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Radical Discipleship:
“Towards the Theology and Sociopolitical Implications”

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A Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of a
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Studies in Religion
The University of Sydney

November, 1998
Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the content and obedience of "radical discipleship" as a principled way towards Christian faithfulness in our time. And in this endeavour, my concern is to pay particular attention to the theology and sociopolitical implications of biblical radicalism. Constitutively this study contends that authentic Christian life must be determined by a following of Christ that is true to the "root truths" of scriptural discourse. It argues therefore for a specific style of discipleship theology and life-alignment. From this commitment, it seeks to develop the private and public concerns of a christocentric life-praxis in historical circumstance.

As it proceeds from the introduction, the form of investigation proposed herein develops in five chapters with a connotative conclusion. It begins with a survey of hermeneutical theories and their ideological attachments. Finding in this examination some to be true to the biblical intention and others guilty of distanced speculation and manipulative methodology leading to falsity of witness as demonstrated in an excursus (chapter one). Following this survey, I have set out a reading strategy that opens up an interactive investigation of the text and the contemporary world concerning the dynamics of radical discipleship. Utilising Ricoeur, a "liberative-narrative" is developed as a reading methodology, followed by a living example of its meaning (chapter two).

My concern then turns to the trinitarian and christocentric underpinnings necessary to authentic discipleship as found within the apostolic contention. This section is brought to a closure by interposing the consequences of Jesus' lordship in its confrontation with violence and the malevolence of the powers (chapter three). Springing from the gracious call of God in the crucified and risen Christ, discipleship is attested to as obedient faith in action. This approach is directed towards the nature of Jesus' liberation programme
(chapter four). Predicating Jesus as God’s antagonist, I have highlighted the consequences of his way as practised by the earliest communities and the ancient church in their contradiction of the theology of empire in its past and present forms (chapter five).

In the conclusion, as within the body of the essay I have maintained that every act of conversion to the way of Jesus deconstructs the world system in its demonic manifestations of injustice. Radical discipleship is postulated as an ongoing venture of faithfulness. It is a contradiction to nominal Christianity and its attachments to alien allegiances. In the vital episodes between oppressors and oppressed, and consequent to the liberation praxis of Jesus the reader is engaged and read concerning their own commitments. Against the deformity and dangers of Constantinian accommodation and cheap grace, the continuing call of Jesus stands as an invitation to the response of radical discipleship.
Acknowledgements

Because this work has been an “on the road” experience it has taken some years in its preparation. It was not written in an uninterrupted period of time. Nor was it written in one place. Its reflections have been influenced by the First and Two Third World countries in which it was written. As a consequence, the number of people to whom I am indebted for help in its production prohibits the mentioning of all of them by name. The list reaches back to my many companions with whom I have struggled in the journey of Radical Discipleship. It reaches forward too, because their lives of commitment and sacrifice continue to be an inspiration to my calling. To these many co-conspirators and their attendant communities and justice churches, my ongoing gratitude remains — especially to the members of Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church, Sydney and Langley United Methodist Church, Washington. As experimenters of Jesus’ kingdom praxis, many of their faith communities are named in the body of this text and in this way, I have sought to express my appreciation.

My gratitude also goes out to the celebrated teachers with whom I was privileged to study at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and Pacific School of Religion as well as the International Baptist Seminary in Zürich, and the Liberation Theology study group gathered around the National University of Mexico. To all of them, together with my companion students in those several places of learning I render my heartfelt thanks.

Among my teachers, I should single out the following professor’s and their spouses. The list includes Athol and Judy Gill, Jorge and Janice Pixley, Jose Porfirio Miranda, William (Bill) and Mary Herzog, Ben Reist, Robert (Bob) McAfee Brown and Sydney Brown, Thorwald and Jill Lorenzen and Garry Trompf.
Especially I need to thank God for Athol Gill; a dear friend, whose life and death is a continuing affirmation of faithfulness. And for Bob McAfee Brown, gentle mentor, weaver of grace and justice, and Thorwald Lorenzen, a reclaimer of truth and an exemplar of commitment. Each of whom from their different gifts firm up my resolve to be ceaseless in attempting to fulfil our highest obligation of obeying God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. They are teachers and friends who will not let the story be usurped or conscience drained. Thanks also to John Urena giver of strength and love, and Ched Myers whose passion and sharpness of mind have driven me on. And to Libby Radcliff, Jim Wallis, John Smith, Brett Grieder, Sandy Lejeune, Wes Howard-Brook, Dave Batstone, Miguel Tomas, Phil Berrigan, Liz McAlister and Dan Berrigan. Each of whom have from their solidarity kept me on the road; giving sense to outrage. They, each one, have always taught me to question the status quo version of the kingdom quest; to turn from any distortion of God’s willing towards the kingdom’s disclosure in Word and world.

For the encouragement of the department of Religious Studies within the University of Sydney and especially professor Garry Trompf who gave me the chance to continue writing. And who in the most serious of conversations understands the gift of humour. He is a friend who also gave me the freedom to explore theological ideas and to “wordsmith” sociopolitical convictions. To him I am much beholden. Thanks also, to the students at the United Theological College, the Elm Centre, Sydney, and my colleagues in the Uniting Church in Australia Tertiary Student’s Association in the University of Sydney, the University of New South Wales and the University of Technology, Sydney. Where I have used and tested much of this material in my teaching opportunities, to all of them I render thanks for allowing me to share in the learning.
I have appreciated the help and assistance of Jude (my sister), my parents and the Rowley family in their several locations in southern California (Dave and Debbie), and Washington State (Jim and Maureen), especially my mother and father-in-law (Bill and Lois), for the provision of lodging and love. To Clancy and Marcia Dunigan (and Kevin) who, when we needed it, provided a home for the heart, a place to write and celebrate.

Carol my wife and companion has pressed the image of love and commitment to God against my life. Gratefully I still ponder her gifts, of artist, mother, nurturer, lover and wife, and the one above all others who really believed I could finish this project. On her has fallen much of the burden of my studies and toil. To her I am forever grateful. Her concern for the liturgy and drama of radical discipleship in the church’s witness is alive to this present. The thanks of my heart to my children, Sierra, Sydney and Jonathan who have made the journey with me and supported this endeavour in their unique ways. May they recognise in these pages the faith and the story of the many godly “unknowns” who have intersected their lives. And may they with their lives and those whom they touch increasingly know the obsession of Jesus’ call to follow.

My abiding hope is that these pages will spur and encourage others on to activism and reflection concerning the cruciaility and the content of authentic discipleship. Into a praxis of following that is radically committed to the life and quest of the One whose solidarity of relationship to God and humanity was ultimately unshakeable. My hope is that Jesus’ God-given provocation and lordship will be more faithfully known in the church’s life and out into the world.
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Radical Discipleship: Towards the Theology and Sociopolitical Implications

Introduction

In Christian life today, there is a sense in which a reinvestigation of discipleship may appear unwarranted. For, whatever else the church may be accused of, our preoccupation with discipleship and its meaning appears to be a subject not unfamiliar to Christians who care deeply about the content of faithful witness. It is a topic to which we are accustomed and has become irradicable. Maybe that is just the point! Is this continuing inclination indicative of something? Something we have missed or are missing? Perhaps our penchant for repeatedly examining discipleship in seminars, lecture tours, tapes and popular books is actually warranted? Is all our pastoral talk and promenading regarding discipleship responsible? Examination of contemporary church life does little to dispel pursuing suspicions.

Consequently, those who claim to love the church and its life must not only rework the content of investigations concerning the nature of discipleship, but evaluate the trivialised place assigned the life of the following of Christ. My abiding conviction is that nothing tells as finally in research and living as much as the positive humanising truth we elicit. The true meaning of discipleship and its implications once we have been overtaken with the essential elements of action and reflection that are endemic to it, will push out the false by its momentum. It is necessary to recognise that displacement of this sort is at times conflictual, but is exceedingly worthwhile, since truth can reign in place of deceit.

Therefore in setting out the content and claims of radical discipleship my intention is to promote a sharp and uncompromising critique of the differing forms of "cheap grace" and "distanced theology". And to do advocate this task in a world dominated by the conundrums of competing and totalising
“gospels”. Herein I am especially writing for those who still believe in the hope-filled content and power of biblical radicalism to transform the church’s compromised situation. To this end, a critical and at times a polemical tone will be evident in this work. Given the necessity of the struggle against religious and political exploitations of authentic discipleship I make no compote of cagey inhibitions.

Concerning my sociopolitical and critical hermeneutical “edge” - I direct the reader to the “Australian” differentia. To that "strong social consciousness which has always been a characteristic of Australian writing." Hence "the lively social conscience which flourishes in the Australian society appears in its writing as an important aspect of the pattern of radicalism" (T. Inglis Moore). Therefore if at times my writing sounds "committed," it is meant to be so. I make no pretence that it is not. I have not wanted to write an "objective" work. I neither wanted to, nor could. There is nothing neutral about the kingdom quest of Jesus. There never was when it was first done or written about. And there never will be either. Unable to outdistance the kingdom's liberative bias, I take sides: I confess it and I do not withdraw from it. Those who recoil from this confession, bear scrutiny concerning their own biblical endeavours. We do well to remember that nothing is composed in a neutral environment - including academic sociopolitical theology. Like everything else, our work serves the interest of authorial instigation. No work is created without reference to its interests. Every project of expression is in some way or another partisan and committed. Traditionally these expressions have been those of the “official” consensus, even in those studies that have presumed to be apolitical and non-legitimising.

The real question facing us is not whether we are committed at the place of our expression, but rather, which cause do we serve. This work concerns a determination that sets forth "radical discipleship" as a predominant ingredient for the renewal of the church and world. It undertakes this purpose having
made a commitment to the "Liberative Relevance of the Historical Jesus" (Leonardo Boff) and the implications of his kingdom directive of salvation and justice. By doing so, it proceeds in its argument that Jesus Christ as God's dangerous liberating memory is the One who seeks to lead the church to the economic, sociopolitical and spiritual liberation of the wretched and downtrodden (Johannes Metz).

Basically this work owes its origins to the "radical discipleship" movement. Under the rubric of radical discipleship (biblical radicalism), I include not only the Australian wellspring, but a world-wide Christian movement, carried on by various groups - "a remnant within the remnant" (Robert McAfee Brown). That prophetic minority who are unable to fit themselves to a duplicitous sociopolitical theology used to justify existing injustice. This movement, to take an image from its predominant rubric, is an "on the road experience" (Athol Gill). It makes the radical following of Jesus Christ in contemporary circumstance its own theological theme with these necessary components. Which is to say that, "Following Jesus is the only way to understand the biblical text as the Word of God and constitutively to state that Jesus can only authentically be followed by believing obedience" (Thorwald Lorenzen). Jesus of Nazareth is thus understood as God's agitator and liberative agent. Therefore being bound through grace to the "liberational" practice of Jesus Christ is the authentic way in terms of discipleship, to let God be God in the church. And concerning the proof of radical discipleship, as Libby Radcliffe commented: "It'll only be known by the extent of our capacity to do the truth of Christ - and that truly!". Consequently, a life fixed on the wholesale following of Jesus is the genius of the church, a maxim of Christian hope for the world. This is the only directive a disciple acknowledges. In God, through grace, it is the only security a Christian desires. It is the marrow of true discipleship for all who would live by it.
Theological and sociopolitical struggles for justice, human rights and standing against war mongering. And the subsequent growth of a broader radical breed of Christians in opposition to idolatrous nationalism, racism, machismo ideology, materialism, environmental violation and other forms of dominance and oppression - have challenged and educated the movement. Empowering many of us at the level of christocentric praxis to argue by word and deed for the renewal of church and society.

In setting out radical discipleship as a centre and a frontier of engagement in the life of the church today, I cannot claim uniqueness or overall comprehensiveness. Since few if anyone is a lone discoverer, originality and intellectual depth of that special kind is best left to the biblical writers, or the philosophical and political analysis of the Søren Kierkegaards and Hannah Arendts of this world. Now as we stand in the shadow and creep of cheap grace, I believe I have provided enough light to see what it is that besieges us, and to point a way towards Christian faithfulness. Throughout I have sought to avoid being tedious, and academically foggy. I have aimed to present the topic in clear fashion, although given that this work is very much a "Towards" attempt, my sense is that a lot more needs to be investigated.

In my formulations I have sought through the hermeneutics of what I have called a "liberative-narrative" methodology to set out a christocentric and sociopolitical examination of radical discipleship. This is as it should be since the following of Christ and christology are bound together. For a proper theology is one which allows Jesus Christ to be its "starting-point" (Jüngel). Concomitant to this reading strategy the significance and force of "competing gospels" in the confrontations of empire are addressed throughout the corpus of this essay.

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1 In my citation of biblical texts I have utilised the text of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament preferring it to most other Scripture versions. Occasionally I have found the need to depart from it, where I wanted to follow the Greek or Hebrew more closely. Where this has occurred indication is given.
From beginning to end, what has been attested to is the conviction that radical discipleship is rooted in a profound commitment to the triune God and the Spirit inspired following of Jesus Christ as the risen and crucified Lord. This commitment to the God of Jesus Christ is anchored in an insistence that the poor will be history's subjects as the beloved of God. What I have also argued is that radical discipleship is a praxis-rooted theology subversive of what I have designated as "Caesaroimperialism" and its legitimating myths. And, that as such, radical discipleship is directly tied to the prophetic tradition of giving voice to the voiceless, the forgotten and the marginalized. In the outworking of discipleship's meaning and sociopolitical implications, the down-trodden find voice and hope in the kingdom's promises whereby their own discoveries are liberationally implemented.

Concerning the reading and writing strategy of liberative-narratives I have not purported to have invented some new genre of biblical interpretation. In this exercise I have followed Croatto's understanding of interpretation theory (which I believe he built off Ricoeur). Accordingly, in the interpretation of texts and in their related semiotics. I understand hermeneutical method as having to do with the whole complex life process wherein reader's worlds and textual worlds do not remain at a distance but "engage each other in real meaning" (Sandra Schneiders). I believe this methodology is an underscoring of a form of interpretation theory constitutive to the Bible's own hermeneutical purposes which are always inviting the reader into the realm of believing obedience. This interpretative effort is therefore not only justified but also a necessary requirement in the hermeneutics of radical discipleship.

Liberative-narrative methodology pertains to and is fundamentally present in the where and why of the salvific activity of God-the-deliverer. Moreover, my conviction throughout has been that liberative-narrative as an interpretation theory is attested to in God's redemptive activity in all historical interruptions and intersections of humanising liberation. Its testimony is validated in the
prophets and all justice voices and movements: my conviction being that this takes historical shape ultimately in Jesus of Nazareth and what God has revealed in his crucifixion and resurrected life.

The given emphases of my efforts in highlighting the sociopolitical implications of radical discipleship are aimed at helping reclaim the "liberative Bible" from a detached and First World speculative captivity. This endeavour requires an honest level of self-consciousness, for us to be fully mindful of ourselves in the surrounds of our sociopolitical location. To turn again to the text, and in this admission to seek something other than ourselves and our First World our interests, which is an admission that we are not the sovereign creators of meaning. Our need is to cultivate this kind of hermeneutical humility with the view to releasing the liberative text with capacious energy for the renewal of the church and society. Interpretative guidelines and sources have been delineated so that the reader is not in the dark about my point of view as a "hermeneutist" (Brueggemann). These guides provide some basis for not just taking this author's word concerning points of interpretation and implication. In my work it has been impossible to not treat what I have found to be fatuous hermeneutical procedures that undergird the system of dominance at work in our time. In this regard, it may seem that I have not cleared my methodological ground quickly enough. Because of its importance, I could not quit early the initial areas of ideology critique or hermeneutical evaluation. This is because I encountered forms and types of hermeneutical procedure that for all their apparent innocence contribute as part of a whole to the dehumanisation of many both in the First and Two Third's World.

My section on methodology is therefore is of some length for several reasons. Aberrant ideologies and methodologies are not in short supply. They abound everywhere and their debilitating effects are considerable. Consequently, within the first two chapters in canvassing the hermeneutical field certain
religious "Pied Pipers" and their commensurate forms of "Scripture twisting" have been critically engaged. I have, in dealing with hermeneutical apparatus' tried to keep to those areas of discussion or polemic that immediately relate to radical discipleship hermeneutics. I am not unaware of other methodologies, but my purpose has had to have been tightly focused because it is impossible to cover the full range of hermeneutical procedures. Such an endeavour would have overwhelmed the purpose of this work. After all my aim has been to make a way through to an enunciation of radical discipleship's content in its earliest forms and to point to its contemporary meaning and purpose. As to the wider comprehensions of what radical discipleship implies, I trust my work issues an invitation for others to take up this task. As I have indicated, my purpose is to clear the ground for further biblical and sociopolitical analyses. This does not mean that I have resiled from making some definite suggestions concerning the life-praxis of radical discipleship and the shape of church life. These are set forth in varying ways. Of particular importance is the living exemplar section, "Pilgrims of the Impossible". Setting forth this discipleship episode as a personal and self-conscious inclusion provides a necessary example of the practice of radical discipleship in contemporary experience. It is a "storied" engagement written in an appropriate style. A "lived" liberative-narrative viewed from within and at no speculative distance making possible an "existential deepening" (Ricoeur).

Although very strongly argued, for all of its firm affirmations, this work does not propose the concrete embodiment of fixed certitudes or non-negotiable positions. It is as I have indicated a proposal and an exploration into the meaning and purport of radical discipleship within and for the life of the church. It represents reflections and convictions that have been "road tested" both at the level of believing obedience and the academy for several decades. The exercise of bringing them into something of a coherent form and forceful argument is partly a way of ascertaining where my own thoughts have come from, and where they are going. As well, it is a way of asking why
companions in this journey of following Christ have come to the place of joyous knowing, of suffering, of no reputation, of losing their lives, coming to grips with the fact that:

This is no charade, no party game
That there is both life and death inside Jesus' name
The life is in the giving (Peter Campbell).

Thus this work is also partly a way of trying to critically evaluate how the followers of Jesus' kingdom call have fared in their attempts to love humanity and the created order with renewed intention. And to walk through again a matter of foundational and perennial importance for the on-going life of the church and the pursuit of human welfare. So, these chapters represent more a "progress report" than a finished product, but they do, even in their tentative form represent experiences of critical thinking and actions of costly grace.

Throughout, I hope that what argumentative difficulties there may be found herein, belong to the subject matter of my writing rather than to the overall presentation of what the call to radical discipleship means. I trust that my investigations concerning this attempt at setting out the biblical and theological foundations of faithful discipleship are correctable weaknesses and not fatal flaws. It is my hope that a corrective route concerning any foibles within this work will demonstrate itself by other, and better attempts at stating the meaning of "following Jesus" in existent historical situation. Indeed, I am among the first to salute all efforts in that adventure.

The subject that I have addressed here is one which permits being handled in a large variety of ways, and for the order followed here I claim no more than what seems sensible to me. I am not unaware that whoever undertakes to elicit investigation and controversy on the wide front that I have addressed, make of themselves an exceedingly vulnerable target. For experts in the many disciplines touched here can easily fill the margins with references to
unattended considerations and other relevant literature. Nevertheless, it is my hope that this theme will appeal to academia. And concomitantly, that it will become a well-tilled field of inquiry on the part of those with a motivating sense of dissatisfaction concerning falsity in the Christian life. Similarly, I would like to think that the consequences of such a work will be of use at a popular level. Particularly to earnest church people in their attempts to take up radically a faithful following of Jesus and his kingdom vision.

In summary, this work aims to contribute to the growing research into the meaning and implications of radical discipleship. If and before this happens, it is salutary to be reminded of a simple fact. Radical discipleship is no intellectual fancy or lone discovery. It is a life-alignment to Jesus Christ and God's liberative work in the world. What this means more concretely, is that the narrative radical discipleship has to deliver is the story of the struggles of Christian believers to be free; to enable a deeper awareness concerning the interrelatedness of both kingdom word and deed. To create the space for liberation from the false forms of idolatrous discourse imposed on us all by the prevailing fictions of the "world system". Indeed, as I will maintain, there is nothing purely academic about these liberative struggles - we forget this to our great detriment. Radical discipleship seeks to escape the polarisations between the tellers and the doers. I want again at the start to reiterate that although the theology and christopraxis of radical discipleship must address the academy, with credibility and aplomb. It would contradict the predications of radical discipleship should they merely become "interesting topics worthy of further research" on the part of intellectual observers and academic archivists. It would be a grave disservice to biblical radicalism's meaning should any form of this captivity prevail. This is because radical discipleship in its meaning and implication has a decisively praxis role to play in the transformation of the church and society as a whole.
It is needful also to reaffirm that the case for radical discipleship cannot be made once and for all. It needs to be made again and again, because obedience to Jesus Christ and the gospel of God varies in each social setting and cultural circumstance. The way that radical discipleship is specified depends very much on one's judgement about the contemporary scene and the issues of urgency and danger; notwithstanding one's hermeneutical posture regarding those specified points of threat. Bearing this in mind, I believe that it is biblically incumbent upon radical discipleship today to articulate, explore, and expost an alternative reading to the dehumanising fictions of our age.

Articulation and engagement of this sort is necessary because we live in a world that in its violent modes is committed to a prescribing of reality that is invented to suit the prescriptions of the "national security" establishment. A manifestation of "empire" that works to make the world safe for its entitlements and that if left to its perversity will finally brutalise and destroy. Consequently, I am convinced that the church, particularly in the so-called First World, is largely contained in and seduced by the system's fabrications. Living as we do, in a contemporary "imperial" context the church remains deluded to the degree that it has little energy or courage for its calling to the life of discipleship and justice.

It is with this belief that I have composed this work: a project dedicated to those myriad unknown and known radical disciples who have not let their consciences be drained, their passion lost. It is dedicated to their inability to believe that from the outset the expectation of God in Jesus Christ was condemned or foolhardy. It is dedicated to those stupid enough to believe against the gainsayers. To those who have gone on believing against the amnesia of those who have prevented Jesus' dream from being. It is dedicated to those who have died in their attempts "to live the dream with open eyes" (T. E. Lawrence). It is dedicated to those who work with little reward, to make the church faithful to Christ's calling, and in the doing, work to transform the
world. My writing seeks to bear testimony to their endeavours, to reflect upon the courage of faithfulness. It seeks to proffer the example of some of God’s vanguard, those persecuted for righteousness sake who teach us that, "Porque Dios es grande, camina para adelante" - because God is great, we go on - (Victor and Beatrice Munoz). This, Christ’s followers will do in the risen company of the “truly Human One” marked by his cruciform praxis; with each impulse of his dangerous liberating memory infusing our witness. Our lives charged by the holier discipline of the Spirit’s continued willing, together with fresh meanings and transformative power for the journey.
Chapter One

Word and World as Prerequisite
Discipleship Hermeneutics

“Every reader brings cultural (grammatical principles, social customs, cultural attitudes, historical experiences), and personal contexts (personal experience, social location, education, beliefs, and commitments) to the act of reading.”

----- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in Expanding The View, p. 149

“The biblical text, instead of being a means of life, can become a stumbling-block in the way of our contemporary discipleship.”

----- Christopher Rowland and Mark Comer, in Liberating Exegesis, p. 35

1 (i) Theological Hermeneutics and Ideological Method

Shallow misinformed commitment is the deadly enemy of the gospel today. The fight for "radical discipleship" is an imperative the church cannot ignore.1 "Radical Discipleship" is a discipleship that seeks to speak from the radix (Latin, "root"): a discipleship that quests to be true to the "root truths" of a biblical and fundamental following of Jesus. The term radical discipleship therefore indicates a specific style of life-alignment and theology. As well as seeking to address the contemporary implications of a biblical and fundamental following of Jesus, it seeks to drive to the root of what being faithful to Jesus means in contemporary historical circumstance. This it endeavours to do whilst at the same time not withdrawing from naming and denouncing expressions of "cheap grace" and inauthentic discipleship that abound in contemporary "culturally religious" Christianity. This work is predicated upon the conviction that radical discipleship is foundational to a faithful contemporary Christianity's theological and sociopolitical purpose.

1 By deliberately paralleling Dietrich Bonhoeffer's opening sentences in chapter one of The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 45, (German translation Nachfolge (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1937), my intention is in two directions. In the first place, my aim is to pay tribute to Bonhoeffer's inspiring classic, and secondly, to announce at the outset, the scheme of this present work, i.e., to lay down the gauntlet to "cheap grace" and contend for a reclamation of an authentic biblical discipleship - that I have chosen to call "radical discipleship."
Confronting us in our time is the rapacious truth that many in both the First and Two Third's World who openly embrace the name of Christian, "have gathered like ravens round the carcass of cheap grace, and there ... have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ." At this juncture, an exigent awareness faces the church. For this is not simply a regrettable and repetitive cultural phenomenon. It is a fatal distortion. What is needed in fighting against this nemesis of "cheap grace" is a sharp stand taken for the central meaning of the Gospel. The fight against "cheap grace" is nothing less than the fight against an unreal Gospel, one floating in the air above human experience, sacrosanctly reasoned and merely "religious". Cheap grace is a diminution of the message of Christianity. It is a discipleship of reluctance. It is a confusion, a disorder that creates within the church a loss of meaning and a growing lack of significance. Whereas God's grace is costly and a summons to liberative tasks within our history, cheap grace capitulates by good intentions. By its bent cheap grace reduces the Gospel to a principle or system of empty intellectual assent. So effectual is its repression of the meaning of Jesus' death, that faith becomes fraudulent, leaving the church full of dishonest commitments and a vacuous inclusivism. Everybody ipso facto is a Christian.

Where all are Christians, the situation is this: to call oneself a Christian is the means whereby one secures oneself against all sorts of inconveniences and discomforts, and the means whereby one secures worldly goods, comforts, profit, etc. But we make as if nothing had happened, we declaim about believing ('Those who know best, those are our priests'), about confessing Christ before the world, about following him, etc. etc.; and orthodoxy flourishes in the land, no heresy, no schism, orthodoxy everywhere, the orthodoxy which consists in playing the game of Christianity.

Thus, Christianity becomes a bargain of forgiveness full of veneer and seeming, devoid of genuine repentance. Creating a discipleship without

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2 Bonhoeffer, ibid., p. 57. This line in most English translations has "eagles" for the original German die Raben, which correctly rendered is "ravens".
commitment, cheap grace is an affront to believing obedience. This Christianity without the cross makes the Christian life indistinguishable in its mediocrity from the dutiful functionaries of those who serve the idols of consumerism and dominance. What remains is a farcical Christianity, a cut-rate believism that is ruinous, giving spawn to a "sort of discipleship" that is a deadly detraction whereby the Christian life amounts to nothing more than easy resignation to the world system's standards. Jesus, the Lord of the church, is thereby displaced, made to occupy the position of a convenient partner, relegated to a comforting Chaplain or mascot.

Decidedly then "in a special sense, today is the hour for following Christ, the hour in which Christians must become more radical, must collect themselves by going back to their roots." What is at stake in this radicalising and reclamatory struggle is nothing less than a bold "denunciation" of a counterfeit Christianity. A "Christianity" that makes mockery of God's campaign in Jesus.

Concomitantly what is called for is a bold "annunciation" of Jesus' kingdom imperatives (born of Torah and the prophets) that seeded and empowered the primitive Christian enterprise. For if the church is to be true to its charge of being a harbinger of grace to the world, it can only do so by decisively being a church authenticated through its unreserved following of Jesus. In the lure and graced passage of discipleship we only know the meaning and significance of our purpose by being caught up into the life-praxis of Jesus.


5 Throughout the body of this work, as will become evident, there is no naive understanding that the person of Jesus attested to in the Gospel narratives is spoken of in any other way than via the redaction of the Gospel writers. What we have in episodic form concerning Jesus is given to us in the light of the resurrection event.
Christ isn’t merely a person. He is a road too. And the person who believes him takes the same road he took. There is no christology without christopraxis, no knowledge of Christ without the practice of Christ. We cannot grasp Christ merely with our heads or our hearts. We come to understand him through a total, all-embracing practice of living; and that means discipleship.  

The integrity of the church’s life will only be maintained by an increasingly radical adaptation of its life to the way of Jesus, to the way of Nachfolge. Only in this way, and in its service to the world, can it truly offer a more human future. This is a tasking the church cannot ignore. No revelations concerning Christian duplicity or betrayal, no matter how painful, must be allowed to impede this recovering of vital church life. It is this faith commitment which requires theological “reconception” in our time. No masking can be permitted to go unchallenged in radical discipleship’s determination to reclaim the resolute obedience required of those summoned to follow Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer’s affirmation remains true: “No other significance is possible, since Jesus is the only significance. Besides Jesus, nothing has any significance. He alone matters.” This assertion of complete commitment to Jesus Christ does not support the notion that a Christian determined to follow "Jesus only," is to be blind to, or estranged from other humanising revelations of God in the world. Be they in other religions, or in art, literature, science or music or any of the substance that constitutes the harmonious whole in the span of experience. But it does solidly state that for the Christian disciple, God’s revelation in Jesus as the true and human one is decisive and consummate.

Since all biblical christocentrism is premised upon a thoroughgoing theocentrism, the principle of following Jesus with single-minded obedience unfolds thus: every possible expression of truth, that is, "all knowledge of
truth in a certain stratum is knowledge of God."8 And as such becomes for the disciple of Jesus, a vehicle, an avenue of knowing God. And, being known by God. Following Jesus is an ever-expanding adventure into truth, not a closure. The Christian who embraces the New Testament claim that Jesus is "the way" to God (Jn. 14:7) follows the process of advancing into the way, into the life, into the truth. The disciple's aspiration then, is always to be more fully overtaken by "truth" wherever it comes from. And, never to suffer the arrogance of being guilty of finality and fixedness, since these are signs of untruth. It follows then that radical discipleship must not in any way become some type of obscurantism, or some new neo-Pharisaism.

a) The Primacy of Scripture and World Intersection

In any attempt at a christocentric reappraisal of Christian life and action there must be a harkening back to basics predicated on the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and as expressed in the Bible. To be clear, it is not the Bible in and of itself that is God's word. It is rather "Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, which we have to hear, and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death".9 Fresh appreciation of the need for dependence on the biblical text has been crucial to church renewal; it was so for Bonhoeffer in his monumental contribution to the recovering of true discipleship. The first line in his introduction to The Cost of Discipleship reads, "the revival of church life always brings in its train a richer understanding of the Scriptures."10 Accordingly, any endeavour to recover the

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8 This is to affirm Søren Kierkegaard's observation that, all truth is God's truth. See "Kierkegaard as Existential Thinker," Union Review 1V, No. 1 (December 1942), p. 6. For a more complete discussion concerning this concept, see Paul Tillich's article "Existential Philosophy," Journal of the History of Ideas V (1944), pp. 44-70. Consequently, this writer is mindful and appreciative of Bellah's warnings concerning idolatrous self-righteousness in its all-consuming "totalism". This is not the sort of "unbroken commitment" that is here recommended, nor representative of those given over to the freedom that is constitutive to the following of Jesus in radical discipleship. Similarly, few if any, would judge the discipleship of Kierkegaard or Barth et al., as closed to truth's freedom and range. See Robert Bellah Beyond Belief (London: Harper and Row 1970), pp. xv - xvi.


10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 37.
meaning and implications of radical discipleship, must in the first place deal with the content of Scripture.\textsuperscript{11}

Radical discipleship's attention, being cognisant of the centrality of Scripture, focuses not only on the content, but also always and necessarily on the interpretation of Scripture. The biblical call to discipleship is invitational, freeing, not static and, for those who seek to live out of its challenge, it is always disquieting. It is this way because it places the would-be disciple of Jesus at the dialogical place of intersection - confrontationally facing both the Word and the world. Here there is a fundamental shift between traditional academic theology and those struggling to do theology from the perspective of radical discipleship. Motivated at every step, radical discipleship seeks to connect the disciplines that open up the past with the disciplines that help clarify the present. Radical discipleship is persuaded of this necessity precisely because of the responsibility of developing and employing an adequate reading strategy. That is, an articulation adequate to the task of interpreting the Word of God as it arrests us in the here and now. In a very real sense for those who take the demand of God\textsuperscript{12} in Christ seriously, the contemporary follower of Jesus stands at the intersection where the "eternal Word" confronts the "contemporary world". It is in the tension between these two clashing environments that the prophetic nature of radical discipleship is fashioned.

\textsuperscript{11} The substance and other meanings relating to radical discipleship will be explained further in this essay. For a helpful survey of the use of the term "radical" concerning its religious usage, see Thaddeé Matura, Gospel Radicalism (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1984), pp. 8-12: see also his reference to "Radical Demands of Discipleship," pp. 27-43.

\textsuperscript{12} Positionally, I am here in agreement with Metz when he states: "God is not just an early, mythological name for what Ernst Bloch has called transcendence. The name of God means rather that transcendence is not simply a symbolic paraphrase at a higher level or an impotent reflection of what simply happens, in other words, what ordinary historical events would have been if only they had been really transcended." see J. B. Metz, Faith in History and Society (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 76. From a biblical belief in "God", Englished as a Tetragrammaton YHWH, or Yahweh [Heb.], $\text{YHWH}$ (see TDNT, III, p. 1067), premised upon a Christocentric praxis understanding of God as the "One who causes to be"; the Wholly Other One, it seems reasonable to assert that God is the One wholly involved in the human predicament who offers and defines, and calls others into redemptive and liberative motivation and action.
An authentic discipleship for today must then be quarried out of that place where Word meets world. It is at this intersection that the voice of prophetic proclamation can be heard - being an exegesis of the Word and an analysis of the world. Positioning of this kind follows the stance of that champion of the Word - Karl Barth. He understood his faith always to be in conversation with "the Bible and real life," with "people and their affairs." It was Barth who placed before the church the on-going challenge, "that any Christian who wishes to live responsibly must read two things: the Bible and the daily newspaper - and never one without the other!" Unsurprisingly for him, "political existence [was] part of theological existence."

The hermeneutical endeavour of radical discipleship does not defer from Barth's compulsion. It constantly bids those who would follow Jesus to investigate Scripture's revelation of God. To struggle for the purposes of God's rule against "the rulers" of the world system (cf. ἄρχοντες, 1 Cor. 2: 8). To resist the counter-claims of the paralysing official interpretive consensus of the illegitimate disputants "of this age" (τοῦ αἰῶνος, 1 Cor. 1: 20). Through their hermeneutical profanity the "powers and rulers" of this age would make the Bible into what Daniel Berrigan has prophetically named a "worldly Word". A word that becomes a pejorative word, an active malevolence of vicious intent which has made us all its victims: "Victims of ... the word that


14 It is with deliberate intention that at the start of this work I indicate that my understanding of God both embraces and transcends male and female characteristics. Consequently, from this understanding of the Divine, I have in liberative fashion undertaken to write of God in language beyond gender, that is to work my words and all citations concerning male and female exclusivity in an inclusive language style.

15 For a more complete explanation of how these specified terms and others such as "the world system" are understood throughout this work, see Walter Wink, Naming the Powers Vol 1, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), especially his section on "The Disputed Passages" where he explores the interconnectedness between "the rulers of this age" (ἄρχοντες), as being human, cf. pp. 40-42 and demonic, cf. pp. 42-45. Also see, Julius Schniewind, Nachgelassene Reden und Aufsätze (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1952), pp. 104-109. For my treatment of the powers against the purposes of God, see chapter 3 (iii).
politcises all questions, breaks all promises, smears the surface of life with a vile cynicism.” In stark contrast to this corruption we must in biblical sojourn look to, must comply with ...

another word, a word of unique solemnity and weight, a word for a people lost .... a word for people wrestling with questions both cruel and crucial, a far less equivocal word, a Word that judges all other words, that invites and welcomes all. A Word that by main and gentle force unmasks all deceitful, duplicitous, and disordered words! This is the Word that stands in combat against the worldly word, against all words uttered with base intent, against all words striving for the greatest possible harm .... a Word utterly irreconcilable with the imperial word .... remarkable as it is ignored ... the Word of God in combat with the word of the powers. 16

b) Hermeneutical Necessity: “Scientized” Accountability

At the outset of this work, given the demonizing effects of such “words,” and the confrontative intersections between Word and world, it is therefore necessary that the science of theological\biblical “hermeneutics” be addressed. 17 Distortion of the Word makes hermeneutical address imperative. So as to enable a standing in the way of fatuous notions of discipleship, solid examination of theologico-scriptural methods are demonstratively urgent. What is needed is a critique of those fictive notions that continue to multiply in the excess. Investigations and interruptions of this sort are exigent since illegitimate theological "authorities" and "powers" out of a specious word,

continue to be *permissioned*, whilst consecrating distorted marketplace reductionist views of human life and social reality.\(^{18}\)

Engaging in the enterprise of biblical hermeneutics presupposes certain commitments to the theological “fields” that concern the nature and authority of the Bible, and concomitantly a biblical discipleship.\(^{19}\) It is not the purpose of this work to trace out in exhaustive fashion an extensive examination of the issues of faith, "Scripture," hermeneutics and theology. Suffice it to say here, however, that the position taken in this essay in concert with the history and life of the church accepts the Bible as the written unfolding Word of God. Essentially, it is the authoritative and sufficient rule for faith and practice.\(^{20}\)

With this understanding in hand, the Bible becomes that genius that is at the core of the church's reflection and the source from which it might replace that which is damaged, decayed, or depleted within its message. Consequently, the Bible understood as central to the "Word of God," is that living word that reveals the task to which the church is called. The fulfilment of which requires our creative participation as "labourers with God" (cf. 1Cor. 3:9) in the journey of "Christic" praxis.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) See Franz J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press 1986), p. 144 ff. for his complex but cogent treatment of "the ruling powers" and "authorities" that are in the time of eschatological reserve, valid, but "illegitimate." In the original, the text states with striking words, *Pablo declara la ilegitimidad de todas las normas de la ley*, ("Paul declares the illegitimacy of all the norms of the law"), p. 183. Hinkelammert further comments: "... all external norms for human behaviour are illegitimate. On the basis of the liberated body, where such norms might not have a role, he [Paul] relativizes them". See p.144.

\(^{19}\) In order to be quite clear, let me indicate that although my reflections in this section may seem to relate primarily to the Gospels, however, most of what I purport applies equally well to the entire body of New Testament literature and to the Hebrew Bible.


\(^{21}\) In using the term "Christic" I am mindful of Teilhard de Chardin's use of it when he says: "The essence of Christianity is neither more or less than a belief in the implication of the world in God by the incarnation". Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1962), p. 91 (my emphasis). Here Teilhard's thought is that God is with us, because God has definitively come into the world. The being of God has become clothed in the universe, so that it is all now the body of Christ. Because the incarnation of God into the world is a reality, now the whole world is transformed into a sacred world. It is the cosmic Christ that energises and gives purpose and
1 (ii) Hermeneutics: A Working Definition

The term "Hermeneutics" (vide, 'ερμηνεύω hermeneuo, Greek "to interpret" and interpretari, Latin "to explain, expound"), treats the art of interpretation of written texts and events. Jewish interpretation of Scripture during the time of Jesus and beyond tended to take the text as it stood in its explicit meaning. This method of inquiry took the form of continuing reinterpretation informed by several important factors. These involved: (i) foundational events in Hebrew history, (ii) folk stories, or homilies on scriptural texts known as the haggadah, (iii) applications of the Law called the halakah, which addressed not only the practices and observances of Jewish religion but personal, social, national and international liaisons as well, and (iv) apocalyptic writings emanating from postexilic Judaism.

In an attempt to open up the classics to later generations, exploration into Hellenic interpretations of Homer and Hesiod developed an allegorical methodology. Early Christian hermeneutics drew on both these traditions. The Alexandian school chose to emphasize allegory (cf. Augustine) as its reading method whilst the Antiochene school reiterated a plain reading of Scripture (cf. Jerome).

direction to all things. As he has it: "it is in the 'Christic' that ... the Divine reaches the summit of adorability, and the evolutionary the extreme limit of activation." See Let Me Explain (London: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 158. It is this Teilhardian "Christogenesis"/"Christosphere" conceptuality that motivates my use of the term "Christic".

22 See J. Severino Croatto, Exodus: A Hermeneutics Of Freedom (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), pp. 1-3f.; and cf. his article "Las estructuras de poder en la Biblia: La contextualizacion hermeneutica," Revista Biblica 37 (1975): 115-28; N. B. Croatto correctly points out in his Biblical Hermeneutics (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1987), p. 2 that: "From the hermeneutic viewpoint, text and event or praxis are already mutually conditioned." Further, he asserts that he "goes beyond the limitation [of hermeneutics] imposed by P. Ricoeur," who he quotes as defining hermeneutics merely in terms of: "the theory of the functions of understanding in their relationship to the interpretation of texts" (Croatto's emphasis). However, I think contra Croatto, that he misrepresents Ricoeur's overall understanding. This is because Ricoeur has noted his insight in this regard: see Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), N. B. p. 12. See also, R. J. Howard, Three Faces of Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
During the early Middle Ages, under the control of church doctrine and patristic authority, the allegorical procedure dominated scriptural method. Following these hermeneutical developments Jewish rabbinical sources began to emerge with renewing significance. Eventually these influences led to modifications that gave rise to the appearance of a fourfold methodology that combined historical, allegorical, moral and spiritual precepts of interpretation.

With the arrival of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and the concomitant surge of interest in the reappropriation of informed intellect and cultural achievements found in antiquity, philosophical and theological scholarship began to raise critical questions concerning the Bible. From the perspective of their classical studies disparate scholars bought hermeneutics back to the study of base source languages, i.e., Hebrew and Greek. These lines of inquiry were further stimulated by the German and English movements of Deism and others that shifted by a route that passed through a different epistemological paradigm. They moved away from belief in a remote God to the immanent activity of the human mind and the intersections of the Divine.

Enquiry into the Bible's meaning and interpretation - biblical criticism - as it came to be called, asked the same type of questions about the Bible and its origins that classical scholars were asking about the ancient documents with which they were concerned. Logically a plethora of questions came to the fore: How and why were these inspirational books written? What was the original text/event? What were the sources used by the writer or writers? What historical factors can be discerned from work behind and within the biblical texts? What was the sociocultural situation of the intended audience?

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23 Jameson has an interesting view of the Christian medieval system concerning the four levels of interpretation i.e., anagogical, moral, literal and the allegorical. He sees among others, allegorical interpretation as a hermeneutical "method." Not that he wants to rescue it as a contemporary hermeneutic. Its distinction lies in the fact that since interpretation embodies more than formal analysis of textual material, complete interpretations are by definition allegorical as well as descriptive. Generally, these medieval systems, disclose the, "incommensurability between the private and the public." Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 29-31.
What sociopolitical and cultural factors - consciously or unconsciously - helped shape the textual material as we now have it? What in short were the presuppositions and intentions of the narrative interpreter of the biblical texts and events? Investigation into these and other questions constitute the burgeoning science of biblical interpretation.²⁴

a) Theology and Interpretation

Theology's task therefore has and is always inevitably hermeneutical: since it treats the interpretation and understanding of the texts and episodes found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Generally, we may say that as a science, hermeneutics addresses the problems of how best to read these texts and events in order to bring out their profound and timeless meanings in relevant fashion. Hermeneutics, then, is the classical identification of the conscientious attempt to elucidate what happens in the interpretative act; it puts before us a seminal question concerning Scripture; how do we find understanding and praxis possible? And, further, it poses questions relating to possible points of contact existing between ourselves and the texts and events of the past? In "scientized" fashion we are obliged to cherish the integrity of the text and event so that we do not merely hear echoes of our own projected bias, but rather hear the text/event's address to us. Throughout hermeneutical enquiry, Ott's assertion is useful:

The nature of theology as a whole is hermeneutical .... It is a matter of understanding Biblical texts, of understanding the subject matter that comes to expression in them, and ultimately in the understandability of the witness to the subject matter in each present situation.²⁵

Accordingly the task of hermeneutics is always a salutary exercise, since all biblical critics must in some way or other deal with the hermeneutical difficulties occasioned by the passages of time concerning one episode and another. They must try to distinguish between the multiplicity of an author's concerns and their varying historico-political contexts. Between the questions that relate to documentary sources, the varying changes through the course of time of the biblical languages, as well as the differences between literary genres, and cultural influences, and so on.

The modern study of hermeneutics arose in response to the epistemological edge posed to these questions. Enquiry, Kantian in its orientation ("How is understanding possible?"), impelled hermeneutical investigation into new situations. Previous scholarship viewed hermeneutics as the "technique of understanding expressions of life set in written form." Observations of this sort are instructive, but lack the needed insight that "expressions of life" occur also quite profoundly in events and beyond that, which is "set". The "privileged locus" of the hermeneutical function, as Croatto points out, is the interpretation of texts and this, whilst never forgetting their interrelatedness with events. Thus with legitimation and conviction we may say in agreement with Ricoeur: "all discourse is actualised as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning," declaring and bringing to comprehension (to use Bultmann's line), "the possibilities of humanity's being."

26 Wilhelm Dilthey, Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik, 1900, published with the supplements from the MS. in vol. 5 of the Collected Works (Gesammelte Schriften), 1924, pp. 317-383. The quote cited above is from, p. 332, my emphasis. Dilthey defines the rare method of the cultural sciences as the "circle of interpretation" - this term has been appropriated by modern hermeneutics, under the phrase the "hermeneutical circle". The word Dilthey uses for "set" (fixierter) in the original German is quite strong, and has to do with what is "settled" or "held" relating to "fixed". Any notion of the biblical texts or events having to do with rigidity or fixedness run counter the findings of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, and consequently in this place, the point of view of this writer. For Rudolf Bultmann's appraisal of Dilthey's view see his invaluable analysis, "The Problem Of Hermeneutics," in Essays: Philosophical And Theological (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 234 ff. These essays are from his second volume. It is of note that in this essay, as well as giving his systematic statement concerning hermeneutics, and contrasting his overview with that of Dilthey's, Bultmann also appraises Schleiermacher's view of hermeneutics in relationship to his own position.

27 Paul Ricoeur op. cit. p. 12.

28 For this powerful and illuminating phrase see, Rudolf Bultmann in op. cit. p. 246 (Bultmann's emphasis). I have taken the hermeneutical liberty, as I will seek to do throughout this work to make
b) Formulation and Conceptualisation

It follows then that a proper expository appreciation of theological hermeneutics will remain cognisant of the emancipatory power of the biblical material, aware that the texts "can redescribe and resignify life in evangelical ways". Since all texts and events as well as particular practices are interpreted by interpreters, no interpreter can come to the text or event free of their selected theological or ideological presuppositions. Free of their own "pre-understanding" (Vorverständnis), free of their chosen "direction of enquiry" (das Woraufhin), nor yet their "self-understanding" (Selbstverständnis). Bultmann, utilising Heidegger in his attempt to find a different ontology, arguing from the position of personalistic existential philosophy, has shown that all "hermeneutists" (Brueggemann's term), adopt presuppositions that are actual and chosen relative to "their psychical processes and ... [their] spiritual make-up or intellectual consanguinity." Whilst taking this helpful augmentation into account, a needed corrective to Bultmann's overall approach is deftly proffered by Metz who targets one of the major flaws running throughout Bultmann's theology. A theological scheme like Bultmann's (and all similar to it), for all its magnitude and invaluable contributions tends to limit the faith by concentrating on the actual moment of the believer's personal decision. The future is then all but lost .... this anthropological theology tends to become private and individualistic. It fails to bring into sufficient prominence the social and political dimensions of the believer's faith and responsibility.

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30 Rudolf Bultmann, "The problem of Hermeneutics" in op. cit p. 241. It is regrettable that Bultmann was not more in touch with the sociopolitical presuppositions and consequences of his own point of view, as well as that of other interpreters.
Bonino, whilst appreciative of Bultmann's assertion concerning the place and recognition of "preunderstanding," cautions for similar reasons to Metz, that this observation needs to be constantly deepened and made more concrete, not in the abstract philosophy of existence but in the concrete conditions of people who belong to a certain time, people, and class, who are engaged in certain courses of action, even of Christian action, and who reflect and read the texts within and out of these conditions.32

Our purpose here is to underscore the observation that assumptions both philosophical and political, are what we bring to the exposition of the biblical texts. There is no self-evident or unambiguous reading of reality. Nothing is simply descriptive (mutatis mutandis). All texts and events construct reality as they see it. All who enjoin the task of hermeneutics do so from vested interests (including those of course of this writer).

Foucault in his aetiology of authors and their power, is particularly clarifying in the dissipation of hermeneutical naivety when he highlights the reality of, the "author as an ideological product."33

Precisely because it is sacred Scripture that is under investigation, no interpreter is free from some attitudinised point of view with regard its content or message, be their hermeneutical disposition one of faith or un-faith. This is not to say that biblical hermeneutics should stake out a claim for special treatment. As Bultmann has quite convincingly shown: "The interpretation of biblical writings is not subject to conditions different from those applying to all other kinds of literature."34 Croatto agrees that there is "no such thing as a

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34 Bultmann in, op. cit., p. 256f. Also Barth, in Church Dogmatics, Vol. 1/2, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), p. 467, says: "There is no such thing as a
biblical hermeneutics distinct from a philosophical, a sociological, a literary hermeneutics, and so on .... There is but one general hermeneutics, with many 'regional expressions'. Basically hermeneutics consists of, and cannot escape some form of "interpretation theory" as the optic or biases through which current opinions towards text-events are processed. 

Clearly, one's selected hermeneutical methodology must effect the questions put to the texts. And since there is no such thing as a completely objective interpretation of the biblical texts or episodes, it is incumbent upon all "interpreters" (including this one) to indicate their hermeneutical strategy. This must occupy the intention of every hermeneutical formulation, since as Gadamer has rightly enunciated: "It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to the language that speaks to us in tradition."

1 (iii) Hidden Prejudices: Hermeneutics and "Sacred Dishonesty"

Given these basic assumptions regarding the necessary interactions between Word, world, and the priority of radical discipleship as a way through to authentic christopraxis, the task of interpreting the Bible is greatly enlarged. Hermeneutical procedures now must not only address interpretation of text and context, but also the incorporation of ideology critique, together with the parameters that delineate the interpreter's own social location concerning the prevailing sociopolitical sphere. Exercise of this type can act to free the biblical interpreter from what Wilder has insightfully called "occupational special biblical hermeneutics."

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35 Severino Croatto, Biblical Hermeneutics (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), p. 2. Here Croatto is alluding to the observation made by Ricoeur in "Hermenéutica filosófica y hermenéutica bíblica", in Exégesis: Problemas de método y ejercicios de lectura (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1978), pp. 263-277. It is to be noted here, that I am aware that citations from disparate scholars, from different schools of thought, could lead to the notion that they agree where there is no agreement - citing Bultmann and Croatto, etc. My aim is that of overviewing theological and sociopolitical "throughsighting" with informed comprehenson. It is not about conciliation, but an appreciation of some of the main strands of thought that have emerged from the body of scholarship within these differing schools.

36 It will be evident that I am heavily indebted to and influenced by Ricoeur's findings in my approach to the hermeneutical task.
It is altogether needful to declare this, since every interpreter lives in a situation that in some-way supports, reflects, legitimates, or critiques a certain mode of being in the world. This by anyone’s fair estimation must effect his or her way and the purpose of their interpretative organisation. Jameson shows with shrewdness that all reasoning enquirers do their work from the position of what he names as the "political unconscious." Utilising our preferred ideological grids, we approach historic enquiry for a reason. Pointedly Jameson impresses upon us that:

History is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.

Clearly, we should understand that social site and intellectual preferences are therefore not impartial or innocuous. As Herzog indicates:

No scholar is a detached mind but a member of a social class dependent upon social institutions, and as such, he or she brings a multitude of engaged interests to any project of interpretation .... [therefore] The time has arrived when the social location of the interpreter must become the subject of critical scrutiny.

Sentient awareness in this regard is a necessity. By being aware of and arguing for liberative hermeneutics, what is sought and proffered is a

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40 William R. Herzog II, "Interpretation as Discovery and Creation: Social Dimensions of Biblical Hermeneutics", *American Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (June, 1983), pp. 113–114. Here Herzog is in agreement, in similar parade of words with the thoughts of Fiorenza, as set out at the beginning of this chapter. For a more complete appreciation of her argument see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Politics of Otherness" in *Expanding the View*, Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, eds., (Maryknoll,
declaratory, principled approach to biblical interpretation. That is, a method of "critical scrutiny" which displays a brace of hermeneutical guidelines specifying their value orientation arising from the totalitarianism of "owned" life alignments. Here, Habermas is germane when he explains the propitious task of a critical sociology of knowledge. It raises the question of what undergirds "the consensus, presented as fact, that supports the domination of the time, and does so with a view to the relations of power surreptitiously incorporated in the symbolic structures of speech and action."^41 With this comprehension in place, room is made for a full appreciation of the illuminating recognition and sustained maintenance of Jameson's perspective: "our readings of the past are vitally dependent on our experience of the present, and in particular on the structural peculiarities of .... multinational capitalism."^42

Hence, what is herein cognitively arrived at and advanced is a non-objective, decidedly "liberative" approach to biblical truth. One that contains a hermeneutical understanding in which faith is essentially connected with sociopolitical morality to the degree that it addresses the real issues of human misery. Rather than one representing studied neutrality, loftily distant and grandiose in its speculative ability concerning the ethereal elements of privatised immortality.

An alacritous approach to the text is thus needed, an approach that is non-vacillating. One that stands over against the sterility of unstated ideological premises; those of "detached" inquiry. Such an approach, accordingly, whilst needing to be aware of, appreciating and utilising the tools of dominant academic theology, does not sit in acquiescing subjection to it. Nor does it fall for the predictable; the religious certitude and overly "attached" ideology of rationalistic fundamentalism.


^41 Jürgen Habermas, Theory and Practice (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 11-12.
a) Hermeneutics and Ethical Responsibility

Genuine theological hermeneutics proffers an approach, which maintains that a faithful expositor will continually strive to avoid any felonious use of the Bible, resisting any form of interpretative anarchy. Far too many misreadings of the biblical texts are presently at large, and a goodly number of them are the cause of macro and micro ethical predicaments. In the hands of those who wish to misuse it, the Bible (vested with the authority and reverence the church has afforded it), all too easily becomes a vehicle of self-willed and non-scientized concepts imposed upon others. All biblical interpreters must continually evict, must resile from any tendency towards this baneful mindset. Precisely because human nature is fickle and because we are all tempted in this direction, this dilemma has remained in the bosom of the church. In every age, the people of God have been visited by those who see Scripture as an object of manipulation. Not surprisingly, the theologians of the church have stridently sought to stay this malevolence. Tillich\textsuperscript{43} incisively specified this intention as methodologically fraudulent. As he discerned, to be guilty of this mentality, is to be party to a hermeneutical disposition that is not only corrupt in procedure, but caught up into a ideology capable of conveying "the demonic" (\textit{Das Dämonische}).\textsuperscript{44}
We all invariably bring to the interpretative task our predispositions: what Tillich is complaining against is the bringing of chosen theological attitudes of divine deceit that transport roguish implications. That is, those methodological attitudes that lead inevitably to what he properly and provocingly designated "sacred dishonesty." Denunciations of this sort, by a theological philosopher of Tillich's stature are to be applauded; for he rightly saw them to be procedures that are not only (using his descriptions) "dishonest," but those fraught with "profanization" making for demonizing "self-deception." In this regard, Tillich reached beyond his own location, highlighting much that is onerous in contemporary Christianity - leaving all and sundry with no uncertainty concerning his targets or meaning. Since his treatment of theology and philosophy concerning the whole human enterprise, has been called "biblical" relative to the distinctness that his search was "wholly and finally determined by the revelation of God recorded in the Bible." There can therefore, be little doubt as to why he exhibited these concerns regarding an honest and unswerving faithful approach to theological science and exposition.

Left unchallenged and uncorrected consecrated untruthfulness in its sophistical forms emerges as a tool of dominance in culture and history. Specifically it becomes a theological and political disease that throws disruption and trouble into human living. Concerning the layout of my argument up to this point, I urge my readers to be aware that, in the subsequent chapters instances of sacred dishonesty's deception, cover-up, and denial of the way and purpose of authentic Christian existence are severally identified. It is sufficient here by way of illustration, concerning the effects of

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45 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 36. To underscore what I have indicated in the main text, in the following sections of this work I have set out varied accounts of how this impedimenta cuts across the purpose and substance of biblical discipleship.

unchecked sacred dishonesty, to reference and explore a period of extreme clarification in Western history - Nazi Germany during Hitlerian fascism.

b) Nazism and Consecrated Untruth

Bullock, in his study of Adolf Hitler's rule, remarks that the dominant obsession of Hitler was power: "The pursuit of power cast its harsh shadow like a blight over the whole of his life." 47 Because of its hierarchical structure and jurisdiction, together with the religiopolitical obedience it engendered, the Christian church (principally the Catholic church) impressed Hitler. As one of the most significant institutions of the nation's culture, it was seen as an indispensable tool of manipulation. 48 According to Albert Speer, the Nazi Minister for Armaments and War Production, and one of a handful of people whom the Führer trusted, Hitler maintained that the church was "indispensable in political life," and accordingly, "ordered his chief associates, above all Göring and Goebbels, to remain members of the church." 49

Although in Hitler's view, the ethics of Christianity were contemptible, it being "a religion fit only for slaves," 50 at the beginning of his purpose, he was predisposed to leave the churches alone provided they would not interfere with the temporal affairs of his regime. He was quite content to leave the church on the sidelines so long as it concerned itself with matters of another world. The role of the church was to confine itself to the Bible, the saving of souls and eternal life, leaving this life, human physical and social well being, to the Nazi ordering of reality. The church was to be tolerated provided it deferred to Nazi ideology as the supreme authority over life. A German Nazi lawyer in Denmark in 1934 told Bishop Nygren that the Nazi movement would not

48 It is not my intention to deal with this issue in extended detail here, preferring to address the substance of "The Church and the National Security State" under a subsequent heading in a following essay.
attack Christianity, provided it did, "nur nichts gegen die nationale Weltanschauung" (only nothing against the nationalist conception of life).\textsuperscript{51}

c) Utilising the Church

Through his 1933 Concordant with Pius XI and the Vatican, Hitler gained the dissolution of the Roman Catholic political organisation and trade unions. In broad terms, he succeeded in making Protestantism an instrument of the National Socialist politics of \textit{Blut und Boden} (Blood and Soil). Religious sanction to party politics and paramoral activities were gained through the election of Nazi sympathisers to church officers. Justified in the name of national identity and purification, and in company with the development of a quasi-religious cult of the state, persecution of the Jews and others that the Reich deemed as "asocial individuals" became rampant. In this way the sacred dishonesty practised by Nazism, enabled the theopolitical rationalisation and establishment of "the German Christians" (die deutschen Christen) with their Reich bishop (Reichsbischof), Ludwig Müller.\textsuperscript{52} As the spectre of Nazism grew in power and control, the people of Germany were increasingly betrayed by the silent compliance of the intellectual community and the Christian churches. The conservative sections of the German Evangelical church rationalised their obedience to National Socialism under the shibboleths of patriotism and nationalism. Premised on Paul's statements in the Epistle to the Romans concerning acquiescence to the state, they subsumed their religiopolitical responsibilities under a hermeneutic of convenience. The claim for obedience to the Nazi regime and its ideological support structures went beyond an attempt to fashion a state religion for the deutschen Christen movement; the battle was for the soul of the German Church. In the words of Nazi Reich Minister Kerl:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Bullock, op. cit., p. 389.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ludwig Müller, before being selected by Hitler and given full powers by him in April 1933 to lead church affairs as the patron of the "German Christian Movement," was a little known and insignificant
\end{itemize}
True Christianity and true Nazism are identical. Since 1933, Hitler has hammered Jesus and his teachings into the hearts of the people .... the Pastors must march with the people.53

Being an expressed form of sacred dishonesty insubstantially challenged by the "shallow liberalism" of the time - that had run, by Niebuhr's perception, "into the sand of relativism"54 - National Socialism sought to retain the appearance of Christianity whilst perverting its reality into a religious version of Nazi ideology. Consequently, any reference to political measures or the National Socialist Party Weltanschauung in sermons or religious teaching was declared by the state to be a criminal offence. Biblical and christological affirmations of Christian faith's allegiance that could only be given to God, as God, were understood by Nazi ideology as traitorous and a threat to the "Nazified" German Evangelical Church. Together with its counterfeit religiosity in its demand for ultimate citizen loyalty to the National Security State.

d) Sabotaging the Hitlerian Lie

From the ranks of the church substantial resistance was slight. Among the few who spoke out with any unfeigned critical edge was Karl Barth. Predicated on the conviction that God alone establishes the basis of divine revelation, Barth's theological concerns carried resounding political consequences. He discerned very clearly that the spiritual seduction of the German people under the programme of the National Socialists was to assimilate the church into the Nazi State. Thereby synthesising Nazism, Christianity, and ipso facto identifying religious aims with those of the regime.

54 Reinhold Niebuhr, cited in Richard Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 123. Speaking of Niebuhr's attitude to the situation of Germany under the control of Hitler and "his crowd of fascists," Fox comments that concerning the religious situation, Niebuhr "perceived a lacklustre church from which the masses of German Protestants, despairing over their..."
Against the prevailing cultural propaganda, he maintained that a theology that collapsed the structures of the divine into cultural and political immanence was idolatrous. Courageously he countered Hitler's pretensions in a lecture entitled, "The First Commandment as a theological Axiom," in which he strongly argued against connecting "the concept of revelation with other authorities," and the danger of having "other gods." Suspended from his Bonn professorship in Germany on the 26th of November 1935, Barth continued from Switzerland to be the theopolitical heart and soul of Christian resistance to Hitler. In his formal farewell to his Bonn students, he ended with the words:

And now the end has come. So listen to my last piece of advice: exegesis, exegesis and yet more exegesis! Keep to the Word, to the scripture that has been given to us.

Barth's courageous insights in denouncing all forms of church captivity and sacred dishonesty still remain relevant to modern times.

Otto Dibelius too, demonstrated courage in the face of fascist suasion. At the Reichstag meeting in the Potsdam Garrison church he preached before Hitler issuing a warning against the emergence of "dictatorship." And Niemöller's founding of the "Pastor's Emergency League," galvanised a courageous group of Pastor's into declarative statements - these among others, were significant indicators of Christian resistance, but there were all too few. Not many with public intent identifiably condemned the paganism, anti-Semitism and tyranny of Hitler's lie. A church where too many adhered to the accommodating theology emanating out of 19th-century liberalism were too easily swayed by a Christ wrapped in a swastika.

national fate, were thoroughly alienated." See Fox, in ibid., p. 123.


So powerful was the political and religious dominance of Nazism's fascist control, that but for the rare exceptions of a few courageous malcontents including some Catholics, and the stand of the Confessing church (*Bekennende Kirche*) the overall effect from the churches was almost total acquiescence followed by inaction. But there was a faithful response. From a prophetic minority and against the tide came one of the great faith statements of modern church history, the "Theological Declaration of Barmen".

In point of fact, the National Socialist rise to power was viewed by many Protestant ecclesiastical officials and clergy as a historical turn of events that were to be greeted enthusiastically. They saw in Hitler's rise to power the indication of "a divine miracle." For too many, National Socialism represented a historical turn of events in the national life of Germany that guaranteed the replacement of "political chaos" and "free thinking" by traditional political and religious conventions constitutive to a pure German "Folk-life."

On what must surely be one of the most shameful days of modern church history, the 17th of December 1941, various German church leaders along with the Bishops of Saxony, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, the Anhalt of Saxony, Thüringen and Lübeck published the following declaration:

The National Socialist leaders of Germany have provided indisputable documentary evidence that the Jews are responsible for this war in its

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world-wide magnitude. They have therefore made the necessary decisions and taken the necessary steps, both internal and external, to ensure that the life of the German nation is protected against Judaism. As members of that same German nation, the undersigned leaders of the German Evangelical Church stand in the forefront of this historic struggle to defend our country, of which it has been necessary for the national police to issue a statement to the effect that the Jews are the enemies of the German nation and of the world .... It is the duty of a German Evangelical Church to foster and to promote the religious life of the German people. Christians who are Jews by race have no place in that Church and no right to a place. The undersigned leaders of the German Evangelical Church have therefore decided not to accept Jewish Christians as members of the Church community. 59

Consecutively the majority of official representatives of the German church, at its highest levels exited into cautious, opportunistic political silence, withdrawing into hesitating statements that were diplomatically shrouded in careful qualifications. Contemptible because of their minimal sociopolitical standard concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 60

e) Committing "Truth" as Resistance

The distinction between a theology that is biblically truthful and a theological construction that is given to the interpretative purposes of sacred dishonesty, can be illustrated by the juxtaposition of two assertions that occurred during this period of Nazi control. During this dark rite of passage, Heinrich Grüber, the dean of the Berlin cathedral and founder of an organisation that helped Jewish people escape out of Germany (the Grüberbüro), stated emphatically: "The gospel in our time is that Jesus Christ was a Jew." The integrity

60 Concerning Barth's foundational response to an all accommodating secularising of the Gospel and to Nazism, see Clifford Green, Karl Barth, The Making of Modern Theology: 19th and 20th Century Theological Texts, gen. ed.: John W. de Gruchy (London: Collins, 1988). Bonhoeffer, who paid for his convictions with his life, stridently stated: "If we claim to be Christians there is no room for expediency. Hitler is the Anti-Christ. Therefore we must go on with our work and eliminate him whether he is successful or not." See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Eberhard Bethge, (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958), 1: 297-298.
contained in this theology can only be understood as it is measured against the degrading avowal of Nazism's Reichbischof, Ludwig Müller. Who in response to questions concerning his strength of orthodox theological conviction, in an all-accommodating statement of cowardice, answered: "I can accept all the creeds."61 The convictional declaration of Grüber against the Nazi State is illustrative of the integrity of hermeneutical interpretation that is receptive to, and informed by, Scripture's mandates of righteousness and justice as they stand against the incursions of sacred dishonesty.

In sharp critique of Nazism and the duplicity of "The German Christian Movement," Tillich, too, was faced with the manifold manifestations of theopolitical corruption and evil present in the Third Reich. Most Christians were mesmerised into believing that the law of the Reich was the law of God. Whereas Tillich alongside the faithful minority of Bonhoeffer, Niemöller and Barth, became convinced that the church must stand in biblical opposition against all idolatry, against all finite absolutes. The Christian gospel they maintained, generates a Freiheitgeschichte (a history of the freeing of humankind), not some harnessing of it for political purposes resulting in a betrayal of its commission. They were persuaded that the weight of the church's complicity with National Socialism was too heavy to be balanced by shallow estimates or theological self-justifications.

f) Against False Gods and a Counterfeit Christ

Buttressed by the ideology of blood and race and anti-Semitism, Hitler's rule became increasingly demanding of the churches. Relentlessly it required of them that they recognise National Socialism as a divine revelation and modify Christian belief and practice without reserve in support of the "Father-Land". After all, was not Germany engaged in "the battle of destiny for the German

61 On these observations see Douglas John Hall, Thinking The Faith (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 84.
people" (*der Schicksalskampf des deutschen Volkes*), and were not the churches part of "Germany" and the German national character?\(^{62}\)

As a counterfeit faith, National Socialism proposed through Carl Schmitt's theology, a puppet theology of "positive Christianity". A calumnious type of "political religion" resulting in a form of civil religion that provided social cohesiveness and spiritual foundation for the sacred dishonesty of National Socialism.\(^{63}\)

In sharp response, Tillich produced a document entitled "The Church and the Third Reich: Ten Thesis."\(^{64}\) The primary purpose of this document was to show that the church's historical role was to be critical and transformative, not functional and legitimating of what he called the "capitalistic-feudal form of rule."\(^{65}\) Referring to National Socialism as both "pagan" and "demonic," in forthright and condemnatory style, Tillich advanced his objections to the Nazi State through his "Ten Thesis." As thesis 7 states: "Protestantism must prove its prophetic-Christian character by setting the Christianity of the cross against the paganism of the swastika. Protestantism must testify that the cross has broken and judged the 'holiness' of nation, race, blood, and power."\(^{66}\)

The "Ten Thesis" published in 1932, in the book, *Die Kirche und das Dritte Reich: Fragen und Forderungen deutscher Theologen* (The Church and the Third Reich: Questions and Demands of German Theologians) was subsequently sent to the German seat of power - to Hitler himself. Containing reflections and critiques of the sociopolitical constitution relating to the

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\(^{62}\) Arendt attributes this manipulative phrase to either Hitler or Goebbels, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 52.


\(^{64}\) See Mark Kline Taylor, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (Blackburn, Victoria: Collins, 1987), pp. 117-118. It is most unfortunate that the power of Tillich's protest in the "Ten Theses" were not let loose into English until 1987. See ibid., p. 116.

\(^{65}\) Taylor, ibid., p. 117.

\(^{66}\) Taylor, ibid., p. 117.
Aryanization of the German nation and Christian existence, it was so forceful that it prompted a strident rebuke from J. Stark, a professor in the employ of Hitler. He wrote of it: "The book in question affords a valuable commentary on the intellectual level of numerous "evangelical" academic theologians. Never have I seen such an accumulation of ignorance, superficiality, presumption and malicious enmity to the German Freedom Movement." 67

Tillich's social and political views, fuelled by his religious socialist struggle for theonomy, and a theology of culture, was correctly understood as a thorough-going denunciation of the sacred dishonesty of National Socialism. Inevitably his book, The Socialist Decision (Die sozialistische Entscheidung, 1933) was banned. Tillich lost his German professorship at the University of Frankfurt and was forced into exile by the Nazi regime in 1933. 68

**g) Sacred Dishonesty: “Christofascism”**

Throughout the struggle for freedom in the world against rivaling imperialisms, the bondage and exploitation of colonialism and militarism, sacred dishonesty has served the religiopolitical momentum of white First World supremacy and racism. These hegemonies continue to exhibit a machismo racial thrust that breeds on what Sölle has called "Christofascism." 69 Being a theopolitical term that by its intensity interprets itself. As such, christofascism is written into history with bloodshed and the stench of gas. It remains lying at the ready to render biblical truth vincible - a ubiquitous and unholy presence, a liturgy of untruth and unlife on behalf of the arrogant few.

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69 See Dorothee Sölle, The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 133-141. More concerning the meaning and outworking of "Christofascism" will be
Evidenced in "righteous" ways, with various intensities, and rooted in a politics of discrimination and religious intolerance, christofascism's chauvinistic violations bear the marks of hate, anti-Semitism, "Communists!" and White Supremacy. Linking the lies of the Nazi past with the Christian fundamentalist present, Bailie Smith the 1980's president of the burgeoning 14.4 million U. S. Southern Baptist Convention, declared at a national assembly meeting, "God does not hear the prayer of a Jew."\(^\text{70}\) Shamefully this sycophancy, this lie put into the mind of God, from which "God" so defined awaits redemption, re-voices the Nazi maxim of sacred dishonesty, "The Jews are our misfortune."\(^\text{71}\) From the place of this sacred dishonesty, Jews share in the plight of God. They, like all the victims of the "sacred lie" await the redemption of "God" and scripture's "truth."

Following Sölle's reckoning, the essential differences between these tyrannies where the religious-ideological support systems of "The New World Order" elites now today play a key role. And that of past European fascism has to do with contemporary geopolitical facts that reveal disturbing parallels. Whereas Hitlerian death camps were once found in "Weimar" now in our time they exist in places like, Rwanda, Guatemala, East Timor and Burma. They exist today wherever the iron fists of the world oligarchies' authorise the practice of torture and political disappearances.\(^\text{72}\) Born out of sacred dishonesty, "christofascistic" forms (both past and present) are instrumental in creating social fictions, engendering argumentation against the marginalized, and serve to venom the body politic against peoples of colour. Be it in Europe, Australia, Melanesia, or the Americas, it acts as the permissioning agent and righteous justifier of the profane in the sacred.

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\(^{71}\) Sölle, op cit., p. 139.
h) Tillich's Illumination of the Pathology

Tillich's queries concerning christofacism in his day and the despoiling effects of sacred dishonesty's sinful index were in some measure anticipated by St. Augustine, who offered to the world of academic investigation the timeless dictum: "The soiled mind is not able to adhere to the Truth." When enacted, Tillich rightly understood (has have others), that mindsets which demonstrate acquiescence to evil's bidding become constitutive elements of a consecrated untruthfulness. Making for a falsifying posture that will seldom act or admit (to the self or to others) culpability for the way self-ingratiating hermeneutical conclusions are done - let alone propagated. Struggling with each other and trying to conquer each other, "constructed" constitutive elements of biblical truth and sacred dishonesty make for apparatus' approximating theological vice. With similar concerns, Luther could characterise the fallaciously "religious" of his day as fabricatores deorum, as those who had fashioned God to suit their own misconceived convenience.

As Tillich saw it, "sin" is the act of humanity's turning away from God (unbelief) and towards itself (thus his use of hubris). This angle humanity takes that it might make itself both the centre and focus of all reality (leading as he saw it to concupiscence). As such this condition of sin, of "estrangement," acts to shut humanity off from the possibility of "New Being in Jesus" - that possibility which Tillich saw as humanity's greatness - that which he called the image of God in humanity. It is understandable therefore that whatever was essentially understood as an organising personal or social reality that soiled the divine human endeavour and hindered the self in its reception of New Being, became on every front the object of attack in the crucial consequences of Tillich's formulations.

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72 Sölle, ibid., p. 139.
73 St. Augustine, De utilitate credendi, xvi, 34.
74 Martin Luther, "Jonas propheta," Weimarer Ausgabe, XIII, 229, II. 11-12 (1526).
Pointedly therefore, Tillich's delineation of this phenomenon describes it as being full of demonry and sinful. Returning to his text concerning the nature of sin, he describes it as, a "state in which God is not 'all in all,' the state in which God" is not properly represented, and becomes something "in addition to" - in this case "in addition to" the desired ends of biblicistic manipulators. As a consequence, God is displaced by this practice and blasphemously relegated to the position of a "stooge" - such is the power of sacred dishonesty.

\[ \text{i) The Evil in the Sacred} \]

Commonly, in both the so-called sacred and secular areas of life, those persons or impedimenta that demean God and God's truth, are disguised. To take up Tillich's language, they belong to the demonic "that is hidden" and thus not easy to discover. Consequently, the cruellest lies are most often told in confidence and in silence. As obstreperous and as "total imaging" as religious hucksters of the right and left are; the public seldom are privy (at least until exposures happen) to their sad reality. In uncloaking fashion Buber writes:

Since the primary motive of the evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one's evil from oneself, [one's sacred dishonesty] as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some other highly visible form of Christian within our culture?

Contemporary agents of divine deceit, located within the church - some clandestinely out of view and others parading as persons of high profile - these sad declensions are with tragic regularity found within the courts of the church.

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76 Tillich, ibid., p. 218.
78 Martin Buber, Good and Evil (New York: Scribner's 1981), p. 111. Tillich is in agreement with Buber in this regard: "Whenever the demonic appears, it shows religious traits, even if the appearance is moral or cultural." See ibid., p. 103.
and its protectorates. Taken together, they tragically justify Buber's remarks. Therefore, we do his insight no disservice in connecting it to that of Tillich's. Constitutively, sacred dishonesty, despite its righteously intended or pretended aim, brings into disrepute the Christian's "Ultimate Concern." This being the case, in face of persisting corrupt theologies and resultant sociopolitical interpretive fictions, perpetrators of hermeneutical dishonesty create a political climate where, according to public perception, God is judged by those who try to serve divine purposes.

j) The Peril of the Self-referent

As I have tried to show, having no corrective axis outside itself, driven by notions of egotheism, the swarm, the reach, of religious self-deception is devious and sly in the extreme. It is in truth bullish and manipulative, estranging those trapped by its wrong from the journey to true being. Sacred dishonesty is venal in that it belongs, like all things sinful, to something that strictly ought not to be, nor be given a necessary function within the scheme of biblical reflection. Where ideologies and theologies that are dependent on predetermined goals that sabotage the welfare of human society are at work then questions of ultimate concern are at issue. They consequently stand contrary to the love and justice of God consummated in Jesus Christ. They are, as Tillich throughout his evaluations correctly understood, inevitably "bound to something demonic." 

79 Tangentially, cf. Lt. Col. Oliver North's TV revelations across the USA, concerning his justifying text, Under Fire and the Iran-contra controversy. North vindicated his actions as being those of a "born again Christian and a regular church goer." George Bush using the protectorate of his position of vice president, and deploying the hermeneutic of empire and kingdom, worked quietly with the U. S. government's "secret team," supporting these activities. See, John Stockwell, The Praetorian Guard: The U. S. Role in the New World Order (Boston: South End Press, 1991). With all this chicanery, it is little wonder that Chaplain Tim Tatum at the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., finds difficulty in "interpreting" the Bible; particularly since modern military ethics are called there "The World of VUCA": "Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity". Further see, Bill Dietrich, "The Military View of Ethics Reflects Specialised Training," The Seattle Times, 10 July 1987, Section E.

"sacred dishonesty" demean not only the Scriptures they tout and claim to revere, but also the very source and inspiration of the sacred documents.

Concerning this brood Kierkegaard wrote. Alertly he warned that the result of such activity "precisely is to make a fool of God, to treat God as a poor devil who has been foolish enough to commit something to writing and now must put up with what the lawyers will make of it." Such is the demonizing power of sacred self-deception so conceived: by its very nature, it always sees to the begetting of the deception of innocent others. The manufactured consent is of the kind that its justifications turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. Again, Kierkegaard's investigations into this pathology agree quite vividly with Tillich's:

Psychologically it is very remarkable how ingenious, how inventive, how sophistical, how persevering in learned investigations certain people may be, merely to get a Bible text to appeal to .... Examples of such behaviour one finds most readily among talented people whose enthusiasm is not proportionate to their intellectuality.

Such is the way of conniving "childish orthodoxy" continues Kierkegaard, that it proffers "a pusillanimous Bible interpretation, a foolish and unchristian defense of Christianity".

1 (iv) Right-Doctrine Fundamentalism: Contemporary Sacred Dishonesty

Throughout Christian experience and now ubiquitously present, the art of "sacred dishonesty" has been utilised and appropriated as a licit tool of

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81 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1941), pp. 534-535. It is not by accident that there should be a convergence of thought here or elsewhere between Kierkegaard and Tillich: whereas Barth supposedly moved away from Kierkegaard, Tillich never completely jettisoned the Dane's insights. Those insights belonging to the "individual rebel's" contributions, though it must be acknowledged that Tillich's existentialism is somewhat different from Kierkegaard's. See Alexander J. McKelway, *The Systematic Theology Of Paul Tillich* (New York: Delta, 1964), pp. 65-66.

82 Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 534-535.

83 Kierkegaard, ibid., pp. 534-535.
ideological domination. What has become clear is that different theologies have incorrectly used, directly or by implication, biblical warrant to justify oppression, thus distorting what they claim scripturally to interpret. Jameson has observed that: "Interpretation is not an isolated act [it] takes place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict." Since radical discipleship is predicated upon a calling and an activity of gracious obedience, it is the polar opposite of all conditions of coercion. In addition, it is, by implication "in conflict" with falsification concerning the politics of interpretation in the "battle for the Bible."

The hermeneutical programme of what Alves has poignantly called the supplied repression of "Right-Doctrine Protestantism" serves as a stark example of contemporary sacred dishonesty. Global inducement towards this socially conditioned neofundamentalism has been achieved by establishing an indissoluble connection between North American Protestant orthodoxy, and its particular brand of laissez faire Capitalism as the ideal Christian social utopia.

Within this geopolitical "interpretive battlefield," proponents of these particular forms of "Bible-believing" organisations are convinced that America's military and foreign policies reflect divine imperatives. It is therefore judged to be incumbent by them that they advance information to U. S. government agencies. "Overseas Crusades," formerly headed by the internationally known evangelist, Luis Palau (touted as Latin America's "Billy Graham"), reported that for a time essentially all of its personnel were frequently debriefed by the CIA. Indeed this activity was well within the acceptable parameters of many right-wing missionary organisations. CIA

85 See Rubem A. Alves, Protestantism And Repression (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985).
86 "Conversing with the CIA," Christianity Today, October, 10, 1975, p. 45.
policy itself, in a declassified memo reads: "The CIA recognises that members of these groups may wish to provide information to the CIA on matters of foreign intelligence of interest to the U. S. government. The CIA will continue to welcome information volunteered by such individuals." During the middle seventies it was estimated that, "between 10 and 25 percent of America's 35,000 Protestant and 7,000 Catholic foreign missionaries have given information to [U. S.] intelligence authorities."

What is met here, is the danger attending all such theologies that place an exaggerated emphasis on reified North American culture Christianity; hostility to theological modernity, liberationist emphases' and democratic self-determination. All such positions were viewed as threatening the foundations of Christian America's social prescriptions. Not uncommon to this holy social field of understanding is the type of sentiment expressed in an issue of the "Christian Voice Newsletter":

America, as a nation and a people, has stood in her [sic] brief history as the mightiest (and perhaps the last) great home of the Faith. She is known to the peoples of the world as a 'Christian nation.' It follows naturally that she and her people are the special target of Satan."

American “culture Christianity”, expressed in religious symbols as a divine covenant of freedom and democracy, has become what Carol Flake has called "Christian capitalism." It has become a mass movement that is regrettably, for an increasing number in the United States and many in the Two Thirds

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88 See, Christianity Today, op cit., p. 46. Amid international public outcry over "information exchange" between right-wing religious organisations and the CIA, the Agency released a carefully worded statement that the CIA would not further seek out intelligence contacts but "would listen if a missionary or clergyman [sic] volunteers information." See declassified CIA cable No. 1217002, in op cit. For further evidence concerning the political agenda of the Christian Right and the U. S. National Security Council, see, Sara Diamond, Spiritual Warfare: The Politics Of The Christian Right (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), especially p. 48ff.
World, an enterprise of oppression, domination and imperialism. It has reached global levels of distortion by sanctifying the particular types of religious experience out of which it has come, and by the erection of its cultural idiosyncrasies into universal spiritual principles. Generating inequality, its form and function is tellingly persuasive, as the contemporary German film maker, Wim Wenders has apprised: "America has colonised our unconscious." 91

a) An Abridgement of Human Freedom

Whilst disclaiming any direct interest in the sociopolitical, Right-Doctrine dogmatism as in the case of all ideologies of domination, relates directly to the construction of social functions. By propounding its estimates of orthodoxy as righteously definitive, this socially modifying fundamentalism through its attendant hermeneutics teaches that the guarantee of Christian reality is realised by embracing its sacralized edicts. Weber's observation concerning religious associations and their control techniques is relevant here: "their power to rule is supported by their monopoly in the bestowal or denial of sacred values." 92

Following the social psychology of this movement, Alves notes that it requires of its adherents that they embrace its understanding of the truth, as "the sacred truth." Because its requirements act as social control mechanisms, Right-Doctrine positivism constitutively holds "that it is an absolute and final knowledge which must be upheld without vacillations or concessions." Doubt is consequently understood as a "symptom of damnation." And since "its discourse and real being coincide .... it holds a monopoly on truth." This is because this belief system over against mainline Christian doctrine believes

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itself to "possesses a body of knowledge that is totally objective and absolute."\(^93\)

At the root of this dogmatism is a denial of the open-ended character of knowledge. Concerning differing forms of epistemological arrogance, Hegel wrote: "Dogmatism as a way of thinking, whether in ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else but the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known."\(^94\)

As Alves asserts, the embracing of this perspectival diacritic of fixed truth makes for the "legitimation of the existing set-up of power and authority, and .... the absence of any sort of prophetic criticism."\(^95\) Displaying this characteristic, the following of Christ is no longer dynamically open to the persuasions of the Spirit or the drive of history. Stripped of any authentic biblical vitality it is unable to develop an exigent attitude towards its current sociopolitical environment. Theological correspondence so mannered means the demise of a critical freedom that is able to act in a compelling and effective manner. Therefrom, Alves notes:

Freedom and absolute knowledge are mutually contrary, and never harmonise. Thus in order to maintain absolute knowledge, one must build a fixed and finished world, a world without the unexpected and without surprises. In this world, doubt is permanently exorcised, and in its place dwell the certitudes that tranquillise the heart.\(^96\)

**b) Against Protestantism: The Protestant Principle**

Indeed, such a position fails to fathom what Tillich rightly named "The Protestant Principle."\(^97\) Its trenched insistence has been that, from the  


\(^95\) Alves, op. cit., p. xxii.

\(^96\) Alves, ibid., p. 108.

dynamism of the Reformation, Protestantism’s claims resolutely are a revolt against all pretensions to absolute truth. It is trusting faith (sola fide) committed to the absoluteness of God alone, that precludes the attribution of ultimacy to anyone or any societal representation. It was Tillich’s insistence that no partial object of loyalty, nothing that is finite, only the divine in Christ may be treated as though it were divine. Against the temptations of sacred dishonesty, his point in The Protestant Principle was that it

contains the divine and human protest against any absolute claim made for a relative reality, even if this claim is made by a Protestant church. The Protestant principle is the judge of every religious and cultural reality, including the religion and culture which calls itself "Protestant" .... It is the guardian against all the attempts of the finite and conditioned to usurp the place of the unconditional in thinking and acting. It is the prophetic judgement against religious pride, ecclesiastical arrogance, and secular self-sufficiency and their destructive consequences.98

Against the endeavour and essence of The Protestant Principle, the righteous tide and global forms of Right-Doctrine Protestantism by its inordinate authority-claims constructs a perennially closed world for the believer. As such, it encapsulates the heinous sin of idolatry. At seminal points the epistemological “fixedness” underlying this type of fundamentalism separates it from all theologies of orthodox content.

