 390; idem, Ethics, 340.

correspondence,[156] McClendon, with Smith, maintains that reality must always be sought through narratives.[157] Thus, both Farley and McClendon agree on this matter, at least to the degree that, when working with a text such as the Bible or a church creed, theologians should strive to connect (or to work through) these narratives to the realities to which they point.

However, I do not find either Farley's or McClendon's views on this matter to be entirely satisfactory. While I agree, more with McClendon here than with Farley, that there can be no access to realities apart from narrative (or language) – or, at most, that realities obtained apart from narrative, to use McClendon's terminology, are "sterile"[158] – I would argue that, in the particular case of inter-communal dialogue, if a community does not have a theory of correspondence, then that community should use caution in striving to show correspondence between narrative and realities when seeking to engage other communities. However, a situation involving intra-communal dialogue, is, in my view, an entirely different matter. That is, if members within a community were to agree that there is correspondence between narrative and realities, then I would argue that – within their community – it should not be considered rationally problematic for them to freely acknowledge and observe such a correspondence, even if they do not have a theory to support it.

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[156]Convictions, 77.

[157]Convictions, 77.

[158]McClendon, "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," 390.

Separation from traditional developments of certain doctrines. Another similarity that McClendon and Farley share is the way in which they both break from more traditional developments of the doctrines of the incarnation of Christ and of the Trinity. For instance, with the incarnation of Christ, both McClendon and Farley either claim or suggest that no element of divinity was imparted to Jesus of Nazareth at his birth. Also, with the Trinity, while both McClendon and Farley stress the unity or the oneness of God, both theologians tend to avoid any robust sense of "three separate persons." In particular, they both reject (either directly or indirectly): the idea that Christ existed as a personal being before the incarnation;[159] and, the idea that the Spirit should be conceived of as a personal being (at any time).[160] These similarities are especially interesting in view of the substantially different theological methods used by these two theologians, with McClendon employing a method based more on narrative and with Farley using a method grounded more on contemporary communal experience, and these similarities

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[159]For instance, Farley holds that "the notion of Jesus as *a* pre-existent divine being both mythologizes divine being and dehumanizes Jesus. It may be a way of justifying the cultic worship of Jesus, but it obscures what actually happened in the event of Jesus as Christ," as indicated in Divine Empathy, 273. Also, McClendon implies that when Scripture applies "logos" to the pre-existent Christ, the meaning conveyed is not a pre-existent person but a pre-existent "speaking of God" or a pre-existent "utterance," as set forth in Doctrine, 289.

[160]For example, Farley suggests that to treat the Spirit (or for that matter to treat God) as a "person" would be to mythologize the Spirit (or God), as shown in Divine Empathy, 132-33. Moreover, for Farley, "the act of worship does not require God . . . [or the Spirit] as a personal entity . . . [but merely] the character of the Creativity we worship," as indicated in Divine Empathy, 133. In addition, McClendon argues that the New Testament never fully presents God's Spirit as the "later Christian writings . . . [would, as] a 'distinct divine person;' . . . [however,] what the New Testament does do . . . is to broaden and deepen the biblical idea of *God* so that God's true role as Trailblazer and Co-conspirator and Divine *Dynamis* is conveyed," as set forth in Doctrine, 291.

suggest that there are at least some limits to the extent to which method might be claimed to inform doctrine.

An emphasis on the suffering of God. Yet another similarity is that both Farley and McClendon place an emphasis on the suffering of God. For instance, Farley argues: that "the empathy of God is . . . a pathos, a 'fellow-feeling' that *suffers;*"[161] and, that the empathy of God is without limit.[162] In fact, Farley suggests that the central feature of God's creative and redemptive works is God's aim of divine empathy (where "empathy" is broadly understood as including "participative suffering, self-impartation, perception of our experiencing, and compassion")[163] and, therefore, that the central feature of God's character is divine empathy. Likewise, McClendon holds: first, (as part of his doctrine of creation) that, since God relationally interacts with the world in God's creative activity, not only the world but also God changes; and, that God suffers throughout these changes, both "artistically," as God seeks to mold recalcitrant human beings, and in terms of God surrendering some of God's own independence, as God sacrificially releases some of God's existence to dependent creatures;[164] and, second, (as part of his doctrine of the atonement) that the cross was not at odds with – but was "exactly what God would do,"[165]

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[161]Divine Empathy, 295, emphasis mine.

