

## The Third Petition

### §1. Will the Son of Man Find Faith on Earth When He Comes?

“Your Kingdom come” trains us not to rely on the regimes of the world for our lives but on the Regime of the Father. It does not refer to an inner spiritual dimension, nor to a Platonic hyper-reality, but to a specific kingdom that has approached in the coming of Jesus Christ.

What then is this YHWH Administration like? How does it operate? These questions drive us onward to the next petition, and to the present chapter.

Should we identify the Kingdom of God with the actual communities that swear allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ? If so, then isn't the Regime just a sadder version of the worldly regimes it supposedly confronts? Its divided churches – preoccupied with pursuing their constituents' usual interests for prosperity, power, and peace in the wider world, with advancing their ideologies in the contest of ideas, with preserving themselves and protecting their own – are just more interest groups in a world of coalescing, competing, and warring interest groups. *This* is the grand divine alternative? “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God,” Alfred Loisy famously observed, “but what came was the Church.” Library shelves are stocked with chronicles and analyses of the Church's assimilation to the world it came to save.

The typical paradigm traces the triumph (or downfall) of Christianity according to its gradual assimilation into the culture of the Roman Empire. The familiar story runs like this: Christians traded Jewish-style elders for Roman-style monarchical bishops. They traded local communities for an increasingly strict network of apostolic communities centered in Rome where the roads converged. They traded theological diversity for creedal uniformity. They traded universal participation for a professional clergy, and countercultural power for cultural power. In

sum, they arrived – or fell away – and entered a way of life that Christians have never really been able to exit, with a few marginal exceptions.

The previous chapter deferred to that paradigm, at least in part. However, we found it of limited value in moving beyond the impasse of worldly investment or withdrawal. Not the least among its weaknesses is that it, like both traditional and “radical” revisionist world history and Christian history, is Eurocentric. For hints at a more promising constructive path we looked not to Rome at the end of the earth but Caesarea and Syrian Antioch at the Church’s cultural frontier. What alternative paradigm lurks figurally in these domains?

Besides, I am an American, writing an American project in an American era. Eurocentric history has its place, but it misleads when we make too much of it. America is as much an alternative to Europe as a continuation of it. Moreover, it was originally English rather than French or German, and in the centuries since the Revolutionary War it has become something distinct, if still more English than continental in character. This may not be obvious on university campuses that Tom Wolfe rightly calls “little colonies of Europe” where the Continental traditions still dominate, but it is pretty obvious everywhere else. Caesarea stands for *any* capital and Antioch for *any* town – including New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Los Angeles. Masonic American Constantinianism is at least as Masonic and American as it is Constantinian, and its detractors are often just as American in their own ways. It is time to give these qualities their due and offer a specifically American perspective on America’s Christian cultures.

A resource here is Walter Russell Mead’s path breaking analysis, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (Routledge, 2001). Mead seeks to overturn a dominant paradigm for understanding American foreign policy. This Eurocentric account begins with the myth that America’s original vision was isolationist, innocent of the

intrigues of international politics and the “entangling alliances” they entail, and thus naïve and incompetent against colonial and post-colonial European approaches. To this myth it adds the corresponding myth that America abandoned its earlier innocence in favor of Continental-style *Realpolitik* in order to make headway as a great power in the world that World War I created.

That account is suspiciously reminiscent of the usual sagas of the Church’s Constantinian transformation. I smell a paradigm – one that might work well enough when conditions are similar to those of ancient Rome, but which in other contexts has to massage the evidence in order to produce the “right” results. Against that paradigm, Mead appeals to a body of evidence that the American republic had an aggressive, bellicose, complex, and sophisticated foreign policy tradition from its beginnings, and that there is more continuity than discontinuity over the twenty-one decades that transformed it from an agrarian British colony to the greatest power in the history of the world (Mead 2001, xvi-xvii). America, which is *not* another continental European power, has found her own way about the world, one that is not only distinct but remarkably more successful than the European approaches which have devastated and demoralized the little peninsular “continent” at the tip of Asia.

If this is so, then the pattern in the chaos of American Christianity, and perhaps world Christianity too, is not resistance against and then seduction by imperial power after all.

Mead traces four main schools of American self-understanding and foreign policy that have spanned America’s history. Businesslike Hamiltonians pursue American integration into international affairs on the terms that best serve American interests and particularly American commerce. Diplomatic Wilsonians concentrate on propagating American ideals across the world – democracy, human rights, and so on – and unapologetically seek to influence other states’ domestic affairs in order to advance them. Protective Jeffersonians fear the threat foreign

entanglements pose to fragile democracy at home, making them diplomatically cautious and sometimes even isolationist. Populist Jacksonians defend American honor and life when provoked, are proud of military strength, and are unembarrassed about their lower regard for the well-being of America's rivals and enemies.

As these American visions originally drew from its Christians' notions of life and mission, so the concerns of these four camps powerfully influence contemporary American Christianity. The Constantinian agendas of the oldest and most established churches have a distinctly Hamiltonian ring. Wilsonian internationalism haunts the mainline bodies that have turned mission into interreligious dialogue or imperialism and politically correct or incorrect activism. Jeffersonian worries reinforce the vast self-protective subcultures of fundamentalism and the elite networks of postliberalism. Jacksonian patriotism animates folk Christians of every ethnicity, social class, and denominational tradition.

For the *Hamiltonian* school, named after Alexander Hamilton, a primary responsibility of the federal government is using wise financial and trade policies to ensure national prosperity in an uncertain and even inhospitable world (Mead 2001, 110). When looking abroad, Hamiltonians are interested above all in promoting the economic interests of their constituents, because the heart of political strength is economic prosperity. A military priority is peaceful seas; a diplomatic priority is favorable terms for trade; a monetary priority is a stable system of finance and currency exchange. Because communal self-interest is their goal, Hamiltonians pursue it pragmatically. When Britain dominated the world, Hamiltonians sought to minimize the threats it imposed and exploit it to its best advantage (114-119). Once the British Empire collapsed, Hamiltonians picked it clean of its assets after World War II and assumed its former caretaker

roles without replicating its imperial structure (125-128). When conditions were favorable in the nineteenth century, Hamiltonians contended for protectionism at home and open ports abroad. Once the interwar economy of the early twentieth century made this no longer feasible, they shifted to favoring free trade (109-110). This is not mere self-interest or the zero-sum vision of the world that dominated in continental Europe, in which one power only wins if others lose. It is a hard but optimistic sensibility in which “business is the highest form of philanthropy” and “commerce is the fastest road to world peace” (127-128). One teaches the hungry to fish, and considers a poor catch just as powerful a lesson as a good one.

There is a strong Hamiltonian strain in American Christianity. Most American Christians think it is the Bible that advises that God helps those who help themselves, not Benjamin Franklin the Unitarian. Christian churches encourage their parishioners to get out of debt, to live below our means, to save for the future, to pursue self-improvement and invest in our children’s education – in sum, to thrive in the fallen world by living on terms favorable to ourselves. In fact, many Christian traditions have done this so successfully and for so long that their worldly achievements have dissolved other aspects of their character.

American Christianity is persistently Hamiltonian in dedicating most of its resources to the chief benefit of its own. Churches and Christian media are networking hubs for business, real estate, legal and financial services, contracting, medicine, therapy, cosmetics, mass media, books, music, and even health food. Christians found schools and colleges for our own children, then direct “charitable” fundraisers and capital campaigns to turn them into educational powerhouses. Churches have become multi-million-dollar entertainment centers – offering baroque musicianship and eloquent rhetoric for the upper crust and dynamic worship experiences and relevant practical wisdom for the rest of us. In an economy that tears community apart,

churches have structured themselves into large- and small- group gatherings in order to offer convenient and safe fellowship, friendship, and even romance. Many of these activities are formally undertaken in order to advance the gospel, but without vigilant supervision the activity itself often eclipses the original mission. Is this because the ulterior mission from the outset is not really the gospel, but the interests of the group? *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson (Multnomah, 2000) hit a nerve and sold millions for an embarrassing reason: Christians in America have been praying for God to enlarge their land ever since Jamestown. The Hamiltonian Church is Hamiltonian America at prayer, making philanthropy the highest form of business.

Christians in America have often engaged in strategies of “entrepreneurial pragmatism.” The Industrial Revolution overturned agrarian America even more radically than agrarian Europe, bringing severe dislocation along with almost constant growth. In response, Protestant Evangelicals pioneered a staggering range of social reforms. Franklin D. Roosevelt epitomized this approach when he described his method of ending the Great Depression: we will try something, and if it does not work then we will try something else.

Wesleyans in particular have excelled at entrepreneurial pragmatism, perhaps not coincidentally because their founder was – unlike Luther, Calvin, and company – a child of the Enlightenment. (Lutherans and Calvinists, by contrast, have tended to grimace at first but quietly follow suit when the innovations no longer seem so innovative and when their survival seems to be at stake). Entrepreneurial pragmatists responded to the Industrial Revolution with schools, the YMCA, the Salvation Army, the Temperance movement, Bible societies, labor unions, prison ministries, soup kitchens and shelters, revivalists, camps, lecture circuits, and *slide shows* – those distant ancestors of our stadium rock concerts and blockbuster summer films. These organizational, ministerial, and liturgical innovations created what James F. White calls a new

“frontier tradition” of Christianity that purportedly focused on revival but equally profoundly centered on *adaptation*. Its changes both remade industrial societies and industrialized the Christian faith.