The practical and epistemological effects of Right-Doctrine Protestantism gives rise to an understanding of Scripture that proffers an infallible Bible – what Barth denounced as a “paper pope” view of Scripture. Such a system results in a set of rigid evangelical beliefs that take primacy over God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ the true Word of God, the One who is mediated to us through the Bible. In Right-Doctrine Protestantism what occurs is a serious failure to acknowledge the unique reality of God, and God’s transcendent authority over all contingent media employed by God in the divine grace-filled
act of self-disclosure. Following Barth’s logic, the revelation of the triune God is set out before us in the Bible. This means that the biblical writings are not salvific revelation in and of themselves. They are the words of inspired human testimony that point away from themselves to the reality of God in Jesus Christ. Because of this, revelation does occur through them. This recognition means that it is always important for theology to be aware that as the Word of God, the Bible is not some content we can control or manipulate. Rather, through the witness in the Bible, God encounters the church. In this encounter, the Bible becomes God’s Word to us – indeed to the whole ecumenical church. It becomes this not by our faith profession or the correctness of our doctrines, but by God’s sovereign revelatory power. Right-Doctrine Protestantism by allying itself with a “biblicistic” legitimation of dominant power against God’s liberative purposes unmaskst itself as a “religion” in servitude to the powerful against the powerless.

Before the all-encompassing graciousness of God’s grace, all else is relative. Against all such biblicistic systems stands the radical consequence of the biblical message of justification by grace alone, which Karl Barth and other mainline theologians have sought so steadfastly to attest to throughout their theologies. It is because God alone can put us in right relationship with God’s own self through the freedom and sovereignty of divine grace, that all human attempts at constricting redemptive activity are utterly called into question. Thus revealing to us that any biblicistic “ultimate” attempts at proscribing how or where God should or can act are attempts of control arising from human arrogance and idolatry.

98 Tillich, ibid., p. 163.
99 Concerning the Bible being “God’s commission” and “God’s decision and not ours” to control because it is the work of “grace and not our work,” see Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics Vol. 1, Part 1, Second Edition, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975), pp. 109 ff. Although I have in this section tended to be determined by Tillich’s investigations into sacred dishonesty, Barth’s monumental theological method presents a solid alternative to both the rationalism and mysticism that dominate the pandemic forms of Right-Doctrine Protestantism.
Concerning human arrogance and idolatry, I have tried to illustrate something of its banal nature within the "German Christian Movement". Particularly as these evils issued forth in acts of sacred dishonesty practised on a grand scale by a self-aggrandising nation state - a tendency that has not abated in our time. Right-Doctrine Protestantism as the underpinning religious legitimisation at work in many "Americanised" national security states, is a continuation of this sin. It is a system propounding a true, body of conservative closed doctrine that is indurate, producing a "faith" free from the freedom of creative doubt and faith that seeks understanding.

Such "faith" becomes insatiably overtaken with a desire to excoriate itself from all uncertainty. The tension between certainty and un-certainty is eliminated, which could be said to be gratifying from the point of view of a short-sighted psychology. The result, however, is theologically and philosophically calamitous. This is because, in the transition from faith that seeks understanding, to fixed dogma, the believer is overtaken with a surety which renders biblical discipleship, and the ongoing dynamic of following Jesus unnecessary. The effect is a form of "believing" free from the creativity of doubt or risk. Consequently, a "human being's mode of existence vis-à-vis life ceases to be an expression of gratuitousness; it becomes the consequence of an absolute foundation."

Durkheim's explanations regarding the state of mind of those believers who "having doubts," still "continue to participate in the cult," are helpful concerning this phenomenon. He posits that although not all constituents of a belief system may be sure that "the details of the prescribed observances are rationally justifiable". And that although persisting doubt may remain concerning the "special efficacy attributed by dogma to each rite considered separately," believers remain faithful to their allegiances. Because, as he puts it, "they feel that it would be impossible to free [themselves] of them without
falling into moral confusion before which they recoil." As he puts it: "The very fact that in them the faith has lost its intellectual foundations throws into eminence the profound reasons upon which they rest."^{101}

c) The Struggle for Rational Emancipation

Right-Doctrine Protestantism and its cognates through pandemic forms of sacred dishonesty organises the hermeneutics of human understanding in such a way as to reaffirm the elemental syllogism of its position. In so doing it vigorously discredits those who challenge its propositions and all theologies that fight for a fuller comprehension of the gospel. Subordinated here is the need to ascertain the content of faith in a free and growing manner. What is also subalternated is the necessary struggle of reason; that credential that makes us intelligently human. This is elementally significant as Cicero preveniently noted, because it is "reason which alone raises us above the level of the beasts and enables us to draw inferences, to prove and disprove, to discuss and solve problems."^{102} To capitulate to dogmatic incomprehension, or perhaps to court it and make a fetish of unreasoned faith, works against the ever salient insights of Anselm. A remarkable theologian whose theological thrust was characterised by the endeavour of fides quaerens intellectum (faith seeking understanding) through which risking faith seeks a reason for its belief.^{103} Anselm always presupposed the gift of his faith before he understood it. His theology (like Barth's after him), never signalled a relinquishment of, nor the sacrifice of the searching intellect. Nor was it a propositional faith full of final, absolute dogmatic knowledge, but rather a questing faith driven to attempt fullness of comprehension.

^{100} Alves, op cit., p. 54.
d) Relativism as Hermeneutical Centre?

To be clear: the rejection of theological absolutes presented as an eternally true body of orthodox doctrine does not mean that its opposite is an embracing of untenanted relativism - as if relativism were to be adopted as a hermeneutical procedure. The insistence that any attack upon theological absolutes must imply the abandonment of orthodox theology to sheer relativism is a cover-up, usually hiding mechanisms of conformism meant to protect a reified religious preference and its companion-in-arms. Or a legitimised political network that acts primarily to represent and enforce appropriated rights or privileges. Besides denying the truth of the "Protestant principle" such reasoning disregards the fact that the most common situation both in creed and life generally are neither one which is entirely without intimations of truth. Nor yet most certainly one which can vaunt and propound the possession of absolute certitudes.

And here, opportunity is taken to reaffirm that the arguments submitted throughout this work concerning the content and the way of radical discipleship should always be understood in this sense.

However, whilst Christians cannot with impunity legitimately indulge in the empty boast of those who claim the possession of absolutes, neither are they wholly abandoned to the currents of uncertainty, listing about without firm hermeneutical centre. We are always and in all times beholden to the revelation of faith contained in the Bible as our "base source," to use Tillich's term. To the body of inherited Judaeo-Christian tradition that makes up our community of understanding, a kerygmatic axis (covered in my section on "reading strategy"), containing those recurring liberative themes that holds us to what McAfee Brown calls our "common heritage."104

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104 From the soundings of his own discipleship and scholarship Robert McAfee Brown has given to those of us who are his students, and to the ecumenical movement at large, continual strength and
On the enduring body of truth that sustains and centres the life of the church, John Hall elaborates: "The tradition is there, and it is there pro nobis." Which means that: "It cannot be ignored, set aside, or treated at will; or rather, if this or that faction is ready to treat it in such a manner, other influences within the koinónia will see to it that such treatment is challenged." Even so, the modes of domination and religious forms of manipulation that derive from the process of Right-Doctrine socialisation, in which the reality of compulsion is made to coexist with the illusion of freedom of commitment, continue to be missionally virulent. Rigid conservatism continues to be rapacious in its ideological assaults, and its ongoing efforts to delegitimize all other mainline theologies as secularising efforts. This is because "the concept that Christians are biblically mandated to 'occupy' all secular institutions has become the central unifying ideology for the Christian Right."

Ellul's investigations are formidable in explaining the falsification of reality and the mechanisms of orthodox conformism that seek to mould human interpretation. He speaks of manipulation by the use of repeated assertions, religio-political slogans and the convenient association of ideas concerning propagandistic manipulation as well as by the "hypnotic" conditioning of mental processes. All of which make for "the suppression of the critical faculty," and the "creation of collective passions," that subsequently provide those who would dominate with the formation of a desired "social conscience."

Wherever in the Christian cause there is an abridgement of human freedom, what follows is an unwillingness to be open in radical dependence to the

impetus to continue on by biblical investigation and practise the "common heritage" of salvation and justice, which is the calling of the people of God.

105 Douglas John Hall, Thinking The Faith (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 86. Acknowledgement is made here to the assistance I have received in this section from Hall’s pursuits.


revelatory character and freeing power of God's Word. The manipulation of such a position abridges faith's freedom by persuasive techniques, thus removing faith-forming critical decision making out of the hands of responsible selves.

e) Establishing Hermeneutical Biases: Consequential Influences

In working for the renewal of the church, many assume that if only it becomes possible to help committed Christians to see what the Bible credibly teaches, that they will gladly accept it. That believers will be open to radical insights and the consequent biblical implications provided they are presented truthfully. But many to whom discipleship is addressed are likely to accept "biblical truths" only if they are perceived to be sanctioning of, and incorporated into, the structure of meaning provided for them by the cultural, and educational agencies, the interpretative grid, of a Right-Doctrine Protestantism.

Built into its modes of analysis (further examples of its precipitates follow in the body of this work) is a pedagogical tunnel vision. It acts to condition its habitués to see the problems of history as isolated particulars, thereby stunting perceptual evaluation. Larger causalities are reduced to events of which they should have little concern - to do otherwise would not be demonstrative of adequate "trust" in the sovereignty of God. Whilst the linkage of historical inequity, racial hatred and the genocide of indigenous peoples go by without criticism, and abandoned; being buried under a congestion of surface impressions and personality platitudes.

Niebuhr in *The Self and the Dramas of History* (1955), has convincingly argued that selfhood becomes mature as a "self" only as it is drawn out of itself by a power that can elicit meaningful devotion. Such meaning however does not occur in an overwhelming of the true freedom of the self.\(^\text{108}\) Which is to say, that a critical link between the ontology of the self and critical social theory must always be preserved. Similar apprehension was argued in Kierkegaard's writings that post-date his pseudonymous books concluding with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1941). Whilst seeking to preserve a passionate piety of inwardness, he argued that the quest for self-hood must never become too wholly vertical lest it be annexed by an ideology of social conformity. Inwardness has social consequences. In his understanding of the social or interpersonal nature of human selfhood, there must continuously be the space that allows one to ask what kind of social setting is required if a self is fully to become itself. Thus, the themes of inwardness and individuality both need to come to comprehensive fruition in this context. Where this activity is absent, myopic outlook and inwardly perceptional evaluations provide aid and comfort to the dominant forms of institutionalised selfishness that are wholly at odds with the fullness of the gospel. Both Niebuhr's and Kierkegaard's insistences remain as warnings where closed forms of religious ideology have achieved the sanctity of "right-thinking."

Whereas doctrinaire adjudication may not always successfully be able to tell the "self" of the clientele what to think, it is strikingly successful in telling believers what to think about. The system of control is pervasive, although not with unlimited perfection on all fronts, on occasion it cannot avoid biblical subject matter that at times causes discomfort to the rich and powerful. Notwithstanding, the interpretations of conservative dogmatism set effectual

\(^{108}\) Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons,
limits on a good deal of clientele discourse and general Christian understanding. This is not to say that they mould total opinion, but they do not always have to. It is enough that through their media they create "opinion visibility," giving legitimacy to certain views and illegitimacy to others. This power to determine the public issue agenda, the information flow, and effect the limits of debate among their constituents so that it extends from very conservative no further than to moderate centre, if not total, is quite extraordinary.

g) Closing the Bible to its Liberative Task

The boundary constructs of theological positivism demands that the Bible be accepted uncritically, and that theology assume the subservient role of being nothing more than the faithful exegesis of the sacred text. Within Right-Doctrine Protestantism's precincts of revealed truth and dogma, there is no allowing for the Bible's own liberative position. Namely, that for the biblical witnesses' the "truth" is God in person (as the Barmen Declaration affirms), the revelatory One, who transcends our best attempts at description and expression. That is, the God who speaks to us through the incarnate Word - Jesus Christ. By assigning to the Scriptures the status of the ultimate, Right-doctrine Protestantism's interpretative mode works to undermine and usurp the sovereignty of God. Herein is a denial of the ancient wisdom that it is only God of whom "something than which nothing greater can be thought."109

Having shut down the emancipatory power of the Word of God at private and public levels of understanding, the way is made open for "solidification" (to use Alves' term). Thus, the foundations are in place for a worldview that is skewed, resulting in desensitised authoritarian attitudes and behaviour. Right-doctrine Protestantism's claim to absolute allegiance and its promise of

1955), pp. 61-72.
109 Anselm, in op. cit., II, p. 117.
fulfilment if only our behaviour and memberships conform to its relationships, are idolatrous.

Those committed to the following of Jesus and his basileia mandates are bound to reject the conjunction of manipulative techniques. Constructed methods whereby "right doctrine" fundamentalism makes itself the foundation of all human relationships, including relationships to God's incarnate word in Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of Christian formulation. Once this construal is in place, the converts of Right-Doctrine Protestantism adopt an understanding of God, of life, which derives from pre-established "biblicistic" formulations, rather than from one's experience of radical discipleship in the contemporary obedience of following Christ.

Alves indicates this view; this shut down of the development of self in his description of the outlook of a fundamentalist convert. "My absolute knowledge prohibits the real from surprising me, from revealing itself differently. Experience is not the criterion of my thinking; my thinking is the criterion of any and all possible experience." Thus, the Bible's message is closed off from any authentically risky or dangerous interpretations, because what has been imbibed is a form of self-deification that arrogates to itself absolute knowledge from a rigid body of truth.

Concerning the "desire" to be in possession of absolute knowledge - of a certitude that is diametrically opposed to being submitted to God and the "meaning of finiteness". Which is a position that casts a believer upon God and not on their own epistemological ability to achieve dominance concerning the limitations of our existence, Ricoeur finds that such activity is akin to the biblical myth of the fall. He refers to this claim as "the desire of desire." One which wants to act in a god-like manner, "taking possession of knowing, of

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willing, of doing, and of being." He observes that such a mentality corresponds to the "soul of the serpent's question," concerning what he calls the "evil infinite." This is the position "which simultaneously perverts the meaning of the limit by which freedom was oriented and the meaning of the finiteness of the freedom thus oriented by the limit."\textsuperscript{111}

Not surprisingly, once this epistemological view of the Bible and reality are in place, the mysteriousness of God as interlocutor and the correspondence of the Word to the world are closed. Making for a situation that results in Right-doctrine Protestantism acting as a form of blockage to ongoing Christian life, for "the solidification of the real, the hardening of experience, dogmatism, and authoritarianism."\textsuperscript{112} In the midst of his analysis Alves laconically states that he sees "prayer as a Freudian slip in the Right-Doctrine Protestantism world."\textsuperscript{113}

From this hermeneutical framework the Bible's message is dislocated from the convert's socio-historical understanding, or any critical theory that proceeds from Right-doctrine's reified ideology as it relates to a partiality of political meaning concerning the human situation. The abundance of biblical writings that manifest a primary interest in the emancipation of the culturally and politically oppressed are circumvented from significance. Judged in this way, the determinations of Right-Doctrine fundamentalism are exposed as "conservative ideology" rather than the culmination of biblical theology and doctrine.

Such is the outcome of strictured right-thinking, once it is provided with a "certain" integrated system of doctrine accepted as the fixed formulation of truth. Together with ethical values taken to be divine, full of sweet talk, and a cozening up to money and the powerful, it constitutes a system, an orthodoxy.

\textsuperscript{112} Alves, op. cit., p. 54.
beyond criticism. From the formulations of its attitude towards the Bible, the sacred dishonesty of Right-Doctrine Protestantism occasions an ominous assembling of a sacrosanct geopolitical "security system."**114**

h) Authoritarian Iniquity, Local Ubiquity: Geopolitical Implications

Although Alves' work is concerned in the first place with the structure of the sociopolitical logic endemic to the particular type of Calvinist Fundamentalism taken to his native Brazil by missionaries more than a century ago, I am convinced that much of his thesis is applicable to the theopolitical interpretations of what is ideally "Christian" throughout the world, particularly in Australia and its regions. Indeed, Alves' work reveals large ideological structures that legitimate the widely held view (held openly or covertly depending on where you are) that upwardly mobile and dominating American culture Christianity and its political outlook is the *sine qua non* of Christian experience.**115**

Alves' investigations are a helpful analysis of the logic and hermeneutical outworking of sacred dishonesty found within the interpretative structures of obscurantism at work in the courts of the church - be they liberal, or conservative attempts. At work globally, these reductive sociological and ideological categories are of contemporary historical signification because as we understand and confront their characteristics we are the better supplied with what is needed in dealing with the same forces at work in our setting.

I have investigated at some length the manifestations of Right-Doctrine Protestantism in the beginning sections of this work because in an attempt to speak of discipleship in our time it takes no great stretch of mind to recognise

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**113** Alves, ibid., p. 113.

**114** Alves, ibid., p. xv.

**115** Cf. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Brave New World Order: Must We Pledge Allegiance?* (Maryknoll,
that we are similarly surrounded by the corrosive effects of manipulative hermeneutics. We need thereupon to understand and draw upon the relevance of Alves' study in order to apprehend the phenomenology of sacred dishonesty when applied to the hermeneutical task. Not the least reason being because it has long-term implications for those within, and by consequence, those outside of the church, all of whom deserve "the whole counsel of God." And not some controlled version of it edited by politically aligned sacredly dishonest theologies. Spiritually and socially dishonest theologies that by their biblicistic mediated versions of "reality" and non-liberative pedagogy form many unsuspecting investigators of Christianity into the religious "mentality of the propagandee," wherein their "confused thoughts are crystallised" by hermeneutical trickery. Once so overtaken, as Ellul has stated, the "incorporated" capitulate any resistance, consequently "the readers themselves offer their throat to the knife of the propaganda they choose."

i) The Matrix of Hermes

Given the chicanery of both the past and present history of hermeneutical sacred deceit, perhaps it is no coincidence that Hermes' name etymologically has to do with the science of hermeneutics. In Greek mythology, Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, was a ubiquitous and agile deity. An extremely complex figure of ancient antiquity, he was best known as being a handsome youth, the swift messenger and herald of the gods who served many functions. Hermes (Ἑρμῆς) himself a god, originally the spirit of the (ἐπιμένη) or cairn, acted as a guidepost or boundary. Multifariously credentialed, Hermes was a capricious and frequently deceitful deity, causing him to be regarded further as


116 See Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 104. In a consideration of a particular Australian version of this phenomena, I would count the style and teaching of "Jensonism" currently at work in Phil Jenson's "Campus Bible Study" groups at work in the University of New South Wales and his other related University outreach groups around Australia. Expressions of "Jenson's" version of Right-Doctrine Protestantism are fairly easily identified by the distinctive use of a supplied vocabulary and intellectual fundamentalism that grows amid a conservative understanding of the geopolitics of the Gospel and a Sydney Anglican mindset.
a god of eloquence (thus the patron of orators, writers); the god of athletes, merchants, cheats and thieves, capable of cunning and fraud; verily the protector of precincts and a guide to souls proceeding to Hades. Known for his ingenuity, speed, and protectiveness, he was usually pictured with a broad-rimmed hat with wings on it, a herald's staff (Caduceus), winged sandals, a ram, a lyre, and a shepherd's staff.\footnote{For a fuller account of Hermes' signification in human culture and history, see Norman O Brown, \textit{Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth} (1947). It is of interest in passing that in mythography Hermes, known as Mercury, was also significant in Roman thought and culture.}

With these suggestive warnings and etymology in mind, it is hoped that what remains clear throughout the hermeneutical procedure, indeed the entirety of this work. Is that the prevailing conviction about the Bible - a unique collection of holy writ, comprising of documents written by various persons within particular and differing historical, sociopolitical contexts - recognises that its actual functioning in the faith and practice of the church requires interpretation to be done with integrity. Indeed, that the revelatory text of Scripture be interpreted with radical honesty beyond right-doctrine dogmatism, and in socially transformative ways. Authentic christopraxis will only become a reality in the church where the Bible as the "base source\footnote{Paul Tillich \textit{Systematic Theology Vol. I} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 35.} is not given over to miscreant interpreters. To those who act under the guise of a hermeneutical method without presuppositions, and who feign a neutral site from which they interpret the text. Such are naught but false guides who by their malapropisms make the Bible an affliction rather than a guide to authentic discipleship. Critical liberationist hermeneutics must therefore take a central place in the recovering of radical discipleship and a thoroughgoing biblical explication of "costly grace" (\textit{Teure Gnade}).\footnote{Paul Tillich \textit{Systematic Theology Vol. I} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 35.}
Factual Hermeneutics and Self-Deception

As previously marked, reliable interpretive methodology is always crucial since every hermeneutist enjoins a "life-alignment" (regardless of their scientific posturing or devotional and purist biblicist claims) that in some way supports, legitimates, or critiques a certain way of knowing the world around us.

In this vein - that biblical texts and events are never neutral and require recurrent interpretation - an illustrative incident deserves the telling. In a lecture in the United Theological Faculty in Melbourne, Ernst Käsemann startled inquisitive theological students with the statement: "Facts, facts, what facts!?" "There are no facts!" In effusive manner the learned professor and renowned New Testament scholar was, by way of making answer, letting all and sundry know that the biblical writers were not guilty of writing the evidencing news of what God had done in Jesus in the cold light of bland facts. Referentially, Käsemann with theological accuracy, was pointing out that truth is not simply "flat fact." As indicated elsewhere,

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120 This "Postmodernist" construct by Ernst Käsemann is cited from lecture notes taken during his lecture series given at United Theological Faculty, Melbourne, Australia, 1975. Alongside of Käsemann's lethal wit concerning the subjectivism of facts, one of Nietzsche's "Postmodernist" aphorisms, in "The Will to Power", is pertinent here: "Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying 'there are only facts', I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations.". Statements such as these fit of course the Postmodernist concept of reality and ideology in which there is a refusal to privilege any one perspective. Concerning Postmodernism and its manifold meanings Gilbert Adair, the British author and critic posited this meaningful definition in the London, "Sunday Times: Books," London, 21 April 1991, "Postmodernism is, almost by definition, a transitional cusp of social, cultural, economic and ideological history when modernism's high-minded principles and preoccupations have ceased to function, but before they have been replaced with a totally new system of values. It represents a moment of suspension before the batteries are recharged for the new millennium, an acknowledgement that preceding the future is a strange and hybrid interregnum that might be called the last gasp of the past." For Nietzsche's remark see, Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 458.
121 See also Hans Küng, On Being A Christian (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 415. Here Küng in similar fashion to Käsemann's observation in Jesus Means Freedom, points out that truth is quite dissimilar to "facticity", and nowhere near "historical truth". Speaking of the power of the symbolic, analogical and poetic in their ability to open up an approach to the ultimate reality which we call God, he salutes poetry and story in their ability to "come closer", to reliable purpose, in this regard "than the most accurate description or photograph," p. 415, (my emphasis).
it must be remembered that truth is not the same as facticity and in particular not equivalent to historical truth. As there are different forms and strata of reality, so there are different forms of truth: and often different strata of truth in one and the same reality. 122

The point is honed further: "The Bible is interested primarily not in historical truth, but in truth relevant for our well-being, for our salvation, in the 'truth of salvation". 123 By his remarks, Käsemann was merely rehearsing what he had announced almost a decade before in his Jesus Means Freedom. 124 In that polemical prophetic work Käsemann set forth in his inimitable way what other Scripture scholars had postulated through an examination of the biblical texts and their hermeneutical purpose. That is that the Gospels are not photographs, they are essentially interpreted depictions; constructed narratives, theological portraits, not dead historical snapshots. 125

a) Biblical Differences: Hermeneutical Preferences

Once biblical texts are viewed in this way, it follows that their compelling, virulent and causative influence is consequently released. Thus freed, the invitation stands open for the Bible to become a whole new experience of praxis faith and liberative understanding for the church and world. Where this realisation of the biblical texts is denied, a common perspective and strikingly similar view of biblical revelation predominates. And this it does despite

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122 Kün, op. cit., p. 415.
123 Kün, ibid., p. 416.
124 Ernst Käsemann, Jesus Means Freedom (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 22. Here Käsemann in speaking about the legendary narratives of the Gospel’s, refers to "paintings that seize the essentials even better than photographs", and says of them that they "do not generally become alive till they are interpreted," (my emphasis). See also Leonardo Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), pp. 2-3, for a similar observation. Additionally, Tillich makes the same point: "The biblical theologian...does not present pure facts to us; he/she gives us theologically interpreted facts". See, Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1951), p. 35.
125 I am not here suggesting that Käsemann at the time of his writing had broken open what current biblical studies names as "socio-literary method", "literary criticism", "political hermeneutics", or "socio-historical exegesis," etc. My intention is merely to indicate that Käsemann (and the historical-critical school) knew better than to believe that Scripture was written from a neutral so-called factual position, or from a position of hermeneutical neutrality.
apparent theological hiatuses raging between Fundamentalists\textsuperscript{126} and diffident bourgeois Liberals.\textsuperscript{127}

As for liberalism, it continues to be eroded by its embrace of the secular spirit. Having been established on the nineteenth century belief that ordinary secular experience transmitted an evolutionary, purposive order, and that the progressive movement of history carried within it an ever-developing condition towards human betterment, liberalism as it is confronted with massive eruptions of evil, vacillates into disintegration.

The Fundamentalist holds that without dubiety "the relationship of verbal inspiration to scriptural authority is the crux of all Christian theology"\textsuperscript{128} Biblical authority from this point of view stands squarely upon inerrancy and inerrancy is directly dependent upon the doctrine of verbal inspiration. The Liberal position in contrast, states that "not everything that is in the Bible is God's Word."\textsuperscript{129} The bridging similarity between these apparently irreconcilable positions can be easily identified. Many interpreters from either

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\textsuperscript{126} "Fundamentalism" as a potent force, arose as a conservative backlash to the Liberalism of the 19th century; occasioned by the development of post-Enlightenment hermeneutical critical methodology and the findings of historical knowledge. In the years between 1910 and 1915, Union Oil company founders, Lyman and Milton Stewart sponsored a set of twelve paperback books propagating what they and their group deemed to be the "Fundamentals" of essential Christianity. The conservative Christian movement finally received the inclusive name of "Fundamentalism" in 1920 at the behest of a preacher, named Curtis Lee Laws. For a comprehensive treatment, see James Barr, Fundamentalism (London: SCM 1981); also his Escaping from Fundamentalism (London: SCM 1984); further, see David Stoll, \textit{Is Latin America Turning Protestant?} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 68-98; and Rubem Alves, Protestantism And Repression (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985), especially his analysis, entitled "Faith Seeking Absolute Knowledge," pp. 55-83. Also, N.B., Paul Tillich's, fortive stride of words in, \textit{Biblical Religion And The Search For Ultimate Reality} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5. For "Fundamentalism" as a general contemporary sociopolitical spectacle, see Richard Swift, "Fundamentalism Reaching For Certainty" \textit{New Internationalist Magazine}, August 1990, pp. 4-10. See "Fundamentalism" further in this essay, variously referred to as "Conservative Evangelicalism", "Biblicists", et al.

\textsuperscript{127} For a fuller treatment-of the mired predicament and continuous ambiguity of much that represents the bourgeois Liberal position see references to "Liberalism" further in this essay. See especially, Dorothee Stille, \textit{The Window of Vulnerability} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); especially her section on "Helpless Liberalism," pp. 111-113. Further, cf. Reinhold Niebuhr's criticisms of naive liberalism, which "do not proceed from a radical or profound analysis of the problem of life", in \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man}, Vol 11 (New York: Scribners, 1964), pp. 53-54 and 45.


side of the theological spectrum not only fail to grasp the absolute necessity of
a fresh hermeneutical re-reading of the Bible, but also fail to treat the texts
with little-to-no consciousness of the relativity of their own unstated
ideological presuppositions. Both camps would perform the more truthfully
should they reference Ricoeur's comprehension of ideology. "Ideology," is in
its most fundamental sense,

a cluster of symbols and representations which facilitate the meaningful
constitution and social integration of action .... a positive phenomenon,
expressing the necessity for any group to give itself an image of itself,
to fill the gap between its origin and its actuality, its founding project
and its fading collective memory.130

And, as such, attention is drawn to the truth that rather than sit "muted", an
ideological perspective by its very nature therefore "lends itself to the
justification of a system of domination and .... to the maintenance of a system
of class domination."131 Similarity of interpretation and constipated practice
among parties of both the left and the right of the church, simply reinforces the
apt and timeless truism: what often appears to be in collision, is in actuality, in
collusion! "The truth is, the 'Battle for the Bible' today has increasingly less to
do with theological divisions and allegiances and more to do with political and
economic allegiances."132

b) Perpetuating Distortion

Relative to the above, the most subtle enticement of all (as was alluded to by
Tillich's analysis), is the snare of self-deception. And, since "self" is seldom
so selfish as when it says, "Thus says the Lord", theological interpreters
should stand suitably and constrainedly warned. As the distinguished scholar
Abraham Heschel rightly cautions:

130 Ricoeur, as interpreted by J B Thompson, Studies in the Theory of Ideology (Oxford: Polity Press,
131 Ricoeur, explicated by J B Thompson, in ibid., p. 174.
Intellectual honesty is one of the supreme goals of the philosophy of religion, just as self-deception is the chief source of corruption in religious thinking, more deadly than error. Hypocrisy rather than heresy is the cause of spiritual decay. "Thou desirest truth in the inwardness" of all people (Ps. 51:8).

From Hassidic legend born among the orthodox Jews of eastern Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century, Heschel by way of further illustrating this observation relates a pithy tale:

Rabbi Bunam of Przyscha used to give the following definition of a hasid [pious man]. According to medieval sources, a hasid is he who does more than the law requires. Now, this is the law: Thou shalt not deceive thy fellow-man (Lev. 25:17). A hasid goes beyond the law; he will not even deceive his own self.133

When ignored, admonitions like the above permit the sinfulness of self-justifying interpretations of Scripture to deal out untold contrivances. The result of this type of intellectual misdemeanour is that often a status quo perspective is reified in that it - having become the prescribed view of divine reality - is proclaimed "within the text" as the authoritative Word of God.

Another complication that prohibits the Bible from speaking authentically to the church and world in the present is the sad and mistaken notion, that the Bible needs no one to interpret it, only those who will unashamedly have the courage to proclaim it. Attitudes and actions of this sort end up casting Scripture in the category of what Croatto has rightly identified as seeing the Bible as "a closed deposit that has already said it all."134 In situations where so-called "pure unadulterated" proclamation sallies forth, proponents of this view imagine that ideological views of the text or myopic assessments, are diseases that "other people" suffer from. By so doing, these preachers and teachers perpetuate blinkered mindsets concerning the historicality of their

interpretations. Having been sanctioned by their systems of rationalisation and distortion, these "blind leaders of the blind" are incapable of ideological self-criticism and critique. Thus, they can no longer differentiate between their plurality of predispositions, interests and contexts. That is, between those "pre-understandings" that link us to a cultural-political tradition, on the one hand, and the "prejudices" which merely perpetuate "distortion and self-deception" on the other.135

1 (vi) Interpretive Abuse and "Poisonous Pedagogy"

Quite probably the majority of us who attend some kind of worship group, or Bible study or expose ourselves to the hermeneutics of sociopolitical religious media do so getting more than we realised. By borrowing insights from Alice Miller's psychoanalytical studies we become capable of understanding much of what has been done to us by pedagogical hermeneutists who act out of a narcissistic compulsion. Narcissism in psychoanalytic theory is the attachment of the self to the self as the pivotal love object.136 The evil of hermeneutical narcissism is that it freezes the opinions and outlooks of its practitioners. It takes no great mental leap to visage the repercussions and psychotheological damage done to church and society by hermeneutical narcissism. Whenever the Bible and tradition of the church are displaced in favour of the self as the primary reference and love object, the consequent hermeneutics are those of "poisonous pedagogy."137 The outcome of this position leads unavoidably to eccentricity and indigence in the tasks of

135 See, John B Thompson, op. cit., p. 174 (my emphasis).
137 I have quite deliberately appropriated this psycho-analytical term used by Alice Miller. Such an adoption seems entirely appropriate for many reasons, not the least being the violence done to all of us by those who have taught us out of their erroneous hermeneutical views "for our own good." See Alice Miller, For Your Own Good (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), p. 3 ff. Cf. also her other works, including, The Drama of the Gifted Child (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
exegesis, preaching and teaching and finally to the betrayal of Gospel. And, inevitably the truth of the church is delivered into the hands of heretics. 138

A tragic commonalty lies in the fact that a great many of us belonging to the category of earnest truth-seekers who have been exposed to hermeneutical narcissism, have been befouled and poisoned pedagogically. And what is even sadder, is the fact that not all are survivors - some never survive. For those who have survived (or think they have) it would be false to assume that exposures to poisonous pedagogy have caused no harm. Quite apart from the culpably frivolous attitude toward the victims, that this view betrays, it also fails to take into account the social scientific questions of what after-effects those exposed will, and are having to face. Even if we have managed to escape, we all too readily make light of the psychopolitical and theological damage done to us. Having escaped immediate harm, we may still function as porters of hermeneutical corruption. We will continue to infect all and sundry, including, other sisters and brothers in our faith community, our pastors and families and societal policy makers. This will happen as long as we claim in naive spiritual fashion that this type of pedagogical poisoning is harmless. It is not harmless, through its sociopolitical pervasiveness it fructurates and delivers terrible consequences. Innumerable justice and peace activists along side of pastors and people working in the caring professions will testify to its repercussions.

a) Conscientization's Challenge

Regarding these consequences, haunting socialising and political questions presents themselves. Where do we think the geopolitical theology that supports the intended use of nuclear armament and the deployment of

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weapons of mass indiscriminate destruction against "our enemies" in the Gulf War, or the horrors of death squad activity in Central America, come from?

In Mexico at a moment of education and conscientização, I was accosted at the Instituto Internacional de Estudios Superiores by a medically trained Chilean Pastor, who, amazed at my sociopolitical naivety concerning the biblical text, complained: "What seems an academic exercise in hermeneutics to you and your sort is a matter of blood, murder and horror to us!" He went on, "Your theological concerns are distanced, ours are crucial, measured out in suffering and torture. We know the reality and consequences of your conservative churches and their self serving exegesis!" Suddenly I was overtaken with theopolitical realisation I had hitherto only glimpsed.

Coming to this index of critical awareness will enable us to understand the truths taught us by our sisters and brothers from their places of historical desperation. Conscientization can similarly prepare theological practitioners always to keep before us the responsibilities of truth and justice. Such realisations will shake us, empowering us to face our blinkered mindsets and hermeneutical methods. So too, they will wake us up to the fact that our failure to apply the liberating hermeneutics of christic praxis makes us all complicit to sacred dishonesty and the banality of evil done in the name of God and Bible.

Critical realisation in its emancipatory power makes it possible for us to know that it was not mere government policy alone that saw to the mutilating murders of the six Jesuit professors and their house-keepers at the University of Central America in San Salvador.139 Governmental attitudes are not neutrally positioned, they arise from sociopolitical constructs. Such premeditated wickedness emanates from a particular process of religious

"legitimation". And such legitimation, is undergirded through acceptation (ex acceptitatione) of ignorant and callow First World hermeneutical understanding. Herein can be seen the dreadful effects of the centrally significant process that religious hermeneutical legitimation plays in serving the purposes of the dominant social order. None of us are "clean" regarding our complicity, our legitimizations of these evils. None of us. Surely therefore we ought be past the time of sociopolitical hermeneutical indifference? Must we not also be past the time of failing to trace back and name the courts and schools out of which these sociopolitical religious legitimations are hatched? Are we not past the hour of theological disingenuousness and offhandedness? We do know that such religiously legitimated killings certainly did not (and do not) come from an undergirded interpretative understanding of the Bible, or a sociopolitical construct, that sees the oppressed as the optic of God's love. Or from Bible teachers, churches, or religious policy-makers that circumscribe an understanding, a hermeneutic that relentlessly requires of theology and sociopolitical realities a central hermeneutical question. "How does this act or that historical episode, or this geopolitical intention, match the spirit and the purpose of God displayed in the crucified Christ?"

If it is true that biblical hermeneutics are not truly known and understood until their implications are experienced and affect our lives, then this much is true. The effects of pedagogical poisoning due to the acceptance of false biblical hermeneutics can be testified to and widely experienced. Strewn around the First and Two Third's World religious landscape, more questions present themselves: why are so many God-seekers who are concerned about equity and justice, abandoning or looking beyond the churches? Or, why are so many who were frequent mainline churchgoers looking to the fundamentalist mega churches, or the New Age pretenders? And, not to suggest that these

groups are exclusive of the church, but why do still other people of good will and religious questing, out of frustration, turn away from church attendance? And in their rejection (sometimes done with great discomfiture of spirit), turn to the commendable political active groups like Green Peace or Amnesty International for a meaningful exegesis of justice?

Speaking of humankind's obstructed search for sanctified meaning and action, Teilhard de Chardin comments that having found no meaningful vitality, people are lamentably liable to give up, despairing of any solution, and therefore become plunged into the place of lost ambiguity. People will thus "never belong wholly to God, nor ever wholly to things; incomplete in their own eyes, and insecure in the eyes of their companions, people will gradually acquiesce in a double life." Such a solution he pronounces ought be an occasion of real disquiet. He adduces: "Whether we become distorted, disgusted, or divided, the result is equally bad, and certainly contrary to that which Christianity should rightly produce in us."

b) Owning Responsibility

Cannot these questions and dilemmas somehow be traced back to the catechetics of discipleship, currently presiding in the First World churches and their Two Thirds World satellites? Where those who continually choose to practise biblicistic literalism over against scholarly hermeneutical guidelines, is theological guilt not present? And what of the perpetual ignoring of the biblical guidelines concerning the New Testament catechetics of the crucified God of justice and compassion?

Whatever the case, it is certain that a particular type of pedagogical poisoning is a reality and at work within the life of the church. It needs naming for what

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it is. Its cognomen concerning discipleship formation is - "ruination". By engaging in a critical examination of this malady, some remedy, some release from its effects may be found. Protection from poison is possible. But only if it is clearly labelled as such. Not if it is mixed (using Alice Miller's illustration) with ice cream advertised as being "For Your Own Good". The Christian community is vulnerable when presented with such labelling.

When good church people who have been the recipients of hermeneutical abuse attempt to play down the repercussions by setting themselves up as examples of survival, even claiming it was to their maturing, they are inevitably contributing to the continuation of this detraction. By their refusal to face the consequences of what has happened to them, and through them to the many others of their lives, they place those others in socio-theological jeopardy. Overtaken with their attitude, their faith communities, as well as their students, will in their turn fail adequately to warn others against this malady. And this injudiciousness, this failure of nerve, this toleration of poisonous pedagogy, will be sanctioned by such off-spring, citing their churches, pastors and teachers as permissioning authorities.

There are unfortunately all too many examples of those in the ecclesiastic arena who perpetuate manuals of poisonous pedagogy. However, a clear example presents itself. It highlights how thoroughly clean, how respectable, unambivalent and "morally right" is this schooling. It demonstrates how good people are fed this contagion. This poisonous pedagogy presents as a captivity to interpretative "culture lock" - to distortion and self-deception. Concomitantly it is miscreant as witnessed by the way it fructifies and reduplicates itself into and by the lives of "righteous people".

A further preparatory observation should be made. Proponents of this phenomenon are not "evil people" in the sense that they suffer from some psychoanalytical illness. They do not easily show traces of the specific
systems of perversion, such as isolationism or self-doting despair due to "egotheism" or its like. They are far from being evil or mentally abnormal. Indeed, they are proud and euphoric concerning their attitudes and position. And they enjoy the human kindness of encouragement by a supportive mass. I make deliberate mention of these attributes since I believe that the view that is advanced repeatedly - that poisonous pedagogy is "freighted" by a mere handful of abnormal people - is grossly inaccurate. Those who are the most influential as merchants of manufactured consent are not easily identified in the beginning of their ascendancy as ignoble types. Rather, they are "good people", "respectable people", who in their exercise of ideological tyrannies and threatening obscurantisms over the biblical text do not to the population at large represent undesirable personality types.

1 (vii) Excursus: Theo-political Travesties, Swindoll as Discipleship Detractor and Weberian "Type"

By way of a locus classicus concerning the portrayal of these poisoning pedagogues my pen lights on one "global-reach" proponent (a representative of blinkered hermeneutics), "Charles Swindoll". In a world of "competing gospels" and the confrontations of kingdoms, he is an example of apparently harmless religious "Pied Pipers" who underpin a cultural hegemony that is finally antithetical to the liberative purposes of the Bible. It is for this reason that I have chosen him as a reference point throughout this work. His position and methodology serve as a code or symbol - as a sociopolitical "type." According to Weberian usage these "types" act as legitimating agents interpreting the "sacred values" of their "constitution" which support "ruling power."142 As such, Swindoll and his particular form of "Right-Doctrine Fundamentalism" serve to demonstrate that particular theopolitically aligned social groupings of dominance in their turn breed other specific identity

142 See, Max Weber, in op. cit, p. 294.
"types." They are identified by their utilisation of biblical interpretation (and other cultural supports) in the welfare and continuance of "Caesaroimperialism." In this capacity he is referenced as belonging to, and being representative of, other influential Caesaroimperialist purveyors who demonstrate an imprudent rationale towards biblical interpretation and faith formation.

Whereas the old-time fundamentalists apocalyptically warned that the end is near, Swindoll and other such "spokesmen" promote a right-wing ideology that is driven by a non-dialogical determination to evangelise the globe. They believe their mission will succeed through a theocratic vision built on an amalgamation between Christian mission and a North American empire theology (see my section 1. (iv) Right-Doctrine Fundamentalism: Contemporary Sacred Dishonesty"). Continuing reference to these purveyors will be illustrated throughout this work. Here I include in my critical orbit the likes of Jimmy Swaggart of "Jimmy Swaggart Ministries," Jerry Falwell of "The Moral Majority," Bill Bright of "Campus Crusade," Pat Robertson of the "700 Club" and Benny Hinn of "Benny Hinn Ministries Inc." Each of them being stylised "hermeneutists" with growing reputations and influence in the geopolitical macrocosm of right-wing American Christianity. Swindoll is of

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143 For a survey of those conservative types who fail to treat the emancipatory mandates of the gospel see, John Charles Cooper Religious Pied Pipers: A Critique of Radical Right-Wing Religion (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1981).

144 Although Weber does not use this exact term my use of it is related to his use of "Caesaroism," see ibid., p. 17; p. 106 and p. 370. My use of "Caesaroimperialism" is related to "the rulers of this age" (ἀρχοντες) etc., as referenced earlier in footnote 14. Further, my employment of Caesaroimperialism relates to the callous control of the Roman Empire in New Testament times. Quite often my use of the term will be in direct reference to the "global reach" of the USA, but not exclusively. The USA will be addressed quite often, since it is and remains the most powerful partner in the intrigue of world management. However, the "System," or Caesaroimperialism, is inclusive of all contemporary expressions of dominance that are global in character; it is not accurate to refer to Capitalist imperialism or Communist imperialism, as if these were separate entities. Though there exists a great gulf, and deep rivalries between these systems and their process of economic and political satellization, they nevertheless represent interlocking and mutually demonic support structures, bound by a common acceptance of "egotheism" and ideologies of dominance and controlling power maintenance.

145 Benny Hinn in an Australian "Sixty Minutes" Television Interview where he was confronted with the difference between his ministry and that of the "poor Christ" was estimated as grossing in excess of $Seventy Five Million in 1989. Cf. "Sixty Minutes" programme, Channel Nine Network on 14th June, 1998.
particular theological interest (as I will show) in the study of the causal interrelationships concerning these sociopolitical phenomena.

a) A Paradigm of Concern

It is unlikely that Swindoll, at his present levels of political ascendancy, will amount to lofty political or theological notoriety - certainly not within the theological academies. Although the way some theological schools for pecuniary reasons are courting "Conservative Christianity," his type of theological formation has to be taken seriously. His hermeneutical grouping must be taken seriously because when error is trumpeted, silence in such cases is implied consent. And ominously, the unenlightened influence and zeal of the Pat Robertson influence is still recognisable. It ought to be noted, that my premonition regarding Swindoll is not with him individually per se. In citing Swindoll, let it be underscored that my address concerning him, is not because I believe him to be psychologically eccentric or errant to a towering degree. Neither is he a doyen of right-wing biblical neo-conservatism (cf., Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart or Jerry Falwell). If he were any of these, he would be too "obvious" - and as such, too easy a scapegoat, and not so deserving of theological attention. However, let not such anonymity or apparent innocence prevail against clear critical thinking. Because his theology is excessively innocent and domesticated, there is a compote here.

146 Pat Robertson, a past presidential candidate of the United States, believes that he is called to continue the task Ronald Reagan had begun, of restoring the U.S.A to its biblical foundations. As of 1985, Pat Robertson had an annual U.S. budget of about US$ 230 million and was on the air on well-nigh 200 U. S. TV stations; a syndicated version of his televangelist "700 Club" was airing in about 60 countries. By the mid-1980's he, and many of the religious right, were telling America and their theological kin, that their destiny was, not to preach the end of the world (through nuclear war), but Christian ("North American Christian") domination over it. Far from a disinterest in local and world politics, adherents were admonished to understand themselves as having a pivotal role, and encouraged to be activists in world redemption and mission. Robertson's recent notoriety has been his frequent warnings throughout the Bush/Clinton U. S. Presidential campaign, that unless America returns to "her Christian roots ..., she will continue to legalise sodomy, slaughter innocent babies, destroy the minds of her children, squander her resources and sink into oblivion." See Colman McCarthy, "Two pilgrims go in opposite directions," The Seattle Times Friday, September 18, 1992, Section A 6. See further, regarding Robertson's views, his book The Secret Kingdom (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1982); and Andy Lang and Fred Clarkson, "What Makes Pat Robertson Run?" Convergence (Washington, D. C. Christic Institute), Spring 1988, pp. 17-23.
b) Karl Barth and "Americanism"

If my investigations seem awry or unwarranted concerning the significance of Swindollesque Christianity, then I draw the reader's attention to the concern of a more astute and able observer than myself, Karl Barth. As he understood it, among the "present day problems" confronting Christianity from various quarters was the ubiquitous malaise of what he called "Americanism". Barth saw this phenomenon as a serious challenge to authentic discipleship. Without mincing words he credits it as having "got across" its pervading influence, and therefore being "powerful" in that its "uniform has to be worn in all five continents nowadays." This is so, he states, whether we acknowledge it or not. Regarding its nemesis he says: "Its 'Gods' are beyond discussion. They are physical welfare and enjoyment. A bright-eyed egoism is united with a brilliant technique; it is anointed with a primitive and in imperturbable optimistic morality which serves its worshippers beyond measure." 147 In summary fashion he states, that it may well be the most powerful contemporary religious challenge to Christianity, since "none of the others is so well rooted in itself, so self-evident, none so easy and pleasant to live." 148 Although written in the 1930's this warning has an alarming contemporary realism to it. Its forebodings and observations are most relevant to my subject. Consequently I am persuaded that the smooth prudent faith equated with Swindoll religio is a force with which to be seriously reckoned.

Because Swindoll sits more within the centre of conservative theology than do the extremists of the fundamentalist right, he is quite capable of inflicting serious injury upon the cause of the Gospel. And, as we have discerned, "the Gospel" does not sit in any neutral position concerning sociopolitical realities. In fact because of his centrist or mainline camouflage, he is more lethal, his liaison more likely to beguile. Swindoll is billed as being "completely

orthodox, mainstream and Biblical."149 As such, he is tested as a "type" because he serves to show the effectualness of a good person doing abusive hermeneutics; the bad theology good people make. Because we cannot give up on the decency of people, we must resolve to embrace the notion that is too large-hearted to be entirely pessimistic, that most people do not follow obvious wrong doers, they tend towards "good people." Which raises the question of what happens if good people, Bible teaching people, Swindoll et. al., who are wrong at the beginning, being misinformed, end up leading the people of God into a massive lie?

Concerning the nature of half-truth and the mendacity of the world, Barth's admonition is appropriate here, he insists that: "We do not understand it, nor can we effectively resist it, if we do not see that it, too, has its origin, its corrupted essence and its temporary existence around the pious form of falsehood." Concerning the "epiphenomenon" of the presence of what he calls "the profane in the Christian," he cautions that, "The worst of weekday lies has its roots in the even worse Sunday lie." And then, with prophetic force he announces: "If we do not recognise the lie at the centre, we shall hardly see it on the periphery. And if we do not resist it at the centre, we shall certainly not do so on the periphery." He concludes his paragraph with an admonition not to withdraw from being "in conflict" with "the pious lie."150

It is the contention of this work that Swindoll religio and its progeny, do represent sociopolitical biblical deceptions which are not mere shows, or outward nullities. His interpretative apparatus works in such a fashion as to pull the listener into a catching sociopolitical current. His exegesis of Word and world do convey agreed definitions of reality which are significantly

149 Barth, ibid., pp. 5-6, (my emphasis).
149 Cited in his "Insight For Living Ministries" letter to Australian Pastors, dated August 3rd., 1988 and signed by John A. Reeder. Potential participants and respondents to Swindoll's Australian ministry, were promised after they had demonstrated some interest, "a complimentary hard cover copy of either 'Growing Deep in the Christian Life' or 'Growing Wise in Family Life.'"
150 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 1V, Part 3, First Half, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T.F.
influential and representative of a politically activating type of theology. As such, it is a socially conditioned type of "biblical" theology that by being "squeaky-clean" and avoiding "Tele-Evangelist" aberrations, has growing appeal beyond the tragedy of the demagogues of the far religious right. By so doing, his brand of theology has arrogated to itself approximations of biblical absoluteness; assertions which have captured the hearts and minds of a large number of Christians, as well as in our age of escalating religiosity considerable sociopolitical sympathy. Good folk wanting to believe the Bible, come to trust this "truthful" religio - Swindoll's cachet, "Insight For Living Ministries," is sub-titled, "Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application." Therefore in "good faith" earnest people have attached to Swindoll and his cultus, divine reasoning concerning the scheme of history. We need again to heed Barth's warning concerning the danger of "Americanism." Swindoll's scriptural justifications convey formidable societal fictions.

c) Perilous Privileges and Immunities

Because this form of religio is beyond the obviously lewd and is marketed by unbesmirched entrepreneurs, many already have found rest in its prejudices, embracing its horizons of middle-class certitude. Swindoll-like Christianity by its illusive uprightness is growing both in size and influence. Currently Charles R. Swindoll, according to his entrepreneurs, has authored more then twenty books, innumerable booklets and produced to date two films, as well as broadcasting to "over 900 stations around the world." As such, under the guise of doctrinal correctness, he exemplifies the type of false but "orthodox" theology that has for so long and so well, shut out so many from the way of authentic discipleship, and the ecclesiology of "Justice church".151 He is cited therefore for what he is and represents, permissions and futures. He is

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151 Concerning the meaning of Justice Church, see Frederick Herzog, Justice Church (Maryknoll,
part of that continuing set of "respectable" Christian theologians and preachers who, as Sölle says, produce "a botched theology which belittles human beings and reduces God to a potentate."\(^{152}\) And as such, not only do they become a justifiable reason for theological anger - what she refers to as *rabies theologorum* - but lamentably by the reproductive effects of their nefarious hermeneutics, they aegis a religious ideology of "Right-Doctrine Protestantism,"\(^{153}\) to use Alves' term, or by another name "Caesaroiempialism," a structure and logic that makes for despotism at geopolitical levels. Theology of this bent, occasions an internalisation and subsequently an exteriorization of the values of empire, resulting in horrific injustices against perceived enemies.

Nelson-Pallmeyer in his book *War Against the Poor*, after listing different Bible teachers, security operatives and politicians as pilots of empire and repression, alerts us to the fact that our predominant mistake as Christians is that "we allow the biblical word to conform to the dominant culture and thereby rob it of its capacity for liberation."\(^{154}\) Further he asserts that by allowing the biblical message to become the property and rationale of Caesaroiempialism, it then "makes it impossible for us to help construct an alternative social order more consistent with the compassion of God." Which means that our captured faith "serves the empire rather than the God of liberation and justice."\(^{155}\)

For people of biblical discipline, who purport to understand the art of theology, there must be a firm understanding that we are all morally bound, by virtue of our discipline, to a faithful rightness of method in the pursuit of moral aims. This means that our theology with christopraxis as our key to orthodoxy must be held to and affirmed. Even when our task is at times

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polemical, as we are faced with a crisis of categories, requiring us to do our critiquing work with some anguish. Where error exists concerning the method of this discipline, this moral pursuit, critical analysis is a continuing necessity. This is salutary, lest we end up with sophistic theology, making for moral fog. I believe that few things are more damaging to biblical discipleship than unchecked hermeneutical irrationality, virtually unbounded in its global influence by vast access to media power, and its appearance of theological orthodoxy. When sophisticated theological error is localised, the chances of influence are perhaps minimal, when popular theology is erroneous, and is rabid through its access to wealth and privilege, its ability to do evil is maximised. A further attention is requisite here. I have designated it previously, it is the fact that evil is most often discovered behind apparent innocence and respectability. The continuing truth is that:

It is an infinitely tragic fact that the greatest crimes of history are committed with the co-operation or at least with the passive consent of the solid citizens who constitute the stable backbone of the community ... the great evils, the persecutions, the unjust wars of conquest, the mass slaughters of the innocent, the exploitations of whole social classes - these crimes are committed by the organised community under the leadership of respectable citizens.\textsuperscript{156}

d) A Methodology of Misreading

My argument is that Charles Swindall, because of his apparent innocence and wide reach, warrants continuing analysis on several fronts. Particularly his book on "doctrine" deserves address. Another reason for analysis being that from within the camp of Bible-believing interpreters convinced of the inviolability of their position, he sallies forth firmly disavowing and denouncing all chicaneries in Christian interpretation. By his own affirmations, he deplores those who abuse and manipulate the people of God

\textsuperscript{155} Nelson-Pallmeyer, ibid., pp. 75 and 78.
and the sacred text: "You can prove anything (yes, anything!) you want to prove from Scripture if you just stop reading soon enough and don't finish the thought, or if you twist a term here and there." He continues, "spiritualizing the meaning .... you can make it say what you want it to say." Swindoll, who reputedly "knows how to ignite your excitement - about life, about the Lord, about what really matters". And therein one supposes lies the reason as to why he has become a much celebrated best-selling author and senior Pastor of a large Conservative "mega church" in the heartland of global-reach conservative Christianity, i.e., Orange County, Southern California. From this heartland he is empowered, and is a man with a mission and a message. His understanding, like those who follow the form of his methodology is a pervasive orienting that subsumes unwanted scientific critical theory in its missional enterprises; in his ministry "to Christians around the world." Writing with a sincere endeavour, Swindoll seeks to impart to his audience "a faith that won't fold, a serenity that isn't shallow, a joy you can't leave behind" as well as a trustworthy biblical message. In doing so he states:

If I could have only one wish for God's people, it would be that all of us would return to the Word of God, that we would realise once for all that His [sic] Book has the answers. The Bible is the authority, the final resting place of our cares, our worries, our griefs, our tragedies, our sorrows, and our surprises. It is the final answer to our questions, our search. Turning back to the Scriptures will provide something that nothing else on the entire earth will provide.

From the ascent to this high ground, Swindoll goes on to say that in reading the Bible, our principle aim must be to maintain the correct meaning.

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158 Swindoll, according to his entrepreneurs, as part of his world outreach, which is already quite considerable, is via "Insight For Living Ministries", up and running, an operational "go" in Australia, replete with books etc., and more than 7 radio programmes.
159 From the cover of Swindoll's book, op. cit., (my emphasis).
160 Swindoll, ibid., p. 56.
161 Swindoll, ibid., p. 69ff.
Venturing further on in his sincere attempt to share doctrinal truths with the people of God, he states:

Just because a person opens the Scripture and calls himself or herself a teacher of the Bible doesn't guarantee the message. Just because they are well-known, just because people hang on their every word, just because they have great followings, and just because they travel the world over, carrying a Bible and teaching from the Bible, none of that guarantees they're right. Be careful about people who lift lines from the Scriptures and adapt them to what they want those passages to say. Scribes and Pharisees live on today. Their problem? They may quote Scripture correctly, but they fail to maintain the correct meaning of God's Word.\footnote{Swindoll, ibid., p. 73 (my emphasis).}

Unfortunately, Swindoll who avows, that he is "committed to accuracy, clarity, and practicality". In his sincere attempt to guide the people of God into digging out the meaning of Scripture rather than "proof-texting" or "mishandling" it, fails to come to terms with the "accuracy" that he himself is writing out of. That is an adapting, self-accommodating ideological mindset. From Spinoza we learn that "we do everything for an end, namely, for that which is profitable to us, which is what we seek."\footnote{Benedict de Spinoza, \textit{Ethics} Part 1, "Appendix", cited in Robert Maynard, ed. in chief, Britannica, \textit{Great Books Of The Western World} (Sydney: William Benton, 1952), p. 369.} Attention to ideology critique demonstrates that "there is no understanding without existential engagement, and that understanding itself already involves appropriation."\footnote{Charles M. Wood, \textit{The Formation Of Christian Understanding An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics} (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1981), p. 17.}

Swindoll and company have an ideological appropriation that comes from writing with an expedient point of view. One which from its entrenchment continues to produce a sectarian biblicism of sacred dishonesty. From Brueggemann's observations concerning the legitimacy of sectarian hermeneutics, we learn that there is no fatal danger in what he calls "sect-truth." In one way or another, we all believe we have a corner on the truth. The problem arises when we balk at submitting our "truth" to examination and
scrutiny in the scholastic community of other truth seekers - this occurs when we operate solely from within our own hermeneutical horizon. And by a selective piety or ideological bias, proscribe into inconsequence all others.

The danger is that the 'truthing community' regards itself as having a monopoly on truth and thus that the truth must be kept ... pure. Such defensiveness reflects a concern not for truth but for control, and also a fear that in submitting the claim to a larger scrutiny, the sect-truth will not hold.165

The nature of Swindoll's religio is like that of others akin to his position, it bespeaks of an erroneous reductionism. And this is bound to be repeated whilst ever it acts without any remedying input from the sagacity of the contemporary community of scholarship. Variegated theological preferences do present themselves in Swindoll's hermeneutical methodology, preferences that apparently are self-sanctioning and self-opiating.

e) Justifying Injustice

In every doctrinal component covered throughout his theological workbook "Growing Deep in the Christian Life," particularly his section concerning "saving the Bible from misuse," a universal observation, a fundamental interpretive grid is conspicuous by its absence. An essential and systematic insight throughout the broad scope of Scripture is that the God of the Bible is decidedly on the side of the poor and downtrodden. This great theme runs throughout the gamut of biblical theology. Many who are great in the history of the church have recognised this overarching theme of God's penchant for the poor; those of lesser stature remain ill advised and myopic. Karl Barth's awareness of God's concern runs:

God always takes a stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against

those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it.\textsuperscript{166}

And from a contemporary scholar-Pastor of the church of the poor - at the close of a different book on how to grow deep in the Christian life - come these poignant words:

If theological reflection does not vitalise the action of the Christian community in the world by making its commitment to charity fuller and more radical, if ... it does not lead the church to be on the side of the oppressed classes and dominated peoples, clearly and without qualifications, then this theological reflection will have been of little value. Worse yet, it will have served only to justify half-measures and ineffective approaches and to rationalise a departure from the Gospel.\textsuperscript{167}

From the theological acumen of Barth and Gutiérrez, there emerges an impetus that is compelling in its Scriptural truthfulness: all who know God's reign are enjoined to be co-workers with God, working for the just deliverance of the abject and wretched. Which is to say that, biblical theology will always display the chosen and obligatory bias of "God's preference for the poor" (the \textit{opción preferential por los pobres}). Any hermeneutical methodology that ignores the invitation to engage in a living out of these great motifs of the Christian life has therefore to answer the question of, why not? Swindoll's choice of interpretive themes, like so many others of the religious right who either neglect or respond inappropriately, contains an invisible amount of these salvific biblical mandates. And the question remains: Why?

Little wonder that throughout this theological endeavour, Swindoll has styled his interpretation of Scripture so as not to cause the ideology and lifestyles of affluent Christians, or grudgingly opulent people generally, any major concentration concerning the macro-ethical demands of God's reign. Like so many other conservative and mainline Bible interpreters wedded to (using

Weberian description) the "classes with high social and economic privilege." Swindoll's endeavour again reaches levels of notoriety and camaraderie with all right wing hermeneutical gainsayers for not only what it purports, but also and particularly, for what it omits, and thereby prohibits. Weber is correct in his analysis of this class of "superior economic status" and their treatment of "salvation beliefs." He remarks: "they assign to religion the primary function of legitimising their own life pattern and situation in the world." 168 Despite his assertions and remonstrations, throughout his book "Scripture twisting" does take place. 169

Swindoll's hermeneutic burgeons forth from a bourgeois mindset 170 that whilst proffering warnings against "the ultimate rip-off," i.e., the abusive misuse of Scripture, continues to afford Swindoll religio and its supporters across the theological boundaries, the ultimate rip-off of culture-lock. This is bibliically traitorous. It is real and it is the consequence of a desired production; because no hermeneutical methodology is value neutral and hermeneutics of this type are by design or default, value reinforcements of a predetermined sociopolitical legitimation.

Religio of this sort is not innocent, nor clean, nor without ideological preference. There is cunning here as in all forms of this religio. When in the course of this form of biblical interpretation, not only theoretical but also practical competition arises between competing hermeneutical interests, dedicated to different ultimate definitions of sociopolitical reality. The truth

of the biblical hermeneutical enterprise is surrendered to an interpretative method that is in agreement with the chosen ideological preferences. Despite the biblical evidence, whatever is disagreeable becomes extrinsic.

Thus a particular form of hermeneutical theory is demonstrated to be biblically more superior. Not by virtue of its scientific hermeneutical accuracy, but by its applicability and reinforcement value to the social interests of the group that has become its "carrier". The particular ideological collectivities, or "carriers" (Träger) as Weber names them, freight the acceptable social edifices of meaning in such a way as to ensure that the desired meanings are on-going and maintain such meaning.¹⁷¹ Carriers of this hermeneutical methodology are peddlers of what "the privileged classes require of religion, ... psychological reassurance of legitimacy."¹⁷² Swindoll's hermeneutics are not open-handed, nay neither clear-cut, although Bible teachers like him deceive many into believing so. Accordingly, as we have ascertained, he displays a predictable inability to relate any of the great doctrinal themes of costly grace, justice to the poor, liberation to those without hope, and equity to the disenfranchised, as normative fundamentals of Scripture. Few if any allusions surface in his guide to Christian doctrine that challenge the prevailing social fictions of dominance. Without even trying, merely by cultural pact, the Swindollesque brand of discipleship spreads a poisonous condition. It perpetuates a theological sickness that undergirds a foreclosure on the human rights of the un-document ed Latino poor and other nonpersons flooding into Southern California. Bible believers following this methodology find little empowerment to repudiate the societal hermeneutics of racism and dehumanisation so graphically present in the metro-plex of "the city of Angels".

A discipleship fashioned out of his guild, lends itself to a discipleship that supports the totalizing discourses of the overbearing and powerful. Adherents to this interpretive apparatus and surrounding equivalent readings of discipleship, serve to alleviate attendant individuals and social groupings from liberative religio-cultural change. Any necessity to change for those under the control of such cultural reality readings is obviated. Accordingly, there is no pressing need to enter into any life-changing personal or societal examination of sociopolitical responsibilities pertaining to the continuance of dehumanising social systems. Little wonder that in such predicaments, Gutiérrez rightly directs those so trapped to biblical "conversion." Correctly, he adduces that the needed repentance and conversion will have to be sufficiently radical as to "bring us into a different world, the world of the poor." 173 Thereby "we verify God, we make God to be true, by taking the part of the poor, of the masses, of the despised ethnic groups, of the marginalized classes. It is from within them that we strive to live and proclaim the gospel." 174 Failure in this lived experience of conversion equals a discipleship of deception.

Those who distract the church's attention away from the essentials of Christ's message, lay themselves open to the charge of being counted among those "certain persons" guilty of leading the flock of God away from the fundamentals of the faith. By so doing, they are themselves guilty of "missing aim" (ἀποχειράσωμενε). Becoming sidetracked and "turning aside" (ἐξετράπησαν) into "vain talking" (ματαιολογιαν) and empty argument that leads to Christian deception (cf. 1 Tim 1: 6-7). Thus the biblical text in the hands of Swindoll and company instead of becoming a means whereby we grow deep in the Christian life, becomes a pedagogy of poison in the way of our contemporary discipleship. And this, particularly to those who earnestly seek to hear God's word, i.e., his clientele, those members of privilege that

have in Weberian language, an individuate "distinctive pattern of economic life". That is the insulated, the self-absorbed class. Those who have become glutted with indulgent deceptions, and are overtaken with an abundance of privilege in their endless pursuit of frivolous distracting amusements. Those differentiating dispassionate rich of "Orange County-Ville" and its "Culture of Contentment" semblances.\(^{175}\)

\(\text{1f) Favouring the Vested}\)

Other theological preferences surface in Swindoll's hermeneutical methodology and religo-cultural symbiosis. Almost without exception, every doctrinal component covered throughout his book "Growing Deep in the Christian Life," particularly his section on "saving the Bible from misuse", seems to be crafted with a specious style. In the gospel according to Swindoll, there must apparently be no substantive content or inference that would interrupt or perturb the church opulent. As has been maintained, it seems as if the prosperous segment of the church is to be saved from the universe of meaning and ethical obligations concerning the justice demands of God. Thus lacking the honesty of biblical hermeneutics, the reversal of societal fortune as promised by the Magnificat (Lk. 1: 46-56) and similar texts found in "floating tradition" concerning the first being last and the last first (cf. Mk. 10: 31; Mt. 20:16 and Lk. 13: 30) is obviated. And the denunciations of the prophets against the haughty and devouring, those become callous, without pity and blind to their own misdeeds (cf., 11 Sam. 12: 1-4), and rampantly evil in their free enterprise society (cf. Mic. 2: 1-2; Isa. 2: 7; Amos 4:1) are with convenience passed over - notwithstanding the castigation of the landlords and merchant class (cf. Jas. 5: 1).

\(^{175}\) See John Kenneth Galbraith, The Culture Of Contentment (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). What fructuates in "Orange County-Ville" (a "reality" I have worked and lived within), is not atypical of other global zones of differentiating opulence, as Galbraith has shown in his assessment of middle class "America." Similar commentary could also be made of other attendant First and Two
The gospel according to the *religio* of First World entitlement promotes and acts to protect a preferential option for the powerful and rich. Indeed, by its confirmations the way is further cleared for what has been aptly called, the gospel of *Geld* and *Geist*. And the bond between faith and fortune strengthened. So far as there being a conflict between moneymaking and piety, Swindoll's strategy makes them natural allies, guarantying faith as a reliable passport to commercial prosperity. Thus the religious appetites of the captains of industry are blessed. The ethics of the *nouveaux riches* are sanctioned. In the end, hermeneutics of Swindoll's type provide biblical justification - a criterion of confirmation - that reinforce the societal modes of analysis and the geopolitical definitions of reality utilised by the prosperous against the poor.

Notwithstanding the above, Swindoll writes with a sincerity of style. I make no attempt at suggesting that he is not in earnest at what he is about. However, his is a sincerity that begs to be better informed. If it was, he would better serve his well-to-do patrons and the church as a whole. His methodology is typical of most who write as he does. His particular method of inquiry and investigation is a conglomerate of brimming earnestness held together by large amounts of hermeneutical misinformation. As his theological impotence concerning the predicament of the struggling poor (none of his work is written with their equity in view), and his blessing of the well-to-do society demonstrates. What may appear to be mellow maturity from one point of view can be interpreted as cowardly compromise and omission from another. For there can be no doubt that he has constructed his teleological theology in accordance with what he believes can *not* be left out of doctrinal statement. At this point it is Swindoll who is condemned by his own predications, for it is he who has failed to "maintain the correct meaning of God's Word." Being guilty of his own warnings concerning corrupt teachers of the Bible, it is he who has adjusted the biblical texts; he has

Thirds World areas.
endeavoured to "adapt them to what they want them to say." He is himself, to be counted among those who literally, "lift lines from the Scriptures." Fashioned by the logic of his chosen preferences; assessed by his own criteria, Swindoll is guilty of hermeneutical manipulation, as citations of his own argument show.

His shrewdness is that none of his writings in outright manner condemn the plight of the poor. He simply has nothing to say about righting the wrongs of their situation, nor redressing the unjust control mechanisms that condemn both rich and poor alike. What is missing throughout his selective perceptions are the extensive transformational biblical themes of liberation and justice.

His is an obvious error (so obvious as that he must be aware of it), in that, prosaic interpreters such as he, not only overlook academic hermeneutics, they "righteously" disregard them altogether. They are interested in the Scriptures from "another" point of view. This is what makes their exegesis so presumptuous and so predictable (like some mainline theologians). Narcissistic interpretation of the biblical message is fashioned to suit the culture that surrounds it. Swindoll and his faction appropriate a biblical message that can be interpreted in terms of a surrender to the appetites of the "financial magnates who have economic interests in ... the political manifestations of power." Weber, concerning such attributes, says: "These groups are the least accessible to the ethical and rational elements in any religion." 

Rarely if ever, in bourgeois hermeneutics does the dominant culture find interpretation or undergo exposure from a surrender to the biblical span of justice and mercy to the poor. The norm of their interpretation lies unabashedly within their reading of a middle class canon within the canon. As

176 Swindoll, op cit., p. 73.
captors to *Kulturprotestantismus* their culture in general has become the bedded partner of a specific form of religion; it has consequently become a specific "class" culture. All too obviously this preferred class is the bourgeoisie, that is, "that creator and carrier of Capitalism." Dilthey’s comprehension is pertinent here in that he, by his "circle of interpretation" understood that a selected culture, or cultural preferences, act as a method of hermeneutics, and recognised as inseparable the relations between concept and theory construction, and the process of inquiry.

Swindoll and those following his methodology, have become willing prisoners in their postulations to a bourgeois universe of meaning. Their value beliefs and hermeneutics are more the result of a chosen *Weltanschauung* than that of systematic biblical reflection. To take up Habermas' phrase their interpretations are "based on a historically determined preunderstanding, governed by social norms, of what is practically necessary in a concrete situation." Habermas explains that the only way out of this culture-lock and ideological preference (a condition that make us all suspect), is to become "enlightened hermeneutically, through articulation in the discourse of citizens in a community." In large measure, it is this unwillingness to be in community with the scientization of hermeneutical inquiry that permissions pedagogues like Swindoll and his kind. And continually acts to shut them off from the genius and enrichment of both the findings of hermeneutical reflection, and the rich span of Scripture and church tradition.

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Something else occurs here as a sad preferred consequence. Swindoll-type pedagogues in their chosen disdain for meaningful discussion with the scholarly community means that they continue to believe and perpetrate their perfidiousness, their cultural group think. And, this they do to the detriment of church and society, let alone to the good people and earnest truth seekers within their sphere of influence. The fall-out from their unwillingness to be confronted with scientized ambiguity tolerance, creates and perpetuates a certain sort of person, a certain type of Christian. That there must always be different sorts of Christians, with different and divergent interpretations of human existence is axiomatic. This is fundamental to the plethora of the "household of God." I make no case here for a one-dimensional personality in the church. However, examination of forms of behaviour and different psychological personas typical of a certain personality type is warranted when it can, via investigative analysis be shown that systems of technics have proceeded and created a specific policy oriented Christian. And, by so doing, have created a distinctive identity that is, in fact tending towards the creation of persons of one-dimensionality, persons of un-freedom.

My point here is that, systems of hermeneutical abuse short on scientized ambiguity tolerance, act as controlling apparatus. And in point of fact, such hermeneutical methodologies are totalitarian to the extent that they fashion a particular "sort of person," determining very often their psychic state and outlook on life. This work bourgeois hermeneutics are able to do because their suasion is not a neutral or innocent element in psychosociological change; bourgeois hermeneutics have reached the proportions of being a means of control concerning both personal and political projects. Choice of sociopolitical and individual ends and means are manipulated by the reified and non-communal logic of their economic-theological co-ordination which remains attached to a given structure of privilege and power.
Examination of the systems of technics at work in these totalitarian hermeneutical procedures demonstrates a convergence of distinguishable personality conditions.

Typically these distinguishable personality types, acting in concert with the attitude of the hermeneutical methodology that worked to shape them, limit unacceptable information into their universe of socio-symbolic meaning. Appropriating and gleaning insights from Ilardo's work, concerning "Ambiguity Tolerance," four behavioural actions among others, present themselves.\(^{181}\) In the first place, these personality types simply remove themselves from unwanted information, or failing this they cut themselves off physically from that which they deem to be undesirable. Secondly, in the fashion of psychic blocking, they tend to withdraw by utilising established societal institutions, such as joining and becoming committed to an "acceptable" religious group or political party. Thirdly, in internalising fashion, they take to themselves informal or unconscious pledges, resulting in the adoption of a exclusionary life-style. Or, acting out their commitments, they live out their restrictive world view in evangelising episodes. In the fourth place, these personality groups utilise a set form of language that acts to reinforce their predetermined sociopolitical outlook. The employment of prescribed language serves to limit their range of information input and their levels of personal and societal uneasiness. Such limit measures serve in turn to make for intellectual oversimplification, literalness and double standard permissioning, as well as the horizoning of their general reasoning orientation. These personality types wield a desired blindness and an oversimplification of cognition, in order to avoid doubt or disparity tensions. Such highly literal persons, although actualising rigidity of thought, are not without solid mental skills. They possess highly developed organisational abilities, demonstrate attention to particulars, and the capacity to think theoretically at lofty levels of

\(^{181}\) See Joseph A. Ilardo, "Ambiguity Tolerance and Disordered Communication - Therapeutic Aspects," *Journal of Communication* Vol. 23 No. 4, (Autumn 1973), pp. 371-391. See also, the
prescribed abstraction. They also possess minimal levels of primary thinking, innovation, imaginativeness and spontaneity. They tend in babbit style to opt for discursive logic which involves explicit explanation over against creative fantasy, involving implicit explanation.

Consequently, they tend to see everything as involving clear cut decisions (the "middle" being excluded), things are either black or white, with little to no room for shades of inbetween. Put together, these combined personality conditions make for the creation of, and perpetuation of, a "certain type of hermeneutist," who occasions and licenses a "certain type of theologian," who gives out a certain kind of theopolitical initiation, who influences a "certain type of Christian," who in turn acting out a God given, Bible driven life outlook, practices and implements a certain kind of geopolitical ethic.

From this progression can be made a strong argument supporting the influencing power of this "type," this symbolic value system. As a sacerdotalizing sanctioned geopolitical ethic, it has the drive to impact public policy, making for a theological and sociopolitical signification, that effects the mechanisms regulating power in society. And so the pedagogical poisoning continues. Needless to say, thereby we are in our present predicament, both ecclesiastically and sociopolitically.

h) Displacing the Gospel

Let there be no doubt that this "sort of hermeneutist," by their reified preoccupation with middle class ideology and group think make the biblical message to be thoroughly "secularised" both in its social and personal ethics. No increase in rationality is offered to thinking people here. What takes place in this process is a diminution of the subversive edge of the Gospel. In this regard it is hard to quarrel with Tillich's contention concerning the research of Herbert Schiller, *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).
consequences of secularisation's fashioning of Christianity. The gospel's freedom becomes increasingly lost as it "falls into the hands of the supporting forces of capitalist society - the economic and the political." In continuing commentary he points out: "Assimilation into the forms of life of the economically dominant bourgeoisie, and subordination to the political unity of the dominant Anglo-Saxon capitalist state became equated with assimilation into theocracy."\(^{182}\) And subsequently this occurrence happens "with all the more effectiveness whenever it happens inadvertently. As a result, however, Christianity's standpoint for possible opposition to capitalist society has disappeared."\(^{183}\) Together with these observations, Tillich ironically adds: "Christianity and modern society have been bought to the point of identity."\(^{184}\) The rule of God thus becomes confused with the rule of the system's consensus.

Therefore, Western Protestantism leaves autonomous culture untouched in the realm of knowledge, but also preserves untouched its own dogmatic fundamentals, in the social realm it creates capitalist society with which it identifies. From both standpoints, however, a critical opposition to modern society has become impossible.\(^{185}\)

As in the days of Tillich's political expectation so too in our time.\(^{186}\) The result of the loss of the ability prophetically to critique the amalgam of church and society is confusion, whereby many of the un-soft biblical mandates undergo a sweetening, and a stripping of their intention. The dominance of the prevailing bourgeois hermeneutic in the area of cultural symbolic life,

\(^{183}\) Tillich, ibid., p. 6.
\(^{184}\) Tillich, ibid., p. 6.
\(^{185}\) Tillich, ibid., p. 6.
\(^{186}\) It is lamentable that Tillich's vision of a socialist theonomy was frustrated. In the first instance his politics were stymied by the structures of American Capitalism. Like Barth he held (though not as tenaciously), to a socialist hope: through thirty years of disappointment, and frustration he came to the conclusion that his socialist hopes should suffer no premature solutions, rather they should be apportioned that "sacred void" of waiting. See Paul Tillich, "Beyond Religious Socialism" *The Christian Century*, June 15, 1949. It is also regrettable, since "Tillich has never written anything more beautiful, richer in ideas, more full of life, and more radiant of goodness than the two meditations, German and English, of his *Principles of Religious Socialism*". See Eduard Heimann, "Tillich's Doctrine of Religious Socialism" in Charles W. Kegley, and Robert W. Bretall, *The Theology of Paul*
means that seminal biblical injunctions of justice are literally rationalised and relativised away. This removal of obligation, has assuredly appealed to many, and helped them feel confirmed in their prejudices, backing up their universe of meaning and their Scriptural compromises. Herein can be the found the explanation as to why there is so little conflict, and so much agreement, between conservative bourgeois churches, their overseas geopolitical evangelising agencies, and the surrounding, prevailing cultural milieus of power and dominance. The implications, the world exegesis of Swindoll-like *religio*, are crucial and frightening.

Whereas the prophets and Jesus condemned every kind of calumny, every structure of keeping the poor in poverty, or the creation of new pitiable human groupings, those who have opted for bourgeois hermeneutics fail to follow biblical example. These are they who have sanctioned the values and the virtues of the imperial plutocrats. As such, they are despicably silent in their acquiescence. Jesus and the prophets made no mere allusions to situations of injustice; they raised both finger and voice in their interpretative denunciations of those who were to blame.

The church robbed of its power to intersect Word and world, fails at the hands of domesticating hermeneutists. The hermeneutics of religio-cultural symbiosis, by all those of Swindoll's persuasion and sociopolitical affiliation, beget churches of bourgeois cultural compliance. Such churches exist and fructify as undergirding agents of oppression. Subsequently their sociopolitical conservative theology is global since it "is supported by authority and much publicised because of access to social communications media, but it is so static and devitalized that it is not even strong enough to abandon the Gospel. *It is the Gospel which is disowning it.*"\(^{187}\) This telling observation by Gutiérrez cannot be gainsaid. That Scripture interpreter's like

\footnote{Tillich (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 320.}
Swindoll and company fail to correct the angle of their views of culture and gospel, as well as the hermeneutical process of the sacred text as it intersects with and violates the underpinning's of their bourgeois exegetical ideology, cannot be denied either.

i) Interpretation without "Scientization"

Concomitantly, the problem with Swindoll's method, and those of his obdurate sentiment, is that as self-styled "simple Bible-believers" they minimise the need for their hermeneutics to be scientized. And as such, they are the most suspect interpreters of all. Their brashness at not addressing their context, and its impact on their reading of Scripture is particularly annoying; since it oft times is assumed but is never adequately articulated. They are not even splendide mendax, since their work is often masked in order to produce an "unbiased", "ideologically sound", "objective" rendition of the Bible.

Therefore such hermeneutical procedures can with guarantee be deemed "vincible ignorance" - they do not know because it does not suit their purposes to know.188 Correspondingly, their contextual knowledge operates as a kind of convenient screen that obscures certain meanings and brings others to the foreground. The truth is, as we have seen, hermeneutical procedures always exist; they are always in contention, always part of the preutterance factor - this is always so, though it is widely feigned by conservatives that there is some sacred locus, beyond corruptive influence from which to interpret the text. Against this malfeasance, Tillich pertinently points out: "there is no pure revelation. Whenever the divine is manifest, it is manifest in 'flesh'".189

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188 Somewhere the full line of Huxley's runs: "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know."
189 Paul Tillich, Biblical Religion And The Search-For Ultimate Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5. There is no pejorative connotation put on "flesh", or our humanity here, Tillich is simply stressing the "concrete, physical, and historical reality ... of the biblical writers" (my emphasis).
Concerning conservative "orthodoxy's" arrogant biblicist posturing, Tillich remarks with stinging insight:

The basic error of fundamentalism is that it overlooks the contribution of the receptive side in the revelatory situation and consequently identifies one individual and conditioned form of receiving the divine with the divine itself.\footnote{Tillich, Ibid., p. 4. What insightful scan, what biting reconnaissance is here! The only thing that saves this invincible remark from application to the contemporary liberal position, is, in my view, Tillich's delineation of the privatised aspect of this arrogance, through his use of the word "one".}

After surveying Swindoll's and other "global-reach" conservative evangelical approaches to the task of biblical interpretation, one is left with feelings of violation and misgiving. Studied awareness of pre-understandings which act to reinforce prejudices, and freight distortion, are perceived as encumbrances to the agenda of conservative evangelical self-affirmation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{j) Immoral Premise: Amoral Consequences}
\end{itemize}

Only extreme naiveté imagines that theological travesties of this sort and size, are fictitious, imagined or triflingly harmless. Because of them, discipleship is made bankrupt and the little people of the world pay the theo-political consequences. Anyone who has surveyed the compass and phenomena that this bourgeois "culture religion" indicates at geopolitical levels, cannot but be convinced that it is far from being innocent. Nor should it as geopolitical phenomenon, be understood as being insignificant. Conservative hermeneutics do not signify nothing, they very definitely represent a shared meaning of something. "Meaning" as Mannheim relates it is,

\textit{a sociological category and it is inseparable from some phase of sociation .... as there exists no sociation without particular understandings, so there are no shared meanings unless they are derived from and derived by given social institutions.}\footnote{Karl Mannheim, cited by Josef Bleicher, \textit{The Hermeneutic Imagination: Outline of a Positive Critique of Scientism and Sociology} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 139. I am grateful}
From Mannheim's insights, it can be convincingly ascertained that there are coalitions of "shared meanings" emanating from sponsoring social bodies. Consequently, the resulting hermeneutics from among bourgeois culture religion are not innocent of ideological signification, they do by design of conscious or unconscious agreement freight the ideology of the societal manipulators. Those who, even with all the best intentions in the world (Swindoll etc.), are party to this suasion are the reiterators of a social fiction, and guilty of biblical malfeasance. As such, they do portray and carry a distinct "meaning" regarding their interpretation of discipleship. It is one that operates as has been stressed, out of a poisonous pedagogy, exuding a "corruptive meaning" into the life of the church. This being the case, then truly such viewpoints concerning biblical hermeneutics and interpretation theory represent the triumph of bourgeois "culture religion" over biblical discipleship.

It is possible that the pedagogical poisoning, hermeneutical seduction, and the sociopolitical reprehensibility alluded to in the locus classicus of Swindoll, is based for his part, on an honest lack of knowledge concerning the hermeneutical task. Lack of knowledge, however, reflects in part a lack of concern, and a distorting perspective that removes certain vital biblical questions from the focus of hermeneutical investigation. The fact is that hermeneuticians like Swindoll and company have deployed a class army of sizeable strength on the sociopolitical battlefield. And increasingly, such religious organisations are serving the function of military Chaplains in these armies, doing what Chaplains have always done on battlefields - solemnly blessing the socio-symbolics of their side, assuring the troops that their cause is God's.

Bonhoeffer, speaking of those who exert corruptive influence into the ranks of Jesus' followers, lays bare the concomitant malevolence, and sharply says:

to Bruce Thornton for this prompt.
Inwardly they are ravening wolves: their words are lies and their works are full of deceit....Maybe they hope their intellectual ability or their success as a prophet will bring them power and influence, money and fame. Their ambitions are set on the world, not on Jesus Christ. Knowing that Christians are credulous people, they conceal their dark purpose beneath the cloak of Christian piety, hoping that their innocuous disguise will avert detection .... Thus they succeed in seducing many from the right way.\textsuperscript{192}

Herein is unmasked the startling results of deceptive hermeneutics as they proceed in their outworking. Sociopolitical hermeneutical abuse in this form of "innocuous disguise" is not limited in its suasion to the Swindollesque world of fundamentalism and its right wing analogies. It exists in our history in all similar patterns of self-referent hermeneutics; moving from micro to macro levels of casuistry and disguise.

At the hands of interpretative corrupters, religious belief itself becomes a churchly vehicle of sociopolitical deception, an accommodation with dominance and oppression. As such it becomes something respectably despicable; an exercise in conscionable public service, an obstruction to genuine human transformation. Good people within the social reality of this form of church life act out of their learned babbitt social designations. In doing what they have been taught is right, they freight through their piety a totalizing socio-symbolic world that is antagonistic to God's domination-free order. Ratification for this action comes from their hermeneutics of what God requires, because they have been \textit{taught} what God's word says. And, all this is done cleanly, with little to no befuddlement about appropriate or inappropriate ethics. One does not have to develop great psychotheological sophistication to perceive the unchecked consequences.

The perception of the reality behind the hermeneutical facades does not demand considerable intellectual effort either. Under Sartre's patent of "bad

\textsuperscript{192} Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 212-213. N.B., I have minimally altered the phrasing so as to make this quote inclusive, in doing so I have not altered the original meaning.
faith" (mauvaise foi), in debunking fashion Berger observes: "Our torturers, just like the Nazi ones, present themselves as conscientious public servants, with an impeccable if mediocre private morality, who reluctantly overcome their weaknesses in order to do their duty." 193 Such disclosures (Bonhoeffer's Berger's etc.) underscores the fact that "the worst is only a hair's breath away" from the predicated and uninformed reified socio-symbolic intentions of anyone. 194 This is true. And this much is certain, such exertions and influences are most certainly part of the Swindollesque world of fundamentalism.

k) The Ongoing Necessity of Critical Analysis

Confounded here then, is a naive scholarly assumption. No longer can the scientized hermeneutics of biblically responsible sociopolitical theology remain distantly indifferent or blind, to the after-effects originating from the calamitous methodologies of bourgeois impresario Bible expositors. Such after-effects do considerably more than tangential touching of the sociopolitical apparatus of church and world - they activate and enable the cultural consciousness of dominance that shapes them. Therefore senses and theological sensibilities must be sharpened and employed critically - because this "type" (emphasising Weberian usage) as it enacts biblical judgements and evaluations, fundamentally distorts the true meaning of discipleship, and freights a theo-political inventory of severe consequences!