[162]Divine Empathy, 296.

[163]Divine Empathy, 296.

[164]Doctrine, 160-71.

[165]Doctrine, 236.

so that Jesus of Nazareth and God were of the same purpose in suffering self-sacrificially for others. Indeed, McClendon implies that the main aspect of God's identity is that God is one who sacrificially gives of God's self. This similarity would seem to further point to the importance of not overemphasizing the degree to which method might be claimed to shape doctrine.

A Consideration of How Farley and McClendon Might Critique Each Other

Having endeavored to demonstrate some of the ways in which elements of Farley's and McClendon's respective projects appear to share similarities with one another, I will attempt, in sections below, to hypothetically consider how they might critique one another.

How Scripture should be approached and utilized for developing doctrine. One area where Farley and McClendon could likely critique each other would be with regard to how the Bible should be approached and utilized for developing theological doctrine.[166]

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[166]The doctrine of Scripture is a topic that has received a substantial amount of direct and indirect attention in the modern and postmodern eras, with a broad range of positions offered. Furthermore, a significant number of these positions would be at odds with the views set forth by both Farley and McClendon. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to set forth a treatment of these various views; however, an analysis of Farley's and McClendon's understandings of Scripture would certainly merit additional investigation and study in terms of major theological positions on various aspects of this topic, such as those set forth in the following works: Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, vol. 1, Seeing the Form (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1989); Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, part 1, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975); idem, Church Dogmatics, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G.

Here, Farley could question whether McClendon, even with his claim, under convictional perspectivism, for differing communities to be open to dialogue with one another, would ever substantially consider as conversation partners those with approaches to constructing theology that do not share his presupposition of a heavy reliance upon Scripture-as-sacred-and-authoritative.

T. Thomson and Harold Knight, vol. 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, part 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956); idem, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); The Bible: Its Authority and Interpretation in the Ecumenical Movement, Faith and Order Paper, ed. Ellen Flesseman-van Leer, no. 99 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1980); Hans Frei, The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974); Colin E. Gunton, A Brief Theology of Revelation (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995); Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991); idem, ed., Revelation as History, trans. David Granskou (Toronto, Canada: The Macmillan Company, 1968); Karl Rahner, Inspiration in the Bible, trans. Charles H. Henkey (Edinburgh: Nelson Publishers, 1961); Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord, trans. John Bowden (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993); Sandra M. Schneiders, The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture, 2d ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999); Ronald F. Thiemann, Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Reason and Revelation, Being and God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991); idem, Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1987); Timothy Ward, Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Webster, Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch, Current Issues in Theology, ed. Iain Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nicholas Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and, Nicholas T. Wright, The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture (New York: Harper San Francisco, a division of Harper Collins Publishers, 2005).

Indeed, McClendon argues: that "the Bible is the church's book;"[167] and, that "we are mistaken if we think the church has no agreed and coherent way to read the Bible. The church has always had that."[168] Also, for McClendon, the "plain sense" of Scripture seems to include the notion that the Bible is "the word of God written . . . [or that through which] God speaks."[169] And, elsewhere, he holds that:

> If one makes allowance for occasional excesses and extremes, the main course of Christian Bible reading has held true over the centuries to the **plain sense** of Scripture – its stories were read as (in the main) real stories about real people; its history, real history; its declarations about God and God's creatures as saying what they meant and meaning what they said. The Bible was not a code or cipher to be cracked; it was not a book of secrets; it was realistic; it spoke plain.[170]

McClendon further argues that, in addition to the "plain sense" of Scripture, there is also "the *point* of that plain sense . . . [or] the **spiritual sense** of the text,"[171] and he suggests that while different Christian communities disagree on the "spiritual sense" of the Bible, they all – except for rare aberrations – agree on the "plain sense."

While the hypothetical critique I am here making of McClendon on Farley's behalf is, in some sense, an argument regarding what McClendon does not address – and he cannot be expected to address all perspectives – such a critique could, in my view, be

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[167]Doctrine, 38.