This transformation was certainly revolutionary. It was also, in part, Hamiltonian business as usual. Tactics that proved impractical or ineffective could be abandoned as boldly as they had been adopted, because the underlying mission had not changed. Every adjustment to the opportunities and cruelties of industrial modernity sought to preserve and extend the life and reach of Christian communities on favorable terms. Entrepreneurial pragmatism’s underlying conviction is that the health of Christian communities is not merely a function of ideological or social purity, but of cultural commerce. There is optimism under this unremitting resolve, optimism grounded in a conviction that for all its sinfulness, still “this is my Father’s world.” “Beneath the Hamiltonian pinstripes beats the heart of a romantic dreamer,” Mead says. The Hamiltonian Christian’s dream is to glorify the Father by thriving as the Hebrews thrive in Egypt and Israel prospered in the midst of its enemies.

The trouble with Hamiltonian Christianity’s prosperity gospel is that the thriving easily overshadows the glorifying. James Tunstead Burtchaell’s *The Dying of the Light* (Eerdmans, 1998) chronicles the seemingly inevitable loss of Christian identity among the institutions of higher education that American denominations had founded in centuries past. Repeatedly, economic and competitive pressure slowly diluted the original missions of schools across the denominational spectrum (even those from the more Jeffersonian Dissenters). Every time these capitulations to the wider culture has provoked a new generation to found a new set of organizations with emphatically Christian mission statements; yet these too seem to drift away from their moorings despite every effort. Is it because an underlying strategy – not the only one,

but a constant one – is really a Hamiltonian vision that straddles the process of secularization? Most Christian schools are founded not just to strengthen orthodoxy but to give their constituents' children a head start in life. Parents want them to become cultured, to marry well, to become marketable and financially independent, and to preserve if not gain social status. From this charge they have *not* drifted, any more than America drifted from mercantilism to free trade and from defending itself against Great Britain to assuming her role as the policeman of world trade. It is only the particulars that have changed according to circumstances. One of those particulars seems to be the specifically Christian character of the prosperity. Hamiltonian communities devolve only into what they have been all along: vehicles of enlightened self-interest. Hamiltonians are sponsors of their regime, not subjects; Solomon is their patron saint, not Constantine.

Mead traces two converging ancestries behind the *Wilsonian* school of foreign policy. First, English Nonconformism produced powerful reform movements in Britain which spawned and influenced an American self-understanding in which equality, democracy, toleration, and peace were ideal not just for England's children but for the whole world. Second, the missionary movement that drove thousands from across America's Protestant denominations to the far corners of the earth made the United States (like England) a medium, instrument, beneficiary, and object of intentional cross-cultural transformation. These flowered in "a view that insists that the United States has the right and the duty to change the rest of the world's behavior" both internationally and domestically (138). Call it mission, moralism, microglobalization, or simply meddling; the fact is that the *Wilsonian* school of foreign policy is "a consistent and centuries-old foreign policy of the American people" (139) which bypassed the usual channels of official diplomacy and formal journalism and brought world consciousness into the sanctuary of every

typical church in America, as well as village commons around the world. It also spread beyond America's borders to jostle today with European-style *Realpolitik* as a foreign policy of every state west of the former Soviet Union (138). Wilsonian visions of both Christian and non-Christian varieties have driven democratization, human rights, literacy, economic development, public health advances, world peace, and of course evangelism from Latin America to the Middle East, Africa, South and East Asia, and the Pacific islands. Today Wilsonian visions are more likely to be left-of-center and secularist (143) and their institutions are more likely to be NGOs and international bodies than mission boards (146), and repentance for their past sins produces the shadow successors of relativism and multiculturalism as often as renewal and revivalism (155). Nevertheless, the same dynamic persists. Wilsonians demand to change the whole world, or at least write its master narrative, in ways conveniently hospitable to themselves.

Since Wilsonianism is indebted to the missionary movement, the Wilsonian flavor of American Christianity is obvious. It is also admirable: Millions of disciples have given sacrificially. Tens of thousands invested their whole lives in tasks that promised risk, obscurity, and poverty. Wilsonians put first the things that were least in the world's eyes: indigenous peoples hidden in jungles and insignificant islands, societies whose morals revolted western sensibilities, those made powerless by race, class, gender, or circumstance, and even outlaws and enemies of their causes. Much of what people of most every confession take for granted as right with the world owes to their prophetic and apostolic vision.

Nevertheless, Wilsonian Christianity's less attractive qualities, ranging from cultural insensitivity to condescension to outright imperialism, have made both liberal and conservative Christians squeamish about studying it too closely and reluctant to admit its staying power (140-

141). So, far from merely belaboring the obvious, looking Wilsonian Christianity in the mirror reveals features we had learned to overlook.

One such feature of Wilsonianism is that it habitually depends on American power won by other means. Domestically Wilsonians did not shrink from using federal and state power to advance their agendas, and today their liberal descendants rely on judicial activism, conservatives on legislation, and everyone on executive orders to right America's wrongs. As relief workers and social revolutionaries have depended on the protections and initiatives of their powerful governments when they ventured abroad (147), so missionary efforts depended from the beginning on English and American resources such as safe travel, a lot of money to pay for it, advanced western medicine, congregational literacy, sophisticated linguistics for accurate Bible translation, and diplomatic muscle to fend off and remedy persecution. This is as true in the age of the Internet as the age of the steamboat. Wilsonian checks are backed by Hamiltonian bank balances.

Lest this fact make the wealthy parents of youthful idealists more smug than they already are, Mead notes that the dependency goes in both directions. Like good-cop-bad-cop interrogators, these schools are a formidable combination that wins more concessions from opponents than either could do on its own. Together they have undermined classical colonialism and promoted global capitalism and democracy with breathtaking success (149, 162-165). Since both camps consider these conditions favorable to their own purposes, the two often find common cause (167-168). As a result, Wilsonians recovered in this age a hundredfold what they had left behind. A revolving door connects the Wilsonian Church and Hamiltonian America: Missionaries took responsibility for the pastoral care and moral policing of expatriates in diplomatic and business occupations (144-145), and in the 1940's missionary kids became

valuable assets and as many as half the “foreign culture experts” the American government and American-headquartered world businesses relied on during and after World War II (154). Mead likens large mission boards to early multinational corporations (142) – and sure enough, after decades of Mormon world missions, Utah is a cosmopolitan center of world business relationships (154) and a stronghold of patriotism, and the Mormon Church and its members hold stakes in a veritable mountain of global assets. While Jacksonians dominate the rank-and-file of America’s armed forces, Wilsonians also populate their numbers, fusing (and confusing) the aims of American defense, personal betterment, global democracy, and world evangelization.

If Hamiltonian power underwrites Wilsonian charity, Wilsonian mission also runs cover for Hamiltonian self-interest (171-172). As multinational corporations fund huge advertising campaigns trumpeting the chump change they throw at charitable causes, and states and counties close libraries symbolically in order to force bond funds and tax measures that mainly go into the pockets of public-sector employees and constituents, so in many American churches paltry missions and relief budgets receive glowing publicity while Hamiltonian projects receive the lion’s share of church funds. While other churches dedicate themselves more sacrificially to liberal or conservative Wilsonian ends, rare indeed is the church or denomination that truly foregoes traditional priorities and makes mission its financial, political, and cultural ordering principle.

These tactics are not purely cynical. The Hamiltonian causes *do* enable Wilsonian efforts. Moreover, they fuel a self-understanding that keeps the world a formal congregational priority, trains churches away from becoming wholly complacent with their own betterment, and strengthens the traditions of hospitality in which churches offer their impressive resources to

strangers. Many of America's churches may be glorified Rotary clubs, but at least they are not country clubs.

Nevertheless, these qualities promote a powerful self-deception that haunts both the evangelical right and the social-gospel left wings of Wilsonian Christianity, as it haunts their neo-conservative and secular activist counterparts in the wider culture. Wilsonian policy often appears idealistic, but it is in fact ideological, and there is a profound difference. Wilsonians regularly sacrifice means to ideological ends – for instance, redefining gender roles and undermining ethnic and class distinctions in service of the cause (152). The ideology that inspires its schemes of local and global transformation is not so much the good news of Jesus Christ as that other gospel, modern liberalism. And as ideology often masks self-interest, so underneath the Wilsonian ideology lurks the identity and self-interest of the ones who profess it.