Radical discipleship in its commitment to the root truths of authentic Christian meaning must always engage in critical examination concerning contemporary theological and sociopolitical constructs. Obligation of this sort is a


humanising necessity because Bible reading methodologies and world-exegesis determine the extent to which genuine Christian existence is gained or lost.

In the most crucial issues of life, the followers of Swindollesque *religio* and its conservative hermeneutical associates obey the dictates of bourgeois socialisation rather than the radical claims of the reign of God. This "type" signifies a hermeneutical injustice at war with a biblical reading of discipleship and justice. Conclusively Herzog is right when he states that the "Christian community is pressed against the wall to give an account of the truth of justice against all untruth about it." This is because: "Strife of truth with falsehood over God's justice is today the context of discipleship."  

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Chapter Two

Radical Discipleship: Developing a Reading Strategy

"Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again."
—— Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, p. 351

"... the one and only thing that can maintain the liberative character of any theology is not its content but its methodology."
—— Juan Luis Segundo, The Liberation of Theology p. 40

2 (i) Towards a Liberative-Narrative Hermeneutics of Scripture

In the continuing work of theological hermeneutics, what is needed by way of gaining adequate guidelines in our reading strategies, is a fresh and renewed endeavour. An affirmation such as this assumes as a matter of record that a fixed point is no longer possible. Therefore, at the beginning sections of this work, in principled style, it has become necessary to "show" my methodological apparatus. And this, so as to demonstrate that what is argued herein is not just this writer's informed word on the subject. But to show that the methodological argument of this study is cognisant of the current state of biblical studies in their intellectual and sociocultural investigations.

Consequently, taking into account the tools of analysis that are available to me out of a myriad validities and not wanting to be bogged down in the minutiae of choices - the unit of preferred method that I have circumscribed is that of "narrative hermeneutics". As may be obvious to those familiar with the confluence of reading apparatus currently being investigated in the fermenting

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1 Ricoeur identifies three basic representations of discourse in biblical interpretation theory; "Prophetic discourse," "Wisdom discourse" and "Narrative discourse." For my purposes I have chosen to primarily utilise his treatment of "Narrative discourse," whilst reserving the prerogative of drawing upon the other two where necessary. See Mark I. Wallace, The Second Naivety: Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology (Macon: Mercer University Press 1990), p. 36. For further reference to narrative method, see also, On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation edited by D. Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160-187.
field of biblical hermeneutical theory, I have chosen to utilise the narrative theological starting-blocks as shown first to me by McAfee Brown, alongside of that hermeneutical grid now refined by the insights of literary criticism, socio-historical exegesis and political hermeneutics into the "socioliterary" method of Gottwald, Herzog, Myers, Waetjen and others. The hermeneutical procedure of this work is also deeply indebted to the profound insights from Ricoeur in his own right, and the Barthian interface.

In setting out my hermeneutical process, I have not tried to lay out in detailed fashion a treatise on the many and diverse methodological issues currently under study in the science of hermeneutics. Presently the hermeneutical field is so full that those attempting the interpretative task are likely to be overwhelmed by the rich profusion of methodological possibilities. Extensive methodological coverage as an undertaking is not the purpose of this dissertation. However, the consequent challenge and stretching resulting from this plethora is exciting. Correspondingly, in general and specific terms I have indicated my preferred method; which as well as incorporating the several formulae mentioned above is inclusive of the form of interpretation highlighted by Segundo; principally in his "Liberation of Theology" and now likewise being referred to as "Liberating Exegesis."

So then, my own methodology is eclectic, utilising the strengths mentioned, but seeking to guard against the abuses or extremes sometimes perpetuated by overzealous advocates of one single position. As might be expected concerning these interpretative tools, my continuing intention is always to be guided by an exegesis that leads to "interpretation and obedience," which as Brueggemann rightly maintains involves moving from a faithful reading

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2 Gratitude is also expressed to Thee Smith and James William McClendon, who added their individual interpretative modes of entrance to Robert McAfee Brown's course on "Narrative Theology" taught at Pacific School of Religion, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Winter 1980.
3 See, Mark I. Wallace, in op. cit.
5 Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, Liberating Exegesis (Louisville, Kentucky:
strategy to faithful living. This is because "the purpose of exegesis is address, and the significance of explicatio is applicatio ... [thus] dogmatics is the call to the church to venture what must be ventured, what, in view of the promise given to the church, ought not to remain unventured." Or as Gadamer in Barthian style writes: "Modern hermeneutics, ... assumes that the word of Scripture addresses us and that only the person who allows themselves to be addressed - whether they believe or whether they doubt - understands. Hence the primary thing is application." In adopting this eclectic reading strategy of the biblical texts, I am following what I believe to be the most reliable methodologies currently available. I believe (animo et fide) that should some other hermeneutical method be preferred, that notwithstanding a differently preferred angle of enquiry, the substance of my findings would stand the test of academic scrutiny.

From this, it should be self-evident that in subscribing to the methodology as indicated above, I will be emphasising the "historical recovery of the biblical message, its liberation from all universal, ahistorical abstractions and all timeless concepts." It follows, moreover, that any eclectic approach to biblical interpretation must have a focus, a base, a foundation upon which the interpretative structure may be built. As to my overriding hermeneutical guide-line, it is best summed up thus: "The great hermeneutical principle of the faith, and hence the basis and foundation of all theological reasoning, is Jesus Christ." I have sought to allow the implications of Jesus' life-alignment and praxis, the power of his death and resurrection, to be rule and guide in my approach and understanding of the Bible. In Gill's words: "This is the theological centre of the Bible as I read it, and from this centre I seek to draw a line backwards through the Psalms and prophets to the revelation of

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God in the liberation of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt." And so too, gripped by this comprehension and credo my concern is to, "draw a line forwards through the writings of Paul, the Gospels, 1 Peter and the Book of Revelation." Throughout then, "the following" of Jesus of Nazareth is the **overriding** premise of my theological endeavours, he is the "still point" of my theological hermeneutics.

As a Christian interpreter I hold to the position that the Bible is best construed as a sustained story of God's liberative acts, unified by the character of Jesus and his vision of God's reign. This is to say, that my conception of the biblical story depicts "the identity of Jesus Christ" whose intentions and actions serves as the centre of theological reflection. Essentially, then, this predication is the operative ideology of my theological grid.

Concomitantly my hermeneutics will be constitutively guided by immersion in praxis based on the revelation of the "Crucified God" as enacted in the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent outflowing of the historical ethical demands of this crucified God christology. My conviction is that my exegesis must always be guided by this organising premise, this prescience, lest my propagations serve only to mask desired commitments, and act to shut out alternate criticism. This is because the object, which must dictate theological method, is the word of God and not our conception of it. As servants of the Word, and those behoven to its obedience and correction, Barth urges that we lean over against ourselves so as to ensure that we live by its authority rather than the license of our own words. By way of remedying the temptation to close ourselves off from that which we find inconvenient or disruptive to our

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12 I am indebted to Peter Campbell's song "Still Point" for bringing this concept of T. S. Eliot's, to my attention.
13 This view is in agreement with Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: An Inquiry into the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). It is not my purpose to take up his contribution here, only to register my indebtedness to his work and that which he drew on out of Barth's section on the humanity of Jesus Christ, entitled "The Royal Man" in *Church Dogmatics* 1V/11, p. 154 ff.
fixations, Barth prompts all who would address themselves to the task of proclamation to, "speak the truth always against our own selves." It is essential always that methodology come to terms with the ideology lodged within one's own interpretations, and this, so as to render oneself open to a "scientized" and therefore critical "hermeneutics of suspicion." Ricoeur's comment is constructive here: "Today a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is an integral part of all appropriation of meaning. And with it follows the 'deconstruction' of prejudgements which impede our letting the world of the text be."

The hermeneutical circle that undergirds my endeavour refracts from God to humanity, from humanity to God. Continuing it moves from faith to history, and history to faith, from the word of God to the human word, from the love of God displayed in Jesus Christ to the love of one's sisters and brothers, and from the love of one's sisters and brothers to the love of God in Jesus Christ, from God's holiness to human justice. And in the motivating power of this hermeneutical interplay, I trust the promise and hope of the Spirit's guidance resides.

Focally this then is my hermeneutical circle: from revelation to revolution, from God in Jesus Christ to humanity and the world. And this hermeneutic, is held to in the firm belief, as Barth has contended, that "Jesus Christ does actually speak. He does so in the promise of the Spirit as the Crucified. And as such He does not merely murmur or whisper, but through the centuries, and therefore here and now among us, He speaks." Unrelenting and in our contemporary situation, Jesus Christ speaks, "where all others think they do, but in reality only lisp and stutter. He has something to say, and says it, where

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16 Here I have drawn on Gustavo Gutiéřrez' angle of enquiry; in doing so I have applied a Barthian oscillation, see op. cit., p. 61. Interestingly, Segundo agrees with my view: "Theology is not an interpretation of humankind and society, not in the first place at least." See Juan Luis Segundo, The
all others want to say something but have nothing worth saying compared to what He says." Hence, the hermeneutical question of import is "not where He is left with His voice and Word in relation to ours, but where we are left with ours in relation to His."17

Having stated the above, I believe my reading guidelines are reasonably identified - they will be pointed to further as the body of this work unfolds. Moreover, having thus been enumerated I trust that they are generally well enough set out so as to make a sufficient case for viewing the writings of the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible in their socioliterary constructs, as texts freighting liberative narratives adumbrating ideological discourse. Extra to the qualifications noted above, attention is drawn to my referential style. By this I mean to indicate that in citing the biblical writers, this work seeks to apply them as ciphers of the biblical text - by so doing, I am not purporting to know "the mind" of any of the biblical authors. Mention is made here of this observation because as Ricoeur has shown (and as will be referenced later) "authorialism" is not an interpretative option. And also because there are from within the biblical narratives, different angles of vision regarding the discourse of biblical faith. No one Scripture tradition is comprehensive of the whole story. Isaiah or Luke's narrative discourse says this, Paul, however, comprehends the story from some different optic, another way. They are not dismissive of each other, rather they are operating from, differing angles of vision. By doing so they offer a fuller view of the salvation and justice shaped by the biblical narratives of liberation.

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"Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol IV/111, First Half (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961),
a) The Dominant Scientific Inadequacy.

More exactly, my aim in the incorporation of the above, is to work towards a biblical scripting of radical discipleship by means of liberative narratology and socioliterary criticism. I have taken a viable position in order to be academically accountable rather than errantly meander among the variant positions currently being bandied about in the universe of biblical criticism. I am persuaded of the viability of a liberative-narrative style of critical interpretation to uncover the discourse of biblical radicalism. And the way that Jesus' story has found re-enactment in the lives of those committed to radical discipleship. My wanting to engage the biblical and the contemporary stories from the hermeneutics of radical discipleship is evidenced by the fact that I am convinced that in hermeneutical science, abstract inquiry does not lead to truth. Scholastic explanation of the text is not enough. Be it ever so refined and consequent to the carefully sculptured formulations of prodigious academicians, "objectivist exegesis" in the end works to nullify a "liberative" interpretation of Scripture. A citation from Kaiser and Kümmler's useful work "Exegetical Method," subtitled A Student's Handbook, serves as adequate illustration of a type of objectivist pedagogy. In this valuable work, even after allowing for the intrusion of "presuppositions" that we all bring to the task as exegetes, lamentable direction is then offered out of the elite consensus by these men of intellectual bearing. Aspiring biblical interpreter's are urged to "suspend" convictions, on their way through to discovering "impartial exegesis" in order "to listen with true objectivity to the text."18

Hermeneutical direction of this sort is not selective, it is representative of what was then considered the essential repertoire of the prescribed programme available for treating biblical data. As such, it is typical of the essence of dominant scientific and historical enquiry. The suspension of evaluative

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18 Otto Kaiser and Werner Georg Kümmler, Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook (New York:
options and participational involvement concerning exegetical research similar to the directive in the above is an integral part of this method's requirement. Any form of detached investigation, of a purported "value-neutral, a-historical point of view is, of course, an illusion. For all empirical work can be carried out only on the basis of certain meta-empirical, ontological, and metaphysical judgements, and the expectations and hypotheses which follow from them." Biblical scholarship that keeps its head down in the pursuit of an exegetical exactness that is objectivistic fails both the investigator and the biblical purpose. The function of hermeneutical analysis should work to help pull down and discredit the current sources of corruption and despotism rather than merely to describe them, or - still worse - by arid academic befuddlement obscure them.

Objectivized neutrality stifles the questions that the Bible seeks to answer. The problem with asking questions is simple: you get answers. And the determinative apparatus of the questions usually determines the shape of the answers. The way that we ask questions is derivative of and establishes our place in the world. The way that we ask is affected by what we know or what we believe, or what we want to know or what we want to believe. In any form of enquiry (as McLuhan has shown) there is always a pre-utterance factor. If our exegetical questions are not inclusive of and do not anticipate an answer that is liberative, how can we hope to receive one? If our methodology works to keep us in "our place" - the place of neutralised detachment - the possibility that liberative engagement might take hold of us out of the biblical mandates is shut off from us. Which amounts to the possibility of divine commission being denied in the name of biblical science.

Thus and so, was the taught and learned methodology of many, the *raison d’être* according to wooden objectivistic technique. Wink’s observations concerning the socio-spiritual debilitation handed out by the academic technicians of "detachment" is to the point. And his adroitness rightly justified in observing that, "the model ... should not be the biblical scholar, but the biblical interpreter - a person competent to help any group of people understand the impact of the Bible in human transformation."21 His entire critiquing work although disturbing, is highly valuable and necessary reading in understanding and moving beyond the misdemeanours and Herrschaft ("domination" or "control" in Habermas’ sense) of historical biblical criticism.

Insofar as I was becoming critically aware of the ramifications of the hermeneutics of suspicion, I sought to leave behind a fragmented period of my initial theological learning. I like others learned many fine things that I cherish deeply and for which I am grateful, but in the politics of my schooling definite social meanings were at work. I was groomed in the well-established and sophisticated discipline of dominant theology, but on the way through becoming increasingly aware of its inadequacies. Not only did it repress or ignore by way of non-application a good many of the biblical mandates concerning justice and the hope of the forgotten. But even worse, it constituted a system of spirituality, of pastoral work and academics that justified the *status quo* of "Caesarism."22 It achieved this capacity by its unexamined ideological subservience to the systems of oppression. It seemed as if the presiding "chair" was to keep "in circulation the discourse of classic Western philosophy and theology on gender-dualism or gender-polarity that understands man as the subject of history, culture, and religion, and women as the other."23 These structures of meaning left unchallenged, left

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21 Wink, ibid., p. 77.
23 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Politics of Otherness" in *Expanding the View*, Marc H. Ellis and
unexposed those social fictions of sexism, racism, classism, militarism, and dirty economic manipulation at work globally. No liberative hermeneutics of suspicion were released into a biblical challenging of national security states, of human rights abuses, or of related cultural oppressions. If any such biblical gauntlets were thrown they were, the exception and happened outside the lecture hall. The ideology that did predominate was that of the ruling class. It operated to legitimate that which was "proper" for pastors to believe and practice - privatised middle-class formulations. My error and guilt was that I was not diligent enough in my studies to have read more deeply and more widely than the syllabus, and that I was content to allow the cultural captivity of the gospel. Not being smart enough to read the labels, nor the agreed sociopolitical ideological arrangements, I was but for rare moments complicit with the totalizing legitimations, willing in trust, to go along with the prescribed organisation of knowledge. Deplorably today many theologues and pastors in training continue on in this politics of schooling which is not the result of, to use Habermas' expression Naturwüchsigkeit (literally, growing-out-of-natureness). Ideological entities or structures of theological formation of this sort do not just develop spontaneously in continuity with what came before, without ever having been subjected to consciously directed human will. We are taught methods, we learn what to believe. There is definite intrigue here. From the continuing culminating experiences of this pedagogical methodology in too many theological halls, a tragic epitaph is still written over the apparatus' of learning, "le mort saisit le vif" (the dead seizes the living).

My teachers across three continents (with notable exceptions) were concerned mainly to be free of socio-theological subjectivities concerning the teaching curriculum of the Word. None of them were bad men, all of them were good and in their own way decidedly "spiritual" and aspiring to academic correctness. As pastoral and theological academicians they had retreated into

"specialisation." And thereby abandoning any long-term passion or disruptive tendency in activistic questioning of social meanings and fictive dominance. As such they were, from positions of ill informed (or non-informed) ideology critique, teaching "objective" scientific theology. This they did as if the ambience of their theology was ever neutral, objective or in its ecclesiastical alignment, non-political. There is always an inherent connection between the occasions of societal intercourse and political obligation. And because there is no unblunted conversation between religion and sociopolitical reality - the church may indeed want to be heard more, but religion and society are an established amalgam - these coexist in the doing of theology. An honest coming to terms with this reality in the conditions of human existence, and fully shouldering the repercussions in human terms, "is an essential precondition for any theological methodology that purports to imitate the liberating creativity of Jesus' own methodology."²⁴

Eventually, thanks to my exceptional teachers (the whole distinguished procession), and from what I have learned from my refugee sisters and brothers (gracias compañeras y compañeros por su apoyo moral y espiritual) my academic intention now is to place my hermeneutical methodology squarely on the side of liberative exegesis for both Word and world. My "yes" to their theological optic, is always in all places and in all times to be party to a community of discipleship that is enveloped by an interpretative strategy that rereads the Bible from the starting-place of a committed praxis on behalf of the dispossessed.

Even given the above, and what will be said further, I am not-here or elsewhere advocating an abandoning of the high vantage point given hermeneutics by the invaluable European insights developed out of modern scientific and philological historical methodology. Indeed, not only does the posture of serfdom need to be abandoned regarding academic dominant

theology, so too does the adolescent attitude of out of hand reaction and rejection. For no matter how much dominant (scientific) theology has suffered misuse, this does not argue against its on-going contributions and merits. None of the plethora of hermeneutical methods now employed would be where they are without the gains and mistakes given us from the findings of this tradition. It is as contributive as it is baneful. By its rigour, biblical scholarship loosened the ties which "chained Jesus to the rack of ecclesiastical doctrine." 25

Therefore, I will not disavow my augmentative appreciation of dominant scientific theology (although it is fashionable to do so among some who, were it not for this method, would today be mute and empty-handed). As Lorenzen has reminded neophyte partisans of liberation theologies, the theological contribution of just the work of Bultmann alone is monolithically important to the church: Bultmann by what he gave is so grand that we are still learning, particularly from his mistakes as well as from his gains. 26 Concerning Bultmann's on-going contributions beyond the stultifications of the historical critical method and towards "Liberating Exegesis," the work of Rowland and Comer is illuminating and instructive. 27 They note Bultmann's short-comings in that: "He recognised in the 'myths' of the first century a primitive science but not a primitive politics." Added to this he also omitted "the political dimension of myth." 28 These are substantial misjudgements

26 This remark is taken from lecture notes whilst a student under Professor Lorenzen at Rüschlikon, Zurich, 1976. And, rather humorously he also frequently reminded all and sundry that Bultmann, was a "European," as was Barth etc. "Sie werden sich daran gewöhnen". In mentioning Bultmann, this essay readily acknowledges the perennial contribution of the political-liberative and narrative hermeneutical edges of Barth, now in fuller focus due to the commonalty of his hermeneutical concerns with those of Ricoeur. See Mark Wallace, The Second Naïveté (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990). Wallace points out that, "Ricoeur's criticism of historical criticism is analogous to Barth's" p. 66. And making reference to Ricoeur directly he notes that Ricoeur makes strong argument against historical criticism in that its interpretative strategy is not "methodologically innocent." p. 66. Reference is here also made to Barth's critical attitude towards historical criticism. Whilst not totally dismissive of it he had continuing problems with its penchant for "historicism," see Church Dogmatics Vol 1/2, p. 492.
27 See Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, op., cit., especially p. 73f.
28 Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, in ibid., pp. 70-71.
indeed. Regardless they understand his contributions to be auxiliary to "The Foundation and Form of Liberation Exegesis." Sölle in continuing conversation or, as the term (Auseinandersetzung) used in the German title of her book "Political Theology" suggests, is in "settlement," or, "discussion" or "argument" with Bultmann, she comments: "More and more it appears to me that the move from existentialist theology to political theology is itself a consequence of the Bultmannian position."29

It is timely to be reminded of these continuing beneficial contributions emanating from among the dominant ranks. The prolific Scripture and Marxist scholar, Porfirio Miranda,30 does so by maintaining that the historical-critical method still serves the church as an invaluable resource - provided we remain suspicious of it.

Birthed by the investigations of the historical-critical method, the arrival of "redaction criticism" (Redaktionsgeschichte) usually associated with the Willi Marxsen school31 dramatically changed the landscape of Scripture study. Now perhaps open to challenge, but operating from his conviction, concerning the unequalled nature of a "Gospel", Perrin has posited that:

We must always remember that the form "Gospel" is the one unique literary product of New Testament Christianity. There are literary parallels to all the other kinds of literature represented in the New


30 See J. A. Kirk, "The Bible in Latin American Liberation Theology," in The Bible and Liberation: Political And Social Hermeneutics, eds. Antoinette C. Wire and Norman K. Gottwald, (Berkeley: Radical Religion, 1976), p. 161. This appreciation as well as its opposite was conveyed to me by Professor Miranda in conversation at a Taller de Teología in Mexico City.

Testament. Other people produced letters, chronicles of the acts of famous people, apocalyptic discourses, but only the early Christians produced "Gospels."\(^{32}\)

The innovator of this new form of literary composition, Mark (traditionally known by this name, and according to the "two-document hypothesis" this gospel is the first) was, seen by redaction criticism as a judicious collector of the traditions handed down to him. As such this Evangelist came to be understood as an author of individual stories or sayings which were fashioned into a dynamic structure and in so doing, constructed the "good news" about Jesus. Undergirding this observation, Schweizer asserts that "the particular message which Mark is endeavouring to express will be found for the most part, in this very 'framework' and in the special arrangement of his gospel."\(^{33}\) Schweizer in this statement gives vent to the fact that the redaction critics had discovered a surprising degree of theological sophistication as well as a previously unsuspected degree of coherence in each of the Gospels.\(^ {34}\) Thus, the goal of the redaction critics was to understand the editing of the traditional material by the Gospel writers in order to fathom the theological viewpoints implied by the way they edited their sources. Regrettably, however, redaction criticism was severely limited by its inherited inclination to view the Gospels essentially as edited collections of traditional material. Although this form of biblical criticism tended to give more respect and credit to the skill of the individuals who wrote the Gospels than source or form criticism had, it still placed a great emphasis on the prehistory of each Gospel and tended to disintegrate each text into material labelled "tradition" and other material labelled "redaction."

At this point, perceptive scholars began to suggest that, if the gospel Evangelists were able to produce a reasonably coherent theology out of a

\(^{34}\) For examples of redaction criticism, see the demonstrations of this method by Bornkamm, Conzelmann and Marxsen, in Perrin, op. cit., pp. 25-33.
collection of traditional material, and, moreover, if they successfully communicated their own theological perceptions by the way they put the pieces of tradition together, then why not acknowledge them as legitimate authors? The fundamental insights of source, form and redaction criticism might still be affirmed, with sincere gratitude for the labour of the practitioners of these methods. But the time had now come to resist the long-standing impulse to disintegrate the Gospels into a string of constructed theological sections in the effort to comprehend the prehistory of each text. More exactly the time had arrived to put all of the pieces back together, in order to discover how a Gospel works as a piece of literature, as an integral, literary whole.

Thus, *Redaktionsgeschichte* pushed biblical scholars to the clear view that the Gospels very definitely had a discernible and motivated theological framework. By making this connection, they were given opportunity to move beyond the narrow focus of scientific historical questions that had governed biblical investigation for so long. Even as this shift occurred, however, this methodology too became overtaken and incorporated into the historical critical reductionistic *Leitmotif* of objectivism from which it had sprung. So useful was the compass of redaction criticism that it in its turn became paradigmatic, but calamitously in a fixed sense. Unfortunately, by doing so, it also became deterministic. New critical findings had brought no radical discontinuity to the biblical guild's overriding outlook. Ranging from the past attributes of dominate theology to a continuing infatuation with objectivistic hermeneutics, contemporary expressions of redaction criticism kept systematic theology under the suasion of detached scriptural understanding, and by so doing shut off an interpretative position that strikes up an ever raw and fresh engagement between reader and text. In spite of this inadequacy it did open the way to something vaster amid the objectivist allotment. However, for all the enterprising and invaluable understanding it suggested, in the end it became another eventuality of objectivistic hegemony.
In this vein, out of reverence for the text's purity, and in reaction to so much "eisegesis," the prevailing biblical "guild" constantly admonished exegeses within its axis to stay "within" the limits of the text. And this is a caution upon which I still place selective value. As someone trained in the standards of the guild, I submitted my will to allowable exegetical function. In so doing, on the positive side, I came to appreciate the crafted theological constructions of the Gospel writers, ascertaining that the primary purpose of the Evangelists was not to write a biography of Jesus; nor were they responding to a commission to compose a "Life of Jesus" so as to gratify those of their day desirous of knowing "what made Jesus tick." Such a psychologizing or analysing approach to the biblical texts is markedly absent from the Gospel writers' interest. Although, now parenthetically, I would upon reflection, want to argue somewhat with the entirety of this position, particularly in light of re-reading Macovec's, A Marxist Looks at Jesus as he treats at least the Johannine intention.\textsuperscript{35} On the negative side, formalistic biblical criticism from its schema of objectified analysis "suffered a gigantic inflation concerning its own reconstructive powers in the life of spirit. In fact it was incapable by itself of reconstruction, because its very life was methodological scepticism."\textsuperscript{36}

The lessons taught by Redaktionsgeschichte stood as the champion of the text without interference - the text by itself. It is not my intention in hindsight (as already indicated) to gainsay in puerile fashion the noble gains and creative role of this method. We are all the beneficiaries of its surge. By diligent, watchful application of its apparatus, this school enables the questioning of perfunctory and careless exegesis. Yet, something more needs to be said, for the text does not live in a place of splendid isolation, left by its writers in a place of normative vacuum. No text in matters of understanding can with hermeneutical validity sit for long wrapped around in neutral seclusion, to allow it this onus, this allotment, argues against a response, a decision for or

against its obedient meanings. And if we make no vested decisions then we run foul of Mannheim's conjecture that since we have "no questions to raise [we are] not even able to formulate a tentative hypothesis which enables us to set a problem and to search history for its answer." 37 I remember trying to get into this problem with one of my professors in Berkeley, and being told, "I'm not interested in what you think the text points to, I'm only interested in what the text says!" - end of discussion. Liberation theology aroused my suspicions that this is not the end of the discussion. Narrative theology has convinced me that this cannot be the end of the discussion.

Having said the above, let me speak further regarding this inadequacy: theological hermeneutics deserving the observance of those in pursuit of Scripture's relevant liberative purpose, are seldom the result of the distanced findings of the objective scientific academe. It is regrettable that many of my professor's like numerous others within the dominant guild, had no inclination to heed the warnings of Bonino's observation: "'Scientific', 'Historical', or 'objective' exegesis reveals itself as full of ideological presuppositions." 38 So-called objectivist criticism, by whatever name it is called, can never, has never delivered the "text by itself," the text value free, into the hands of anyone. As Habermas says of our ability to know in relation to our vested interests:

Whether dealing with contemporary objectivations or historical traditions, the interpreter cannot abstractly free his or her self from their hermeneutic point of departure. They cannot simply jump over the open horizon of their own life activity. 39

Narrative liberative hermeneutics takes issue with objectivist approaches which posit that the sociopolitical situation of the interpreter is extraneous to the exegetical task. As if the science of hermeneutics, and its object were

meant to be separate from, meant to "jump over" the concerns of history. The criticisms of the above, are reminiscent of Gadamer's exposure of those biblical interpreters who assume that by application of their particular autonomous method they can abandon their own value concepts and think only in those of the epoch to be researched. Gadamer pithily points out that no such move happens, such exegetes finally are caught out - being guilty of the biases, they left unexamined.40

Located here is a seminal difference concerning the "objective neutrality" of the dominant theologians and that of liberative theologians. As Segundo conjectures, those committed to liberative theologies are filled with a hermeneutical conviction that compels them "at every step to combine the disciplines that open up the past with the disciplines that help to explain the present."41 There can be no option regarding this necessity since theology must always relate the biblical message contemporaneously, in our "here and now." Without the employment of this uncompromising "hermeneutic circle" that keeps the past and present in suspicious and informative tension, so that "each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on,"42 Segundo believes that a truly liberative theology would be lost. Stripped of this corrective edge, and guilty of methodological naïveté, theology whilst conceivably dealing with liberation "would eventually be reabsorbed by the deeper mechanisms of oppression."43

The disclosed truth out of which liberative hermeneutics operates over against dominant theologies, flows rather from the predication of a discipleship which

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40 Gadamer, op. cit., pp. 357-358. As concerning this connecting point of agreement between Gadamer and Habermas, I am not suggesting that they are in total unison concerning the dynamics of human understanding, or, the construction of, or use of social knowledge. See Dieter Misgeld's analysis in, *On Critical Theory*, ed. John O'Neill (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 164-168.
41 Segundo, op. cit., p. 8.
42 Segundo, ibid., p. 8.
43 Segundo in, ibid., p. 8.
is radical, a biblical radicalism that promotes an obedience which commits itself again and again in life-alignment with the struggling poor, the meek and the ostracised, to change and humanise the world. This it does in obedience to "God's preferential concern for the poor" (the opción preferential por los pobres). Also this stands true, if the hermeneutist is to challenge faithfully the conjures of imperial narrowness and provincialism, then hermeneutical methodology must come to grips with the ideological mechanisms of the society of official consensus - Caesaroimperialism. Being cognisant of, and standing against what Hinkelammert calls "The Ideological Weapons of Death"44 (Las armas ideológicas de la muerte), has to happen if hermeneutics is to employ God's word and save it from vagaries to a transformative message. Otherwise, our attempts at biblical interpretation will be court jester drivel, gratuitously granting the appetites and ideas of the mastering factions and classes.

It follows, that if we refuse to develop a discernment capable of the determination to turn biblical interpretation into a usable and accessible instrument for an orthopraxis that is liberative, then a manipulative and superstitious concept of orthodoxy will dissipate biblical interpretation into the realm of the mundane. Alternatively, at the very least, into a set of ahistorical commentaries and assumptions. In order for this not to happen, we must be past the danger of removed reductionistic scholasticism, and its cramping effects as they inhibit the liberative narrative of the gospel.

It becomes necessary therefore to maintain in all ways possible, the redeeming power, the freeing prerogative of God's word. This we must do so that as hermeneutists, we become competent in placing before the people of God pastoral empowerment on the one hand, and on the other hand responsible claims and demands to the world; and to both, a scientifically reliable

interpretation of the Bible that is genuinely creative and redemptive in all situations of the human predicament.\textsuperscript{45}

b) The Conservative Fundamentalist Inadequacy

Whereas dominant scientific theology became a distraction from liberative purposes by adopting the academic posture of "detached" enquiry, dominant conservative theology misled by other conundrums. Marked and shaped by the "global-reach" of fundamentalist entrepreneurialism (the prodigy of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy), and reaching right across the diverse spectrum of differing denominations, too many in years past and too many today continue to suffer from a theological upbringing that has taught them to believe that the Gospels, indeed all biblical texts, are \textit{straight history}. That is, a history and a theology that contains the life of Jesus - "descriptive statements" about Jesus, his disciples, his life, his death, his resurrection and his coming again; sum and total, fullstop! As a consequence, any suggestion of investigating Jesus' socio-liberative purposes or the sociopolitical narrative practice of the Evangelists, through the lens of theological hermeneutics has \textit{ipso facto} been viewed as going beyond the pale of conservative orthodoxy.

To propose any such investigation, and the incumbent shock of viewing the sacred text in such an unorthodox manner is right from the start to embroil oneself in knots of uneasy conversation and to place oneself in the position of dubious belief. Plainly, involvement in any such liberative exegesis is to be damned initially, since such activities are bound to be perceived as a threat to "Bible believing", "Gospel preaching"\textsuperscript{46} faith and church life. For too long the

\textsuperscript{45}I am reliant here on Segundo's analysis in op. cit., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{46}These indicated terms should not be thought to be vague in their usage, they are used frequently and with very real emotive intent and theological deliberation by fundamentalist Pastors. And this, so as to distance oneself or one's congregation, or the intention of both, from those "others" who fail to pass the evangelical fundamentalist litmus test. By way of illustration, at Calvary Church in Santa Ana California, a sincere and friendly non denominational 30 odd staffed "mega-church," predictably ideologically aligned and doctrinally in accord with the totalizing American discourse of social formations (on track with Caesaroimperialism), I counted more than a dozen such "differentiating
evangelical fundamentalist schools have foisted misinformed religious education upon their populace, teaching would-be disciples to look to the Epistles as the place where they would learn the substance of Christian obedience. As orthodox evangelicals understood hermeneutics, reading the Gospels on the part of inquiring minds would only provide "descriptive" theological disclosures about Jesus - for the stuff and means of prescriptive theology, i.e., how to live and act as a Christian, the enquirer should turn to Paul. Of such chicanery has been the Christian education of too many in the dominant First World and its attendant Two Thirds World counterparts.

Myers, exposes this flawed manner of hermeneutical reading by way of an imaginative image: he suggests that such exegetes do their work in a way corresponding to "mining for precious metals: the 'gold' of timeless and universal theological principle or churchly dogma is carefully extracted from the 'ore' of historical or social particularities, which are sluiced away." Continuing on, he points out that the effect of such an operation is that the biblical message is "Wrested away from history and practice, the kerygma distinctives" during the then Sr. Pastor's, Dr. David Hocking's appeal and challenge to the world evangelism section of his sermon at Calvary's "50th Annual Missions Celebration Jubilee 2000," 1991. Among many discovered evidences of litmus testing, one humorously came to light when I found in checking out of this mega-church's library a very scantily read copy of Eric Hoffer's The True Believer. Inside the front cover a doctrinal "warning inscription" reads, "In accordance with our Church doctrine, as it appears in the front of our hymnals, we find areas of this book where we do not agree!" The doctrinal formulation found in the front of the hymn book, was based primarily on adherence to the authority of the church leadership.

47 To be clear, my suspicion is that Fundamentalists were suspicious that the Gospels had been sorely invaded by the Higher Critics, and were therefore not safe for the uninitiated - accompanying this suspicion was the apparent certainty that Pauline Scripture was still unsullied, and was therefore "safe". Additionally, see Steven C Knapp, "Let's Look Again", The Other Side, Vol 4, (Dec. 1976), p. 58. He points out that some Dispensationalists: "have gone a step further; they argue that the Pauline Epistles are explicitly for our age in a sense in which the synoptic Gospels aren't" (βασιλεία). It is noted too, that some Liberals made the mistake in the opposite direction: emphasising Jesus' teachings in the Gospels at the expense of Paul's in the Epistles.

48 Concerning the need to dig into the purpose of "the gospel" from the Gospel's see George Beasley-Murray's, Preaching The Gospel From The Gospel's (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 27. In this work (which is dedicated "To the Lay-Preachers of London"), Murray in his concern for the Gospel in all its fullness to be preached from the Gospels, in sermonic form marks: "...they [the Gospel's] deal with the ultimate concerns of God and humanity .... Those who tarry long enough among them will enter into the mystery of the passion of God. Like the transfigured Lord, they will descend to the plain of humanity's need."

thus becomes the domain of abstract thought or 'spiritual' reflection.\textsuperscript{50} In concert with Myers' knowing, the concerns of Belo have relevance at this point. He asks the question \textit{nervus probandi}: "From what standpoint do [conservative] exegetes read? From the standpoint of a text that ever-already refuses the openness of a revolutionised space; from the standpoint of the text of .... dominant ideology."\textsuperscript{51}

Pushing the same sharp point further Belo observes that it is just this kind of "theological ideology that is ever-already at work in bourgeois exegesis," an ideology that persists and insists that Scripture is read from the position, of the "idealist site of interiority" rather than from the materialist "bodily site of exteriority."\textsuperscript{52} Reading the text from the standpoint of idealistic interiority is perilous, warns Belo, since it is, in Mark's theology, the chosen reading site of the "scribes!"\textsuperscript{53} The resultant consequence of this misdemeanour, is that the sociopolitical and historical character of the gospel is stripped away, and the concretely human nature of it is denuded. Being cognisant of this fundamentalist nemesis, Gill remarks, "the problem is that such theology is a betrayal of the gospel and the Gospels". The result of this misinformation has been that:

Almost 60 per cent of the New Testament was reduced to the realm of history and the other 40 per cent made to sound like the work of an English philosopher-theologian giving a series of lectures on theology and ethics. In the whole process, Paul was distorted as Jesus was neglected and the Christian faith was reduced to a lifeless set of ideas and ideals.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Myers, in ibid., p. 9.
\item Belo, ibid., p. 259.
\item Belo, ibid., p. 259.
\end{thebibliography}
One can only wonder about the innocence and continued ideological intention of this pedagogical method. The words of Two Thirds World narrative historian, Eduardo Galeano carry a strange accusation about them when addressed to pedagogues at large; when addressed to theological teachers (bearing in mind the noyading fundamentalists alluded to above), they carry an even more pernicious and baneful tone:

They taught us about the past so that we should resign ourselves with drained consciences to the present: not to make history, which was already made, but to accept it. Poor history had stopped breathing: betrayed in academic texts, lied about in classrooms, drowned in dates, they had imprisoned her in museums and buried her.55

Thankfully, contemporary informed theological and philosophical scholarship is demonstrating through an appreciating apprehension of the biblical texts within their own narrative history and socio-historical worlds, that the Gospels, and the entire sweep of the biblical message, is about much more than so-called orthodox conservative schools ever allowed. Concerning the impoverishment of conservative hermeneutics, in their deployment of "concordism" found in fundamentalist readings of the Bible, that make for "theological reductionism" and the superficializing of the biblical message, Croatto rightly accuses such methods of "restricting [the text] to the level of external fact, and confusing what happens with the meaning of what happens." Under the pretence of "taking the Bible as it is," this practice drains the text of "its kerygmatic content, and any hermeneutic effort of investigation of a deeper meaning of the text becomes superfluous."56

Acceptance of the Gospels and the corpus of Scripture, and the "materiality" of their texts, as texts designated for a particular sociopolitical purpose in which the community of faith was situated - have shown the message of the

55 Eduardo Galeano, Memory of Fire, 1. Genesis, p. xv. In this context a simple transference of Galeano's reference from "poor...buried history" and it's fate, to the dynamic Jesus of History, at the hands of the conservative theological controllers, seems to this writer, to warrant a mention.
gospel to be anything other than dead non-ethical, flat non-interpretive narrative. Wilder makes the point with clarity: "Our visions, stories and utopias are not only aesthetic: they engage us."

The biblical narratives understood as constructed socio-literary works located in ideological engagement against the socio-symbolic universes of their context, rather than merely being objective accounts of who Jesus was (locked in the flat past), tells in the now, as well as then, who Jesus is (alive in our relevant present). And further, they tell us what he now does through faith in him and his continuing liberating practice, how the people of God, ought to respond in fully human ways, in concrete historical circumstance.

c) Adequacy: Ricoeur as Interlocutor

My attempts here at formulating a segue into a principled academic reading strategy are indications; they are set out in the hope that they in their sagacity, will point to a way forward for radical discipleship's implementation, to a praxic reading of the following of Jesus for our time. In saying this, I remain aware that every method has limits (including the preferred choice of this work). Nevertheless, I have confidence that my hermeneutical methodology will enable the reader to appreciate the liberationist perspective of the biblical story, as well as the argument of this work without fear of academic impunity or various misuse of the scriptural text. As indicated in the previous sections, the preferred method of interpretation to be employed in this work is that of liberative-narrative hermeneutics combined with socio-literary criticism. And, as was also enunciated, application of this narrative method cannot be separated from the phenomenology of interpretation as uncovered by Ricoeur.

Here it ought to be noted, however, that the informed hermeneutical opinions of this writer do not relinquish in slavish manner critical reflection concerning Ricoeurian interpretation. This affirmation is necessary, since one cannot but be concerned "if Ricoeur is really speaking of the Bible for the Christian community when he accents its differences rather than its thematic unity." Further criticism of Ricoeur is due when inquiring as to, "What possible benefit to a Christian narrative theology is a hermeneutic that emphasises the Bible's conflicts in style and genre at the expense of its clear and unified depictions of Jesus in the Gospels?" Where adjudged necessary, therefore, other informed hermeneutical methodologies will be drawn upon, thereby adding to Ricoeurian theory my own analysis to the confluence of meaning and implication concerning theological interpretation. This procedure seems quite sensible for these stated reasons, and also because some of Ricoeur's work in the area of narrative hermeneutics are unpublished, or yet to be published. Some of his work is therefore not readily accessible in published form. Plus, as they have been taken up by others, his broad hermeneutical investigations are expansively ongoing in the pursuit of human meaning.

Ricoeur's appealing scholarship for me, however, is found in the manner whereby he demonstrates a way through the extensive hermeneutical problems concerning "meaning," "verification" and "commitment." These issues are foundational to sociopolitical-literary critical issues as they relate to the essential questions of literature and belief systems. The benefit of Ricoeur's research is that he has ascertained that the goal of interpretation is not to be preoccupied with the fruitless pursuit of trying to understand and judge the worthiness of an author's beliefs (i.e., authorial criticism). Ricoeur by his "de-psychologizing" of interpretation, is not wanting to be totally dismissive of

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authorial intention, it has not "lost all significance." Nonetheless, he is in agreement with Wimsatt in denouncing the so-called "intentional fallacy," that is, an interpretative method that maintains that: "All valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition of what an author meant." Ricoeur identifies the problem with authorial criticism as having to do with a distinct disadvantage: "the author is not available for questioning." Further he remarks: "the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author." Here as Ricoeur acknowledges in "From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language" he is selectively building on Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" (Horizontverschmelzung). Whereby from this principle, as reading takes place, a mutual relationship is occasioned between the horizon of the text and that of the interpreter. And by way of releasing the biblical message into our horizon of meaning, he rightly adduces that what the text says "now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its proceedings within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its

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64 Barth also denied authorial intention its hermeneutical right, see Wallace, op., cit., pp. 11 and 21; cf., Barth Church Dogmatics, Vol. 1/2, pp. 464-465. As he puts it: "My exposition cannot possibly consist in an interpretation of the speaker." see p. 464.  
65 Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 30.  
67 See Hans-Georg Gadamer Truth and Method (New York: Seabury, 1975). For an analysis of Gadamer, see, A. C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980). Croatto, in positing that "the Bible is an open text" also shapes his hermeneutical principal of, "the forward of the text" from Gadamer's findings concerning the "fusion of horizons." See J. Severino Croatto, Biblical Hermeneutics (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), pp. 50-51. Whilst Ricoeur utilises many of Gadamer's concepts, he is suspicious of separating method and truth, as proposed by Gadamer, he states that he wants to "resist the temptation to separate truth, characteristic of understanding, from the method put into operation by disciplines which have sprung from exegesis." And this so as to not neglect the conflict of interpretations within which we ascertain the schema of being that we seek to understand. See Ricoeur cited in John B. Thompson, Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the human sciences (Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 19.
moorings to the psychology of its author. Such a conviction holds that whatever the deliberate intention of the author was, now different levels (different horizons) of meaning become apparent, because they are free from the author's original trammelled notion. And as such, they are powerful in their address to the world of the reader.

Having arrived at and being equipped with this comprehension, our task, is to "explicate the 'world of the text.'" Thus we are to come to grips with a possible "world" that enables us to find meaning; a meaning that is opened out before us in the discourse of text and event. To this end, Ricoeur states:

"Thanks to writing, humanity and only humanity has a world and not just a situation.... In the same manner that the text frees its meaning from the tutelage of the mental intention, it frees its reference from the limits of situational reference. For us, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by the texts."

This possible "world" is reached through a procedure that has three stages, each of which is a reconstruing of one of these three seminal interpretative issues. Understanding of the first stage involves not the determining of the beliefs embodied in the text-event, but rather an understanding of the text-event's meaningfulness. Resultantly, an interpretation of the possible "world" emanating out of the text-event is reached. Thus our comprehension of a text must go beyond analytical observation and seek to grasp "the world" that the text-event discloses. Of this "world", Ricoeur says: "Is not the force of this projected world a force of rupture and of opening?" Continuing this aperture he asks, "must we not say that what is thus opened up in everyday reality is another reality, the reality of the possible?" Theologically he explains that this means, " 'the reign of God is coming'; that is, it appeals to our utmost

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90 Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 36, my emphasis.
possibilities, beginning with the very meaning of this reign, which does not come from us." 71 What does not come from us, *comes to us*. This is the transformative power of the reign's discourse, the push of "another reality" driving us with the possibility of its reality in our everyday. From the forceful meaning of the text, we are thus addressed. This is because: "Writing brings *distantiation* which detaches the message from its speaker, and thanks to writing, the speech reaches all the way to us." 72

Having been directed away from authorial ideas, interpretative focus is thereupon free to be brought to bear through "distantiation" into a situation where the text "decontextualises" itself from its socio-historical conditions of production, thereby opening itself to "the mode of being-in-the-world displayed by the text, before the text, and not behind the text." 73 Thus, the biblical text is emancipated into an ever-unfolding contemporary interpretation concerning the sociopolitical and literary purposes of the texts and their episodic events. Herein radical discipleship is given vindication in its Word and world interrogations concerning the liberative necessity of meaning accorded its affirmations in the following of Jesus in present-day historical circumstance.

"Verification," which is the second stage, involves the hermeneutist in two steps. The first step involves the work of testing the adequacy of the construal of the text-event. This engagement treats the sketch of the event-fullness of the text's overall meaningfulness as was developed in the first stage. Attention is particularly focused by this exercise on the "polysemous meaning" - the multitude of meanings - discovered in the text-events in order to demonstrate how they may all be covered by the proposed overall possible "world." The interpreter is here concerned with a "meaning surplus" of the text-events which is similar to that which occasions symbolic proportion: this being the

71 Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 161.
72 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 157.
case Bliecher explains that "they always contain more meaning than they express verbally, they give rise to a continued production of new statements and therefore necessitate an interpretative endeavour which is directed at the existential, spiritual meaning underlying their literal ... sense."74

The second step in this regard, involves an ascertaining concerning the appropriateness of the event-fullness of the text's possible "world" for the hermeneutist's task. Stage three, as pertaining to "commitment," has to do with one's actual appropriation of the text-events as they reference at a profound level what Husserl designated as a "life-world" (Lebenswelt) and Heidegger indicated by his term "being-in-the-world" (in-der-Welt-Sein). Thus this third engagement relates to and negotiates a way of "being" in relation to "commitment" to the text-events. "This implies that the reader does not submit the meaning of the text to his or her own finite capacity of understanding, but that they let themselves be exposed to the text, in order to receive from it a Self."75

Ricoeur's interpretation theory is set apart from, and obviated from the guilt of the unyielding appetite of the subjective "crisis of cognitive-claims," and those of objectivistic "self-indulgence" at the expense of the text's meaning. He is most clear about this relinquishment of subjectivity as the precondition that enables the ultimate expansion of consciousness subordinate to the guidance of the text. In a seminal statement he remarks: "By Self I mean a non-egoistic, non-imperialistic mode of subjectivity which corresponds and responds to the power of a work to display a world."76

Hereby then is found the impetus of the liberative world of the biblical narratives (what I have called "liberative-narrative") let loose into our ontic

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73 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 162.
75 Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 162. Ricoeur's sentence, "The Self is the correlate of the 'thing' of the text." See ibid., p. 162, is forthwith effusively directed to the phenotypes, Rowley, Lejeune and Prof. Bill Herzog, concerning the place of the "thing."
and political world of imperial dominance, a world which is suffering from the occupation of illegitimate and fictive story lines; a world driven by graphic expressions of egotheism. The hermeneutical dictate concerning the liberative character of biblical narrativity is of no minor importance to Ricoeurian interpretation theory; it is maximal. "This way of tying together the narrative dimension and the kerygmatic dimension is, for [hermeneutics] of the greatest importance." Here I would maintain that I do the meaning and intention of Ricoeur's argument no wrong by insisting that the hermeneutical methodology that I have adopted, that of liberative-narrative, sits well within his hermeneutical insistence. As he avers: "Not just any theology whatever can be tied to the narrative form, but only a theology which proclaims Yahweh to be the grand Actor in a history of deliverance." Adumbrated by another name, what Ricoeur is speaking of here is, "liberative-narrative.

By his metier regarding the phenomenology of interpretation, Ricoeur has distanced the science of hermeneutics from the captivity of imperialistic epistemology, and the paralyzing grip of detached bourgeois production and ownership - thereby releasing it to historic liberative-narrative meaning and usage. As Thompson notes: "History and narrativity, narrative and historicity: such are the main axes of the hermeneutical problem in the current writings of Ricoeur." As such therefore, Ricoeur's interpretation theory has demonstrable relevance concerning the "life-world" of radical discipleship. And by satisfying the hermeneutical criteria of scientificity concerning liberative-narrative, it is opened up as capable reading method. More exactly then, by virtue of Ricoeurian interpretation theory, liberative-narrative as a methodology finds warrant and aegis, and becomes effective as a viable reading strategy for investigating radical discipleship's contemporary meaning and purpose.

76 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 162.
77 Ricoeur, ibid., pp. 158-159.
78 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 159.
79 John B. Thompson, op. cit., p. 25.
Liberative-narrative theology encourages and promises a form of interpretation theory that integrates literary imagination, historical realism, philosophical sensitivity, and sociopolitical insight. From genres woven deeply into the fabric of sacred Hebrew and Christian literature, liberative-narrative methodology acts to release discipleship's meaningful and purposive perspective. The Bible's text sets us free to hear, and in hearing, never to discount what Caesaroimperialism orders us not to hear or remember. "Remember Me" in all of life, particularly in those broken by life, says the Christ of the biblical text, un-remember, dis-member, says the system's discourse. Against this perversity, liberative narratives occasion the untaming of the text, keeping it dangerous and subversive of our middle-class narcissism. In this capacity it acts to save the Bible from the vertigo that we face in the endless speculative proposals of interpretative theoreticians. It presents with dialectical vigour a critical style to the traditional disciplines of biblical interpretation, and as we have ascertained, it challenges the consensus formation of objectivist scientific exegesis. It insists that the propositional statements derived from the discipline of detached biblical criticism, must be as McClendon has stated,

in continual and intimate contact with the lived experience which the propositional doctrine by turns collects, orders and informs. Without such living contact, theological doctrine readily becomes (in a pejorative sense) objective - remote from actual Christian life, a set of empty propositions more suited to attacking rival theologians than to informing the church of God. With this living contact, theology may develop its propositions in the confidence that their meaning is exemplified in contemporary Christian experience.\(^{80}\)

McFague makes a similar case in order to bridge the gap between theology and personal meaningful experience. Her comment pertaining to the New

Testament has a wider reach in that its reasoning applies to the entirety of the biblical enterprise, "the parables of the New Testament, the passion story, and Paul's writings are not ideas to which a spectator must somehow relate him or herself, but stories of men and women whose lives are one with their thought." Her argument here is that if hermeneutical enquiry were to view such "genres" as creative alphas of theology, then whatever else theology comes to stand for, it does not stand for the abstract, it is not something unimaginable, or unrelated to or, "apart from my life, your life, or the life of our contemporary society. It is fearfully personal, which is to say, of course, fearfully social as well, for stories are always about persons in relation to their world." 

By what they do biblical stories open up a flow of personal meaning into each of our lives; by their form a way is found to explore the human adventure and the vital claims that God lays upon us. True stories help us to hear what we must hear, or must discount, they are powerfully vivifying, exposing life in all its frightful detail and in all its wondrous rapture. Against bland form, true stories work on us in double fashion, they simultaneously batter us and help us see with clearer reality. Narrative produces effects in our world of meaning, as such: "Story establishes world in myth, defends such established world in apologue, discusses and describes world in action, attacks world in satire, and subverts world in parable." Through stories we seek to understand what we are and what we can become, to grapple with the measure of our human existence, with that which Joyce has called a "parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity." And in the midst of our "infinitesimal" opportunity, and the "brevity" of our existence, to strive throughout the biography of our lives to understand enough of God so as to savour the richness and the wonder of our

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82 McFague, ibid., p. 2.
interrelatedness with the creation and all living things. So that in the grandeur, the confusions and horrors and joys of life we develop a way of seeing, of anticipatory reading, of exploring the contours of human biography, and in the doing to know and to strive to know the preciousness of our true selves as the insatiable Lover meant us to be. As McFague says, God's truth "being personal in this way means also that theology is radically concrete, for there is no such thing as 'a person in general.'"\(^\text{85}\)

**a) Story as Truth Present in Our Midst**

Few I think argue the case against the text-event as being that which is locked off in some "impersonalized space" away from the address of our humanity, as profoundly as does Ricoeur's work. Against this malady, he states his intention as seeking to show "why it is necessary to renounce the chimera of a philosophy without presuppositions and begin from a 'full' language."\(^\text{86}\) By the term "full language," Ricoeur means a language oriented by the universe of symbols, which come to us from our particular cultural memory. This cultural memory acts on us all as a "neo-past" and saves us from speaking from nowhere - we are "situated". "More precisely, the 'encounter' of the Jewish source with the Greek origin is the fundamental intersection that founds our culture."\(^\text{87}\) Speaking about this occurrence, that nobody from "the categories of our ontology" - shaped from Greek and Hebrew thought - can escape the "contingent constitution of our [cultural] memory," he says "it is always in the midst of contingency that rational sequences must be detected."\(^\text{88}\) Sharpening his point through sarcasm Ricoeur states:

> Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated 'objectivity' would at the most know everything, but would understand

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\(^\text{85}\) McFague, op. cit., p. 2.
\(^\text{87}\) Ricoeur, ibid., pp. 20-21.
\(^\text{88}\) Ricoeur, ibid., pp. 23-24.
nothing. In truth, they would seek nothing, not being motivated by concern about any question. 89

In their criticisms regarding the restrictive elements of dominant hermeneutics, the acumen of McFague and Ricoeur et al., makes room for a more comprehensive appreciation of how biblical narrative and discourse "live" in the faith journey of those who seek to follow the liberative script of God's willing. As Wilder puts it:

Perhaps the special character of the stories of the New Testament lies in the fact that they are not told for themselves, that they are not only about other people, but that they are about us. They locate us in the very midst of the great story and plot of all time and space, and therefore relate us to the great dramatist and story-teller, God's own self. 90

At the place of this relational intersection, faithful and fateful stories mean that belief in a loving saving God (despite theodicy's void) and in humanity's humanising purposes (despite dreadful contradictory evidence), is still possible. It may be that haunted by the frightful details of Hitlerian and Stalinistic pogroms that occurred in Burma, in East Timor, in Guatemala, in the Serbian "ethnic cleansing" concentration camps of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the horror zones of Somalia and Rwanda, we by the gift of truth's narrativity, may become like Bellow's character, Artur Sammler. That is, a narrator disabled in the left eye, smashed by the blow of a rifle butt, which "distinguished only light and shade," but enabled in the right eye, "dark-bright" with truth to look into the horror and to hope with sharp observation. 91 Narrative that carries the hope of the better and of deliverance, empowers us to see further and deeper than ordinary sight allows. Liberative-narratives come from one-eyed seers, possessed of a knowledge beyond themselves;

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89 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 24.
haunted by the sanctity of "holy madness," and pushed by a belief in "hope against hope" that endures regardless of how perverse human beings can be, convinced that no matter what, truth must be told because they are aware of a knowing that blessedness will come, that evil will not prevail, and that good will survive.

Liberative narratives, framed by those driven to the limits of their spiritual and moral powers for "one has to be mad today to believe in God and humanity," are indeed like Sammler, one-eyed seers many of whom from their staring at the consument pain that is both God and humanity, have become "maimed into truth." To look at the world's lexicon of horrors through their eyes may indeed mean that we run the risk of seeing more than we wish to see (or feel) by their disfigured vision, but to shield our judgements and responsibilities from the realities they have seen is "to court blindness altogether." To escape sight's absence and to face life with godly reality is to heed what Stringfellow with prophetic exactitude used to teach us: "In the face of death, live humanly, in the midst of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst Babel, speak the-truth."

In our world surrounded by the inversion of biblical values, where expendable minorities are blamed with the guilt of their existence, it is through history's narrative truth-tellers that God calls us to remember that our diminished humanity is inextricably connected to all innocent victims. The biblical God of passion and deliverance proposes to save us from all forms of cruel paradox where innocence and evil are promiscuously conglomerated, where:

slave camps under the flag of freedom, massacres justified by philanthropy or by a taste for the superhuman, in one sense cripple

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93 Wiesel, ibid., p. 79.
95 Rosenfeld, ibid., p. 26.
judgement. On the day when crime dons the apparel of innocence - through a curious transposition peculiar to our times - it is innocence that is called upon to justify itself.\textsuperscript{96}

Faced with the continuance of this consternation the justification of our human survival becomes contingent upon our noncompliance with the infrastructures of death, and our continuing refusal to give our allegiance to those fictive legitimating discourses that justify the meaningless of minority extinction. Therefore unless our hermeneutics liberate us from the failure of remembering, towards a "re-membering" of those handed over to death, and a ruthless honesty concerning our complicity in their killing, and a radical determination to stand in the way of the history of atrocity in our time, then all our theology is vain effort, futile gesture done in the name of God who does not care, amounting only to impotent empty words and an untrue story. We must like Metz, recognise that the "narrative and memory" aspects of the concept of God "are not added as an ornament to a 'pure' idea of God," but that "practical fundamental theology" in affirming "humanity's ability to be a subject" adduces that theology by asserting "memory and narrative as categories of salvation" are "dangerous," because they act to give continuing meaningful identity to persons now or in the future who have suffered at the hands of "any form of suppression or institutionalised hatred."\textsuperscript{97}

Narratives concerning the memory of suffering attuned to the exigencies of historical consciousness act salvifically to challenge the chosen societal blindness of the safe dominant classes, and to affirm the identity of all those who cry out against the injustice of their end - "identity is formed when memory is aroused."\textsuperscript{98} It is necessary for us to draw upon Metz's formulations in that, "the concept of God is basically narrative and memorative" and as such provides a way beyond "transcendental-idealistic theology" into realising our

\textsuperscript{98} Metz, ibid., pp. 50-51; 65-70.
responsibility, and the responsibility of God, in our attempts to express in "history and society" the extremity of hope and deliverance that stands at the heart of the vision of God's reign. Because "those who don't suffer refuse to hear about suffering," we must with earnest deliberation by liberative narratives, remember the lost (the lost of both then and now). Our humanity and our theology are dependent upon our remembering the collective catastrophe of the lost, and our standing in the way of all interpretations that preclude what dangerous remembering means. For the sake of our sanity, and for our sanctity, we must not let our biography be "storied". Without the dreadful truth of what our humanity sanctions - there can be in the anatomy of our ontic selves no vacillation here. As Wiesel reminds us: "We cannot forget. The images are there in front of our eyes. Even if our eyes were no longer there, the images would remain." By remembering, the door is kept open that links past to present.

Any form of scriptural interpretation that locks faith's liberating impulse primarily in the dispassionate past is undeniably pessimistic about God's present historical opportunities. The allowing of the biblical text-events to confront "us" and include us in their "now," acts to save them from becoming fossil language, a mere trafficking in muted words and lost episodes. The Scriptures accordingly freight a narratively meaningful past that becomes alive and illuminating of our present. And the new possibilities of God's reign advance into our time for the fulfilling of personal and social transformation. Through the hermeneutic of liberative-narrative the text is revoiced, and theology is enlivened by the literary genres of poem, story and autobiography, and so on. Having decidedly turned to the text-events as alphas of self and social meaning and thereby seeking insights about life's better meaning, we find ourselves ineluctably drawn by liberative narratology further and further into the space where the text-events speak. And Jesus' story as the kingdom

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99 See Metz, ibid., pp. 51 and 66.
100 Wiesel, op. cit., p. 169.
agitator, the messenger of God's gracious self revelation, becomes even more clearly an enduring reference to the divine intention - to that bidding that ever invites us to follow with might and main resolve.

It ought to be noted in passing, that at least one of the resources for the making of what is now known as narrative criticism was referred to by Barth. In his exposition on the perfections of God it is clear that he uses a linguistic pattern quite similar to that which is found in novels. In "Church Dogmatics, II/1," treating "The Reality of God", Barth recounts biblical stories-about God, and on the basis of these stories he fashions theological statements about God's properties. "According to Karl Barth to disregard the way narratives determine one's understanding of the properties of God is to engage in a study of something other than the 'reality of God'." Theologians, according to Barth's contention, have continuously miscalculated in their expositions of the divine perfections because they "have derived their ideas of God's properties from starting points other than the biblical narratives which recount God's deeds." Barth's concern in his description of attributes made for the selection of

scriptural stories of what God has done, especially the narrative of what God has done to Jesus Christ, to determine his use of terms. A careful reading of Barth's account on the holiness of God concretises his critique of a certain kind of theological method, and illumines a function of narratives in his programme.\(^\text{102}\)

Notwithstanding Barth's use of narratives in order to explore the attributes of God and personalised human connection, it has to be admitted as McClendon has pointed out that for Barth self-ingratiating "'religious experience' remained for him a red flag of warning."\(^\text{103}\) Although Barth's energies at this point were

directed to defending the unqualified deity of God, no sustained argument could be made to support that such a posture precluded him from strongly advocating the "free course" of the Word.\textsuperscript{104} Nor yet from criticising those who approached Scripture without a lively understanding of its theonomous ability to engage us and take us into the domain of its control.\textsuperscript{105}

b) Narrative as Vulnerability Agent and Meaningful Intrusion

Liberative-narrative method is a form of biblical study keenly aware of the multitudinous ways in which hermeneutists have attempted to escape what Frei has called "the plain sense" of Scripture, leaving untouched the value systems of the interpreter.\textsuperscript{106} Hermeneutical criticism of this sort allows a reading of the text-events to be evaluative of something, but in no way an evaluation of consequence - since the text has been kept at arm's length from the life-world of the interpreter. Liberative-narrative seeks to foster a reading method beyond the prerogative of the "papacy of scholars," wanting to join the best that scholarship has discovered from the biblical text to the concerns of the believing community.\textsuperscript{107}

If liberative-narrative criticism seems in many cases to be deeply critical of traditional scholarship's endless intellectualisms and of dry academic curriculum, it would be incorrect to represent this as if it were somehow a comprehensive denouncement of those scholastic efforts that provide reliable guidance in the discernment needed to ascertain the necessary perspectives from which the essential liberativeness of the text-events are to be read. On the contrary, liberative narratology following the germinal events of the faith, arguably has a greater claim to the employment of the canons of traditional

\textsuperscript{104} See Karl Barth, \textit{The Epistle To The Romans} (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 32.
\textsuperscript{105} See Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} Vol. 1/2, pp. 883-884.
\textsuperscript{106} See Kathryn E. Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," in Garret Green, \textit{Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 59-78.
method. This is because it joins in thought and practise an interpretative strategy that lies solidly in the direction of the biblical text's overall meaning. Effective use of liberative-narrative method necessarily requires informed knowledge of the sociopolitical and historical circumstances assumed by the narrative episodes. The believing community has always to be not only preoccupied with the contemporary intercourse of the biblical stories, but also always in the scientific historical significance of their construction. Therefore, rather than seeing to the ejection of the disciplines of traditional biblical science, liberative narratology pursues the hope that by its contribution it will enable dominant theology to look from under its iron lids and see beyond its intellectual deflections so as to fill the postponed expectation of our blighted world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill.

Considering the horizontal effects of arid theology McAfee Brown advances that we renovate the great themes of classical Christianity (as do theologians like Elsa Tamez, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Djiniyini Gondarra, Jorge Pixley, Suliana Siwatibau, Walter Brueggemann et al.,) by returning to their root meaning, "whittling away the safe, tame, comfortable bourgeois efflorescence we have cultivated around them." The radicalising of theology's theory-formation will ensure that "the great Christian affirmations themselves are liberated from our bourgeois grasp, and we are forced to look once again at them in their original and naked and alarming power."108

Until this essential exposure occurs, Scripture's mandates continue not to be significantly identified or applied to the elements of the human condition in our time. This predicament has left many pastors and multitudinous church people (or marginalized would-be churchgoers) in negative space, unable to hear in realistic terms or engaging style the liberative content of the Word of God. The "way" of liberative scripting, in diffidence to the way of detached

esoteric scholarship (or preaching) is the way of story, of metaphor and parable, and as such relates to the happenstance of the believing community, to the positive space of the "ordinary, contemporary, and imagistic."\textsuperscript{109} In this capacity, theology is given a form of exegesis capable of bringing the reader to the place of vulnerability concerning Scripture's meaning with the hope that in the process, the ardent enquirer will be carried beyond the "human standpoints". Into what Barth called "the standpoint of God."\textsuperscript{110} Into that Spirit conspired place where the Bible's meaning makes the macro and micro connections, and delivers beyond limp measures of compromise, revelatory empowerment into the ranks of the people of God.

Anyone, who has read or listened to narratized forms of scriptural inspirations packed full of outraged disdain concerning religio-political sham, nationalistic idolatry, coupled with a fervent love of biblical justice. And this together with a commitment to understand life in congruence with biblical meaning and hope over against all forms of injustice, put together with acidulous comedy, wire-drawn suspense, and taut style concerning history's drama and faith's response. From the likes of William Stringfellow, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Elizabeth McAlister or Philip or Daniel Berrigan, knows the truth of what is betokened here. Aware of the intense and searching biblical hermeneutics of meaning, what he calls "incarnational hermeneutics" arising out of the discourse and liberative narratology of the underground faculty listed above, Lehmann pays numerous tributes to their brood (recognition is registered here also concerning the countless other "non-tenured" underground faculty of the Two Thirds World). Lehmann gives high praise to their "poetic and paradigmatic reading of the Bible and its implications." Expressing as he does "deep admiration" for the "incandescent integrity" of Daniel Berrigan's witness and the biblical practice of his "humanism of the Incarnation" as one example on behalf of all those

\textsuperscript{109} McFague op cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{110} See Karl Barth, \textit{The Epistle To The Romans} (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 45.
committed to "sacramental participation in the biblical life-style." Lehmann's laudation of these practitioners of truth concludes with thanks concerning their commitment to the script of biblical radicalism and "dedication to the reclaiming of the human in and for us all." 111

Beyond the hackneyed forms of mediocre interpretation, and the bleary functions of conformist religiosity, the exigency of the liberative-narrative form of the Bible's discourse must be allowed to work its own "holy wholeness" 112 upon us. It is in becoming open to the Bible's storied world of realistic and figural readings of times past and times-present, that the reader is caught up and incorporated, and connected into the world of meaning, and the re-reading of contemporary human existence emanating out of and made accessible by biblical narration. Thus, those convinced of a liberative narrativity in their style and practice of theology, stress that if we would learn how theology must be done in our time, we should take our cues from the biblical code of story, and parable and related genres, which, to take up McFague's phrase keeps "in solution" the language, belief, and life to which the gospel calls the church and world. 113 So stated, liberative-narrative theology allows the text-events to be re-voiced and allowed to be meaningfully read against reflective obsolescence.

c) Narrative's Truth free from Manipulation and open to Engagement.

Underscored here is what has been all the while implied. That is, that narrative interpretation "need not repudiate and should not ignore the

112 I am indebted to Doty for his employment of this expression out of his reading of Susan Sontag. See William G. Doty, Contemporary New Testament Interpretation (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 32.
propositional statement of theological doctrine." Not only does this need to be continually affirmed, as has been maintained, but thoughtfully indicated: liberative-narrative theology would cease to be a viable hermeneutic without the guidelines and science of the historical grammatical method. So long as this exercise accompanies liberative narratology as a prolegomenon towards a fuller scriptural understanding, it can be hoped that greater dependence will be placed on the biblical narratives and literary genres in shaping the Gospel enterprise.

This is a preferred and informed scientized hermeneutical methodology. With this critical methodological apparatus in position we are in that place that allows us to be saved from becoming "self-grounded" - to use Barth's term. Self-grounded interpretation is that hermeneutical movement when at will, our determinative wills act to import subjectivist and false interpretations into the Bible. That interpretative position in which we could in non-scientized fashion manipulate the Scripture to reflect and reinforce our particular comfort-oriented points of view. Scientized hermeneutical methodology enables us to be free from this regrettable position.

In our day of soft religiosity, it has become vogue to displace the directness of the biblical message as it addresses our dark complicity with the powers. This is deemed preferable rather than face the correspondence of the powers persuasion over our interpretative judgements. That attention needs to be drawn to this temptation concerning our accommodating subjectivism, is all the more heightened because of our bourgeois milieu and the accompanying influence of "mellow speak." Warnings must be sounded loudly here lest the Bible be given over to fabricated self-serving exegesis, i.e., "If it feels comfortable its OK." "If it doesn't feel comfortable look for a scriptural text (or interpretation) that does!" Cognitive expediency of this sort, born of self-advantageous motives making for a "religion of OK relationships," needs not

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114 McClendon, op., cit., p. 178.
only the guardian of the positive criteria of disciplined scientific method. But also the Gospel's constant radicalising message to unreservedly follow not our embedded inclinations, nor our religious messianism, but Jesus Christ the Lord of the church.

Vigilance concerning Scripture's purpose as it pertains to radical discipleship means that liberative-narrative theology can give greater clarity to the content of costly grace. Without this twin concern for academic discipline and biblical mandate, biblical interpreters could find themselves in what some of us in Australia have in light of our biography come to call "hormonal discipleship," or more suitably termed in some First World zones, "I don't feel comfortable with it discipleship." These warnings and seductions being heeded, it becomes necessary to stress that liberative-narrative theology does and must addresses us at a "feeling" or "emotional" level. Its methodology not only involves recognition and appreciation of what is actually present in the world opened up by the text. But as Buechner counsels, good interpretation does bears witness to the register of our truth-telling emotions.\textsuperscript{115}

This is possible because the focus of liberative-narrative methodology affirms the need to re-read the text existentially. And by so doing (despite its "uncomfortableness"), it lets the text's story line impinge upon our story. Thus, we become interlocutors, becoming drawn as earnest enquirers into an inner relationship with the story line of the text-event. Even though the point of the story, stated or implied, may be contrary to our personal conclusions about reality, it enlarges our own sense of human possibility. Once this movement takes place the reader, hearer, preacher, story-teller, is caught up into the element of surprise (the "like," the "unlike") and opened up to nuances of meaning as the biblical story gets loose among the stuff of our life and world. As this happens it then becomes wonderfully possible for us to hear

\textsuperscript{115} See Frederick Buechner, \textit{Telling The Truth} (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 5. I am primarily concerned here with his use of Shakespeare's emotive truth-telling against what we probably
the biblical story with a "second naïveté." Consequently, we are drawn into that "world where reality becomes transparent to a reality realer still." The transformative potential of the text-events becomes possible, and we are spoken to in a way wherein we cannot avoid hearing for ourselves. This is the power of word-events, because although there are times when they can shield us from reality, at other times they assail us with it.

Once this happens theology becomes much more than a mere reflecting on the sacred text with little or no relevance to the human predicament - leaving the Scripture opaque to our life concerns - rather we are grasped (sometimes gasped!) as the story is loosed from outmoded model-setting periods of history into our living script. It becomes as it touches our story, that agent which enables us to position ourselves critically toward our own script and history. In this interchange and tension between the text-event and ourselves, we experience as McAfee Brown explains, "an ongoing 'circulation' from text to self to text again, from past historical context to present historical context and back again." This dynamic circulation is "between the text in its historicity and our own historical reading of it." Opening us up as it does, liberative-narrative addresses our securities and pretensions. Moreover, it confronts our reputations, our life expectations. As it does so our hope is that maybe we will hear a word spoken to illumine, not just our intellect, but a word to our lives, a warm life-giving word. As Ricoeur adduces, "In this reconversion to word, I recognise something revealing that is not frozen in any ultimate or immutable text."
For too long flat biblical interpretation has been without the corrective edge of a lively liberative narrativity which, when applied, enables our hermeneutics to stand on the twin pillars of "then" (the theology found in the Bible) and "now" (a theology based on the Bible). Liberative-narrative theology as a critical tool of literary genres has that unique ability to quarry out that which cannot fully enter discursive language; it gestures in the direction of the story's meaning, but will not allow the story to be captured by that to which it points - to the purposes of God's willing. It is this confrontative potency of liberative-narrativity that makes it prickly for status quo biblical interpreters, and the eliciting agent of liberating praxis for those who strive for a more equitable future for humanity. This obligation of praxis, issuing out of the story as it intersects our story, existentially keeps our thinking confronted with our contemporary "life-world," to use Habermas' term. The world that is accosted is the real, our "social life-world," it is not some "worldless universe" but a real feeling world:

the world in which humans are born and live and finally die; the world in which they love and hate, in which they experience triumph and humiliation, hope and despair; the world of sufferings and enjoyments, of madness and common sense, of silliness, cunning and wisdom; the world of social pressures and individual impulses, of reason against passion, of instincts and conventions, of shared language and unsharable feelings and sensations.

d) The Self and the Text Interacting

Here we note that, as confrontation happens, the text-event's story becomes all the more virtual, since it speaks to us in the real, where we live, "our" Sitz im leben (life-setting), the place of our life alignment, the place of motivation concerning our innermost selves, the space in which our "selves" take shape.

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121 See Doty in op cit., pp. 146-147.
122 Jürgen Habermas, Toward A Rational Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 51. This term Habermas has derived from Husserl's use of it.
Thus in actualising Ricoeurian terms: "The Self is the correlate of the 'thing' of the text."\(^{124}\)

From a different angle, Ebeling's observation becomes relevant, which we may overwrite as saying that in response to the "polysemous meaning" of the text the responsibility of every biblical interpreter is "the obligation to keep my thinking in agreement with my reality."\(^{125}\) Furthermore, this obligative ontic necessity is ever-recurring as prior intellectual and political commitments and responsibilities interact with the "world" of the text. For there is a dynamic interplay (as Bultmann has shown) between the self of the interpreter as the interpreter questions the text concerning its understanding of human existence in the world, and as the interpreter in turn is questioned by the claims of the text's polysemous meaning concerning the questions of human existence in the world. "The presupposition for any genuine interpretation" of a text, following Bultmann's perception, is the "living relationship" between the interpreter and the understanding of human actuality "being expressed directly or indirectly by the text." From this living relationship the text and interpreter are bound together as necessary components to hermeneutics; without this interaction, "inquiry and understanding are not possible." Thus the interpreter as the subject interrogates the text, correspondingly "in the interrogation of a text the interpreter must allow him or herself to be interrogated by the text, they must listen to its claims."\(^{126}\)

Here questions arise. What are we in our life situation to make of these claims, or we might ask, what is the response of our "self" to the world of the

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\(^{124}\) Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 162. There seems to be some building here on the part of Ricoeur from Bultmann's observation concerning textual interpretation and "the problems connected with an understanding of 'being,' and so of the 'self.'" See "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in Essays Philosophical And Theological (London: SCM, 1955), p. 246.


biblical text - as we listen, what is the Self that is ontically received as the thing of the text? In the confrontation of our situated self, in our life alignment, which as we have learned sets up a living relationship between the interpreter and the text-world, we must always be mindful as Bultmann seminally remarks that "every interpretation is guided by a particular purpose."127 What particular purpose then do we as Selves in our striving to keep our thinking in agreement with our reality, bring to the text? Is not our dominant reality relative to our sociopolitical life alignment; is it not therefore part of the "particular purpose" we bring to the interpretative act? Bultmann regretfully does not sufficiently stress the fact that the self-identity that we bring to the text is inclusive of micro and macro sociopolitical position and preference. It follows also that we must take seriously the choices and ideological biases we freight; they are very definitely inclusive of what guides our "particular purpose" concerning our hermeneutical search. Bultmann's approach to hermeneutics (in this place) being too abstract, is too existentially personalistic and too unconcerned about the structures of injustice pertaining to the questions of human existence in the world. Consequently, we are herein confronted with an occasion of inadequate theology that brilliant people do.

**e) Interpretative Determinates**

Along this same line of critical thinking, if I am as an interpreter to keep my thinking in agreement with my reality, what of my praxis concerning the political structures of human existence? If my dominant reality is guided by a particular purpose in the interpretative act, what should be my interpretative posture. If both my thinking and my praxis are determined by the biblical script's disclosure of God (as we have previously noted from Ricoeur), who is "the grand Actor in a history of deliverance?"128 Biblical theology's reality, its dominant reality, as the particular purpose that it brings to the hermeneutical

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128 Bultmann, op. cit., p. 241, my emphasis.
task must contain a continuing corrective component of commitment to a belief in the God of liberation. This is because the Exodus narrative is a vivid example of the biblical narrative as a whole, a narrative impetus that has as its central thesis that the revelation of God in history eluctably declares as a basic germinal event of faith that the divine is salvifically involved in the liberation of the oppressed.

As we probe the Scripture, we must be questioned by the constitutive elements of this revelation. For "hermeneutics reminds us that biblical faith cannot be separated from the movement of interpretation." What we do as interpreters we do in the train of those in Scripture. Those who brought to their hermeneutical outlook guided by their particular purpose, an ever present (and often denied) matrix of reality that sought to strike up a living relationship with the biblical scripting. An axiology that testified to the salvific and liberating purposes of Yahweh declared to us in and through the exodus event and the resurrection of the crucified One. We do indeed do our interpretation "guided by a particular purpose." Our resolve is to uncover and to be interrogated by the Bible's particular purpose. As Ricoeur states: "If the Bible can be said to be revealed, this ought to be said of the 'issue' of which it speaks: the new being which is displayed there. Revelation is the trait of the biblical world." Catechised by this "revelation," we do our theology from this reality (if it is any other it is not biblical). Our theological purpose must be one that seeks to be fully cognisant of the divine reality's redemptive intersection on behalf of the new being as disclosed in the "constantly renewed interpretation of sign events reported by the Scriptures, such as the exodus of the Old Testament and the resurrection in the New Testament." These "events of deliverance" as Ricoeur calls them are the criteria, the dominant realities emanating out of the biblical text-events that are seminal to the

\[\text{References:}\]
\[\text{Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 159.}\]
\[\text{Ricoeur, ibid., p. 164.}\]
\[\text{Ricoeur, ibid., p. 164.}\]
\[\text{Ricoeur, ibid., pp. 160-161.}\]
Bible's hermeneutic. As it from its scripting probes us as interpreters, as it is
guided by its particular purpose - its endemic hermeneutic concerning human
existence.

As I have continually maintained, the sacred text is always vulnerable to the
disposition of an interpreter. This is true: but from this actuality it cannot be
extrapolated that, since the Bible can be utilised to say anything, it is never of
itself left with nothing liberative to say. Jameson maintains that, although
interpretive incursions constantly rage against each other's options concerning
world and human exegesis, the Chinese proverb is correct when it observes
that, "you use one axe handle to hew another: in our context, only another,
stronger interpretation can overthrow and practically refute an interpretation
already in place."132 Overall the assertion holds true that the Bible itself
contains an interpretative purpose that constantly prevails in its cutting down
of legitimating fictions put in place by the Caesaristic brokers of this world
order. The implication here is that liberative-narrative serves as the relatively
adequate expression and norm for God's self-manifestation. If liberative-
narrative is not apparent as the "stronger interpretation" and reflected in every
part of Scripture, then aspects of its intention not immediately visible are
latent in it, repressed or unconscious within it, only waiting occasion to
surface. At times in the interplay of traditions it must be admitted that the
Bible's liberative intention is sometimes all but drowned out - even so, like all
good narratives the true plot holds firm and the liberative content overwrites
all other interpretations and echoing throughout comes true in the end. To
maintain this high view of Scripture (its trustworthiness, its infallibility
towards liberation) asserting that, despite its internal breaches of trust, it is
consistent in its ability to recall and vindicate the heralding of God's new order
of justice and salvation, is not to be biblicistic or to worship a "paper pope."
Such a conviction affirms that the Bible's "world" will not relinquish its grace-

132 Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca:
filled trespass into our everyday lot: Scripture repeatedly proves "sharper than any two edged sword [or axe]" (Heb. 4: 12).

To any who consider my work to bear the marks of "biblicism," I make answer as did Barth, that my methodological approach refuses to give in to that style of research which after, uncovering invaluable scholastic insights, promptly moves on leaving the biblical message unexplained and unappropriated. Barth attests: "It is the Bible itself, it is the straight inexorable logic of its on-march which drives us out beyond ourselves and invites us ... to reach for the last highest answer .... And that answer is: A new world, the world of God." The stronger and overthrowing hermeneutical purpose of the Bible concerning the saving and liberating activities of Yahweh, demands that both our thinking and our praxis be informed from the reality of this biblical "world." Which is, the domain of the redeeming God's penchant for humanity's beleaguered and broken poor. "The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves toward the highest answer." The indefatigable gracious God of suffering love and the gracious love of God is the highest answer, the thematic flow, the kerygmatic union running throughout the Bible; once we are committed to this truth, it will carry us away from our limited horizons. Herein is the more powerful, the governing interpretation, the prevailing axe of Scripture's liberative discourse.

f) A Hermeneutical Obligation

Stressing ethics and praxis as necessary constituents in the scientized discipline of biblical interpretation, Croatto's corrective that signifies a liberating sociopolitical hermeneutic, is an interpretative necessity.

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133 See Karl Barth, The Epistle To The Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 11-12.
Sagaciously it stands as an obligation of *all* theological methods. With import he states: "a conscientization with respect to the implications of hermeneutical theory is vital for the theology of liberation - the reflection on faith that is done from *within* a context of the hopes and struggles of the oppressed."\(^{135}\)

Although not always possessed by the same theological line of reasoning as Croatto, Moltmann solidly states:

> Reading the Bible with the eyes of the poor is a different thing from reading it with the eyes of a person with a full belly. If it is read in the light of the experiences and hopes of the oppressed, the Bible's revolutionary themes - promise, exodus, resurrection and Spirit - come alive.\(^{136}\)

Caught up in the integrity of this hermeneutical principle, he further attests: "The way in which the history of Israel and the history of Christ blend with that of the hungry and oppressed is quite different from the way in which they have often been linked with the history of the mighty and rich."\(^{137}\)

If in the interactions between the interpreter and the text there is no continual pivotal realisation of this liberative axis of meaning that runs throughout the biblical record, then as hermeneutists we are working from false scientific constructs concerning ideological candour and objectivity as they relate to biblical discourse. Unless interpretation is seen through the grid of Yahweh's purposes as being instigator and guarantor of justice against all injustice, becoming what Croatto deems a "kerygmatic axis," theological theory formation not only fails at the level of scientized requirements, but is a contributive source of hermeneutical misinformation. Whatever detracts from the particular purposes of liberative narratives, issues forth from erroneous constructs of epistemological interpretation. Epistemological error of this

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\(^{137}\) Moltmann, ibid., p. 17.
kind acts to reinforce theological and human disaster. And, as Sölle points out, such detractions work to "deny precisely the depth of reality and the longing of human beings for freedom and justice, as not being 'objective,' not being worthy of scientific regard." Extrapolating from this assessment, she make the point sharply, that: "From here come the false ideals that deny the epistemological distinction that exists between one who is sated and one who is hungry, between one who thirsts for justice and one who has an understandable interest in maintaining the present system." 138

g) The Hermeneutics of God: Justice and Mercy

A fundamental hermeneutical principle is at stake here. The constructs of revelation contained in the events of deliverance as enacted by the Crucified God are hermeneutical realities that must remain ever present in the ontic consciousness and hermeneutical praxis of all scriptural interpreters. The Bible is not (even allowing for the differences of liberal and conservative theological interpretation) just another moderately entertaining story about the divine and the human struggle that might just as well have been signed by some concerned deity. Be our theological gymnastics ever so sophisticated or confused, the God of the liberative-narrative is, as Miranda reminds us, "The God who does not allow the person of God to be objectified, because only in the immediate command of conscience is God, truly God." And as such the biblical God who claims both our theological indicatives and imperatives, clearly specifies that only as the God of justice can the God of the Bible be authentically knowable; and this knowability Miranda maintains occurs exclusively "in the cry of the poor and the weak who seek justice."139 In concert with the above, Assmann's theological and philosophical observation is not to be construed as a theological localisation relative to his socio-cultural position only (as some have tried to make of it): it is theologically pertinent to

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all situations. Biblical hermeneutics and systematic theological reflection across the board must face in all times and places the biblical fact of "the epistemological privilege of the struggling poor." 140 From this theological conviction a segue is found from traditional theoretical forms of interpretation, which tend toward abstract uncommitted theoretics to a praxis methodology on the side of the poor - those who have no hope but in the God of unremitting mercy and justice.

The interplay of reflection and action in solidarity with the poor, distinguishes a hermeneutical methodology's frame of reference. Liberative-narrative as a methodology functions from within a commitment to the poor, touting an ongoing interplay between theory and practice, leading to what Gutiérrez has called "the praxis of the poor". "It is not enough to know that praxis must precede reflection; we must also realise that the historical subject of that praxis is the poor .... Without the poor as subject, theology degenerates into academic expertise." 141 The testimony of Scripture is that the saviour God of the poor is the God of liberation: "When Israel ... saw the great power that Yahweh had shown against the Egyptians, they feared Yahweh and believed" (Ex. 14:30-31, my emphasis). Salvific liberation was the harbinger and basis of belief for God's people. From this revelation, "it is this liberation experience that will be the 'referent' in the historico-salvific project of Israel." And as Croatto adduces this pivotal event of the Old Testament firmly fixed within the longings of the people of the Hebrew Scriptures "permeates the


141 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology," in The Emergent Gospel, eds. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, New York:
pages of the New Testament," there to be echoed in "the salvific message of Jesus addressed preferentially to the poor, in his death as a prophet rejected for his words and deeds."\(^{142}\)

There is no vagary here. The "great Cry" that is "blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and in the heart of every living thing,"\(^{143}\) comes from Yahweh the deliverer. This God who refuses to be objectified, is "not among the entities nor the existings nor in univocal being nor in analogous being, but rather in the implacable moral imperative of justice."\(^{144}\) Therefore our knowledge and relationship with God coheres in this, "God defended the cause of the poor and needy .... Is not this what it means to know me? It is Yahweh who speaks" (Jer. 22: 16). In this way Scripture brings to the hermeneutic of life the revelation of God, quintessentially God given in cruciform shape for the salvation of the world.