[168]Doctrine, 39.

[169]Doctrine, 464.

[170]Doctrine, 36. As previously indicated, by placing certain phrases in bold, such as "plain sense" in this citation, I am following the style of text used in the book being referenced.

[171]Doctrine, 36.

shown to have at least some merit. Farley does not share McClendon's notion of the "plain sense" of Scripture – or that the Bible is that through which God speaks. And, because McClendon does not consider a non-plain-sense perspective, it seems as though he has from the outset, almost by definition, excluded as a potential dialogue partner any community that shares or reflects Farley's type of perspective that "the house of authority . . . [with its notion of Scripture-as-sacred] has been dismantled."[172] In other words, as a practical matter, McClendon sometimes seems to assume that while different Christian communities might disagree on how to interpret Scripture, they all – except for a few anomalies (that need not really be addressed) – share the perspective that the Bible is the authoritative word of God.

Nevertheless, McClendon could counter Farley's critique in various ways. For instance, he could argue that Farley's methodological and theological project should be classified with those "occasional excesses and extremes" that reject the "plain sense" of Scripture or that reject the Bible as "the word of God." McClendon would seem to be accompanied by other scholars along these lines, as observations, made by David Pellauer and Geoffrey Wainwright, noted above in this chapter, appear to indicate. However, attempting this type of counter argument would be a difficult task, since Farley is by no means a lone theological voice in holding that Scripture should not be viewed as sacred or authoritative.[173]

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[172]ER, 171.

[173]Farley, together with Peter C. Hodgson, elsewhere offers a condensed version of his call for the dismantling of the "house of authority," including the dismantling of Scripture-as-sacred, as set forth in Edward Farley and Peter Hodgson, "Scripture and

In addition, in a perhaps more productive approach, McClendon could attempt to refute Farley's claim that the fact that the early church had a choice in deciding to treat Scripture no longer as a mere record of events, but as an inspired, sacred and authoritative collection of documents, shows that this collection of documents cannot be sacred. McClendon could frame this refutation by considering some of the intra-biblical and extra-biblical evidence that I have already described above in this chapter.

Furthermore, McClendon could endeavor to show that, to the extent that Farley rejects the "plain sense" of Scripture and seeks to construct theology instead largely by turning to realities themselves, Farley develops theology by means of what McClendon refers to as a non-narrativist approach. McClendon could then reiterate his view that a substantial limitation of the non-narrativist approach is that when one detaches theological convictions from narratives, these convictions "become sterile because they are ignorant of their own roots."[174]

In reply to a counter like this last one, though, Farley could argue that even if some of his doctrines seem "sterile," at least he has not claimed more than he ought to on the basis of a text which the Christian tradition has, for the most part, erroneously treated as an authoritative document.

Tradition," chap. in Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks, eds. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1982), 35-61. And, most of the various other contributors to this monograph appear to give at least tacit endorsement to these views. In addition, many other significant contemporary theologians, while they might view Scripture as some sort of "classic text," would not, as McClendon does, consider the Bible to be a text through which "God speaks."

[174]McClendon, "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics," 390.

How conceptions of God pertain to hope for the future. Another area where Farley and McClendon could likely critique one another would be in terms of how their understandings of God pertain to hope for the future.

Here, McClendon could question whether Farley's doctrine of God, even with his notion that the central feature of God's character is divine empathy, offers any substantial basis to claim that there is reason to hope for a positive future.

Farley suggests that, in light of his doctrine of God, any eschatology he could offer would provide no "certain knowledge of what *will* happen in the future,"[175] in part, because of the fact that one can observe that entities self-initiate (and, therefore, that humans are free), which means that the future must be an "open future."[176] Thus, Farley would seem to acknowledge that one simply cannot know, with assurance, whether the future will be a positive one or a negative one. However, he holds that, "at the same time, the facticity of redemption and the event of Jesus as Christ bespeak an ever-active God, a God whose empathetic relation to the world never ceases."[177] Therefore, he implies that whatever the future may hold, when armed with an appropriate "eschatology," which, when adequately understood, "means convictions or theological formulations that concern the reality of human hope,"[178] one can hold out the belief that God will remain in empathetic relation to the world. In addition, Farley maintains that

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[175]Divine Empathy, 314.