As Mead says,

Europeans, Indians, Chinese, Africans, and Latin Americans have ... noticed something about this tradition that tends to escape notice in the "Anglo-Saxon" world: that the espousal of [Wilsonians'] high ideals has not prevented the successive rise of two English-speaking empires to global hegemony. The Anglo-Saxon conscience may be sensitive and easily excited, they say, yet it is also flexible, and generally manages to concentrate its outrage on those aspects of the world's evils that threaten to thwart some interesting project of an Anglo-Saxon state. The Anglo-Saxons may be as innocent as doves, note our neighbors and critics, but that has singularly not interfered with our ability to be as cunning as serpents (137).

Ethnically located ideologies mislead their people into imagining that *their* identity rather than Christ's is universal. When a studio full of American pop singers gathered in 1985 to raise money for Ethiopian famine relief by singing "We Are the World," they really thought they were! I have seen this mindset over and over in otherwise faithful and healthy evangelical churches. A consortium of evangelical churches in the Los Angeles area recently partnered with an African-American church in Watts to hold an evangelistic street fair there. Along with the

usual food and music it featured haircuts, makeovers, and other services that echoed earlier missionary assumptions about what the world outside the west needed for its redemption. My very favorite church pours the money its music ministry raises into missions that center in musical tours bringing contemporary Christian praise and worship revivalism to stadiums, prisons, orphanages, and ghettos in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In both cases the faith is genuine, the intentions are admirable, and the assistance is real. Yet while the “missionaries” are consistently struck by their audiences’ superior zeal, they persist in calling their visits missions. What are they offering that their audiences do not already have, except for American culture?

A church I once visited decorated its sanctuary with the flags of the nations in which it supported missionaries. One nation was missing: the United States. When I mentioned the omission to some churchgoers after the service, one replied (and the others agreed) that the church supported no missionaries in America. When another member pointed out that this was not really true – that much of the church’s “outreach” was missionary in character – the other shifted her explanation, responding that the American flag was disqualified because authentic mission is *cross-cultural*. On one level, of course, America is so culturally diverse that this statement is plainly false. Yet at a deeper level the statement is absolutely true. If political and technological culture rather than Christian confession defines the mission field, America is already planted and harvested.

Not coincidentally, it was not until recently that American missionaries realized the need for missions in the old imperial centers of post-Christian Europe or the English-speaking worlds with which they felt a cultural familiarity, just as few secularists have tumbled to the increasingly illiberal character of Europe. In secularist circles and even in Christian ones, it still strikes us as odd that relief work or missions should be directed to a former imperial center. Sending

missionaries to Spain seems almost as strange as sending the Peace Corps, while Mexico and the Philippines seem natural objects of both, even though their Christianity (Protestant as well as Catholic) is much stronger.

One suspects that an animating principle of Wilsonian Christianity is not making the world more like Christ – or at least not merely that – but also making the world more like *us*. Wilsonian ideology and its confessional cover are always at hand to dispel these troubling thoughts and assure us that we are altruistic after all, and that God is being glorified and the world healed in our endeavors.

When the assurances fail, as they increasingly have since the Masters of Suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and the like) renarrated the west, a Wilsonian backlash has set in. Cross-cultural contact opened Christian America to cross-pollination – funding, among other things, nineteenth century transcendentalism (156) and creating lasting romantic western impressions of non-western cultural traditions. Mead traces multiculturalism and relativism to the unexpected long-term impact of western missions. The trajectory of the World Council of Churches from its origins in the vital world missionary movement to its present doldrums in inter-religious dialogue is illustrative. Today college students hardly ever enter long-term missions. Instead, in my evangelical circles at any rate, they enroll *en masse* in short-term summer- or spring-break missions. The point is to grow spiritually from their “sacrifice,” to benefit from the superior qualities of the indigenous churches they are visiting, and to build a building or two despite the dirt-cheap labor costs and overwhelming unemployment where they are. The exception is postcolonial hell-holes like South Africa and Palestine, which remain fashionable destinations for longer term missions.

These shifts are not the complete reversals of the Wilsonian vision they seem to be. Underneath the drastic changes lies a robust and tenacious conviction. Liberalism originally conceived of persons as sovereign subjects who negotiate their own futures along with other sovereign subjects under a common Creator. In this scheme some things are proper to the individual (will, perspectives, and values), while other things are proper to the whole (natural law, objectivity, and facts). Self-determination, democracy, free trade, the rule of law, property, and the like are the conventional expressions of this vision in the Anglo-American tradition, and colonial rule, monarchy, mercantilism, autocracy, collectivism, and the like are its traditional enemies. Liberal eschatology narrates past, present, and future history as the world's progressive self-realization in a new order of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Newbiggin 2003, 3-18).

Liberalism's fundamental categories have shifted rather than given way. Once truth was safeguarded in the objective world, secularism discovered that the Creator had become dispensable to the scheme. Liberty, equality, and fraternity were natural rather than supernatural qualities. Thus they were knowable and attainable with or without outside help. "Preach the gospel, use words if necessary," said St. Francis. Neo-Wilsonianism has found words – at least words about God – less and less necessary.

Other shifts have still left the basic scheme intact. Retaining equality but abandoning individualism reframes the goal as late Wilsonian intercultural and interreligious harmony and mutual multicultural affirmation. Reified "cultures" or "religions" rather than reified individuals will coexist and interact like marbles in a bag or citizens in a modern republic. The only enemies of this gospel are the "fundamentalist" holdouts who refuse to heed the altar call.

In other respects, though, liberalism's dream has dissipated even while its categories remain in place. Both the hard left and the apocalyptic right still operate in a modern frame but

oppose modernity's vision of progress. Sometimes they substitute their own eschatologies of Stalinism, Fascism, and Dispensationalism. Other times they abandon eschatology altogether for bitter nihilism (Newbiggin, *Proper Confidence*, 1995, 29-44). Today missionaries are the anti-heroes of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (Perennial, 1999). The world is not being self-realized under a benevolent if rather Deistic God, but being handed over to a satanic power. America is the Enemy; the Church is the oppressor; the United Nations and the World Council of Churches are the Antichrist. If Wilsonianism's eternal temptation is self-love, then anti-Wilsonian's eternal temptation is self-hatred. Common to the apparent opposites is the centrality of the self. Whether or not we like what we see, we refuse to turn away from our mirror.

Evangelism is a key tactic for classic Wilsonians, late Wilsonians, and post-Wilsonians alike. Though modern relativism pushes objectivity out to the horizon and enthrones subjectivity, it remains arrogantly self-assured of the universality of its appraisal and strangely missionary about spreading the bad news (Newbiggin, *The Open Secret*, 1995). We can resolve the inconsistency by noting the consistent quality of its self-assertion: *we* embody the knowledge that *you* need to embody too. Relativism is liberalism on the rebound: You can be whatever you like, as long as you are like us rather than them.

If early and late Hamiltonian Christianity makes the Church a vehicle of enlightened self-interest, early and late Wilsonian Christianity makes it a vehicle of liberal self-realization and reproduction. One of the most popular current forms of ministry among both evangelicals and liberals today is the recovery and support group, offering "whole life" to people both inside and outside the Church. Like the other efforts over the centuries to clean up personal lives, neighborhoods, and civilizations, these prosper whether or not the "higher power" facilitating the healing is named as the God of Jesus Christ. The deity is optional, but the paradigm is

mandatory. On their good days, Wilsonians are still ambassadors and emissaries of the Kingdom, but on their bad days they are autocrats posing as others' subjects. Like Adam and Eve, who being made like God nevertheless sought to be like God in the only way forbidden, so the Wilsonian drive to overachieve makes their patron saint not Constantine so much as King Saul, whose spiritual confidence led him to second-guess God's own commands (1 Sam. 15), and who never gave up even after God had given up on him.

Unlike these first two schools, *Jeffersonian* foreign policy likes to play defense. To Jeffersonians the American political culture with its democracy, civil liberties, and social arrangements are "uniquely precious but achingly vulnerable." Foreign policy must therefore respect that not commerce but "liberty is infinitely precious, and almost as infinitely fragile" (183). With roots in the English and Scottish dissenters who achieved a miraculous respite in the New World from Europe's hopeless class divisions, warring monarchies, and Catholic legacy, Jeffersonians seek above all to protect and deepen what they have won from the corrosive effects of power both at home and abroad. Pessimists at heart, they do not see a world of either Hamiltonian opportunity or Wilsonian progress, but of trials and temptations to win the world but lose one's soul. Empires and moral crusades alike, especially American ones, must be resisted, especially the wars that ratchet up federal power (199). On the other hand, Jeffersonians practice constant vigilance and wage domestic battles against new and old priesthoods, aristocracies, conspiracies, and other concentrations of power.

For Jeffersonians, small (enough) is beautiful. They still balanced powers and appended a Bill of Rights to the Hamiltonian Constitution after the more Jeffersonian and centrifugal Confederation failed. They saw to the demilitarization of post-Civil War America to almost antebellum levels (202). Expansions such as the Louisiana Purchase and policies such as the

Monroe Doctrine safeguarded the U.S. against European ventures in its neighborhood, but Jeffersonians opposed the annexation of Texas, let alone the acquisition of territories in the faraway Pacific (184), pruned diplomatic budgets relentlessly, and fought governmental secrecy that left citizens out of the intelligence loop. The trick, of course, is staying strong enough to fend off encroaching powers from without yet weak enough to keep from becoming the enemy within. Today's Jeffersonians built the meritocratic engineer-culture of Silicon Valley ("Two Young Men Who Went West," Wolfe 2000, 17-65), mock the ossifying aristocracy of the East Coast, inhabit the libertarian "right" and the countercultural "left," worry at the size of the Federal Register, consider the Vietnam War paradigmatic, and fight off feelings of helplessness of generally being on the losing side of policymaking since the eve of World War II.