Theological hermeneutics always needs the constancy of this preeminence and norm of God's self-manifestation; in this way the theologian is kept in touch with their true reality. Without it acting as that ever present dominant reality, and guided by its particular purpose, that which the interpreter "brings to the text" - acting as theological maxim and interpretative orientation - hermeneutics is capable of serving the interests of the privileged and dominant legitimising factions within the sociopolitical apparatus. Thus, the liberative predicate of interpretation is the biblical predicate of interpretation, and the biblical predicate of interpretation is the liberative predicate of interpretation.

Let those who find in this assessment of theological hermeneutics an inadmissible tautology ruminate over the question of whether their own attempts to avoid tautology convey them further into a flight from the sum of God's liberative purposes as disclosed in Scripture for the sake of bourgeois-

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\(^{142}\) Croatto, op. cit., p. 53.


\(^{144}\) Miranda, ibid., p. 49 (my emphasis).
safe logical tidiness. Or, whether they have given into another kind of world altogether than the world in which the Bible testifies to the reality of God as the One who is in the midst of the poor for their deliverance and salvation from all individuals and structures that dehumanise life. However much we may rationalise, idealise, or give reasons to justify our inability to realise God's willing on earth in order to feel at ease with our conscience; in the last analysis, only theology done in determination with the one just God as the pivotal counterforce of all unjust history, can be called "biblical theology". *Quod non est biblicum, non est theologicum* (What is not biblical is not theological).

The reading site of liberative narrativity works from the premise that the murderous historical legacy being inflicted on the lowly and forgotten can never be other than at the forefront of radical discipleship's mission. A "committed" reading of Scripture is thus ever mindful of what the text-events have revealed concerning the nature and purpose of God: they must not only seek to stand under the Bible's mandate to be committed to the victimised non-persons, but also to the commitment of changing the structures of Caesaroimperialism that legitimate the continuing exploitation of the forsaken. Be their pretensions ever so high blown, and from whatever quarter they may come, theological hermeneutics that do not grow out of the possibilities of "commitment" formed from the perspective of liberative praxis are more than suspect in the areas concerning their ideology constructs; they are antithetical to the liberative suasion of the biblical record.

With realistic critical eye Two Thirds World theologian, José Comblin scours the weaknesses and strengths of uncommitted theological intent. With determination declaring that far too much theology is "a mass of words" devoid of the concerns of Christian practice living safely and far removed from the realities of starvation and oppression. As such: "Theology does not possess the simplicity that marks the faith of the poor." These detached
Radical Discipleship: Towards the Theology and Sociopolitical Implications, by John Hirt

Chapter Two

theologians "see the world through the eyes of those who guarantee them their daily bread." With directness he taunts, "Theologians must eat before doing theology." And from a truthfulness that stings, he adduces: "There is no sense in trying to hide the fact. Though we may try to cloak them under the trappings of apostolic garb, the enslaving bonds of social position and prestige have their impact on our use of words." Except in rare cases we are motivated not by salvation's liberating story, but by theological word plays that do not prove disadvantageous for us. Given to such betrayals our theology "intermingles with God too much that is not God, too many elements of ignorance and self-interest cloaked in the immaculate garb of devotion." Conclusively Comblin adds, "The truth of Christianity is not to be found in intellectual understanding but in charity; it is a lived truth." Immersed in the story-scope of God's truth: "The real task of theology is to liberate the church from false theologies."145

The socio-symbolics found within the literary genres of the script of the Bible's radicalism (its attacking at "the root" of things) acts as both good and bad news to the dominating politico-theological factions. In this process "theology [as] critical reflection in and on historical praxis in confrontation with the Word of the Lord lived and accepted in faith,"146 brings about a situation in which for the Christian everything faces the possibility of being bought under the Bible's radical revelatory power. Which means that our thinking, our acting our indifference, all are threatened as the biblical story becomes alive in our day to day realities.

Liberative-narrative theology evoking the socioliterary genres of the Bible challenges the rendition of the biblical script in "flattened" form. Throughout its methodology, the biblical message remains open as a transformative agent.

In vigorous style it keeps the text untamed, subversive of all our interpretative complacencies. It keeps the story line open and coming back to revisit us. Making it calamitous for us as modern day theological Scribes to insulate ourselves within academic verbiage, intellectual self-indulgence or historically fixed doctrinaire certitudes. And since as God's people we cannot escape the disturbing exercise of having heard (and hearing) the biblical story, in as much as its redemptive energy for all of our failures is still present in the church, we are put in the place of having to make answers - be they adequate or inadequate. Consequently, the church beyond its preponderance with trivialities and religious sentimentalities is caught by the subversive activity of the Spirit in this continuing exercise: one way or an other Word confronts world.

More than this, the Word as liberative story by its liberating praxis working on and through the church (and very often despite it) works to not only inform, but to transform. Moreover, by doing so it makes us open to the verisimilitude of what Foucault calls the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." When the impacting liberative-narrative intention of the Bible is realised, the evasion of non-commitment is hard pressed. If we are willing to see it, the central aim of the Scripture's liberative scheme is not only to subvert the socio-symbolic constructs of "the system."

The focus of its concern is to enlist us as "co-workers with God" in the system's downfall. And as we live from the premise of liberative story, securing us in the overthrowing of evil's legitimating ideologies and practices. Because the Bible allows no neutrality to its hearers or readers, we are positioned in the narrative salvific plot, as Wilder adumbrates, very definitely "in the middle of the action." And this feature he assure us is "certainly true of the Bible epic as a whole." Speaking of the differentiating character of the

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147 Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. D. F. Bouchard. Trans. D. F.
narrative mode of the Bible, Wilder remarks that in contrast to "other religious and philosophical classics" their purpose is non-analogous to the Bible's intendment. "Their sacred books may often rather take the form of philosophical instruction or mystical treatise or didactic code or oracular vision." Whilst there is correspondence between the Bible and other sacred literature, his argument is that the narrative purpose of the Bible is different, calling into telling question the ontic implications and socio-symbolics of the prevailing universes of history's meaning.

The Bible in its "acidity" drives to the heart of religio-political signification by uniquely posing such episodic questions as: "What view of people and the gods do they convey? What kind of realism do they represent" concerning human history? Wilder's point is not that other Scriptures don't pose similar kinds of questions (he is not implying religious imperialism), but rather that the Bible poses its historically determinative questions from a different angle, and this very intentionally, because it inquires from the point of view of a gracious "God [who] is purposeful" in the activity of cosmic trespass, and is seminally intent upon engaging in redemptive "action with and for humanity" in the "beginning," the "middle" and the "end" of human history. As he further puts it, "The life of a Christian is not like a dream shot through with visions and illuminations, but a pilgrimage, a race, in short, a history."148

Wilder's attentiveness regarding the historical drive and purpose of Scripture coincides with Jameson's concern that an effective interpretative stance requires a continual commitment to a "genuine philosophy of history."149 Jameson depreciates all non-historically interpretative modes of causality whilst (to the consternation of some) at the same time appreciating the Christian scheme of interpretation; this is in keeping with his assimilation of

149 Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell
the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and the analytics of Frye - both formed derivationally from philosophical theology. He finds Christianity "particularly suggestive in the solution it provides," in that Christianity's hermeneutical grid is able to link the privacy of individual experience to the onward movement of humanity's communal history. From this estimation Jameson's Marxist "social hermeneutic" is able to "keep faith" with its Christian "precursor.'

The Bible's liberative narratives as socio-symbolic episodes advance through history pregnant with revolutionary impulse, acting to change and humanise the world. Clearly, all theological constructs that negate or resile from this redemptive historic flow, this historical necessity emanating out of the Bible's purpose, are contrary to proper exegetical scholarship. True biblical method is maintained only in interpretative actions commensurate with the historico-salvific project of the God who does justice. Like God, we are from start to finish, in the "beginning," the "middle" and the "end". As Wilder states we are meant to be co-conspirators of a redeeming and new history.

There can be no failure in this understanding if the reader is to grasp Scripture's constitutive message. Once the Bible is comprehended in its textual-episodic polysemy as "a single text" running along a particular course, it is saved as Croatto notes from "semiotic dismemberment," to "the unification of a linguistically coded central kerygma." This foci of meaning predicates "relationships among its different parts, and among its distinct literary collections - legal, historical, prophetical, sapiential, evangelical, epistolary, apocalyptic, and so on." And as Croatto correctly concludes, although there are other incorporated "axes structuring the Bible" such as

150 Jameson, ibid., p. 31.
152 Croatto, op. cit., pp. 56-57.
"love and fidelity, hope, the covenant, prophecy, God's presence as grace, judgement, freedom" and so forth. The biblical axiology is intact providing we remember the fact that the terms "justice," and "liberation" do not have "a single meaning all the way through the Bible." But as he assures us, in the end, in the narrative totality of Scripture the preponderance of meaning is to be found in the recognition of "the saviour God in a liberative dimension." This is because the "principle origin of the Bible," emanates from experiences of "suffering-and-oppression and grace-and-liberation."\textsuperscript{154}

The Bible as a single text of constructed liberative narratives can be solidly affirmed as setting in "high relief God's preference for the oppressed." And that as a consequence "the most adequate 'ownership' of the Bible, the most adequate 'pertinency' for rereading the kerygma of the Bible, is with the poor." Or additionally it can be said that "the lowly of the earth are on a 'horizon of understanding' that renders the biblical kerygma 'pertinent' to them. The 'horizon of production' corresponds to [this reality]."\textsuperscript{155} The central core of biblical production is constitutive to the liberative narrativity of salvation's principal meaning. It is in the continual recapitulation of this crucial reality, in the reinforcement of its truth to our selves that we shall be saved from spiritualistic delusion, moving us towards liberational praxis - that is provided we practise what we profess to believe. Until this reality of God's redemptive activity is an endogenous formation of our theory constructs concerning the Bible, then inevitably we will misread and misconstrue the content of scriptural revelation: "Quod non habet, dare non potest" (What it does not have, it cannot communicate or impart.) In the process of reeducation and recommitment to God's purposes, our theology and mission must operate from the horizon of liberative conviction lest we be counted among those guilty of distorting the biblical message and worshipping false gods.

\textsuperscript{153} Croatto, ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{154} Croatto, ibid., pp. 58-62.
h) A Proper Recognition: Grace comes by Story

We do not honour the Word of God, nor the following of Jesus, by defending as "inspired," texts that deflect the people of God into docility concerning the Bible's liberative purposes. In Scripture, where there is no correspondence to the reality of the God of the poor; in those places where the biblical writers betray the liberating story-line of justice and mercy, God nevertheless speaks through such texts - to denounce them as incongruent to the totalizing discourse of salvation's central meaning. Even in places of-incongruence, these texts bear witness to the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ the faithfulness of God; who inevitably contradicts all earthly powers; crucified and risen up as the vindication of the God of justice.

For those seeking to unequivocally follow Jesus and live by his imperatives, an essential element always therefore stays to the fore: does an employed hermeneutical methodology lead to the possibility of obedient understanding - to the place of enabling encounter - so much so that the reader can respond and own the responsibility and the meaning that inheres within the text? As Barth posits:

The Word ought to be exposed in the words. Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter; till the document seems hardly to exist as a document; till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him or her to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his or her name myself.156

155 Croatto, ibid., pp. 62-63.
156 Karl Barth, The Epistle To The Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), from the preface to the second edition, p. 81. Although given to misunderstanding from Jülicher et al., at the time of writing, Barth (can we say, before his time?), was correct in this hermeneutical insistence of his. Although Bultmann reproached Barth for his overall treatment of "Romans," he in this place was in firm agreement with him concerning this form of hermeneutical understanding to the point of saying that Barth, "has grasped Paul's view of faith in its depths, and likewise that through his exegesis many details have come alive for me." See James M. Robinson, ed., The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology (Richmond, VA: John Knox 1968), pp. 100-120. In the midst of bumping into each other and continuing mutual criticism and long-standing friendship, Barth and Bultmann continued to respond to each others' position. See Bernd Jaspert, ed., Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters: 1922-1966 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1981). Because of the way in which they complemented each other they find citation in this work.- their proximity was closer than some imagine, i. e., both were consequent to World War 1 critical of Liberal Theology, Bultmann (to my knowledge), did not
To take up Barth's prompt, in the interplay between the text-events and the reader's appropriation, realistic and figural reading that allows the reader to be incorporated into the world of the text's contemporary meaning must signify a trustworthy hermeneutical method. That is, a defining characteristic which leads to an absorbing engagement of fidelity towards the script of biblical radicalism exemplified in Jesus, who is finally and at all times the true Word of God. For it is through the liberative Word as the commandment, the imperative to love our neighbour, that God has chosen to be revealed and thereby transform the human situation. Jesus is the embodiment and purveyor of that liberative-narrative which "makes human life more human." It is from Jesus' story that we are taught the way grace comes. It is from this passage of grace that we have learned what it means to love God: to know God means to love one's neighbour and to do one's neighbour justice. Loving, knowing God is then a dynamic experience, it is a being encountered by God as the moral imperative (God as provoking agent, not static untouched, uninvolved ontological Being), in such a way as that we are caught up into God's story of redemptive process in history. This kind of living praxis faith saves us from what Miranda calls "protracted idolatry." Knowledge of Jesus' meaning must continually include us in the struggle of those marginal ones who see God's purpose most clearly and ultimately expressed in Jesus as God's liberating Messiah. Unless our hermeneutical apparatus brings us to enlistment in the liberative task as displayed in Jesus' meaning and work, then our endeavours be they ever so "credentialed," amount to only so much chaff. Gutiérrez' words have particular significance in this regard, they can be prefaced by saying in agreement with them, that all hermeneutical methodologies and all formulations of radical discipleship,

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157 Lehmann, op. cit., p. 239.
all political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation, are not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes. They are not worth one act of faith, love and hope, committed - in one way or another - in active participation to liberate people from everything that dehumanises them and prevents them from living according to the will of God.\footnote{Gustavo Gutiérrez, \textit{A Theology of Liberation} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), p. 308.}

If the church today is to escape the spiralling circles of ecclesiocentricity and become more than a casual part of God's process of humanisation, then it must allow itself (we must allow ourselves), to be apprehended by the liberative-narrative ultimatums brought to light by socioliterary methodology. Such appropriations of liberating exegesis will no longer allow us the privileged position of white First Word side-line coaches to God's saving story at work in the world.

Being involved in Jesus' destiny and becoming a church guided not by the prevailing social fictions, but a church carried along in its obedience by God's story, will by the nature of things cause misunderstanding, opposition and persecution; from within as well as without the church. This will not be welcomed by most, but it will be a sign and symbol of the biblical story's authentic arrival. Recognition of this story (through grace), our story, my story, bids all join in God's process of humanisation. Accompanying this apperception there must also come the willingness to act for justice, existentially to hear the Word as liberation.

\textbf{i) Discerning an Angle of View}

Before quitting the field concerning this clearing of hermeneutical ground, in the laying of footings for the reflections that follow, I should here again serve notice that, while preferring the interpretative procedures that I have indicated, I am not closed off to other forms of criticism where they prove helpful in the
task of reclaiming the liberating script of biblical radicalism. My hermeneutical process therefore involves skirting

between the twin errors of contemporary biblical criticism. To port lies the Scylla of historical criticism's dismantling of narrative texts; to starboard the Charybdis of the literary criticism, which divorces narrative signification from the historical world. I insist upon both the literary and the socio-historical integrity of the whole text.\(^{160}\)

My efforts up to this point, then, have been an attempt at overviewing the meaning and place of theology and hermeneutics pertinent to expressions of discipleship - both authentic and spurious. It has also (as exposures require), been a polemic against bourgeois biblical claimants and their interpretative manoeuvring, their puerile promises and their false delivery. In that they claim truth when there has been none, "saying 'Thus says Yahweh,' when Yahweh has not spoken." (Ezk.22: 28). In this exploration I have tried to demonstrate the perniciousness of sacred dishonesty, the phenomenon of poisonous pedagogy, together with the agendas of supportive ideologies, as these agent falsities intersect and decentre the truth, acting as "innocent" interpretative entrapments that take away from the meaning and cause of biblical discipleship. On the way through I have learned from Barth to seek always to "be possessed of a wider intelligence" and undertake my work "without rigidity of mind."\(^{161}\) And this so to do, whilst shying away from that kind of ambiguous "will" that "knows no dominant and inflexible idea." Nor have I sought to dip my hands into "the dish of tolerance."\(^{162}\)

In consequence, I have gone on the offensive against religious flimflam and sophistry (following in the train of Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer) not wanting to let the damaging pastoral effects of theopolitical misdemeanours pass into academic inconsequence. As Barth judges: "In each age and by each

\(^{160}\) Ched Myers, op., cit., p. xxviii.
responsible theologian the best definitions, combinations and conclusions must always be sought and found afresh in dogmatics with a continually new desire for [truthful] obedience.” There is benefit in this exercise for several reasons. Such an undertaking has and will occasion a naming and a cleansing effect, providing a solid honest edge for agreement or disagreement. Among my other reasons, Will Campbell’s words concerning the way of the world are apt: "It's dog eat dog, and the big dog does all the chewing." As a small mongrel pup from "down under" I have offered a few yaps and a few bites back. This I have done with the hope that other little dogs will bear their teeth and take to the heels of the ecclesiastical bosses, those clever theologians and office-holders who without much discomfort, difficulty, or reluctance, self-assuredly provide the ideological constructs necessary to justify the existing order. Those privileged ecclesiastical leaders, bulwarked and removed, who concur with theology done at a distance, accepting, and teaching others to shield themselves from the responsibility of the imperialistic acts of violence that occasion the despoliation of the lowly.

Thus far then, my work has of necessity brought to the fore a profile of my own hermeneutical methodology - "liberative-narrative." My predications concerning the need for a competent hermeneutic, relating to the treatment of the biblical text as it concerns Word and world has been about the search for a proper understanding of radical discipleship. Throughout, I trust that beyond my ineptitudes I have provided transformative and scientized space for an adequate hermeneutic and theological procedure. In other words my overall intention has been to lay out a reading strategy that is capable of the discernment needed, one that is reliable to correct and document the biblical mandates of radical discipleship and its sociopolitical implications.

165 My thoughts here concerning the sociocritical reluctance of the establishment church and the undisturbed position of its pompous leaders, stem from Karl Rahner, The Shape of the Church to
I turn now to a “worked example” to show how in Christian praxis the liberative-narrative of Jesus has been constructed in contemporary situation. Because the text is never a dead letter and always calling for a public and personal response, what follows is both narratively alive and highly personal in its public elucidation. Despite its style, its telling is at no distance to a serious investigation of the story and history of radical discipleship’s reality in the church history of Australia. Concerning its intimacy of detail and its personal content, Ricoeur’s remarks are very much to the point:

This means that the Gospel will always be carried by an extraordinarily fragile testimony, that of the preacher, that of personal life, that of community.\(^{166}\)

2. (iii) A Living Exemplar: A Liberative-Narrative Biography

(A Story about some Pilgrim People in a Community called "The House of the New World" and by many other names.)

There was once a man and a women who decided that they had enough of the world as it is. So they thought they would quit it. In order to do this, they procured for themselves quite a large water tank, the kind used by farmers to catch and store rain water. It was very spacious, warm, weather proof, and most of all exclusive of outside interference; and for this reason it suited their purposes admirably. Into this new home they placed all their favourite things. The special things that were especially loved and that they did not want soiled or broken. So, in went paintings and pictures of great beauty, lovely china, cherished books, their digital precision tuned CD player with all their very favourite disks, the Hi-Fi Stereo digital TV/VCR system and the latest Macintosh with colour laser printer. All this, with world-wide Internet email “web access”, air conditioning, and of course their water bed. They would have taken their “turbo tub,” but then they thought enough was enough and

they did not want to be greedy having read an article on "First World Selfishness". Besides they had given up their car for ecological reasons, and they longed only to be alone and comfortable, to live in undisturbed peace where they could enjoy the good things of life with each other. Surely they felt, they at least deserved enough time for this, and to pray or meditate, as well as space to hear where each other was coming from - this was their chief desire.

When all was assembled, they sealed themselves in, careful to leave a small opening where phone-in dinners could be delivered. So, life became for them all that they had hoped, and more besides. Their days were idyllic, pleasure upon uninterrupted pleasure.

Then one day something terrible happened. Right in the middle of one of their times of quiet enjoyment, a volley of bullets came ripping through their tank in all directions. Things were broken, special possessions, personal effects that could not be replaced, and both of them were not a little shaken up. Who could have done such a thing?

Someone was shooting at them! Their fears about people were confirmed. It just was not safe on the "outside." Well, eventually, they were able to straighten thinks up, fill in the holes and gather their composure. Until, one day it happened again. Rapid fire, bullets coming at them from all directions. This was not the only time either. It happened again and again, until eventually there were so many holes in their home that they were visited with moon beams in the night, sun shafts in the daytime, and the sounds of people laughing, crying, talking, living, dying, from the outside. In one of these bullet-infested moments, one of them was seriously wounded and consequently suffered a great deal of pain.
Eventually the time came when the bullets and the corrosive effects of weather collapsed the sides of the tank. There was nothing else they could do but step out and face their would be assailant. Thereupon they were greeted not with the face of a murderer, but with the presence of the shining One, who also bore many wounds and scars. Before this One, they stood in utter amazement. Confronting them stood their assailant in utter love. The truly Human One spoke; "My daughter, my son, I have only done this to you, wounded you that you might be healed. Broken down your walls that you should be free, released to life."\(^{167}\)

I had to tell this story before getting any further into the main body of narrative exposition, because this story out of many stories, is for those within this script a seminal one. The style and verve of it has served to keep those of us who belong to the vision of radical discipleship going throughout the years. And simply, because the kind of "sending out" experienced by the people in the tank bespeaks of the same assailing love as has called many sisters and brothers, in difference parts of the world, together with Carol (my wife), our three children, and myself into "justice churches" and communities of hope and resistance. In addition, I needed to tell of it because I want urgently to destroy the notion that these justice churches and communities are experiments of impracticability, safety zones for "radicals," or places of escape: nothing could be further from the truth. Such places are, in fact occasions of reality, experimental maybe but experiments in the real life of discipleship, full of sacrificial commitment and mission. There is more that I should say here concerning the worth of such communities as they contribute to the springs of liberative action, but it is best to let their story stand without over much defensiveness or promotion - their strength is in the consequence and practice of their hope. This needs to be said here though, my intention in

\(^{167}\) This story in a different form was shared with me in Australia by Brian and Helen Phillips, who gathered it, I believe from the writings of an Aotearoan New Zealand Christian mystic.
writing is itself a formation towards community. As Ursula LeGuin puts it, "in the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood."\(^{168}\)

Apprehension is my companion as I think of how to tell the story of one such community, "The House of the New World" - a community like many others but dissimilar.\(^{169}\) I am certain I cannot bespeak of it well enough since it involves the life-pain and hopes of "dear hearts" better than I can tell. Yet it should be told, for the institutional church needs always to be reminded about radical discipleship's quest. Therefore, here I proceed to try to wrap a past inside a present.

In addition, who knows, perhaps someone after reading this, who can write with clearer style, may pick up the tale, to tell it as it should be told. However, I am truthfully also afraid of what this recitation might do to me and mine. For I cannot tell easily of a story that is deeply a personal one, present to me in every day of my life. I am afraid that from this liberative story active pains and tearful joys might fling up like shafts of bittersweet quickening among my hours. But even as I shy away from the telling, refluent as air comes a not to be denied urge to tell it, because the truth is, that radically following Jesus - even considering the consequences - is the persisting element of the church's life, and will be till the end.

Fantasies though these words may appear to such as are able to call all such efforts at obedience misguided effort: nevertheless many still know


\(^{169}\) No two communities or their stories are the same, but if I can draw parallels without causing offence, then in the genre of the quest of radical discipleship I would reference communities like the House of Freedom (Brisbane), the House of the Gentle Bunyip (Melbourne), the Glebe Zoo (Sydney), Sojourners (Washington DC.), Westgate Community Church (Melbourne), Voice in the Wilderness (Oakland), Emanuel Baptist (San Salvador), Anathoth Community (Melbourne) to name but a few. For a sociological overview of a good many Australian communities see, Jim McKnight, Australian Christian Communes (Sydney: Trojan Head Press, 1990) For McKnight's "understanding" of the House of the New World see pages 17-19. It should be understood that not all of the Australian expressions explored by McKnight are to be identified with the theology and practice of radical
themselves furnished with the faith and courage to live now in the promise of Jesus' determination. Even when it appears to be defeated, Christ's power is at work in the world calling us out of our anomie to ever new obedient beginnings. It is there charging us with life, affirming within us that there are other possibilities than those of acquiescent subservience to the status quo and cheap religiosity.

And anyway, when stories get told they are not easily forgotten, nor are the people who made them so. It is in the telling of such stories, that stories concerning our inability to live and die content in "the system" get told. It is then that they become subversive of our complacencies. And lives are changed. And the radical minorities within the church find refreshment. And the world comes to know just a little more truthfully of the liberative narratives of God. And new stories begin.

a) The Beginning of a Dream: On the Road

We are all part of a story, our own. And yet we are part of a larger story, that of humanity. As part of humanity's story, and yet part of a personal story, I want to share the tale of a "Company", a nondescript bunch on a journey. Our "quest" story might be of the Faërie kind, but those of us who are still caught up in its drama remain doubtful of the line that says, "and they all lived happily ever after." At least that is our penultimate feeling. Beyond this scepticism, at the place of our innermost convictions, we still carry the ultimate confidence that in the end the chorus will ring out loud and strong: "the rule of this world, has become the reign of our God and the Lord Christ" (Rev. 11: 15). Unfortunately, however, obvious day-to-day realities often drain away from us the strength that comes from the eternal verities. We are not, in the heat of things, consistently able always to believe that in the end those that are, "the jealous, the greedy, the proud, the power hungry, all discipleship.
receive commensurate punishments. The humble, the unselfish, the hardworking, the honest, and the noble are rewarded beyond their estimates of their due." But even so, I am sure our story is of the Faërie kind.

According to Tolkien's celebrated essay "On Fairy-Stories," such stories "cannot be caught in a net or words; for it is one of their qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It [the fairy story] has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole." I take heart in those words as I try my mind at this task. In the same essay, Tolkien establishes the point that most so-called fairy stories do not in fact have any fairies in them. As he puts it, "Most good 'fairy-stories' are about the adventures of people in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches." That there is hope for people in the "Perilous Realm" of today's world, that there is hope in our "shadowy marches," gives me heart to believe that our story and the story of similar communities is surely of the Faërie kind. For ours is a story about people in continuing need of the conviction, the "turn," that a real Faërie story gives; that in the end there is joy, and that because Jesus has come and is risen, the truth of the "happy ending" has been divinely appointed.

As Tolkien judges it: "The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope and die; but they may now perceive that all their bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed." In the surety of this expectation, I can now turn with thankfulness to the start and continuance of our story.

So, once and now still in our time, there came from all over Sydney (and indeed Australia), a Company of people whose convictions and encounters led

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171 J. R. R. Tolkien, _The Tolkien Reader_ (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 10. I have chosen to use Tolkien as "theory guide" and his story characters as carriers of this narrative, since I believe they work clearly and well. They are used also because they were and are truthfully part of our "story-scope".
172 Tolkien, ibid., p. 9.
173 Tolkien, ibid., p. 73.
174 Tolkien, ibid., p. 73.
them to journey in faith together. Given a hindsight name, this Company can best be described as "pilgrim people," or "pilgrims of the impossible." The fact that they journeyed together was not particularly planned. They were unable to do otherwise, since they were overtaken with a dream, a dream of what a people who tried to take God's revolution in Jesus Christ seriously could become, could do alongside of other friends.

As we began our journey in April 1970, we were repeatedly warned, by older and wiser folk, by sympathisers and friendly religious hierarchs, of how foolish and idealistic we were. Besides, leaving behind the stories of untold other saints and their attempts, "it", or something like "it", had been tried before around 1525 by a enthusiastic group called the "Anabaptists," and they had failed, so why, should we try again? This to say nothing of the damage we would do to each other, let alone to those with whom we would have to do. Fashioning this dream, trying to live it in our world of complexities was unrealistic and risky, we were piously warned; besides there were less perilous ways of being Jesus' disciples. We were thus invited to be buried before we were born. Well, we decided not to let the things we were told we could not do stop us from doing the things Christ told us to do. The truth stands that: "The same thing happens to Christianity or becoming a Christian, as to all radical cures, one puts it off as long as one can."175 We couldn't put it off, so in blessed naiveté we went ahead, reassuring ourselves that whoever thinks that they will live without failure are not half as wise as they think. In the midst of pondering our lot, one of our pilgrims of the impossible (it was Rob), read a poem to our group, and the poem challenged (and still challenges) our hearts. The poem said:

All people dream; but not equally.
Those who dream by night in the
dusty recesses of their minds

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wake in the day to find that it was vanity
but the dreamers of the day are dangerous people,
for they act their dream
with open eyes, to make it possible.\textsuperscript{176}

After hearing the poem, someone said that it reminded them of a passage in the Bible (1 Thess. 5: 5, 6) "You are people who belong to the light, who belong to the day. So then, don't be sleeping like others; be awake." After it had been shared, the reader said that one day he would try to write in a meaningful way about our attempt and what we as a group were trying for. As I have said, this journey was not something we dreamt up. It was more like responding to an irresistible charm, an enchantment. In different ways we knew we had been summoned by the call of Jesus. In fact someone who joined us, or whom we joined, I'm not sure which, was a theological Professor and he helped us understand what Jesus meant when he said, "follow me."\textsuperscript{177}

It was a grace filled invitation to follow "on the road." (cf. Mk 1: 14-20), to go where Jesus goes, to follow with all our strength. And as we did, not to let the things we could not understand or do keep us from doing the things we could. Therefore, we felt we were well equipped as pilgrims of the impossible to give of ourselves. We gave to the uttermost. As Athol Gill (the "Doc") said: "let's remember that this discipleship of which the Gospel speaks is always in response to what God has done in Jesus." He taught us that following Jesus must never be reduced to 'a work' by which we seek to gain God's approval. "Discipleship is an act of grace. It is our joyous response to Jesus, who he is and what he does. Jesus calls us and he makes it possible for us to follow him."\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{176} T. E. Lawrence, \textit{Seven Pillars of Wisdom} (Melbourne, Australia: Penguin Books Pty Ltd. 1962), p. 162.

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. Mark 1: 16-18, 19, 20; 2: 14; 10: 52; 16: 7, the force of these text-events have stayed with us resilient in their meaning and challenging invitation.

\textsuperscript{178} Athol Gill, \textit{Discipleship Studies} (Sydney, Australia: Australian Council of Churches, 1978), p. 4. Athol died "on the road," his great heart giving out on March 9th., 1992. He was too young to die, too soon parted from us. We were not ready, we took him for granted, always thinking there would be another time to yarn, argue, learn and laugh. It is impossible to say in few words what he was to us; companion of the Quest, theologian, teacher, activist and community leader, and a good mate. Like others who have died, gone from our midst we will miss him - exceedingly. As Jim Wallis put it: "Athol now joins the company of those who will forever hover over us in intercessory affection,
Being thus mindful of God's grace to us in Jesus we set off "on the road." Our aim being to become as much as we were able a people who would give their lives away for Jesus and the reign of God (Mk. 8: 34). Ours was a bold attempt to re-enact the biblical text; to find as best we could, some way of taking its story into our community character. As Jim McClendon put it:

Our doctrine, then, must be that persons of biblical faith are those who find in Scripture what is centrally there - great dominant images, such as the reign of God, and Israel, and sacrifice, and Son of Man, and who apply them as the makers of Scripture applied them - to themselves.

Because we took the Bible seriously, we wanted to apply it to ourselves and to the world. We had some sense of where Jesus' way had taken him and what it could inevitably mean for us as we went the same way. One of our number, a "theopoetic" bard, Peter, gathered up in a song of strong cast the sense of what was happening in our midst.

Seems to be a quiet afternoon.
To look in here you'd think
there's nothing going down.
TV in the sloping sun
Conversation on the lawn
And there's a feeling
This is the calm before the storm.

Seems to be a lazy afternoon
There's children playing in the shade below my room
But my family's getting anxious
As the guiding lines are drawn
And there's a feeling
This is the calm before the storm.

watching over us with loving care. That smiling bearded face will ever be planted in our collective consciousness." He remains the bearer of the love of those whose friend and advocate he has been, and of the crucified and risen God in whose realm he now lives freely. See Jim Wallis, "The Passing of a Prophet ... and a Friend," Sojourners Vol. 21, No. 4. May 1992, p. 50.

For us the motif of following "on the road" from what we had learned from Scripture and from Athol Gill, has and remains central to our understanding of contemporary discipleship. See also David M. Miller, "Narrative Pattern in The Fellowship of the Ring," where he notes that the narrative setting of Tolkien is "the road," cited in Jared Lobdell, ed. A Tolkien Compass (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 103.

James Wm. McClendon Jr., Biography as Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974) p.95 (McClendon's emphasis).
It was our contention that the institutional church had almost successfully strangled Jesus in its ecclesiastical foliage. Oblivious to this, it went on its merry way, spending its energetic righteousness in hot pursuit of private obsessions, observed by a world whose curiosity inevitably subsided into boredom. We wanted to be free to find the boldness and fidelity of Jesus' quest again - the un-church tainted Jesus. Our faith search was for the Jesus whom the "little people" loved, who poured himself out for the marginal and disenfranchised, the Jesus who was prepared to do whatever must be done to bring the lowly and broken into the immediacy of God's mercy and forgiveness. For too long we felt the middle-class church had left the penetrating of the hellish places of humanity to a select few (the Mother

181 Peter Campbell, "Calm", eventually from his theopoetic album, Of Time and Its Distance (Trinity Records, Brisbane, Australia), 1975.

182 There is obvious intentionality in this term. My employ of it is because it was the designation that Thorwald Lorenzen and Athol Gill (drawing on the work of Jeremias and Schweizer) first taught us in referencing the "sinners" to whom Jesus brought the "good news" and who followed him; deemed to be disreputable by his "pious" opponents. Additionally, I use it herein because it fits the Faerie genre, cf. Tolkien's cognomen of the rascally "Hobbits," known in Celtic folklore as "little people." See Paul H. Kocher, op. cit., p. 116.
Teresa types), instead of seeing that becoming the "friend of publicans and sinners" was the mission of the whole people of God.

For too long too many of us within the institution had spent too much time confronting people in ways unrelated to real life; or where confrontation did happen it took place in predictable "churched" situations. Cultural insularity and reactionary politics converged to produce a failure of nerve regarding social justice. We learned that what had been claimed as biblical and therefore absolute was often the deification of self-orbiting ecclesiastical cultural patterns not only relative but often downright callous towards the broken and lowly. To many of our band the currents outside of the church which fought for social justice seemed not only more right, but more biblical than the position taken by our elders. We were seeking a spiritual theological reconstruction that could bring our intellectual and activist worlds back together.

Being locked into insular ecclesiastical circumstance meant that most of the church's efforts were spent sorting its way through the accumulated problems of property, finance, self-perpetuating bric-a-brac and administrative paraphernalia. It seemed to us that the only real confrontation with human suffering facing people of the religious establishment was frequently the battle for power in the church's Committee of Management. Our feeling was that our discipleship must take shape "where the pain is."

Problem: we were to be respectable, and therefore ipso facto shut off from any prolonged contact or involvement with the blighted, the poor, the bashed and beaten; the people we in Australia like to call, "no hopers." For us the institutionalised church and the glitzy "non-denominational denominational churches" represented little more than testimonials to self-indulgence; bastions of middle-class virtue and otherwise functionaries of a religious system foreign to the meaning of "mateship."
In Australia, faith had to be practical or it was not real; otherwise it was contemptuous and the butt of amusement. As the bushman and their "Outback" songs in scorn put it: "parsons and preachers are all a mere joke." Religion had always historically been viewed as being in cahoots with officialdom, and therefore the enemy of common folk. Our Australian history with justified hostility named the clergy as, "these batteners upon effete superstitions, these cringers to wealth, these despisers of the poor, these prosperous Judas's." As far as we could see the traditional Australian view of the Clergy was right: too many Australian Ministers spoke with "plumb in the mouth sounds" and tried to act as posh "poms." Thus cast they were representatives of a Christianity more at home among the "gentry" than the common folk. There were some rare exceptions (mostly among the Catholics), but basically they were "a bunch of well meaning but tolerably harmless "men" who had perfected the art of tea drinking and biscuit-nibbling and little more." 

It may be we are beside ourselves, but it is for God; if we are in our right mind it is for you. For the love of Christ leaves us no choice, when once we have reached the conclusion that one died for all and therefore all humankind has died. His purpose in dying for all was that men and women, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life. With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any person; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer. When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun. (11 Cor. 5:13-17).

Sisters, brothers, you are among those called. Consider your situation. Not many of you are wise, as people account wisdom; not many are influential; and surely not many are well born. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; God singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. God chose the world's lowborn

185 The Tocsin, 2nd October 1897, cited in ibid., p. 310.
186 This line is taken from one of the early "House of the New World Propaganda Sheets".
and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something; so that humankind can do no boasting before God (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

We began to feel again something of the early church's unabashed contempt for everything in their culture which stood contrary to the Lordship of Jesus, whether it be on the political or religious plane. We were nobodies, but then so were they. Our "Company" of believers had little more than a scattering of alternative ideas and a few crude symbols of faith and hope. However, like the pristine believers we had the burning of a desperate longing. It has been that longing, I think, that has counted most, that vital creative imagination that has sustained us and given birth to our rhetoric, our songs, our actions and our communities. Yes, it has been that longing, that holy sense of dissatisfaction that has steeled our hearts in good times and bad, in stages on the way. Our tune maker of the road, sang our yearnings.

Well I sing most all the time now
its hard to leave my friends
Days are long, and weekends never end
I hate to leave my family
But though I ride alone
The way we've grown together
Is like a dream we've never known

Chorus
But we're on this road together brothers/sisters
Let me hear you sing
Let me see your faces
Let your voices ring
Jesus, Jesus, can't you hear the sound
Can't you see the changes
Take a look around, look around.

So I feel Just like a pilgrim
Stepping off an ancient road
Up to a mountain that seems impossible to climb
Though we're moving through the darkness
I can see you where you stand
If we're climbing this same mountain
Why can't we take each others hand

Chorus
And then the dawn came  
The morning blew my soul into the sunrise  
I was burning with a light too bright to see  
And I could hear the drummers drumming  
Some were fast and some were slow  
But everyone was marching  
Where only People of Jesus dare to go.  

As the song rang out, spirits rose and our moral vision opened out more widely, reaching beyond selfish ambitions and timorous efforts. Amos Wilder writing about the power of inspired imagination as it forges "powerful new rhetoric and witness," comments:

So in the early church there was much of what we would call subversive songs, guerrilla theatre, underground messages, and political graffiti. The empire did not know what to do with this clandestine movement whose dreams were more universal and contagious than those of the Sibyls and the oracles or of Vergil himself.

Forged in the crucible of our contemporary catacombs something of that pristine contagion was nurturing us, telling us not to settle with mean achievement. However, that is not all it did: it caused division. Its "presence" was not exactly comfortable, and those among our number with "sort of" comfortable dreams tucked away behind what they were willing to risk for a while, started to become unstuck. And in concert and conspiracy they began to loosen the grip of others. Soon they left off dreaming and lost the connecting thread to a deeply Bible-derived vision. Abandoning the House's dream they sought another - a dream that did not deny passports to the central culture's offerings of security and power. The grammar of our reality was not total enough for them. As a constant present they affirmed that they did not really understand the dream, and that therefore nobody else could or should either. After all, a dream is hard to articulate and very hard to reclaim. But it will be recited on the Day of Great Summons.

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187 Peter Campbell, "Look Around" from the Album, Of Time and Its Distance (Trinity Records, Brisbane, Australia), 1975.
b) The Inviting Future of The Quest

"Symbol invites thought", observes Ricoeur: the symbol is an invitation. We "do not posit meaning, the symbol gives it."189 Further he elucidates: "Symbol is a sign in this, that like every sign it intends something beyond and stands for this something."190 And where a belief system is informed by its symbols it "has for its task a qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness. Every symbol is finally a hierophany, a manifestation of the bond between humanity and the sacred."191 Being aware of Ricoeur's insights makes something about The House of the New World in Sydney all the more intelligible to me now.

Many years after the beginning I am able to understand more of what we were touching, more of what was touching us, motivating us as a bonding agent. Our vanguard minority was not motivated just by words and actions, words spoken, or words sung, actions done. Our Company had its symbols and out of its symbols grew its myths acting as contributing agents to our being and becoming. From our myths and symbols came a fluent and inspiring world from which we drew sustenance for the journey, for the road.

By way of explanation, reference to our habitat will serve as guide: after an initial attempt at decorating the walls of our main meeting room with a collage of "Jesus Revolution" slogans, i.e. "Jesus is Lord," "Brotherhood" (sorry sisters), "Freedom," "Revolution," and "Love," etc., we painted them all out. Situated philosophically where we were, our becoming reached out beyond our known into the unknown, in its seeking for justifying expression. What transpired from our many ruminations left us with purposeful wonderment. The result was something that carried us towards meanings that met and touched us beyond what rigid words can signify.

190 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 38.
The House's central wall, which contained a drama stage had a large circular opening. To look at it, was to look "into" something. On the outside edges of the opening and arching around it were painted two very ancient and large thickly leaved trees. In the inside centre of the stage, Kerry and Allan painted a tall figure with full hooded cape and back turned, holding a long staff: there stood "Aragorn" - right out of "Lord of the Rings."

I remember that there was something about his person that was mesmerising; although stationary he wasn't still, he was gazing out into a sky filled with a myriad twinkling stars, propped up as it were by a twilight containing huge mountains, valleys, rivers and uncharted lands. The two side walls of the room carried large landscapes, of far away vistas, deep forests, waterfalls and leafy vines and things. The whole effect, gave the room a strange enchantment. It was truly an exercise in imagination, a narrative in visual images. In its own way, it was an avowal of faith that challenged the prevarications of our time. Its aesthetic quality and mythic power gave substance to our hopes and reality to the unseen.

Entering this room off a dirty urban street, within plain view of a noisy railway yard, "the House" became an experience in fantasy, a sharing in the gift of seeing and of myth-making. In the evenings the room was even more compelling. The lights were naked bulbs of many colours hanging down by dark cords from the ceiling, which was painted black and therefore giving it the appearance of not being there. When softly illumined the lights threw our candle-like shadows, forcing those present to peer and look hard at the shapes and forms of this "new world" into which they had entered. It was an enthralment, a compelling into "a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside."192

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Although this exposure, this room of the House no longer in time exists, its fantasy, its reality stays with me: "Uncorrupted, it does not seek delusion nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves." 193 Perhaps this is because as wonderful and alluring as the picturesque episodes of the room were, it was Aragorn and what he mandated that gave it meaning. He stood as sentry to our vision, beckoning through silence into the unknown - the adventures of the quest.

c) The Failure and the Hope

The House of The New World is closed now. It fell apart from the inside. Nothing from the outside had the power to bring the House down. Our failure was both calamitous and unremarkable. The crippling neurosis that bought our Company undone was not new. The shadow of ourselves overwhelmed us. Too many "sought to do what was right in their own eyes" (Jud. 17:6), and too many of the House's Aragorns, had become Striders ranging with big heads in other places. And yes, we had our "Absalom(s) in the gate" (cf. 11 Sam: 15:2-6).

In our failure, the myth of what we thought we had become could not match the reality of what we were. Having defeated ourselves, we had no positive response to the question posed by a brother past: "Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves remorseless enough, for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?" 194 Our hope turning to darkness, was almost past. And to lose hope is to go close to losing the virtues of faith and love. Our dream could not long endure without these three strengths together. Finally, through all the jealousy and bickering our faith and love became as imperilled as our hope. And although our band did not capitulate without a passionate struggle, too many lives were

193 Tolkien, ibid., p. 53.
194 Bonhoeffer, in Eberhard Bethge, ed., Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Letters and Papers From Prison (New
sore wounded, and we had grown weary in body and heart. Being so 
distressed, we were no longer close to each other, and so not brave enough to 
face the changes in our lives that the vision called forth. Many wondered why 
we could not go on, but we could not, and others said they knew something so 
sacramental could never last.

Thus, the tides of our fate overwhelmed us. The quest of our Company had 
stood "upon the edge of a knife." Our hope remained while all our 
Company held true. It did not. Let the record show albeit, that although we 
failed, the dream did not. Amidst all the debacle and brokenness a song of 
hope rose up. Peter was singing, and even as he sang, out of the gloom there 
came the edge of sunlight, an enabling to go on, to continue in other places, to 
start again with other companions of the way, with sisters and brothers as new 
as they are old.

And the quest went on: "Dayspring in the City" endured valiantly in Sydney 
for a time. The "Glebe Zoo" (Sydney), "Bunyip" (Melbourne), the "House of 
Freedom" (Brisbane), the community of "Care Communication and Concern," 
"The Master's Workshop," and "Westgate Community" (Melbourne) and 
"Sojourners" (Washington D. C.), "Jonah House" (Baltimore) and "Emanuel 
Baptist" (San Salvador) continued on, thank God. "Bartimaeus Community" 
was born, and died an unworthy death in Berkeley (its perception lingers still). 
Other communities rose up like the "Voice in the Wilderness" (Oakland), 
Galilee Circle (Seattle), and others have like "Anathoth Community" 
(Melbourne) burned brightly. As have others, and more beyond. Some of our 
pilgrim people from "the House" went into other areas of obedient 
commitment. Some to the dangerous places of the world to live and work for 
equity, peace and human rights. Still others went to ordinary places to work 
dangerously. Beyond this, some thought it right to go to theological Colleges,


195 From Lady Galadriel's speech of warning to the Company of the Quest: see J. R. R. Tolkien, The
and Universities to train or teach as pastors, professors and activists. To put radical discipleship to work in the midst of local congregations, into the political arena and the wider scale. Some have worked to the point of death, they shine with a light that never dies; someday we will join them again in "joy beyond the walls of the world." And the singing carries us on:

We are born upon a storm that rages day and night.
We are burning with a flame that never dies
The sea we sail is changing but eternally the same
And we are bound to follow
tho' the turns be tight and narrow
We are the eyes that see the vision
We are the hearts that bear the pain

Chorus
Turn your life to face the sun you light the earth
When you give your life away you learn what life is worth
In the light of Jesus face
Your life turns in its place
Jesus is the still point in a turning universe.
We are menders of the body, we all have our place
Our life comes through his blood, comes through his grace.
And all we owe is all we are so when we hear the word,
We have the cross behind us, we have his love to bind us.
We know whose we are and we know who we serve

Chorus
Can we turn around the sun and never see the light.
Can we make the revolution and avoid the fight.
And though we'll never know the price we'll never pay,
can we take our flight for granted, leave the questions go unanswered.
And never find out what it really means to give your life away.

There are other "Houses" and more radical groupings around Australia now as there were other communities like it around the globe then. New ramparts of God's reign have taken the place of the old. Other epiphanies have come. Better, more theologically ready, and with more political understanding (well,

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most of them), functioning as justice churches or intentional communities (e.g., Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church and Anathoth Community in diaspora), they continue the quest. Of course, the dream, the quest, was bigger than The House of the New World. It had burned with a light as if from Lothlórien, and like the high elves, Lord Celeborn and the Lady Galadriel we had "fought the long defeat" which was to be the caprice of our fate.

The House now, has become as Peter sang, "like a dream we've never known." Remote and yet present, its meaning does not leave, it remains ever clear and unstained. The adventure of the House, that time of high resolve, is a living vision still: it will not fade or grow old. In this emotion, we knew the longing and the hope bespoken by Galadriel as she pondered on some distant future when "the lands that lie under the wave are lifted up again." The last newsletter of "the House" had Aragorn of the quest, boldly displayed on the front cover, back turned, yes, but looking into the future, and on the move into new beginnings. The heading read, "The End, A New Beginning." Aragorn lives!

It has always garrisoned my heart that Aragorn was prominent in our quest: "he is probably the least written about, lease valued, and most misunderstood of all [The Lord of the Rings] major characters." Yet, for our Company he represented someone whose heart was true, who had steeled himself to keep uppermost in his journey those things that were essential for the achievement of the quest. Tolkien scholar, William Ready dismisses Aragorn as "almost too good to be human; he has some of the qualities of a noble horse." Ready wants to bring Aragorn down to earth; wants him at least to display "a

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197 Peter Campbell, *Still Point*, from his private collection of "Songs."
199 Kocher, ibid., p. 4.
200 Kocher, ibid., p. 130.
sharp taste for sin."

I guess it is because of Aragorn's resoluteness mixed with tenderness, that I have always been enamoured with and challenged by his complexities and commitment. I don't find Ready's view of him actual, rather I find it misleadingly incomplete, and find myself more in agreement with Kocher who sees Aragorn as mysterious, but not so pure that he is not real."

Now that I have lived, joyed and struggled in other places and lands, I have often looked around seeking Aragorn, needing his watchfulness; that orientation which always summons forth an impatience for the quest. Aragorn, for all his blemishes, displays beyond his masks a genuine sense of obligation to not only go himself, but also to enable his struggling companions further up the road. As for the rest of us, our strongest emotion towards other people's muddles is to be guided by the instinct to pass by as discreetly far as possible on the other side. Finding fault with the handling of all the universe, we leave off the making of deliverance stories; preferring languishing comfort rather than a conclusion that satisfies the desires of justice and mercy, we hope that the Aragorns have also, and thereupon have abandoned their righting of this world's wrongs. Over against this cruel disposition fantasy intrudes, realer than our "realism." Moreover, upon its arrival, Aragorn's "secondary world" of fantasy summons forth the willingness always to seek the truth of what this world ought to be. Speaking of fantasy's lore, Tolkien says:

"Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will make it. If people were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could

202 Kocher, op cit., p. 130.
203 For Kocher's thorough treatment of Aragorn see ibid., pp. 130-160.
204 "Tolkien's adherence to justice and mercy is his greatest concession to the Christian philosophy." So says Ruth Noel of Tolkien's writing; further she adds, "Tolkien's treatment of the story is distinguished by his sense of justice." See Noel, ibid., p. 10.
not perceive truth (facts or evidence) then fantasy would languish until they were cured.  

d) Aragorn in the Glare of Public Knowledge and Legal Jeopardy

My light had flicked, nearly quenched, but not out. Almost lost in perplexity, I was being stretched in another community "Jonah House," the Berrigan's place of faithful works in Baltimore. Along with the bluntness of their commitment, a banner someone had hung on the wall of the second story staircase greeted me each day. It said: "The most apostolic thing we can do is keep each other's spirits up." Ched Myers had cleared the way for me to be invited in to share life and transformation with this faithful minority (quid pro quo).

Unable to deny the claim of God, this Company after weeks of discussion and discernment tested by prayer, Bible study and eucharistic liturgy, were readying themselves to do another civil disobedient action. As an act of dramatic "public liturgy" they would pour out their blood against "Lord Nuke." Here was a faith community who were not only concerned with the Bible as narrative, but with a re-enacting of the text through the drama of prophetic deeds. The "theory of the text" became their "theory of action." Their actualising of Scripture from the position of living faith, hermeneutically became the basis for interpreting prophetic action as a construal of the text. Ricoeur has posited:

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206 These prophetic, symbolic actions, are what fellow activist, Professor George Armstrong, one time co-ordinator of the anti-nuclear "Peace Squadron" in New Zealand, has rightly called, "public liturgy." On "liturgy as assault," see Minjung Theology, edited by Kim Yong Bok, et al. (Singapore: The Christian Conference of Asia, 1981). From within this work evidence is provided of the faithful witness of the Minjung (the People) and the central place of Han (collective struggle against oppression) over against a totalitarian regime.
207 "Lord Nuke" obvious in its meaning, is a socio-symbolic term frequently used by the Berrigans, particularly by Dan.
the notion of the text is a good paradigm for human action. Human action is in many ways a quasi-text. It is exteriorized in a manner comparable to the fixation characteristic of writing. In becoming detached from its agent, the action acquires an autonomy similar to the semantic autonomy of the text; it leaves a trace, a mark. It is inscribed in the course of things and becomes an archive and document. Even more like a text, of which the meaning has been freed from the initial conditions of its production, human action has a stature that is not limited to its importance for the situation in which it initially occurs, but allows it to be reinscribed in new social contexts. Finally, action, like a text, is an open work, addressed to an indefinite series of possible 'readers.' The judges are not contemporaries, but subsequent history.\textsuperscript{209}

Here was a Company who through their commitment to Scripture's justice mandates really were "re inscribing [the text] in new social contexts." They did not read the Bible only to speculate and then close it. Like their sisters and brothers in the Two Thirds World, the Bible as a living narrative was their resource of obedient actualisation. In von Rad's sense these modern prophets akin to their Third World counterparts, participated in, and declared the "passions of God."\textsuperscript{210} To them Yahweh's word was not "empty" of historical signification, rather it was the word of the powers of their age that were to be regarded as vacuous; in opposition to the word of God.\textsuperscript{211} Scriptural praxis was the rationale of the Jonah House Company, they were about a translating of the biblical script into prophetic action; moving from text to contemporary context. For them, as for Jesus and the prophets, God's word and obedient action reciprocally interpreted one another. Like the subversive activities of the early church engaged in a "war of myths" in "contest with the idols which goes on in the hidden dramas of the heart," this Company came into "open conflict"\textsuperscript{212} with the institutions of their society. In this vein with clarifying argument, Wilder states:

\textsuperscript{209} Ricoeur, ibid., pp. 160-161.


\textsuperscript{211} von Rad, ibid., p. 65.

Early Christianity was more like guerrilla theatre than social revolution, but it overthrew principalities and powers .... It is true that if we look at the New Testament history in an anachronistic way we seem to see a movement devoted to soul-saving, indifferent to politics, slavery, and other social patterns. But actually it was a guerrilla operation which undermined social authority by profound persuasions. What no overt force could do it did by spiritual subversion at the level of the social imagination of the polis and the provinces of the empire. It was a case of liturgy against liturgy, of myth against myth.²¹³

Wilder's analysis has real convergence with the character of Jonah House's understanding of liturgy and commensurate action. In the midst of my learning there, something happened. It was as though at the place of bone and marrow something was re-membered and rekindled. They all taught me something, but it was Phil and Liz's (and Ladon's) spirituality and courage that penetrated my deep. The dream was true, although by some presumed conveniently to be mere fable, it held firm and its storied truth recanted nothing. I had much to learn at Jonah House and I went a long way toward it. Their Scripture commitment to doing theology, their love of Christ that risked repute and life itself, became an accelerating agent in my faith journey. Little wonder then, I guess, that from the midst of these reinforcements, these "deeper persuasions of the Spirit," that I was greatly taught, and that subsequently from this crucible, "powerful new rhetoric and witness [were] forged" in the "revolution of images."²¹⁴

From this vantage point, I remember seeing (not from nostalgia but the hard force of presence) Aragorn again, standing boldly in clear sight, as steely faced courage confronting "the powers" at the Pentagon. It was Thanksgiving Day 1976, and cold. Not only so: it was an occasion charged with moral pressure and ominous events. For me it was to become a significantly important encounter, a "nerve fibre" of history (to use Weber's term). Our Company had been vigiling, shiveringly kneeling or standing, for what

²¹³ Wilder, ibid., p. 28.
²¹⁴ Wilder, ibid., p. 29.
seemed like many hours outside one of the main entrances of that place of war lust, that morally void "Orthanc". That war making bastion which by the manner of its accomplishment feeds on the whole world.

We stood outside, while warm inside untroubled "believers" kept the licenses of the nuclear facts of life in good working order. Finally the security Police, soldiers of the state, arrived with bolt cutters to cut "them" off, "them" being peacemakers garbed as "beggars," who had chained themselves to blood streaked columns astride the entrance way of this war edifice. These resisters had signs hung around their necks marked, "the poor of the world". Behind them dressed in black spectre outfits with skull masks stood other members of our Company. They hovered around the beggars chained to the pillars and addressed employees, defence contractors, weapons buyers and visitors, who by their patronage, declared as we all were, that in one way or another all of us are shackled to the policies of the Pentagon.

It was my first demonstration at this place. Nothing could have prepared me for it. I was across the other side of the parking lot with about twenty other peacemakers. We were the support group, more or less guilty, accessories to this "crime" by reason of conscience. Together and by turns we managed to hold up a huge banner that read: "Weapons abound while millions starve, dare we give thanks?" An appropriate signification on the national day of "thanksgiving." Others were closer in to the Pentagon steps, leafleting whoever arrived or departed. Our flyers in a small statement, spoke of the plight of the starving, in a world that spends millions of dollars every hour on weapons of death, and asked how the reader felt about such ignominy. Some of the Police discovering that their bolt cutters were not big enough, sent for larger appliances, others began angry "questioning" about the blood that had now been poured not only on the columns but in the entrance way. This

building right then looked like it should; human blood was running down its front steps.

Carmel arrived. He was in charge of security at the Pentagon. Everyone told me he was a tough customer, who had no time for people of our sort. According to Weber: "The honour of the civil servant is vested in his (sic) ability to execute conscientiously the order of the superior authorities, exactly as if the order agreed with his own conviction. This holds even if the order appears wrong to him." For Carmel, there was nothing disagreeable about enforcing the law apropos our Company. For awhile though he stood; watching, figuring, looking out over his turned up coat collar, rocking anxiously back and forth on his heels. From somewhere a bigger bolt cutter appeared and the Police began to cut "the beggars" off the columns. Others were unmasking the spectres - you do not want skulls staring at Pentagon visitors? Suddenly amidst the fracas, a shout of surprise!

The Pentagon soldiery discovered that one of the spectres they had been "man-handling" was a woman. What a sight! There she was, being pushed around but not dissuaded: Liz stood capped and cuffed, a felon, a prisoner, but as free and relentless as Aragorn standing fast in faithfulness.

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216 Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 95. Subsequent to these order of events, I was physically accosted by Carmel in the Concourse under the Pentagon at a "idolatrous" church service. In the furore we exchanged points of view: angered by the fact that I, as a "Christian Minister" (was he a Christian?) would be party to this disruption, he let me know in anger his feelings regarding our "Thanksgiving Action."

217 Liz McAllister, is described as "a true Christian revolutionary" by her husband and compatriot in these words: "Like a cork in mid-ocean, Liz gets heavy seas from every side, most of it immeasurably more messy and painful than the weather. With me in jail, she has taken alone the veiled questions, arched eyebrows, and clumsy innuendoes arising from our relationship. She expects, and gets, pressure and criticism from her Order, her family, the defense committees, friends, defendants, lawyers, audiences. And handles it beautifully, humanely, non-violently, gently insisting that the issue is the murder of innocent people. Only rarely does the strain show; her clarity and patience weaken. She has splendid stamina - capable of immense, sustained effort - and an intelligent resiliency of mind, cheerful and comprehensive." See, Phillip Berrigan, Widen The Prison Gates (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 186.
Carmel having had enough (or having received enough orders), decided to stop further effronteries; public actions of alternative allegiance were not to be tolerated - not on this day, not on any day, definitely not at the Pentagon, the symbol of imperial power. With the legitimacy afforded him by the state, and his face rapt with anger, Carmel gave the order: "arrest the illegal" - here the question might be asked, arrest whom, the "illegal," those outside or inside the Pentagon? The massed police to his left and right began to come down the steps toward us, to do their duty. There we were two distinct groups, one advancing on the other. One Company for peace and life, there for the sake of humanity, the other for law and order, for the sake of National Security - each with respective justifications. The facing off of "the ethic of responsibility" by the "ethic of ultimate ends."\(^{218}\)

Pentagonal officials would stand for no more deviations from what should be done: "Complete [the soldiery] confronted the incomplete, the gunless hordes of the unviolent."\(^{219}\) Phil Berrigan, no stranger to such consequences, and sensing how intimidated we were at the sight of Carmel and his bevy of soldiery acted with apostolic authority. He began with open Bible pacing back and forth in our midst, reading in a loud voice: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven." The Police were almost upon us, so his voice became louder, more urgent:

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be bought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up .... (cf. Lk. 21: 10-16)\(^{220}\)

\(^{218}\) Weber, op. cit., pp. 120-121.
\(^{220}\) For a prophetic and concise rationale regarding civil disobedience against the Bomb and Empire
Phil never did get to finish reading the text: but it was acted out. It became an event. The Word was present against the world, and I heard the words as if for the first time, just as if I had never heard them before. And right then, I knew I was "in" the biblical story. Or to put it another way, I knew the biblical script was right there confronting all of us, the legal and the illegal. Both companies surrounded by the Word, the Word that remains. The witness to God that will not let the system have the last word. In an access of light, sudden and intensely there too was Aragorn around me everywhere. And the quest story that was, was present, and broke into the future.

e) The Road Goes On

Thus and so was Aragorn seen and found again. Returned, this daring invader was present, messaged and all. I remain solaced and encouraged by the strength of that visitation. There is more to tell, but not here. Concerning closures of the quest, I do not fully understand the web of The House of the New World's unhappening. But I know this, our continuing possession of the quest's vision imposes its confirmation. Now, there is "a landscape for the cry." No one can say "the House" never really was, "Bartimaeus Community" never happened, the "School of the Prophets" did not exist. This road not so worn, has been trod with guideposts left along the way. What we did not think shameful to undertake in company with Jesus Christ, that we do not think shame to confess ... we failed trying. But we failed only after we tried with maximal effort.

Our search for faithful continuance will go on unabated. The richer coming from other visionary efforts of love; the purer coming from where much of the

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biblical script came from - costly grace lived out in our world; the stronger coming from an unrelenting following of Jesus, as radical disciples fighting alongside the little people.

It is true that this endeavour, this "eloquence will not be persuasive unless it is lived out and unless its archetypes are quickened and reshaped in the encounter." Once having found Jesus among the little people, the suffering and forsaken, our story, has never been the same. Nor should it be, for the provoking and the reshaping continues. The road issues further invitations. Blest and burdened we must endeavour to see the world from the bias of the reign of God rather than from the perspective of this world order. As Bonhoeffer tells, such a posture requires courage and vision, for this is, an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. The important thing is that neither bitterness nor envy should have gnawed at the heart during this time, that we should have come to look with new eyes at matters great and small, sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible. We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune.223

f) An End Like A Beginning

Phyllis Trible says: "Storytelling is a trinitarian act that unites writer, text, and reader in a collage of understanding." In the sharing of this story I hope for understanding: even more though, I hope that apprehension initiates feelings and visions beyond impermanence, and brings about conspiring acts for the

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222 Wilder, ibid., p. 29.
223 Bonhoeffer in Bethge op. cit p. 17.
Radical Discipleship: Towards the Theology and Sociopolitical Implications, by John Hirt

Chapter Two

reign of God. Before I leave off the telling, I cannot end prior to referencing an episode in another tale whose story line textures this one. It lends itself to an influence that is hopeful and in someway as only stories can, it is freeing as it answers to our searching, and lights up our uncertainties and confusions, illuminating the present and the future.

In sacramental narrative it is wordsmithed by Australian novelist Morris West. It, too, concerns a small prophetic community. They were frustrated, isolated and broken. At the place of their desperation "a laconic guest" stood in their midst. One who spoke words of comfort and strengthening. To these sharers of mystery come the words:

You should know that you are not here by your own design. You were led here, step by step, on different roads, through many apparent accidents; but, always, it was the finger of God that beckoned you.

You are not the only community thus brought together. There are many others, all over the world: in the forests of Russia, in the jungles of Brazil, in places you would never dream. They are all different; because people's needs and habits are different. Yet they are all the same; because they have followed the same beckoning finger, and bonded themselves by the same love. They did not do this of themselves. They could not, just as you could not, without a special prompting of grace.

You were prompted for a reason. Even as I speak, the adversary begins to stalk the earth, roaring destruction! So, in the evil times which are now upon us, you are chosen to keep the small flame of love alight, to nurture the seeds of goodness in this small place, until the day when the Spirit sends you out to light other candles in a dark land and plant new seeds in a blackened earth.225

This story draws to a close with the One "revealed in a sudden splendour"226 sharing with this small group in eucharistic celebration. Then "quietly and persuasively" calming their fears not as "a conjurer" but strengthening them as

"the Lord" they all loved.\textsuperscript{227} For all their contriving doubts and the dire exigencies of human circumstance they are spoken to of hope; reassurance given them that beyond the door of their fear God is not "heedless" but is the One who enables them: "Enough to hope, work, pray, reason a little longer together."\textsuperscript{228}

The answers to our foreboding as to what might befall us as we journey on down the road of obedience is not easy to discover. Will we recognise the One who comes into our midst? The One who always journeys with us. We have no sure answer. It is not possible to guarantee honestly that our attempts will exact enough meaning to make sense of our lives. Nevertheless the power of the biblical story remains, and because of it our hearts stay open to the quest of Jesus. And if we are silent for a long time, listening, at least so far as I can testify, we become familiar with a desire to know over and above our despair that:

\begin{quote}
Our life comes through Jesus' blood,  
\hspace{2cm} Comes through his grace  
And all we owe is all we are  
\hspace{2cm} So when we hear the word  
We have the cross behind us,  
\hspace{2cm} We have his love to bind us  
We know whose we are  
\hspace{2cm} And we know who we serve.\textsuperscript{229}
\end{quote}

From this heart singing we can smile in trouble, gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. And as we do, we are not withdrawn into cruel feelings and disobedience: against all perils reassurances come, and we know better than to live the lie of detachment.

\textsuperscript{226} \textit{West}, ibid., p. 333.  
\textsuperscript{227} \textit{West}, ibid., p. 336.  
\textsuperscript{228} \textit{West}, ibid., p. 337.  
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Peter Campbell}, "\textit{Still Point}," from his private collection of "Songs".
Whether this story or one like it is part of your memory or part of your heritage I do not know. Dispute the passage of this story as you will, but the call of Jesus and the liberative biblical narrative remains true. Ahead the road runs towards the light. Do not be content with not knowing. Unexpected, as if out of nowhere, gently comes the beckoning. Begin on the road, the story is faithful, night is at our back, our faces turn towards the dawn: the inviting future of the quest opens before us.

*Pie Jesu.*
Chapter Three

Christocentric Affirmations and Discipleship

"The real approach of theology is none other than the path of faith itself. No Christology can or does explain the reality of Christ from outside ... Christology in particular ... must help us draw out those viewpoints that enable us to do a better job of explaining how the faith is to be lived in real life."

------- Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, pp. 346, 347.

"What comes to our minds when we think about God in Jesus Christ, and where this crucified and risen God is to be found and who we believe God is for, this is the most significant thing about our discipleship."

------- Thorwald Lorenzen, in conversation

3 (i) Christological Concentration: Foundational for Radical Discipleship

The New Testament writings are resolute in their affirmation that Jesus Christ is the way to God.¹ In no thin or attenuated sense their claim is that those who seek ultimate religious reality must unite with Jesus and follow his leading into a new and living relationship with God.² For this reason Jesus does not

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² Concerning the person of Jesus: Ἰησοῦς [Gr.] is a transliteration of יְהוָ֫הוּ [H.], Joshua: amply Yehoshuah meaning "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh will save." It is to be understood that when the name "Jesus" is used in this work, reference is being made to the name of the person who was born, lived and died and was "resurrected" within human history circa 2000 years ago: and whose decreed title Cristou, "Christ," [Gr.] accorded its name to the Christian faith (cf. Acts 11:26). The name "Jesus" found herein specifically refers to the historic figure who through the early church's postpaschal theological reflection, was affirmed as "Christ" (or "the Christ") or "Jesus Christ" - the English form of the word is
merely point the way to God, as the truly human one he dares to make clear what is otherwise obscure in the divine-human encounter. The New Testament declaration is that union with him is the optimal way to God, hence: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to God except through me" (Jn. 14: 6). Radical discipleship asserts with biblical force that Jesus Christ is the rightful "Lord" of Christian existence. True to what God had done in the resurrection, the early church recognised that the historical Jesus had become the kerygmatic Christ who had died to atone for the sins of the world. Through his suffering, atoning death, and subsequent resurrection the dawn of redemption was marked, the reign of God announced. Therefore, within the apostolic contention it is not to the historical Jesus that the supreme expression of commitment is to be given. In our search for the co-ordinates of eternal truth: "If the christological theme is restricted to the historical person of Jesus, the very theme of christology evaporates."³ Predicated upon the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the subject and object of faith is to be found in the crucified and risen Christ.⁴

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a derivation of the Latin *Jesus*, which is a transliteration from Koine Greek. Thus, Jesus Christ became the centre of the theological tradition known as "Christianity." And this, because Christians have a christomorphic way of demonstrating belief in God. As indicated, there is no precritical understanding that the person of Jesus advocated in the Gospel narratives is written of in any other way than being consequent to the redaction of the Gospel writers. What we have in narrative form concerning Jesus is given to us in the light of the early church's Easter faith risen up in the resurrection event. Among the many sources concerning the historicity of the person of Jesus, see e. g., Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The quest of the historical Jesus in narrative form* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 189-195.


⁴ In stating that I do not want christology to be "confined" to the historical Jesus, I want to underpin my christological concentration as having to do with God's presence in Jesus of Nazareth and the human liberative struggle which has to do with a proper appreciation of a "christology from below." My concern is to not divorce christological formulation from those who are relegated to "the underside of history." In my view christology should never become a matter of distanced doctrinal correctness. Concerning the historical Jesus and a christology from below, McAfee Brown makes a telling point which according to my understanding of christology is essential: "The mistake of many later Christians has been to start where the early Christians finished - namely, with Jesus as "God"... a "christology from below," then, allows Christians to affirm that in one they already know as a full human being, God has not only approached, but has shared their life to the full." See, Robert McAfee Brown *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), p. 116.
Thus the creed-like primitive Christian hymn in Phil. 2: 6-11, which from any angle of view (judged by whatever belief system), leaves no room for gradual approaches or “easy believism”. Nothing in this pristine confession takes the interlocutor by the hand. Rather, declaratively the kerygmatic conviction is announced, and you and I and the world are profoundly confronted for, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Creator."

It is Jesus who is the sustaining energy, the constant of the Christian disciple's life, the one who summons' in his inaugural proclamation of God's reign: "Come follow me" (cf., Mk. 1: 15; 16-20 and 2:14). He is the designate of God who gives to the church its stance in the world, the determinate who provides the model for a really humanising style of life. It is Jesus who not only communicates to the Christian community the picture of authentic existence, but also by the potency of his commitment to God enables it towards the power of that authentic existence.5

Thus Jesus of Nazareth who through God's resurrection of him became the Christ of the Christian tradition is the living One who invests the church with the "contagion of his freedom," to use Gilkey's words. He is for the Christian communion, "Lord and God, the centre of our ethical ultimate concern, he around whom we build our humanity and so our active existence in the

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5 Since the Bible states that: "The Word became flesh," (Jn. 1:14) this work takes it for granted that there is no contradiction to liberative purposes by referencing Jesus' maleness through the use of pronouns such as "he," "his" and "Lord," etc. when referring to his historic person. Commitment to a liberationist perspective is maintained by substituting male pronouns or formal terms (i. e. "the Son of Man" etc) where appropriate with the use of terms such as "the truly Human One," or "the Human One." For a fuller discussion see, An Inclusive-Language Lectionary: Readings for Year C (New York: The Co-operative Publication Association, 1985), p. 12 and its Appendix.
world." This means that Christians are not autonomous individuals who are self-directed concerning their norms of life and their criteria of knowledge. Christians are dependent by willing embrace upon the Lord Jesus Christ for their self-realisation and authenticity. Reflecting the validity of this christological foundation concerning the church's reality principle, Karl Barth, as one convinced that God's call in Jesus Christ is the form of Christian existence rightly asks, "whether a Christian theologian can with good conscience and a joyful heart do anything else than put 'Christ only' first and last in all their thinking."

a) The "Cruciality" of Jesus Christ in the Trinity of God

At a place of christological concentration, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostolic contention is that God's "light of revelation," is "the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4: 6). It is from the premise of commitment to this revelatory person - the One in whom God is present by divine act - that a christocentric discipleship theology advances the scope of its endeavours concerning the hope of human transformation and the care of the natural order.

Christian comprehension and hermeneutical discernment of the Judaeo-Christian God are thus measured by the centrality of correlative christological premises. Radical discipleship as a christocentric theology has at the core of its attention a total dependence on the triune God of life; the Divine who is revealed as the gracious loving Creator, and the "humane human being" in the

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7 I am indebted to Gilkey in ibid. for this style of phrasing.
person of Jesus, and the conspiring drive of freedom and relentless love in the power of the Holy Spirit.\(^9\) This means that radical discipleship is committed to a theology that is shaped and formed by christocentric trinitarianism. It is a triune experience of God embodied in Jesus Christ and the cruciality of commitment to him that informs the content of biblical faith. For it is, in "the history of Jesus, the Son" that God is disclosed, for "he is the revealer of the Trinity."\(^10\)

Realisation of divine truth revealed in this One who interpreted God without falsehood (cf. Heb. 4: 15), and the identifying of one's experience with the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth, confessed as the Christ, brings with it the recognition that what has been given to humanity comes from the triune God; that in this conversion from darkness to light, there is nothing in it of one's own deserving or merit. Christian discipleship is therefore an act of grace and gratitude to grace expressed within the believer by the creative mediation of God's three-fold love. Because of the source from which it comes, this triune love cannot be unrelated, it will not be requited and is ceaseless in its relational creativity to individuals and the whole of life.

The Christian affirmation is that "God is love" (1 Jn. 4: 8), and that God has with loving grace acted towards humanity in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. In this way God's love is proved towards us "in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rm. 5: 8). C. H. Dodd commenting on the fact that Christ died for us not as those who were "good," or 'even "just," draws attention to the reality that, "Christ's self-sacrifice could never be thought of as something through which an angry God might be induced to treat us lovingly,


since it is the love of God's own person, existing from all eternity, which was expressed in the sacrifice of Christ."\(^\text{11}\)

God's being, as divine love revealed in Jesus by the power of the Spirit gives expression to the trinitarian purpose of "self-giving Love." This creative love, from within the triunity of God is determined to see nothing lost, and so through the reconciliatory work of the Son, God has willed that all things be brought into union (cf. Eph. 1: 10).

Within this redemptive context, Christian faith understands the crucifixion of Jesus as the Spirit inspired event "of the love of the Son and the grief of the Father/Mother, that is, as an event between God and God, as an event within the Trinity," that is "the liberating word of love which creates new life."\(^\text{12}\) As Moltmann explains, where this encounter occurs, believers are taken up "into the inner life of God, if in the Cross of Christ believers experience the love of God for the godless, the enemies, in so far as the history of the Christ is the inner life of God's own self."\(^\text{13}\) In the innertrinitarian life of God, the Father/Mother and the Son are united with one another through the Holy Spirit in a living communion of mutual love. Wherein the eternal saving will of the Father/Mother is accepted, obeyed and completed by the Son in the power of the Spirit.

Concerning the depth of love within the triunity of God, Moltmann adds: "If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and death of Jesus - and that is something which faith must do - then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for all people on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ."\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{13}\) Moltmann, in ibid., p. 249.
b) Jesus as the Christ of God because of the God of Promise

For Christian discipleship, it is at the place where divine love marks Jesus Christ as the truth about God, and the way into the reign of God, that authentic experience of God is to be found. His life is the way and the content of salvific love; through him the distance between God and humanity is bridged. By the power of Jesus' living presence he places us into a real and spiritual relationship with the living God.

Faith's quandary and search for God is answered in existential encounter with Jesus Christ. Beyond our competence or capacity in the area of faith, Jesus is the Christian revelation. Against any anthropological attempts at christological correspondence our knowledge of God, is the knowledge that springs forth from faith in God's self-disclosure in who Jesus Christ is and not in who we are. Nor in whom we aspire to become. God has given, and continually gives, and faith's task through the believing obedience of holy living and prayerful dependence is to receive this faithfulness of God in gratitude. Discipleship is grounded in faithful obedience to God's grace and promise. Thus, a discipleship predicated on biblical christology has to do with the exposition of God's self-revelation.

Jesus is known as the Christ of God for the sake of the God of promise, and in this process God is known as the Father/Mother of Jesus Christ for Jesus' sake. The nature and attributes of this God of Jesus Christ are therefore discerned from the history of Christ, from his passion and his raising from the dead; they cannot be perceived and premised from any other source.15

It is not as if by some inner light of our own devising we knew about God, and, then by some sort of spiritual presupposition decided to attach Jesus of Nazareth to God's being. In the formulation of a biblical christology that

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14 Moltmann, in ibid., p. 249.
begins with God and not human aspiration, God’s saving message is made known to us according to the witness of Scripture, in God’s revelation of Jesus Christ. Within the disclosure that comes through God’s word

... the knowledge of Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity: the earthly, human, and therefore historically knowable Christ is remembered and known in the light of his resurrection from the dead and his presence in the Spirit of God.\(^{16}\)

Which means that, “the raised and present Christ is perceived and known in the light of what was remembered and passed on about the life he lived”.\(^{17}\)

Against any sort of “natural theology,” or “anthropological Jesuology” our christological comprehension - which underpins our investigations into radical discipleship - is predicated on what God has done in Jesus Christ. And then through grace has revealed to us. Rather than what we believe ourselves to have deduced or originated concerning our knowledge of God and the following of Christ. Consequently, theological truth is to be judged by its faithfulness to the Gospel of God as revealed in the biblical message. Robert Jenson is correct: "To identify the gospel's God, we must identify Jesus. It is in this sense that we may say that God 'is' Jesus: every reality is somehow identifiable, and we cannot identify this God without identifying Jesus."\(^{18}\)

Jesus Christ as the revealing of God's person was God's supreme act of self-expression. He accepted the call of God as the very centre of his being, his very self. Therefore, in Jesus the divine purpose was manifested without hindrance. And although, καὶ σχῆματι εὑρέθης ὡς ἄνθρωπος, "being found in human form" (Phil. 2: 8), the apostolic tradition affirms that the attributes of God were fully manifested in his life and purpose.

\(^{16}\) Moltmann in ibid., p. 69.
\(^{17}\) Moltmann in ibid., p. 69.
As Jüngel states: "Christian theology can use the word 'God' meaningfully only in a context which is defined by the understanding of the human person of Jesus. Whatever the word 'God' is to mean, for our thinking it is determined, for the Christian faith, in Jesus." 19 In the cruciality that is Jesus Christ, humanity is drawn to a unique person. Someone who in every part of his journey, and who at every level of his "life-praxis" was centred entirely upon the being, the loving graciousness, and the justice demands of God for humanity and all creation. 20 From his attitude to life, his entire enthusiasm, so far as the life of this world is concerned, Jesus' life was dominated by a passion for God's willing and consumed with the well-being of others. In him humanity was confronted with the presence of One who was totally and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God, and who from this disclosure

19 Eberhard Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 12. In citing Jüngel, I am aware of his concern that God's history in Jesus must not be reduced to other histories. I believe he is right in wanting to protect the divine reality from any human interference or ownership, for God is self-related. I am equally in agreement that our best attempts of witnessing to the kingdom can only be analogical. We cannot presume the human arrogance of stipulating that what we do is in sum and total, solely God's will. Our heralding of God's rule together with our attempts at following Jesus are to be found in the relationship of analogy - not in direct correlation. Although in an apocalyptic context we may claim to approximate to God's will and the doing of it. However, I beg to differ with him concerning the possibility of drawing out political and historical connections concerning God's liberative activity in Jesus, for incarnationally God is self-connected to us and our history. His theological delineation of boundaries is understandable given the theological history of Germany. But as Webster comments, such a separatist position is "a polarisation insensitive to the mediations of God's 'history'" in the contemporary world. See, J. B. Webster Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to his Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 135. I am in basic agreement with Jüngel's theological concerns. Without wanting to sound trite, I cannot but wonder if Jüngel's formulations and his way of theologising would carry a larger "surplus of meaning" and sound different were he caught up in the past revolutionary context of Nicaragua under the Somozan dictatorship, or the apartheid demonism of South Africa before Mandela's release, or in current day Burma. In defense of his concerns, his comments regarding belief and action are helpful: "Love does not yet rule on earth. But it can moderate the ruling powers and thereby make the ambivalences and ambiguities of life in the kingdoms of this world more bearable. If this ambivalence, in face of which the one who acts politically need not be ashamed, cannot be removed, it can at least be reduced by an approximation to the reign of love which brings unambiguity. It can become an ambiguity directed towards unambiguity." See Eberhard Jüngel, "My Theology" - A Short Summary, in Theological Essays II (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1995), p. 16.

20 What I mean here by life-praxis is akin to Taylor's articulation, in that it relates to the "sociohistorical dynamic" of Jesus' outlook and action as they took shape in the personal, political, economic and religious contexts of his life-alignments. For this meaning and a
was completely open to being without reserve, the vehicle of divine purpose and passion. Biblical-Christian belief holds to the conviction that in Jesus Christ, beyond that which we ourselves cannot possess, God has addressed humanity at the root of being, and in so doing, has given to the church through the crucified and risen Jesus, the meaning of its existence and that of history's drive. All our theologising about Christian existence and meaning then, is meant to be affixed to this christocentric recognition.

The way of real faith and faithfulness to God will only be truly radical and full of promise for those caught up into the most terrible form of "un-faith," into that ubiquitous atheism which is not a militant and passionate struggle against the idea of God's reality, but more that practical atheism of Christian indifference and apathy found in so much of the First World church. To deny God vitalising existence, is to leave humanity as its own deity - which is idolatry. All theology ought to have as its perceptible centre the meaning and relevance of *solus Christus* which discipleship demands. As Paul has stated: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Consequently, a theology of discipleship in the struggle for justice and liberation, and in its interactions with other theologies - feminist, black, indigenous, Two Thirds World, ecological and wide ecumenical - will maintain a christocentric and biblical orientation. It will maintain this conviction without reticence because it understands that the inspired one who is Jesus Christ is the optic that brings God and the reign of God into historical focus.

c) The Revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Crucified and Raised

In contrast to non-normative christologies, a biblically radical discipleship follows the argumentation of those mainline theologians who stand resolutely

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for God's reconciliatory act in Jesus Christ, and against any displacement of his cruciality. Arguing from the coherent centre of the gospel, "front-ranking" theologians like Jüngel, Moltmann, Schneiders, Pannenberg, Otto, Achtemeier, Kasper, Lorenzen, Braaten and others, have in the context of contemporary theological debates rightly maintained that the unique gift of the Christian Gospel to the world is the revelation of the triune God. Their insistence - arguing from the apostolic premise - is that this triune God is revealed distinctively as the God of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jüngel's words: "The sacramental priority of the man Jesus consists in the fact that God is objective in the existence of this man uniquely." Further to this, their mainline theological constructions insist that the point of departure for a biblical-Christian understanding of existence can only be the scriptural witness as attested to in the Bible, and its kerygmatic axis, and not some philosophy or pluralist accommodation. In sum, their individual and combined insistence is that the God-question for Christians is trinitarianly revealed (or, "identified" to use Jüngel's expression), in the person of the crucified Jesus, and that he alone, through the novum of the resurrection is the revealed word of God. As Jüngel points out, God's purposes in Jesus Christ can not be understood apart from the reality of the resurrected One. Which is to say that the resurrection must never be construed as something secondary to the Cross - as some displaced event. Far from being in the background, the resurrection openly

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23 In respect to the authority and normativity of the Bible, see, Sandra M. Schneiders, The Revelatory Text (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 55-61. I am in particular agreement with her comment: "The normativity of scripture in relation to the Church's overall mission is constituted by its presentation of the reign of God that Jesus preached." For this remark, see ibid., p. 58.
and publicly makes known, "God's relation to the death of Jesus of Nazareth." In forceful language Jüngel states: "The meaning of the death of Jesus, which is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, comes to speech as faith in the identity of God with the crucified man Jesus."

Thorwald Lorenzen, commenting on the resurrection of Jesus as being "first and foremost an act of God," being analogous in its significance only to "the events of creation and salvation" and therefore having a "novum character" or quality about it, maintains thereby the unique revelatory purpose of God in Jesus Christ. One of the earliest Christian confessions of faith (as Lorenzen points out), underscored the conviction that indeed it was God who "raised Jesus the Lord from the dead." (e.g., Rm. 4: 28, 8: 11, 10: 9; I Cor. 6: 14, 15: 15; II Cor. 4: 14; I Thess. 1: 9 f; Gal. 1: 1; Col. 2: 12; Eph. 1: 20; I Pt. 1: 21 as well as Acts 3: 15, 4: 10, 5: 30, 37.). By contrasting these texts with those that speak of Jesus Christ himself being the primary agent of his own resurrection (cf., I Thess. 4: 14; Rm. 14: 9), Lorenzen deduces within the canon of the New Testament a clear trinitarian development of thought concerning Jesus' person. He argues further that Jesus is unique to the purpose of God and that all other resuscitations of persons back to life were not resurrection deliverances by God from the ontological actuality of death's power and realm, but rather resuscitations "from death to earthly life" - which as such is "a life unto death." What is unique about Jesus' resurrection he maintains, is that in this new reality God by raising Jesus from the dead uniquely owned his person and message. Through Jesus' resurrection, death's claim was defeated by a new

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25 Jüngel, cited in ibid., p. 33.
27 See Thorwald Lorenzen, Resurrection and Discipleship (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), pp. 125-126. For a detailed treatment of God's Novum purpose in Jesus Christ that carries exegetical insight, theological understanding and biblical commitment see,
and unexpected act of God - Jesus being raised "from death into the eternal presence of God." Being of the same conviction, Moltmann argues that God's saving purpose in the resurrection of the crucified One is the comprehensive foundation (der Grund) for christology and the church.