[176]Divine Empathy, 314.

[177]Divine Empathy, 314.

[178]Divine Empathy, 313.

the burden to establish and maintain this hope rests with ecclesia (which is not the institutional church but the authentic faith community), since it is ultimately "religious communities . . . [that] . . . are called to hope, . . . [and] to rediscover and rethink hope."[179] That is, for Farley, "we do not hope because we believe . . . [doctrines] X, Y, and Z. We believe . . . [doctrines] X, Y, and Z as expressions of . . . [a] hope [generated by the faith community]."[180]

As part of his critique, McClendon could argue, first, that Farley's belief in a God who has an empathetic relation to the world rests upon his belief in the event of Jesus as Christ, which rests, in turn, in large measure, upon his perception that the reality-at-hand of the ecclesia, the faith community, has been working to eliminate ethnic and social boundaries.[181] McClendon could then inquire about the facts upon which this perception might be based. Outside of a few fortunate exceptions, where does one see the Christian faith community gaining any significant ground in eliminating ethnic and social boundaries? If anything, the facts would seem to suggest the opposite, unless, perhaps, one understands ecclesia too broadly. But, if so, where, then, concretely, would Farley locate ecclesia?

Second, McClendon could question the basis on which the faith community, with Farley's schema, might find reason to generate hope. According to Farley, the faith community cannot look to doctrines, church creeds, or Scripture as authoritative

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[179]Deep Symbols, 112.

[180]Deep Symbols, 96.

[181]EM, 219.

resources for hope. Can it look to God? It can only look indirectly to God's character, through appresentation, Farley avers – and that appresentation should be based, to a significant degree, upon the presentation of the faith community striving to remove ethnic and social boundaries, a presentation that would seem to be dubious (as discussed just above).[182] Can ecclesia look to nature or to the cosmos as a reason to generate hope? Farley implies that this is a possibility, since, due to God's redemptive activity, the faith community can retrieve the reality that world-as-creation, while containing mystery and the tragic, has significance and goodness as its primary characteristics.[183] However, at least in looking to the human part of the present world-as-creation, it would seem that McClendon could mount substantial evidence (such as the holocaust or the growing disparity between rich and poor across the globe, among other possibilities) not only to show, as he argues, that "the world we know is torn by racial, national, economic, ethnic, sexual, cultural, and (not least) religious strife,"[184] but also to call into question "significance" and "goodness" as primary characteristics of (the present) world-as-creation. Thus, given Farley's understanding of how the character of God can be known and what Farley would allow and would not allow as authoritative resources, McClendon could argue that Farley has demonstrated only limited grounds on which the faith community might find reason to generate hope for a positive future.

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[182]This is also the case with divine ciphers, since, as Farley suggests, they, too, can only be obtained as realities at hand indirectly show, imply, or appresent them.

[183]Divine Empathy, 245-48.

[184]Doctrine, 444.

In response, Farley could counter that at least he has not tried to make eschatological claims beyond what can be known solely on the basis of realities at hand and that he has successfully avoided turning to documents such as Scripture and the church creeds that were never originally intended to have the authority that church tradition has come to give them. Also, Farley could argue that, while his schema may offer less than others in terms of assuring a positive hope for the future, he has not only avoided erroneously conceiving of the character of God as overly monarchical (and the related dangers that come with such a view), which such a strong assurance would tend to require, but he has also amply provided for human freedom, which if that freedom is to be genuine, he could further maintain, must have "an open future."[185] In addition, Farley could inquire whether McClendon's schema offers a viable alternative for claiming that there is reason to hope for any sort of positive future.