Fundamentalists and their descendants are Jeffersonian not only in sharing an ideological heritage but especially in appropriating common attitudes from their American context. Jeffersonian fundamentalists home school their children, continually reconstruct their vast but decentralized network of alternative media and institutions for passing on traditions and airing dirty laundry, build congregational and nondenominational churches and cell groups, privilege conscious decision as the definitive form of justification and private devotion as essential to sanctification, weave anti-Catholic and conspiracy theories and apocalyptic paranoid fantasies in which their fragile communities vanish or earn martyrs' rewards, fund cult-watch organizations that police each other against departures from Protestant Orthodoxy, and separate from any institution – even one of their own making – that threatens their purity. They tie themselves to the masts of yesterday's confessions, theological systems, apologetics, and cultural adaptations in order to weather contemporary storms. These tendencies can look individualistic, Gnostic, consumeristic, and modernistic from other perspectives, and those dimensions are sometimes

present; but they are fueled and ordered by a coherent political vision whose theology is more firmly American.

For these traits fundamentalists, like other Jeffersonians, are pilloried by Hamiltonian and Wilsonian Christians and non-Christians as isolationist, anti-intellectual, unsophisticated, and even stupid. The characterization is deeply unfair, as anyone knows who is acquainted with fundamentalism's robust intellectual history and demographic shape. Mead's kind words for Jeffersonians – brilliant, loyal, innovative, reformist, and rigorously critical – apply to Jeffersonian Christians as well. They have maintained and even extended their theological traditions remarkably well against awesome cultural and intellectual pressures. The acuity and tenacity of their appreciation for traditions such as supernaturalism, substitutionary atonement, and sexual self-discipline that others would just as soon leave behind has helped keep Christianity intact in America and confounded once universal assumptions of inevitable western secularization. I myself am a Christian in part because Jeffersonian Christians shared the good news with me in a potent, coherent, and plausible form that the liberal churches of my youth had either forgotten or did not bother to teach me.

Yet Jeffersonian sensibilities can lead to disaster just as the others can. Jeffersonian nonresistance to Fascism leading up to World War II devastated and marginalized Jeffersonian schools until Vietnam (208), and fundamentalist self-isolation led to fifty years almost out of sight from the mid-1920's until the mid-1970's – an era in which mainline Christian denominations slipped into unopposed modernism, Niebuhrian realism, social integration, and secular activism without their ballast. Likewise, Jeffersonian reluctance to overpower slavery and segregation dealt a winning hand to Hamiltonian and Wilsonian abolitionists and civil rights advocates, just as Christian Jeffersonians ceded moral ground to activist Christians who were

more passionate about reversing the Church's sorry records on racial and gender oppression. At times the Jeffersonian paradigm, like any paradigm, blinds and paralyzes its advocates in the face of danger.

Both the advocates and their principles suffer as a result. When Jeffersonian Christianity fails, its constituents can turn rapidly into ruthless utilitarians. As isolationist Americans turned into total warriors against Japan, so Southern Baptists have sacrificed their own ecclesiological principles and transformed themselves into a centralized denomination in order to root out liberalism and advance the fundamentalist agenda. *Roe v. Wade* and other developments in wider American society turned the fundamentalists of the sixties into the Christian right of the seventies and eighties. Today the Republican Party woos social conservatives with faith-based initiatives, and American evangelicals look to governmental power where it might help them get their way. Conservatives are as Niebuhrian today as liberals were fifty years ago. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Yet here too, the inconsistency can be dissolved by noting a deeper consistency among Jeffersonians. Foreign policy Jeffersonians consider war a last resort, not so much because war is terrible but primarily because war is socially distorting. They may cry, "Give me liberty or give me death," but in the crunch they will accept a diminished liberty that allows them to see another day. Life, not liberty or the pursuit of happiness, is at the top of their list of inalienable rights, and they fight the wars they must rather than go to the cross. The Jeffersonian order is always a pragmatic balancing act. It is willing to free-ride on others' power as America let England bear the costs of *Pax Britannia* (1799-204), and it rests on the lethal power it used to win independence from England and preserve it in an increasingly dangerous world. It abhors aristocracy, but owns slaves. It is at least as prudent as it is principled, for its principle of liberty comes second to its

principle of self-preservation. At the heart of the Jeffersonian vision is survival, not faithfulness to another.

This feature makes it useful even for its opponents. Mead notes that Jeffersonianism is a handy temporary ideology for Hamiltonian and Wilsonian activists to adopt when their adventures fail (217). Vietnam and Watergate gave an immense boost to Jeffersonian fortunes after decades in eclipse (until Iran and the disastrous Carter presidency buried them again). Since the eighties the party out of power in Washington has consistently demonstrated profounder respect for republican principles than its rival. Republicans discovered the virtues of a strong legislature for reigning in the imperial presidency when they killed Bill Clinton's health care reform and won back control of Congress; Democrats discovered the perils of nation-building not in the Balkans but Iraq; liberals rushed to declare the conservatives' war on drugs a failure even as they refused to concede defeat in their own war on poverty (and vice versa). Jeffersonianism is at least as convenient for covering one's flanks as for preserving one's soul.

So also postliberal Christians really began discovering new respect for the Anabaptist tradition and what John Howard Yoder called "the Politics of Jesus" and "the Original Revolution" once ministers from the Christian right rather than their own ranks started leading congressional prayer breakfasts. Yesterday's triumphalists are today's prophets: thirty years after igniting a "black theology" that narrated the black Church's core spirituality as a racial variant on liberation theology, James Cone's most recent reflection on the movement casts himself as a prophet unloved in his own country (Orbis, ??). The contemporary myth of a pure preconstantinian Christianity (among third century Gnostics? second century catholics? first-century Pauline feminists? the "Q" community?) resembles the romantic myth of American innocence that is as seductive for Jeffersonians who do not like what they see in the mirror as it

is convenient for Hamiltonians and Wilsonians who want to relegate them to history's photo album. Today the old Christian mainline is the new fundamentalism, lamenting the destruction of American Christianity from its deteriorating theological bastions, turning *The da Vinci Code* into a liberal *Left Behind*, envisioning itself in Babylonian exile, indulging in Jeffersonian pessimism, and dreaming of another day.

Jeffersonians would have as their patron saint Samuel, who warned against monarchy but anointed it anyway. Yet the dark side of Jeffersonian Christianity will accept a Herodian throne or Essene wilderness rather than submit to a Roman prison, let alone a cross. So a truer figure for the school is Josiah, the boy king who discovered the Law of Moses and cleaned Judah's theological house, yet neither abdicated nor traded his crown for one of thorns.

Mead's final school of foreign policy is *Jacksonian*, named in honor of the populist president who harnessed the political power of the lower and middle American classes in an unprecedented way, and who as a result crafted a foreign and domestic politics that centered in their collective self-interest and codes of honor. Southern political dynasties, northern political machines, midwestern farm communities, westerners suspicious of the federal government, ethnic voting blocs, suburban lobbies for middle-class welfare, military and sports cultures, and even inner-city gangs follow Jacksonian dynamics.

Jacksonians are not missionaries, but their gospel propagates anyway. Mead characterizes the school as the folk ideology of the United States, rooted in the culture of America's original British colonizers, especially the Scotch-Irish who settled its original frontiers (227). These had long ago become hardened in their opposition to English power, but habitually fought it physically (rather than intellectually, as Jeffersonians did). Their warrior culture took root in the United States, renewed itself every generation through frontier, civil, international, and world

war (227) – and assimilated ethnic immigrants into its ways, if not always its circles, with astounding success (229). Its core values descend from the honor codes of the American frontier: self-reliance (though with a side order of entitlement to the deserving) rather than inheritance, welfare, or affirmative action; respect for rights and dignity rather than condescension or humiliation; prosperity through equality of opportunity and self-improvement rather than aristocracy or equality of result; independence for youth and reverence (and political muscle) for elders; individualism governed by deference to the tribe; freedom of conscience and self-expression (taking economic form as consumerism rather than thriftiness) rather than theological and economic discipline; honesty to one's own community; loyalty to family; sexual decency (tolerating premarital sexual activity but not homosexuality); and courage and militarism rather than negotiation or pacifism (231-235). These values delineate its communities; to be outside one is to be outside the other, and to be outside is to forego the group's respect, protection, and even toleration – as elites, Catholics, ideologues, prison inmates, slaves, indigenous Americans, and foreign powers have all learned from often brutal experience (236-237). Honorable insiders are respected; dishonorable insiders are disciplined and expelled; outsiders are ignored; trespassers are shot. On this last point, Mead's numbers are devastating: in its wars both great and small, Americans have killed more foreign civilians for each military casualty of its own than even Nazis did on their eastern front (218-220). The nation is an extension of the Jacksonian family (245), and Jacksonians do all they can to win the wars their country starts.