Whereas theologians like these and various others are willing to admit that there are many and varied statements about God in the world, purposefully they insist that statements concerning God are for the Christian faith, only reliable statements to the extent that they bear testimony to the saving and liberative activity of Jesus Christ in the self-revelation of God as disclosed in Scripture. Christocentric trinitarianism they assert is the sole and unifying theme of the church's theology. Thus, their writings contain an abiding affirmation of the trinity on the basis of christology. This is a repeated feature of Welch's work on the Trinity, who contends:

The content of the affirmation that God is triune is not different from the content of the confession that Jesus is the Lord, or that God has revealed God's own person in Christ, or the acknowledgment of the paradox of grace, or the assertion that 'God so loved the world ...,' or any other summary statement of the gospel, for the affirmation of the triunity of God is an explication, 'a necessary and relevant analysis,' of what is involved in any of these statements.

Such emphasis is needful because only in the trinitarian nucleus does the entire meaning of these statements come to light. Welch continues: "Both the unity and the variety which the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to express are given in the New Testament witness to the one divine act." At this point his summary is that, "the threefoldness of the Creator, Son and Spirit does not

Lorenzen's position on this point, see Part II "The Resurrection of the Crucified Christ as a Foundational Event" in ibid., pp. 115-182.
28 Thorwald Lorenzen, ibid., p. 125.
contradict but expresses the oneness of God's essence."31 Biblical radicalism's insistence is that where this understanding is lost the Christian message will be reduced to a form of "unitarian theocentrism" leaving the church with a trinitarian God-talk without the normativity of Jesus Christ and a "type of theology" about Jesus Christ that diminishes God and God's becoming.32 For, it is the triunity of God which is always graciously active toward the whole creation, and Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit are indivisible persons of the triune activity. The trinitarian foundation of the Gospel is clear, in Jesus Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2: 9). It follows that Jesus' redemptive and unique place is not able to be in any way abstracted from the trinity of God (as some accommodatingly try to do). Any weakening of trinitarian content is a diminution of Christianity, of its form and determination - without this essentiality theology is not Christian theology.

**d) Jesus Christ: Never Relativised, Forever Contemporaneous**

Within Christian theology there can be no relegating of Jesus Christ to a reduced place - nor yet to a time-bound culture or history - as do those who give uncritical acceptance to a relativised pluralism. As the saviour of the world, Jesus is not locked within a given historical moment of the past without relevance or entrance to our present or future. Pannenberg points out that Jesus is not isolated from God's contemporary purposes because salvific power is always "connected with the presence of the future of God in the coming of Jesus, and also with the imparting of this presence of eschatological salvation by the Spirit, who through the gospel leads to knowledge of the Son in the human history of Jesus."33

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31 Claude Welch in ibid., pp. 233-234.
The righteousness of God manifested in the resurrection of Jesus who through the variety of interpretations conveyed in the gospels and Paul is proclaimed as the Christ of the apostolic canon. As such, Jesus Christ in his essential relationship with God is not therefore some time-bound representative of God's salvific intent "once upon a time" shut up within an alien worldview. Those who propound any such position hold too static a concept of worldview presuppositions. We can review our theological hermeneutics, and specify our presuppositions, and we can reflect critically upon them to free them from a dead past and contextual error. However, a critical and necessary exercise of this sort does not relativise the living person and the liberative narrative of Jesus. It uncovers however a new openness of possibility. The guiding concept that informs Christian critical observation is the ongoing drive of God's reign and Jesus' purpose as the kingdom meta-narrative in conflict with the dominant discourse of a world ruled by sin and greed. Without a tenacious adherence to this biblical vision praxically reflected in the theology of the prophets, Jesus and the apostles, our worldview falters as to who God is and how the God of Jesus of Nazareth has continued relevance through historicocultural and political patterns in the world. Jesus Christ, and God's willing in him is the abiding totality of Christian interpretation. It is no fading memory that Christian worship knows. Any such tired estimate is belied by every current living experience of every Christian believer. New Testament theology expresses this continuity of communion in the words: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13: 8). Jesus' continuing presence and purpose is that which eschatologically thrusts God's future radically into our present and into every contemporary meaning.

By the dynamism of God's resurrection of Jesus, his spirited person and work are ever present in the world - forever efficacious, never withdrawn or remote. An analysis of the interventionist impetus' at work within liberation theologies demonstrates God's future as being empirically and existentially present in Jesus Christ. The historical project of God's Basileia works both as a sponsor
of driving concerns and as a companion in the struggle for liberative realisation. Jesus of Nazareth's saving lordship is contemporaneous. As are the meanings and the claims of his kingdom of justice and love. All of which reach the point of concentration and fulfilment in him. Braaten says of God's extant claims in Jesus Christ: "They are universally true and meaningful for all nations, for all individuals, for all time to come." 34

As to the contemporary confrontation of Jesus in the sphere of religious dialogue and dehumanising politics, and against any historical relativisation of his person and message (be it by an errant church or proponents of a theocentric pluralism), Bonhoeffer's formulation is to the point:

The question How the man Jesus, bound to space and time, can be contemporary is impossible. There exists no such isolated Jesus. The other question, how God can be in time, is also impossible. There is no such isolated God. Only the question Who is contemporary, present, and actual is possible and meaningful. Answer: the one person of the God-Man Jesus Christ. 35

My meaning here is, that for biblical faith the normativity of Jesus for the church and the world may not be limited to the time of his earthly existence, his salvation is a continued experience. Deliberately not neutral and challenging of all mediators, Jesus' claims still to this day despite the convention of pluralism have not disappeared. In Jesus Christ, "the new aeon which cannot become old is present" says Tillich. The Christ-event widens in its meaning across time and space, as Tillich insists: "Christianity lives through the faith that within it there is the new which is not just another new thing but rather the principle and representation of all the really new in humanity and history". 36

Pannenberg with clarity advances: "The message and history of Jesus contain the eschatological definitive revelation of God and God's turning in love to the creation. 'No one knows God except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal God' (Matt. 11: 27 par.)." Therefore there can be no displacement of Jesus Christ from the God-head because "the risen Lord is exalted to eternal fellowship with God." And Jesus' connective intimacy "to the eternal God as the Son, ... means that the Son was linked to God before the beginning of the earthly existence of Jesus. The relation reaches back also to the time before his earthly birth."

Against any relativisation of the church's theological centre, and by way of lifting up the essence of the Gospel, Luther's battle-cry rings true: "At this man thou shalt point and say that he is God." And in concert with the apostolic conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is exclusively God's designate, and therefore the basis of the Christian kerygma, Barth has foundationally stated:

Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, how ever better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though Jesus were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, and indeed the very Word of God itself. Theology must also end with Jesus Christ, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions from what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him .... Against all the imaginations and errors in which we seem to be so hopelessly entangled when we try to speak of God, God will indeed only be maintained if we will only allow the name of Jesus Christ to be maintained in our thinking as the beginning and the end of all our thoughts."

38 Pannenberg, in ibid., p. 367.
39 This formulation of Luther's, was a theological favourite of Bonhoeffer's frequently used his teaching. It is cited in John A. Phillips, The Form Of Christ In The World (London: Collins, 1967), p. 82.
40 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III/2, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), pp. 4-5. This quotation from Barth has been made "inclusive" freeing it from male descriptors of God. This is in keeping with what I have sought to do throughout this work. And follows what Sölle, Brueggemann, Ruether, Gilkey, Wink, Horsley and McAfee Brown along with many others are mindful of doing. In so doing I have in no way altered Barth's or any other author's theological meaning. My
3 (ii) God's Liberative Narrative:  
Jesus is Lord (κύριος ήσούς)

Ventilating pristine elements of the early church's credo, Paul, probably as the first Christian to express christological conviction in writing prophetically states: "We know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as in fact there are many gods [theoi] and many lords [kyrioι] - yet for us there is one God, the Creator, from whom all things come and for whom we live; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made and through whom we live." (I Cor. 8:4-6). In the religious world of his day (through many such unambiguous statements), Paul articulated that in Christ's face the shining splendour of the Creator of all things was revealed (cf., II Cor. 4: 6); a shining that suffused the whole of life with the revelation of the true and only God. In the apostolic announcement of God's exaltation of "Jesus as Lord" which Käsemann and Bornkamm indicate corresponds to not merely functional, but ontic identity; Jesus' personage acquires a consentient laudation, "that every tongue should confess," and before whose name, "every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2: 9-11; cf., Rm. 14: 11 and Acts 2: 36). Embedded within this early Christian creed is an echo of the divine consciousness and decree wherein God (Yahweh) conviction is that if theology continues to be stated with the absence of the female pronoun and other alternatives to "men" and "man" or continues to only speak of God in male dominated language then it is not liberative and reflects what Meeks calls "the rigid circle of sexual alienation." Unless theology frees itself from this penchant it only mirrors the domination-system that would enslave us all. See M. Douglas Meeks, Origins of the Theology of Hope (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 153, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "You Are Not to Be Called Father" in her Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

41 See Neil Elliot, Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994), p. 206, where he indicates that phrases such as: "an idol has no real existence," and "there is not God but one," suggest that Paul is quoting convivial watchwords integral to the Corinthian Christians. Given that the cities of much of the New Testament area were "full of idols" (cf., Acts 17: 16), this form of convivial denunciation must have had considerable sting within the social symbolics of Christian discourse.
asserts: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (Isaiah 45: 23). Herein Yahweh/God confirms that not only peoples and nations, but every individual will conform in worship and bend in obeisant homage. The strength of the divine authority here, which is confirmed with a solemn oath (and cannot be over estimated), decrees that when anyone invokes "deity in their oaths, they will swear by the name of God (cf., Amos: 8: 14)." Such an absolute statement declares forever, "the death-knell of all idolatry." For, Yahweh is the true God, before whom all "gods" are deprived of ontological validity, force, authority, and are voided.

The continuation of the divine experience and empowerment is attested to in the new and overwhelming apprehension of truth within apostolic hermeneutics: what Isaiah attributes to Yahweh, powerfully Paul immutably equates to Jesus. God's revelation in Jesus Christ as "Lord" now stands as the contradiction of all other revelations with their so-called gods and lords. It is through Jesus Christ alone that access to God has been graciously granted (cf. Eph. 2: 18), and to whom: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given ..." (Mt. 28:18). Traumatically confronting their polytheistic environment, the christocentric conviction and praxis of the first followers of Jesus refused to supplicate the theological plurality of their day. Their faith-illumined clarity was intolerant of all other claimants to deity, refusing on all sides the highly particular event of God's revelation in Jesus Christ to be accommodated within the existing plethora of "principalities," of "powers," of "gods and lords." This it did by disallowing their assertions of Jesus' lordship to be subsumed, or made into merely one more example (albeit a particular example), of the larger extensive relationship of the divine human interaction.

Undoubtedly, as various biblical commentators have shown, "lord" at the time of the primitive communities of disciple-believers had various connotations in their world, which was essentially hierarchical given the social and political relationships of domination and equity. In such a world it is salient to notice that in the midst of misunderstanding and political choice, it was for Jesus alone that the first followers of the Christian way reserved the place and title of absolute lordship. What is indestructible and constant, in the understanding of primitive Christianity was that among all the claimants of deity (and there were many), only "one" was truly God - that triune One who is the Creator and consummation of all things. Likewise Jesus Christ was not one god among other possible contenders - the one true God is mediated through Jesus Christ, whom the primitive Christians affirmed as the true Kυριος. As van Leeuwen adduces, Paul discloses the magnitude of the Gospel's scope in that he "witnesses to the fact that Jesus is now Lord over the pagan world and that the pagan conscience is therefore no longer autonomous or left to its own resources." Although there is no attempt by Paul in I Cor. 8: 4-6 to formulate a systematic christology, the spiritual and moral oneness between the Creator and the Son is explicitly indicated. As Foerster (and Quell) show, Paul's usage of Kυριος is clear. Concerning this precision, he comments that Kυριος signifies a particular christological bearing, "a concept of relationship." Commenting further he states that,

there is only one Lord on whom [Christians] are dependent and through whom are all things, through whom they have their very being as

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45 Concerning the formulation of God's Being, see the Trinitarian work of Eberhard Jüngel, The Doctrine Of The Trinity: God's Being Is In Becoming (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976).
Christians .... it is plain that κύριος is the One through whom God has come into the world to work and to save.47

Within the irreducible core of canonical images and therefore Christian discipleship, "Jesus is Lord" became a prevalent confessional formula: in this declaration Christians gave Jesus of Nazareth the title κύριος which was in the great majority of cases, the Septuagint translation (LXX) reserved for יהוה (Yahweh).48 It is no surprise then that the lordship of Jesus was an expression of full Christian faith, retaining an implacable place and resolution in the apostolic stratum of the church (eg., Acts 2:36; 4:33; 8:16; 16:31 and 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Cor. 12:3; 11 Cor. 13:14 and Rev. 22:20).

a) Lord and God

The gospel evangelists affirmed the same commitment to Jesus as was normally ascribed to an incomparable relationship with God.49 Most certainly, one of the clearest examples of Jesus' relationship to God together with an invitation to join in the discipleship community where his lordship was the unifying centre, is posited in John's Gospel. Wes Howard-Brook sees the focus of this episode as "moving Thomas off the road of unbelief and toward faith."50 In the interaction between Jesus and Thomas, where the doubting disciple requires violent "seeing" belief, Thomas will "base his faith only on his own forceful touching of the places where Jesus has been most forcefully touched." The strength of Thomas' doubt is such that "it allows him to deny

48 I am not concerned in this essay to enter into the disputed question of the origins - be they Palestinian or Hellenistic - concerning the New Testament usage of κύριος, and I do not assume that every time κύριος appears it is used as a translation of Yahweh. But it is my conviction that in general when the New Testament authors used this title, they were quite consciously aware that Jesus was being given a designation which would correspond to his identification with the God of the Hebrew Bible.
49 See the Gospel of John 12: 44f; 49 and compare also the Q-saying in Luke 10: 16 and Matthew 10: 40.
the implication of Jesus' death for his own future." So for him, "seeing alone will not suffice. He must both see and touch the nail prints in Jesus' hands."\(^{51}\)

The place of Jesus' lordship is finely crafted in this powerful confrontation. Jesus appears to the disciples who for fear of their lives are behind locked doors. Howard-Brook catches the meaningfulness of the story line for disciples past and present, when he explains that by the power of who he is, Jesus is able to "penetrate both the locks and their fear." Understanding the credal intention of the author is imperative, for "Jesus' coming has been changed from an aorist indicative (êlthen) to a present participle (erchetai), changing the context from a completed event to an ongoing reality."\(^{52}\) In this confessional confrontation Jesus is addressed as "My Lord and my God" (Ὁ Κυρίος μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου).

The force of the Thomas' confession is designed to serve as a confessional climax to the Gospel. For a divinely "risen Jesus is the most powerful evidence imaginable that Jesus is indeed the one sent from God, whose commandment is the word of God that requires obedience."\(^{53}\) Jüngel's perception regarding the revelation of God in the one who commanded the allegiance of the early Christians is that:

The divine sonship of Jesus revealed in the event of Easter is nothing other than the very conceptualisation, that is, the naming, of what Jesus in his earthly life was: one who ek-sisted totally and completely from his heavenly Father[Mother] and who in-sisted directly on God's fatherly[motherly] will. Precisely in his humanity he is therefore the Son of God. Precisely in wanting to be, and being, nothing other than the human person in correspondence to God, he is truly the Son of God.\(^{54}\)


\(^{51}\) Howard-Brook, in ibid., p. 460.

\(^{52}\) Howard-Brook, in ibid., p. 461.

\(^{53}\) Howard-Brook, in ibid., p. 460.

b) Jesus Christ's Inviable Person

In Jesus' existence, the Christian community believed that it experienced the very life and purpose of God. From the acceptation of this new coherence, God must not only be conceived of anew, but must be known with a new and different incitement: a spirited personal and political invitation to transformative change. Thus, in Jesus' unique relationship with God, our understanding of God is forever changed.55

What this means is that in the obedience of knowing Jesus as Lord, we are not so much called upon to believe a flat doctrine, but rather a living relationship. By this obedience, faith in Jesus became the incomparable and irrevocable step over the frontier that separated the old age from the new - humanity therefrom alive to God in Jesus Christ (cf., Rm. 6: 11). Jesus' lordship is thus a call to a new life-praxis; it is a declaration of God's intent in and through the crucified Jesus in ways that demand believing enlistment in the cause of liberation.

From this determination Gutiérrez is correct when he stresses that, Jesus of Nazareth is "the full manifestation of the God who is love" - vulnerable and determined love that incarnated the meaning of God's justice in history. His lordship means that he is "the one who will come; he is the future of our history."56 As Moltmann puts it, now God's "eschatological history with the world is at heart God's history with Jesus, and Jesus' history with God," which of course is uniquely "trinitarian history" aimed at the redemption of the world.57

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It was from configurations of christological conviction such as these concerning the "Lordship" of Jesus Christ and his alternate vision - the rule and reign of God - that radical discipleship was predicated. New Testament theology is clear, "the Lord" referred to in the apostolic kerygma is none other than the crucified, risen and exalted Jesus, upon whom God has conferred the designation which contradicts the expectations of every other authority. With high christology, Tillich's language engraves this meaning on our imagination:

Even the greatest in power and wisdom could not more fully reveal the Heart of God and the heart of humanity than the Crucified has done already. Those things have been revealed once for all. 'It is finished.' In the face of the Crucified all the 'more' and all the 'less,' all progress and all approximation, are meaningless. Therefore, we can say of Him alone: He is the new reality; He is the end; He is the Messiah. To the Crucified alone we can say: 'Thou art the Christ.'

From this breakthrough in language and symbolisation of the only true and living God revealed in the crucified Jesus came the distinctiveness of primitive Christian subversion and the content of its alternative set of ideological investments. Variously this convictional concern and historical sharpness became one of the most widely exercised theopolitical designations within the primitive Christian communities and the world.

c) Jesus Christ as Cosmic Lord

But the lordship of Jesus relates not just to anthropological history; it embraces the whole cosmos, as the Christ hymn in Col. 1: 15 -20 indicates, "in him all things were created" (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα). As God's agent in creation "all things" (τὰ πάντα) cohere. And Paul in Rm. 8: 19-23 also

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59 It is appropriate that I acknowledge here that my attention was drawn to the meaning of τὰ πάντα by Rev. Alistair Macrae.
testifies to the Spirit as active in the total renewal and freeing not only of "the children of God," but also of "the whole creation."

Within the biblical discourse, Jesus Christ then, is shown to be the lord of all history - cosmic as well as anthropological - indeed, Christ's work of redemption involves the whole universe. He is the initiator of a process of salvation and transformation that moves at God's behest towards cosmic emancipation (cf. Eph. 1: 1-10). It is accordingly, for good reason that Moltmann draws the church's attention to a much neglected element of christology - Jesus Christ's lordship in cosmic and universal dimensions. For Christ's cosmic lordship addresses all facets of life; which means there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, everything is within the saving activity, the "τὰ πάντα" of Jesus' lordship which gives liberative purpose and energy to all things. All human stories together with the wholeness of creation must occupy soteriological significance for theology today.

In the ancient world, cosmic christology confronted Christ the redeemer with a world of powers, spirits and gods. The proclamation of 'universal reconciliation' liberated believers from their fear of the world and their terror of demons. Today a cosmic christology has to confront Christ the redeemer with a nature which human beings have plunged into chaos, infected with poisonous waste and condemned to universal death; for it is only this Christ who can save men and women from their despair and preserve nature from annihilation.

d) Competing Totalisms: Jesus' God and Rome's Caesar

Although it was crucial to the Christian argument, the title "Κύριος" was not uniquely Christian in origin. It was current in the pluralistic world of the New

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60 Concerning early Christian theology and tradition pertaining to the "Greater Christ" see, Moltmann in op. cit., p. 280f. For a theological and ethical treatment of the ecological crisis and a set of meaningful responses see David G. Hallman, editor, Ecotheology: Voices from South and North (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994).
Testament, both in religious and religio-political parlance. Basically the term indicated a superiority of the one to whom it is assigned. By the apostolic church's claim, and in its confrontation with priestly-Roman rule and the pro-Roman Sadducean aristocracy, the issue of Jesus' lordship and his historical project of the kingdom became much more than neutral discourse. For the inspired primitive Christians it carried with it strong social and political significance. In everyday usage the term κύριος had generalised meanings, but was particularly addressed to deities, especially among Semitic and Eastern peoples in the Greco-Roman epoch. Stambaugh and Balch writing about the religions of the period explain that, "wholehearted conversion, in the sense of exclusive devotion to the god of the cult, was not normally expected." This attitude was part of the prevailing cultural phenomenon since, "syncretism was the tendency for one god to accumulate the attributes of other gods."62

In the rich pluralism of the time, there was a religious willingness which fostered and accommodated a world-view where theologians for millennia in Egypt, for instance, "tended to interpret different individual gods as manifestations of a single godhead" (a similarity one cannot but notice from some theologians today). They cite Graeco-Roman theologians, building from oriental sources, and deducing from various other gods into "a single godhead, expressed in popular exclamations such as 'Zeus Hades Helius Dionysus is one,' or 'Zeus Sarapis is one.'"63

And reflecting the climate of the religious pluralism of the time Stambaugh and Balch note: "The gods of paganism were not jealous gods."64 We know from the course of history that this was not the case concerning Christianity, it

63 See Stambaugh and Balch, in ibid., p. 44.
64 See Stambaugh and Balch, in ibid., pp. 41-51.
freighted a theological and historical acidity that the prevailing religious pluralism could not contain. The God of Jesus Christ was identifiably a jealous God whose claim was totalising and universal.

The clear and unremitting testimony of the Bible from the beginning declares in evangelistic language that the people of God should acknowledge: "I, Yahweh am your God" (Ex. 20: 1) and that, "You shall not have other gods besides me" (Ex. 20: 3). Concomitantly, in the theology and social symbolics of the biblical story line Yahweh is pictured as being in battle and in contest with other gods, be they the Pharaoh's of power (cf., Ex. 15: 4-10) or idols or heavenly claimants. As the victor and vanquisher of the gods both in heaven and on earth Yahweh/God is to be worshipped:

For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised;
Yahweh is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but Yahweh made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before Yahweh;
strength and beauty are the sanctuary of Yahweh.
(Ps. 96: 4-6).

The evangelistic claim here is unmistakable: there is "one God" who is the Creator of all, and as the insatiable lover of all created things is to be acknowledged by all. The people of God therefore are called to be Yahweh's witnesses and a light to the nations (Isa. 43: 8 - 13; 42: 6; 49: 6). Whereas some religious traditions propound a syncretistic approach to belief in God, the biblical witness requires a "declared" announcement of faith in the one true God. Without any hint of deception as to their meaning, the biblical faith-claims are straightforward: the God of Israel, the God who is known in Jesus Christ, is the God before whom all other gods are idols (Isa. 42: 8; 43: 11). With similar clarity the Bible declares that there is no Redeemer other than Yahweh, and Jesus Christ the Saviour whom God has sent (cf. Acts 4: 12).
As I have maintained, for Christians, faith in Jesus Christ as κύριος was understood as constitutive to faith in God alone; as such the meaning of this claim became an antagonistic social script for both the governing bodies of the Jewish high priesthood and its council in Jerusalem, and for Rome's delegated authority, the Imperial Prefect.\textsuperscript{65} Which meant that in the preaching episodes of the first Christian evangelists, God's being and purpose was narrated in a "counter cultural story."

If the story of the crucified and risen Jesus was true, it represented a theological and political set of ideas that would revolutionise the world. In the announcement of God's rule over against all other potentates and rulers, it is not without consequence that the confession "Jesus is Lord" was possibly the earliest baptismal creed of the church for its initiates into Christian cells (cf. Rm. 10: 9 and Phil. 2: 11). In contrast to much that passes for it today, nothing about baptism was nominal or safe. The act of baptism immersed the believer into the life and purpose of Jesus (cf. Rm. 6: 3f.).

The social symbolics of dying and rising with the crucified one meant that the new convert was commissioned to share wholly in the following of Jesus and his purposes in the world. To profess and own his name in baptism was (as it was in later centuries for the Anabaptists and others) costly and controversial. It meant being immersed into a view of God and the world that cost Jesus his life. It meant being identified with that one whose body was strung up on a Roman gibbet for a set of beliefs that were to become the bounds of kinship and kingdom for all those who followed him and obeyed his commands (cf. Jn. 15: 14).

The early followers had little to offer by way of resistance to the opponents of their belief and baptism. If they had anything at all it was finally only their

\textsuperscript{65} For an analysis of how Rome conducted "instrumental adequacy" in Palestine and Jerusalem see, E. P. Sanders, \textit{The Historical Figure of Jesus} (London: Penguin Press, 1993),
own skin - and they offered that solely because they had no other way of affirming the truth they believed in. Their actions simply articulated the dignity of their bearing, and the strength of their commitment, regardless of the cost. Rightly understood baptism was a subversive act of worship and pledging because the baptismal creed was a language construct of allegiance to the only true God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

e) Jesus' New and Different Hermeneutics of Life

The emerging religio-social movement that was primitive Christianity caused by its faith commitments and conflicting claims a breach of the dominate consciousness. At its dawn it articulated a different outlook. What we see reflected in Jesus' movement and the proclamation of his "good news," is not some view of history, or some set of stories that leave out or minimalise the plight of the powerless in favour of the grand parade of the powerful. Far from it: the leitmotiv of Jesus' liberative narrative concerned a divine solidarity with the oppressed and a concept of justice measured by the treatment of history's most vulnerable members. Concerning the dissimilitude of Jesus' liberative teaching and ministry in Palestine, dominated as it was by the cultural and political structures of priestly-Roman rule, Carney's comments are instructive:

Antiquity ... the golden panhandle of history, is an ideologically important era. Aryan heroes bestrode it, founding Western Civilisation. It is variously remythicised by each generation of ancient historians. The voices that speak to us from antiquity are overwhelmingly those of

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66 As I analyse, exegete and overview Jesus' alternative practice of God's graciousness in history, I intend to be self-consciously "heuristic" in my formulations concerning radical discipleship. Heuristic reflection is what a good many hermeneutical scholars do - in fact I think in one way or another, most do - often without drawing overly much attention to their interpretative method. Essentially, "heuristic hermeneutics," to quote Myers, "refers to models or frameworks that are consciously preconceived, the intention being to see if they are confirmed by or are useful for interpreting data being analysed." See Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), p. 47.
the cultured few; the elites. The modern voices that carry on their tale are overwhelmingly those of white, middle-class, European and North American males. These men can, and do, laud imperialistic, authoritarian slave societies. The scholarship of antiquity is often removed from the real world, hygienically free of value judgements. Of the value judgements, that is, of the voiceless masses, the ninety-five percent who knew how 'the other half' lived in antiquity.67

It is important to draw attention to the inter-relatedness of the Jesus movement and the socio-historical location of the marginalised poor since, as Carney's work indicates, the peasants as a significant group form little to no part of the literate world on which most reconstructions of ancient history focus. Indeed, the peasants are almost lost to historical view, because of their illiteracy and localism. Rather than leaving out the forgotten poor (the pagani), the underlying vision of Jesus' work is markedly inclusive of their life-world and social conditions. In fact their lot and fate proscribed the urgency of his call concerning the in-breaking of the reign of God and the transformation of history.

From the very first recognition and assertion that Jesus was κύριος and that in him God's intervention and trespass had taken concrete expression, the Gospel and its heralds were, wittingly or unwittingly, committed to a message that was charged with subversive consequences - hope for the poor masses, judgement for the rich. For the ruling oligarchies and the broken poor, these radical outcomes are signalled from the beginning of Jesus' coming. The birth announcement of Jesus to Mary contains eschatological reversals and warnings to the high and mighty and the promise to the lowly that God will take up their cause (cf. Luke 1: 46-55). How else could the living shape of these and other promises be interpreted? Do they not anticipate the formation of a the new community from the ranks of social nonpersons ("gifts to the poor"), and the inversion of the powerful ("the rich sent empty away")? What

is heralded here is the creation of social hopes and imaginative possibilities of an altogether new humanity beyond the efficiency of any imperialism to ultimately control. In Jesus' arrival the "power of God," δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ (Rm. 1: 16), is demonstrated against the perpetuators of ἀδικία "injustice" and cruel dominance (cf. Rm. 1: 18). Porfirio Miranda specifies that it is for this reason that Paul can say with confidence that he is "not ashamed of the gospel" (Rm. 1: 16)⁶⁸. In Jesus' declaration of God's intolerance against the evil practitioners of ἀδικία expressed in all forms of mercilessness, and the exploitation of the destitute, the justice of God addressed and bought to the fore the social existence of the common people. It was for them that the gospel was good news, as Deissmann has noted:

Primitive Christianity, alike in its leading personalities and in the preponderating number of its adherents, was a movement of the lower classes. The water of life did not filter down from the upper level to the many and insignificant .... The first to drink of it were fainting stragglers from the great caravan of the unknown and forgotten.⁶⁹

f) Jesus' Redoubtable Courage and Life Choices

Within the purpose and driving passion of Jesus' life-alignment to the poor I am sure that we may be convinced of a courageous attempt, as Lorenzen says "to concretely live out in a humane and non-violent manner what he had heard in the first commandment."⁷⁰ In my writing, by alluding in any way to Jesus' manner of living, I am not wishing to enter into an investigation of a biography of his life. The imparting of such information is not the theological intention of the gospel evangelists. Neither am I so much wanting to enter into how Jesus psychologically perceived the radical social and political edge of his message and activity; but I do not want to draw back from how the

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commitment and passion of his life made his obedience to God historically manifest, for his purpose cannot be separated from his person.

Jesus' subversive announcement of God's new reality held out alternative hope and promise to the importunate masses of his time (cf. Mt. 5: 3-10; Lk. 6: 20). As a "pedagogue of the oppressed," Jesus selectively invested his teaching with theological and ethical concerns consistent with his understanding of the themes and concerns of God's requirements of justice for the non-privileged. In his unique way he challenged the sociopolitical constructs of the time, indicting the elites who dominated the people by putting upon them burdens too hard to bear (cf. Lk 11: 42, 46, 52). What is announced in Jesus' coming he authenticates by making the disenfranchised the central subjects of his historical project. Without trying to uncover the complexity of Jesus' mental and emotional qualities that motivated these activities, I believe that it is important to be cognisant of the particular disposition of his redoubtable courage that undergirded them; to not shy away from touching the commitments that lay deep within the fabric of his life-praxis and made him loyal to the graciousness of God and the needs of the harassed and helpless (cf. Mt. 9: 36; Mk. 6: 34).

These "forgotten" are not unknown to his compassion, nor their dire social and political disenfranchisement. When Jesus provocatively states that: "Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the reign of God ahead of you" (Mt. 21: 31), he is not addressing the predicament of the outcasts in only some ethical sense but as Schüssler Fiorenza notes: "The phrase, 'tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes,' however, characterises not just

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71 For this evocative terminology and its meanings, see the ground-breaking work by, William R. Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster; John Knox Press, 1994).
a morally reprehensible group of people but even more a class so destitute that they must engage in 'dishonourable' professions in order to survive.\textsuperscript{72}

The all inclusive love of God and the hunger for justice out of which he acted, especially towards the religiously "unclean" and politically "unacceptable" with whom he shared both by words and table companionship became the occasion of outrage and intrigue. To those happy with the existing arrangements concerning religion and political matters, Jesus' message of "good news to the poor" (cf. Is. 61; Mt. 11; Lk. 7), placed a different twist on the character of God's redemption. From within Jesus' understanding of God, and his engaging participation in his culture, the focus of his life was not about separation from the world as was the spiritual and political course of some within his period. He believed that whoever sought to save themselves, actually lost life and purpose (cf. Mk. 8: 35; Mt. 10: 39; Lk. 17: 33). From within the convergence of the temptations to save himself by being "holy" and forsaking the public domain, he chose to meet the world of intrigue and power and openly attack those who shut people (especially the little people), out of the kingdom (cf. Mt. 23: 13). For the priestly-Roman rule and the pro-Roman Sadducean aristocracy, those custodians of Torah and Temple whose interpretation of God must always be understood against the backdrop of social conflicts emanating from greed and unjust economic relations, Jesus' actions created a scandalous condition. By the values and norms of the religiously upright and proper, Jesus consistently acted in a way they judged to be contrary to the will of God, and not in the best interests of their best interests. Their interests being centred around social, political, religious and economic control of the way things were. They certainly did not want his disordering presence and teaching to gain currency. His revolutionary message had to be neutralised. For both sides, Jesus was a unsettling figure,

who represented an insufferable annoyance, an insult to the coteries of propriety.

We know without any admixture of fantasy and false sentiment, that Jesus' courage of spirit did not cause him to shut his eyes to evil and wretchedness, but rather to open his eyes more clearly in order to discover not only his sisters and brothers crushed by evil, but to stare into the face of that evil (cf. Mk. 15: 1-5; Mt. 27:13; Lk. 23: 8). Nor did he, as was the manner of some, seek to empty his mind so that the Spirit could flood into its emptiness: like the prophets before him, he sought rather to fill up his mind with the needs of the struggling poor, and to enquire into the machinations of differentiating wealth and injustice (cf. Lk. 6: 24-25).

From a position of solidarity with the downtrodden rather than ascetic isolation, Jesus taught the system-shattering claims of the reign of God. He spoke of who God was among the least, and what loving and being committed to such a God meant, and he got through to all manner of people by the way he applied his teaching and parables to human existence, calling on those who neglected justice and the love of God to repent (Lk. 11: 42). In his person, in his life and death, more of God was revealed than was concealed - yet the divine mystery and invitation remained. In his announcement of the justice requirements of the kingdom, he drew on his wit and clever tongue, by which he could with calculated insults playfully or sarcastically arraign the politically powerful and the religiously upright (cf. Mt. 23: 15-16; Lk. 6: 20). Or on other occasions, he could turn his language to comfort and encourage the distressed and broken (cf. Lk. 7: 13; Jn. 8: 11). Motivated by the all-embracing love of God, he was committed to a depth of happiness and liberative joy that took him into festive occasions and table sharing among the common people. An activity that self-respecting rabbis avoided, a choice of Jesus that caused those who kept themselves pure and disassociated from the unclean to be angered and critical.
Not given to cowardice he was remarkably courageous, willing to continue what he was doing even when it was clear that his radical commitments were putting him in fearful danger (cf. Mk. 9: 31, 10: 34, 11: 18; Mt. 26: 4; Lk. 18: 33; Jn. 5: 8, 8: 37). Inhabiting as he did a life that his enemies were anxious to dissemble, the fate of the prophets and John the Baptist must have been constant reminders to him of what happened to those who attracted a significant following in the turbulent political atmosphere of priestly-Roman rule in first-century Palestine. Given the strength of his personality there must have been something very compelling about his unity of character. A personal strength which impelled his unfaltering purpose through sweating blood and flood of tears, enabling him through cruciform pain to remain faithful to God (cf. Lk. 22: 44).

By the direction of his effort, he attracted powerful enemies, especially among the proud and lordly who saw to it that he was made to be a despised malefactor. By any measure he must have been a remarkable person, not only because of his fixedness of purpose, which sent him to his death, not allowing the shirking of what his conscience and heart told him he must undergo (cf. Mk. 8: 31); but also by an enthusiasm only seen when the whole self is gripped and energised and controlled by an inspired power whose influence leaves little room for self-preservation, or any disharmony concerning the divine impulse (cf. Lk. 22: 42). Within the energy of his cause, and the underlying vision of his public work there was an immediacy of thought, of speech and action which had the effect of an irresistible contagion. For the language of his life was suggestive, image-laden and always ardent; his object not only directed at solving the problems of injustice and enmity, but the evoking of God's presence through constant appeals to his disciple's hearts and minds (cf. Jn. 15: 14).

So clarified was his understanding of God's willing, that he completely captured the devotion of his first followers, thus they faced the possibility of
going and dying with him even when they did not always understand his enlarged vision (cf. Jn. 11: 16). By Jesus’ experience of God and his godly inspiration he enabled the discipleship community to make its rightful confession in the world (cf. Acts 2: 36, 4: 29, 4:33). And this persuasion of his lordship and continuing narrative presence became the convictional centrality that united the first followers "against all the odds" to continue on in the adventure of the kingdom, believing that the words and life-praxis of Jesus could continue to have decisive significance for human life and continuity. It is little wonder that the "fire" of God's redemptive love that he brought to earth was not only kindled (cf. Lk. 12: 49), but burns still with an inextinguishable blaze! For Jesus' risen presence is the indestructible source of courage in the life of his followers. To adopt the practice and bearing of courage for the kingdom's sake which so marked the life of Jesus is part of the apostolic admonition to "put on Christ" (Gal. 3: 27). There ought therefore to be no surprise that the movement and historical project he launched survived his death and the world's persecution.

3 (iii) Jesus' βασιλεία, Beyond Violence and Passivity: Always Revolutionary

Provocative on all sides Jesus exemplified a critical partisanship on the side of the humiliated and dispossessed; notwithstanding this commitment, his kingdom purpose was not simply to change the relationship between those who were oppressors and those who were oppressed, but rather to bring about the liberation of all and open the way to God's ultimate "Shalom". Within Jesus' message of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (the reign of God), against the "Caesaroiemprialism" of his day he radically criticised both personal and political loyalties whenever they stood in the way of the divine purpose. Although Jesus called for real change at the personal level of life, for him the rule of God required not just a change of heart but the reordering of societal
structures, since individual repentance would not occasion the demonic objectifications of subjugation to disappear. The "signs" of the kingdom's arrival were about a transformation of the objective sociopolitical and physical conditions of life. Hence Jesus' historical project was about the actuality of God's reign, and not some scant dabbling into engaging "spiritual" or literary illustrations of its presence.

By the power of God the promised Βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ was already breaking in through his work. The real and historical meanings signified in Jesus's sermon at the beginning of his evangelistic outreach occasioned his preaching of contentious assertions concerning the blind receiving their sight, the lame being made to walk, lepers being cleansed, the deaf being made to hear, the poor having good news proclaimed to them, the captives promised release, the oppressed being set at liberty, and the preaching of the acceptable year of God (cf. Lk. 4: 18 f. cf. Matt. 11: 5).

The extraordinary character of God's transformative action in Jesus is highlighted by Waetjen when through his exegetical study he describes the religio-political consequences of Jesus' givenness to God's willing present at his baptism:

As such it ends Jesus' participation in the structures and values of his society. It concludes his submission to the moral order into which he was born, in which he has been nurtured, and in which he is to realise his potentially. The entire redemptive process of Jewish society as it is maintained by the institutions through which power is ordered - the temple and its priesthood, the Great Council of the Sanhedrin and its dispensation of justice, the scribes and the Pharisees and their guardianship of the law, the Roman administration and its military forces of occupation, its political oppression and economic exploitation,

73 Concerning my hermeneutic of "Caesaroiempialism" see Chapter One, page 52, at footnote 141.
indeed the totality of the Jewish-Roman social construction of reality - has been terminated by his 'death' experience.  

The seismic shift present in Jesus' commitment to God's reign subjects every relationship in politics and life to a new and radical judgement, meaning that in Jesus' life-world: "All of the debts that had been incurred under this hierarchical ordering of power and its community life have been cancelled: to his parents for feeding, clothing, and sheltering him; to his friends for their love, encouragement, and support; to his society for educating and civilising him; and to the government for its maintenance of law and order." In what Waetjen calls, "the reordering of power," Jesus as the authoritative agent of God, by his words and actions, affirms that God's rule challenges every other claim to power and allegiance, so (as Waetjen says), through "his baptism, the death experience of repentance has redeemed Jesus from his comprehensive indebtedness and the prescribed ways and means of discharging his obligations. As a result he has become wholly unobliged!" 

Within the core of the message of God's saving and liberating grace, and in all that differentiated Jesus, as the one "unobliged" to any power but God, he taught nothing inhuman, therefore there is nothing in his life-praxis that endorsed the glorification of enmity and violence. If the world was to learn the meaning of Jesus' message, it would only do so by observing the truth-telling, enemy-loving injunctions of his historical project. Its unobliged meaning and difference, true to the person of the proclaimer, were to be true also of the lives of his followers (cf. Mt. 5: 14-16). As Yoder puts it: "Not only does such behaviour say that the kingdom is at hand; it also describes God." What Jesus propounds is that by their honest and peaceable lives of love his disciples enact God's will, becoming "like their heavenly father/mother" (Mt. 5: 43-48, cf. Lk. 6: 32-36). It is of paramount importance

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75 Waetjen, in ibid., pp. 68-69.
to note that this remark of Jesus, as Yoder observes, "is said of no other ethical issue." 76

a) Jesus and the “Zealot” Resistance

In the social upheaval and economic exploitation experienced under Roman occupation attempts to regain national autonomy gave rise to disparate resistance groups. These revolutionary theocratic bands of protest issued forth in desperate acts of brigandry and struggle. The rise and activity of these groups was in direct response to the consequences of the Roman armies’ brutal modes of colonisation. When the cohorts of the Empire colonised a country what followed was a series of factors which contributed to a situation ripe for revolution. As well as suffering the loss of their independence, the Jews were made (as is the lot of all conquered peoples), to endure the occupation of their land by thousands of civilian ancillaries (wives, children, doctors, merchants and so on), all deemed necessary to ensure proper procedures and adequate management of those under "the protection" of Roman imperial rule. As Horsley and Hanson point out, although Rome showed various elements of judicial care, in their attempts "to be sensitive to Jewish religious scruples in their handling of Palestinian Jewish affairs," they were a conquering power, and the Jews were a subjugated people in a "police state" 77 Inevitably in this situation of domination (similar in our time to the circumstances of many struggling peoples in the Third World) the army lived off the benefits of the occupied country; what followed were callous acts of misconduct, rape, servitude, pilfering of the countryside and a general terrorising of the populace, all of which meant that there would be violent and non-violent reprisals against Rome's repression. During the "whole period of

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direct Roman rule from 6 to 66 C. E. was marked by widespread discontent and periodic turbulence in Palestinian Jewish society.  

As has happened everywhere in history, it was the peasantry who were the most vulnerable and who consequently suffered the most. These of course, were those who heard Jesus' announcement of the \( \text{βασιλεύα τού θεου} \) as the promise of a new future in which God will right injustice and restore the proper standards for human dignity (cf. Mk. 10: 17-30; Lk. 6: 20-26; Mt. 5: 3; Jas. 2: 5; 5: 1-6). It was in this climate that insurrectionary millenarianism and revolutionary activity were bound to rise up. In his illuminating comparison of ancient and modern terrorism, Richard Horsley notes that:

Terrorism is the weapon of the weak. It is especially well suited to the struggles of colonised peoples against foreign domination, since the 'normal' means of 'legitimate' coercion have been closed to them. Terror is particularly tempting for small conspiratorial groups that lack a power base among the people. Often it is directed primarily against fellow nationals who are collaborating or at least cooperating with the foreigners.

Between Jesus' struggle and the rising resistance of the disparate social bandits, the sicarii, Zealots and messianic pretenders - most of whom advocated armed resistance - there was a comprehensive difference. The extremist strategies of Zealotry whilst eager to purify Israel was built and sustained by malignant hatred and murder; Jesus revolutionary impulse in contrast was motivated by cruciform love and complete self-giving. Therefore

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78 Horsley and Hanson in ibid., p. 35. See also, E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, editors, Jesus and the Politics of His Day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
80 The "Zealots" although operative as a loose band of malcontents against the Roman principate and antagonists to any who acknowledged or served foreign rulers, as a "party" probably were not formalised until the winter of C. E. 67-68. See, John G. Cager, Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 23. As such, the Zealots were known by some as the "Fourth Philosophy" (after the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Essenes). For my purposes they
he did not give himself over to the Zealotry cause of insurrection. As Gutiérrez notes, whilst Jesus life was an articulation of the political dimensions of the good news, he "kept his distance from the Zealot movement." Concomitantly though, as he also remarks, "to situate Jesus in his time implies an examination of his connection with this movement of religious and political resistance to the Roman oppressors." 

Nor though did Jesus determine to assail nothing - remaining only passionately impassive - he did not deal in appeasement with the authorities of his day or the yielding of his message to their prescriptive forms concerning the divine-human relationship. Jesus exposed in a transforming way the structures of oppression in the world in which he lived by what he taught and modelled. In Jesus' announcement of the consequences of God's willing he denies the prevailing structures of authority and domination their right and passage. So, concerning the reordering of power, Matthew states that:

Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mt. 20: 25-28).

Remembering that this teaching was not said in a sociopolitical vacuum, Jesus' arresting words transported liberative meaning for his first followers then and the church now. Thus a total shift in the understanding of how human community becomes possible is required. The politics of life are not only to be revolutionised, they are to be transfigured.

represent the mindset - and act as a cipher - of those who in the world of Jesus advocated armed rebellion in their struggle for true worship and freedom from foreign domination.

Gutiérrez, commenting on the political significance of Jesus’ ministry affirms that his mission meant no apolitical propagation of faith in some non-temporal “futurising” event of God, but was rather an invitation to continual and lasting transformation that leaves no dimension of human life untouched, and so against those who distance Jesus from anything political, or minimalise the radical upheaval of the kingdom he discerningly remarks:

For Jesus, oppression and injustice were not limited to a specific historical situation; their causes go deeper and cannot be truly eliminated without going to the very roots of the problem: the disintegration of community and communion .... Jesus is opposed to all politico-religious messianism which does not respect either the depth of the religious realm or the autonomy of political action .... The liberation which Jesus offers is universal and integral: it transcends national boundaries, attacks the foundation of injustice and exploitation, and eliminates politico-religious confusions, without therefore being limited to a purely 'spiritual' plane .... Jesus’ posture precludes all oversimplification. To close one’s eyes to this complexity amounts to letting the richness of his testimony on this score escape.83

Living as he did in the sociopolitical formation of a “National Security State,” it was inevitable for Jesus’ turbulent presence, message, and attitude to have political implications.84 His life-praxis was as Sölle writes, a “cipher of

82 For a theological insight into the “political” and “revolutionary” tasks of the church see Paul Lehmann, The Transformation of Politics (London: SCM, 1974).
83 Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), p. 132. Representative of those who diminish the message of Jesus into an apolitical propagation of faith by some reductionistic “futurising” event of God, and thereby deny that Jesus had any insurrectionary involvement in the sociopolitical realities of his day, and that he was not particularly concerned about the changing of these formations is represented in the work of Sanders. This particularly “First World” school does not say that Jesus was unconcerned about the lot of people in First-Century Palestine, but as Sanders understands it: “Jesus doubtless had views about the social, political and economic conditions of his people, but his mission was to prepare them to receive the coming kingdom of God.” Thus, although Jesus is involved with his social world, according to the abstract and idealist hermeneutics of this view he really had very little to do with it. See E. P. Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus (London: The Penguin Press, 1993), p. 188 (my emphasis). See also, James H. Charlesworth, editor, Jesus’ Jewishness (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 92, where this idealist view is epitomised in the statement: “Jesus seems to have had no interest in the great political and social questions of his day. He was not interested in the reform of the world because he was prophesying its end.”
84 For an analysis of the nature and methodology of “National Security Doctrine,” and its social formation in occupied countries where the concepts of religion, rule of law and
liberation". Howbeit, Jesus embodied love’s subversive power in personal and public acts that included but went beyond politics in their nature and meaning. Therefore his practice cannot be particularised and reduced to a part of transformation, such as exterior attitudes. His purpose was to direct all reality in all of its dimensions, human, social and cosmic to God’s reign, to that governance that alone can change individuals and world structures. His foremost purpose was to give to the presence and purpose of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ the understanding that by its meaning it signified something more profound than what Zealotry or any armed messianic pretension offered. Jesus’ reordering of power called for both a conversion of persons and the world, his way demanded a love of friends and enemies alike, and opened up the possibilities that within this radical discipleship there would be found and fashioned pathways leading to the overcoming of all elements hostile to God and humankind.

My present argument is that the character and content of the redemptive media proposed by Jesus coheres closely with a reinterpretation of salvation as a single yet complex process of historical liberation which encompasses the totality of human existence. The unobliged gospel he proclaimed revealed a God whose love, freely given, frees human beings to serve one another in love (cf. Gal. 5: 1-13). As such it called forth a human response to God’s self-communication as love of neighbour and not hate. But this gift and ability

civilisation become enshrined in a “National Security State” see, José Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979). Concerning the National Security State and “Jesus’ Message of Liberty and Liberation,” see pp. 149-155. See also Marcus G. Raskin, *The Politics of National Security* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: 1986), pp. 145-170. The remark of Lyotard concerning another essential component to the security of the National Security State is worthy of note: “Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major-perhaps the major-stake in the worldwide competition for power. It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control over access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour.” See Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. vi.
itself requires the freedom to love made possible and predicated upon the reception of God's love.

This emancipation of human consciousness from self-concern to solidarity with others opens the way for our redemption from sin into a companionship of love not only towards our neighbours, but also to God. Consequently the message of Jesus which placed the ideals of universal truth and communal love above coercive political power demonstrates the difference between what Jesus envisaged and that of armed messianic triumphalism. As Sobrino states the major difference between the mode of Zealotry and Jesus' way was that:

The Zealots favoured armed insurrection. According to Jesus, however, God's coming was an act of grace .... The basic temptation facing him and others was the temptation to establish God's reign through the use of political power. The only true power in Jesus' eyes was the power embodied in truth and love. That is why he ... called for pardon and love of enemy rather than vengeance .... Over against the notion of God as power, Jesus sets the notion of God as love. 86

b) Analogous Hopes: Real Differences

However, for the all the differences between Jesus and the early Zealot collectives, his relationship to them, or more particularly, his view of their hopes and aspirations concerning a true Israel is not as easy to qualify as some have suggested. 87 I believe that an examination of the shared views between

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Jesus and the anti-Roman sentiments of the early Zealot movements is essential to an overall understanding of the "life-world" of Jesus and his first followers - as well as reaching some sensible understanding of what motivated the impetus of the early church's stance to imperial power. This is because believing in the dominance of the \( \text{βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ} \) as they did, the followers of Jesus with a this-worldly eschatological view understood that God's reign meant the end of all other governance's, including that of the Romans and the priestly aristocracy. In this regard Cullmann was to the point when he remarked that it would be "an error to underestimate the importance of the Zealots for the doctrine and life of primitive Christianity, and for its conception of the State."\(^88\)

Against the research that has lead some scholars to argue that Jesus had little to do with the rising Zealots groups because they were not visibly prominent until after his death, I contend that despite these arguments Jesus' relationships to the revolutionary mood that longed for a faithful Israel free from foreign domination cannot be disregarded. Ferguson, although suspicious of how much close association Jesus had with the Zealots, remarks that the "presence of revolutionary activity against Rome from the time of the census in A. D. 6, apparently motivated by a similar ideology, leaves open the possibility that Zealot was already in use earlier in the century, if not as a technical party name, at least as a semitechnical description."\(^89\)

It is hard to believe that Jesus and his movement were oblivious to, or unmoved by the multiform character of resistance to Rome and unable therefore "to maintain relatively autonomous direction of their efforts at

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renewal, particularly in Galilee or in the outlying areas of Judea."90 Located firmly within the social matrix of first century Palestine, Jesus, like the emerging Zealots, possessed as Josephus stated, "a passion for liberty that [was] almost unconquerable."91 In similar manner, Jesus like them, must have been committed in his redemptive process to the view that true Israelites were those who acknowledged Yahweh as God and their only true head.92

Common to both Jesus and the theocratic nationalists was the theme, preserved in the exodus narratives, the psalms and the prophets, that the authority of Yahweh is clear and unambiguous. God's rule challenges and does away with every form of power and domination (cf. Ex. 15: 4-10; Ps. 96: 4-6; Jer. 10: 7, 10f). Yahweh's rule left no room for human rulers (cf. Judg. 8: 22f). Israel as a covenant people were to look to Yahweh alone as their judge, lawgiver, and deliverer (cf. Is. 33: 22). Any betrayal of the primacy of Yahweh was to deny the "steadfast love" - the hesed of God (cf. Hos. 6). Such denial was the way of harlotry and forsakenness, the certain result being divine punishment (cf. Hos. 2: 11-13; 4: 1-11). God's preeminence was superior to the sovereignty that any human power could claim. It was therefore impossible for Israel to accept any other Ruler without renouncing its status as the chosen people; should Israel ever serve another, it would become an "abomination" to God (cf. Is. 41: 21-24). Opposition to Caesar as an absolute monarch sprang from this theological core of Israel's life; it could not therefore have been possible for Jesus, compelled as he was to the watchword of faithfulness to God, to disregard the religio-political implications of his call to the obedient reordering of life.

92 Josephus, ibid., xviii: 23.
As Horsley points out, the sociopolitical situation of complicity on the part of the Jewish and Herodian ruling groups with the colonial oppression of Rome left Jesus with little "praxic" choice. Not unaware of the concrete and tangible social and political affairs of his day Jesus prophetically denounced these sacerdotal authorities. They had become differentiated from the poor, assigning themselves privileged positions creating a hiatus between the justice of the Torah and their everyday workings of inequity (see Mk. 12: 38-40; Lk. 20: 45-47). These elites shared in class solidarity with the Roman adversaries, thus in their abandonment of the covenantal-prophetic tradition of Israel they had made the temple, an expedient of imperial legitimation and authority over a subject people. Besides this observation Horsley adds: "The sociopolitical cause of the rise of radical theocratic movements was illegitimate and oppressive rule, whether native or alien, or native collaborating with alien."\(^93\)

Therefore, it requires no great stretch of mind to hold that Jesus and his followers genuinely sympathised with those who saw complicity on the part of the Jewish ruling elites to the demands of Rome and its occupying forces as a betrayal of fidelity to Yahweh as their Sovereign ruler. As Comblin remarks: "The whole of Jesus' mission was related to the accomplishment of Israel's calling. Jesus was a new Moses, the liberator of his people. The liberation of Israel was a new creation of the people, or a returning of them to their prior condition .... accomplishing the promises of the prophets."\(^94\)

There were too many similar hopes for freedom, too many stinging attacks, too many clashes and prophetic signs, too many oppositional elements between Jesus and his adversaries for there not to be any sympathy between Jesus' concerns and those of the early revolutionary cadres in their cries for self-determination and freedom. For Jesus as for all those who longed for the


fulfilment of monotheism, the evil of oppression was more than a "point of view" to be spoken against, it was a direct flaunting of God's willing, and as such it must be countered by liberative action. The dismissive way that certain theologians distance Jesus from Zealotic hopes could lead some to believe that the character and carriage of Jesus' "unobligedness" was more to do with the path of gentrified civility amounting to little more than the outbreak of silence - than the inbreaking of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεου!

Over against any hermeneutical view of distanced speculation (see chapter two), the Two Thirds World theologian José Comblin unmasks "uncommitted" theological intent, declaring that far too much theology is "a mass of words". An exercise devoid of the sociopolitical concerns of Jesus' practice. Such theology, serviced by theologians unable to give up their time-honoured addictions to establishment servitude, whose capitalistic peonage consciously or unconsciously guarantees the legitimacy of unjust and idolatrous powers have betrayed some of the most fundamental duties of any biblical interpreter - that of being aware of their comfort zone biases in contrast to the context in which Jesus operated.

Only bad theologians would confuse the certainty that follows their investigations with the truths that their dissimilarity of sociopolitical situation and life-alignment to that of Jesus reveal. Compared to Jesus of Nazareth, their safe life-world and therefore their hermeneutical optics are entirely different. Which means, as is so often the case for First World theologians, their "individualistic focus" leads to entirely different findings to those of struggling peoples and biblical scholars whose geography of faith is more proximate to that of Jesus. To take up Horsley's telling language concerning this type of First World theologian, we could say that their theological assumption "seriously affects the selection of data and methods of historical
investigation” because it lives too respectably, too safely, and too far removed both in research and practice from the actuality of the historical realities in which Jesus lived and worked among the dispossessed.96

Fortunately not all First World theologians are so cloistered: there are those whose work shows that Jesus’ historical project was a serious and polemical attack upon the structures of oppression in his day. In various examinations of the popular characteristics of the Jewish resistance to Roman rule Horsley and Hanson show how first-century Jews, like many Third World struggling peoples today, were victimised and dominated by the structural and institutionalised violence of a foreign power. Concerning this background Horsley examines Jesus’ response to the undermining and fermenting effects of Roman imperialism on the Jewish peasantry, determining that Jesus by his life-praxis advocated not neutrality, but resistance and renewal.97 He observes:

Modern biblical scholarship has tended to play down or even to deny that the Jesus movement came into sharp conflict with the ruling institutions of Jewish Palestine. This may be due partly to the modern separation of ‘religion’ from political-economic life, and perhaps it also reflects the modern ‘concordat’ between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ that they will not interfere in each others’ jurisdictions.98

Another theologian, Jon Sobrino, a surviving member of a liberationist community in San Salvador where six of his Jesuit teaching companions and

two other friends were massacred in 1989 by the armed forces of the Salvadoran National Security State knows from a position of solidarity among subjugated people the consequences of Jesus’ politics.99

This is why it can be said that he speaks for many interpreters who are neither at a distance from the biblical texts or current world texts, when he remarks that, “Jesus does not disagree basically with the Zealots on the idea that there must be some historical and socio-political mediation of the kingdom of God.”100 In addition to this he draws attention to the fact that in the gospel theologies “the Zealots are not rebuked as harshly as other social groups such as the Sadducees, the Scribes, and the Pharisees.” And this comparative silence towards the Zealot cadres on the part of the Gospel writers compared to Jesus attitude towards his most condemned opponents in the retainer classes, Sobrino believes is clearly conveying something quite selective and as he makes a point of saying is, “significant”.101

c) Corresponding Hope: Differing Redemptive Process

Without arguing for a “Zealotic Jesus,” or making Jesus into a terrorist ally of the emerging Zealot movements, it cannot be gainsaid that some general lines of convergence do emerge within the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of the gospel text-events. Against the retainer classes, they present us with a Jesus who is conflictive and who does hold similar political lineaments to those deemed “insurrectionists”. Given that first-century Palestine was a society of domination, where at the religio-political level the masses were fiercely exploited by the privileged priestly class who in turn were supported by the large landowners, who themselves were very definitely indebted to the mechanism of Roman occupying power, it is difficult therefore to dismiss

99 See Sobrino’s moving reflections on this event in, Jon Sobrino, Companions of Jesus (Maryknoll, New York: 1990).
101 Sobrino, in ibid., pp. 211-212.
some connections between Jesus and the emerging Zealot causes. In this regard, Segundo comments that, "when we read the Gospels stripped of the prefabricated image of 'sweet Jesus of Nazareth,' at every step we encounter a conscious, voluntary conflict between very definite and well-defined groups." Because he understands that Jesus' way was not an evasion of reality, he underscores the fact that as the counter-story of Jesus unfolds the conflictual element of his mission, "far from diminishing," gains galvanising hatred among his adversaries leading to a state sanctioned "legal execution of Jesus."\(^{102}\) Horsley commenting on this theme and Jesus' death, remarks:

However elaborated, embellished, and legendary the gospel passion narratives may be, it is clear that Jesus was executed by the Romans as a political dangerous popular leader and that he was arrested by initiative of the priestly aristocracy.\(^{103}\)

The constant in my argument here is that should our hermeneutics be relieved of the theological academy's validation of the status quo, our reading of Jesus' politics would show that social balance was clearly not what he was on about. Like the rising theocratic movements, Jesus believed in and was motivated by God's impending intervention; his enthusiasm was that from history's future the reign of God was radically breaking in (cf. Mk. 8: 38; 9: 1 and 14: 62). For this reason (as Horsley notes), Jesus and his movement were not about a "strategy of avoidance." Rather, Jesus' followers "proclaimed, and to a degree went about organising, a new society based on local communities and under the direct and exclusive rule of God." As such they "stood in schismatic tension with other renewal movements," which put them "in direct opposition to the ruling groups of the 'society.'" And here Horsley adds, that in Jesus' call for the renewal of society, "the Jesus movement anticipated (and proclaimed) the termination of its aggressor opposition by means of the


imminent judgement of God (or the Son of Man)." Conclusively Horsley comments that far from being about eschatological renunciation, Jesus' movement was not "able to serve an integrative function for society. It rather persisted in its course of revitalising or establishing local communities regardless of the consequences (persecution, etc.) for its participants." 104

Whatever way Jesus is viewed, his subversive speech and actions are those of a Rabbi to his people, a revolutionary leader from Galilee, who championed the cause of the poor of Yahweh, and who promised in parables and action that the 'am ha-'arez - the people of the land, the ignorant and ritually unclean - that they are the chosen of God, for whom the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ had come with power to save (cf. Mk. 1: 15 and 9: 11). The disloyalty and defection created by Jesus as the protagonist of God's reign opened up a "counter-story" that whilst challenging the prevailing religio-political climate of his time refused the options of violence and terrorism.

For all of the actions that aligned Jesus with the nationalistic hopes of his people, Jesus, in contrast to the Zealotry codes of enmity and violent change practised a different way of life. Whereas Jesus suffered and died for an ultimate ethic of love of enemies, they suffered and died seeking to eliminate Roman collaborators and Torah law breakers. It is at the place of love juxtaposed to hate that the comparison between Jesus and the Zealot groupings entirely breaks down. Against the contagion of evil that rules the human heart and is finds demonic expression in structures of injustice, Jesus urged his followers to be "peacemakers" (Mt. 5: 9). In this way he told them they would be owning and owned of God. To those who hunger and thirst for justice, Jesus tells them to respond with acts of non-violence against their aggressors. As Pixley states, there is a particular and historical reading of the gospels, which

... stresses the sayings of Jesus on making peace, finding his option to be that of reconciliation and nonviolence. Jesus advised his followers to learn to love their enemies (Mt. 5: 43-45). They were to seek forgiveness from those whom they had offended (Mt. 5: 21-26). They were to suffer evil rather than to retaliate (Mt. 5: 38-42), and to embrace the injunction to forgive seventy times seven (Mt. 18: 21-22).105

Jesus tells those who hear these beatitudes and take their life direction from them, that they are the very salt of the earth and the light of the world; in short those who live out these truths for themselves and others are the transformative agents of history (cf. Mt. 5: 13-16). The difference between Jesus and the Zealotry option is also demonstrated by Jesus' deliberate and unacceptable bias towards those whom the most sacred traditions of Israel considered unworthy of the promises of God. What was absolutely decisive for Jesus was God's coming in forgiveness, mercy and justice. In Jesus' view of what God required and the prescriptions of Zealotry, there is a clear distinction of approach in terms of their understanding of compassion, and acceptance towards the least in Israel and their understanding of power, together with their strategy of societal-religious change.

When Jesus shared "community" with sinners at meals, he was consolidating his alternative view that the forsaken and despised were particularly within the purview of God's grace and essential to his mission of compassion and mercy to the least deserving. His command to love one's enemy (cf. Mt. 5:44: Lk. 6: 27-31, 35), together with his table communion must have particularly insulted the Zealot collectives (as it did the Pharisees and others), since it had the effect of prefiguring the longed-for eschatological feast of the righteous in the world to come. As Schüssler Fiorenza remarks: "While the Pharisees sought to realise Israel's calling as a 'nation of priests' by carefully observing the ritual

105 George Pixley, *God's Kingdom* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 81. It is to be noted in ibid., pp. 81-82, that Pixley does not believe that Jesus "categorically rejected military tactics," believing that Jesus "did not espouse them for ridding the country of priestly
purity of the 'holy table' and eating their meals 'like priests,' Jesus and his movement did not observe these purity regulations and even shared their meals with 'sinners.'

This shameful eating and sharing of life with those who were forced to work in jobs such as "swineherders, garlic peddlers, bartenders, seamen, public announcers, tax collectors, all of which were deemed 'polluting' or 'unclean' by the theologians and interpreters of the Torah," reinforced the rift that separated Jesus out from among those who did not choose to accept his view of God's all-inclusive graciousness.

Such knowledge of Jesus' determined concern for the "expendables" would have spread widely not only among the Pharisees and Saducees, but also most certainly among the Zealotic groups. And admonitions like, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Matt. 9: 13), must also have reached their ears causing consternation and enmity among them. These insurrectionary millenarians would otherwise condemn such people as being so desperately unrighteous as to be collaborators with the Roman occupying forces. Particularly the harlots who would have sold their wares to whoever helped them make a living, and the tax collectors who were especially hated for their work as agent's of the imperial colonialising power.

d) Jesus, not about Passive "Not-doing"

When we clearly recognise that, the status and circumstances of all people were of paramount importance to Jesus' practice and that for him the rule of God was not about impossibilities or the intangible. It is then that we refuse to

oppression," understanding rather that, "the Jesus movement was trying to distinguish its tactics from those of the Zealots."

resign ourselves with a certain eschatological dismissal to the supposition that for him the conflict of evil with the βασιλεία was futile. Jesus was not content to allow the visible possibilities of real human life to be determined by dehumanising domination and the operations of the powers; as if the course of his world and the governance of God had nothing to do with each other.

Jesus did not have his eyes fixed upon a redemption that was not available in or related to this world, nor did he proceed to conclude peace, or to arrange an armistice with the world as it was. His deeply penetrating and transforming achievements are urgent testimony to the power of the Spirit at work in him. Jesus' way from which the light of sacrifice shines and by the power and gravity of its ethics, was an assault upon all religious inaction.

Any attempt at appropriating the alternative non-violent lineaments of Jesus and his renunciation of Zealotic practice, must in no way serve as an endorsement of bland pietistic passivity. His practice was active and engaging: his non-violent actions were not passive or rendered inoperative by the blatant military might of his period. In his teaching, and certainly in the conduct of his life there was no weak submission to hostile power; all his kingdom declarations are testimony to his struggle against evil, and modes of a more equitable style of life. Jesus' way was no justification for a religious or quietist politics of renunciation. The hope he offered did not drain off the desire for human justice into the negative behaviour of "not-doing" (as Barth would say). As part of a subject society, Jesus was not naive enough to think that the politicians, government officials and the dispassionate rich of his time would one day see the error of their ways and act justly towards the lowly. There was no sycophantic appreciation or encouraging of flattery on his part towards those who willingly and with full intent made the poor of his country to be oppressed and broken. Jesus recognised no fixed boundary between God and other claimants, be they religious or imperial. The invective attitude and

107 See, Schüssler Fiorenza, in ibid., p. 128.
response of Jesus' adversaries, together with the form and function of the "conflict stories" with their direct bearing on life in his time as found in the gospels are testimonies to that. Nor did his teachings endorse a social revolution of non-violent change because he thought that God would imminently wreak vengeance on the wicked priestly class and the Roman overloads. Jesus' practice, forged out of his experiences with and among the common people of his day represents too much urgent action in the "now" of their societal world to believe that eschatological rationalisation.

I want straightway to underscore that we in the distanced First World of today will not be able to be interrogated, and activated by the theo-political consequences of the liberative narratives of Jesus' life-praxis until this reading strategy is adopted. We will not know an interpretative method which makes an authentic following of Jesus possible, one that reflects the major themes of his kingdom hopes until Jesus is viewed as he was - a teacher and activist on the side of the oppressed, a sociopolitical revolutionary who represented the counterintervention of Yahweh.

Only as we free the texts concerning Jesus' historical practice to live dynamically again, will we, in our historical circumstance be able to make his meaning politically possible today. And this will require our salvation from a purely speculative level of reading; a reading freed from a romantic theology that fails to think systematically about evil; a reading that no longer allows us to be ignorant about the way that power was arranged in the subject society of Jesus' world.

e) A Discipleship of Confrontation

From this reading strategy no one should doubt that the biblical core of Christian obedience in current historical circumstance, always involves active

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resistance to injustice and continued action for what is right against the overwhelming weight of what is wrong. In this confrontation (which by the nature of things is always fraught with ambiguity and contradiction), there can be no drawing back, no refusal to take part in the consequences of liberation's story in our time. If we are determined to be in conformity with and live out the \( \beta \alpha \sigma \iota \lambda \epsilon \iota \alpha \) convictions that animated Jesus' dominant inspiration, then we must adopt a passion for the possible represented by the assault of God present in him. Such a determination constitutes the passage of our obedience against the massive dimensions of evil. It becomes the announcement of a relinquishment of personal and political idolatrous self-sufficiency, and the arrival of our discipleship into the determination of impossible obedience.

Aware of the revolutionary implications of the reign of God and its unavoidable force and power, together with the ambiguity of the struggle for justice in a world of evil, Karl Barth's contribution in this regard is indispensable. We, as those graced by God's presence in Jesus Christ must endeavour to "turn from the demonstration of 'not-doing' to demonstrative action," to what he expositionally calls, "Positive Possibilities," so that in all of our actions, as he puts it, we should genuinely "love one another!" Barth marks out the path of faithfulness by stating in a decisive piece of writing, that despite all the complexities facing Christian witness:

To every person we should owe love. It is not permitted us to excuse ourselves for the absence of love by saying that, since we live in the shadowy region of evil, we can only bear witness to the Coming World by 'not-doing'. Even in the world of shadows love must come into active prominence, for it does not stand under the law of evil. Love of one another ought to be undertaken as the protest against the course of this world, and it ought to continue without interruption. We remember that human conduct is positively ethical when it is not conformed to this world (Rm. 12: 2), when, within the framework of this world and in complete secrecy, it bears witness to the strangeness of God. We define love as the 'Great Positive Possibility' for the same reason as we had previously defined subjection as the 'Great Negative Possibility'. We are not now thinking of a single act, but of the combination of all
positive - that is to say, protesting - possibilities; we are thinking of a
general ethical manner of behaving. We define love as the 'Great
Positive Possibility,' because in it there is brought to light the
revolutionary aspect of all ethical behaviour, and because it is veritably
concerned with the denial and breaking up of the existing order. It is
love that places the reactionary also finally in the wrong, despite the
wrongness of the revolutionary. Inasmuch as we love one another we
cannot wish to uphold the present order as such, for by love we do the
'new' by which the 'old' is overthrown. And so, in speaking of the
breach in the wall of the incomprehensible 'not-doing,' we have to
speak now of the much more incomprehensible action of love.109

These words of Barth's are most significant since earlier in his theological
journey he could only be classified as "chastened non-pacifist".110 Whereas at
the close of his life, after World War II (in which he had "rejected pacifism as
a principle"),111 Barth became someone who longed for the churches, in
calling the nations to faith in Jesus Christ, to do so in such a way as to make
"war in any form superfluous, abolishing and excluding it." So much so, "that
they cannot withstand and evade knowing the reality of salvation and therefore
of peace."112

f) Discipleship and the Banality of Violence

What weight of wrong have Christian's inflicted upon countless generations -
born and unborn - by baptising "the sword" in Christ's name? If Jesus in his
insurrectionist activities did not crown with a halo of "real power" the path of
Zealot violence how then today can we? His words are clear, he challenges

110 See John H. Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970). Yoder, commenting on Barth's struggle with the issues of violence and non-violence, remarks that Barth in these earlier formulations declared the pacifist position to be "almost overpowersing." See Yoder in ibid., p. 51.
the impotence and false presumptions of violence by telling his followers that: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5: 43-44). This saying and others like it (cf. Mt. 5: 38-42) indict all exegetical attempts to portray Jesus as anything other than what he was - a practitioner of non-violent love who understood it to be the only ultimate realism (cf. Lk. 6: 27-36). Jesus' statement is not some pietistic exhortation wherein the innocent are meant to suffer relentless injustice, and who by their non-retaliation offer only flattery and sycophancy towards those who oppress them. His teaching is just as much a denial of passivity as it is violence. In contrast to cowering resignation, it summons his followers into the place of prayer and a love ethic that seeks the true welfare of others against those acts that are contemptuous of God's reign. Whereas violence propagates by imitation, love, as taught by Jesus seeks to contain and defeat evil's multiplication by discernment and resistance in the neutralisation of love-sustained non-violent direct action.¹¹³

With these observations, I do not fancy that I have deprived many earnest Christians of the validity of their arguments for "redemptive violence."¹¹⁴ Nor do I presume to totally discount Segundo's point that "all the remarks we find in the Bible about violence or non-violence are ideologies - necessary, of course, since we will always be confronted with the task of filling the void between faith and concrete historical realities" and that consequently Jesus' practice of non-violence was more a question of situational means appropriate to his context than the substance of dogmatic faith for all Christians in all

¹¹⁴ See the formidable and lasting statement on theological ethics concerning the questions of revolution and violence in, Paul Lehmann, The Transformation of Politics (London: SCM, 1974).
And, I do note the insight of Gutiérrez when he comments against the possibility of a "double standard." As he puts it, "we cannot say that violence is all right when the oppressor uses it to maintain or preserve 'order,' but wrong when the oppressed use it to overthrow this same 'order.'" But even taking these observations into account, there cannot be an endorsement that violent means are the purposeful way of obedient discipleship.

I do not want to pass facilely over the ethical struggles of previous generations who have suffered through the impasse of violence as an alternative to fascist domination. That is not my intention here. But, given the current vertigo of violence as a micro and macro way of life, I am in agreement with Myers and company who insist that:

It is the realities of violence - and the political economy that drives it [globally] - that empirically preclude the possibility that violence can halt, reduce, or contain violence. To arm against the militarism system is like throwing water on an oil fire; even if it manages to temporarily dampen the flames in an immediate area, the fire will only burn hotter overall.

Examination of the Gospel narratives reveals a Jesus who in his maximal resistance to evil did so without violating the limits imposed by his own theology of unrestricted love. He was a protagonist who did not avoid conflict, but he entered into it without resorting to violence. Jesus is then the essential model for a nonviolent way of life, providing for those who follow him not only the example but also the motivation. Therefore, any unmitigated justification or open endorsement of violence by the Christian church is

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117 I note here that very few Liberation theologians endorse violence and see it as it as an act of last resort, and justified only in cases of fanatic and protracted despotism. See, Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), p. 187.
shattered on the example of Jesus' own life practice wherein he shunned any violence-oriented conclusions, refusing to "mirror evil," and affirmed the redemptive truth of the way of the cross.\textsuperscript{119}

Given the contemporary orgy of killing, more than ever in the following of Jesus today the important thing is to learn how to live in the strength of a non-violent world-view. Befallen as we are by the existing power arrangements of violence and domination, the work of non-violence must never stop because the cycle of war and poverty, never stops. Among the most crucial issues that a life of radical discipleship must face today is the question of commitment to non-violence, for it is an affirmation that Jesus is \textit{Lord}, despite the savage and fear-feeding ideologies of violence which stand contrary to it. Christian non-violence, which is never antipolitical is stronger than fear. It stands beyond fear and passivity. It denies the penchant of the Christian majority, which from the time of Constantine has failed on human pragmatic grounds to establish its long-term validity.

In her development of "The Theology of Peace," Dorothee Sölle remarks, that: "Some Jewish rabbis" hold to the conviction "that shalom is a name of God," and that the "definition of the content of the kingdom of God, its peace and its joy, has seldom become the object of systematic theological questioning." Further to this she notes that apart from those churches and communities that stand within the Anabaptist tradition - the Mennonites and others - the mainline denominations "have usually considered the theme of peace relevant only in social and ethical terms. It is completely absent from many outlines of Western theology or merely becomes the application of theological teaching, instead of being understood as the substance of God's action."\textsuperscript{120} I am in


agreement with her concerns about the loss of this prospective because as she puts it:

Peace is a central theme of the biblical writings. The basic significance of shalom is faring well, prospering, goes far beyond the so-called negative concept of peace common among us, which means the absence of the open and collective use of violence.... in the philosophy of mutual deterrence the negative concept of peace (eirene) is used: the status quo of threat, hunger, anxiety, lack of freedom is prescribed, without peace being given a positive content as the fruit of righteousness, which is what happens in biblical thought.\(^{121}\)

More than ever the practice of non-violence as it confronts politics and life requires a radical renewal of biblical radicalism (cf. Ps. 46: 8-11a; Ps. 85: 11), and a new commitment to Jesus’ own stance (cf. Mt. 26: 52). The use of imaginative non-violent engagement goes out of itself beyond the stalemate of violence as “usual” into the hopefulness of Christ’s peaceable kingdom. In this way, a life of non-violence expands our humanity to include all others as sisters and brothers. Jesus’ way of non-violent action confronts our present-day deadly mutual interests, calling us all to wage love instead of constricting and surrounding us with the embrace of bloodletting. In our time Daniel Berrigan has constantly challenged the war-waging way of the First World with his best gift - that grace gift of non-violent biblical conviction. He has assailed our consciences and raised the questions as to whether we have the courage to face the intention to use the doomsday cache of nuclear weapons present in our world. In face of the nuclear demonry that could swallow up the whole world, and still not be sated - as he once told a few of us, “lord Nuke” could take our lives, our deaths, and take all of our theology, and with it the destruction of our communities, and our resistance, all in its stride and still not be sated. Confronted by such an entity, he reminds us that:

We have assumed the name of peacemakers, but we have been, by and large, unwilling to pay any significant price. And because we want the

\(^{121}\) Dorothee Sölle, ibid., p. 154.
peace with half a heart and half a life and will, the war, of course, continues, because the waging of war, by its very nature, is total - but the waging of peace, by our cowardice, is partial. So a whole will and a whole heart and a whole national life bent toward war prevail over the velleities of peace .... 'Of course, let us have peace,' we cry, 'but at the same time let us have normalcy, let us lose nothing, let our lives stand intact, let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties .... 'There is no peace because there are no peacemakers. There are no makers of peace because is at least as costly as the making of war - at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.122

Thankfully, God in Jesus Christ has for the sake of our sense of one another, of our compassion, indeed for the sake of our very sanity has shown a way beyond passive non-action and violence. For Jesus’ life and passion chartered a new course requiring obedience and sacrifice - leading to life and hope - and away from those commitments that are deep within the fabric of our militarised lives.

By Jesus’ obedience, he irrevocably opened up the way of revolutionary change. This he did that his followers might ever perpetuate peace and not war. By obeying the call to follow Jesus into a life of peacemaking, we discover that God-given guarantee that God’s will owns us. Once believed and practised this life-alignment can save us from the arrogant presumption that we think that we own God’s will. If we practise peace and not violence, then from our changed mentalities we give life to the truth that war is not indispensable to life. If we presume that violence needs no place in our hearts, and we practise civility and non-violence with the discipline of love. Then we

122 Daniel Berrigan, No Bars to Manhood (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 57-58. Arguing against those who believe that Nuclear deterrence has something “Godly” about it, Sölle remarks: “In biblical thinking it is therefore wrong to assert that nuclear weapons have guaranteed us peace for forty years, in so far as over the same period they have guaranteed famine for people in two-thirds of the world. A peace based on deterrence and force, on terror, misery and threat, is anti-biblical, because it makes armaments and not justice the foundation of peace.” See Dorothee Sölle, Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 156-157.
will see the first fruits of the breaking up of the culture of violence within and without us all.

If he had been overcome by the intoxication of violence, Jesus would only have continued the human propensity to serve the hegemony of violence as the way through to societal solutions. To continue on in that servitude would not provide the world with the radical alternative that would lead humanity to the way of ultimate transformation; it would only be another episode of prevailing prejudices and worldly projections, leading to local and general bloodletting in an ever increasing orgy of killing made all the more and evermore powerful because of Jesus' endorsement. What Jesus did not sign his name to, neither, should the church. With epistemological singularity Jesus renounced the way of violence and war-making, imposing upon us the dilemma and the relentless fact that in the long run the violence of evil is not answered by the evil of violence. 123

g) Jesus' Cross and the Subjugation of the Powers

The literature of the early church proclaims that in Jesus' cross the true enmity and violence of "the principalities and powers" were unmasked and exposed to the victory of God's sovereignty. In a decisive conflict against evil's strength, against those temporal and non-temporal forces that according to the apostolic contention are part of the world system's darkness, which does evil and multiplies sin and death, a cosmic battle rages (cf. 1 Cor. 2: 8; Rev. 17: 13 ff.; 19: 15). Through the power of God's incursion in Jesus Christ the tyranny of evil was broken, culminating in the conquering of "every ruler and every

123 I cannot, even in light of what I have written here - from my "distanced theology" - presume to dismiss the Christian use of revolutionary violence by my sisters and brothers in places of desperate "Guerrilla Warfare," as in Burma or formerly in Nicaragua, El Salvador or Guatemala. I know no sure way out of this conundrum, I do know it is not my place to speculate from a safe distance about their predicaments. I will never forget a young Pentecostal Nicaraguan Pastor, who had been caught up in the violent struggle to overthrow
authority and power,” and in the re-establishment of true being. A transformative event in which the earth and all humanity will know the coming of “the end” (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 24).

Concerning Christ’s conflict with the system’s powers, and from within the confluence of meaning and collision of concepts in the New Testament writings (cf. Col. 1: 13 with Eph. 1: 20-22), the battle that has been won, has yet to be realised in our entire historic experience. As Elliot points out, the overall argument of New Testament theology concerning the defeat of the powers permits no retreat into triumphalistic living, no relaxing of justice efforts, nor any endorsing of an “otherworldly spiritualisation that distracts us from the web of this-worldly power relations,” for the church’s struggle against evil is one of active existence within the span of history. The battle against the forces of religious and social oppression must not be variegated to accommodate those who in every age seek to modify the word of the cross into prudent rhetoric. Too often faith in the form of an accommodating culture religion has tended to give an illusion of certainty to political fictions. The church in its service to the liberating content of the Christian revelation must never resile from prophetic criticism. It must always stand firm against all religio-social fictions in their attempts to negate the apostolic argument of the crucified God to the interests of empire and the disease of power.

Evil’s malaise is constant, striking at church and state, reaching the upper levels of demonry in ecclesiastical legitimation where the will of the authorities is presented as the divine will. For this reason Carter Heyward is right when she points out that when churches committed to “justice-making” do their work in the midst of political administrations who utilise religious

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Samoza’s regime stating in answer to the question of violence: “Our revolution was not made by angels, but it was not made by devils either!”

groups as co-opted partners, then our confessional stance is compromised. The criticism of biblical radicalism is blunted because not all governments are true to genuine justice efforts. The fact is that her situation of living and working in North America is analogous to other contexts where: “The forces of social oppression are too deeply entrenched in our religious and civil traditions and their efforts too devastating to support individualistic, ‘spiritual,’ and ‘inner-directed’ approaches to our prophetic mission.”

In such instances, where sacred dishonesty is present and its perversions sanctified, as Berrigan says, the “weapon of sovereign will removes limbs and heads so cleanly it becomes almost a privilege to perish at such hands - under the Excalibur that whispers as it kills: God’s will! God’s will!”

What remains constant in the life of discipleship today is the reality that the work of gospel struggle stands sure, our social reality is such that our battle against the powers is not at an end - not “until” Christ “has put all things under God’s feet” (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 24, 25). Our strategy therefore, is to continue in the work of justice making and non-violence within the apostolic indictment of the “rulers of this age” who crucified Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 2: 6-8), and who crucify him afresh in every act of human and ecological perishing.

In his comprehensive work on “The Powers” as disclosed in biblical literature and their significance for today, Walter Wink describes them as being, “both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural.” As such, they “possess an outer, physical manifestation,” that are recognisable within sociopolitical structures and institutions. Thus, in the

127 Here Berkhof’s contribution is helpful: “That Christ has unmasked and disarmed the Powers does not mean that with one blow their ungodly working has been put to a stop. In principle the victory is certain; yet the battle continues until the triumph will have become effective on all fronts and visible to all.” See, Hendrik Berkhof, Christ and the Powers (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 39,40.
aggregation of their meaning they display "an inner spirituality, or corporate culture, or collective personality."\textsuperscript{128}

In Paul's liberative narrative of Christ Jesus, it is important to remember that as well as attacking the supernatural aspects of the powers, for him the "principalities and powers" wore definite and arrogant temporal features. It is politically as well as theological significant that Paul writes \textit{in} human history and from within his personal experience of the liberty of Christ which sets us free from the powers - and this he does in no disembodied state (cf. 2 Cor. 3: 17; Gal. 5: 1). As Elliott points out, it was because of his apostolic praxis in history that Paul wore "chains of Roman iron."\textsuperscript{129} Nor should we forget the flesh and blood reality of the "arrests and beatings" that he and others as servants of Jesus Christ suffered as a consequence of their preaching (cf. 2 Cor. 11: 23-27). Though Paul moves in his language from the historical to the cosmic plane, he is constantly in touch with the political vocabulary of salvation's meaning. In his presentation of the message of Jesus' lordship there is no minimising of the political aspects of the gospel. He does not limit the realisation of what he preaches to another world. Paul's words seize his time and capture the revealed meaning of Jesus Christ in history. His heart and therefore his mind was like a compass that pointed in the direction and intention of Christ's victory.

Fundamental to pristine Christian proclamation, then, was the belief that in defeating the powers, the victory of Jesus Christ was not apolitical in its significance. To reappropriate Wink's terms, in the "collective personality" of Rome, indeed, in its "inner spirituality," and its religio-political "corporate

\textsuperscript{128} Walter Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 116. To be clear, I am aware that the New Testament also holds the view that "the powers" since they were created by God, also can have positive virtue, as Wink indicates. They do, when not in antipathy to Christ or the church, also sustain as well as subvert human life. It not my purpose herein to describe their sundry positive roles, see Wink in ibid., p. 3f. and p. 10f.

“culture” primitive Christianity rightly understood it to be in direct opposition to God’s sovereign will as expressed in Jesus Christ. In order to defend its truth and validity against Rome’s claims the apostolic witness sought to unmask the consequences of Rome’s evil. This it did through the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus and the victory of his cross. In so doing it opened the way from servitude to liberation. Jesus’ suffering and self-sacrifice became the means through which God broke through the structures of bondage and death, demonstrating that they cannot ultimately prevail.