McClendon could argue that his eschatology would provide at least a measure of knowledge about what will happen in the future, because, in part, the New Testament "end-pictures" of the last judgment and of Jesus Christ returning, when seen through the lens of the "this is that" and "then is now" hermeneutical principle, show that the Jesus Christ who will be king at the last judgment is the same Jesus Christ who lived in first century Nazareth and the same Jesus Christ who reigns in the present. Thus, McClendon could further aver that it follows, since Christ at the last judgment will reign as the resurrected Lamb who was slain, that Christ intends to form a new people (his kingdom), that will exist with God in the present and in the future, by means of Christ's own

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[185]Divine Empathy, 314.

sacrificial love and the sacrificial love of his disciples.[186] Moreover, McClendon could hold that because Jesus was completely faithful, during his life and death, in following God's way of the servant, in the act of Jesus' resurrection, God re-identified Jesus with God's own life.[187] Thus, what can be said of *Christ's* role in eschatology may be understood to reflect *God's* role in eschatology. Therefore, McClendon could maintain that one can know, with some assurance, that, for Christ and Christ's disciples, the future will be a positive one.

In response, Farley could argue, first, that McClendon's entire eschatological project rests upon, not realities at hand, but, to borrow Terrence Tilley's phrase, upon "playing Bible land;"[188] in other words, Farley could hold that McClendon's argument for a positive future rests upon a notion of Scripture-as-sacred, a notion that careful historical research simply does not support. Second, Farley could question whether McClendon's eschatological perspective portrays an overly deterministic notion of God's sovereignty, in which a kingly divine being willfully forces salvation to occur for only a part of humanity.[189]

To counter, McClendon could argue, first, that he is not playing Bible land and that, while acknowledging that Scripture was conveyed through human beings,[190] there is

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[186]Doctrine, 69-102.

[187]Doctrine, 247.

[188]Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," 95.

[189]ER, 156.

[190]Doctrine, 41.

abundant intra-biblical and extra-biblical evidence (previously mentioned) to support the notion that Scripture's primary identity is that of "God speaking."[191] Next, McClendon could maintain that he has endeavored to set forth an eschatological perspective in which Christ and his followers may be said, in a sense, to "conquer;" although this "conquering" occurs, not through "the world's weapons,"[192] but through a suffering, self-sacrificial love, where Christ and his disciples willingly give up their lives for others.[193] Therefore, McClendon could aver that he is advocating not a deterministic triumphalism, where God makes his kingdom available to a select few (and where human freedom would be suppressed), but a yielding self-sacrificialism, where God makes his kingdom available to all (and where human freedom would be preserved).[194]

Conclusion

With this dissertation, I have sought to examine both Edward Farley's and James McClendon's theological method and the manner in which their respective methods shape and inform their doctrines of God. In addition, I have endeavored to compare their methodological and theological projects with one another.

On the whole, it seems that both Farley's and McClendon's doctrines of God have been partially influenced by their respective theological methods, at least in terms of the

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[191]Doctrine, 40.

[192]Doctrine, 97.

[193]Doctrine, 96-101.

[194]Doctrine, 98.

general thrusts of these methods. For instance, with Farley, while such features as eidetic reduction and noetic-noematic analysis do not appear to carry over from his development of theological method to his construction of a doctrine of God, his major emphasis on turning away from "the house of authority" and turning to communal experience of reality – or, more specifically, to ecclesia's experience of the realities of faith – does extend from his methodological endeavors to his theological work. This often results in a fairly apophatic description of God, or, more accurately, since Farley maintains that God Godself cannot be known by humans, of God's character, as consisting of (partially knowable) divine empathy in God's creative and redemptive works. At times, as Robert R. Williams suggests, Farley's doctrine of God is so sparse that his "position . . . [appears to] border on agnosticism and stoicism."[195] However, one of the great advantages of Farley's project appears to be that he strives not to claim more about God's character than can ultimately be supported by direct appeal to realities at hand, or, as Paul Lakeland observes, with Farley's doctrine of God, "God emerges . . . at once both less surely known and yet more reassuringly encountered."[196] Indeed, even in view of some of the criticisms raised in this chapter, if the various elements of "the house of authority," including Scripture-as-sacred, are disallowed as legitimate resources for constructing doctrine, it would be difficult to conceive of a more carefully developed treatment about what can be known about God's character.

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[195]Williams, "Being-Founded, Negative Theology, and the Tragic Dimension," review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, and of Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation, 147.

[196]Lakeland, review of Divine Empathy: A Theology of God, 560.