Both the considerable incentives and the considerable disincentives explain the Jacksonian ethic's popularity and its ability to spread. The early history of the Muslim world offers an instructive parallel, when the tribe of Quraysh – the first to convert to Islam – embarked upon its astoundingly successful conquest of the southern Mediterranean. It made a formidable

combination of tribal social cohesion, military discipline, financial and political bounty, ideological confidence, a sense of theological destiny – and a willingness to accept other tribes into its ranks and share the plunder among the Muslim *umma*, albeit with a smaller share of the profits according to a system in which the earliest tribes to join got the biggest cuts. Submitters were treated generously, opponents ruthlessly. The resemblances between sixth- and seventh-century Arabia and nineteenth-century middle America help explain why there are so many Pakistanis of Indian heritage with the surname “Qurayshi” and Americans of Mayan descent named “Edward.” These are tribes it is better to join than to cross. These are the social engines that power civilizations and drive empires.

Jacksonians have shifted their party registrations (lately from Democrat to Republican beginning with Richard Nixon and accelerating with Ronald Reagan), but not their political tune. Jacksonians are more convinced of original sin than of prevenient grace. Wilsonians trying to usher in the Millennium thus have their heads in the clouds. Jacksonians tend to be social libertarians, trade protectionists, and foreign policy hawks; they believe government exists for the well-being of the folk community, and any means of promoting that well-being, including apparent ideological inconsistency and a reasonable level of corruption, are permissible within the honor code’s limits (238-239). Conversely, failure to attend to constituents’ interests – whether by failing to return tax dollars to their congressional districts or by sending constituents’ boys off to fight other people’s wars – is politically unforgivable. Sky-high military budgets, yes; United Nations dues, no. War for oil, if necessary; for oil companies, let alone the House of Saud, no.

Jacksonian culture and constituencies have staggering influence at home and abroad. American sports teams and figures are heroes in the States and worldwide. Pop, country, and rap

music are worldwide musical phenomena. Crime dramas, mass-market sitcoms, and “reality television” rule the television at night, soap operas and talk shows in the daytime. (The Work family keeps its children on a Jeffersonian television diet – PBS kids’ shows almost exclusively – but indulges in a guilty suburban-Jacksonian binge after bedtime: *Law and Order*, *Survivor*, *What Not to Wear* and *While You Were Out* on TLC (toned down and low budget fashion and home redecorating shows), eighties and nineties retrospectives on VH1, *Wife Swap*, the odd *Blind Date*, and that Jeffersonian concession to the masses, *Frontier House* on PBS.) The princes of syndicated radio are Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh. Action movies dominate box offices and video shelves and export Jacksonian militarism to the world. These are the stories we tell ourselves and the billions who want to listen along. A Jacksonian Iraqi put it famously in 2003, according to *The New York Times*:

In the giddy spirit of the day, nothing could quite top the wish list bellowed out by one man in the throng of people greeting American troops from the 101st Airborne Division who marched into town today. What, the man was asked, did he hope to see now that the Baath Party had been driven from power in his town? What would the Americans bring? “Democracy,” the man said, his voice rising to lift each word to greater prominence. “Whiskey. And sexy!” Around him, the crowd roared its approval (<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/03/international/worldspecial/03AIRB.html>).

Almost all Christianity in the world is folk Christianity, whether purists like it or not. American Christianity is Jacksonian by second nature, if not first nature, and every indication is that it will continue to be. The twentieth century’s liberal mainline Protestant subculture was Jacksonian: It authorized the New Deal and later the Great Society to save the middle class and honor its elderly. It countenanced the intentional targeting of civilians in both theaters of World War II that culminated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One of its most popular figures was the positive thinker and self-improver Norman Vincent Peale. John F. Kennedy helped convince Jacksonian America that Catholics could be faithful to the tribe as well – after all, American

Catholics are firmly Jacksonian when it comes to heeding Rome on matters such as marriage, finance, and sex (and the Church's recent sexual abuse scandals have only accelerated Catholic distrust of elites who seem far away, out of touch, and preoccupied with their own). It accepted segregation in both the north and the south until Martin Luther King appealed to its instincts and convinced it to widen its tribal boundaries (237).

When the Democratic Party turned left and alienated its Jacksonians, it alienated many of its churchgoers too. The loss was more the Democrats' than the Jacksonians. The only Democratic presidents since Kennedy have been southerners who, in varying degrees, embodied populist politics. [KERRY?] With liberal Christianity in decline since the sixties, today conservative evangelicalism has the demographic edge, church attendance is a reliable predictor of Republican party affiliation, and middle America is still getting its programs and tax breaks.

Conservative Jacksonian Christianity has diluted the qualities of its many ancestors – Wesleyan missionary initiative and social reformism, Reformed theological orthodoxy, Baptist soul competency, fundamentalist obstinacy, Pentecostal spiritualism, Dispensational pessimism, and Catholic identity – into a bland nondenominational mixture that is as appealing to the common man as it is theologically unchallenging. Today's evangelicals mingle almost effortlessly with the others in the Jacksonian tribe. Their spending habits and voting patterns are about the same. They digest many of the same ideas (though perhaps repackaged as Christian books or channeled through the Trinity Broadcasting Network instead of Fox News). They marry and divorce in similar though not identical ways. They are as litigious as the rest of America.

There is no reason to minimize the considerable strengths of Jacksonian Christianity. Its honor code draws from Christian convictions as well as other ones, bearing something of a resemblance to the honor codes of medieval Europe in which folk Christianity ran almost as deep

as it ever has. It is more intellectual (if selectively so), and far more intelligent, than its detractors admit. Its inclusiveness is a powerful force for grass-roots ecumenism, racial reconciliation, and even feminism (cf. 260-261). The Jacksonian Church also acts in ways that recognize the serious challenges to Christian faith both within and without the Christian community. Its dualistic cosmology does not wish away the power of the enemies of the faith, but respects the power of evil in the world. Thus Jacksonian Christians fight spiritual wars as determinedly as temporal ones. Charismatic Jacksonians do not just stockpile weapons of the Spirit, they use them. Many are dedicated “prayer warriors.” Furthermore, as Mead notes folk America’s relative openness and capacity for self-improvement – qualities that American elites often fail (or refuse) to perceive (260-261) – so Jacksonian Christianity can be powerfully self-critical, especially when the criticisms are backed by the Holy Scriptures it holds dear. Finally, Jacksonians deserve respect just because they comprise most of Jesus Christ’s American brothers and sisters. Snobby Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, and Jeffersonian Christians who deplore their influence forget that their king and his court had Galilean accents. God uses the foolish of the world to humble the wise.

Nevertheless, conservative Jacksonian Christianity deserves its share of criticism. At the heart of the problem is the priority of the tribe, not Christ, in its vision. This ‘school’ marginalizes key features of the ancient faith – from Church attendance to the doctrine of the Trinity, mission, and service to the poor – and centralizes concerns that had been more marginal, such as creationism, pretribulationist eschatology (which sits uneasily beside American hyperpower), property rights including gun ownership, and legal and psychological support for the nuclear family. Some of these obviously maintain community interests, while others mark community boundaries.

A strange thing happens to the key conviction of Protestant Christianity, the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, in Jacksonian contexts. It makes the Prodigal Son an archetype of discipline in communities that are in other ways rather Pharisaic. The Jacksonian Christian lives by the honor code, embracing both its continuities and its contradictions with the moral shape of the New Testament Church. It is when she breaks *that* code rather than, say, the Bible's moral standards that the community of faith demands contrition and repentance and offers forgiveness and restoration. Christian businessmen do not need to repent of lives driven by greed, or overachievers repent of consuming competitiveness. Conspicuous consumers do not need to repent of how they handle their prosperity if it has not endangered their children. Soldiers do not need to repent of fighting unjust wars, let alone just ones. Politicians do not need to repent of working the system (so long as they have done it legally). Wage earners do not need to repent of exploiting the tax code or America's retirement system (though welfare parents do). Heretics do not need to repent of their theological mistakes. Parents and children do not need to repent of putting their families before their church commitments. Teens do not need to repent of longings to be popular. When these people do, the reaction from fellow congregants ranges from puzzlement to amusement to discomfort: we have a zealot in our ranks! Moreover, these minor offenders are not expected to shape their lives according to radical demands of the gospel that challenge Jacksonian convictions in order to regain or retain their good spiritual standing. In fact, they can be discouraged from it. After all, embodying countercultural convictions as if they apply to every disciple violates the honor code. It is judgmental. It disrespects one's equals, not least one's elders. It implies the violation of others' freedom of conscience. It overturns expectations. It weakens tribal solidarity. It is, frankly, too Christlike. Fidelity to Jacksonian

convictions – some of them, anyway – and Christian practices of repentance, grace, justification, and restoration arbitrate one’s standing with the group more than with God.