In unmasking the principalities and powers, their totalitarian and controlling hold on life, of state, race and class were laid bare to the ongoing attacks of the gospel. In the proclamation of God’s saving event through the crucified and risen Jesus, the end of domination became not some distant dream but an impending reality made real through a life of discipleship and deeds. God had set an end to evil’s working, and liberation from enslavement to the powers of fate were made real in the ongoing ethical consequences of the gospel. The present and the future for those who lived out Jesus’ message of liberation held out the promises of the kingdom in ever increasing ways. Thus the ongoing conviction that Jesus was victorious was constitutive to the inspiration and impetus of the apostolic mission. It was this message that indefatigably challenged thereafter all other authorities and set free the hearts of many who had previously been gripped with fear by the hostile cosmic and violent political powers in the Roman world of Paul’s day. In its confessional situation the church declared that God in Christ had come into a world that was wilfully and unwillingly captured by wickedness, and had through Christ’s redemptive work opened freedom’s way to us all. All the powers that hold us captive and rule over our lives - the unexplainable and opaque destiny of fate, sin and death - had been taken captive through Christ - “triumphing over them” (cf. Col. 2: 13-15). This victory given to us, the final certainty of which is not yet revealed in its completion but is present and revealed in Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the domination of death’s power, will, in Jüngel’s
words, break in as the promised "great future" - a surety of God "revealed in us with the return of Christ."\(^{130}\)

Langdon Gilkey states, that this salvific message concerning the defeat of the domination of the forces of evil is the "theological conjunction" that is "perhaps the most fundamental affirmation of the Old and New Testaments: in the Old, God, the Maker of all things and the Ruler of history, is the Sovereign of Israel who is coming soon to save; and in the New, this great event is proclaimed to have happened in Jesus Christ."\(^{131}\) Essential to the formation of Christian understanding throughout history is the knowledge that in Jesus' practice of God's all inclusive graciousness, and his cruciform witness to the reality of the rule of God, the world system's powers were engaged in ultimate encounter and defeated. Jesus the crucified and risen One had become the Lord of all, and through his victory "the present scheme of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7: 29, 31). Indeed in this "new creation: everything old has passed away ... everything has become new" (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 17). Through this climatic work, as Elliott states:

> If God had raised to life a body pierced by Roman iron - a victim executed as an enemy of Roman peace, and thus submitting to his people's tormented history - then the calculus of sacred violence that had made such an execution appear a terrible necessity, the calculus that had motivated Paul's persecution of the church, was destroyed forever .... In Paul's understanding, the dread balance of terror upon which every empire is founded had been broken.\(^{132}\)

The life-changing significance of this "different realism" this "wholly different logic, the Law of Life," needs increasingly to overtake the church.\(^{133}\) That is, if its life is truly tied to the destiny of Jesus - the enemy and

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vanquisher of evil - and not just about using God for its own privileges and legitimacy. We must for the sake of fidelity to the Gospel stay in essential contact with the commitments and actions that inevitably led Jesus to his death. Rather than advocating the abolition of radical change, from his different logic Jesus proposed an alternative to violent recrimination.

Given the structural violence imbedded within the Roman empire, the crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates that he was executed not just as a blasphemer but as a political rebel. His knowledge of God and his proclamation of God’s rule and reign could not evade the necessity of conflict with the powers of his day. As Sobrino reports, “The cross is the outcome of an incarnation situated in a world of sin that is revealed to be a power working against the God of Jesus.”

His conception of God and his radically inclusive actions entailed universal love for all sorts and conditions of people - albeit this love was displayed in dissimilar ways. He did not relativise disproportionately people’s pain, and he did not close off a redeeming future from them, but left open the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that: “Out of love for the poor, he took his stand with them; out of love for the rich, he took his stand against them. In both cases, however, he was interested in something more than retributive justice. He wanted renewal and recreation.”

From his examination of Jesus’ life-praxis Horsley also contends that in his struggle with the powers in Roman-occupied Palestine, Jesus offered a non-violent alternative to the universal methods of cruelty and violence. He argues that “Jesus, while not necessarily a pacifist, actively opposed violence.” He was no political militant but he “consistently criticised

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133 Elliott in ibid., p. 172.
and resisted the oppressive established political economic-religious order of his own society.”

Rather than his mission being purely religious or quietist, “he aggressively intervened to mitigate or undo the effects of institutionalised violence, whether in particular acts of forgiveness and exorcism or in the general opening of the kingdom of God to the poor.” He equated the realisation of God’s reign as one “opposed to violence, but not from a distance.” The liberation of God he expressed in deeds actively entering “into the situation of violence, and even exacerbated the conflict.” Not avoiding the sociopolitical realities of his day for a “peaceable existence” Jesus with his disciples “were prepared to suffer violence themselves and to allow their friends to be tortured and killed for their insistence on the rule of God.”

h) Violence as the Dominant Manifestation of the Powers Today

Were we created for war? Did our Maker create the eye, that we might take better aim on the field of battle, give us skill that we might invent methods of slaying by thousands? And plant a thirst in the soul that it might be quenched with the blood of others? No! Not so, says the life and teaching of Jesus. We were not made for the indescribable evils and miseries of violence and war. Jesus’ life operated on several fronts; every one of his operations was in favour of a radical alternative to the world system’s one infallible and internalised political and personal “solution” of violent recrimination. Through Jesus’ self-giving victory there is an acquittal, a remission of penalty, a release from the domination of death and sin and from any allegiance to the violence of the powers. His way of “peacemaking” is not simplistic or even yet idealistic, on the contrary history has and will prove it to be not some

137 Horsley, in ibid., p. 319.
facile construction, but historically effective because nothing is stronger than love. Here Garry Trompf’s words are salutary when from a christological angle in consideration of the question, “Does God Requite in History,” he calls for a revisiting of the “hermeneutics of love.” Against the retributive bloc of “unconvincing ethical verdicts,” he posits the axiology of “Love as radical caring, and unconquerable goodwill, not misconstrued as mere sentimentality, or weak-kneed concessiveness ... but love as the very bow-string of justice.”138 This quality which is the apex of discipleship, indeed the culmination point of human existence particularly as demonstrated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is that quality which gives all else quality because it “will never end” (cf. 1 Cor. 13: 8). And because it “keeps on returning as the curiously unexpressed standard through which all the events we and others perceive, all the evaluations we and others make, all the actions we and others take.” It is that utmost range of being that is particularly costly, since it is only ever fully known through the entire self-giving of one’s own being. It is that unique virtue by which, as Trompf says, “all intellectual and institutional achievements, receive their most subversive critique.” Of all energies love is the most revolutionary, it is that “judgement [which] probes every hidden motivation, undermines every false excuse, queries all privileging, engages each manifestation of human power, and beckons to refine us as those base metals we very often did not recognise ourselves to be.”139

According to the Gospel testimony the world and those who believe they control it stand under the scrutiny of God - and God is love - and all the ambassadors of darkness are judged, and will be judged by the victory of Christ. Evil and its rhetoric, racism, and environmental degradation, nationalistic pride, the clichés of the establishment concerning human rights and the poor, the seductive lure of mad violence, all of this evil is contrary to human good. And all of it will be judged by the logicality of God’s willing

138 Garry Trompf, in op. cit., p. 77.
139 Trompf, in ibid., pp. 77-78.
enacted in Christ. The force of Jesus’ truth makes plain our current complicity with the illegitimate powers of our time. Those evils that continue to ensure the despoliation, and the death of innocents as a phenomenon that is "just the way life is" because violence is the norm of existence. Martin Luther King questioned the unreliability of a following of Christ that can endorse violence, revel in warfare, and still want to be counted among the meek, the merciful, or hailed as peacemakers, let alone be blessed as those who hunger and thirst for justice (cf. Mt. 5: 1-11). He attacked violence’s ability to bring peaceful change as being only illusory, since: “Violence brings only temporary victories; violence, by creating many more social problems than it solves, never brings permanent peace.” He was sure, as he put it that:

if we succumb to the temptation to use violence in our struggle for freedom, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to them will be a never-ending reign of chaos. A Voice, echoing through the corridors of time, says to every intemperate Peter, 'Put up thy sword.' History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow Christ’s command.  

Just a Jesus waged his non-violent struggle against the powers of his day, so too, we must by our acts of non-violent commitment join in the contemporary fight against the generated totalitarianism of violence which has produced the concentration camps and factories of death in recent history. If we join in the gaggle of "realists" and their penchant for violence solutions by brushing aside Jesus’ non-violent defiance of the powers insisting that his witness is irrelevant to the desperate needs of our cruel epoch, we must ask which God do we serve, the Christ of the New Testament or the one proffered and connived by the world system? If we confess that we see God strikingly at work in Jesus subjugation of the powers, then we face the truth of analogous commitments in all our tasks in this present age. The significance for the church today of Jesus’ non-violent victory over the powers lies here - and is

penetratingly clear. Jesus challenged the “necessity” that binds us to the system’s methodology and drives us to violence. Ellul’s insight is instructive for Christian radicalism when he writes:

only one line of action is open to the Christian who is free in Christ. They must struggle against violence precisely because, apart from Christ, violence is the form that human relations normally and necessarily take. In other words, the more completely violence seems to be the order of necessity, the greater is the obligation of believers in Christ’s Lordship to overcome it by challenging necessity.  

Against human existence as that which is established on violence, the light of Christ’s witness exposes our subjugation to the domination of violence. Exposed is our willingness to prefer the quick fix of military solutions and their profitability. Exposed is our worship of the false god of war; to that “no-god” created in our own fell image, who as Dan Berrigan has said is "a god of servitude to our fear, our ego, our instincts of cruelty." It matters little of whether we are of comfort to the “Right” or the “Left”, Christians contribute to the world’s disorder, and we betray the veracity of Jesus and the truth of discipleship’s calling by submitting to the axiology of death-dealing and violence. I am convinced that in our “world reality” of violence, non-violence is the testing point of our obedience. The stance and assertion of, “Peacemaking, not pacifism: Scripture rather than theory,” is, to quote Wendell Berry’s line, “The Time’s Discipline” for us all.

Wink points out that bowing to the tyranny of enmity is the wrong remedy, and that “nonviolence threatens the powerful because it would require

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relinquishing unjust advantage” over the underprivileged and homeless. Given the arrangements of dominance in our world he argues that: “The burden of proof must always be on the proponent of violence to explain why war is preferable to nonviolence, especially when nonviolence has usually not even been tried. The truth is, nonviolence generally works where violence would work, and where it fails, violence too would fail.”

i) Violence not Permitted its own Autonomies

Because Jesus’ rejection of violence and hate are central to, and not ancillary to the Gospel, we are called to faith in the transformative genius of his non-violent love, which must be affirmed and practised if we truly believe in his triumph over the powers of this age. Too often, the church has been a chaplain married to the arrogance of militarism where presidential vanity has been cultivated and the disease of power most malignant in claims of embodying God’s will. The reign of God censures the democracy of violence. It unmasks the arrogant idolatry of First World messianic imperialism.

Concerning the conquest of evil in life and the struggle of Two Thirds World peoples, Walter Wink remarks that, “Christians have no business judging those who take up violence out of desperation. The guilt lies with those who turned justice aside and did not know the hour of their visitation.” Where people are driven in their fight against tyranny to the affliction of violence, the church must “bear a large share of responsibility in such a time for having taught a gospel of docility and compliance instead of evangelising people in the way of nonviolent transformation.” Wherever violence is accommodated the Gospel is robbed of its radicalism and the church is given over to experiences of relativism and fragmentary obedience. In this regard, Stringfellow’s words stand firm:

146 Walter Wink, ibid., p. 240.
Where Christians, in the same frailty and tension as any other human beings, become participants in specific violence, they do so confessionally, acknowledging throughout the sin of it. Christians become implicated in violence without any excuses for the horror of violence, without any extenuations for the gravity of it, without sublimating the infidelity it symbolises, without construing violence as justice, without illusions that their violence is less culpable than that of anyone else, without special pleading, without vainglory, without ridiculing the grace of God. 147

Where the church is faithful, the christological centre is decisive: it affirms after the cross and resurrection that its “power” is found in the Lord. It lives from the transformative centre of the Gospel which is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rm. 1: 16). Its lives and advances from the conviction that Jesus is Victor in consequence of which the church is founded on the “already” of the defeat of the devil and the principalities, rulers, thrones and dominions. From this understanding all of life was revolutionised: from their living relationship to Christ, faith’s formation, social convictions and political outlook were forever changed. God has forever altered the world because of Jesus Christ’s fight of faith: he is God’s critique of violence’s domination.

The categorical aspect within the New Testament presentation of the truth of salvation relates to Jesus’ victory over the counter-reign of Satan which is a blasphemous mockery of the rule of God (cf. Mt. 12: 26). These competing claims reach dramatic climax in a decisive battle in which the fortress of the “Strong Man” encounters the victorious work of Jesus (cf. Mk. 3: 27). The fulcrum of this theology is that against the malignant power of evil at work in the world, against that force which attempts to pervert the good purposes of God toward the creation, “the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the Devil” (cf. 1 Jn. 3: 8). As the victorious Lord of redemption, Jesus has conquered the world (cf. Jn. 16: 33), and reconciled to God the rulers of this

present age (cf. Col. 1: 20; cf. 2 Cor. 5: 19). Through his sacrifice Jesus has brought to naught the Adversary who had the power of death, and delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to bondage (see Heb. 2: 14f.; cf. 1 Jn. 3: 8). Against the dominating and globalised violence of the principalities and powers Jesus’ passion and resurrection destroyed their claim to absolutism. Through the cross God entered the darkness of human suffering engaging the personal and suprapersonal structures of evil and conquered them. Jesus, as Wink observes, “exposes the Powers as unable to make Jesus become what they wanted him to be, or to stop him being who he was.” He sought to serve God only and exhorted his followers to live by a new radical life-giving ethic. This meant that he “choose to die rather than compromise with violence. The Powers threw at him every weapon in their arsenal. But they could not deflect him from the trail that he and God were blazing. Because he lived thus, we too can find our own path.” What his God-given determination represented was that death was rendered powerless, and unable to effect its triumphant purpose. Incapable of destroying what God had made to be alive in him, Jesus confronted death as “the Powers' final sanction”. Over against death’s intransigence and its continued idolatrous claims, the crux of the cross revealed that “Death is swallowed up in victory” (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 54).

Committed to the conviction that God is the sovereign ruler of existence, the loving and just author of life, Wink, addresses the praxis of suffering and in seminal paragraphs asserts that, “Jesus at his crucifixion neither fights the darkness not flees under cover of it, but goes with it, goes into it. He enters the darkness, freely, voluntarily. The darkness is not dispelled or illuminated. Yet it remains vast, untamed, void. But he somehow encompasses it. It becomes the darkness of God” penetrated by the passion of Christ. From the impetus and meaning of Jesus’ self-offering what to us is impossible “is now

149 Wink, ibid., p. 141.
possible.” Beyond our strength or ability to endure or understand it becomes conceivable “to enter any darkness and trust God to wrest from it meaning, coherence, resurrection.”¹⁵⁰ It is God’s will that we are so sustained. Accordingly the once-powerless are granted freedom and those “who are freed from the fear of death are, as a consequence, able to break the spiral of violence.” Wink’s argument here is that, “Jesus’ nonviolent response mirrored the very nature of God, who reaches out to a rebellious humanity through the cross in the only way that would not abridge our freedom .... By this act of self-emptying, Jesus meets us not at the apex of the pyramid of power, but at its base: ‘despised and rejected by others,’ a common criminal, the offscouring of all things.”¹⁵¹

Further to this exposition, Wink submits that the cross of Jesus is “God’s victory in another, unexpected way: in the act of exposing the Powers for what they are, Jesus nevertheless submitted to their authority as instituted by God .... He submitted to their power to execute him, but in so doing relativised, de-absolutized, de-idolised them, showing them to be themselves subordinate to the one who subordinated himself to them.”¹⁵² All this means that we live through the dying of Christ, that our life and freedom are given to us by his resurrection power. Our new humanity is therefore brought into being by that which is pre-eminent over and prior to all other power and authority. No single feature of our of our discipleship is intelligible apart from this redemptive work. All of our existence and our calling to be Pilgrims of the Impossible is claimed and illuminated by God’s Calvary-centred activity. Indeed, the Christian engagement of the powers that encompass us, serving and exploiting, burdening and dominating us has its beginning on the other side of the cross. As Paul has put it: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rm. 5: 6). Because Christ has died for us the world is met with the promise of ultimate salvation - for Jesus’ lordship

¹⁵⁰ Wink, ibid., p. 141.
¹⁵¹ Wink, ibid., p. 142.
applies to all things. Thorwald Lorenzen remarks: “Concretely this means that in the power of the reconciling life of Christ the believer and the community of faith resists the estranging forces of death. The exploitation and oppression of humanity and of nature is resisted by a struggle for economic justice, human rights, and the rights of nature.”

Christian faith as trust and discipleship lives from the strength and meaning that Christ has been “raised from the dead” and enthroned “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.” Therefore any or all titles of power and government that command allegiance are neutralised, for God “has put all things under [Christ’s] feet” (cf. Eph. 1: 20-22). Exalted to the highest conceivable dignity and honour by the “immeasurable greatness” of God’s might (Eph. 1: 19), Jesus alive in the midst of the early church and very much one of their company stands supreme over all. God’s seizure of power in him extends beyond the widest dimensions of the human heart or the life of a person and reaches out to encompass the entire arena of earthly and heavenly activity. All powers are effected, be they the “principalities” (cf. Eph. 1: 21; 3: 10; 6: 12), or “the ages to come” (Eph. 2: 7), or the “ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient” (Eph. 2: 2), or “the devil” (Eph. 4: 27; 6: 11). As Markus Barth posits, the author of Ephesians “speaks of Christ’s dominion over these principalities and powers (1: 21f.), of the church’s function to manifest God’s wisdom to them (3: 10), and of every Christian’s duty to reckon with them and withstand them (6: 11-13).”

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152 Wink, ibid., pp. 141-142.
Walter Wink, in commenting on what God has brought into subjection through the death of Jesus, states that God has “depotentiated” the powers and their insatiability for death. Therefore it is not Jesus or his historical project that is conquered at Golgotha, it is the agents of death, because the “cross marks the failure, not of God, but of violence.” In answer to the question of: “If this is so what has changed?” Wink, in expository style concludes that everything has been altered, all things forever transformed: “As a result, it is the Powers themselves who are now paraded, captive, in God’s victory celebration ... everything had changed. For now the Powers were forced to ‘listen for the silent step of the dead man’s invisible feet,’ and to contend with a spirit that ‘walks through walls.’” Because the powers of evil could not kill the divine purpose within him, “the cross also revealed the impotence of death.”

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God constructed the thrust that victoriously moves in the direction of a new future for us all - the reality of a new humanity. Beyond arrested possibilities and from within his understanding of God's sovereign intendment (that will not be defeated), Wink argues - despite the manifold evidence to the contrary - that “the universe bends towards justice.” He therefore concludes that those who live from the promise and guarantee of God’s purpose in the resurrected Jesus freed from death’s domination determine the shape of hope. Living a life consistent with the model of Jesus, those who follow him are “as a consequence, able to break the spiral of violence.” This is because on the cross Jesus as the clear and unmistakable bearer of God’s saving will intentionally took into himself the whole embedded mass of human capriciousness and with it “the violence of the entire system.”

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157 Wink, ibid., p. 141.
158 Wink, ibid., p. 141.
Chapter Four
God’s Rule: Jesus’ Liberation Project

“It is important to keep in mind that ‘the kingdom of God’ is a political metaphor and symbol. In Jesus’ preaching and action the kingdom clearly includes the socio-economic-political substance of human relations as willed by God.”

“A continuing commitment to the revolution of structures in the direction of humanity and justice are essential if the process of liberation is to continue as a sign of the reign of God. And a matching commitment to personal conversion is also essential if the process of liberation is not to end in a worse tyranny than the first.”
--------- Athol Gill, Life on the Road, p. 209.

4 (i) The βασιλεία of God: From Revelation to Revolution

From within the deep involvement that he bad in the sociopolitical circumstances of his people Jesus’ focus was fixed not on himself, but on the time of salvation declared in the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (the reign of God). Mark’s theological summary captures the demand of God central to Jesus’ teaching: “The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15).

This formulation comes again and again in the tradition of the words of Jesus. In Matthew it usually appears in the form “the kingdom of heaven,” which means precisely the same as “the kingdom of God,” because the expression “heaven” is a devout periphrasis for God. Many sayings and parables are introduced by maxims that explicitly identify their focus as the βασιλεία of God (cf. Mt. 13: 24; Mk. 4: 26; Lk. 14: 15-24; and parallels). Others are clearly addressed to closely related topics, such as the great judgment (cf. Mt. 25: 14, 31), or forewarn of the impending apocalypse (Mt. 22: 11-14; Mk. 13: 34-37; Lk. 13: 24-30). Even in those cases when the parables or sayings turn their attention to theological issues as in (Mt. 20: 1-16; Mk. 4: 26-29; Lk. 15: 3-7), or spiritual matters (Mt. 11: 16-19; Lk. 13: 6-9), or substantive moral concerns (Mt. 5: 25-26; Mk. 12: 1-11; Luke 10: 25-37), their purpose is
clearly affixed to the impact of God’s liberative future present in the ministry of Jesus.¹

There are approximately a hundred instances of these βασιλεία statements in the synoptic gospels; the way in which they are used indicates that this social and political project was for Jesus his most dominant obsession, embedded within the core of his life and teaching.²

In the “now here” and the “not yet” of the kingdom proclaimed through Jesus’ action and message, the time of salvation has come, the consummation of the world is dawning: “This is why humanity’s salvation is linked to its attitude towards Jesus, in whom is finally fulfilled God’s revelation in history and God’s salvific intervention.”³ Throughout the theology of the New Testament, Jesus and his βασιλεία project become the incarnation of God’s future in a world plagued by injustice and oppression. This praxis of salvific justice reflected throughout the gospel sayings, parables, beatitudes and conflict stories, this being “in Christ” (e.g. see, Acts 24: 24; Rom. 6: 11, Rom. 6: 23: 1 Cor. 1: 2), is the fundamental key to the church in the New Testament. Thus within Paul’s theology, and with it the essential kerygma of the primitive Christian theologians there emerged a deep and fundamental continuity concerning Christ’s work. And herein there is set an ineradicable link between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the New Testament church that can never be nullified without leading to docetism. Thus the church as the “body of Christ,” the vehicle of Jesus’ willing became the messianic community, the remnant, the “little flock” to whom the βασιλεία was divinely promised and given (cf. Lk. 12: 32).

¹ I am grateful to William Herzog for these observations. See his ground-breaking work, William R. Herzog, Parables a Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).
² Boff indicates 122 references throughout the Gospels with the term being used by Jesus on about ninety occasions. See Leonardo Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for our Time (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), p. 52.
Jesus' ministry unleashed the righteous and hoped for future for humanity; history in him and for him became the new theatre of God's willing, the time of the divine now radically pressing for change in the present. For Jesus nothing in humanity was great, but so far as it was connected with God and God's liberative rule. And this revolutionary impulse was the keystone of his purpose and the substance of his teaching. Hence of it he was both evangelist and prophet. In the apostolic contention, Jesus as the harbinger of the kingdom is represented through his preaching and praxis as the incarnational activity of God's will and purpose come "with power" to transform the world order. Thus Jesus' focal point was foundationally fixed on that time of divine intervention which, as Leonardo Boff says: "is the realisation of a fundamental utopia of the human heart, the total transfiguration of this world, free from all that alienates human beings, free from pain, sin, divisions, and death." Dedicated to its realisation not as some distant pious speculation, or some legalistic localised set of religious rules, but the present outflow of God's purpose in the midst of the people, Jesus, "not only promised this new reality but already began to realise it, showing that it is possible in the world. He


4 Concerning the present (the now here), and future (the not yet) aspects of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, Sölle propitiiously comments that the "two tenses contradict each other ..., and yet they supplement each other in a paradoxical way." She further notes that the language of the New Testament speaks of "what is already present by being foreshadowed, anticipated in loving expectation." And at the same time the apostolic tradition also speaks of the in-breaking of the kingdom as "confirmation, fulfilment, [and] realisation." This tension needfully exists because "the reign of God is among us and before us, fulfilled and unfulfilled, already known and tasted, and yet still to come." As a German theologian concerned that the church eschews any semblance of what she has called "Christo-Facism," she stresses that both parts of this indissoluble eschatological connection must stay in tension and that the church must never believe itself to have captured the kingdom. She warns that when this sort of arrogance predominates, the church is given over to a theology of the "present without expectation." In this situation the church is a place of "self-destruction which begins when the church feels sure of the present Christ and thinks that it 'has' him in word and sacrament. The present possessor of the Spirit has then swallowed up the incalculable future of God. If Christ has become completely the possession of such a community, if there is no longer anything unknown, enigmatic, mysterious, about him, then the Christness is stamped with a false triumphalistic certainty, the boundaries are drawn clearly between within and without, church and world, us and them, and God becomes a household object to make use of." See Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 139-140.
therefore did not come to alienate human beings [from present realities] and carry them off to another world. He came to confirm the good news: this sinister world has a final destiny that is good, human, and divine."\(^6\)

It is important to note that Jesus’ statements about the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and its consequences were not unknown to the people of Israel.\(^7\) It was most certainly one of the central ideas in the Hebrew Bible. Which as Pixley points out is powerfully present from the origin of the monarchy in Israel and Judah to the promise and hope of a new kingdom of justice in which Yahweh’s will is honoured in the late prophetic and apocalyptic writings. For the prophets the rule of God carried specific announcements of “salvation for the poor” and the judgement of God “on their oppressors (Ps. 146; Isa. 11: 9: 61: 1-3).”\(^8\)

This link of continuity, following the tradition of the prophets meant that Jesus enunciated the meaning of God’s rule not in abstractions but in the day to day realities of the people in their relationship to God. This is the essential background concerning the meaning of the kingdom’s break-in within historical circumstance out of which Jesus’ own apostolate was formed. As Jüngel elucidates, his “life and his death was an existence out of the coming reign of God and an insistence on God’s fatherly/motherly will.”\(^9\)

a) The Irruption of the Kingdom

And here it is important to note that this liberating activity of God was the foundational construct that gave coherence and theocentric meaning to Jesus’ discipleship calls - to all those that God had given to him. Whilst wanting to safeguard the fact that the kingdom is what God inevitably does and that it is

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5 Boff, op. cit., p. 49.
6 Boff, ibid., p. 49.
8 George Pixley, in ibid., pp. 4-5.
never established by human effort (though we must enact its arrival), with authoritative theological content, Barth remarks:

The call to discipleship makes a break .... The kingdom of God is revealed in this call; the kingdom which is among the kingdoms of this world, but which confronts and contradicts and opposes them; the coup d'etat of God proclaimed and accomplished already in the existence of the person Jesus. Those persons whom Jesus calls to Himself have to stand firm by the revelation of it. Indeed, they have to correspond to it in what they themselves do and do not do. Their own actions, if they are obedient, will always attest and indicate it.¹⁰

If we are Jesus’ disciples, the irruption of the βασιλεία into our lives, into and against the powers of the world system means that we have no choice. Barth insists, that in our witnessing we must “participate” to “witness” even against our selves in criticism of all religio-political self-interest and every attempt at self-preservation. For the kingdom judges all things - all human endeavours - rendering them to be useless unless they attest to “the great attack” that God has launched against the world system in the divine reality of Jesus Christ. Powerfully, Barth contends that in Jesus, God has acted in ultimate critique of the powers.

The kingdom is not merely the announcement of God’s purpose to overturn and destroy all idolatrous manipulations and acts of injustice, it is specifically God’s liberating action, it is “the revolution of God.”¹¹ As such it is not one activity in the midst of others, it is God’s salvific work “which breaks, which has already broken” the principalities and powers. This is because in this movement of revelation to revolution, “Jesus is their Conqueror.”¹² Indeed, so drastic is this revolution that it is to be directly apprehended by those disciplined

¹² Karl Barth, ibid., p. 544.
to Jesus and his way. From its pedagogy they were to be formed, becoming their only guide to meaning and purpose.

b) A New Humanity: God’s Just Rule in the World

The fulfilling future of God was of no momentary impact for Jesus’ teaching therefore; it was constant and all embracing. It was so central and animating of his ministry that Jesus surrendered all his efforts to it. By extension, everything had to give way before the kingdom’s demands. Whatever prevented his followers from coming to authentic judgement or decision concerning the future of God radically present in their midst must fall away (cf. Mk. 1: 15f; Lk. 17: 21; Matt. 4: 17). Clouded thinking concerning its reality must be subordinated. God’s will and satisfaction was all-important: all else was only contributory or peripheral. So, Jesus gave himself and willed those who followed him to be complete in this central concern, to let the heralding of its arrival overtake them beyond every other passion and commitment. Moreover, in his own purpose he surrendered all other attempts at determining the course of his life. As his centre and vision, as that “possession” that compelled him into complete self-giving, for Jesus, the content of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ was the destroyer of false consciousness, it opened the way whereby deceiving illusions were broken and transformed into “true” consciousness.13 From the power of this commitment, he became a wedge, a force that struck a passage through this close-grained world of injustice and violence. And in this undertaking no servant should be above the master ... never insensibly posed towards Jesus’ magnificent obsession, but continuously and dangerously and zealously affected.

From the event of the kingdom’s impetus Jesus described a horizon of hope beyond the subjugation and grinding brutality that was the daily lot of the
societal outcasts and lowly ones - "the mass of people" (ὅ πολὺς ὀξύος), those who heard him "gladly" ἧδεῳς (cf. Mk. 12: 37).14 Into the lot of the beleaguered crowds Jesus entrusted himself to their predicament; even if eventually they did not do the same for him. Into their personal lives and sociopolitical situation he announced the beyond of "God's now" both present and coming. It was the promise upon which he staked his life: the divine certainty that the dominant powers with all their machinations and violence could not stop; a time in which God's new possibilities would come to fruition in history. Concretely this meant a time of deliverance, a radically different order of life from the prevailing world system. A time in which by the power of God, in the context of conflict and struggle, he had been anointed to bring good news (εὐαγγελίον) "to the poor," and sent "to proclaim release to the captives," and "sight to the blind," to "let the oppressed go free," to "proclaim the year of God's favour" (cf. Lk. 4: 18-19).15 Referent to the message divinely given and delivered by Jesus was the surety that justice and well-being were taking historical shape; the pledging to those who followed him that they would be participants in God's action against all expressions of sin. Those who followed Jesus therefore shared in the partisanship of the kingdom. Moltmann describes this critical association with Jesus and his project as a discipleship which refuses to "acknowledge Godless obligations." In the negation of values that contravene the will of God and the building up of a new humanity, the disciples of Jesus must "through the dialectic of siding with

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13 For thoughtful remarks concerning the constructs of "true" consciousness as opposed to "false" consciousness, see Helmut Peukert, Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986), p. 8f.
14 For this see, Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), p. 319. And further on page 319, concerning the fickle nature of the throngs of people, Myers remarks that Mark's language constructs "captures the contradiction in the crowd's loyalty, as it to suggest that its delight in Jesus' attacks upon the ruling classes offset his messianic unorthodoxy. Jesus does not depend upon the support of the masses, but does sense their need to demystify the authority of the scribal class, instructing them in critical thinking: 'Beware the scribes' (Mk. 12: 38b)."
the humiliated,” work towards the realisation of a Christian universalism. In the words of Moltmann:

The barriers which we erect between each other to assert ourselves and humiliate others are demolished in the community of Christ, since all people are there affirmed in a new way: they are ‘children of freedom.’ By undermining and demolishing all barriers - whether of religion, race, education, or class - the community of Christians proves that it is the community of Christ. This could indeed become the new identifying mark of the church in our world, that it is composed, of equal and like-minded people, but of dissimilar people, indeed even of former enemies. This would mean, on the other hand, that national churches, class churches, and race churches are false churches of Christ and already heretical as a result of their concrete structure.16

In the kingdom invitation to “deconstruction” or what theology calls conversion, the partisanship of Jesus involves us in the actual transformation of social relationships. From this place of gospel conviction especially here in Australia, the church must enjoin the fight against racism and the architecture of white supremacy. We need again to hear the kingdom theme introduced to the church through the theology of James Cone. In answer to the question of: “Who is Jesus Christ for us Today,” Cone has stated that all Christians must in the renunciation of superiority and the experiencing of what it means to suffer the oppression of white power structures “become black”.17 In order to make his point the more obliquely he frequently redacted the well-known evangelistic passage in John 3: 16. Not as “You must be born again,” but in order to un-blinker those blinded by the oppressive racist societies of which we are a part, he chose to preach, “You must be born black.” In his main work “God of the Oppressed,” Cone convincingly argues that the emancipating God of the Hebrew Bible and the prophetic Jesus Christ as declared in the New Testament are events or instances of liberation in the lives

of oppressed peoples. And that subsequently the struggle of peoples of colour is the contemporary equivalent of biblical experience.\textsuperscript{18}

From this hermeneutical bridge, Cone insists that the church of the powerful must break away from its ideological commitments to patriarchy, white domination and the divine entitlement of the rich. Today we need to understand the "blackness" of Jesus Christ, indeed he posits "blackness" as a definitive christological title. He states: "It is ... within the context of Jesus' past, present, and future as these aspects of his person are related to Scripture, tradition, and contemporary social existence that we are required to affirm the blackness of Jesus Christ."\textsuperscript{19} By way of hermeneutical explanation he remarks: "The phrase 'Black Christ' refers to more than the subjective states and political expediency of black people at a given point in history. Rather, this title is derived primarily from Jesus' past identity, his present activity, and his future coming as each is dialectically related to the others."\textsuperscript{20}

Particularly in Australia, surrounded by racist semiotics and white overdetermination, failure to challenge the cultural discourse of racism means that we are in denial about ourselves and the universe of meaning in which we live. It is to deny the reality of the discriminatory evils and religious bigotry we have committed against the "stolen generations" of our dispossessed

\textsuperscript{18} James Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed} (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), in his chapter "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence."

\textsuperscript{19} James Cone in ibid., p. 133.

\textsuperscript{20} James Cone in ibid., p. 133. Stinginghe addresses himself to the subjective interests of "white theologians" who find difficulty with the concept of Jesus' blackness. He avers: "When the past and contemporary history of white theology is evaluated, it is not difficult to see that much of the present negative reaction of white theologians to the Black Christ is due almost exclusively to their \textit{whiteness}, a cultural fact that determines their theological inquiry, thereby making it almost impossible for them to relate positively to anything black. White theologians' attitude toward black people in particular and the oppressed generally is hardly different from that of oppressors in any society. It is particularly similar to the religious leaders' attitude toward Jesus in first-century Palestine when he freely associated with the poor and outcasts and declared that the Kingdom of God is for those called 'sinners' and not for priests and theologians or any of the self-designated righteous people." In summary fashion he concludes that the "The difficulty of white theologians in recognising their racial
Aboriginal peoples. It is to be party to an axis of separation, a expedient amnesia, and a comprehension of our history past and present that many now would encourage us disregard.\textsuperscript{21} Lest we forget evil's line of succession still very evident today, we would do well to recall Rauschenbusch's comment regarding the ongoing nature of maleficence. Prior to the First World War he wrote:

Theology has not given adequate attention to the social idealisations of evil, which falsify the ethical standards for the individual by the authority of their group or community, deaden the voice of the Holy Spirit to the conscience of individuals and communities, and perpetuate antiquated wrongs in society .... The evils of one generation are caused by the wrongs of the generations that preceded, and will in turn condition the sufferings and temptations of those who come after.\textsuperscript{22}

Lest the proportion of tragedy already inflicted on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue, in the name of Jesus Christ we must presently face the responsibility of our crimes and turn away from our sins by way of reparation and reconciliation. Christians must repent of their sins, and we may well do the whole of our country no small service were we to give the lead in repentance in this regard. For the church in Australia this must be at the forefront of our witness to Jesus' kingdom project, for although we have made some progress towards hearing the deep pain our indigenous peoples, as Boris Frankel notes:

Aboriginal culture has been given the role of an established of permanent marginal culture for white Australia. It is the marginal culture which simultaneously serves to shame middle-class Australians but rarely to inspire or threaten them in to action. Guilt may be accepted as a fleeting mood, but urgent radical action is a phrase which

\textsuperscript{21} Instances of conscience concerning the brutality and lies committed against Australia’s Aboriginal peoples are poetically documented in Kevin Gilbert ed., \textit{An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry} (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988).

is not part of the dominant political-culture's vocabulary. Liberal middle-class Australia has learned to live with Aboriginal degradation, just as it has learned to live comfortably with the notion that millions of poor non-Aboriginal Australians 'will always be with us.'

In the changing of the kingdom's relations of power, whites as well as people of colour experience liberation as a foretaste of the kingdom. The annunciatory, prophetic function of the gospel of the kingdom for those of us who belong to the white dominate classes are both disturbing and hopeful. For the sake of effecting the liberation of all we must be held accountable to the kingdom's commands. As this happens the actualising wholeness and justice of the \( \text{πασιλεία} \) is disturbing because we, in the dominate culture, are indicted by its demands of equity and repentance - as well we should be.

But we must be also hopeful because the message of the kingdom provides our best chance of communication and community across the deep channels of alienation that white individual and collective collusion with evil has created. Our sharing in the critical partisanship of Jesus' practice alongside of and with those who suffer most at the hands of the world system - the minority groups and marginalised of every society - is not for their sake alone. In the journey of human wholeness, it is only as the church contributes to the actualising of the gospel of liberation that it will succeed in the recovery of its own true life in Christ.

c) The Kingdom: Costly and Provocative

For the people of first century Palestine the explication of the kingdom's meaning concerning their real life circumstances and the inhuman structures that made for their situation had been significantly neglected by the dominant Pharisaic piety of their time. As a consequence, the kingdom's historical promise as the liberating nearness of God announced by the Prophets had been

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23 Boris Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come* (North Carlton, Melbourne: Boris Frankel)
displaced to a more regulated place among the prevailing religious opinion. Like much that nullifies the meaning of the kingdom in the church today, the orthodox theological circles of Jesus’ time had posited the political and equity themes of the kingdom into their coven, controlling its meaning by the privatised vocabulary of their life concerns. Conservative versions of holiness then as now had succeeded in weakening the establishing of God’s rule to an interior private matter, or pushing its revolutionary implications off and away from the real issues of life’s struggles. So that for the religiously orthodox the salvation of God was sequestered away from the centre of faith’s concern, relegated to a future transcendent sphere with an otherworldly interpretation of its fulfilment.

Jesus’ proclamation of the \( \text{πασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ} \) showed no signs of fragmentation concerning its meaning and purpose for all those who had no hope for a better future. Against the different responses of various interpretations of the kingdom, Jesus possessed a unity of approach. He acts as one who sought imminent acts of deliverance particularly concerning the plight of the oppressed and exploited poor. As Myers’ points out Jesus’ response to needy individuals or hungry crowds is very different even to that of his disciples. In dismissive style, the disciples are prepared to, “Send them away” (cf. Mk. 6: 36). But Jesus sees the lot of the lowly as drastic evidence of the absence of God’s rule and the impetus for his heralding of it. At this place Jesus message and mission of the kingdom reaches its highest point of aggravation with the Jewish and Roman authorities. In contrast to the human structures of domination, as Waetjen notes, the “rule of God that Jesus is establishing as the New Human Being is a new moral order, horizontal in structure and therefore essentially egalitarian, in which human destiny will be

realised both individually and corporately."²⁶ And in the enactment of this project, as Horsley observes, in which Jesus presented himself as the uniquely authoritative spokesperson, his concerns were "not abstract or even primarily religious, but ... with the people's concrete circumstances, both somatic and psychic, material and spiritual."²⁷

Whether by personal risk or explicit instruction, Jesus' love for the people is what made his proclamation fiercely impatient and difficult, and the reason he could not render the rule of God into the realm of abstraction. With unabated fervency he articulated it as inexorably coming and present in their real lives. It was not to be passively awaited in some distant invisible and dim future. His vivid sense of the reality of God's concern for the welfare of the people, particularly those of marginal status is touched throughout by the precipitating action of his life. While exhorting his disciples to follow him into a radical new community, as Wink has stated, Jesus "lived" the kingdom. Beyond empty theological idealism, Jesus "acted on it." There can be no doubt that he "brought it to reality" by living from its power and presence "actually freeing people from bondage."²⁸ Only God could bring about the kingdom's completion. But in anticipation of its arrival amidst their daily lives surrounded by the structures of their oppression Jesus called upon the people to "live" and affirm the presence of the kingdom. They did not have to wait its consummation before God's redemptive process could be manifested in their midst; they were able to practice, to live out its in-breaking, so that catalysed within its meaning, they could immediately apply this new energy to their everyday lives; fortifying themselves by the kingdom's announcements and contradictions against their oppressors. Sure that God was present to deliver, Jesus answered his detractors by announcing that the power of Satan's

kingdom was being overcome by the ancient yet ever present power of “the finger of God” (cf. Ex. 8: 19). Against his antagonists, his intention was to serve notice that the greater power - beyond all authorities and rulers - was present. That they were all under threat for, “if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk. 11: 20).

There should therefore be no falsifying of his intention, no hesitation on the part of anyone, no waiting any longer to begin living from the kingdom’s meaning. About this his message is sure, because he understood that “the end is already in the beginning” and that in the engagement of the kingdom “a new way must be constructed for the realisation of new society in which love and justice will prevail.”

Jesus’ liberating practice took seriously the real religio-social and economic plight of the people. This is why the movement he catalysed and the kingdom-society he both envisioned and “fleshed-out” through his life-praxis and counter communities posed such an undermining threat to the system’s assumptions (cf. Lk. 8: 1-3 and Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35). The message and presence of Jesus’ new society was a contradiction, indeed a reproach to the established order. The shape of their alternative practice became that of “Defective social formation” (cf. Mk. 9: 42ff). Their life-practice of defection was enabled by a divine empowerment so that from the inbreaking of the kingdom the people should know that God did not predestinate them to be fated as the lost and broken but enlivened to shape their own liberating future. This is why Gutiérrez is right when he says that “the life and preaching of Jesus postulate the unceasing search for a new kind of person in a qualitatively different society.”

29 Herman Waetjen, op. cit. p. 78.
The commonwealth of love as inaugurated by Jesus posited the structures of society differently. It was a contentious conviction that understood right from the start that all people were under divine rule, and this ideal as taught by him transcended and judged all human rule. Consequently in his prophetic announcements he was not concerned about concealing the meaning of this historical obsession. In the congruity of the kingdom this meant that sinners and the dispossessed “should not fear exclusion from the community of the redeemed: indeed, because they now follow Jesus, even the most notorious of them - tax collectors and prostitutes - may precede the priests themselves into God’s reign (Mt. 21: 31).”

Therefore implicit in Jesus’ teaching of the βασιλεία of God a subversive challenge upheld by divine power was issued. Its meaning was plain enough considering it was aimed at cruel authority enshrined in legitimating forms of religio-political domination. Both his popular following and the power elites understood his meaning, since it was in diverse ways aimed at those who dehumanised God’s truth, and who institutionalised a form of religion and life that whilst perpetuating privilege for the powerful demeaned the lot of the lowly. There ought be no surprise therefore concerning Jesus’ attack upon all those who inhabited the privileged groups of spiritually upright interpreters - those who made the word of God dead by the mechanisms of their distortion (see Mk. 7: 8f). Beyond religious or political dogma impregnated with human arrogance, the new society that Jesus espoused required historically specific “egalitarian, nonexploitative, and nonauthoritarian social relations”. That is, relationships that became risky alternative strategies of transformation for his time.

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33 Richard A. Horsley in op. cit., p. 192.
d) Called by Costly Grace to the Testimony of the Kingdom

Cumulatively the liberative narratives of scripture urge us to acknowledge Jesus' salvific message on his terms and not ours. The self-sufficient Christianity of the rich church with its message of "cheap grace" and its essential "church growth" packages full of personal-realisation and serene vagueness concerning specific justice aspects of discipleship contradicts the liberation strategy of Jesus. No matter how carefully the gospel writers may have tried to ease Jesus' message into the world, inevitably on the way through to enacting the rule of God his life-praxis comes across as unsafe and full of struggle. Likewise, contemporary Christianity can only be designated "Christ-like" as it conforms to the cost and obedience of the kingdom required in our time. As we are confronted by "the world in front of the text" and the questions raised concerning the kingdom's meaning and implications today. It is necessary to admit that too many contemporary Christians have become, for all their religious flights of rhetoric and fancy, apt tools of the world system.34

And too many hierarchs in too many churches have courted the favour of, and meshed their mindsets (not to the βασιλεία of Jesus), but to that which they judge to be a more desirable, a greater and more powerful ruler - the high God Capital. To that "no god," to that totalitarian ideology that religiously claims our allegiance, and that works its way now in our time as a modern day "Constantinian Assumption" comprised of state and military blessings undergirded with multinational giantism. And the church as it advertises its false allegiance is now announcing to the secular world, as though by way of discovery, what the secular world has been announcing to it for a rather long time.

In the coordinates and the testimony of discipleship today there must be - by God’s grace - an authentic and corresponding witness to the way of Jesus. In order to keep his dominant inspiration alive in the ongoing process of history this is a necessary task of the church. For the truth of the kingdom is at stake in the lives of those who bear witness to Jesus’ programme of liberation today. The gospel of God’s reign does not only ask for committed belief in its truth, it also invites the believer to do something uniquely different, to be and become in the constructs of “the self” and the mutuality of life, a decisively different person. Bornkamm, comments that:

Discipleship means decision; Jesus’ decision as regards certain individuals, but then it means no less their own decision to follow him. It consists, in actual fact, in the determination to abandon everything and, in the first instance quite literally, to follow Jesus from place to place, and to accept the fate of the wanderer with all of its privations.  

The call of the disciples was, for the Gospel writers an example of God’s rule of grace being “fleshed-out” and actualised in their personal human history. This invasion of grace called them to radical obedience which was for them testimony to their true repentance and faith. Jesus’ message of the kingdom summoned all would-be disciples to embrace its meaning; to become committed believers of his magnificent obsession and testify to others concerning its truth-claims. Metz comments that in the dramatic disclosure of discipleship - of declaring our allegiance to the way of Jesus - we commit class betrayal. He argues that: “It is possible that what love demands of us here may look like treason - a betrayal of affluence, of the family, and of our customary way of life.” To this observation he adds: “And in periods when the social contradictions in the world cry out to heaven [discipleship] will incur the suspicion of class treason for betraying the allegedly necessary interests of the propertied.”

37 Metz, in ibid., p. 15.
himself incur the reproach of treason? Did not his love bring him to the state? Was he not crucified as a traitor to all the apparently worthwhile values? Must not Christians therefore expect, if they want to be faithful to Christ, to be regarded as traitors to bourgeois religion? .... So must not Christian love in following after Christ continually strive toward that same obedience?" 38

Commenting on the content of obedient testimony, Ricoeur says: "Witness is ... the engagement of the pure heart and an engagement to the death. It belongs to the tragic destiny of truth." And further to this he adds: "The witness is capable of suffering and dying for what they believe .... The witness is the person who is identified with the just cause which the crowd and the great hate, and who, for this cause, risk their lives." 39 Informatively too, Lorenzen argues that: "In the New Testament the word group ‘witness/testimony’ is at least as prominent as the word group associated with ‘word’, ‘proclaiming the gospel’, and ‘kerygma’". 40 My present argument here is that what the promise and risky testimony of the kingdom call the church to in our time is not some self-indulgent individualised exercise of faith, or some distracting preoccupation with intricate liturgical forms of worship, nor yet with dogmatically correct rational acceptances of evangelical truths into which true believers have with extraordinarily assured tone been "briefed". 41

38 Metz, in ibid., p. 15.
41 Kierkegaard has a solid word for those who have proffer rationalistic arguments for the proof of Christianity. And it seems most clear to me that those St. Matthias type of “Jenson Christians” within the Anglican diocese of Sydney who through right doctrine “briefing” fall clearly within his contemporary condemnation. The only thing that we can prove about Christ and his claim is that “it is at variance with reason.” Strongly Kierkegaard argues: “The proofs which Scripture presents for Christ’s divinity - His miracles, His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into heaven - are therefore only for faith, that is, they are not ‘proofs,’ they have no intention of proving that all this agrees with reason; on the contrary
What the kingdom calls us to in the following of Jesus is nothing short of "radical discipleship"; a discipleship that involves living out a life-praxis in which the Bible and the actions of people committed to salvation and justice fuse into a single ongoing process in which God brings forth the kingdom deeds of liberation and relentless love. Every true witness to Jesus' way stands under the kingdom's commission. Within the apostolic contention there are no exceptions. Witnesses point away from themselves, and in so far as they speak about themselves, they do so in relation to the one who is their true and only κυριος. Those who live from the body of the kerygmatic axis know that those who seek redemption and renewal, find it not in what the witness can do in and of themselves: it is to be found in the source of liberative power - Jesus Christ himself. As Paul testifies: "It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake" (11 Cor. 4: 5). All that Paul does, he does for "Jesus' sake" convinced that service to others is obedience to Christ (cf. Mt. 25: 40). And here as a true witness, he follows in the way of his master who made it his life work "to serve" and to give his life away for the sake of others (cf. Mk. 10: 45). In Jesus' case, this fundamental attitude of testimony and self-emptying achieved its most significant expression in his descent from the glory of the Son that in Johannine theology, he shared with the Creator (cf. Jn. 17: 5) to the ignominy shame, and rejection on the cross - a theme similar to that of Paul in his testimony to the Philippians (Phil. 2: 6-8).

From the constitutive elements of apostolic proclamation it is therefore small wonder that each of Jesus' followers must take up their own cross if they were to be true disciples (cf. Mk. 8: 34, 38). This was the apostolic conviction and life style. They are those who always carrying in the body "the death of Jesus" (νεκρωσις, putting to death), with the hoped for consequence that "the life of Jesus may be made visible" in their obedient lives (11 Cor. 4: 8-11).

The use of νέκρωσιν (dying) seems to indicate the constant exposure to danger and death that Paul and the other apostles face daily. It is quite possible that this reference may be Paul’s equivalent to Jesus’ words about taking up one’s cross and following him (cf. Mk. 8: 34). Or, as Elliott puts it, this language may mark Paul’s “own identification with the crucifixion of Jesus”.42

In the New Testament the word "witness" is not limited to eye-witnesses. In this existential character there is no difference between the eye-witnesses and later generations. The apostles were by no means the exclusive witnesses. They led the way and we later disciples follow their conviction and obedience. In this we are dependent on their faithfulness. In Christian life and confession there is, however, no difference: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn. 20: 29). We know from New Testament times that those following the path of the apostles confessed publicly their faith in the crucified and risen lord, the Christ. Many of whom went to their deaths because of their stubborn refusal to offer sacrifices to Augustus and subsequent Caesars. Roman authors and authorities, Horsley and Silberman write, besmirched the early believers as those who were by their testimony, ‘notoriously depraved’ adherents of a ‘deadly superstition’ that represented a direct threat to the moral majority of imperial Rome. Christians were hunted down in the slums and back alleys of Rome and other provincial cities. They were rounded up, beaten up, and condemned to execution for atheism and treason - that is, failing to participate in the state-controlled cults of the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon and abandoning honoured family values of pagan society.43

Such was the character of the discipleship to which Jesus called his followers that in the clash of allegiances many sealed with their blood the confession of

their faith. Persecution was described by Jesus as part of the blessedness of being one of his followers; its reality was confirmation that they were heirs of the prophets and witnesses to that tradition of fidelity and justice (cf. Mt. 5: 11-12; Lk. 6: 22-23). Suffering as a consequence of and testifying to Jesus' new order was an expression of the life of the kingdom as it took shape in this world. For this reason Paul never let the early church forget that the defiant life-choices of belonging to Jesus' way would mean that those who dared it would pass through many tribulations (cf. Acts 14: 22). But joyfully too, he reminded the church that those who shared in Christ's death would also share in his resurrection (cf. Rm. 8: 17).

So with sacrifice and powerful invitation the early Christians surrendered their lives as those who believed and acknowledged God's sovereign demand in Jesus Christ. Their witness to those who belonged to the old aeon was not a mere communication of something that was radically different. It was an appeal to “conversion” to “repent and believe” to commit to and embody this new radicality (cf. Mk. 1: 15). For them the kingdom of Jesus was an impending reality, indeed the one great reality that confronted everyone in the "now" with the need for decision. As such the preaching and enacting of God's rule and justice (δικαίωσις, cf. Mt. 6: 33) as their primary object led the early Christians into the building up of an alternative society, a community where God's love was present in an unprecedented way and exploitation abolished (cf. Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-37). Through their human sacramental action they wanted to wake the world of their time, and in future generations, to the same faith and testimony: “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn. 1: 3). Their testimony was that the future was not impoverished of meaning or hope. For they had experienced the present and the future companionship of God through the truly human one - Jesus Christ the founder of a new humanity.

43 Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asjer Silberman, The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World (New York:
Within the Christian vocabulary the term “witness” became synonymous with the word “martyr”. This was consequent to their life-commitments and public attestations. It indicated a believer who had borne witness to Jesus by the shedding of their own blood for the sake of “the name” (cf. Acts 5: 41; 9: 16). In the text-event concerning the faithfulness of Stephen (cf. Acts 7: 54-60; 22: 20), he is called a "witness" in connection with his murder. It was no mischance that his death aroused such hostile passion on the part of his persecutors. Since, in the midst of accusing his hearers of failing to obey their God-given laws, he dares to name the point of their opposition to God's will by charging them as being those who not only killed the prophets, but handed over Jesus to the Romans, so constituting themselves as his betrayers and murderers. It is important to note that Stephen is “not a witness, however, because he is killed, on the contrary he is killed because he is a witness.”

In a consideration of the role of the church as evidenced in the book of Revelation, the faith of Christians is continually the reason for their embattlement and persecution by Rome. Subversive narratives led to dangerous consequences and dangerous memories told subversive narratives. Schüssler Fiorenza comments that the Christians represented an “anti-kingdom to the Roman empire.” Being a Christian in such circumstances was dangerous both politically and theologically since in the book of Revelation redemption belonged only to “those who, like Christ, were faithful witnesses“ and had been “victorious in the struggle with the Roman empire,” only these believers “will have a part in the eschatological kingship and priesthood.” Such theology left little room for cheap grace. Again and again against Rome’s fiction, the Christians witnessed to the point of martyrdom. Here as elsewhere in the New Testament “μάρτυς” (cf. Rev. 2: 13; 17: 6) signifies

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witnesses who have paid the price of their existence for the sake of their testimony to the truth.  

Modern parlance concerning the use of the word "martyr" tends to muddle our thinking due to it being appropriated in an undue misuse of the term. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the pristine and existential nature of what being a true witness, a μάρτυς means, at the heart of which lies obedience and trust together with the real life costs of the kingdom's meaning. The phenomenon of suffering for the sake of the gospel has always been present in the life of the church; perhaps most dramatically evident in Central and Latin America in contemporary history - but certainly not absent in places of struggle like South Africa and Burma. This most cruel reality as Boff states must not be minimalised in any form: "We dare not glory in the testimony of our martyrs to the point of overlooking the grievous sin it unveils and presupposes. Christian martyrdom in Latin America exposes a much more general death - the structural, gradual, but altogether real death of entire crucified peoples, together with that of those who defend the rights of the poor." And then in quoting Gutiérrez, he adds, that we must never permit ourselves to forget, 'the cruelty that surrounds this fact, and thereby the rejection of the conditions that give rise to these murders.'  

For those who follow Jesus in the present, as in the past, there is as the poet said: "life and death inside his name."  

In our time some are inclined to put witnessing by words over against witnessing by praxis. The New Testament does not give the slightest reason

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48 This line is from Peter Campbell's song, "In the Giving" from his Album/CD Rear-View Mirror, (Newtown, Australia: Tintacks Music, 1998).
for such an opposition. On the contrary, within the script of biblical radicalism, the witnesses paid, because of their life-alignment and their praxis, for their words as well as their deeds. No testimony is an authentic Christian testimony if the verbal proclamation of the resurrected Jesus is not presupposed in one way or another. No testimony is a real Christian testimony either, if this faith in the resurrected Jesus does not occupy and direct the witnessing person's political and personal discernment. Christians are called upon to be no mere speculative reporters of Jesus and his kingdom, rather our lives are meant to be (however so humble), real and authenticating signs of Christ's resurrection life in the midst of competing and conflicting allegiances.

In the struggle of announcing a better human arrangement the churches are engaged in a battle for the hearts, minds and future of our society - as too were our early sisters and brothers in the faith. In this work, testifying is not an appendix to Christian life, nor even a part of it, it stands at the very heart of discipleship. There should be no hesitancy on this point. Barth argues that witness and witness alone is the essence, the aim and the common denominator of Christian life. In the evangelising work of witnessing, for too long personal salvation has been regarded as having final significance. Barth attacks this age-old conviction. He points to the fact that the Bible does not know stories of privatised conversion but of calling, of "election" in which the privatised element plays a secondary role. If personal salvation were the aim of our calling, Barth rightly determines, then Christ would become a means to that end, and the Christian would only be one more religious consumer arrogantly seeking divine endorsement. Even more, in this way Christianity would become an ever increasing egotistic enterprise needing to be adapted for massive privatised consumerism. In biting phrases, Barth forcefully asks:

Can the community of Jesus Christ ... really be only, or at any rate essentially and decisively, a kind of institute of salvation, the foremost and comprehensive medium salutis, as Calvin self-evidently assumed
and said? Is not every form of egocentricity excused, and even confirmed and sanctified, if egocentricity in this sacred form is the divinely willed meaning of Christian existence, and the Christian song of praise consists finally only in a many-tongued but monotonous pro me, pro me, and similar possessive expressions? 49

Quite obviously, this view of Christian witness has formidable consequences for ecclesiastical procedures together with evangelistic and personal testimony within the life of the church. Barth’s observations stand strongly against an egotistical and individualistic understanding of salvation which for centuries has corrupted a proper understanding of conversion and discipleship.

Such a critical view of the “winning of souls” does not however endanger the strong emphasis in the New Testament on personal salvation. Transformation at a personal level is morally and ethically vital as it addresses the issues of unbelief, disobedience and injustice. History confirms the reality that the effects of individual salvation and its consequences are never limited from others. That which is private is intrinsically related to that which is public. Since there is none that are “righteous, not even one“ (cf. Rm. 3: 10), all human beings need to know the emancipatory power of the gospel against sin’s enslavement (cf. Rm. 6: 23). When we face our denial of God’s willing at the personal and collective levels of life and when we face the basic substance of sin as disobedience, violence and oppression within our selfish selves - a penchant that creates and wants to maintain these conditions - is it not we as individuals that need to be personally converted again and again?

The fact of our personal state is that: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1: 8). This is true, since as Davie Napier observes, all of “life is judged by the righteousness of God, upon the violation of the divine-human relationship,” we then, every one of us, come under the prophetic scrutiny: “Why have you despised the word of

Yahweh, to do what is evil in God's sight?" (cf. 11 Sam. 12: 9). In this common human predicament, who of us is not in need of the inward disposition of personal decision? The need of interior conversion is forced upon us and is necessary for the personal dimension of belief to come to fruition.

Nevertheless, Barth's problem with an undue emphasis on privatised conversion is valid because conversion does not exist for its own sake. Personal conversion cannot be final and all-consuming in the life of a follower of Jesus since it is always only a means to an end, that end being bearing testimony to the inbreaking of God's rule. To take up Barth's language again, the special "determination of the elect" by God's grace in Jesus Christ must involve the Christian in the active participation of the church's witness as the community of Christ. In this role neither the individual believer nor the church however are in a position to proscribe who will or will not be determined within the saving purpose of God. Not by our own doing, but found within the graciousness of grace, and mindful that we are all of us people in personal turmoil given to misdirection, and that we are too often found out by history as miscarrying salvation; indeed, given to manifold injustices and locked in the concrete impasse of the system, as members of the church we would do well to announce not the damnation, but the salvation of God. This should characterise the content of our witness. Against exclusivist arrogance we do well to ponder Barth's words:

The person who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this person can only be the godless person's own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual person consists in this: that this choice of the godless person is void; that they belong eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore are not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which they deserve on account of their perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that they are appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous,

divine decision. The promise of their election determines that as members of the community they themselves shall be bearers of its witness to the whole world. And the revelation of their rejection can only determine them to believe in Jesus Christ as the One by whom it has been born and cancelled.\(^{51}\)

There is no sell-out to secular universalism here. Because this conviction emphasizes the fact that it is never the prerogative of the witness to determine the full scope of God’s gracious election of humanity in Christ. Considering the graciousness of grace with its free reach, in principle, those who find themselves within salvation’s embrace are precluded from denying the possibility of a christocentric universalism.\(^{52}\) Neither is there any place for a negation of the evangelistic task of witnessing here either. This is because the gospel must always be proclaimed in the hope that it is always God’s will to enlarge the number of the elect. Christocentric grace belongs to God alone.

In the reconciling of the world to God, it is God’s prerogative to delimit and to know what are the universal parameters of the divine undertaking in Jesus (cf. 11 Cor. 5: 19).\(^{53}\) As the provisional representation of the justification, and vocation of the whole world, and as that which exists for the world, it is the church’s task never “to consider its own security.” But rather to proclaim the evangel to the world, to every “street”, to every “alley”, never to “close in upon itself”, but against all profanity to witness, that resurrection’s reality will mean the liberation of all people.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{52}\) For his views on “Universalism” see, Karl Barth in ibid., pp. 415ff.

\(^{53}\) Karl Barth, in ibid., p. 419.

\(^{54}\) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/I, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), pp. 725ff., also see *Church Dogmatics* IV, 3 (First Half), pp. 762ff. and pp. 795ff.
e) Testifying against the Church: For the sake of the Church

In our time it is needful to make vigorous protest against the easy conscience of right-doctrine presuppositional fundamentalism. What is needed is a new self-understanding of that which is central in the Christian message. Accordingly, it becomes necessary, as did the members of Tillich's "Kairos Circle" in Berlin, who as they faced the rising spectre of Hitlarianism and a conformist church, called for "a struggle against the church for the sake of the church." Despite the evidence of so many success oriented churches, and their clergy, indeed, because of the rise of culturally compliant religiosity it is today essential to combat present attempts at domesticating the project of Jesus. It is again necessary to "struggle against the church for the sake of the church."

In the protracted emergency situations of our time; from a position of "rootedness" in biblical faith wherein discipleship remains the only authentic epistemological location for knowing Jesus Christ, it is vital to hold to that which is present and coming - the commanding, judging, sustaining, renewing and transforming reality of Jesus summons to the compliance of the kingdom. Confidence in the Holy Spirit's call to this alternative theology and social vision is the nerve and centre of biblical faith. A discipleship that is biblical therefore rejects all notions that Christian faith can provide sanction for what Lorenzen has condemned as a "North Atlantic theology" that is culturally captive and contemptibly limited with regard to the justice meanings of Jesus' life and resurrection. In the context of God's all-encompassing salvation, his indictment reads: "When faith therefore seeks to remain tied to Jesus Christ, it must also seek him in the poor and oppressed. Faith in him must take on the

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concrete form of showing solidarity with them. Refusing to do so would not only be a denial of justice; it would also be a denial of Christ.  

Blind to the consequences of the gospel's meaning in the world, to that field of our witness that has so often been forgotten by the church in its preoccupation with its own problems and designs, we have willingly allowed the moral demands of the kingdom to be pushed to the sidelines. Having successfully convinced themselves of their misnomers, many of our bland ecclesiastical hierarchs leading other bland hierarchs have sacrosanctly attitudinised their viewpoints as being either correct or correct. And so we continue using the polite language of liberal religion, always careful to balance our negative statements with positive ones lest we get anyone off-side. Lest we are guilty of creating the impression that the course of the world is basically a well-balanced affair that will finally - as we see globalised Capitalist sense - come round right. Against this conformism, we must summon the determination to refute the placating theology that too many theological educators and clergy have become so congenitally bound to in the confines of the academy and the sweetness of prestige. We must have the determination to overcome our captivity; a proclivity that maintains our First World entitlement and our lust for ostentatious consumerism that spreads the gospel of homo consumens as the ideal of human fulfilment. Behind the materialism that characterises consumerist society lie the powers of enslavement that together with the basic structures of sin continue to create and sustain the conditions of racism, militarism and economic disparity that plague our world. It is these powers of destruction to which the New Testament writings refer. We need the stomach to see the world the way it is and repent; to be converted to the kingdom's demands. As Luis del Valle observes:

57 Indications of life beyond the control of “consumerism” can be found in John V. Taylor’s *Enough is Enough* (London: SCM Press, 1975).
Theology both derives from and leads to conversion. Conversion is here understood as a real commitment to, and involvement in, society. Society must be changed to measure up to a faith that is both utopian and rooted in the present moment. Thus theology is critical of itself. In the light of faith it is also critical of the praxis of Christians. It drives them on to the transformation of society, not letting them rest content with mere contemplation of some revealed truth.58

The centrality given to the discipleship of the kingdom makes the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, constitutive to the conversional nature of the Christian life and not some mere take it or leave it proposition. The primacy of witness given to the βασιλεία of Jesus is not a mere rearrangement of theological or ecclesial concepts: it creates and places before us a totally different space for the doing of theology. It places the biblical mandates of Jesus’ kingdom at the centre of our reformulations of faith and action: making for a new emergence of biblical and activist theologians occurring throughout the churches. The result being the reinterpretation of the Bible in light of sociopolitical realities, enabling a breaking away from distanced speculative patterns, transcending the entrenched theological camps that constricted and controlled biblical reflection for so long, opening up the Word of God to the world of God, and empowering ordinary people to do theology that is profoundly ecumenical, deeply biblical, imaginative, and creatively liturgical.

If there is to be any intelligent passion for the Word of God and a determination to give it incarnational reality in our churches, Christians must actively testify to the truth and meaning of God’s saving rule in public practice and policy. Exercised in freedom and by the coercive grace of God, this they will do against the rebuke of inner and outer demons whose craft it is, is to suppress their will power, telling them with every effort for justice innumerable times that nothing can reshape the system’s reality of “business-as-usual.” This they will do by faithful and persistent witness to Jesus’

kingdom through which God is transforming human society. In this regard, for the followers of Jesus, as they seek to live out the truth of their baptisms, authentic “life” can only be found in the promise of radical obedience, with the fruits of service and justice as constant companions. In no way can authentic Christian life be caught up in self-invested immobility.

Through God’s grace and by obedience to Jesus’ domination-free order the truth of genuine discipleship is defined despite untoward consequences. Those who live from some other construct of life - from some notion of self-aggrandisement - only demonstrate that their discipleship is false since the way of Jesus is defined as service at indeterminate cost to oneself. What is at stake in the kingdom hermeneutic of Jesus is the consistent scuttling of human self-justification and false witness. Faithful testimony, Lorenzen remarks, “remains dependent on the event to which it testifies, and it calls for witnesses who communicate it, and who with their existence are responsible for the accuracy of the testimony.” And pointedly he adds: “If a witness distorts the testimony then the very event is distorted and it does not arrive in the present as the event that it is.”

Our key thought here is the praxis of the kingdom as a way of life, as testimony. Which means the continuing willingness to submit to God’s reality, to let the divine willing break through in the shaping of our selfhood and our life-tasks as true witness and right worship. Counterfeit disciples have shown themselves unable to appreciate sacrificial testimony as God’s way. Following Kierkegaard’s line, one critic of the church rightly identifies such false Christians as “kissing Judases.” With irony, he adds, “it is not literally with a kiss that Christ is betrayed in the present age: today one betrays with an interpretation.”

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59 Lorenzen, in op. cit., p. 209.
Unwilling to travel the way of the cross and preferring the tepid and diluted offerings of analgesic Christianity, their adulterated discipleship leads them into a betrayal of the gospel. Christian betrayal takes many forms. Not the least of which can be the lifting up of the emotion of intimate loyalty to the person of Jesus, without any call to his "historicising" of the justice mandates of the kingdom as they relate to the devastation of ecological pollution, of starvation and poverty, depletion of basic resources, and the sacrilege of war. Which is to say that this form of betrayal does very little by way of attaching the emotion of personally loving Jesus to the specific tasks and projects of the kingdom's meaning in a world of inequity and domination.

We need urgently to move beyond a constant dealing in sentimentalities to the application of redemptive energy to the world's drastic difficulties. Like the saints of old we need to strengthen our hands in the work of this "common good" (cf. Neh. 2: 18). Such action would represent life and reality among the people of God in our time, sharpening our commitments to the rule of God, and freeing us from a cowardly listlessness for fear of what might happen in our churches as the kingdom impacts the domination system.

4) (ii) Discipleship as the Cost and Meaning of Life

Meaning in life and life as being the capability of embracing meaningful existence are the experiences, or better "the experience" that every person seeks to find in their own life journey. In the determination of Christian life what is of supreme importance is that each of us should become a person, a whole and integrated person in whom there is manifested the lordship of Jesus in relevant and meaningful human purpose. According to the apostolic testimony, Jesus' life had a particular and unique meaningfulness throughout it (cf. Mt. 3: 17). The richness of his existence and exuberance for living was

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derived from the depth of his “given” ability to articulate the original liberating purposes of God and the message of the prophets that lay buried beneath deadening religious formulas and rituals (cf. Mk. 7: 6-8). Essential to the nature of authentic Christian existence, as Metz says, is the following of Jesus as the “criterion” of our true “identity” and purpose. It is in this giving over of ourselves, in the relinquishment of our autonomy to the purposes of God in Christ that we find the meaning of life. However, this discovery comes at a cost, it involves submitting to the death of self and the putting on of Christ (cf. Rm. 13: 14; Gal 3: 27). Of this status and orientation Kierkegaard writes:

Just as the expression he uses of his teaching, that it is food, is the strongest expression for appropriation, so the expression of putting on Christ is the strongest expression that the resembling must be according to the highest possible criterion .... You are to put on Christ ... put him on, as when someone who looks strikingly like another not only tries to resemble him but re-presents him. Christ gives you his clothing ... and asks you to re-present him.

a) The Cross is laid on Every Disciple

The Christian situation is described well by Brueggemann when he says: “We who hold to biblical faith are heirs to an alternative tradition that operates as a minority opinion in our culture.” We know that Christian faith is not served well by attempts to bypass its new and different meaning in life. Discipleship, as with our alternative story comes to us as gracious gifts - for so they are. The substance of this different life that Christians have been given “in Christ” involves the believer in acts of obedience that reflect critically on the system and “destabilise” the normativity of the status quo. Questing in this area

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brings us very close to a primary crisis confronting both the church and individual Christian witness. This is because it leads to an examination of a core issue concerning the quest for true discipleship. In his central section on discipleship (cf. Mk. 8: 22-10: 52), the writer of the church’s first Gospel brings the first followers of Jesus to the moment of confessional crisis: on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mk. 8: 27). The evangelist, with this question has Jesus interrogate the disciples as to their understanding of his nature and purpose. The point of Mark’s narrative structure is to campaign “against balcony-type Christians who are too high for the mission of discipleship that ... necessarily involves cross bearing and self-sacrifice.” Mark cautions these elevated ones that the authentic way of Jesus is the way of the suffering - all other views can only be of the diluted or ethereal kind. By way of remonstrating with the exponents of a "theology of glory" Mark makes plain to his readers how genuine Christian faith must express itself. He shows that whereas in Jesus' previous conflicts with the representatives of established religion and power who had conspired together as to "how to destroy him" (Mk. 3: 6), the shadow of the cross lay upon Jesus’ pathway. But now throughout this centre section he graphically freights the dreadful truth that what was once a mere shadow has become an inescapable reality (cf. Mk. 8: 31f.; 9: 31f.; 10: 33f).

From within the narrative site of being “on the way” εν τῷ δρόμῳ (cf. Mk. 8: 27; 9: 33; 10: 32), that leads to the inevitable conflict with those who claimed dominion over the earth, Mark, in this sharing of Jesus’ way would have us (as with his community), three times be plunged into a massive concentration of the inescapable passion of Jesus in his confrontation with the powers. Thus portrayed, Jesus, is in the company of his band of disciples amid heart

65 Discipleship is very much about being “on the road” (cf. Mk. 1: 16; 1: 19; 2: 14), with Jesus and being aware that his kingdom purposes are both the beginning and the end, and that his presence is the sustaining power.
breaking misunderstandings as to his purpose. Nevertheless he leads them on "in face of their persistent protestations, to recognition of the truth that the cross willed for the Master and which he alone in the first place knew how to endure, presents an inescapable call to his followers to travel the 'via crucis' also." 66

How do the disciples respond to this full disclosure? What is their reaction to the invitation to learn what faith in Jesus looks like when it is fleshed out in the shape of a cross? To this open declaration, the disciples react as any normal person would inevitably react - they suffer a failure of nerve in face of accepting so costly a discipleship. Their blatant refusal to accommodate this kind of following into the realm of their obedience and destinies is embodied in the reaction of Peter who is not able to accept such a despicable fulfilment of his religious hopes and ambitions. It was not that Peter misunderstood Jesus either. He understood only too well. Knowing this One now with greater clarity that he had ever known him before, the disciples as well as Peter, do not now want to know this sort of Messiah. Thus Peter rejects the way of Jesus and in so doing takes the unparalleled step of rebuking him. By way of commentary on Peter's action, Schweizer assures us that, "nobody can understand Jesus in a non-demonic way until they have learned that Jesus' divine sonship reveals itself primarily in his rejection, his suffering, and his dying. Looking at his signs or even at his glory as revealed in his transfiguration leads, by necessity, to a mere misunderstanding as long as it is not a glory which follows the shameful death of Jesus on his cross (Mk. 9: 9, 12)." 67

From within the heart of the apostolic contention, and inevitably the core issue of our faith facing us today is: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mk. 8: 34). Perhaps

66 Anderson, ibid., p. 205.
there is not a more sure word to be heard in the modern church than the summons to this elemental obedience. This taking up of the strange reality of what the cross means in our inner-most selves and in the historical process of justice. This call is not about staying in control of our present or our futures, it is as Brueggemann says, "about vulnerability, not about self-sufficiency but about the risky reception of life as a gift." It is about becoming open to Jesus’ salvation as opposed to the pathology of the system. It is about losing one’s life and autonomy, losing claim to independence and taking up the alternative path of submission and giving obedience to another; to one more noble and truer to God’s will. If we want to understand the churches present condition, our own existence, and the way towards a more truthful future, we cannot avoid Jesus’ summons to take up the cross and “follow” (ἀκολουθεῖσθαι) him (cf. Mk. 8: 34; 10: 21; Mt. 10: 38; 16: 24; Lk. 9: 23).

As the gospel writers indicate, Jesus' discernment was that his followers live not only by his indicatives, but also by his moral imperatives. The radical re-orientation of the life called forth by the demand of the reign of God, is driven by the apostolic contention right to the heart of the disciple's existence, and is stated most fully when Jesus says that those who follow him must “repent and believe” (cf. Mk. 1: 15). In Jesus’ estimation of discipleship as the cost and meaning of life, he addressed himself to the motives and hearts of his would-be followers. For him allegiance to his campaign struck across all boundaries. Being in his company as a messenger of the kingdom involved the totality of a person’s existence and what that meant in an oppressive society. To turn away from alien allegiances and believe in the counter cultural values of the kingdom meant refusing to live according to any other definition of reality except that of the kingdom. What Jesus called for was beyond propositional affirmation, it required more than some verbal assent to a creedal formula, it demanded ultimate trust in God’s just future being present with his cause. In

the call to follow him, Jesus required his disciples to form an entirely new attitude to life and death; to be overtaken with an irreversible decision. Not some acquiescence that could be cherished privately without making any discernible difference to the private and public totality of their lives.

The gospel writer’s usage of the phrase to “take up the cross” leaves no room for hedging around the political overtones of this invitation, as Ched Myers has shown. Despite the numerous exegetical efforts of “spiritualising” this saying by bourgeois reductionism: a method well employed and responsible for conditioning many responses to the commands of Jesus, this language in the ears of his audience would leave no uncertainty as to the repercussions of following him in a world where Jewish nationalists were regularly crucified for their insurgency. The sociopolitical context of first-century Judaism, ruled over as it was by raw military power meant that the cross was a symbol of those defeated and crushed by Rome. Of its meaning, Griffiths notes:

‘Taking up the cross’ was a specific, though not invariable, part of the Roman custom. The person condemned to crucifixion was ordered to carry his own cross to the place of death.

There can be no neutralising therefore of the political thrust of Jesus’ turn of phrase, and the shock of its life-effects as it fell on the ears of his would-be disciples. Similar psychic dislocations must have been felt as he spoke of “denying oneself,” for it too carried political as well as social meaning. To follow Jesus and pursue his kingdom practice was to be about the restructuring of reality. So much so that his disciples must be centred on and possessed by an attitude which informed and infused everything else. Which meant that in the process of the kingdom, his followers were from their commitment to him engaged in the deconstruction of all other meaning-schemes. In Horsley’s

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68 Brueggemann, in op. cit., p. 175.
consideration of the call to "take up the cross," he too refuses to ignore the political practice of the kingdom, in that "the opposition of Jesus and his followers to the system was sufficiently serious that they were likely to be executed as rebels." 72

Conversion to the practice of Jesus necessitated a conviction that motivated and gave character to every other attitude and action. For Jesus' companions this meant embracing the cross as the vehicle of self execution, that they might actualise a new self, one that was totally aligned with God's purposes. Speaking about the crisis that the cross brings, Brueggemann writes: "The cross is not a magic sign but is the modelling of an alternative mode of living. It is our normative claim about God, about us, about our life with God, and about our life with each other." 73 It represents the abandonment of a false criterion of life, and by its acceptance a new paradigm is created. Jesus speaks of this new attitude to life from the logic of the kingdom:

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? (Mk. 8: 35-37).

Concerning this kingdom paradox, Brueggemann conclusively remarks: "This is the gospel at its most terse and dangerous. ..... This evangelical tradition claims that the embrace of pathos and the practice of community pain is the locus from which God's new life is given." 74 In his unique style, Daniel Berrigan by way of preparing a group of us for the required life adjustment needed to follow Jesus, told us plainly: "That we'd better look good in wood!" 75 This form of mentoring has saved many from superficial

71 Ched Myers, in op. cit., p. 246.
73 Brueggemann, in op. cit., p. 176.
74 Brueggemann, in ibid., p. 176.
commitment and played an undeniable part in keeping alive a proper awareness of discipleship's implications in the continuance of kingdom actions against empire today.

Consistent with Jesus' ongoing determination to do the will of God and his charge to "take up the cross" is the present tense command - "follow me" (ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι) - indicating a staying attitude, an ongoing life-praxis. In Mark's construct, there are three initial actions succeeded by a summons to "keep on following" Jesus: and in this obedience to find him in the practice of the kingdom. This command to "come after me" is an inclusive statement which unmistakably binds discipleship to Jesus. For Mark, discipleship is not just the readiness to take up a cross and suffer, it is a call to fall in behind Jesus and be "on the road" with him and go where he goes (cf. Mk. 1: 16, 19; 2: 14 to 10: 32, 52: 16: 7), which is a theme intrinsic to the sociopolitical implications of his kingdom practice. Kavanaugh's words are salutatory here:

Thus, it is not some pacifying homeostasis or legitimation of the given order which his followers will bring to the world, but an option which strikes so deeply at the heart of men and women that they will have to choose between ultimates, they will have to be 'either/or,' and they will find themselves confronting each other in this fundamental choice. Christ's call is to an ultimacy in belief, to a wholeheartedness without qualification or conditions. It is as simple as clinging to one's small life and losing it in the suffocating isolation of idolatry, or losing life, giving it away, and seeing it expand and bring forth new life (Mt. 10: 39).76

"Come after me" is a general command which specifically links discipleship to Jesus; it is an elusive call to fall in behind Jesus, into the practice of his mission. Thus the disciples are sent out and authorised to preach the rule of

76 John Francis Kavanaugh, Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), p. 75. I would be remiss if I did not mention in this section the valuable contribution of Joachim Gnilka concerning Jesus and the lifestyle of discipleship. Although somewhat reserved in his sociopolitical understanding of Jesus' person and the implications of discipleship, Gnilka's work is valuable and full of
God, to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out the demons (cf. Lk. 9: 2; Mt. 10: 7). In the calling forth of a new people of God, “the disciples are given the same tasks which Jesus himself exercises as authorised by God. The disciple is equal to the master to such an extent that in principle the commission does not exclude them from doing what the master himself does.”77 They, in fact, are to share fully in the concerns and consequences of Jesus’ calling. Entirely devoted, soul and body to the divine, the Hebrew prophets were commissioned directly by God. Hahn, notes that this pattern of direct commissioning and responsibility is also true of Jesus’ person, repeatedly attested to in the New Testament (cf. Mk. 9: 37, par. Lk. 9: 48; 10: 16, par. Mt. 10: 40, and Jn. 13: 20).78 What is of special interest “is the fact that Jesus hands on the commission which had been given to him to his disciples.” And he explains that this gives clarifying meaning to the saying: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Lk. 10: 16). All of which marks a disciple as being uniquely dependant on Jesus, and having a singular relationship and accountability to him, as Hahn emphasises:

The sending out of the disciples rests upon, the sovereign authority of Jesus, an authority which has been bestowed upon him and which he in turn confers and hands on .... Discipleship is thus characterised by this peculiar subordination of the disciple to the master and yet at the same time by being his equal in the service to which he is called.79

b) No two forms of Discipleship: All Called

We can take a further step toward a more adequate understanding of Jesus’ intention concerning the cost of discipleship, the meaning of being a witness,
when we note the force of the self-denying obedience that he demanded by the use of the three commands, "deny, take, follow" (ἀπαρνησάσθω, ἀράτω, ἀκολουθεῖτω) in Mark. 8: 34 (cf. Jn. 12: 25). These three commands are all in the aorist tense indicating that which is done once and for all, and are addressed by Jesus not just to the immediate circle of disciples but to the crowd. Here the cost of discipleship is clearly not differentiated, not set apart for a select few. Ernest Best notes that "the same appeal is made to each, whereas elsewhere [Jesus] regularly distinguishes between these two groups." And Athol Gill remarks: "The Gospel of Mark specifically says that Jesus summoned 'the crowd' with his disciples before giving his teaching about taking up the cross and following him (Mk. 8: 34). In other words, this saying has for Mark, a universal application which was not to be restricted to the original followers of Jesus."

Mark's redactional interest here concerning the inclusion of the multitude is unmistakable. It takes place in order to make the point that the obligation to undergo the denial of self and cross-bearing is the lot of everyone who would follow Jesus, and not that of the twelve disciples alone. This is because within the call of Jesus there are not two forms of discipleship. It cannot be denied that the sayings which follow are statements which apply to everybody - not a select group - regarding the conditions for going the way of Jesus. Eduard Schweizer, comments: "Discipleship is therefore not merely something for

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specially chosen people. Everyone is called, so that as disciples they may understand the meaning of God’s revelation.”

Speaking of Luther’s commitment, Bonhoeffer says: "God showed him through the Scriptures that the following of Christ is not the achievement or merit of a select few, but the divine command to all Christians without distinction." To allow Christians to go on believing that discipleship in its entirety is not binding on the whole people of God is not true to Jesus’ call and claim. Hahn warns that “we should not make the mistake of classifying those to whom Jesus’ call goes out as exceptional cases,” and further to this he suggests that such a decision would throw us into the dilemma of having to ask "who was a disciple of Jesus in the true sense and who was not," or to enquire as to "why Jesus chose some to be disciples and not others." Thus leaving those not chosen as being in the position of moral nondescripts.

We may say with conviction that the implications of radical discipleship are binding upon us all. This is because "the circle of disciples was basically open and by no means exclusive. When we take this into account then we see that discipleship is not to be understood as confined to exceptional cases. The early church quite deliberately handed down the stories about discipleship as so-called paradigms, and with the intention that they should serve as example for every Christian." This is what Nachfolge means, and as Kierkegaard rightly understood nothing less will suffice - immediately, irrevocably, wholesale following is what is demanded of every Christian.

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86 Hahn, ibid., p. 25.
Concerning Jesus’ call and purpose as he charted the way for a new humanity, there will be little disagreement that genuine discipleship cannot happen apart from divine grace. In theological circles, such a view will be saluted. But when one grasps the nettle and suggests that what exists, both rampant and unchecked within our churches is a gross distortion of biblical discipleship. A discipleship of the “double standard,” indeed two forms of discipleship, eyebrows twitch and nerves show. Plainly, the church will only be able to engage the proper work of the gospel in the world as we enjoin the reappropriation of the apostolic basis of conformity to the call of Jesus. Bearing this in mind, it is of paramount importance in face of today’s “easy believism,” and the ever present propensity for there to be what Kierkegaard called, “admirers” rather than “followers” of Christ, that the call to wholesale commitment to “Lordship” be stated loud and clear. Else we may see the day when good and earnest people in their attempts to live the life of faith are led astray by exegetical hucksters; believing (for want of another option), that it was the Gospel writers who created the fatal conception of a maximum and a minimum of Christian obedience.

c) Living in Conformity to the Truth

The life of discipleship is a passage of grace, an action of God by which we shall be made new and already are. But here we need to remind ourselves that there is no authentic following of Jesus Christ without relentless struggle and interior strife. If we seek conformity to Christ, then we must learn to live by

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58 For Kierkegaard’s distinction between “admirers and followers” of Christ, see ibid., p. 234 ff.
59 See Charles Swindoll, Growing Deep in the Christian Life (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986) p. 415. Here Swindoll shows his hand concerning (as eventually do so many other preachers of his ilk) his duplex via understanding of following Jesus. He distinguishes between "followers and believers"; as he puts it, "Disciple" refers to a "pupil, learner, or a follower....(but not necessarily believers)". Question: are we to infer that the New Testament teaches "two forms" of discipleship - some are more called than others?
the principle: "holiness before peace." Such earnestness in the spiritual life defies all deviations right or left, all half-hearted attempts at following Jesus on the road. Our struggle to "apprehend that which has apprehended us," is the harder because our service in joy and struggle will not be over until "we know as we are known." Most serious Christians in their attempts of conformity to Jesus' way are willing to initially undergo inauguratory hardship and sacrifices. This is common and does not require overmuch commitment. But sadly, few continue, only a handful are willing given the climate of our First World proclivities, to persevere throughout the years of their lives in the costly following of Jesus. Very often the reason as to why so many committed followers "burn out," is not because they are running too fast, on the contrary, it is because the rest of us are running too slow, or not at all. To "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12: 1) is beyond the preference of too many.