In addition, with McClendon, while such elements as detailed depictions of conviction sets as well as extensive use of the narrative of tradition, including biography, do not seem to span from his treatment of theological method to his development of a doctrine of God, his primary stress on the use of the narrative of Scripture and, to a certain degree, his emphasis on the employment of various loci of justification, including not just correspondence but also coherence and other loci, do carry over from his methodological project to his theological task. For some of McClendon's critics, this largely amounts to a description of God that has been built upon a questionable basis of Scripture-as-authoritative, while simultaneously showing an inadequate appreciation of what the Christian tradition has contributed to a description of the divine. Max L. Stackhouse likely voices the view of at least a few of these critics, when he states: "He . . . [McClendon] has shown me why I am not a 'baptist,' and why I hope the current fascination with narrative theology does not become predominant."[197] Yet, one of the main strengths of McClendon's work is that – because, as Robert Barron suggests, he attempts to present an "inside-the-Cathedral" or an "inside-the-narrative-of-Scripture" depiction of God[198] – he can offer a rich and vibrant view of God as one who presently and actively suffers with God's people by sacrificially giving of Godself. Thus, while for some McClendon may claim to know more about God than can be adequately

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[197]Max L. Stackhouse, review of Systematic Theology, vol. 1, Ethics, by James William McClendon, Jr., in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55 (Fall 1987): 616.

[198]Barron, "Considering the Systematic Theology of James William McClendon, Jr.," 269.

demonstrated, if Scripture is, as he claims, Scripture-as-God-speaking, then he has, in my view, contributed to showing how God is a God who is worthy of worship.

Moreover, one of the central differences between Farley and McClendon, it seems to me, has to do with the issue of how one understands and identifies Scripture. For Farley, since the early church had a choice in the matter as to whether or not Scripture should be considered inspired or sacred, it necessarily and can only follow that the Bible cannot be sacred. Thus, for him, while it can be one of several "fields of evidence" for constructing Christian doctrine, Scripture is not God-speaking, and it is not authoritative. It is, rather, chiefly a text that the faith community has "made." For McClendon, while he allows that Scripture was mediated through human authors, because of the claims the Bible makes about itself and because of the "plain sense" that most of the Christian tradition has attributed to the Bible, it must be the case that God is the ultimate narrator of Scripture. Therefore, for McClendon, the Bible is God-speaking, and it is authoritative for developing Christian doctrine. In other words, it is primarily a text through which God can "find" us. At the same time, both Farley and McClendon seem to "speak past each other" on this matter. Farley does not offer an analysis of what the Bible says about itself, and he does not consider the possibility that the Bible could still be authoritative even if the early church had a choice in whether or not to view it as such. Similarly, McClendon does not offer an examination of how the early church viewed Scripture and what possible impact this might have on whether or not it should be considered sacred today.

Furthermore, regardless of the fact that Farley and McClendon unfortunately "speak past each other" on this issue, a corollary of their notions of the identity of Scripture is where they place authority (or power) as the basis for developing Christian doctrine. To borrow (but slightly reshape) Farley's "house of authority" terminology, Farley, as I have tried to show above in an earlier section of this chapter, locates this authority chiefly in a "house" of the contemporary ecclesial community, while McClendon clearly places it primarily in a "house" of the narrative (rather than the atomistic truth claims) of Scripture-as-God-speaking. If Farley has a better grasp on the identity of Scripture (as a collection of documents by only human authors), then that would suggest that McClendon has treated as divine what is only human. However, if McClendon has a better grasp on the identity of Scripture (as a collection of documents with God as the ultimate author), then that would imply that Farley has sought to elevate the voice of the contemporary ecclesial community over the voice of God. Much is potentially at stake, therefore, in some of the differences between these two theologians.

Whether one sides more with the direction of Farley's project or more with the direction of McClendon's, one must accept the challenges that come with these key issues regarding how one understands the identity of Scripture and where one locates authority (or power) as the basis for developing Christian doctrine. Given the respective challenges, I would prefer to address the ones faced by those who would side more with McClendon, not because they are any less difficult than the ones faced by those who would side more with Farley, but because, in my view, there is much more ground to be lost for the Christian faith, if McClendon's perspective is wrong.

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