This perpetuates a folk Christianity that rewards social conformism, punishes radical obedience, and distorts the faith through peer pressure. Many of my students come from such backgrounds, bring their folk Christianity with them to Westmont, and have difficulty even understanding the classic doctrine of justification as individuals, let alone living by it as a community. The message of Galatians can hit even a major in theology like a hurricane. Jacksonian groupthink inoculates them against healthier theology and drives disobedient tribe members, recovering Pharisees, and outsiders away from the Church.

At times Jacksonian Christology resembles more the cry of the crowds on Palm Sunday and even Good Friday than the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, let alone Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross. It thrives on collective and personal self-assertion, self-expression, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-help, self-protection, self-defense, and self-justification. It lives with and even loves what it sees in the mirror. Its kindred spirits are the judges of Israel who did whatever was right in their own eyes, but let its patron saint be King David – charismatic warrior, militarist until the end, uninhibited worshipper, sexual dynamo, family patron, murderer, and son of God.

These are harsh words about my country and my Christian brothers and sisters; perhaps undeservingly so. They are also a departure from my usual optimistic style. In many other contexts I would be more inclined to narrate the American features of American Christianity in a more charitable way [and that time may come before chapter’s end]. But this is a work of prayer, and it is better to pray like a publican than like a Pharisee. I resonate with aspects of each of

these schools. Every one of them has had such a powerful impact on my practices and instincts that even after this analysis I cannot imagine a truly post-Hamiltonian, post-Wilsonian, post-Jeffersonian, post-Jacksonian life for myself, let alone the American Church. Mead is right to respect their power and flexibility in bringing the United States to the apex of world power, and a parallel analysis of their Christian circles would have to conclude the same thing of the American Church, which almost alone in the developed world has bucked the trend towards secularization. Yet each of these political visions centers on the self – self-advancement, self-realization, self-protection, and self-assertion.

No wonder the Church disappoints those who seek first the Kingdom of God. Perhaps it is because Loisy's feeling was already mutual: the world awaited a Messiah, but what came was Jesus Christ. It is not polite to admit that neither party has found the other entirely satisfactory, but it is true. We – we peoples of the world, but also we Christians much of the time – have spent the last two thousand years doing what we had been doing already: trying to turn the world God gave us into the world we want, the people we were made to be into the people we would rather be, and God from the Lord we got into the Lord we want. A result of this extended theological makeover is that many of the problems already raised in the previous chapters – God's character, God's reputation, the scope of God's work – reemerge, sometimes with nearly equal force, in circles that know of and even worship Jesus Christ. Isn't God's "Fatherhood" oppressively patriarchal language that distorts God into a male image? Doesn't "holiness" withdraw us from the world? Isn't organized Christianity just a way of baptizing who we already are so we don't have to change but others do? Isn't the Christian God cruel? indifferent? irrelevant? non-existent?

Against even the most impressive achievements of American Christians stand words that reduce them to filthy rags, but also point the way out of the American theological maze: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

## §2. “Your Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven”

A famous analogy from St. Augustine finds vestiges of the three persons of the Trinity respectively in human memory, intellect, and will. To unpack this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, consider the following claim, which at first seems like a stretch, if not an outright confusion, of that analogy: *The will of the Father is the Holy Spirit.*

The first section of this chapter set the stage for examining that claim. The redemption of the world seems fragile and precarious, and for a good reason: It hangs on human intentions, efforts, and powers. From the beginning to the end of history, the Father has chosen humanity for the realizing of his will on earth. Despite our apparent inconsequentiality, the eighth psalm says, “you have made [*adam*, humanity] little less than God, and adorned him with glory and majesty; you have made him master over your handiwork, laying the world at his feet” (Ps. 8:6-7). Human beings have persistently used the Father’s gifts to pursue our own ends, yet the Father has remained steadfast in supporting the original and ultimate determination that human beings represent him as *imago dei*, the image of God. God has not deposed us and set up another order for his earth’s governance. Delegating such power to us even in the face of our failure and resistance has had terrible consequences (Rom. 1:28-32). As a tiny rudder steers a huge vessel, so the sheer leverage of the human will makes us formidable agents of creation and destruction.

YHWH saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ... The earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth (Gen. 6:5, 11-12).

Opposition preceded the Kingdom's coming, opposed it, undermined it from within, and resists it to this day. Even at our "best" (and American history offers an unusual range of relatively bright moments along with its darker ones), we ambassadors of God have repeatedly set up dynasties of our own. Our insurrections against the YHWH Administration wield the vast power God vested in human beings against the investor. Rebels against the Regime of God combine forces to form powers and principalities. We use our strength, which is really God's strength, to build strongholds. We use authority to dominate and enslave. We use speech to beguile and misinform. We use imagination to distort God and idolize ourselves. We use worship to baptize our own agendas and usurp the place of God. We use our living spirits to elude or obey our fear of death.

Genesis 1-3 is the definitive story of this categorical human failure. Unfortunately, by making the two creation stories that open the Scriptures a morality tale about free will, we have often trained ourselves to read them in a conveniently misleading way. Our usual interpretation places God far away from us on one side and a Satanic serpent close to us on the other. Each makes its case, and the woman and man render their judgment in the sovereignty of their consciences. We are free, or were anyway; we chose poorly, but the point was to choose.

That is a poor reading of the story.

The narrative itself gives us no compelling reason to read it in terms of free will. As helpful as this approach might be, it reflects the philosophical and theological priorities of a much later age that worries about relating 'inward' thoughts to 'outward' actions and reconciling human freedom with divine determination. On its face, the text is more concerned with abuses of power than abuses of freedom.

When the story is framed in terms of human freedom, it becomes a "temptation narrative." Some even infer that God plants the tree and introduces the serpent *in order* to trip up

the man and woman. After all, why is the tree right in the middle of the garden? Why does God allow Satan to be there? What chance does a free human will have against the seducing power of the devil himself? Who wouldn't take the fruit once both God and serpent have drawn such attention to it? Is this story an exercise in the dreadful predestination of a manipulative, even duplicitous and evil God? Is Eden a setup?

Yet the point in Eden was not to choose; the point was to reign. In the first creation account God creates *adam* in his image and blesses them with rule over the earth, sky, and sea (Gen. 1:27-28). The second develops this as the making of a man, then a woman, made from the earth, endowed with the spirit of life, charged to tend the ground (2:5-9, 15), and given authority to name all God's cattle and birds *and wild beasts* (2:19-20). The man and woman are powerful, not powerless. God has set the world at their feet, just as Psalm 8 has said. They are not the world's critics, but the deputies of its Master.

Why would God have vested human beings with such power? The text answers repeatedly: for purposes of cultivation, not oppression. By ruling with God's goodness, they are God's image. They are the creator's viceroys, sharing and extending his power for the benefit of all in their charge. They are indeed set up – to succeed.

Why is the tree of knowledge there? It is not there just to tempt. Perhaps the tree is not there to tempt at all. First, it is beautiful (Gen. 3:6). So it belongs there – for God and humanity to see and appreciate. It is a monument to the unattainable wisdom and knowledge of its Creator. When things get tough, it is a reminder that

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears  
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,

The morning light, the lily white, declare their maker's praise.  
This is my Father's world: he shines in all that's fair;  
In the rustling grass I hear him pass; he speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world: why should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring! God reigns; let the earth be glad!

Second, the commandment not to eat of it is good. A rule not to touch the stove doesn't just keep children from burning their fingers. It teaches children to respect parents. It teaches humility, and humility teaches trust – faith. Third, the tree's presence teaches humans that our authority still has limits. We rule the sea and ground and sky, but not **(yet)** the starry host (Gen. 1:26). Without such a reminder, the race will soon be trying to storm the heavens through its own efforts (Gen. 11). Sure, the tree's presence is a convenient opportunity to transgress the limits. But there are already others. As we shall see, even before the woman eats the forbidden fruit, she has already failed to rule the creation as God intended.

What is the snake? Merely “the shrewdest of all *the wild beasts* that the LORD God had made” (Gen. 3:1). Contrary to popular impressions, the story does not tell us that the serpent is some fallen angel out to visit the fall upon God's new humanity that has already come upon the angelic realm. Those details are insertions from other extrabiblical narratives that have become so popular that most of us automatically read them into the story. This little reptile is no fearsome angelic power the woman is up against. It is one of God's creatures, one of the beasts the people have already named. Other beasts are shrewd too, though less so. Perhaps the people had triumphed over earlier, easier challenges: growing plants, keeping birds away, herding cattle, domesticating cats. Had things not gone so wrong, perhaps other tests would have followed. No one said imaging God in this world would be easy. Eden is a career, not Club Med.