Of our spiritual efforts, Merton says that most of us believe that too much is required, "the tax on our weak love is too enormous: or at least we fear that it will become so." Having been fed contentless discipleship for so long we consequently "do not understand the meaning of the cross and the seriousness of our vocation to die with Christ in order to rise with him to a new life." Little wonder that we fail to engage the truth of the Spirit's dealings with us, consequently we must acknowledge that, "are not 'converted' only once in our life but many times," in a steady "series of large and small 'conversions'" and inner revolutions. Merton notes further, that whilst "we may have the generosity to undergo one or two such upheavals, we cannot face the necessity of further and greater rendings of our inner self, without which we can not finally become free." Against the fate of the pusillanimous and betraying,

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92 Merton, ibid., p. 117
this is the truth we must embrace if we would learn the full seriousness of the life of discipleship (Mt. 10: 38).

Our conformity to Christ’s way is not to accept a certain system of teaching, live by it, continue dutifully to interpret it and pass it on, which was in essence the call of a rabbi to his disciples. Nor is it a call to accept an intellectual position which will express itself in abstracted behaviour. Far more than this it is about getting in step, hewing a line, and against the system’s torment, glare and shadow ... indeed coming to “life” as God intended (cf. Jn. 10: 10).

According to Jesus, this way of life is the only way; for if anyone attempts to “save their life” by deny him and his kingdom campaign, by being “ashamed of me and of my words” (cf. Mk. 8: 38; Lk. 12: 8, 9; Mt. 10: 32, 33), they will lose true life (cf. Mk. 8: 35); because for Jesus nothing of equal importance could be imagined. For him - who would form all others to his kingdom purpose - the project of the kingdom was not some dispensable indulgence, some add-on to life, it was life. From within the primitive Christian preaching, “real-life”-then, is defined and found by falling in behind Jesus and going with him. To join oneself to Jesus, was to love him, fear him, to know him as a confessor, prod, spur, consoler, hellraiser, discerner of spirits, firebrand, wrecker and inventor of lives, because always within his soul burned the humanising insatiable purpose of God’s willing “on earth as in heaven” (cf. Mt. 6: 10).

To join his quest demanded everything from those who would follow; any indifference to this new “order” aroused his cutting displeasure since he saw such an attitude as is a denial of God’s just purposes. Since Jesus-ranked discipleship above all other loyalties, be they ties of kinship, or the dearest of all relationships, nothing must be allowed to intrude upon or counteract with absolute commitment to the reign of God (cf. Mt. 10: 34-37). Thus Luke’s strong warnings concerning the conditions of discipleship which are unequivocally addressed to the crowds. These sayings are held together by the
refrain “whoever does not ... cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14: 26, 27, 33; cf. Mt. 10: 37-38), so that with clear-eyed understanding those wishing to follow Jesus might truthfully understand the cost involved. The division and crisis that Jesus brings “produce offence and alienation.” And Jesus, as Waetjen notes, “takes responsibility for them.” Thus the frightenly honest words:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household (Mt. 10:34-36).

About this declaration Waetjen remarks: “The sword that Jesus wields severs the bonds of enslavement and oppression. For one it means freedom, for the other the loss of power and profit. It begins with the many forms of bondage which exist within a family and ultimately extends to all relationships in society.” This is why for Jesus, anything that fails to give his kingdom project primary loyalty, or any discernment that undergirds self-preservation amounts to apostasy. Peter, who in the gospel discourse seeks to “save himself” becomes a cipher for those who opt for the safe choice. According to primitive Christian preaching, any who follow this path, do not “profit” but only lose and “forfeit” life (cf. Mk. 8: 36f.). This forsaking of oneself to which disciples are called, is a conclusive act without which true following is impossible. At the outset, at the beginning stage, once and for all, the disciple of Jesus says “Yes” to Jesus, and “No” to all other claims. And within the gospels these affirmations are to be made unreservedly.

So today we should be clear that to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus must not be weakened to mean the acceptance of disappointments. As if misfortune or financial setbacks as indicated by conservative charismatic leaders like Pat Robertson are signs that the “kingdom truths” are not present in the life of a

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believer. Taking up the cross, was not some metaphor for personal anguish or private asceticism; and we may emphatically say today that it has nothing to do with interpretations of accepting a bourgeois inconvenience. It means as I have already registered, capital punishment, it means death to self’s right over one’s life.

Although this statement did not imply the literal carrying of crosses by all the members of the primitive Christian communities, it was an ever present possibility because this religio-political consequence confronted every follower of Jesus. Therefore within the early church’s teaching this consequence was meant to be inherently understood as binding upon ever follower of Jesus. So stipulated, it would not be something into which the disciple will later stumble as by mistake, but a possibility which they deliberately shouldered and carried from the beginning of their conversion to Christian obedience. Apostolic theology therefore, made it abundantly clear that "following Jesus" in the way of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is not a self-indulgent passive exercise. On the contrary, it means precisely the opposite: to be yoked to the kingdom is to be fully active - living out of the moral demands of God’s reign.

Those of us who come to the task of theology from middle-class backgrounds are probably going to have to be pried loose from such backgrounds and our dependencies upon them if we are to be free enough to hear the Word of God. Precisely because being bonded to Jesus’ life-praxis of the kingdom is a non-negotiable norm, the yearning to submit to another way of life, a different enchantment, like those offered today by the “positive thinking” of a "Schuller" or the “reward Christianity” of a “Swindoll” is problematic to true discipleship. To indicate the acuteness of this present nemesis, I raise a question or two: “What sort of message is being freighted when mainline

Christian catalogues are blanketed with titles such as, ‘Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul,’ or ‘Gods Vitamin C for the Spirit’?\(^5\) From these titles to what are we connected, what kind of discipleship formation are we proclaiming? What accommodations, what “routinisation of charisma” is at work here?\(^6\) For all the good intentions of the authors: what incongruity is here, what nonsense!? And within these anodyne prescriptions, what masking of the disquieting association with the subversive Jesus is at work here? It is if we have succumbed to the cheap provocations of Buechner’s “Rev. Leo Bebb” - the quintessential religious “con man” and Evangelist extraordinaire. Word has it that in many places we have... We want... more of what this Scripture twister, this dangler of souls, this promiser of prosperity on earth with afterlife paradise to come, whose jumbled preaching about Jesus and sex and death breeds in the end not only fear but cajoled Christianity.\(^7\)

We are drawn to these peddlers of surfeit, these “pop theologies” because what they offer “fits better” and “works” well within the system - and this is precisely why they are grievous. The way of stage-set cathedrals and “power Christianity” with their propaganda theologies are dangerous because they are fragmentary, diverse, and vacillating about the intensity of Jesus’ historical preoccupation for the “nonpersons” of history.\(^8\) From their partiality with self-preservation, their pop gospel chic leads us away from real discipleship as the cost and meaning of our lives. Other religious techniques similar to these take us into a religiosity that undergirds the system: together what they offer risks the surrender of the authentic meaning of what discipleship means, and is

\(^6\) For this important Weberian concept, see H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 262ff.
\(^7\) See Frederick Buechner’s three novels, “Lion Country,” “Open Heart” and “Love Feast.” In the last of these three novels Buechner’s genius shows through in that Rev. Bebb ironically and finally shows a capacity for the truth of Jesus Christ. See Frederick Buechner, Love Feast (New York: Atheneum, 1974).
\(^8\) For the gospel power of this expression see, Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology Of Liberation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973).
therefore the basis of a betrayal of what Jesus and the disciples lived and died for.

We may need sterner exterior events impacting our churches to help us put directions together that comply with the kingdom - as experienced by many of our Third World sisters and brothers. Their lack of material things, their solidarity with the poor, indeed their experience of witness may be a prefiguring of how we must follow Jesus. Together with their activist First World counterparts, their ongoing struggle to relate life to faith’s meaning continues to teach us how to do theology. As Eduard Schweizer, who in his own life takes the commands of Jesus seriously, and is insistent of the lordship elements within the call of discipleship states:

He is the Son of Man whose call involves a life which is poorer and lowlier than that of the foxes and birds, yet who nevertheless calls his disciples with authority to exactly this kind of life which he himself lives. 99

Nowhere in the New Testament are the people of God excused from this calling of solidarity with Jesus’ life-praxis, involving as it must the discipleship path of self-giving and suffering (cf. Mk. 8: 32; 9: 31; 10: 32-33; II Cor. 4: 10; Rm. 8: 17; Phil. 3: 10, II Tim. 2: 11f.). 100 Real discipleship provides us not with a choice, but with ultimate claim; to live out our lives for the kingdom with grace; to expose ourselves to the nonpersons, to lay bare our lives to a greater depth than we of ourselves can endure. The obedience demanded by the enabling grace of God in Jesus Christ, Barth argues will

99 Eduard Schweizer, “Discipleship and Church” in Ferdinand Hahn, August Strobel, Eduard Schweizer, The Beginnings of The Church in the New Testament (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1970), pp. 85-86. I clearly remember one remarkable night when in the company of Thorwald Lorenzen and Athol Gill in the modest home of Eduard Schweizer, as very much the student I asked Professor Schweizer about the poverty of Jesus and his demanding call. Schweizer, being the convinced disciple that he is became very frank - to the point of embarrassment. Candidly he explained how in life he too has struggled to keep himself true to the claim of Jesus over all of his possessions and vocation.

100 For this cf., Schweizer’s treatment of “discipleship claims” beyond the Synoptics in John and Paul’s theology, in ibid., pp. 89-104.
always entail the exercise of "self-denial." As he says: "If we are not ready to deny ourselves, of what use can we be as witnesses of the great assault which is directed against the world (for the sake of its reconciliation with God) in and with the coming of the kingdom?" Consequently the followers of Jesus are always "summoned to witness to the kingdom in unambiguous deeds by their own acts and attitudes .... to be offensive, or at least suspicious, or at least conspicuous to those who worship their gods." 101 About these commitments the disciple of Jesus has no choice, for as Barth states, "the break made by God in Jesus must become history." 102 And since our acts of self-denial in the service of the reign of God "stand in the service of this great onslaught" faithful witness to the revolution of God must create that which it presumes. 103

As those called to be witnesses of the kingdom to "seek it first before everything else" (cf. Mt. 6: 33), preeminently we need to be engaged in a fresh hearing. We must choose between the way of traditional security, power and glory as suggested in the gospel encounter between Jesus and Peter (cf. Mk. 8: 31-34), and the way of humiliation and sacrifice. In Waetjen's language the crisis of following means that:

The way into the reality of God's rule begins with death, as it did for Jesus himself. And it is as complete a death experience as his was, inclusive of the social, economic, political, cultural, and religious realities of human existence in society. It is a death experience that terminates all participation in the activities, moral rules and assumptions about power which belong to the redemptive process of society. Like crucifixion, therefore, it is a death experience that is slow, painful, and ostensibly full of shame, for it involves the negation of values that are propagandised by the upper class. 104

102 Karl Barth, ibid., p. 544.
103 Karl Barth, ibid., pp. 543-545.
d) The Ongoing Witness of the Anabaptists

In the history of the church, those referred to as the “Left-Wing” of the Reformation - the “Anabaptists” - put themselves out of favour with the magisterial reformers by their insistence that biblically there could never be any biblical severance between justification and sanctification.\(^\text{105}\) Being in Christ, meant for them they were from the beginning bound to his Lordship. Jacob Kautz confronted the magisterial reformers by maintaining that:

Jesus Christ of Nazareth did not suffer for us and has not satisfied [for our sins] in any other way but this: that we have to stand in his footsteps and have to walk the way which he has blazed for us first, and that we obey the commandments of God, and the Son, everyone according to their measure. Whoever speaks differently of Christ makes an idol of Christ.\(^\text{106}\)

For too long the biblical radicalism of the Anabaptist’s has been ignored. We need again to be struck with the force of their commitment and revelatory understanding. Too often their observations concerning the radical nature of discipleship have been abandoned for a reduction of gospel proclamation to that which they referred to as the following of “a sinful sweet Christ.”\(^\text{107}\) At the heart of the Anabaptist vision was obedience to Christ’s reign. Regrettably the church’s existence in the world has not taken the shape of kingdom obedience; it has chosen the path of the “sweet Christ.” Ignoring the apostolic injunction to the contrary (cf. Rm. 12: 2), we have become “conformed” to the image of this world system, and eschewing the moral demands of the sovereignty of God we have succumbed time and again to the desire for

\(^{105}\) Concerning the Anabaptists and their view of discipleship, see Lorenzen’s valuable insights in, Thorwald Lorenzen, Resurrection and Discipleship (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), pp. 233-234. Many of my observations here are indebted to his work.


\(^{107}\) Robert Friedmann, in ibid., p 85 (italics mine).
approval and glory; to the sovereignty of capital and power. This leaves us focused in the wrong direction, acting like worldlings, power-seeking, looking to be part of the domination system where our domineering self becomes increasingly turned inwards into an egotheistic and secluding captivity. In McAfee Brown’s words, “A complacent Christian is as much a contradiction in terms as a solitary Christian.”

We cannot dissolve the reality and spirituality of discipleship into discrete units of “justification” (Jesus as Saviour), and then sometime later “sanctification” (Jesus is Lord). We are “in Christ” wholly, and joined to one another. Bonhoeffer (who was influenced by the Anabaptist stream), was right when he told us that it is only as we join with our sisters and brothers in the community of Christ’s lordship that we can be freed from our “autonomous, isolated, knowing ‘I’ which violates reality by understanding everything from itself.” To create a new humanising future is to focus on the possibilities of non-individualistic salvation. This New Testament view was tenaciously held to by the Anabaptists. Friedmann says of them, their affirmation was that: "Only in the Gemeinde [Community] can the believer apply Christian love in action. Only here can believers realise their

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108 Concerning the church’s calling to active and authentic obedience, it is worth observing that in an early section of his writing Tillich characterised the proper stance of the church in this way: “The ‘church’ in the essential meaning of the word ... [is] a community which is determined explicitly and representatively by those transcendental norms, in which the renunciation of power is expressed. A church which really was what it essentially should be, would be the institution in which the structure of power in society and being would be transcended. It would be the visible conquest of the ontology of power ... A people can become the ‘church’ only if in an unexpected historical moment it is seized as a whole by the transcendental idea and for its sake renounces power. Such an event would be one of the great turning points of human history; it would perhaps create ‘humankind’.” See, Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History (New York: Scribners, 1936), pp. 199-200).


convictions that they cannot come to God in good conscience except with their brothers and sisters.  

Tempered by the realities of confrontation, the Anabaptists were placed in serious jeopardy by both Protestants as well as Catholics for challenging their vested worldly interests. The price of their loyalty to Jesus’ kingdom above all other dominions meant that some were burned at the stake; some were drowned; some were beheaded and many others lived out their lives in squalid prisons. Yet their kingdom commitments to radical discipleship for every believer, the church as Gemeinde and their exemplary witness to non-violence was not put down. Remembering these realities together with the fact that from this stream of theology we owe much of what we understand of religious liberty today: it is then that we can begin to understand why their enduring witness can be an important corrective within the contemporary church.  

Given as they were to the pre-eminent conviction that the Christian life had to be lived in accordance to Jesus’ commands of peace and justice, and not to those of the world or its magistrates, in our age of violence and complacent Christianity their witness is significant. As Littell has observed:

In contrast to many groups in history and in contemporary Christianity the Anabaptists actually meant what they said. The separation between verbalisation and action which has been so marked in contemporary church groups can mislead us in our approach to the Anabaptist movement: the Anabaptists meant just what they said, and their teaching is unimportant apart from the direct attempt to give it embodiment in actual groups living in history.

Whereas being bound to Christ's rule was viewed as speculative or only for those especially set apart to religious orders, the Anabaptists believed grace and salvation's meaning to be a gift enjoyed by all believers. Thus as Marpeck stated: "We recognise as true Christian faith only such a faith through which the Holy Spirit and the love of God came into the heart, and which is active, powerful, and operative in all outward obedience and commanded works." Of primary importance for them therefore was not "faith" as it was for Luther's theology, but "discipleship" (Nachfolge Christi) as the true sign of believing obedience and a believer's church.

When taken seriously these formulations emphasise obedience to God's reign in a very specific way: they require that we place ourselves under the gracious command to be "discipled" to the lordship of Jesus and his community. This involves the awareness that the follower of Christ must be willing to surrender self's right in all their concerns, in all their desires for the sake of Jesus and his dominant inspiration. Nothing is too precious to surrender for the sake of the Ultimate - God's salvation, present in Christ for the sake of the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has significant insights to offer us here. He says:

The call of Jesus teaches us that our relation to the world has been built on an illusion. All the time we thought we had enjoyed a direct relation with people and things. Now we learn that in the most intimate relationships of life, in our kinship with father and mother, brothers and sisters, in married love, and in our duty to the community direct relationships are impossible. Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in their family relationships nor in the relationships formed in the process of living. Between father and son, husband and wife, the individual and the nation, stands Christ the mediator. We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him, through his word, and through our following of him. To think otherwise is to deceive ourselves.

e) The Church as a “Discipled” Community of the Kingdom

In the Christian life, the identity of the disciple does not come from human aspiration nor yet from religious construction. Discipleship is a grace event; it is a “given” life. So too, the church is “graced” - and given its life. The church constituted by the trinitarian mission of God has salvific creation and purpose in the unique event of Jesus Christ. Actualized by God, it was Jesus Christ that created the church. As Lorenzen has stated:

It was not the church that created Jesus, but it was Christ who created the church. This means that the church has its identity in him. It is his church: the church is on his mission. The crucified and risen Christ must be the criterion for everything the church tries to be and do. Theologically speaking: ecclesiology must be an aspect of christology; christology must not be dissolved into ecclesiology.117

The church, as a discipleship community of faith, of love, hope and transformative life properly exists at the intersection point where the struggle for justice greets the arrival of the reign of God. The church is always only an anticipation of the kingdom. It is not the kingdom, but is an eschatological entity, and in this sense is an anticipation of humanity redeemed and liberated by God. By its inspired existence and passage it discloses and declares that God is in its midst and present in the crucialities of human history. As such, the church exists not for its own sake: it exists for the missio Dei. It is this mission which is present to save the church from being a strictly human, self-ingratiating mundane organization.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the church participates in the renewing of God’s creation. By the power of the Holy Spirit the church witnesses to God’s liberative love through its praxis of solidarity with the marginalised and suffering. Thus founded in God’s mission of transformative action in history, the church primarily
testifies neither to its own life nor that of the surrounding culture. It attests to God’s present and coming rule and reign. A radical discipleship ecclesiology thus understands that the substance and life of the church is Jesus Christ. It is born of his life, death and resurrection, and is a believing witnessing community that is in an essential relationship to the inbreaking rule of God.

Mindful of its constant imperfections, the church looks with eschatological orientation to the future of God’s purposes already present in the world. It is because of its openness to God and the kingdom’s humanizing future, that the church is constantly engaged in the following of Christ in historical circumstance. As the purpose and promises of God are decisively revealed in Jesus Christ, so the life and mission of the church is decisively formed in the service of Christ - in the life and work of discipleship. As it thus bears testimony and witness to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ - both to itself and to the world - the church is saved from dislocating itself from its living Lord and his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the dangerous liberating One who is the life-force that circulates within the believing community both sustaining its life and energizing its mission. The sending of the church into the world is a continuation of the Triune God’s sending of the truly human One by the empowerment of the Spirit.

This messianic mission of the church mandates the church’s existence. As the company of Christ’s people, as “Pilgrims of the Impossible,” the church is found wherever Christ is present as the liberative narrative of God. As a people chosen for freedom and fulfilment, the church is wherever the following of Jesus is present and wherever the actualization of his liberation project is grasped by the Lord’s followers. Therefore the church after the model of Jesus, must constantly live by God’s willing and engage in a critical partisanship on the side of those who are most vulnerable in the world - the dehumanized and humiliated. As an anticipation of a new humanity, a

humanity under the rule of God and passaged by God’s Spirit, the church embodies God’s drive to deliver all those subject to and in bondage to the powers. The church by its efficacious acts of love in history, by its life and preaching (cf. Rm. 10: 14-15) witnesses to and points to humanity’s fulfilment in joy and freedom.

In essence, the church’s life in its congregations and structures will only ever genuinely be known as it accepts the dynamic truth that it finds its authentic life by surrendering it; surrendering its life to the passion, the purpose and the joy of knowing God in the following of Jesus Christ. In this way, true to its call, the church is able to “act in consistency with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2: 14), partaking with provocative consequences in the missional task of heralding Christ’s liberative way in the world.

f) The Danger and Opportunity of the Kingdom

Obedience to Christ’s kingdom in whatever age presents the church as the believing community with an opportunity that reveals participation in a reality that denounces oppression in the persistence of freedom. This means that the biased politics of Jesus’ βασιλεία when practised as the seat of discipleship’s deepest loyalty, one way or another always takes the shape of the cross in world history. In following Jesus in the First World today we see no bodies racked up-on crosses. But this is not the situation of the church in Africa, Asia and Latin America where crucifixion for the truth of the kingdom is a likely occurrence. ¹¹⁸ Within the First World though, many who practice faithfulness suffer aggressive ill-will, malicious slander, defamation and finally prison for righteousness sake. ¹¹⁹ Consistently, the church of the First World must be

¹¹⁹ Among the many who could be mentioned here, is Padre Phillip Berrigan (now 74 years of age), serving time in a federal penitentiary in Virginia (again), and forbidden the loss of
watchful lest the desire to savour the Gospel of God’s forgiveness and love are perverted into “religious calculations” to avoid the meaning of the cross and costly grace. Apart from some significant exceptions, and I am not discounting the radical stance of early Christianity, or the Reformation (particularly the “Left-Wing” groups), or the Wesleyan movement in England, or the Social Gospel consequences in the United States, nor the ongoing effects of the Marxist-Christian dialogue, together with other black and feminist liberationist efforts, but we would be fooling ourselves if we were to forget that these are exceptions! Mostly, our First World theology is not known for explicating the gospel in the light of the liberation of the oppressed.

Despite the verbalised concern for dignity and justice, within the constituency of church membership broad commitment and identification with the needs of the weak and helpless is limited. Sadly the church’s politics and language have contributed to oppression, either by defining the theological task independently of, or opposed to, marginalised races, sexually despised people, and exploited classes, rather than realising that what is needed is the church’s discipleship in the radical reinterpretation of human existence. Concerning our insufficient actions against the avoidable sufferings of the masses of the poor, the church does not have to wait for the ultimate day of judgement to come. As the Epistle of James warned the people of God in their day, the Judge is already “standing at the doors” aware of the church’s condition (cf. Jam. 5: 9).

Theologically we may say that judgement in the inchoate sense of consideration or trial by God is not to be escaped by any Christian. As Moffat puts it, “God’s judgement will take strict account of Christian’s behaviour as
well as of their persecutors". On that day when those who name the name of Christ are confronted with the reality and the consequences of the crimes of history committed before their eyes. We respectable people will be faced with the circumstances and outcomes of our analgesic gospel: a gospel that has everything to do with self-satisfaction and little to do with liberation concerns.

Risk-taking, going against the system goes with the territory of being a Christian today just as it did for the first disciples. A false sense of Christ’s peace and blessing in the church must be disturbed as long as the innocent are daily being offended and broken. To a large degree, Merton sees the perplexity of continuing injustice and violence as having to do with our non-participation as “intellectuals”. We too often assume the role of “innocent bystanders” reflected in our being “helpless through our own neglect.” Instead of squarely facing history’s frightening issues:

We are the intellectuals who have taken for granted that we could be ‘bystanders’ and that our quality as detached observers could preserve our innocence and relieve us of responsibility.

Adherence to the historical process of the kingdom means that as contemporary followers of Jesus we must denounce complicity with evil as sin and enslavement. It means that our discipleship participation in the translation of justice does not wait because we have become convinced that “they” are in control. Beyond “easy solutions” our redemptive actions even as they are “innocent” of conclusive political answers become those of sacrificial ministry and resistance. Confronted by the ravages of the high god Capital, our

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121 For sections of my phrasing here I am indebted to Carl Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), pp. 123-126.
123 Here I am following Merton’s line of argument, see ibid., p. 59ff.
situation is addressed with stinging lucidity in Dorothy Day's words: "If they don't have to step over your body when they come for the innocent poor, then cursed be your religion, and cursed be you!"\textsuperscript{124}

\textbf{g) Constituted by God: Acts of Contradiction}

Christians do not have to go far to find profound and provocative motivations for the doing of justice. God has created through Jesus' kingdom project the possibility of humanity's human future, wherein the church must become both vanguard and advocate of righteousness and equity. When the church joins the politics of the silent majority, then we have entered into the discourse of our own self-contradiction, and have become the visible opposition of our true being. "I believe," said McAfee Brown, "there is an eleventh commandment for Christians: Thou shalt not decide that someone else should become a martyr. In the nature of the case there is no checklist of risks that can be duplicated wholesale against which Christians can measure themselves. That being said, Christians must seek to discern the kind of witness that is demanded of them."\textsuperscript{125} And discerning witness today must from the place of reflective Bible study, prayer and concerted action form a messianic community that enlivens our lives both individually and collectively in the midst of human history.

Denominational leaders, teachers and ministers cannot expect members of the church to be moved to work with them by the power of a prophetic word which cannot be regularly heard within their own vocabulary. We can hardly expect to mobilise for sacrificial action in the world if our faith community has not inherited "activist sacrifice" within its internal life and catechism. In

\textsuperscript{124} These words continue to be part of the catechism of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker and I am grateful to Cath Robson, to Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morrison for not letting them be lost to our conscience and placing them within my range and understanding of what discipleship means in our age.

\textsuperscript{125} McAfee Brown, op. cit., p. 119.
our theology, our preaching and in the faith formation of our congregations we need a biblical radicalism that will allow us to see in this generation’s ordeals the opportunities to transform both our churches and society. Where this does not happen, I have come to the uncomfortable conclusion that it becomes entirely possible that in calling ministers to true discipleship, one could be accused of “making up the truth!” After all, the gospel of Christ has transforming power only as it intersects with our own life-stories and the broader story line of the times in which we live. Explicating the gospel and the politics of Jesus, Braaten states:

The fate of genuine love in the polarising situations of worldly politics has been placarded for all eyes to see in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian can hardly demand a kindlier fate than their Master. No one gets crucified unless they have been trapped in a polarising situation. Jesus was unable to keep peace in Israel while bringing in the righteousness of the kingdom. As long as he was silent, there was no trouble. But when he began to state his meaning, the call went out for his arrest. He was grabbed by the police, jeered by the crowd, and brought to trial for the truth that he spoke. Jesus entered into solidarity with the left out and the cast out; for this one-sided action he became marked for suffering. He was murdered by the system of law and order which he seemed to threaten. He was not the pitiful victim of tragic misunderstanding, mistaken identity or a communication gap. A sensitivity marathon would not have changed the outcome. He really was a threat to the system; his truth really did create a polarising situation; his therapy was more than the existing order could accommodate. For Jesus to have ascended into a cloud of sweet talk about love and harmony, stepping aside from the encounter with the officers of the system, would have meant the betrayal of the kingdom he represented. He could not mix the truth of God with the lies of the world. This unrelenting consistency for the kingdom’s sake was spelled out in the world in the shape of a cross.¹²⁶

Polarising and costly, the ongoing impetus of Jesus programme of liberation always interrupts the power arrangements that dehumanise and destroy. With “historicising” arrival and the impacting of its counter claims the βασιλεία of Jesus announces that God’s willing is not locked within past text-events but is

active now in humanity’s present. The purposes of God are not shut off from
the world within closed texts: the Spirit of God addresses us today. As I have
shown, the concept of Jesus as the one to whom we are bound and must follow
points to the awareness that the transformation of our existence from
egocentrism to actual self-less service is rooted in his total self-giving on the
cross. It is repeatedly renewed and consolidated by discipleship’s
reappropriation of that event. We now therefore find ourselves in a drastically
altered situation: Jesus has dared to announce that with him, and those who
dare to act in concert with him, the liberating purposes of the sovereign God
are present.

What is most dangerous to the beneficiaries of the system is the fact that Jesus’

basileia project is not determined by this world order or its functionaries.
Rather it is from above, beyond the abilities of the rulers of this world to
manipulate or dissolve (cf. Jn. 18: 36). In their attempts to stop his contagion
the enemies of Jesus rejected him, delivering him over to the Roman
authorities for torture and execution. They became immersed in the
destruction of Jesus and his campaign. They understood that the kingdom he
was fashioning must inevitably challenge the religio-cultural order that they
attributed to divine origin; a falsifying scribal religion they secured through
Roman domination and violence.

To those broken by the daily realities of oppression, poverty, disease and
estrangement Jesus’ speaks a gospel of changed governance. A governance
which concerns all of life, for all people, particularly the voiceless multitude
of the forgotten. As James Cone put it:

Jesus’ conquest of Satan and the demons also carries out the theme of
the liberation of the poor. ‘If it is by the finger of God that I drive out
the devils, be sure that the Kingdom of God has come among you’
(Luke 11: 20). Jesus’ power to exorcise demons is the sine qua non of
the appearance of the kingdom, because freedom for the oppressed can
come about only by overcoming the forces of evil. Jesus saw this
victory already in hand after his disciples returned from the mission of the Seventy: 'I watched how Satan fell, like lightening, out of the sky' (Luke 10: 18).\textsuperscript{127}

Cone adds that it is through the these exorcisms that "the conditions of servitude" are broken. With the arrival of the kingdom, "God in Jesus has bought liberation to the poor and wretched of the land." And this means "that liberation is none other than the overthrow of everything that is against the fulfilment of their humanity."\textsuperscript{128} Sobrino has an interesting word to add here: "That is why the Gospels place Jesus in the midst of situations embodying divisiveness and oppression, where the good news and salvation can only be understood as being in total discontinuity with them. The freedom that Jesus preaches and effects in practice cannot help but take the form of liberation. Jesus appears in the very midst of those who are positively despised by society and segregated from its life."\textsuperscript{129}

Because of Jesus' praxis and the discipleship of his followers, a new people are gathered in acts of contradiction to the prevailing paradigms of enmity and oppression. They were a movement constituted by God into a divine humanising promise, and as such became an accusation, an inspired ongoing process of political rupture. Miranda, commenting on the convictional and emotive politics in Luke 1: 52 remarks that what is called into question in the phrase, God "tore the rulers from their thrones," is not just the place of the Roman and Jewish overlords:

> It is a question of every class of rulers. Jesus was incomparably more faithful to genuine biblical tradition than all the other Jewish revolutionaries of his time. God and human beings cannot reign at the same time.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{128} Cone, in ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{129} Jon Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), p. 47.
\textsuperscript{130} José Porfirio Miranda, \textit{Communism in the Bible} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982), p. 72 (my emphasis, Miranda's translation).
In justification of Jesus’ faithfulness to the biblical tradition, which called Israel ever and again to the sovereign rule of Yahweh and to the denial of other gods, Miranda cites Judges 8: 22-23: “Then the Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.’ Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you.’”

God the only true object of worship, is the one who must be served, no other sovereign will be permitted theological or political assumption in the life of the people of God.

As I have already pointed out in various contexts, the claims and assertive hopes concerning the fulfilment that Jesus brought were not ahistorical or relegated to the realm of the “spiritual”. The followers of Jesus far from being quietist or socially conservative in spreading the promise of the βασιλεία urged all who would hear, to view the world from the directing power of the good, of turning human life around – in the direction of the human. The “good news” spread by the popular movement created by Jesus, and lived by the consequent counter communities (cf. Lk. 8: 1-3 and Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35), implied an invitation to a new social construct, and an implicit rejection of anything ultimate and absolute in human religo-cultural institutions that were not in accord with God’s rule.

The early Christian articulation of God’s answer to human meaning in Jesus, and their ensuing evangelistic invitation was so drastic that it required converts to engage life differently. Through the righteousness of God, to be “born again” (Jn. 3: 16), to a new “a better hope” through which they may approach God (cf. Heb. 7: 19); to a life-alignment that in practice was both personal and social. Which is to say that the reception of the gospel created a crisis, a conversion to a set of alternative value-orientations which were blatant in their denial of all other realities. Be it spiritual or political,

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131 Miranda, in ibid., p. 72.
everything without exception was under challenge. In Christ, God had established a new order, "everything old has passed away ... everything has become new" (cf. II Cor 5: 17). In God’s new order, all were called to “the obedience of faith” (Rm. 1: 5). All were summoned to make ultimate decisions about Jesus Christ, the One that God had vindicated by the “resurrection from the dead,” and declared to be “Son of God”. And thus placed above all others in title and claim (cf. Rm. 1: 4). Now there could be only one “Lord.” There could be no mortal lords (thnetous despotas) alongside of the one true God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.
Chapter Five
Empire, Struggle and Discipleship

"With the conversion of Constantine ... the empire assumed from the church the role of God’s providential agent in history. Once Christianity became the religion of empire ... its success was linked to the success of the empire, and preservation of the empire became the decisive criterion for ethical behaviour."

---- Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers, p. 150

"For Jesus to announce that the kingdom is at hand, to undertake to make it operational through his exorcisms, which expelled the demonic anti-God, and through the texture of his own career, whose consequences he did not flee, was to undertake the task of showing the sort of reality God is and that precisely this God is trustworthy. To trust Jesus is to appropriate him as the index of God."

------ Leander E. Keck, A Future for the Historical Jesus, p. 183

5 (i) Jesus as God’s Antagonist

As the harbinger of the reign of God, Jesus aligned himself with the dispossessed as the place for obedience to God. This option meant that he stood in prophetic judgement, denouncing every alienating relationship or rule. By so doing he proclaimed an ultimate, structural, all-embracing meaning, one that challenged and transcended every human feasibility and determination. His stance meant that he would not allow himself or his vision to be co-opted either by the Zealotic rebels, or the religious and political surrogates of Rome. His radical and uncompromising demands called all authority and power to account. His summons to love and justice contained provocative edges, including condemnation, biting criticism, rejection and non-violent resistance. Thereby his way of being in the world stood as an antagonism and provocation to all parties. He rendered in a visible way the power of God’s loving and just will, inviting his followers into its transformative path; never excusing them from their duty to take up the tasks of the kingdom with their own lives.

In Jesus’ solicitude for the poor he took up a critical and distaining distance from the structures that constituted the mainstay of domination in his world.
From his unshakeable attachment to the priority of God's just reign he condemned domination as essentially diabolical, as being in contradiction to the willing of God (cf. Mt. 4: 1-11; Lk. 4: 1-13). Thus, his determination to reorder the world and his passion to bring all things into conformity to God's purposes were bound to set him apart as a threat to the guardians of order.

a) Jesus' Lordship and the Confrontation of Empire

The geopolitics at the time of Jesus saw the progressive development of the Roman empire throughout much of the known world. By conquest and treaty Rome's expanse incorporated the peoples and countries stretching from Spain to Armenia, from Britain to Egypt and North Africa. Walker writes of this empire, that it was "never before equalled, and unapproached in modern times," so vast were its territories, that it embraced most of what came within the perception of civilised life for the ordinary people within its boundaries.¹ In the conclusion of his work concerning the uniqueness of the Roman imperial apparatus, Michael Grant remarks:

The world of Rome, which generation after generation of these diversified peoples created and maintained, was a new world, and it was a world both wonderful and horrible, as startling and enlightened in many ways as it was grey and brutish in others. But it was a world which we can scarcely ignore, since in many ways it made us what we are.²

¹ Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1959), p. 1. Some, like myself would see the "American Empire" as approximating "globality" of control, and therefore greater and more sinister in its "global reach" than Rome ever was.
The phenomenon of Rome's imperial practices of domination and colonial arrangement together with the early church's responses offers an understanding of theology and history in direct connection with the ongoing claims of Christ's kingdom and Caesar's empire whereby we may use the past in Barth's words as, "an uninterrupted conversation between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of tomorrow."

The domains of the Roman empire brought a general improvement in the material conditions of life, together with the imperial promise of an interchange of ideas and the possibility of cultural unity. Rome was hailed as saviour by those who benefited from its policies of law and order, those who shared in its wealth and gained by the privileges that the imperial dictates bestowed on certain classes. All of life, through the government's provisions of "bread and games," kept the populace content most of the time: thus the imperial period was hailed as the coming of "world peace" which was ensured by the presence and devotion to the gods and entities that protected Rome's rule.

"Empire," in Rome's understanding, stood for the unification of peoples and territories brought about by the triumph of universal military domination and treaties enshrined in a state religion. Far from crushing local institutions and religious practices, the empire was on the surface quite accommodating. The government of Rome was tolerant in practice of any religion provided that it didn't encourage sedition or challenge the welfare of the state. As E. T. Salmon has indicated, throughout their history, the imperial Principate showed a shrewd political foreign policy in welcoming and assimilating "foreign gods into the Roman pantheon." In so doing, the authorities actually safeguarded - that is "controlled" - various religious practices and the pronouncements of religious leaders so long as these were inclusive of other religious

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dispositions, and could accommodate the apparent elastic adjustments required by the overarching and dominant Roman religio. Therefore an “allowable” religious narrative or practice was one that did not disrupt or resist imperial political authority and its prescriptions of what "Rome" deemed to be the permissible story line.

In the complexity of the political situation surrounding primitive Christianity, Rome was therefore seen to demonstrate a religiously pluralistic attitude towards its subjugates provided they conformed to the social configuration and story that was "Rome." In this way the received paradigm retained controlling power and was powerful to put down insurrection, maintaining a pacified world. Chadwick notes that one of the reasons posited for "Roman military success was believed to be the fact that, while other peoples worshipped only their local deities, the Romans worshipped all deities without exclusiveness and had been rewarded for their piety."5

Stambaugh and Balch writing about the plethora of religions within the period explain that, "wholehearted conversion, in the sense of exclusive devotion to the god of the cult, was not normally expected." This attitude was part of the prevailing cultural phenomenon since, "syncretism was the tendency for one god to accumulate the attributes of other gods." Such an attitude of course suited Roman dominance since an ideological embrace of this sort was just the right tool for those who managed the power of the existing order. In contemporary political analysis, Marcuse is correct in announcing that, "there are two kinds of mastery: a repressive and a liberating one."6 Part of Rome's practice with its subjugates was to couch its control mechanisms, its "mastery," in social discourse that sounded liberating; broad enough to allow for certain and apparent de facto adaptations - so long as these did not deny

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Rome's overall intention. So, by repeated imperial assertions that undergirded "the creation of collective passions," and the formation of an acceptable "social conscience," in the sphere of what was proclaimed sacred, Rome saw to the fashioning and masking of reality. Therefore the institutions of society within its dominions could function quite effectively on their own local level, providing the required service was paid to the prevailing patterns of Roman rationalisation. Rome used this guise as much as possible in order to foster the bonds of community within the Pax Romana which lasted overall for two centuries.

Where this control worked, peace prevailed across its suzerainties and nation lived in peace with nation; the imperial empire enjoyed peace, remaining undeterred with common understandings and commonly accepted symbols - apparently for the greater good - tolerantly put in place by a beneficent overlord as part of its technique of imperial control. But the empire and the domination that undergirded its existence came at a cost, and Rome whilst on the surface representing a civilising force and future for humanity, in reality was a regime full of intrigue and political embroilment. Concerning this, Pilch and Malina comment: "Of the 79 Roman emperors, 31 were murdered, 6 were driven to suicide and 4 were deposed by force. Moreover, such upheavals in antiquity were frequently accompanied by civil war and the enslavement of thousands." With regard to the sociopolitical constructs and ideological rationalisations of "empire," J. Fears asserts that the phenomenon of empires rests, "firmly and unabashedly on a political theology of victory, or what we might call a clear sense of Manifest Destiny." And in drawing out recurring elements for those who are the audience and participants to the phenomenon of "empire" today, he concludes: "The Roman Republic and its

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empire thus rested upon ideological foundations similar to those twin pillars of the modern nation-state: democracy and nationalism."^{10}

b) Rome: God-claims and Idolatrous Status

In the world in which New Testament theology took shape it suited the powers and was "in general a good thing to keep all the gods well tended and favourably disposed towards the state."^{11} The primitive church however, resisted any such initiation into Rome's version of "repressive tolerance"^{12}. No such mechanism of conformity prevailed against the Christian witness or undermined its capacity to oppose the existing order. In the constant interplay between Rome's "signifiers" (to utilise Derrida's term)\(^\text{13}\) and those of the Christian's credo, Rome's claims were judged to be empty - to have no meaningful centre, no final definition. Which is to say that the early Christian theologians were not ideologically blind to the meaning of what Jesus' lordship meant in the social symbolics of their day. Their deconstruction of Roman "theology" and its ideological underpinnings contradicted the imperial structure of knowledge, disavowing its right to be a true expression human life and worth. In so doing Christianity became a powerful contradiction, creating epistemological disarray, cultural upheaval, and ideological contestation. Whatever rule or set of relations, whatever offering of containing tolerance or violent opposition that Rome put in front of the church, the gospel deconstructed it by avowing that in comparison to Jesus Christ's claim all else was merely provisional and without absolute value.

The imperial religion, whilst pluralistic in appearance was built around an ideological centre. The fixed point of reference - that which was not

\(^{10}\) Fears, in ibid., p. 101.


negotiable, the rule or measure for everything else - was Rome and its local and national "interests." Thus, loyalty to the state and its religious comprehension were really paramount. This apprehension was the conceit that held all other concepts together in a religio-political totality. Concerning the miscellany and influence of the national religion of Rome's gods, Weber notes that Roman *religio* "denoted a tie with tested cultic formulae and a concern for spirits (*numina*) of all types which [were] active everywhere." Consequently the Roman populace and those within its imperial charge, were surrounded by a force and ideology the proportions of which created a life-world in which the ordinary was permeated by the rites and procedures of what was deemed sacrosanct. As Weber explains, this *religio* compassed their "entire daily life and their every act with the casuistry of a sacred law, a casuistry which temporally and quantitatively occupied their attention."14 Weber further maintains that Rome's religion was so pervasive that: "Every act and indeed every specific element of an act stood under the influence of special *numina*." Interestingly, as pertaining to our subject, he goes on to point out that "the characteristic distinction of the Roman way of life" which resulted from this religiosity "was its ceaseless cultivation of a practical, rational casuistry of sacred law."15 A sacred accordance to all things in life, he explains, that gained such universal importance as to "produce an ever widening rationalisation of the worship of the god, as well as the god concept itself."16

c) Caesar is not God

With the manifestation and subsequent utilisation of "the god concept," Rome was able to implement a national security state that required a preeminence of loyalty to the empire and allegiance to the emperor. The emperor, with a

common military system subject to him, was the single bond of the whole empire. In the first century and beyond, the title "lord" (κύριος) came to be applied to Roman emperors. Richardson indicates that throughout the Middle East "lord" was in usage in a religious sense to announce and affirm the divinities of the mystery cults, and employed before the close of the first century by Roman power arrangements who had accorded to their emperor the religio-political title Dominius et Deus noster. The imperial cult thus employed, became one of the most important ideological weapons available to the empire's cohesion.

What was needed was a collective identity that would cement a large number of diverse ethnic religious groups and their politics under a single government. Rome accomplished this largely through a form of civil religion that suited the purposes of the ruling elites throughout the empire. Roman propaganda promoted a religio-political and universal humanistic message that advocated a belief in the divine vocation of Rome to rule the world through peaceful law and order. Backed by raw military might, Roman rule was the guarantee of religious toleration, economic trade and freedom within the empire. It was necessary if ever the empire was to be united into a common national destiny and prevail against competing claims and ideologies that it be garrisoned by a common legitimation, some common loyalty, that all of its beneficiaries shared. It was the genius of Octavian that permissioned the progression of imperial civil religion as a dominating spiritual entity surrounding the cultic worship of Rome.

Octavian, once the young revolutionary, following his victorious wars against Mark Antony and Cleopatra, surrendered the extraordinary military powers given him and placed the republic within the disposition of the Senate and the Roman people. In grateful recognition for his statesmanship and political

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astuteness, the Senate conferred upon him the title of "Augustus" (Sebastos), a designation "equally applicable to gods or humans, [it] was well adapted to express his exalted position." It was through the significance this title that he became known as Caesar Augustus. From then on his station and standing grew, whereby he was granted the right to summon meetings of the imperial Senate, his rank then being that of "Princeps civium Romanorum" (the first of Roman citizens), holding "the unrestricted right of making war or peace." It was by the acquisition of these autocratic powers that the position and epithet of divi filius ("son of the god [Julius]"), was bestowed upon him.

From within this religio-political legitimation, Augustus however, did not officially encourage personal worship of himself. Rather, his policy was "to encourage the worship of the imperial house in conjunction with the worship of the goddess Roma." This was a clever ploy, for in so doing he did not in actuality deflect worship away from his person or position, but achieved the veneration of both by suggesting as Salmon perceptively notes, "that the imperial house and the State were virtually one, or at the very least that their fortunes were inextricably bound together." In this way he sought to foster and direct the rise of religious impulses that were developing in his world and make use of these proclivities to strengthen his hold on the belief-systems and loyalties of those within Rome's dominions. But Augustus went further, keenly aware of the strength of religion's use in political control, he not only welcomed other religions but in restoring the public state cults saw to the reintroduction of "the ancient priestly colleges devoted to the performance of

19 Boak, and Sinnigen, in ibid., p. 272. Herein I am much indebted to the work of Boak and Sinnigen.
21 Salmon in Ibid., p. 29.
particular rites."\(^{22}\) To ensure that these colleges had "the required number of patrician members, Augustus created new patrician families. He himself was enrolled in each of these colleges and ... was elected chief pontiff, \((pontifex maximus)\), head of the state religion."\(^{23}\) Commenting on what he calls the Roman "gospel of imperial salvation," Horsley remarks:

Perhaps the most striking move symbolically was that after Augustus became \(pontifex maximus\) he did not move to that priest's official residence near the Temple of Vesta in the forum. Rather, compounding the fusion of religion and politics with the blurring of public domains, he made part of his house on the Palatine in to a \(domus publica\), dedicated to the worship of Vesta. The lararium of his household and family thus became in effect also a shrine of the state.\(^{24}\)

This ploy of reconfiguring Rome's venerating and political forms virtually made it possible for Augustus to gain totalitarian control of the Roman society ensuring a divine "perpetual dictatorship" of the Emperor. The imperial cult thus served to deify the emperor, in that he was called "god" - finally determining that his power surpassed all others. By so doing it served the central purpose of leading the populace "to cultivate and express 'piety' \((eusebeia, devotion and socially oriented commitment) towards him."\(^{25}\) Horsley notes further, that recent religio-cultural studies "have not only placed the emperor cult in a whole new perspective, but made it appear integral to Roman imperial society." Throughout many of the "civilised areas of the empire, the imperial cult provided the principal means by which disparate cities and provinces were held together and social order produced."\(^{26}\)

\(^{22}\) Boak, and Sinnigen, op. cit., p. 279.
\(^{23}\) Boak, and Sinnigen, in ibid., p. 279.
\(^{25}\) This quote from Horsley, in Ibid., pp. 20-21, who is building on the work of S. R. F. Price, \(Rituales and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor\) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 231-232.
\(^{26}\) Horsley in ibid., p. 20.
With the support of official Roman imperial propaganda this led to a mythical conception of Caesar Augustus as one sent by divine providence to restore and save the Roman commonwealth (*res publica*) by taking up Rome’s eternal mission which would in the end lead to the political and cultural supremacy of the world. Roman colonialism considered the veneration of its ideological constructs to be of vital importance to the religious and political pacification of its subjugated peoples. To this end it promoted the virtues of Roman superiority by way of its art, poetry and literature, always of course efficiently supported by its military power. Rome thus set out on “civilising missions” to its occupied territories using the moral power of its colonialising cultural superiority. This had the desired effect, as Romke Visser adduces: “As a result the defeated peoples learnt to cherish Roman civilisation as their own and contributed out of free will to the political, economical and cultural system, the *imperium romanum*, which was set up in order to guarantee an everlasting prosperous peace, i.e., the *Pax Romana.*”

It is not difficult to imagine how this divine designation of the emperor effected the conceptuality of the early Christians. It is unlikely that as the “glad tidings” or contrasting “good news” (*εὐαγγέλιον*) of Roman propaganda concerning the divinised emperor and his “reign” was published throughout the world that the primitive Christian communities could have remained apathetic. It is not too much to assume that claims of loyalty to the divine claimant to his “rule and reign” through client kings or imperial governors would produce nothing but negative allegiance for them. As Horsley and Silberman note:

> Early Christianity was, in fact, a down-to-earth response to an oppressive ideology of earthly power that had recently swept across

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27 See Romke Visser, “Pax Augusta and Pax Mussoliniana” in *The Power of Imagery: Essays on Rome, Italy and Imagination*, ed. Peter van Kessel (Rome, Italy: Apeiron Editori, 1992), p. 113. In which he shows the way that in the Fascist revolution of Mussolini it too used its civilising processes in order to gain totalitarian control. In this manner it was as he states, “spiritually identical” to the age of Caesar and Augustus, see ibid., p. 116.
continents, disrupted economies, and overturned ancient traditions. And this triumphant ideology of progress and development was expressed in many media in the elegies of Latin poets, in the grandeur of Roman architecture, in Roman law courts and statutes, in the technological triumphs of Roman engineering, and in the majestic, fatherly wave of every emperor’s hand.28

From the convergent certainty of the prophets and Jesus, Yahweh alone by divine revelation was their only ruler and true sovereign (cf. Ex. 15: 4-10, 18; Ps. 96: 4-6; Is. 41: 21-24). The prophetic call to Israel that it love and serve God only was the basis by which Jesus inevitably by political depth of meaning demolished, as Segundo says, “the foundation of an authority structure that was political in the name of an idolatrous conception of God, that was conveying a false image of God.”29

Once Rome employed and established, its “god concept” it became the vehicle that projected a entirety of imperial divinity and divine legitimation for its purposes and claims. In the web of power that followed, the emperor’s head was portrayed on Roman coins minted in virtually every city and dominion.30

“Coins struck under Augustus,” says Elliott, “link the armed and armoured First Citizen with Pax, goddess of peace, trampling on the weapons of subdued enemies, and Victoria, goddess of conquest, treading upon the globe itself.”31 As well as coinage in his likeness, conquered peoples and citizens of the empire were constantly reminded of the emperor through images and statues of him everywhere. As Paul Zanker comments: “This in itself

29 Juan Luis Segundo, The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985), p. 85. Segundo’s whole section on “Jesus and the Political Dimension,” is most instructive and well argued as he works through the politics of Jesus’ message and the “authorities”.
represented a unique means of honouring the world ruler on a scale never seen before." Thus the imperial cult became the means by which loyalty to the state was universally expressed. With this ideological architecture in place, Rome as an empire, with divine rights over its populace and dominions was able to employ control technics in a form whereby it circumscribed an entire culture, projecting a historical totality, a world-view, indeed a "world."

To the extent that the Roman religio challenged the primitive believers with fundamental questions of worship and freedom, it posed a set of assertions that could not be answered merely with declamation but only with agonistic struggle and blood. The truth was that: "No believing Christian could possibly accept any of this Augustan propaganda. For them, Rome was the Beast, the Harlot, the Dragon, Babylon, the Great Satan. They knew that Rome's empire was made possible not by divine order but by the acquisition of vast territories through the deadly violence of the Roman legions and the self-serving acquiescence of their own local aristocracies." In the contest of kingdom verses kingdom that followed first came the torn flesh of Jesus the Christian messiah, and then inevitably the innumerable martyrs of the early church. For as much as the early Christians wanted to be able to preach and live peacefully throughout the empire (even to the point at times of blunting the edge of the Gospel), they could not in the long term cloud the sociopolitical issues that were endemic to Jesus' liberation strategy.

It is instructive to note in contemporary Christian witness, that real correlations can be drawn between the non-political language, or the at-first-glance politically conservative language of the early church and the apolitical language, or the politically conservative language of churches in situations of

34 Horsley and Silberman, in op. cit., p. 11.
contemporary domination. In my interactions with Miguel Tomas, one of the senior pastors of a prominent Baptist church in San Salvador, and Victor Hugo an exiled Christian lawyer from Guatemala, where the church works non-violently in situations very akin to the New Testament communities of faith, I have had it explained to me on several occasions that the more "other-worldly" and "politically conservative" their language (particularly written correspondence or public notices), the less the military and the oligarchy were likely to understand their real and intended social and political intentions. The less likely their testimony to be impeded or really taken seriously; which for them meant that fewer of their people would be jailed, tortured or made to disappear as the churches went about the transformative practice of the gospel.

I must confess real frustration that this fact does not even yet seem to have dawned on many distanced commentators and academics who continue to refuse to come to terms with this hermeneutical reality.35

**d) Jesus was Subversive and So is His Message**

It is to be assumed that Jesus knew too well the limitations of determining his teaching and life-praxis to the surface level of mere political commitment. Jesus, as we can deduce from the gospel's was concerned to non-violently denounce those obstructions that blocked the humanisation of the poor and lowly. However, his concerns reached further into the divine human condition than the nationalistic thrust of liberation and the vertigo of violence as

espoused by the Zealotic groups. The depth of his liberative-narrative reached beyond the tangled web of limited parochial concerns into the very heartland of the human condition; into that universalised place of where humanity and God should find each other in reconciliation and love. His enduring gift, his teaching and actions were touched with transcendence and historical materialistic substance. Composed as they were with the divine human intercourse that addresses the whole of life with contemporary impetus and meaning in merciful forgiveness and human justice.

Having said this, I want to affirm as I have done throughout, that no matter how often we speculate from a distance about Jesus’ politics and the powers of his day, there can be no obfuscating of the fact that Jesus suffered the eventuality of his subversive message. In all likelihood the consequences of what his wilful efforts and discrediting of the imperial relationships between Rome and the ruling Jewish elites were not hidden or foreign to him. Nor was the avenging wrath of the Roman counterinsurgency programme. Horsley therefore is to the point when he says that Jesus’ execution “would have been standard procedure in such a Roman province, where the local authorities were responsible for the arrest of troublemakers. However uncertain historically the trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate may be, the principal charges brought against Jesus were that he had threatened destruction of the Temple, claimed to be a messianic king, and ... had stirred up the people and forbidden them to give tribute to Caesar.”

But not all those who professed Jesus’ lordship over life and empire were true to the subversive meaning of his kingdom. Some were willing then as now to accommodate the exiting order, others in the years beyond the primitive church, sought to interpret Jesus’ message in a way that contributed to the state’s welfare. Here, Moltmann’s comments are helpful:

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Early Christianity was persecuted as godless and hostile to the state by both the Roman authorities and by pagan philosophers. Christian apologists were therefore all the more zealously concerned to rob these charges of their force and to present the Christian religion as the religion which truly sustained the state.37

Howard Clarke Kee observes that from the Roman point of view, Jesus' being made a spectacle and an object of ridicule validated by the mockery that he received for his capital crime on the cross, "confirms the political charge that [Jesus] sought to be 'king of the Jews'" (cf. Mk. 15: 26; 32).38 Here Echegaray's remark is to the point, "the reign of God and the reign of Caesar were incompatible; the reign that Jesus proclaimed was utterly alien to the Roman empire and its world of degradation, enslavement, and dehumanisation."39 That Jesus met such an ignominious end is logical in view of the condemnation and critical insight he held against the amalgam of ruling powers in his time. Anyone who initiated a strategy of revolutionary change and promoted a solidarity of purpose among the poorest levels of society as he did, was bound to meet with resistance and incite the passions of the top levels of society. The respectabilities of the dominate society are based upon moral compromises and every community is anxious to defend these compromises against the prophet who presents some higher moral logic, and to condemn such a one as a criminal; because this type of agitator imperils the societal structure from below. The "aristocracies of salvation" as the dominant institutions therefore seek accommodation to their existing law and order regimes, where this fails intrigue and rejection become the compelling factors.

In Jesus' movement of protest he demonstrated an authority of purpose at his centre, a clarity to his vision of life, that could be sneered at by the powerful, but not dismissed. In this he exalted by example because the truth of his life verified his vision - tested in his own flesh. By so doing he sought to make his

38 Howard Clarke Kee, What Can We Know About Jesus? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 86.
followers over completely. Caught up in his life and teaching they struggled
to change themselves and their world to the edicts of the kingdom. They were
not cold "engineers of the human soul" in some "Lenist" manner, but ordinary
folk overtaken with the extraordinary of God.\textsuperscript{40}

Jesus after all did not settled with the authorities in the abstract, he became the
living violation of all that their culture of domination held dear. And
believing what he did he made himself dangerous to the Caesarian state and its
acolytes. For this reason Jesus' enemies "were not common criminals, well-
known reprobates, or public delinquents. Quite the contrary, they were the
pillars of the community, honourable people, respected and respectable." They did not show contempt to Jesus or seek his destruction because "they
were base, ignorant and immoral by community standards." No in fact, "they
were the acknowledged, esteemed, learned and virtuous members of the
community"\textsuperscript{41}. Their objection to his words, attitude, and conduct proceeded
not from their social ineptness but from their social standing. For the most
part it was the people of status, the connected, the significant, who were his
enemies: Jesus was opposed and murdered by the religiously upright and
proper classes of society.

To hear his message, to be exposed to his theology in relation to the prevailing
theologies of the time was to come into explosive contact with the polemics
and practices of a new order. In his encodings of divine reconciliation,
economic justice, equity strategies and social transformation, he employed
concrete processes which promoted an alternative enlargement of the
awareness of God's reign of freedom against the stipulated conditions of his
day. For this reason he bought down upon himself the condemnation of the

\textsuperscript{40} This phrase used by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, cited in Benjamin R. Barber, \textit{Superman and
\textsuperscript{41} José Comblin, \textit{Sent From the Father: Meditations on the Fourth Gospel} (Maryknoll, New
"principalities and powers." He was dangerous to them because he embodied another way than theirs, other resources (the power of the poor), and other grace (that of the all-loving God). In so doing, Jesus, by seizing on the reality of nonviolence and the enterprise of his peaceable kingdom, he resisted their tyranny and dealt a death blow to their vitals of religion and empire. He proved that the foolishness of God was wiser and stronger than human strength (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 25). His liberation programme judged: in turn, it stood under judgement as he boldly condemned the bestial conduct of those who harried the worth of the worthless.

e) Jesus Reckoned with Criminals and Executed

The Romans and the religious authorities consequently judged Jesus dangerous enough to law and order as to have him tried, tortured, and executed by the decree of the Roman governor of Judea. This was no historical accident or mistaken deed dealt out to someone who was not a real sociopolitical threat. For centuries, spiritualised hermeneutics have overlayed Jesus’ crucifixion with misleading sentimentality. Barely “innocent” many of these interpretations have actually removed the truth of God’s redemptive purpose as a transformative help to our understanding of present-day realities of injustice. "Over against otherworldly and apolitical interpretations, as Elliott points out, there stands the fact that “The crucifixion of Jesus is, after all, one of the most unequivocally political events recorded in the New Testament.”42  The manner of the death of Jesus as an instrument of imperial terror, carried the shame of the convicted. Its intention and meaning were demonstrably clear:

Crucifixion as a penalty was remarkably widespread in antiquity. It appears in various forms among numerous peoples of the ancient world, even among the Greeks .... [It] was and remained a political and military punishment. While among the Persians and the Carthaginians it was imposed primarily on high officials and commanders, as on rebels, among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e., slaves, violent criminals, and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least in Judaea. The chief reason for its use was its allegedly supreme efficacy as a deterrent; it was, of course, carried out publicly .... It was usually associated with other forms of torture, including at least flogging .... By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place - at a crossroads, in the theatre, on high ground, at the place of his crime - crucifixion also represented his uttermost humiliation, which has a numinous dimension to it. With Deuteronomy 21: 23 in the background, the Jew in particular was very aware of this .... Crucifixion was aggravated further by the fact that quite often its victims were never buried. It was a stereotyped picture that the crucified victim served as food for wild beasts and birds of prey. In this way his humiliation was made complete. What it meant for a man in antiquity to be refused burial, and the dishonour which went with it, can hardly be appreciated by modern man.43

Against a myriad muted interpretations of Jesus being convicted as a criminal who died in ignominy and humiliation stands the barbaric reality of the cross, as the "most nonreligious and horrendous feature of the gospel."44 There can be no abrogation of the political significance attached to Jesus’ crucifixion for notorious crimes which Rome judged to be deserving of capital punishment. As we consider the political character of Jesus’ death at the behest of imperial state security, Horsley and Silberman’s remarks are to the point:

Were we not so familiar with the stylised image of Jesus on the cross and were we no so thoroughly programmed from our earliest school days to admire the grandeur, majesty, and technological sophistication of the Roman Empire ... we might be able to see this oppressive, genocidal, imperial mode of torture for what it was.45

Crucifixion was a clear message: no less the case for Jesus of Nazareth, or to any others who rejected or threatened Rome’s “world’s logic and structures of power.” By its might (deemed by it to be by divine right), Rome, once branding anyone an enemy of the state through its routinised “judicial vengeance” and “merciless application” of crucifixion, changed “a living breathing person into a bruised, bloated, almost unrecognisable corpse.” With his life Jesus paid in pain and humiliation “the supreme Roman penalty” particularly apportioned to “slaves” and “violent criminals.” A brutality which was “almost always inflicted on the lower class (humiliores).” And this was as the propriety of the day would have it, since from the point of view of the righteous, and status people of his day Jesus represented some sort of social deviant. After all he had rejected family ties, challenged expected religio-political practices and the mainstream notion of social conformity. He was known to keep company with undesirables, hysterics, fugitives, sinners and those society judged to be fools and troublemakers (cf. Mk. 2: 15-17). For the most part the company he kept was suspect.

Amid these “untouchables” he taught and celebrated the historic and coming validity of God’s loving will for all; that becoming in which the character, life and lot and validity of each person will be illumined in a higher resolution. The redemptive process of which he spoke carried the insurrectionary energy of God’s rule against the triumphant incarnation of the unrighteous domination of the powers - and this, the world grandiosities could not tolerate. Jesus’ activity therefore gave validity to Rome’s deployment of terror through crucifixion. As Hengel notes the main reason for its use was “its allegedly supreme efficacy as a deterrent.” As a form of state terrorism it was practised particularly on “groups whose development had to be suppressed by all possible means to safeguard law and order in the state.”

46 Horsley and Silberman in ibid., p. 86.
48 Hengel in ibid., pp. 125-137.
Clarke Kee observes: "The inscription placed above Jesus' head as he is lifted up on the cross confirms that he is dying on a political, anti-Roman charge, rather than as a violator of Jewish law." 49 Those in control understood that the God of the Christians would never become a useable entity. As to the seriousness of the threat that Jesus posed in the minds of his enemies, this is attested to by the fact that Jesus was condemned in the way that he was. "This Galilean prophet could have been beaten like the later Jesus, he could have been beheaded like John the Baptist, or stoned as one who blasphemed the sanctity of the Temple. But this was a much more public matter, in which the power of the Roman administration and the public order of Jerusalem were at stake." 50

Thus, commitment to Jesus' cause far from being a harmless gesture in face of the dominate religio-culture of Rome and its surrogates represented a threat to their totalising power. The experience of his rule became the sometime clandestine, but always visible new challenging reality whenever the community of believers gathered in worship or practiced Jesus' life-alignments. Thus, Christian devotion and life understood itself to be above any ethical or political constraints of the official religio. In Christ they were released from its gravity. Which meant, as Peukert observes: "Concrete historical and social experience thereby become transcendental-constitutive occurrences." 51 Consequently, Christian belief as a new historic dimension not only defied the Roman prescriptions and justifications of history, but issued such a protagonistic challenge to the imperial fabric of meaning, that its inevitable truth revealed the incoherence of Rome's and every empire's self-justifying foundations. Jesus thus broke the patterns of what society said was propitious, and became the contradiction of God to all purely human constructs of power. In place of the derived divinities which usurp authority.

49 Clark Kee, in op. cit., pp. 85-86.
50 Horsley and Silberman in op. cit., p. 86.
in this world Jesus’ reality demonstrated that God’s favour was not a speciality only for certain privileged and well-disposed people. It was subversive judgement, a challenge and hope of supreme significance.

Now the death of Christ was the death of a political offender. According to the scale of social values of the time, crucifixion was dishonour and shame. If this crucified man has been raised from the dead and exalted to be the Christ of God, then what public opinion holds to be lowliest, what the state has determined to be disgraceful, is charged into what is supreme. In that case, the glory of God does not shine on the crowns of the mighty, but on the face of the crucified Christ. The authority of God is then no longer represented directly by those in high positions, the powerful and the rich, but by the outcast Human One, who died between two wretches. The rule and the reign of God are no longer reflected in political rule and world kingdoms, but in the service of Christ, who humiliated himself to the point of death on the cross.52

If Jesus was executed as a political enemy of the religious elites and Roman order, and God had vindicated this abandoned one by raising him to life, then as Elliott states, in "Paul's understanding, the dread balance of terror upon which every empire is founded had been broken."53 Such revolutionary comprehension "could have arisen only from the dramatic manifestation in tortured human flesh of God's power to raise the dead."54 The experience of God's saving power intervening in their history and the political logic of this disclosure meant that the primitive Christian experience had every reason to believe that "the appointed time has grown short," and that "the present form of this world is passing away" (cf. 1 Cor. 7: 29; 31). The crisis of this lived appropriation of eschatological meaning gave seed to a fundamental disagreement in divine human understanding that was bound to issue in polemical responses and social ferment.

54 Elliott, in ibid., p. 173.
One of the main reasons for this was because the sociopolitical order that Rome had constructed, demanded and was dependant on a respect for proscribed "differences". Such "differences" were to be regarded as entirely natural ("natural," in the sense that they must conform to Rome's view of reality). Any denial of the established order represented the threat of chaos and the break up of the empire. What came into play through Christianity's counter-imperial gospel was an understanding of freedom in faith and politics that would not permit the pressure of conformity to Rome's globalising claims. Rome (and ever since its Weberian "types")\(^{55}\) set in motion controlling factors in history which made it impossible for Christians to be submissive subjects and at the same time achievers of freedom.

**f) Standing Firm in the Freedom of Christ**

In the midst of historical existence the gospel of Christ confronted the consequences of sin and domination. Such consequences made for enslavement to the powers and institutions that controlled and ultimately worked to debilitate, rather than enable the increase and exercise of liberty and human welfare. By the New Testament's understanding, Jesus Christ's life and resurrection represented the conditions of true freedom. In a world of enslavement, Schüssler Fiorenza argues against a "purely religious" understanding of the text, insisting that Paul's statements carried clear "political implications" that must not be minimised. The status of being set free by Christ is repeatedly affirmed (although at times its meaning is interiorised), in freedom formulas throughout the Pauline epistles. Believers, having been emancipated, "bought with a price" had become "freed person[s] belonging to the Lord" (see 1 Cor. 6: 20; 7: 23).\(^{56}\) For them the future was no

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closed system; un-freedom was antithetical to the gospel's purpose because: "For freedom Christ has set us free" so they were to, "Stand firm" not submitting "again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5: 1). The present and the future were open because they "were called to freedom" (Gal. 5: 13), and their strength was in the fact that "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom" (11 Cor. 3: 17).

In "faith" writes Moltmann, "we experience liberation for freedom." Any undoing of making space for liberty, which in the purposes of God is universal in its reach (and the divine given inheritance of Christians), that is, "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (cf. Rm. 8:21), stands in overt contrast to any fated bondage be it cosmic or political. The early Christian believers were prisoners to the hope of God. For Jesus had summoned them to and granted to them the liberation of the kingdom. There could be no denial of this freedom, for it was God-given. The divine One had sent "the Lord Jesus Christ," who gave himself for their "sins" in order that they should be "set free from the present evil age" (cf. Gal. 1: 3).

According to Christian belief, no power could stop freedom's impetus therefore, nothing must be allowed to stand in its way, be it submission to the law of Moses (theological captivity), or the practices of the Judaizers (legalist cultural captivity), nor submission to the unjust and idolatrous powers (Roman imperial rule) It was this freedom - that was not of human origin - that the believer's lived out in the praxis and consciousness of discipleship. In their new ontology of becoming. From this understanding, as those submitted to the higher "law of Christ" (cf. Gal. 6: 2), Christians were constituted into the unrelenting way of freedom's cause. Marcuse understood this when from his critical perspective he wrote: "The message of the Son was the message of liberation: the overthrow of the Law (which is domination) by Agape (which

57 I am following Fiorenza here in ibid., p. 225.
Historically we know that the freedom proffered by the gospel could not be withstood by Rome or any emperor - the captivity of the First World church of today is another matter however! Commenting on the implementation of freedom's intentions against the wretched futilities and absurdities in the history of humanity, Moltmann observes that, "one cannot help noting that the basic anti-revolutionary, conservative option has determined the historical form of the Christian religion, the way in which it is given form in the church and presented in theology, down to the present day."  

God's sovereign freedom enacted in Jesus was understood by the church in terms of liberation from all captivities. This logic of liberation was bound to cause trouble (as its still does), because in Jesus' gospel what is disclosed within history's drive is God's determination to overthrow all governance's of human limitation. Within the early church this alternative purpose was disruptive; hostile and apocalyptic. In contradiction to the edicts of Rome the word of God in Jesus Christ represented theological and political readings of reality that transcended the empires dictates. It refuted the imperial prescriptions of class, culture and frontier.

**g) The Spiritual and Political Reality of "Justification by Faith Alone"**

For the primitive Christians, life's liberative realisation had meaning only through the principle of "justification by faith." It was through this act of God that the first Christian communities and the individual believer's identity were established - with Jesus Christ as the centre (cf. Rm. 5: 1; 3: 26). Which is to say that *nothing else* gave the Christians their identity. In making this

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signification, I am not in any way wanting to endorse a theological marginalisation of Pauline politics: he was repeatedly anxious to unmask the idolatry of "sovereignties and powers" (cf. Eph 3: 10). My intention is exactly the opposite. I do not want to distort Paul's meaning in the then or in the now. With Elliott, and others I do not accept that "Paul was less interested in justice than in setting individuals in right relationship with God."61 Nor do I accept that Paul separated out, or made some essential distinction between "theology and doctrine over ethics and activism, or right belief (orthodoxy) over right action (orthopraxis).”62 To make this sort of assertion is to be ignorant of his life-praxis which stands in essential contradiction to such claims. And such assertions usually are only made by speculative types whose continuing acceptance of this dichotomy permits intolerable extensions of oppression and banality.

For the early Christians, in their distinctive conception of God's revelation nothing else justified; no other interpretation of being, no other status or formation be it spiritual or political enthused their liberation for life (cf. Gal. 2: 16). The gracious activity of God towards them in Jesus Christ provided the believers with their only basis for faith and hope. Nothing else justified the followers of Jesus Christ, not the nation-state claims of Rome, not the claims of Judaism, nor the allurements of a safer life style. For them this conviction became the formative ingredient that prevailed amidst the internal and external events of their period. Convinced as they were by this apostolic affirmation, the old order and its belief claims became lost to their intelligibility. In their profession and belief in a crucified Messiah, they themselves suffered social dislocation, being deemed ignorant fools, given over to what the discerning "savants" of the day named as foolish knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 21-23). Thus, in contradiction of the conventional wisdom, they insisted that salvation does not come "through wisdom" but rather by the

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foolish event of the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 18-25), which "none of the rulers" of their age understood (cf. 1 Cor. 2: 8).

In our present age no other persuasion must be allowed to undo this kerygmatic axis: the contemporary church and its members urgently need to recover and affirm "the politics" of being justified by faith alone. To profess this faith stance is not to state some foregone or abstract point of biblical hermeneutics and doctrine. It strikes at the heart of the church's confession.\footnote{I am indebted to professor Thorwald Lorenzen for pointing this observation out to me.}

We have too easily drained away the meaning of this biblical principle. As Jüngel says the "idea that we are accepted by God without any moral effort, without any cooperation on our part, solely by our trust in God's grace, and that we thereby become acceptable once and for all," appears to many people both inside and outside of the church today to be foolish and unsophisticated, bordering on a depreciation concerning the ongoing enterprise of human moral effort and advancement.\footnote{Eberhard Jüngel, "Living Out of Righteousness: God's Action - Human Agency" in Theological Essays, Vol 11 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1995), p. 241.}

Competing "justifications" have removed the gospel's radicality and ultimacy over Christian life and discipleship. Variously this has occurred, particularly by otherworldly spiritualisation and theological myopia. Too quickly have we allowed this type of interpretive move to distract us from the meaning of this-worldly power and its foreign claims in their attempts to justify us through such things as race and blood, civil religion, militarism, social or sexual status and mammonistic life-styles. The biblical script declares that "in Christ," and because of Christ, we are "free" of alien allegiances, and "justified" before God (cf. 11 Cor. 2: 14; Rm. 15: 7; 11 Cor. 1: 20). Without this justification, this radical freedom and the right to express the gospel's meaning, the conviction that "Jesus is Lord" would have degenerated into just another empty religious or political language construct instead of becoming the
predicate of freedom. The production of meaning within the seditious content of early Christian discourse disrupted a common understanding of the world - that convention being that "Caesar is lord". It uncovered what had been left out, what had been silenced by domination's story line. In its resistance to unjust and idolatrous power and in its refusal to accommodate the dominate modes of salvation, the early church identified its salvation (that is their justification), as the gift of God to them in the redemptive story of Jesus Christ. Rather than a reality realised through acts of obedience and incorporation into the privileges arising from conformity to Jerusalem or Rome's rewards, the early believers stalwartly stood by the conviction that salvation was to be found in the despised Jesus, and in him alone. This was their distinctive view and where the church remains faithful this affirmation abides. In Jüngel's declaration, our true being as humans is, properly understood, "existence out of the creative power of the justifying God." 65

5) (ii) Christian Faith as Subversive Content and Practice

Because it separated belief system from belief system, the church at an early date experienced persecution from Jewish and Roman authorities. Stambaugh and Balch in their investigation of the Greco-Roman civilisation in which the early Christians lived, comment that: "Conversion to Christianity made a decisive impact, both in terms of the individual's self-perception and in the social context of a new sodality." 66 For the early Christians the intervention of God in the history of Jesus Christ was divisive and factious. Which meant that faithful discipleship in its repudiation of Jewish and Roman ethical codes and practice came to know in itself the Stigmata Christi. Ushered in by the clash

of loyalties beyond any shallow or local grasp of his fearful predictions, Jesus' kingdom cause became the occasion of separation and strife. With dreadful reach in the fate of the disciples, Jesus' lordship could not but universally be the determinant of trouble, even to the division of life's natural bonds, setting "a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother," to the point of where a person's "foes will be members of one's own household" (cf. Mt. 10: 34-36).

For Jesus' sake the early Christians became objects of derision and hatred, suffering floggings and trials, murder and death. Ched Myers, in commenting on the Gospel of Mark's narrative concerning "the political destiny" of the disciples, states that as John the Baptizer was (cf. Mk. 1: 14), and Jesus was (cf. Mk. 9: 31, 10: 33), so too the primitive believers would "earn the wrath of local and national Jewish authorities as well as that of the Roman procurator and even Caesar himself." They would be "handed over" (παραδοθήσεται) to the religio-political leaders. As he puts it, "Mark makes the point no less than three times: 1. 'they will hand you over' (13: 9), 2. 'when they take you and hand you over' (13: 11), 3. 'brother will hand over brother' (13: 13)."

Further to this, Myers adds: "The disciples are told they will be pursued at every possible instance of legal jurisdiction in Palestine: 1. 'you will be beaten in the Sanhedrin and synagogues,' 2. 'you will stand before governors (ἡγεμόνων) and kings,' 3. 'for my sake as a witness against them.'"

Linked as they were to Jesus' destiny the believers would not give up his purpose. Thus the early Christians came to experience beyond any privatised meaning, the force of Jesus words: "Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God" (Jn.

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inclusive. As I have stated, I have sought to use inclusive language throughout - in my language and that of author's cited.


68 Myers, in ibid., p. 333.
16: 2). Affliction, suffering and distress of mind was the inevitable lot of those who sought to live Christ's way in an alien world. And very early on in the written correspondence of the church, Paul admonished the believers that persecution was fundamental and inherent to a committed following of Jesus. Paul penned what in their lives they knew, hence: "no one should be shaken by persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know" (1 Thess. 3: 3-4; cf. Col. 1: 24; Rom. 5: 3-5; cf. 11 Cor. 12: 10; Phil. 3: 10).

In his words to the Thessalonian believers the substance of Paul's words concerning their lot are significant: τὸ μηδένα σαίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις. αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἴδατε ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κεῖμεθα (1 Thess. 3: 3). The sense of the descriptive verb used in this statement rendered as "destined" or "are appointed", is particularly strong. It conveys the idea of the future being fixed in advance. Interestingly Calvin comments on this verb that by its use it "is as though [Paul] had said, that we are Christians in this condition."

Like so many before him, in following Jesus, Paul had already given up his right to life. Because of his apostolic praxis he reckoned himself dead to the world powers and their claims. It is not without consequence that in his hostile environment Paul uses language that is not by pious confinement to be drained of its political overtones; thus he describes himself as being "crucified with Christ" (cf. Gal. 2: 20). Polemically challenging the notions of salvation and justice which Judaism and Rome espoused, and whose prescriptions surrounded the early church, Paul, in his theology and commitment was through great labours, imprisonments, countless floggings, often near death (cf. 11 Co 11: 23). And in such situations always bounded by "the death of

69 Myers, in ibid., p. 333.
Jesus" (11 Cor. 4: 10). This state seems to be ever present in his life experience: as he puts it, bearing the sentence of Jesus in his inmost self (cf. 11 Cor. 1: 9). Unlike the false teachers who shrank back from persecution (cf. Gal. 6: 12), Paul in the same manner as the true Apostles who came before him, did not consign the realisation of Jesus' lordship to cultural or political compliance - nor yet to another world. In rejecting the idolatrous and inhuman models of imperial existence, Paul lived out of the "foolishness of the gospel" (1 Cor. 1: 18), from which he sought "to know nothing but Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 2: 2). With others of the apostolic band he underwent open hostility which in real terms meant that,

... as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see - we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (11 Cor. 6: 4-10).

Paul's aim in life as well as that of the apostolic community was to bear faithful witness to God's gracious meaning in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection humanity had been granted an alternative realisation. An entirely new element had entered into history, and by the saving significance of this event human and cosmic reconciliation had been made with God (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 30; 11 Cor. 5: 18; Gal. 1: 3; Rom. 5: 6, 8: 3). With passion Paul preached that the God of the Exodus and the Prophets had through Jesus Christ set humanity free from all expressions of idolatry and sin. As I have noted, in the midst of Jewish obduracy and Roman colonial presence, he persisted in proclaiming the "word of the cross," and the message

70 John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians; and
of the "crucified messiah" which was judged by the religio-political authorities to be an "offence" and a (σκάνδαλον) "scandal" (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 23; Gal. 5: 11). Through the cross, God had denuded the strength of the principalities and powers leading them in "triumphant procession" as conquered subjects (cf. Col. 2: 15). With this subversive turn of military speech Paul required of the early believers that they repudiate the empire's imperial claims to commanding power; understanding themselves as no longer belonging to the Roman order and thereby riding themselves of the dominion of sin. Since they belonged to the realm of freedom, rather than serve Rome's aims, Christ's people are to give themselves, their "[μετάτροπη, bodies] to God as instruments [δαίμονα, weapons] of [δικαιοσύνη] justice" (cf. Rm. 6: 13-14). And in so doing, refusing to be coerced into conformity with the world system, allowing their minds to be transformed (see Rm. 12: 1-2). Since they belonged to the rule of God and not Rome, Paul urges the Christian believer's to bear the cost of their discipleship as he himself did; leaving the fibre of their new lives interwoven forever in the work of making the world new.

For Paul, belonging to Christ meant that he was a "slave to all" (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 19), in order to win as many as possible through the ultimate effects of the liberation of the gospel. In truth he counted himself as a "slave of Christ" (Rom. 1: 1), and this meant as Barth says of him that,

"in contradiction to himself and in distinction from all others, he is called by God and sent forth .... For this reason he dares to approach others and to demand a hearing without fear either of exalting himself or of approximating too closely to his audience. He appeals only to the authority of God. This is the ground of his authority. There is no other." 71

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Submission to God's supremacy had an irreducible and costly dimension to it for Paul. Jesus had "grasped" him and from that conversion experience of the risen Christ, he came to "regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing" Jesus as his Lord. For Jesus' sake Paul says he had "suffered the loss of all things," regarding "them as rubbish," so that he may gain Christ (cf. Phil. 3: 8). For this one-sided devotion to Christ's rule and his desertion of all others (which he considered to be pretentious), he paid through all sorts of privations with his life, executed by Rome, following in the steps of his master whom the Romans had crucified for sedition. In word and deed Paul's discipleship proves that he is "limitlessly faithful to Jesus Christ" and the vision of God's just rule.\(^{72}\) If we consider the "explosive ultimate effects" of Paul's teaching among the churches and the geopolitics of his time it is hard to understand the conservative twist that so many have previously put on Paul's gospel, as Michael Grant states:

Indeed, his attitude, that these secular institutions were really of altogether secondary importance, was potentially subversive in the highest degree, for it was destined to change Roman society from top to bottom. It is therefore ironical that the many modern writings emphasising the revolutionary character of early Christianity can find nothing whatever to say about Paul. And yet his Letters, beneath their quietist surface, were potentially incendiary.\(^{73}\)

Miranda makes a telling point when discussing the conscience-tranquillising theology of so many in the contemporary church in contrast to the faithful witness of the early church: "It is evident that it was the persecutions of the first three centuries, unleashed by the lords of this world, which constrained Christian's to present a version of Christianity which would no longer provoke repression." And of the same mind he maintains: "In the fourth century the church dispatched the kingdom to the other world, assuring the lords of this


one that they could rest easily as far as the gospel was concerned."\textsuperscript{74} Full of radical faith's vision of liberation, with force he continues: "What is certain is that, first out of a fear of repression, and afterwards out of a fear of revolution, a conception of Christianity continued to be taught and dogmatised which, from every viewpoint, is irreconcilable with the texts."\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{a) Confessing Christ as Differentiating and Illocutionary Force}

Instead of accommodating the fusion of religion and empire that Rome had fought for, the "illocutionary force" of the Christian kerygmatic "speech acts" (to use Habermas' terms), were conflictual.\textsuperscript{76} Particularly as they related to individuals and groups locked into a controlled society where class and power were oppressive agents. To those who consistently demonstrated allegiance to the content of kerygmatic faith, Christianity was adjudged rightly by the controlling governors of power in the world of Jesus to be a dangerous vehicle of freedom and alternative hope. Its liberative narratives concerning the rule of Christ betrayed all other narratives as false. From its "meaning source" it accused them of being distorted guides to human fulfilment. Jameson’s point is of interest here:

\begin{quote}
All works are profoundly ideological .... all have a vested interest in relation to social formations based on violence and oppression .... The restoration of meaning of the greatest cultural monuments cannot be separated from a passionate and partisan assessment of everything that is oppressive.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

From its locus of theological and social formation Christian conviction cancelled out the primacy of Rome’s monopolising institutions. It

\textsuperscript{74} José Porfirio Miranda, \textit{Communism in the Bible} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{75} Porfirio Miranda, in ibid., p. 68.
deconstructed the existing theories and conceptual systems that were used to justify and undergird the way in which the world was meant to run towards Roman advantage. The early Christian catechism refused to accept the dominant imperial understanding. From its ideological base it believed that its meaning-world was given by God. So too its proclamation, its language, and that consequently it could not give that up to Caesar or any other "lord".

As I have previously indicated, Rome tried early on to contain Christianity (as it had sought to do with Judaism), by its supposed syncretistic acceptance of other religions, offering the concept of toleration as the way forward to civilised living. Embedded in this conceptual construct was the notion that "other" approaches - those differing from the imperial prescription - simply caused trouble, and were not amicable to the common good, resulting in deviant disruption. From Christianity's contentious claims, which Rome (nor Judaism), could in any way co-opt or neutralise, intrigue was bound to occur.

This was because, historically as Jameson notes: "A ruling class ideology will explore strategies of legitimation, while an oppositional culture or ideology will often in covert and disguised strategies seek to contest and to undermine the-dominant value system." Where this happens, there "is a process of reappropriation and neutralisation by the dominant ideology." 79

Whatever Rome tried by way of control and containment, the evangel of Christianity broke out of by refusing to be to be "reappropriated" as some sect of Judaism, or as some such recognised religion (religio licita). Primitive Christianity ignored any principle of co-operation since it held an entirely different view of life; a radical difference that its kerygmatic language contagiously carried wherever it could get a hearing. The possibility of overcoming the predominate discourse of Rome's framing power occurred in

78 As Marx put it: "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class." Cited in David McLellan, The Thought of Karl Marx (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 46.
79 Jameson in op. cit., p. 86.
the event of the word of the gospel. For, by its language it set out meaning constructs in which the regularity and continuity of the world's history were broken apart and set free for new possibilities.

Ricoeur has observed that one of the direct achievements of language is to "intend being, not under the modality of being-given, but under the modality of power-to-be," in such a way that "everyday reality ... is metamorphosed."\(^8^0\) This was the danger of the gospel, its language and liturgical activity were without legitimate warrant and dangerously transformative. And as such, the early church challenged the ontological priority of Rome claiming the possibility of an entirely different world achievable through the priority of God's rule in Jesus Christ. Thus the Gospel narratives spoke powerfully to those caught in the throes of social change and longing for a better way.