The serpent's statements are slippery and demand to be carefully parsed, but they are not outright falsehoods from "the Father of Lies." The serpent's wily question is a test of human authority. The serpent reminds me of two things I know from experience: First, something like a "strong-willed child," to use today's euphemism. The Hebrew 'shrewd' or 'subtle' (*'arum*) echoes the Hebrew 'naked' (*'eyrom*). First-time parents will surely identify with that! This being has an agenda of its own, and if not handled properly its actions will get everyone (including itself) into trouble, but its resistance to authority does not necessarily rise to the level of sin. The woman and man are up to the task. Both the story and later theological tradition is clear: Sin begins in human actions, not serpentine ones. The second thing the serpent reminds me of is a demon. Much contemporary demonological literature attests to common behaviors among demons in situations of confrontation and exorcism: They are clever, though not enormously so. They are wily, exploiting whatever rhetorical opportunities their victims and their exorcists leave open to them. Their power is more that of suggestion than outright authority – unless people have authorized them to act. They are mainly bluster; when commanded by a true authority, they can resist but not prevail.

At any rate, the serpent outsmarts the humans – or perhaps the humans *use* the serpent as leverage to break God's command. Certainly there are signs that things are amiss before the fateful resolution to eat the fruit: for instance, the woman has already placed the tree of knowledge at the middle of her mental map of the garden (3:3), whereas the tree of life is at the middle of God's (2:9). It is the woman, not God or even the serpent, who puts forbidden knowledge at the center of her world. It is she, not it, who invents prohibitions where God has not, and it is she, not it, who softens God's warning of mortal consequences (3:3b, cf. 2:17). The serpent arguably tells the truth every time, and God vindicates his prediction in the end (3:22).

The people are the real transgressors and receive the most serious curses (3:14-19). These are not just unprepared parents, let alone victims of entrapment. These are officers looking for an excuse to mutiny. With the world at their feet, with life at the center of God's promises, the world's earthly governors turn two of their own subjects, a clever animal and a beautiful tree, into invitations to spurn their creator's incredible grace and usurp his divinity. God's likeness resolves to be like God in the only way forbidden. Humanity exchanges a glorious way to image God for a tragic and self-defeating one. Freedom suffers in the exchange: the garden is now off-limits and the way to life closed (Gen. 3:23-24). These are fools, not moral heroes.

If the garden is a setup, it seems just as much a setup for success as a setup for failure. The man and woman have a job as tough as it is glorious, but they are already beneficiaries of vast blessings to help them: unique relationship with God, lifetime employment, power and authority, perfect companionship, the promise of eternal life. Framing the story in terms of human power makes it a "shame narrative" (Gen. 2:15) – a sin narrative – a rebellion narrative. We, not the devil, let alone God, turn those blessings against God, against each other, against ourselves, and against the earth. This is the story that foreshadows and explains American failures both secular and Christian. The threat we pose to our world, each other, and ourselves is as real as our power and authority, which are gifts from the almighty covenanting God. It is natural and supernatural, physical and spiritual, individual and cosmic.

All these failures – Eden's and America's and every other – are undone in the Spirit as the Father's will on earth as well as heaven. The redemption of the world seems fragile and precarious because it depends on powerful human wills; yet the redemption of the world is sure because it also depends on a Determination of divine origin, divine nature, and divine destination.

History's alpha and omega is another *adam* who *has* realized the Father's will on earth. As God breathed his Spirit, and "the first man Adam became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7 in 1 Cor. 15:45a). so "the last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45b). Begotten of the Father, incarnate of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-20), and with the Holy Spirit's anointing (3:16), leading (4:1), presence (12:18), and power (12:28), the Son pursued the Father's will on earth (Matt. 7:21), realized it flawlessly (26:39, 42), and forever holds authority in heaven and on earth (28:18).

Christ turns our human leverage all the more powerfully toward the new creation. Jeremiah's new covenant to renew Israel and Judah with a law written on their hearts (Jer 31:31-34) is fulfilled in something far greater: an apostolic ministry of the Spirit that makes the Church a glorious letter of Christ competent to reconcile the world to God (2 Cor. 3:2-18). In Christ our gifts are brought to bear now for their intended purpose. In him we share the Spirit's powerful baptism (3:11). In him we war against the strongholds and break them down. In him we emancipate captives and persuade the dominators to surrender and enter into true freedom. In him we speak truth in power (10:20). In him we imagine with prophecy and discernment to read the signs of the times and interpret God's mind. In him we worship in Spirit and truth. In him even our deaths are gifts of the Spirit (27:50) that bring life (27:51-53). In him we are again set up to succeed, and we do. Every age, every culture, every tradition, every community, every family, and every person finds a place in the interplay of wills that hides in the mystery of the Father, begins in creation, suffers in sin, begins anew in Israel, centers on the Son, and extends through his Church ultimately to the whole world as the heavenly and earthly locus of his Spirit.

The Spirit is the wind from God, the Father's will to create the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:2, Ps. 33:6). The Spirit is the breath of God, the Father's will to share life with creatures

from the inanimate earth (Gen. 2:7, Ps. 104:30). The Spirit is the finger of God, the Father's will to deliver Israel and author its Torah (Ex. 8:19, 31:18, Luke 11:20). The Spirit is the anointing of God, the Father's will to bring justice to all nations through his beloved servant-son (Isa. 42:1-4 in Matt. 12:18-21). The Spirit is the Counselor of God, the Father's will to dwell among his chosen people and guide them to their eternal destination (1 Cor. 16:19-20, John 16:13).

All this is a deliberate overflowing of the creator's eternal being. What else could the Church do after seeing all these signs and wonders but name the God of Israel as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Nothing short of this does justice to the richness of these revelations. As Trinity offers the only truly Christian way to understand God's character, so Trinity offers the only truly Christian way to appreciate the place of those who pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As the Father wills to beget the Son and the Son then wills to be begotten of the Father, so the Father wills to make human the only begotten Son and the Son then wills to inherit all things from the fecund Father. The Holy Spirit is the fullness of that eternal will. As the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church receives the Spirit as living water (John 7:37-39), inherits the Spirit as the Father's promise (Luke 24:49), and fulfills God's will by living in the Spirit powerfully and faithfully.

Likewise, as the Father determines to breathe the life-giving Spirit and then the Spirit determines to proceed from the living Father, so the Father determines to send the Spirit as the giver of life and the Spirit determines to animate the Father's world. The Son is the fullness of that eternal determination. As body of Christ, the Church dies and rises with the Son, follows him to obey the Father's will at every cost and for every benefit, and shares in his powerful prophethood, priesthood, and kingship as the world's redeemer and new creator.

Finally, as the Son depends on a source for breathing the Spirit and the Spirit depends on a source for begetting the Son, so the Son depends on a source from whom to receive the anointing and indwelling Spirit and the Spirit depends on a source for conceiving, empowering, and raising the welcoming Son. The Father is the fullness of that eternal source. As children of the Father, the Church enjoys the freedom of depending on one who is utterly dependable and the maturity of mutual servanthood, love of neighbors, and fruitfulness.

Trinitarian language is treacherous. People are forever reading it too exclusively, too quickly, and too broadly. Do not rush through these three paragraphs; linger over them. Read them again and again, meditating on the details of biblical passages, Church stories, and personal experiences that make them come alive. These claims do not abstract God from the concrete and glorifying way he has made himself known. They do not flatten God to accurate but dry formulas of “one nature in three persons.” They do not misuse ‘will,’ ‘determination,’ and ‘source’ as controlling definitions to make the persons of the Trinity mere impersonal aspects of a unitarian ‘God.’ The theological categories do not implode; the mundane categories explode. The Spirit is not a *mere* will; the Father’s will is the infinite depth of the Holy Spirit as he has really acted and come to dwell. The Lord’s Prayer allows us to perceive the richness of divine will as everything the Holy Spirit actually shows himself to be.

We have to resist every temptation to understate this! Jesus does not just receive the Holy Spirit’s *life* or *power* or *presence* or *authority* or *gifts* or *fruit* as the heavenly Father’s earthly answer to his prayers. Rather, “when Jesus also had been baptized *and was praying*, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him” (Luke 3:21-22). Likewise, Jesus does not promise the Holy Spirit’s *life* or *power* or *presence* or *authority* or *gifts* or *fruit* to his Church, but the Spirit himself (Acts 1:8a). God promises that God will give God. Jesus follows the Lord’s

Prayer with the following assurance: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more *will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit* to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). When we pray the Father’s will to be realized on earth, our answer is nothing less than the third person of the Trinity.

While Christ images the Father clearly in the Spirit, rebels image the triune God poorly in our alienation from him. The Lord’s story allows us to appreciate America’s stories as the confused tales of rebels and disciples who ignore, obscure, twist, and resist the divine nature. Our human spirits will to advance themselves, realize themselves, protect themselves, and assert themselves. This has a spiritual character, but it is that of “the spirit presently working in the people of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), an empty will-to-power that despises the Father’s resurrecting mercy. Likewise, we determine to exercise our will and not to be shaken. That futile self-determination also has a filial character: we are sons of our “father, the devil” (John 8:42-44), defying the heavenly Father who then appears remote and tyrannical. Finally, we fall back on ourselves for self-determination and self-justification. That futile independence is a lordship that prefers to father ill will, violence, lust, theft, and lies (Matt. 15:18-19) than to serve over all that the Father has. In these demonic vestiges of the Trinity we make ourselves the objects of our worship. [Durkheim.]