We can understand the power of the Christian narrative only if we keep in front of us that which confronted it and take into account its relation to the forces of social formation surrounding it. By its nature and content it functioned as a subversive force to the established order. Amos Wilder in commenting on the power of the subversively inspired actions of the early Christians comments:

So in the early church there was much of what we would call subversive songs, guerrilla theatre, underground messages, and political graffiti. The empire did not know what to do with this clandestine movement whose dreams were more universal and contagious than those of the Sibyls and the oracles or of Vergil himself.\(^8^1\)

Against the Christian movement, the imperial state (and its acolytes), asserted itself as the bearer of all that is true, right, just and life-giving. Christianity emerged as a challenge to this imperial monopoly. In face of repressive

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measures and persecution it proclaimed and celebrated in liturgy the truth of Jesus Christ as God's agent of freedom. Through "gospel" proclamation it bespoke of a greater and higher reality. We know from the religious literature and archaeological evidence of the empire that the state also through its political theology sought to absolutise itself by its liturgical activities. Imperial rituals were celebrated within most cities of the empire, the object being to enable Rome's hold on power and sovereignty (*auctoritas*). Concerning these occasions, Price notes:

The visual expression of the emperor was incorporated into the regular life of the communities through public celebrations. Long established festivals, such as the Nedameia, had an imperial element added to them: they were now also called Sabasta. Separate imperial festivals were also founded, where sacrifices were offered and the whole community was involved either in processions or as the recipients of donations from members of the elite, often acting as imperial priests. The honours, temples, priests, festivals, and sacrifices were curiously close to the honours given to the traditional gods. Indeed these honours were: designed to display quite explicitly "goodwill and piety to the god."82

But the worshippers of the crucified God refused to allow their religious lives to become reduced or co-opted. At this attempt the gospel of imperial salvation failed. What Rome intended was stability and control through theopolitical encirclement. Where this happens, then conformity, docility, exploitation and oppression are well legitimated. Concerning the pressures of assimilation and the early church's resistance, Wilder's remarks bear emphasis:

*Early Christianity was more like guerrilla theatre than social revolution, but it overthrew principalities and powers ... It is true that if we look at the New Testament history in an anachronistic way we seem to see a movement devoted to soul-saving, indifferent to politics, slavery, and other social patterns. But actually it was a guerrilla operation which*

undermined social authority by profound persuasions. What no overt force could do it did by spiritual subversion at the level of the social imagination of the polis and the provinces of the empire. It was a case of liturgy against liturgy, of myth against myth.83

The strength of the gospel together with the liberating pedagogy and liturgical combat of the primitive communities of disciple-believers desacralised all oppositional theologies and with them the grand myth of Rome. Propagandise as it might, Rome could not overcome the annunciation and denunciation of Jesus' kingdom message. The gospel opened up new discursive space in the predicated world of Roman control, and the ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ of Jesus by the presence of the Spirit knew the word of God to be present in their words. In so doing they refused the vocabulary of the dominant order, which to them were only alienating words and phrases.

Language is not only political, it is as Ward in his comparative work on Barth and Derrida shows, "always and ineradicably theological."84 Because of this intersectory relationship, "language which makes understanding possible for one person, prevents understanding for another. Language creates simultaneously understanding and incomprehension, it binds and it separates."85 Thus the language of Jesus' lordship not only transmitted meaning but created and expressed the tension that existed between the competing realities of Christ and Caesar. By its content the message of Christianity interrogated the hypostasising acts of Roman claim and control. And in the process of its contesting arguments it disabled imperial meaning by the propagation and enactment of its alternative world-view. Rome thereby fell under the judgement of a greater ultimacy - that of God's reign present in Jesus Christ - which demythologised imperial reality. A new history was thereby constituted, a new meaning and beginning that relentlessly

83 Wilder, in op. cit., p. 28.
interrogated the centre of Rome's right to rule. Its "signifierers" (to use a Derridean term), were deconstructed by the decentering claims of the gospel. Rome was thus undermined and named not as "eternal" but merely "conditional." In this way the Christian gospel waged war in the battle of competing myths, and in so doing sabotaged Rome's ideological apparatus by negating its imperial metaphysics.

b) Rome's Oppression and Brutality

From their prescriptions of controlled accommodation, what Horsley notes as "their self-legitimating ideology of 'defending their friends and allies' and of bringing 'civilisation' and 'peace' to the rest of the world," the authorities of the Roman imperial age advocated a form of acceptance concerning socio-religious groups and minorities. They allowed the Jewish peoples special considerations, but viewed most others with a more or less cynical detachment. Consequently most of the masses within the "protection" of the empire pursued their lives in reasonable security providing they were willing to accept through the Pax Romana the subjugation of their homeland by an alien force. Rome's entry into Jewish Palestine was by blood and war; its direct rule from 6 to 66 C. E. was a continuing series of popular discontent and ruinous power struggles. Horsley and Hanson in their investigations concerning the sociopolitical events that took place in Palestine at the time of Jesus, note that the consequences of Roman invasion and Herodian rule for the Jewish peasant population meant "unusually heavy taxation, indeed a serious threat to their very existence, as many were cut off from their land." The whole period surrounding the time of Jesus was one of sedition and widespread disquiet, "framed by large-scale peasant uprisings: the outbursts following the death of Herod in 4 B. C. E. and the massive revolt against

Rome in 66-70 C. E., followed by a second major revolt against Rome in 132-135 C. E.\textsuperscript{88}

Rome wore a tolerant face where ever and whenever its domination went unchallenged. In a fratricidal world it gave to its subjects (particularly the upper classes) unparalleled prosperity. But like all imperial powers its civilising and liberating wars came at great cost to the voiceless struggling poor. The effects of Roman hegemony in Palestine as in other provinces of the empire in real terms meant that beneath the semblance and show of benevolence conquered peoples witnessed the despoliation of their lands, the levy of oppressive taxation and ongoing repression so that law and order should be maintained. Horsley and Hanson point out that in "their initial conquest, and subsequent reconquests, the Romans treated the inhabitants brutally in order to induce the people to submit. Repeatedly, the Roman armies burned and completely destroyed towns and either slaughtered, crucified, or enslaved their entire populations."\textsuperscript{89}

The practice of the Roman regime when it took action against its enemies was usually efficient and ruthless, its victories being engineered by the power and killing efficiency of its armies,

their imperial conquests were carried out by massive use of violence, with whole populations either being slaughtered or enslaved (30,000 at one time from Tarichaeae in 52 B. C. E., \textit{Antiquities} 4: 120; \textit{War} 1: 180). Not surprisingly, the imperial regime was hardly legitimate in the eyes of the conquered.\textsuperscript{90}

For all the greatness that constituted Roman history and culture, ever-recurrent horrors and brutalities were, but on rare exceptions, an essential part of its imperial government. There was something maniacal about Rome’s view of

\textsuperscript{88} Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, in \textit{ibid.}, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{89} Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, in \textit{ibid.}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{90} Horsley, in \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
war-making, sending "its legions out to war with neighbouring states nearly every spring." Commenting on the extreme violence of Rome against its enemies, Esler remarks that it was akin to some kind of pathology, that was "a game the Romans played with more determination and ferocity than other peoples of their time." Concerning their use of violent force, Grant comments:

The visible and practical sign of the Roman will to power was Roman cruelty. This found expression in savage, primitive floggings often resulting in death; crucifixions, tortures, burnings and buryings alive, hurlings from the Tarpeian rock, revengeful massacres of prisoners, drowning in sacks, brutal punishments by heads of families and schoolmasters.

It is not without significance, that the social symbolics of Roman imperial power and authority were the *fasces* (the axe and rods). Their symbolics were not without meaning in terms of pain and punishment. Whilst there were some protests against differing forms of savagery practiced in the Circus and elsewhere, Rome's most blatant cruelty, what Grant calls Rome's "most hideous feature," was the practice of imperial entertainment through the massacre of subjugated peoples and gladiatorial combat in the "Games." The ability from Rome's positional arrogance of "egotheism" to provide barbarous entertainment seems to be a constitutive feature enjoyed by regimes of domination.

In this regard, I distinctly recall as a student at the National University of Mexico being told by a political science professor how dictators in Latin America groomed and bred captive deformed individuals as maniacal dwarfs whose sole purpose in life was to eat the genitalia out of political prisoners.

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93 Grant, ibid., p. 142.
Such acts were directed not only to inflict torture, but also to provide lewd entertainment. 94 Other liturgical spectacles of butchery, games and torture with the specific aim of inflicting physical and mental pain to the point of death against "prisoners of war, slaves, defeated enemies, children, sick people, (especially the mentally sick), inmates of prisons, non-whites," and others, are examined by Fromm in his, "The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness". Under the heading of "Malignant Aggression: Cruelty and Destructiveness," he cites: "The Colosseum in Rome," as one of history's "greatest monuments to human sadism." 95

Concerning Rome's fascination with ceremonies of torture and murder, it ought be noted that whilst some intellectuals and emperor's objected to these games, Grant notes "that whatever their thoughts, they did not usually dare to suppress or diminish the bloodshed." 96 These shows took place not only in Rome, but in other large centres of population under the protection of the empire. Audience's were entertained by immense and costly contests, "between gladiators [that] formed an integral part of the programme of food and amusements which emperors felt obliged to offer the people of Rome." Grant further comments that although eventually some imperial personages, such as Marcus Aurelius' view of them was that they were "wearisome." He adds that Augustus approved of "10,000 combatants, some of whom fought in the first permanent amphitheatre, made partly of stone." 97 Even though there were some continued objections to these public participations in vicarious bloodletting (Tiberius after Augustus cut down on this expenditure), the lust for such entertainment he asserts is illustrated in Petronius's novel:

94 Such gruesome entertainment was in a somewhat different style practiced by the emperor Domitian who made women fight for their lives against dwarfs. See Grant, in ibid., p. 143.
96 Grant in op. cit., pp. 142-143.
97 Grant in ibid., p. 142.
Our good Titus has a big imagination and is hot-blooded ... he is all against half-measures. He will give you the finest blades, no running away, butchery done in the middle, where the whole audience can see it .... After all, what has Norbanus ever done for us? He produced some decayed twopenny-halfpenny gladiators, who would have fallen flat if you breathed on them; I have seen better ruffians turned in to fight the wild beasts. He shed the blood of some mounted infantry that might have come off a lamp; dunghill cocks you would have called them; one spavined mule, the other bandy-legged, and the holder of the bye just one corpse instead of another, and hamstrung. One man, a Thracian, had some suffering, but he too fought according to the rule of the schools. In short, they were all flogged afterward. How the great crowd roared at them, 'Lay it on!'

Political prisoners, Christians and others, slaves, criminals, Gladiators and wild animals were continually given over to bloodthirsty "entertainments," be they combatants pitched one against another, or thousands engaged in reacted navel battles, or theatrical performances. Rome's sadism was not sated but by appalling acts of mass cruelty and murder. Such spectacles of terror and mass murders whilst they outraged a small minority, performed the social function of distracting amusements, and political pacification for the majority of the populace. With of course the embedded warning that such state horrors (including scourging, branding, torture and crucifixion together with differing forms of slavery and family break up, penal labour in concentration camps and of course exile), could befall anyone who fell out of favour or became subversively critical of what represented imperial domestic or foreign policy. The Mediterranean imperium indicted those who choose to interfere with the best interests of the Pax Romana.

Bouquet determines that Paul obviously knew about these entertainments when he ironically alludes to the apostles as those condemned to die in the arena. He suggests that such "a show might even have taken place in the

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98 Cited in Grant, ibid., p.143.
99 For evidence of these atrocities see Grant, in ibid., pp. 140-148.
stadium at Jerusalem during Christ's ministry."\textsuperscript{101} As I have shown Jesus' death was a "public display." It was an example of Rome's indignation against those it condemns and makes to be "a show" for all others of similar seditious intent to witness. In contrast to those Christians who have an improper view of apostleship and are false servants, Paul argues the true witnesses of Christ have become "a spectacle to the world," and are in the world's eyes "fools for the sake of Christ," since they are like those "displayed" (ἀπεδείξεν) and "doomed to death," (ἐπεθανατοσ) made to be, a "show" (θεατρον) for the universe (cf. 1 Cor. 4: 9).

Working effectively to protect the interests of the Roman national security state such warnings and the "control entertainment" of the games as massive acts of banality eventually seared the soul of even Rome. Its ever increasing acts of violence leading to its inner moral corruption, which left its outer garrisons open to political devastation. Rome's murderous culture so incensed Tertullian, that he wrote with infuriation of:

"the greatest of all spectacles that was to come, the Last Judgement in which all Roman monarchs, officials, professors, and performers - even those in the less lethal branches of their profession - will be enveloped in a far greater holocaust than any which they themselves had perpetrated."\textsuperscript{102}

However, Rome's domination and interpretation of reality did not, and could not finally rely on brute force and violence. Even with all of its global hegemony the empire could not inevitably stop or withstand the nonviolent onslaught of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

\textsuperscript{101} Bouquet in ibid., p. 181.
\textsuperscript{102} Michael Grant, \textit{The World of Rome} (New York: Mentor Book, 1960), Tertullian's remark is cited in Grant, p. 147.
c) The Liberating Affrontary of Jesus’ Lordship

My contention is that the prevailing criterion of the Christian faith concerning the Lordship of Jesus was a commitment to a credo that surpassed all temporal or transcendent reifications. In order to understand the history of oppression and persecution that Jesus and the Christian communities faced, it is necessary to always call to mind the life-praxis implications that Jesus called forth in his teaching of the reign of God. God’s plan for the world, Jesus argued, took the form of calling together a new exodus people and having them create a new society where humans dealt justly and equitably with each other, no matter their status, in order that no one should ever be poor or oppressed. "If the mind of Jesus is to be in us" says Ernest Best, "then we must know something of that mind. We must also know that there is some measure of continuity between Jesus and the gospel which was preached about him."\(^{103}\) As we have seen what filled the mind of Jesus was the willing of God. This was the road to which he directed his followers. And this for him took precedence over all other occupations and loyalties. No other rule or reign was important compared to this ultimate form and claim (cf. Lk. 9: 51-62). Consequently, in his historical project all other established political orders and social structures were eclipsed and nullified. Walter Wink’s words are helpful concerning Jesus’ vision and our contemporary inabilities: “Perhaps we have had our eyes too close to the texts and the period to sense just how radical his assault was.”\(^{104}\) This may very well be true, but my sense is that we have not had our gaze fixed closely enough, for fear that we might see the shape of a glaring obedience.

It was this magnificent obsession of God’s just rule (framed in the hearts of the prophets and central to the Hebrew Bible), that formed an essential bond, a line of continuity between Jesus and the apostolic gospel. It worked to

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counteract false theologies and their supportive ideologies of imperial racial limitations, and all conditions of mammonistic religion. As such, the mindset of Jesus inspired a divinely willed new humanity, which in his message and the subsequent kerygma of the Christian missionaries was the salvific task of every disciple (cf. Mk. 3: 14; Lk. 9: 2 and parallels). "The mission of Jesus' disciples was an ambitious yet down-to-earth attempt to overturn the accepted order through a revolution in the people's behaviour." This programme was not about "purely spiritual conversion," but rather an originating impulse that propagated kingdom ethics into the individual and corporate lives of the discipleship communities.105 Fleshed out in the early church's practice of egalitarian life and alternative economics was "a community suffused with love, the transfigured structure of a twice born humanity."106

These early Christian counter-communities initiated by Jesus (Mk. 10: 17-31; Lk. 8: 1-3) became examples of his new definitions of human responsibility by their unmasking of exclusivist social relationships.107 As incentives to discontinuity—their creative events of koinonia (κοινωνία) attested to the life-changing power of the gospel (cf. Acts 2: 42; Rm. 15: 26; 11 Cor. 8: 4; 9: 13; Gal. 2: 9; Phil. 2: 1; Heb. 13: 16; 1 Jn. 1: 3, 7). These cadres as conspiracies of Jesus' Spirit, and vanguards of the kingdom were stinging indictments of the body politic, eventually unravelling the social fabric of the empire.108 The signification of these κοινωνία communities ought not be minimalised for what is represented by them is the re-enactment of the kingdom vision; the


107 Cassidy notes that "the disciples were taking Jesus' teachings seriously and putting them into practice." See Richard J. Cassidy Jesus, Politics, and Society (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), p. 148. This early Christian witness points to how the church today (where it takes the gospel seriously), can demonstrate the fire of an unquenchable charity in its own life and continue to illuminate the world through the practice of Jesus' non-exclusivist relationships.

possibility of a new future. The creative possibilities of their alternative practice are attested to in the idealised post-resurrection communities of Acts. Although, as Schottroff and Stegemann show, Luke has not given us “a historically faithful account” - which is not his purpose anyway - what we have are not “simply idealisations”. His purpose is to represent the Jesus movement’s socioeconomic alternative to life in the empire. As Schottroff and Stegemann point out:

Luke has a concrete social goal in view: an equal distribution of property within the community .... he formulates his own utopian vision of a Christian community that is characterised by material and social equality.109

Rather than capitulate to the structural imperatives of the system, these communities resisted by holding "all things in common." Inspired by Jesus’ commonwealth of love, the believers "would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). In these early paradigms of kingdom society, "no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common," so that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32-34). In doing so they took up the promise of Jesus:

Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first (Mk. 10:29-31).

Through their sense of agency, as Lohfink says, the primitive believers practiced a radical “togetherness” that changed their definitions of responsibility to Rome, and became a new social form wielding and

109 Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, Jesus and the Hope of the Poor (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 1986), p. 117.
solidifying their resolve.\textsuperscript{110} Mirroring of a counter-society also occurred in the Pauline “assemblies” (ἐκκλησίας) where there was “no longer Jew or Greek, ... slave or free, ... male and female,” and where differing groups were given their continuity in “Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 28) and not by definition “in Caesar.”

Throughout the first centuries of the church, what came into being therefore were “local communities of an alternative society to the Roman imperial order.”\textsuperscript{111} To wit, these ἐκκλησίαι were counter-imperial cells of just relations and collectivist economics where the believer’s, joining in faith’s joy and empowerment reached out to transform the world.\textsuperscript{112} Speaking of early Christianity and the dynamism of its dissenting minorities, Wimbush concludes, that it “took the ‘heart’ out of the Empire not only in its radical allegiance to another power, but also in its creation of whole new basic units of social existence.”\textsuperscript{113} The precipitous action of these alternative societies, as Georgi indicates created “a concrete alternative social utopia.”\textsuperscript{114}

Full weight should be given to the social and political praxis of these primitive Christian experiments and the anti-establishment consciousness they engendered. Far from being incidental occasions of closed-off piety with a purely spiritual function, they acted as microcosms of God’s rule enfleshing and nurturing alternative solidarity; cultivating a countervailing


\textsuperscript{112} Concerning the destabilising nonconformity of the discipleship communities see Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 75-147.

\textsuperscript{113} Vincent L. Wimbush, Paul, the Worldly Ascetic (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 93.

commonwealth of the kingdom.\footnote{115} By their obedience to, and their interpretation of the equitable humanness within the teaching of Jesus, these visionary commonwealths contained and carried the dynamic that undermined Roman prescriptions of how life should be lived. With every successful expression of their egalitarian society these κοινωνία cells provided a resisting force to, and a platform for pandemic exoneration from imperial conformity.\footnote{116}

Throughout the dimensions of Christian faith, by being too much in the grip of privatised belief and the dominations of various expressions of capitalist appetite, few in the church's history excepting the Anabaptists and a few contemporary communities, have dared to emulate this social and communitarian practice. This is more than unfortunate since, disconnecting from the system, through "communities of discontinuity" as Myers conveys, "can sustain our collective engagement with the system in the actual social, political, and economic spaces of our lives and can nurture alternative practices" of faithful discipleship today.\footnote{117}

To give all of one's fealty to the God of Jesus, to believe in him, as Barth has said, "is the most hazardous of all a hazards."\footnote{118} To accept the proclamation of God's revelation in Jesus as the one who becomes the norm for interpreting God and ultimate human welfare, was a determinative and irrevocable act of treason against the empire. Yet it was to be incorporated into and become part

\footnote{115} With respect to the radicality of the primitive Christian collectivities and the possibilities of their world vision, see José Porfirio Miranda, *Communism and the Bible* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 1982).


\footnote{117} For an important contemporary retrieval of patristic texts concerning alternative "koinonik" theory on wealth and property see, Charles Avila *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983).

of the revolutionary vanguard of the kingdom; that power which contradicted every system that prevents people without distinction from becoming truly human. To be pledged "to do the ever scandalous and outrageous will of God" was an intolerance against the empire and the undergirding legitimacy of Rome's ideology.

Not only so, primitive Christianity stood polemically against the imperial gods, against the idolatry, and all the syncretistic religions of the ancient world. Its evangel distorted political and social communication, precluding religious harmony by withstanding the repetition of Rome's proscribed inclusivity. By the fallout of its ideological constructs the Christian gospel's encompassing field of influence provided an alternative universe of meaning. The significance of Christianity's social intercourse became so strong that it meant that there could be no lasting formation of consensus among the constituents of the empire. Thus, by its alternative hermeneutics it challenged the dominant cultural linguistics, and undermined the structural status quo; breaking out of "one-dimensionality". The universality of Rome's hermeneutics, the accommodations and drive of the ancient world were debunked - forever refuted. The contradiction that was Christianity was decisive. Rome's sacred absolutes were overturned with an impetus so strong that the church was able to outlive and grow beyond the dire political, social and economical crisis' which dismantled the empire in the third century.

Where the imperial credo was the highest authority, the gospel credo through its action-oriented discourse gave text and meaning to the ontological disparity between the proscribed rule of Rome and the reign of Christ. Christianity was the alternative reality in which all separating decrees between the much-too-poor and the much-too-rich were served notice. Given the highly propagandised apparatus of Rome and the drive of its ideology at work in the subjugated world in which he lived, Jesus, could not have been psychically

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119 Barth in ibid., p. 99.
alienated from the sociopolitical implications of his subversive message. He was the harbinger of a gospel that was a direct competitor to the gospel of Caesar. The kingdom he heralded announced explosive social, political and religious reorderings of life and class structure. And since we have no good reason to think that he was oblivious to the implications of his reversal statements concerning sociopolitical existence, in which, the first would be last and the last first" (cf. Mk. 10: 31; Matt. 19: 30; 20: 16), we can only assume that the primitive Christian missionaries were echoing the politics of their leader and thus were rightly guilty of the accusations brought against them for "acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17: 7).120

The confrontation between the proscribed Roman religio together with the prescriptions of the Rome-authored Jerusalem authorities revealed fundamental antithesis's concerning the prevailing codes with their social arrangements and the apostolic campaign. In the spoken repetitions of the Christian confession the gulf between these differing claims widened. The project of Jesus’ kingdom opened up a historical way of living, in which the present was lived by the hope of God’s future promised in him, and attested to in the past historical experiences of God’s faithfulness. Jesus’ governance represented a revolutionary way of life that ennobled the human value of nonpersons seeking the right of free expression and practice. Jesus, by the very nature of his politically implicated sympathies, and his habitual anti-establishment associations with the lowly poor, the harlots, the sinners, and the socially dispossessed became, in Berdyaev’s words: “the truth about freedom.”121

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120 As to the swearing of oaths to the Caesarean household and violations concerning offences against the “decrees of Caesar” see, Donfried’s treatment of E. Judge’s work in Karl P. Donfried “The Imperial Cults and Political Conflict in 1 Thessalonians” in Richard Horsley, ed., Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 216f.
Schüssler Fiorenza, asserts that the author of the book of Revelation, in (Rev. 1: 5-6 and 5: 9-10), determinately betrayed normative structures, believing that the redemption wrought by the gospel, "involves liberation from bondage and slavery and that salvation gives new dignity to those who have been redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ." Such liberation the early church held will be consummated only after "Satan and the concrete representation of demonic power, the Roman empire, no longer rule on earth." 122

From the subversive Christian cells which produced the church, the apostolic announcement that "Jesus is Lord" became the mightier logic, allowing no accommodation to the pluralistic formations of the time. The counter-imperial meaning of Jesus' lordship was catastrophic, not evolutionary nor accommodating. Here was not just some mere cognitive potential that was announced, but rather what was (and is) indicated through the meaning of Jesus' designation, is a liberation praxis whereby a new time, a new meaning, a new energy broke up the proscribed decrees of domination forever. What had been could be no longer, for in Jesus' crucifixion and lordship a new and radically different set of transformatory forms of religio-political belief and action took historical shape. What was created was nothing less than active refusal, a "Legitimation Crisis" to use Habermas's term. 123

Because the Christian message affirmed a locus of authority outside the claims of the imperial community, Rome was forced to deal with the dysfunctional side effects of the kerygmatic processes of the church. A destiny of confrontation therefore existed between the coherence of first-century Judaism and Roman power over against the Jesus movement. Between these competing totalisms a transformation of the basic forms of social integration and imagination had taken irrefutable shape. In the cruciform message of

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123 For his treatment of this exigency as it impacts Capitalism see, Jürgen Habermas Legitimation Crisis (Boston, 1975).
Jesus freedom had broken through. From this commitment dire consequences arose, crises, confrontations, sufferings and crosses. To the extent that Rome could not keep the humanising effects of this different persuasion within acceptable limits, manifestations of “deligitimation” began to appear. Marcuse states this activity well when he says:

Voluntary servitude (voluntary inasmuch as it is introjected into the individuals), which justifies the benevolent masters, can be broken only through a political practice which reaches the roots of containment and contentment .... Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitive world .... No matter how great the distance between the middle-class revolt in the metropolis and the life-and-death struggle of the wretched of the earth - common to them is the depth of the Refusal.124

Given their sociopolitical contours of their apostolic preaching, the kerygmatic insistence that Jesus is Lord (κύριος Ἰησοῦς) ought be given the religio-political refusal it deserves. This is because for the heralds of the gospel, in the complexity of the dominant religious ruling classes and the Roman state, κύριος Ἰησοῦς was not some neutral statement, nor prudent rhetoric, but rather a summons to an obedience that flew in the face of all other claimants. Concerning the cancelling effect of the Christian declaration over against imperial proclamation, Horsley notes that:

Insofar as Paul deliberately used language closely associated with the imperial religion, he was presenting his gospel as a direct competitor of the gospel of Caesar. Once this is discerned, then other features of Romans [and other epistles] suddenly take on their true political significance, for example, the introductory creed in 1: 3-4 in which Jesus Christ (not Caesar) is the true king, ‘designated Son of God in power.’125

Georgi, reinforces this point of view when he states: “For Paul, Jesus is what the princeps claimed to be: representative of humanity, reconciler and ruler of the world.” As the Christian gospel set out this challenge to Roman political theology it laid the foundation for an epistemological break. Conflict became irrepressible. It might be argued that it would be impossible for a tiny number of Christian churches to withstand, let alone overcome the might of the Roman empire. This would have seemed the case. It certainly would have been the view of those committed to what was “possible”. But the dangerous followers of Jesus believed that it was better to inaugurate the “impossible” in order to obtain the possible. This was so because, “Paul was not interested in the mundane logic of military balance”. His outlook was framed by the conviction that “though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war.” As he assured the Corinthian Christians, the weapons of Christ are more effectual, “for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (11 Cor. 10: 3-4).

The imperative mood of domination was the warp on which the sacred pattern of Rome was woven. When Christianity tampered with those strong authoritarian threads, the whole web was set to unravel. The basic data of the kerygma had an annulling effect on Rome’s rituals and power. Whereas in the imperial self understanding, “authority” was the possession of the emperor, the kerygmatic preachers of the Gospel announced that in God’s divine trespass, Jesus had come and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 28: 18). Since Augustus was the one who in the logic of the empire had attained the eminence and power of the gods, the apostolic claim that Jesus held all authority by its creedal revaluation was nothing short of subversion. Such statements pertaining to

127 Horsley and Silberman in, op. cit., p. 187.
128 I am following Horsley and Silberman’s commentary and translation here, in ibid., p. 187.
129 Regarding the close interrelationship of power, politics and religion within the empire’s expanse, and the divine attributes of Augustus, see Horsley’s remarks as well as his citation.
Jesus as the one who had divine authority and power could nothing but inexorably thrust the religio-politics of the imperium against the early church.

Authorised by a different power, the early church set itself against all competing allegiances. And since the spirit of empire was expansive in its reach, the gospel summons to a new obedience lead to choices which would involve believers in life-changing acts of counter cultural witness. When the primitive church practised faith in the God of Jesus Christ, it was not basing its conduct on some general awareness of God, but on the God revealed to them in Jesus, and this faith-praxis implied a fundamental fidelity to the politics of the gospel - an activism that would make them plainly conspicuous. More than this it was an attack which was frontal and sharp, its meaning being both categorical and condemning. As Wink explains: “In its early centuries, the church lived in conflict with the Roman Empire, and used the imagery of conflict to explain the efficacy of the cross.”

Christianity was a sedition within the empire, representing two incongruous systems that with ardour struggled for humanity’s allegiance. From within the apostolic proclamation the church announced the radicality of Jesus is Victor, and from this premise “proclaimed release of the captives to those who had formerly been deluded and enslaved by the Domination System [of Rome], and set itself against that system with all its might.”

Against the Caesaroimperialism of the day, the early church exercised a faith practice that was radically incompatible with any alien form of worship,
eschewing subservience of anyone or anything be it personal or political. This is the assumption within the theology of Romans 13, where Paul, "declares that in itself the Roman state possesses no sacral power," but in fact has a "derived" authority, coming "exclusively from the fact that it has been appointed to the service of God the Father/Mother of Jesus Christ." 133

d) Redemption: Personal and Political

Concerning the content and consequences of the Christian confession, Jesus confessed as the only Lord, entailed a radical dismantling of the imperial and cosmic gods. Likewise, the refutation implicit within the kerygmatic confession entailed the negation of the whole divinised, transcendent world that underpinned the empire. When we consider the political, private, economic and religious landscape that lies behind the words of the New Testament, we must never forget (particularly in contemporary theological consideration) the fact that the claim of "Lordship" when applied to Jesus as compared to the falsified forms of the notion of God did not happen in an apolitical vacuum. There were no ahistorical elements to its totalizing religio-political claims and meaning. In their exegesis of God regarding the lordship of Jesus, the first Christians unmasked the accepted alien lords and gods, and in iconoclastic style "desacralized" the existing powers. What existed as determinative of life and meaning within the panoply and power of the ancient world, what apostolically were called "the rulers of this age" (ἀρχόντες, 1

New Testament times. For the sake of clarity, I repeat that often my use of the terms the "System," or "Caesaroiempialism," is inclusive of all contemporary expressions of dominance that are global in character; it is not accurate to refer to Capitalist imperialism or Communist imperialism, as if these were separate entities. Though there exists a great gulf, and deep rivalries between these systems and their process of economic and political satellization, they nevertheless represent interlocking and mutually demonic support structures, bound by a common acceptance of "egotheism" and ideologies of dominance and controlling power maintenance.

Cor. 2: 8), or the "powers of this age" (τοῦ αἰῶνος, 1 Cor. 1: 20) were forever deemed illegitimate by the Gospel’s power (δύναμις).134 In present word and world exegesis, Walter Wink argues that the powers and principalities today by their collective nature need the church again to stand squarely for the truth of Christ; to present a united front "against the cosmic powers of this present darkness" (Eph. 6: 12). As God’s redeemed people, we are called to resist the entities of unrighteousness "the rulers of this age" (ἀρχάγγελος), which determine each of us at the centre of our existence. Those forces that estrange us from our true selves, from human community and nature making us "slaves to sin" (Rm. 6: 17), and captive to the distortions of self-aggrandisement and violence.135

Unable to cohere with the false gods of injustice and the world system's established interests, the lordship of Jesus at work within the early church impacted the sociopolitical and spiritual realities of the first century life-world. Jesus’ story lead those communities of disciple-believers out of impotence into a vision of the future inextricably bound up with the shaping of human history. It is impossible to estimate their lives aright, unless we give this truth concerning them the first importance. Because of God’s new story in Jesus all history was suddenly beginning again. In the meaning of the proclamation that "Jesus is Lord" over against, and in preference to other "so-called lords and gods" (cf. 1 Cor. 8: 5, 6), the early Christians (despite domesticating influences) were exceedingly counter-cultural. They drastically effected a non-violent transformation of human society as it was, making it new and

134 As I have noted in Chapter One, for a more complete definition of how these specified terms and others such as "the world system" are understood throughout this work, see Walter Wink, Naming the Powers Vol 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), especially his section on "The Disputed Passages" where he explores the interconnectedness between "the rulers of this age" (ἀρχάγγελος) as being human, cf. pp. 40-42 and demonic, cf. pp. 42-45. For a comprehensive and systematic explication of the principalities and powers Wink's third volume is monumental, see Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Also see Julius Schniewind Nachgelassene Reden und Aufsätze (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1952) pp. 104-109.

135 For these insights see Walter Wink, "Waging Spiritual Warfare with the Powers," Weavings 5, No. 2, March - April, 1990, pp. 34-35.
loosing a meta-narrative that challenged the religio-political propaganda and patronage systems of imperial Rome.

In God's ordaining of Jesus, the plot and praxis of the kingdom's new drama was forever loosed upon the world. And what that means concretely in our day is that the hermeneutic radical discipleship has to deliver is the liberation narrative of God in the struggle of peoples to be free from exploitation and oppression. Which poses the question: what would real and determined commitment to Jesus' lordship do to the content and meaning of our discipleship if we were to surrender our selves, our churches, our politics, to the contemporary paths of its meaning?

e) The Ancient Church: Jesus' Lordship and Roman Imperialism

Whilst there is little in the New Testament to indicate that prayer was offered directly to Christ without due reference to the pre-eminence of God, Paul resolutely applies to Jesus fundamental Hebrew Bible passages in which references to "the Lord" meant God (cf. Rom. 10: 13). Within the apostolic theology there is present a dependent meaning of Jesus Christ to God the Sovereign, as in Phil. 2: 11 or 1 Cor. 15. 27f. Yet everything that the community of believers came to depend upon and expect from God, the apostolic corpus of understanding came to equally expect from the Lord (Kύριος). To say that Jesus was "Lord" implied setting him at the determinate centre of life since for the believers their theology came to affirm "our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2: 13). Which, as we have seen means by implication displacing any other god or lord - Caesar or potentate - offering to Jesus alone the total obedience of one's being. However, this christocentric stance was under constant challenge from the prevailing system, making for sustained and strained relationships at all levels of the church's existence.
As the Jesus movement continued beyond the New Testament communities into the age of the "Ancient Church" a process of limited accommodation to the empire took shape. The church in its operations faced the challenge of being culturally rather than theologically determined. In Horsley and Silberman's words:

As the years wore on and the Roman Empire refused to vanish, the passion and rage against immorality and injustice were turned increasingly inward. The churches continued to help the weak and the powerless, and the widows, orphans, and destitute strangers among them, and over time, they gradually developed permanent ecclesiastical structures and officers to oversee and regulate the day-to-day lives of the communities.\textsuperscript{137}

Even so, Lohfink, who is clearly aware of the church's heritage, dilemma and destiny, strongly argues that in contrast to this adaptation the "boldness and foolishness" of Jesus' first disciples continued on into the ancient church. His argument is that the original impetus of Jesus contained within the kingdom communities representing a "contrast-society extended far beyond the early church into the third century and marked the form of the ancient church so unmistakably that no one can speak in this regard of pure utopias, much less of purely New Testament utopias."\textsuperscript{138} The root-truths of Jesus' project were still intact if not somewhat entangled in the attempt to keep to and contend for the faith "that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (cf. Jude 1: 3).

Amidst a growing but controlling tolerance on the part of Rome's fraternal embrace the church struggled to maintain its free and independent initiatives. But at least for a time within the ancient church what emerged was an expedient, or contextual arrangement issuing forth in the offering of

\textsuperscript{136} For a helpful investigation into this dilemma, see Robert McAfee Brown, \textit{Saying Yes and Saying No: On Rendering to God and Caesar} (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986).

convenient submission but worshipful disobedience to the empire. In this vein, Irenaeus is able to acknowledge the positive side bought to the world by the Roman state, thus he can say: "Through [the] instrumentality [of the Romans] the world is at peace, and we walk on the highways without fear, and sail where we will." However, this sort of commentary should not be interpreted as meaning that the Christians had totally changed their recalcitrant attitude towards the empire. From their commitment to God’s reign there could be no “questionless” political cooperation with Rome. This was because Irenaeus knew that, in the religio-political power of the Roman empire there were the spawning seeds of the reign of the antichrist. So following his discussion of “the powers” constituent to the biblical text of Romans 13, and the Christian responsibility to the state, he forthrightly launches into an exposition concerning the nearness and spiritual corrosion of the antichrist.

The church entered a new epoch of consolidation in the provision of humanising religious resources within the soul of the existing imperial society. Thus up to a point Christians were loyal to Rome’s attempts at establishing some sort of order out of the chaos of the old world. The church in its historical process, following the strategy of the earliest Christian cells recognised imperial civic authority only in principle, prayed for the emperor - which is vastly different to praying to the emperor - and paid their taxes. But such activity must never be misconstrued as assuming that their consciousness, their life-alignment, was finally submissive to Roman ideology and imperial propaganda. For the church of Jesus Christ even in the midst of accommodations, "Rome" was held in suspicion as an interim power, a temporary presence of God’s coming righteous rule and authority: whereas

140 Irenaeus, ibid., 5: 25-30.
"the true presence" of God's humanising purposes as revealed in Jesus were present, if not yet fully realised. For the ancient church, as for those before them in the pristine communities, the realm of God was their strength and true country. They belonged to a different citizenship (cf. Phil. 3:20). As Origen, a later follower of Jesus who suffered cruelties under the emperor Decius came to state it, "in each city" of the empire the Christians represented "another sort of country, created by the Logos of God."  

Hippolytus went as far as to characterise the Roman state as demonic (as had the author of the book of Revelation). He saw Rome as a demonic imitation of what God intended in a true state, he comments acerbically:

For as our Lord was born in the forty-second year of the emperor Augustus, whence the Roman empire developed, and as the Lord also called all nations and tongues by means of the apostles and fashioned believing Christians into a people, the people of the Lord, and the people which consists of those who bear a new name - so was all this imitated to the letter by the empire of that day, ruling 'according to the working of Satan'; for it also collected to itself the noblest of every nation, and, dubbing them Romans, got ready for the fray. 

For Christians the distinction between the gods of Rome and the uniqueness of Christ was still undeniable. Persistently until the "Constantinian Assumption" they gave no blind, irrational servitude to the emperor. In their negotiations what they offered Rome was a conscious, vigilant and critical compliance. As Lohfink puts it, "there was a clear distance between the Christian communities and the rest of society - especially in the first two centuries. This distance was concretised in constant refusals" against the apparatus that spanned and maintained the whole Roman society.

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In listing their social and political non-compliance, Lohfink with solid notation of sources, notes that Christians sustained their defection by, "refraining from attending matches of gladiators and animal fights, from participating in processions and parades, and from eating at public meals and banquets, such as those on imperial holidays." 144 Far from standing outside the historical process, the followers of Jesus gave the veneration of the gods, and the claims of the imperial cult no real place; it was not mild non-attentiveness they gave, rather the practice of the Christians was sustained defection. A defection that earned the objection and scorn of many within the empire. Such as the bitter complaint in Minucius Felix's Octavius (12. 5-6), where Caecilius rails on the Christians:

Have not the Romans without your God empire and rule, do they not enjoy the whole world, and lord it over you? Meanwhile in anxious doubt you deny yourselves wholesome pleasures; you do not attend the shows; you take no part in the processions; fight shy of public banquets; abhor the sacred games, meats from the victims, drinks poured in libation on the altars. So frightened are you of the gods whom you deny! You twine no blossoms for the head, grace the body with no perfumes; you reserve your unguents for funerals; refuse garlands even to the graves, pale, trembling creatures, objects for pity—but the pity of our gods! Poor wretches, for whom there is no life hereafter, yet who live not for to-day. 145

Lohfink notes that: "It would be a mistake to presume that Christian refusal took place only when veneration of the gods or the imperial cult came into play," the list of Christian repudiation in the ancient church extended into "the practices of cremation, the exposure of new-born children, and especially pagan marriage morality." Specifically he posits, as I have already argued, that: "The final and most profound reason for the Christian distance from the pagan society must have been the preserved knowledge that Jesus wanted to

144 Lohfink, in ibid., p. 164.
gather the people of God as a divine counter-society.” Alves has a comment that is instructive here, concerning the backward and forward looking subversive nature of the people of God. His remarks apply not only to the early church, but equally into the age of the ancient church. Insightfully he remarks that:

In the Old Testament the community of Israel was a counter culture. Its lifestyle, values, and patterns of human interrelatedness were radically different from and opposed to the dominant cultural patterns of its environment. The early Christian community was ... an underground counter culture. The reason it was so ruthlessly persecuted was because the dominant powers perceived it as a basically dysfunctional and subversive social reality. The values it wanted to realise and live out implied in the long run the abolition of the very foundations of the Roman Empire.

For Rome the state was supreme, and Roman citizenship gave the right of entry and admission into the glory that was the empire. Belonging to Rome required submissive patriotism and worship of the emperor cult as legitimating codification, and the way of ensuring the state’s welfare. But consistently believers gave supreme allegiance only to the rule of God. Because they believed that all the gods were nothing, they called upon their members to abdicate all other forms of worship. So they discredited all adoration but the worship of Jesus and in so doing they would not serve the behest of the state. Thus, for the church, earliest and ancient, Caesar and his empire could never be above Christ. It was not without reason therefore, that the adversative Rome always inevitably had to view Christianity as a growing contradiction; a teaching of disloyalty, a danger to good government and society.

Considered to be irritants, the Christian assemblies were eventually charged with atheism, anarchism, sacrilege and treason to the state. Through their faith and manner of life, the believers were accused of “hatred of the human race”

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146 Lohfink, in op. cit., p. 164.
(odium generis humani). Among the broad diffusion of opinions within the ancient Christian determination concerning the imperial claims, few spoke out more strongly than Tertullian, who, whilst approving of the Roman empire as a bulwark against savage and semicivilised life, disavowed Rome's national security state mentality, provocatively asserting: "Nothing is more foreign to us than the State."

Within the first three centuries being a follower of Jesus could not be construed as being non-aligned concerning ancient church's present, making for a new and humanising form Rome's national security state, because it meant believing a "different" narrative to the official story-line. The gospel's story-based imperatives as the remembering of Jesus' project continually impinged upon the of social organisation. The church as a counter society stood out in marked contrast to the pagan society that surrounded it. A clear indication that it sought to hold to Jesus’ visionary commonwealth of love is attested to in a remarkable section of Aristides' Apology (15-16). In its beauty it expresses the gospel’s transformatory power at work in the ancient world.

But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they hew come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth ... from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe .... Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honour father and mother and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols (made) in the image of man; and whatsoever they would not that others should do unto them, they do not to others and of the food which is consecrated to idols they do not eat, for they are pure. And their oppressors they .... comfort and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies.

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149 Lohfink, in op. cit., p. 165. Lohfink, quoting from the Latin text cites Tertullian's remark as: "nee ulla magis res aliena quam publica."
Further, if one or other of them have bondmen or bondwomen ... through love toward them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brothers and sisters without distinction. They go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from those who treat them harshly. And whoever has, gives to those who have not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take them in to their homes and rejoice over them as a very brother or sister for they do not call them brothers or sisters after the flesh, but family after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to their ability gives heed to that one and carefully sees to their burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to their necessity, and if it is possible to redeem such a one, they set them free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them. And if any righteous person among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God; and they escort their body as if they were setting out from one place to another. . . Such, O King, is the commandment of the law of the Christians, and such is their manner of life.  

From the hortatory character of this text, and its intention as an idealised statement of Christian life (similar to the constructs in Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-37), it is not difficult to understand its evangelistic value. It bespoke of and told of an alternative society wherein lives were “redescribed” in the midst of the old order. It served to remind the church of who it was in its history and in its future. History would prove that life lived in this fashion was not politically innocent. From Christianity’s different reality referent it created a crisis of decision, continually demanding that discrimination be made between the living Christ’s effectiveness on the historical scene and the competing kingdom of Caesar.

To make these assertions regarding the radical nature of discipleship in the early centuries of the church is not to be party to some modern anachronistic intellectual gymnastic. In this affirmation one does not need to search for legitimation in obscure texts or current expressions of liberative theologies. All that is needed is a comprehensive understanding of the sociopolitical life-choices of Jesus' time and to take with historical seriousness the church's apostolic contention concerning Jesus' person and work in the early history of the church. Concomitant to these recognitions is the fact that the theology of lordship was inclusive of, but more than an individualistic claim and activity. It was essentially a commitment made from a community base to a new order that fundamentally denied the old and by implication bought every believer into a conflict of loyalties, not only by what they were affirming, but by what they were not affirming. A disciple who is constantly reborn by the inner conviction of the Spirit of Jesus could not say yes to two lords at once. The reality and truth of the Christian witness within the early centuries of the church surely reflect a self-understanding among Jesus' first followers worthy of our emulation. As Lohfink with emphasis puts it:

*It would be a miserable hermeneutic to tone down ancient Christian texts merely because we moderns, in our sceptical resignation, no longer consider it possible for communities to take the gospel seriously.*\(^{151}\)

No sincere Christian can disguise or dismiss the fact that the following of Christ meant making manifest the reconstruction of the world in the manner of the kingdom. Whenever this has not happened, or whenever the questions of worship and loyalty have become blurred, what has resulted has been counterfeit faith and false witness. The God of Jesus Christ never comes under obligation to the divine right of Caesar or any other ruler. Despite numerous attempts to placate the powers, to purport the political innocence of

Jesus' message from the front ranks of the early church to this present time, the gospel has always been revolutionary. As Miranda insists, "to uphold an apoliticism of the gospel is to uphold the nonrealisation of the gospel." Before the church of the latter centuries associated itself with the imperial establishment in a monolithic coherence, the struggle of the apostolic contention seeded a continuing obedience to the reign of God above any rewarding conformity to this world order.

Concerning the intersections between word and world, as I have indicated from the initiative of this work, my hermeneutical methodology and writing style is not that of some "detached observer." Openly I choose the bias of the kingdom. Herzog confirms my meaning when he writes:

Some would contend, no doubt, that scholarship should be objective or neutral, as if objectivity were possible in historical study. It seems increasingly obvious that the claim to objectivity is essentially a rhetorical ploy to assert the authority of an argument, and because all efforts to remain neutral actually serve the interests of some group, it is impossible to take refuge in neutrality.

Given the impossibility of a non-neutral reading strategy of text-events past and present, my conviction is that the liberative narratives of the Bible should become normative for the church's sociopolitical alignments. Concerning systematic and discipleship theology, this means that the closer contemporary text-events approach or differ from the sociopolitical realities of Jesus' gospel, the more they need the confrontation and the reality check of his kingdom claims.

Commenting on the primacy of redemption as addressing total liberation in the midst of life, Käsemann posits in Rom. 10: 5-13 that the "acclamation" Jesus

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**is Lord**, does not pertain to an *inner* attitudized "faith of the heart," as an "expression of faith." Consequently the faith that is bespoken by this confessional statement should not be "interpreted merely as inner understanding. For the heart as the centre of personality means existence in is totality." Against privatised captivity and non-political meaning: "Universality rather than individuality is the point for Paul." This acclamation comes from, as Käsemann points out, a submission to an "adherence" of the creed of the Christian community, and as such it is "a summary of the gospel," which the community of faith intended by lucidity and precision of meaning to be a matter of instruction and commitment - to be learned and obeyed. In pithy style Käsemann submits:

Thus the voice of the righteousness of faith speaks through the church in distinction from the synagogue. The word is also near in the fact that it has a fixed place on earth and a concrete bearer. The promise of Joel 3: 5 LXX is thus fulfilled .... Salvation is found in the Christian community.154

The story of Jesus told by the Christian gospel describes the compelling tasks of being bound by his lordship and his conspiracy for life. Following his way necessarily involved drastic choices: choosing the kingdom beyond all other loyalties, joining his alternative community, challenging idolatry, confronting the empire, and defying the destructive myths through the discernment of his relationship with God.

For those who believed God’s grace in Jesus their new understanding revealed a joy and a freedom in the Spirit that had been hidden from their eyes up to that point. Within the gratitude of grace that became their celebration of life and its God-given goodness, the believer’s discovered that the kingdom’s meaning in history was not some abstract entity. The obstacles to following Jesus meant going the way of costly discipleship, symbolised by the taking up
of the cross (Mk. 8: 34) and their inability to envision life without worldly power and honour (cf. Mk. 9: 34; 10: 36).

Similar difficulties are mirrored today in our attitudes and conduct. Nevertheless, the story of the apostolic contention and the disciples struggles in their comprehension of Jesus’ way can help shape our discipleship journey as we confront contemporary “empire” and its policy makers with its underlying spirit of domination and violence.

f) Church and Empire: Fusing the Horizon of Jesus’ Lordship

What I have argued is that far from being a term of religious or political neutrality, the proclamation of Jesus's lordship by the church in its early centuries was not moderate or tolerant, nor selective in its investment of meaning. The claim of the gospel that specified the centrality of Christ disconnected gentile believers from the polytheistic pagan religions and cultures out of which they had come (cf. 1 Cor. 12: 2-3; 1 Thess. 1: 9). The gospel represented an antithesis of meaning to the codes of priestly-Roman rule and the pro-Roman Sadducean aristocracy. With evangelising force it carried the conviction that in the following of Jesus a different way of life was called for. It taught against the sociopolitical norms of the day, a new and better way; that life was to be lived according to the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6: 2; cf. 1 Cor. 9: 21). By faith and praxis in conformity with Jesus' teaching, it opened up a way that required a new obedience where the distinctions of race, sex, class, and culture were transcended (cf. Gal. 3: 28; Col. 3: 11). In this way the apostolic preaching caused cultural confusion and political collision.

As I have noted, until the time of the church's cooptation under Constantine, the way of Jesus' people was antagonistic to the jurisdictions of Roman religio

154 Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 290 292 (my emphasis).
concerning the place that imperial control played in undergirding the religious elites of the time. When the church moved from being a revolutionary minority to the imperially recognised majority within the "Constantinian assumption" it penetrated by compromise all ranks of society.\textsuperscript{155} "There was in consequence a loss of spirituality or, as Paul would have put it, of freedom. There was a gain in stability and collective strength. By the end of the third century Christianity was able to confront the most powerful corporation in ancient history - the Roman empire,"\textsuperscript{156} But this was at a great and immeasurable cost to its authentic life. Imperial acceptance and "orthodoxy" came at a fearful price. A faith that is free to admonish and usefully critique society requires a sociopolitical theology that is able to stand over against any or all national attachments and mythologies. For its criticism to be truly redemptive and capable of assuming a significant degree of responsibility for history, a liberative faith must be one that is reliant upon and founded upon a radically independent source of revelation.\textsuperscript{157}

Constantinianism opened up the way for "nominal Christianity" and "civil-religion."\textsuperscript{158} Securing by its accommodative religiosity a church-state alliance that compromised a believer's church - as it still does to this day through "Christendom". Vidler writes of a legend in the life of Sylvester who was Pope during Constantine's reign. "It says that at the moment when Constantine bestowed large endowments on the church a voice from heaven was heard to say, 'Hodie venenum effusum est in Ecclesiam,' 'Today is there


\textsuperscript{157} For a solid and helpful analysis of theology that is "political" and oriented to social praxis, see Johann Baptist Metz, Faith in History and Society (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

\textsuperscript{158} Moltmann carries the meaning of my critical view, see his essay, "The Cross and Civil Religion" in Jürgen Moltmann et al., Religion and Political Society (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974) pp. 9-47. See also the helpful essays of Willi Oelmuller and Johann Baptist Metz in this same volume.
poison poured upon the Church.""159 Speaking of the deleterious effects of what he named the "Constantinian Arrangement," Stringfellow saw it (as do many who argue for radical discipleship), as a defamation of the apostolic precedent, representing as he called it a "comity" from which the church urgently needs to recover.

It is, put plainly, an ethos that vests the existence of the church in the preservation of the political status quo. This inbreeds a mentality, affecting virtually all professed Christians, and most citizens whether Christians or not, which regards it as normative for the church's life to be so vested. And that has caused radical confusions in the relations of church and nation, church and state, church and regime. It has encouraged and countenanced stupid allegiance to political authority as if that were service to the church and, a fortiori, to God. Venerable though it be, this accommodation, and the way of conceiving of the juxtaposition of church and political authority that it has inculcated for so very long, accounts more than anything else for the profound secularisation of the church in the West and for the inception of Christendom as the worldly embellishment of Christianity.160

The task of theology consequently ecclesiology, considering the loyalty categories and attachments of our time, is to provide the antidote to this abiding poison of compromise by reassigning Jesus Christ the supreme place apostolic theology gave him as disclosed in the biblical liberative narratives. As the church conflicts with the corrosive power of sin and violence in their social and personal manifestations, the pertinence of meaning in christocentric an ecclesiological affirmation was (and still should be) to lead the church to freedom. In our church life today, we can only live authentically as Christ's followers; that is as a community of believers, where the ongoing conviction

that God calls us afresh to occasions of the kingdom’s liberating power are firmly in place.

g) A New Beginning and a Transformative Process

In the faith and practice of Jesus earliest followers, the embrace of his lordship represented more than some unlawful defective language-game. It lead them to a change not only on the level of cognition but also to a change in the affective-motivational basis of their social action. In the widening of its meaning horizon it broke out of any ideological mystification. The hermeneutic of Jesus' lordship pointed to an entirely new way of being - changing one's interpretation of self and others - shattering the ineluctable web of fate. It lead to the transformation of historically obsolete domination, providing the way for emancipatory action in which knowledge and political will became united.

Against the worldly embellishments of the call to discipleship it is always necessary to understand the meaning of κύριος Ἰησοῦς as "enacted speech" in the theatre of history. We must lend ourselves to its persuasion in order to bring alive for our time the hope and practice of what it means to follow Jesus today. Which means assuming the risky responsibility for the making of justice; believing that the Bible’s assertion is that God is concretely revealed both in the groaning cries for liberty and the struggle against everything that destroys human welfare.

Our need in this undertaking is to become sufficiently uncompromised as to merit the description of being “post-Constantinian”. This is an essential part of the contemporary challenge facing all Christians, in every part of our church life; to embody through costly discipleship a justice-making alternative that is more faithfully committed to the reconstruction of human community. This is an event of first importance, to wrestle with the problem of how to
become a church of liberative ecclesiology; a people freed from the spell of any Constantinian structured vision. Today, the “church” with its councils, missional organisations, and liturgical forms needs to recapture as its guiding ideal that it exists fundamentally for the sake of the kingdom and not for the sake of Constantinian convenience. Kierkegaard also understood Christendom to be a grotesque distortion of biblical Christianity; a transformation of the gospel “into worldliness”, therefore a “crime” and for this reason he insisted that:

Every generation has to begin all over again with Christ and thus to present His life as the paradigm; but instead of this, Christendom has taken the liberty of interpreting the whole relationship simply historically, beginning by letting Him be dead - and then it triumphs!161

Cutting through ecclesiastical as well as political cant, this is the onus of a church that would be a believers church, and a free people for all people. As Friesen has written: “The burden is on us to allow the Spirit of God to create out of the church a just and justice-making political alternative to the Constantinian compromises (both old and new) that we have decried.”162 From within this critical framework, the inheritance of unique allegiance to Jesus’ βασιλεία project sets out and marks a path for Christian faithfulness. The church must open itself to the risk-taking of being a community in solidarity with those suffering poverty and repression beyond what any state-aligned revolution has ever claimed to be. This becomes the prerequisite for discovering a way beyond Constantinian captivity and the contemporary arrogance of “Christendom”.

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From within this purposeful activity there must be no attempt to ignore the reality that liberative struggle is always ambiguous, or that redemptive activity is impossible without compromise. Nor can there be any denial of some degree of situational accommodation. It is one thing to proffer compromise in the sense of flexibility and cooperation with all other humanisers, together with a willingness to live with life’s ambiguities and in this recognition to be aware of our own “falleness,” with our selfish motives and imperfect actions, and to reject dogmatism. But these accommodations and admissions are quite different to selling out to the system, or retreating into quietism or some accommodating triumphalism that is less than faithful to biblical radicalism into the type of compromise that bases decisions and life-alignments on expediency and safe passage in this world.

We must never resile from bringing the contradictions between the kingdom and imperial gospels to light. This type of compromise is most often seen in the division of personal and political ethics, choosing the soft option, the lesser of the two evils, and allowing the ends to justify the means. Giving over to this type of temptation is to be seduced by the dominate order according to the rules of empire; to be overwhelmed by it, to slip down into its paralysing contradictions, into a denial of the moral demands of the kingdom. Our bearings in this regard ought to be nothing more or less, than was the posture of our earliest sisters and brothers. This is not to suggest that we march backwards into the future. It is to affirm the place and “reconceiving” of our true story which tells of a different way than compromise. Utilising the “referentiality” of Mark’s narrative as the ground of gospel communication, Myers adduces:

It legitimated neither defection, nor withdrawal, nor reform minded moderation, nor Maccabean triumphalism, nor despairing acceptance of a world dominated by the powers. It called for resistance to the rule of the “strong man,” and the creation of a new world: a practice of radical
discipleship .... But this was the way of the cross: to the Romans a symbol of hegemony, to Mark the sign of the kingdom come.\(^\text{163}\)

Those who seek to follow today and live from the moral energies of Jesus’ story must become people (as were the earliest followers), who try to make God’s rule tangible in a world fraught with contradictions. While Christian theology’s starting point is the theatre of God’s revelation throughout the Old Testament narratives, together with the pristine witness of Jesus’ first followers and the christological concentration of their faith, we need to be always aware of the dynamic historical interaction between divine promise and fulfilment.

Raúl Vidales rightly comments that, "biblical truth is characterised by the fact that it is projected into history, and that this historical projection is a concrete dimension of the eschatological promise. Biblical truth is related to history, not only by virtue of its formal structure but also by virtue of its content"\(^\text{164}\) From this dynamism, true discipleship, and all theological methodologies must always be alert to the "process of integrating the multiform aspects and concrete embodiments of faith into the unique, all-embracing eschatological Mysterium Dei that is being realised in history."\(^\text{165}\) If we are to know the way towards our relevant salvation, we must be thus aware. In this awareness we need to heed and utilise Gadamer's injunctions, indeed to push the edges of his investigations and to move into the area of cultural-political hermeneutics. This shifts our attention to the task of making the hermeneutical bridge to our situation; to articulate a sense of the integrity of the texts and language in relation to present cultural and sociopolitical critique; to narratively “fuse the horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*), because:

\(^{165}\) Raúl Vidales, ibid., p. 39.
Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutical task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation but consciously bringing it out.\textsuperscript{166}

h) “Reconceiving” the Way of Jesus

When we employ the concept of cultural-political hermeneutics and through our life-praxis apply discipleship’s meaning in front of the liberative narratives as they impact contemporary history it is then that we begin to understand the implications of Jesus’ lordship both in the past and the present more deeply, more applicably. Understanding Jesus’ programme of salvation and liberation in terms of the sociopolitical location in which it was first construed makes for critical awareness concerning our own historical conditions. To become ruthlessly clear about the biblical message and passionately committed to it cannot but effect our paths of fidelity and witness in the midst of the world’s current “civilisation of terror”.\textsuperscript{167} Sobrino gives voice to Christ’s lordship, and the consequences for those who stand against and dare to deny the contemporary rule of empire; the rule of the idols of domination and death.

Women and men have shed their blood - people from El Salvador, from Spain, and from the United States. People from different confessions, from different faiths, from different places, are united in their soul, as we all are by the tragedy in El Salvador and also by the commitment of the martyrs. We all know why these people ended on the cross, why they were killed. They dared ‘touch the idols of death.’ .... Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador defined idols as the accumulation of

\textsuperscript{166} See Hans-Georg Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method} (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 273. I am aware that Gadamer does not move in the same directions that I do - but his prompting is invaluable. He does not overtly or concretely explore “the who” of narrative discourse in a way that impacts hermeneutics with the rich details of social or political location. He seems to hold back from an engagement with those meanings and implications that are so essential to relevant interpretation concerning the “in front” of the texts. Nevertheless, the notion is there and his research is most enabling.

wealth and the doctrine of national security. Those who dare touch these idols get killed.\textsuperscript{168}

Apprehensions of this sort, be they ever so stinging are most needful because the great danger of national security state totalitarianism exists still - in our time. The more discipleship leads us towards a hermeneutic of engagement and testimony to the kingdom of the crucified God in the midst of current national security states with their violent determinations and societal directions of public and private life, the more we need the impetus and the truth of Jesus' liberative praxis. A vital reconceiving of his purpose can renew biblical faith for a living encounter with the deeper currents of our time. Christian witness must constantly purge itself of its own complacencies, and distempered forms. It must relate itself constructively to the world to determine human purpose because there are haunting parallels between the situation of Jesus and our age. Being mindful of his higher insistence we do well to keep in mind Hannah Arendt's warning concerning our contemporary situation, where she concludes:

Deadly danger to any civilisation is no longer likely to come from without. Nature has been mastered and no barbarians threaten to destroy what they cannot understand, as the Mongolians threatened Europe for centuries. Even the emergence of totalitarian governments is a phenomenon within, not outside, our civilisation. The danger is that a global universally interrelated civilisation may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages.\textsuperscript{169}

To take up Vidales' observation again, our discipleship existing at the place of where the Word intersects with the world, "entails a close and intimate relationship between its own existence as time and time as lived being. Thus

liberty, time, and history constitute the broad horizon in which we come to comprehend the truth according to Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{170}

As we survey the moral and political miasmas of society it is constantly necessary to affirm the hermeneutical process and the provocative discipleship claims of the liberative-narrative of God. Our need through a restored naiveté and inspired spontaneity is to hear again God’s word in Scripture as a rendering of life’s joyful and meaningful possibilities. In the recovery of our story it becomes possible for us to resist the Bible’s reduction to a flat historical work rather than the living Word of God to the church. Related to this is our need to “reconceive” the reading of the biblical narratives according to a christocentric concentration and “praxic discourse” for our time.

Constitutively, the biblical narratives of God’s willing in the illuminations and emancipations of the prophets are revealed in Jesus Christ and his liberation programme. By them and their more total vision of human welfare we are sustained and challenged. In every age they are foundational for a recovery of the church’s authentic, life giving fresh meanings to everyday experiences and revealing the staleness and fatuity of much that passes for novelty and innovation. Their motif of radical discipleship is constant, and their impetus and empowerment continue. By grace, passaged by the liberating memory of Jesus they are fulfilments of their own intentions when enacted in obedient action. Thus, there is no severing of the text-events "then" from a direct reinvigorating relationship to our lives, between the reader and the text-events "now." Which means as each of us “read” we are being “read” and enlivened by the christocentric affirmations of the first disciples. And from their powerful interventions, in face of every obstinate bondage on the journey, the adventure of our true life in following Jesus stands as a beckoning towards a more human future.

\textsuperscript{170} Vidales, in op. cit., p. 39.
Conclusion

Radical Discipleship: a Centre and Frontier for the Future

"To be a Christian is to believe that a human being of this concrete history of ours, who loved us in loving the people of his time to the point of giving his life for them, who loved the poor by preference and revealed God to us, and who therefore came into confrontation with the great and powerful of his time and was finally executed as a subversive, is God."


"If the People of God want to know what they must do, they must first rediscover who they are."


a) Discipleship and the Divine Initiative

Herein what I have argued is that commitment to the truth of Jesus Christ's way as revealed by God in Scripture is the interpretative criterion of radical discipleship. It is faith in what God through grace has revealed and done in the crucified and risen Jesus that constitutes the basic presupposition and point of departure for all Christian life. Both the narrative of the earliest believers in the New Testament and our story in this age of "competing gospels" are given cohesion by the centrality of Jesus Christ. By who he was in history, and who he is in our present, and what he liberatively continues to do. Following Jüngel's logic my christological assertions are determined, not by some abstract Christ-principle, but by the continuing history of Jesus Christ.¹

In the truth of God's revelation to the world, Christians are bound together in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, maintained by the showing forth of God's faithfulness in "the majestic pre-eminence of grace". Without this biblical witness wherein Jesus of Nazareth was revealed by God as the Christ

¹ I am here following Webster's enunciation of Jüngel's specificity regarding whether or not theological assertions can claim to be "Christian". See J. B. Webster, Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to his Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 130.
of the Christian story we would have no reliable discipleship narrative at all. What God has, and continues to reveal in Jesus of Nazareth is not only a pattern of faithfulness, a model, an exemplar, but also an enabling through the Spirit in the ongoing dynamic of God’s willing.

The way and life of discipleship is not only patterned after but continually guided by Jesus’ own life-alignment and ministry. “Following” can take place only because God in Christ has made it possible. The ongoing narrative of Jesus in his obedience to the rule of God is both our starting-point and our end. What we have received we have been given, and what we have been given is nothing less than a living relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

If, then, someone asks us what new thing Christ has brought into our life, we have, in the last analysis, only one response: he has brought himself. His most real and most transforming contribution is not what he has given us but what he himself is, in union with God and the Holy Spirit. His newness is not to be found in the gifts he offers but in the love with which he has given himself.3

Within this matrix I have drawn out connective radical discipleship hermeneutics concerning the place and meaning of discipleship in the confrontation of world orders both at the time of Jesus and in our current history. Consequently, because of commitment to Jesus as Lord, our Christian existence in this age involves believers in very definite acts of resistance and promise against contemporary expressions of imperial domination. Against that system, that from its axioms of banality condemns millions of exploited nonpersons into cruel suffering and death. Those innocents whose hope depends on a fundamental restructuring of the international orders that hold them in bondage.

b) Making Choices: For the Kingdom, Against the System

From the reading strategy of radical discipleship, I examined the competing gospels within the hermeneutics of empire and its analogous relationship to the theology and politics of the national security state phenomena both in the world of the early believers and ours. Following Ricoeur's notion of understanding as "expansive thinking" as I pursued this hermeneutical task the more I recognised the phenomena of "Caesaroimperialism" as iniquitous and deserving of critical examination. This is an ongoing agenda facing scholars of biblical radicalism in the attempt to make the connections concerning the sanctions of evil. In order to do this we will need to maintain an ongoing interplay between the past, the present and the future in our re-reading of the biblical message. Concomitantly moreover, to continue to explore a Ricoeurian "reservoir-of-meaning" for our time.

The existent order of domination today predominates through the duplicities of militarism, racism and materialism: all of which are possible in part because as individuals and churches we have become accomplices within its dominating cultural prescriptions. As acolytes of affluence, capitalist competition, power, appearance, consumerism and self-grounded individualism we in the First World church are part of a way of life that is vastly different to biblical discipleship. In the grip of imperial faith, we have joined the agents of oppression, and in the maintenance of the status quo our "religious" existence is monumentally idolatrous. All of which adds up to the dictum that bourgeois cultural complicity equals Gospel duplicity.

Rather than lead us into the maintenance of stability - business as usual - within a world order of violence and imperial domination, the biblical story

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and the apostolic *kerygma* concerning the lordship of Jesus offers subversive narratives from which to critique world orders old and new. This means that the hermeneutics of radical discipleship ought to make us suspicious about any conclusions concerning the biblical message that diminish its liberative intentions. The gospel of God’s grace within the message of the prophets and Jesus’ liberation project contain the determinative elements of Christian theology upon which the early Christians predicated their evangelical appeal, and which today represents the essence of the church’s true life. The church will only be renewed as it preserves and robustly proclaims the truth of the liberation motifs of the kerygmatic foci. Lying behind all our talk of faith formation and church renewal, there must be a resolve to hold to the apostolic continuity that Jesus and the New Testament writers stood for. Lest being overtaken by a fictitious *kerygma* - one that betrays the script of biblical radicalism - we find ourselves saying one thing and the New Testament proclamation another. Thus Jesus as lord, is both the criticism and the hope of the church.

Beyond the lordship of cheap grace, the church’s responsibility in every age is to show the truth of its evangelistic continuity within its *raison d’être*, Jesus Christ. The saviour of the world is the saviour of the church, in the words of Moltmann:

> The Church cannot be renewed by social and political criticism from the outside. Basically, we do not need an accommodation of the Church to the modern world and its sociopolitical movements. We need the renewal of the Church from within. The central nerve of the Church is Jesus himself, for every Church calls itself by his name and appeals to him. We must take the Churches radically at their word. Jesus is the criticism of the Church from the inside. He is the criticism of its untruthfulness, for he alone is the origin of its truth and its freedom. Whether a Church or a Christian community in a divided, oppressive and alienated society has a divisive, alienating and

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oppressive effect depends ultimately on whether Jesus has become alien to it or whether he is the Lord who determines its existence. The social crisis of the Church in the contemporary world is precisely its identity crisis. The problem of its credibility in the world stems from its faith crisis. The Church will be renewed and will become a bearer of the freedom of Christ to the extent that it remembers Christ and him alone and hears no other voice but his.⁵

c) Called Again to Costly Grace and Holy Living

In bringing this work to a conclusion I cannot do so without addressing myself briefly to the ongoing life of the church. If we are ever to move beyond the middle class canon and its mystagogues, observations like Bonhoeffer's will have to have compelling relevance to the mainline churches of the First World: "The price we are having to pay today in the shape of the collapse of the organised church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost." His words accuse us of being so overtaken by a "humanitarian sentiment" that much of what we present represents "unending streams" of cheap grace. Whereas all the while, "the call to follow Jesus in the narrow way was hardly ever heard."⁶

In light of the potential of the church's calling as a creative vanguard of Jesus' liberation project we have good reason to lament the "spiritual corpses" of our congregations. Consequently Bonhoeffer's stinging question must concern us as we ponder the appropriateness of our missional endeavours: "Where were those truths which impelled the early church to institute the catechumenate, which enabled a strict watch to be kept over the frontier between the church and the world, and afforded adequate protection for costly grace?" If the apostolic content of the Gospel has not changed, the question facing us is, in our prescriptions of discipleship, have we? P. T. Forsyth spoke of a religious climate when:

⁵Bonhoeffer, in ibid., p. 45
Spirituality without positive content seems attractive to many minds. And the numbers may grow of those favouring an undogmatic Christianity which is without apostolic or evangelical substance, but cultivates a certain emulsion of sympathetic mysticism, intuitional belief, and benevolent action.

We are in such a time. Today in many circles it is intellectually respectable to be religiously eclectic - "Christ and others" - point the way to salvation, so the spirit of the time goes. The church betrays its trust and throws its life away when it acquiesces to such pressure. Unsure of itself, the church today needs to heed the timely truths of Kierkegaard. As he viewed the church "contained" in his day by the dictates of Christendom, his sharp eye saw not just contrasting belief systems, but contradicting systems. "Since that time Christendom has been increasing in numbers year by year - and what wonder; for people are only too eager to take part when there is nothing whatever to do but to triumph and to enjoy the parade."

He understood that Christendom had obscured and belittled the determination of discipleship. It had substituted observances of the sacraments for the "fear and trembling" in which the life of discipleship must be worked out. His concern was that counterfeit Christianity had abated the price of discipleship and compromised its meaning by substituting an easy optimism of belief for real and ethically demanding commitment. For Kierkegaard it was not a matter of Jesus Christ and "others". The others may be valid in their own right, but compared to Christ and his claims about God and the kingdom, these stood over against each other with definite qualitative difference. An all prevailing mediating theology, akin to a "both-and" inclusivism Kierkegaard opposed with vehemence.

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10 For Christ and Christianity as "the absolute" see ibid., p. 66 f; p. 128 and passim.
This "knight of faith" would have none of the smooth all-accommodating, all-explanatory schema of a Hegelian metaphysics. No "both-and" for him, rather a ruthless irreducible "either-or." Let the truth have out and let the paradoxes stand. He maintained it better to stay by the gospel's claims in all their naked uncompromising essentials than deny their profound meaning - salvation and truth in Jesus Christ - than to artfully try to make them fit into a pleasing preconceived pattern stripped of all their unpalatable rough edges. Let the cost of discipleship be clear, let the Gospel's claim be heard: he was convinced, Jesus is Lord! Religiosity may speak of the same "kind" of salvific issues, but the differences are not just in "kind" but in "degree." The New Testament's claim was that, Jesus is God and those who would ultimately please God must follow him. Was this an offence, making for bafflement? Yes, certainly. But he dared as did the primitive Christians to believe in their "nevertheless against the world." Against the reasonableness of the age to choose the absurdity of faith - this was his way. Kierkegaard saw there to be no obscurantism in his position; for what is "reason" but an instrument of human perplexity. Should the Gospel's wisdom be obviated by human bafflement? Could not reason's failure be faith's opportunity? What greater sin than to fail in the exercise of faith and the faithful following of Christ? His argument was, if human bafflement evokes faith in a gracious saving God, failure to embrace faith's absurdity is itself an affront to reason. Let reason be affronted that humanity may rise to the height of faith's supreme achievement in treating as final and absolute the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ - the absolute truth of the Gospel which human reason pronounces to be absurd and irrational.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) For a view of how Kierkegaard saw "reason" as having real limits concerning the knowledge of God and believing faith, see Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton
d) Beyond Indifference to Historical Engagement

If, as Christians, we could face the question of the effects that our ambivalence and alien allegiances have incurred, we could the more adequately begin the painful but necessary process of repentance and reparation. Leading us to all enveloping, penetrating change in the areas of personal and political holiness. And with this necessary discipleship discipline of μετανοία, we could change sides and begin reappropriating the heritage of the primitive believers that is the inspiring resource of every would-be follower. The revolution of God demands that we see the world around us differently. To look from the vantage point of the kingdom; to be overtaken with a corrected perception and deeper insights; that contemplative action may save us from the debilitations of indifference. In the suffering and condemned ones of this earth Christ the crucified one waits for his people to “do justice and to love mercy”. It is a dreadful reality that even today many sectors of the church still adopt a mentality of indifference and accompanying spiritual practices totally out of touch with the real historical interests and predicaments of the world’s desperately poor.

Many today in their attempts at being comfortably happy in the face of so much mendacity and cruelty reject the biblical claims of selflessness and humanisation. Subverted by the corpses of the innocents, masses of apathetic and unconcerned people increase the power of evil by their indifference. Indifference’s power lies supremely in its ability to trivialise and conceal human need. Spreading by its power a carefree optimism; telling us to be content with simply knowing about world events (indeed being well read about them). Then as informed information brokers, being somewhat concerned, but not really.

Indifference succeeds when it teaches us to notice, but not genuinely care. It succeeds when it quietly assures us that human problems can be solved with a little more morality and medicine and psychology on "their" part; when "they" practise progressive socio-economic politics against the world's ills. All of which, of course do not involve us, or alter the course of our life's direction. Indifference works to offer a way of escape, of comfort to our insensibilities. Whenever it does this it creates a situation of no hope and no consolation to the oppressed. Just as in Jesus' parable about the rich person's irresponsible conduct towards Lazarus, indifference creates in us a callous uncaring attitude toward the abused and homeless. Once it captures our minds it closes us off not only to the demands of compassion, but as with the rich man "Dives", having become so absorbed in ourselves, we become closed off and indifferent to the revelation of God. Even when God cries out to us from the poor at our doorstep we fail to hear or see (cf. Lk. 16: 19-31).

Indifference to the plight of the poor always has it manifold justifications with its redoundable ability to ensure its own dreadful reality. It accomplishes this by insisting that personal choices and life-alignments are not really significant. Its ability lies in its power to convince us and others that nothing we think, or do can, or will make a difference. We must not overlook or deny the fact that its debilitating performance is real and constantly successful. We cannot deny its powers of falsehood that deceive in a thousand different forms. As such we must not deny that in its nefarious ways it is real and brisk and vital, and always forming a dreadful influence in the interchange of thoughts or opinions through the shared symbols of individuals and their collectivised relationships. Indifference needs to be taken seriously as the opponent of God and humanity, and fall under the strong suspicion of radical faith's concern. Elie Wiesel holds that:

We need, above all, to be shaken out of our indifference - the greatest source of danger in the world. For, remember: the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. The opposite of faith is not arrogance but
indifference; the opposite of culture is not ignorance but indifference; the opposite of art is not ugliness but indifference. And the opposite of peace is indifference to both peace and war - indifference to hunger and persecution, to imprisonment and humiliation, indifference to torture and persecution.¹²

For the Christian church the reclamation of the truth of God in Christ enshrined in our history and tradition is always more dangerous, more potent than any of the vessels it which our story is contained. It is more powerful than our best attempts to reduce its liberative intent to indifference and nonthreatening platitudes. It represents discontinuity with the established order and harbingers the consciousness of sin which leads to repentance. In our turning again to God, we must not resile from the way of costly grace into what McCaughey has denounced as a deceit, "a series of human aspirations."¹³

e) The Church and the Personal Address of Jesus Christ

The great threat facing the church today is not the possibility that it might become a minority in society. But rather, that it may misunderstand itself so completely as to think of itself as a bourgeois religious entity beholden to the system's techniques of control and not an apostolic people telling out the dangerous "storied" memory of Jesus. The true church is never about individualised persons or councils of self-serving ends, but rather of a people of surrendered obedience. A community of people "called out" to be a movement of salvation and justice enacting the freeing actions of the true God who is the insatiable lover of all. The gracious Lover who has proved in Jesus that the church ... that all humanity is worth the blood of God.

As the beloved of God, "looking for righteousness and awaiting redemption, but, under grace, already liberated", the church must never as a betrayer of the

¹³J. Davis. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia
gospel interminably give itself over to becoming an ever accommodating Constantinian institution loftily rationalising its identity.\(^\text{14}\) In contrast and in contest with the rulers of this age we are always meant to be a celebrating community "re-membering" and enacting stories of freedom and deliverance with the evident redemptive and political intention of affecting those who listen by making them "not hearers but doers" (cf. Jam. 1: 22). The idea of Christian truth without reference to christopraxis on the side of struggling peoples as the subject of history is a subordination of the church's apostolic calling.

Our ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ, to the crucified and risen Lord who stands among and outside us among the poor is, as Sölle determines, centred on that One who had "neither wealth nor weapons". Christ crucified within the community of the lost is the one who "portrays the life of the world for us to see." This Jesus, the apostle to the church, is the only one who can authentically correct it through the obedience of authentic discipleship; by pointing us towards the ground of our true being, to God. And this is possible, because the Holy Spirit as the subversive memory of Jesus, is God's evangelist to all the churches: "Christ is God's exegesis, the exposition who made God known to us (Jn. 1: 18)."\(^\text{15}\)

To their great detriment, many within the mainline churches continue to diminish or neglect the theology of costly grace. Instead of maintaining, and redeeming a theology of holistic conversion and discipleship formation - principles that are essential to the life and growth of authentic Christianity - too many mainline clergy and churches take the soft option regarding these missiological areas. Exasperation and anger towards conservative interpretations of the gospel are understandable, but they must not be allowed

\(^{14}\) The quotation is from Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p.332.

to strip the church of the essential place and practice of evangelistic endeavour.

**f) Personal and Political Evangelism: the Ongoing Task**

We are bound to recognise, as Emilio Castro states that, "no Christian solidarity with the poor can exist which does not point to the totality of the kingdom promises, including the invitation to personal faith and witness." Or, to put it in other words, where a sound theology of conversion is in place, there will be no operative antithesis between "political evangelism" and "personal evangelism." They are inextricably wrapped up together. We cannot evangelise in the public domain without reference to the facts of life that exist in that domain. Those facts include the recognition that political structures determine who gets "opportunity" and who does not and who gets justice and who does not.

And as soon as we make this point, we make the one that undergirds it; a converted political order will only survive so long as there are converted people - prayerful people who are open to the ongoing conversion of God. Without the practice of personal holiness, the practice of public holiness degenerates into secularity. Without public holiness, personal spirituality runs the danger of being vague, otherworldly and alienated. The only authentic practice of the following of Jesus must take place within life and politics. In no way can it claim to be biblically radical if it shuns the realities of life and history. In other words, discipleship must be lived from within a deep relationship to the spirit of Jesus. A relationship that knows the presence and touch of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and souls as well as in our words and deeds. "When all is said and done," says Sobrino, "without the spiritual life,

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apostolic work would be threatened from within. It would be cut off from its deepest roots.”

In the proclamation of the kingdom, Jesus’ disciples taught all who would listen how they should live in a proper relationship with God and with their neighbours; in healing the lives of individuals and in changing or overthrowing the demonic systems that crush and dehumanise. Gutiérrez’s amending words to the church are particularly helpful and worthy of recapitulation at this point:

Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbour. Evangelical conversion is indeed the touchstone of all spirituality. Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ - present in exploited and alienated humans. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely. It means to commit oneself not only generously, but also with an analysis of the situation and strategy of action. To be converted is to know and experience the fact that, contrary to the laws of physics, we can stand straight, according to the gospel only when our centre of gravity is outside ourselves.

**g) Speaking a Redemptive Word to the Church**

It is as a lover of the church then, that I have with these interpretations of the possibilities and the promise of radical discipleship tried to point the way to renewal. Maintaining all the while that a second-hand, bourgeois acceptable and accepted system of cheap grace leads to shallow sincerity of belief and practice at best and mediocrity at worst. In framing the work in the way that I have, and enunciating the elements of Jesus’ call and βασιλεία project with its implications for authentic discipleship, I am hopeful that it will prove

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useful as an aid to all concerned church people. Hans Küng speaks for me when he says:

The Church must constantly reflect upon its real existence in the present with reference to its origins in the past, in order to assure its existence in the future. It stands or falls by its links with its origins in Jesus Christ and its message; it remains permanently dependent, for the ground of its existence, on God's saving act in Jesus Christ, which is valid for all time and so also in the present. It must never cease to reflect upon those origins. Specifically, it must meditate on the original testimony of faith, which remains a constant point of reference for the Church in any century. This original testimony is unique, incomparable and unrepeatable. And as such it is actively obligatory, binding and normative for the church in all ages.¹⁹

In each situation where the radical discipleship movement is present, it owes its impetus to that dangerously resurgent spirituality committed to the imitation of Christ. A discipleship that is never private, yet always personal. In a world that contains so much sham and in the midst of personal turmoil they have found the energy to continue by the early church's memory and enactment of Jesus' truth. With pristine rigour they have sought to remain persistent in their reading of the Bible. And this they do with sharp insights intended to provoke action and provocative opinions to contest the prevailing system ideology. This crude innocence in the midst of an imperialised church escalates discipleship's confrontative meaning when practiced in local and international sociopolitical levels.

Thus, it is not some pacifying legitimation of the prevailing paradigm of the system's domination that Christ's followers bring to current history. It is rather an option that strikes us so deeply that we must choose between ultimates, forcing us into a situation of "either or". And in this option sometimes confronting each other concerning our fidelity or lack thereof. What becomes determinative is our willingness to follow Christ without

qualification or conditions. We face the decision of clinging to our rights and First World entitlements or losing our lives, giving them away in a continuing process of conversion and seeing our dying to self expand and bring forth new life (cf. Mk. 8: 35; Mt. 10: 39; Lk. 17: 33 and Jn. 12: 25). These sayings are for us now. Today and everyday we must confront ourselves in light of their demand and promise. We must ponder them and pray through their meaning, and in the process believe in the possibility that our lives can be reclaimed by the Spirit. And that in the process we may be given fresh energy to follow Jesus beyond the apparent omnipotence of the system's claim over us. In all of this though, for those who seek to follow the way of Christ in the conflicts of history we are linked to resurrection hope, trusting in the apostolic contention that:

We are never abandoned to our fate .... Wherever we go we carry death with us in our body, the death that Jesus died, that in this body also life may reveal itself, the life that Jesus lives (II Cor. 4: 9, 10).

h) Risking a Precarious Existence

Radical discipleship groups both in Australia and in other countries are small, and their efforts judged to be modest. Their many stories together with those of other activists from around the world deepen their sense of contributing something hopeful, creative and effective. Their activist following of Jesus has taught them that they are not captive to the old order of domination or any new one either: that they are not surrogates of any system of oppression. And that their commission towards faithfulness is not authored by credentials, nor large achievements, or positions of power - for the kingdom breaks in from the margins.

Their insistence has been to embrace the path of vulnerability and sacrifice and the doing of the gospel's truth. In the witness and movement of
integrating faith with lifestyle within the ecclesial and political realities of the world, they have not always been sure of where home has been either. To be sure, at the limits of their endurance they have become "strangers and pilgrims." Having succumbed to the distant but present future of God and the constant lure of Jesus' call they have learned to see meaning even in their exile, and to discern the hand of God, not absent but present in the midst of their deepest distress. In their "lostness," their waiting in hope, they have discovered that God is their true and only home. They have and are always learning that "God's omnipresence overcomes the anxiety of not having a space for one's self."§ That the knowledge of the faithful God "provides the courage to accept the insecurities and anxieties of spatial existence."22 In the grip and certainty of the everywhere present God, they struggle to go on the believing that they are "always at home and not at home, rooted and uprooted, resting and wandering, being placed and displaced, known by one place and not known by any place." Strengthened even in loneliness, by the assurance and "certainty of the omnipresent God" they are visited with the assurance that they are always home - because of the faithfulness of God.23 All the while they seek to exhibit the radical difference that such a belief makes, as they, with new perceptions endeavour to show others the way home. Against the imperialist theological project, they have continued to hold on to the sorely needed vision of equity and righteousness, building justice churches and intentional discipleship communities as ramparts of the kingdom.

During the writing of this work I have reflected upon the ideas, practices, problems of this movement and the self-giving of many "notable un-notables". People in whose lives Christian affirmation does not become saccharine, people who have taught me never to say farewell to Christ's truth. Churches

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22 Tillich in ibid., p. 278.
23 I owe much to the beauty and strength of Tillich's insights here, see ibid., p. 278.
and communities who have lived deeply from a place of faith and human commitment. In contending for a authentic following of Jesus for our time they have refused to believe that falseness of commitment is inevitable. Against the stream they hold to a conviction of biblical radicalism. Unable to conform to the system they are made the stronger by a growing understanding of critical sociopolitical theology. Because of their risk-filled lives and efforts of justice, together with non-violence and human rights, my contention concerning the need for a radical disciple-centred theology is the more resolute. Theirs is no atrophied discipline, their witness to the gospel in a life-and-death struggle with “the spirits of the age” makes Christian conviction the stronger.

Therefore, my hope is for a fresh consideration, a reconceiving of discipleship. A catechesis that underpins the authenticity, the reliability, and depth of Jesus’ liberating strategy. A believing in the possibility that in this “new awareness” our lives may be reclaimed, and that from the midst of such an investigation will come - is coming - a meaningful committed evocation of radical discipleship’s meaning for our time. For God’s promise is this, there is from the passaged grace of the first believers a past inside our present and because of it a continuing invitation. Because of this there is now in the heart of history the promise and witness of a new future already here within our time. To live thus, with joy in and before God, is to live by grace in the confession of the vitality of the Word of God. The surety of this future of the kingdom’s hope and justice is attested to not by human effort, nor yet without it, but by Jesus and his call to follow.
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