We may not indulge in understatement here either. We may not lighten the awfulness of human rebellion with comforting abstractions like “the absence of God.” As the Son’s pursuit of the Father’s will brings the fullness of the Spirit, so self-assertion brings the ultimate emptiness of cultural and personal death, self-determination that of perpetual slavery, and independence that of outer darkness – the expulsion from Eden writ large.

These two dynamics do not run independently as if each had its proper scope and respected the other's autonomy. They overshadow each other and intersect. Yet they do not meet according to a simple hierarchy where divine will simply determines or overpowers human will. Rather, God wills people to will, and vice versa. God sends Jesus and his Spirit to free human wills bound by sin and turn them around (Phil. 2:13, 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9). Conversely, people from Moses to Jesus and his disciples pray in the Spirit and prophesy not only to other people but back to the Father, freeing God to act in ways that depend upon human cooperation (Matt. 23:38, John 17).

The prayer itself is wonderfully subtle: rather than the language of *doing* one's will that is common in the Old Testament (*e.g.*, Ps. 145:19), here the verb hints at deeper mystery: "your will be *realized*." "Monergists" like Augustine and Calvin absolutely privilege the divine will even in the actions of human beings. "Synergists" like James Arminius and John Wesley acknowledge that divine intention and action precede faithful and fruitful human willing and working. While it is true that monergism risks reducing prayer to affirmation ("you will do your will") while synergism risks reducing prayer to consent ("we will let you do your will") both these orthodox positions can honor the prayer's subtlety and mystery. Both look to a common beginning – divine initiative – and a common outcome – divine-human cooperation. The Father wills the Spirit, and sooner or later, one way or another, humanity concurs in the Son. In him God brings the world out of sinful rebellion and into agency in realizing the Father's will. This is the success Jesus seeks himself and rewards in others, not being his kin or even doing his works (Matt. 10:32, 7:21, 12:50).

"Your Kingdom come" and "your will be realized on earth" echo each other in the familiar Hebrew parallel style that runs throughout the prayer. Yet in a subtler way they contrast

and cooperate. These are two moments in one atonement. The former petition invites God's Regime to advance along its frontier; the latter invites God to stay and make the earth a new heartland. The former confronts, the latter receives. The former liberates, the latter heals. The former recalls the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan, the latter the instruction at Sinai and orderly life in the wilderness and the land.

The former petition *summons* the Holy Spirit, while the latter *receives* the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's role in atonement is often neglected or taken as subsidiary to the Son's, but it is not. "No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). If anything, the Spirit's reception may be more determinative than the Son's: "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Luke 12:10).

The space between the Spirit's summons and the Spirit's reception is the decisive intersection of wills in which "it is finished," in which the Regime and the Rebellion pursue their ultimate ends, expose their true characters, and by grace reconcile.

The gospels record the Spirit's uneven reception around the Messiah. Jesus' mother embodies the hope of Israel when she accepts the angel's declaration that the Spirit will overshadow her and make her son the Father's heir and David's successor: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Yet Jesus' family and community also embody widespread failure to discern the subversive aspects of the Spirit's work (Luke 8:19-21, 4:14-29). Similarly, John the Baptist embodies an Israel awaiting and tasting the Spirit's deliverance (1:15, 3:16-17), overtaken by the events that bring it (3:21-22, 7:19-29), yet never abandoned (Acts 19:1-7). Jesus' Jewish and Roman opponents embody a world that rebels against the Regime of God not only sporadically but structurally, weaving resistance to the Holy Spirit into the fabric of its ways

of life and even its devotion to God (Acts 7:51). When he receives Satan as Passover approaches, Judas Iscariot embodies the hopeless ones who choose wills other than the Spirit (Luke 22:3). Jesus' other disciples embody the opposite trend that moves from perplexity to familiarity with the Spirit, from distance to intimacy, and from intimidation to authority (Luke 11:13, 12:11-12, Acts 2:4, 2:38, 5:32, 8:14-24, etc.). At the center of the Spirit's life, of course, is Jesus the Anointed One, whose life in the Spirit definitively realizes the Father's will on the way to Jerusalem and from Gethsemane to Calvary (Luke 22:42).

All these trends persist in the Church as Luke's gospel transitions to Acts and the New Testament transitions from gospels to epistles. Paul the Pharisee, Roman citizen, and "captive of the Spirit" who seeks the Father's will on his own journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22, 21:14) embodies the many successes. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and Simon the Magician (8:18-24) embody the many failures that persist too. The intersection of wills continues as the Church bears the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). Everywhere there is power and life, puzzlement and joy, refusal and acceptance, rejection and submission, persecution and wonder-working, tragedy and victory – what charismatic Christians call spiritual warfare.

Like the gospels, the New Testament's letters witness that this willing of God on earth has a heavenly counterpart. Both aspects are especially well developed in the letter to the Ephesians. The Church is humanity being both restored to its former place as the world's ambassadors of God and newly brought to a place of pneumatic authority even in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10). We already exercise this heavenly authority when we pray in Christ through the Spirit before the Father (Eph. 3:14-19). Being members of God's earthly household means

being heavenly citizens too (Eph. 2:19). Christ as joined heaven and earth, and so joining Christ enlists us into the battle on both fronts.

Spiritual warfare requires spiritual *matériel*, and the Spirit is the Church's armory. The Almighty Spirit of Holiness "empowers in the lord and in the might of his strength" (Eph. 6:10) by supplying instruments of righteousness to fight against the spiritualities of wickedness in the heavens (6:12): truth, righteousness, good news of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God (6:14-17). The Spirit teaches the Church to use these properly through training in practices such as prayer and proclamation, to use them wisely by cultivating virtues such as perseverance (6:18-19), and to remain faithful to the Father's policymaking as the Son's ambassador by maintaining discipline in fellowship (6:19-24). These are forms of structural obedience that counter the world's structural sin, free its captives, and develop them to maturity.

The language that closes Ephesians – obedience, service, might, principalities, powers, warfare, peacemaking, ambassadorship – is the language of foreign and domestic policy. It meets us where the first section left us. A Church that absorbs American foreign policies and makes them its own is a Church that has forgotten its own spiritual nature and contended against flesh and blood on fleshly terms (6:12). It has become seduced by empty words (5:6). It has forgotten the Father's will (5:17). It has ignored the Holy Spirit (5:18). No wonder it is finding its practical and theological problems overwhelming!

Jesus' Israelite way and Paul's Roman way implies also a way of being American, *truly* American, that releases us from servitude to our corporate or personal self and empowers us to be fellow reconcilers as the Messiah's fellow prophets and apostles. The real answer to narcissism in the American Church is, was, and forever shall be the Holy Spirit.

### §3. Generosity under Pressure: or, How to Win in November No Matter What

*A sermon delivered at Montecito Covenant Church, Santa Barbara, August 15, 2004.*

*The American feedback loop.* I am glad the Olympics have started. I needed the breather from presidential politics. I'm ready for a race that is a *literal* race. You know? One that lasts ten seconds rather than two years. One without months of predictions. One where a finish line does the judging. Most of all, I need a breather from all the fighting. I need a while away from statements like this, which came from two adjacent letters to the editor of the *South Coast*

*Beacon* several weeks ago:

“Could it be that those stolen documents [on Sandy Berger’s person] strengthen Bush’s case while revealing Clinton, Kerry and the Democrats to be nothing more than al-Qaeda enablers?” –R.E. Lynn, Santa Barbara

“President Bush, with unparalleled arrogance, masquerades as a door-to-door salesman for democracy and human rights. Yet, post-invasion Iraq labors under the jackboot of a foreign military occupation and its hand-picked puppet government...” –Robert Baruch, Goleta

Both of these letters illustrate the bitter polarization right now in American politics.

Robert Samuelson described it in a nice column in *The Washington Post*:

Politics is increasingly a world unto itself, inhabited by people convinced of their own moral superiority: conspicuously, the religious right among Republicans; and upscale liberal elites among Democrats. Their agendas are hard to enact because they're minority agendas. So politicians instinctively focus on delivering psychic benefits. Each side strives to make its political “base” feel good about itself. People should be confirmed in their moral superiority.

Polarization and nastiness are not side effects. They are the game. You feel good about yourself because the other side is so fanatical, misguided, corrupt and dishonest. Because real differences between party programs have narrowed, remaining differences are exaggerated. Drab policy debates become sensational showdowns – one side or the other is “destroying” the schools, the environment or the economy. Every investigation aims to expose the other side’s depravity: One side’s Whitewater becomes the other’s Halliburton.

Entertainment and politics merge, because both strive to satisfy psychic needs. Rush Limbaugh and Michael Moore are more powerful political figures than most senators, because they provide more moral reinforcement. ...

Politics should reflect and, at its best, conciliate the nation's differences. Increasingly, it does the opposite. It distorts, amplifies and inflames conflicts. It's a turnoff to vast numbers of centrist voters who do not see the world in such uncompromising absolutes. This may be the real polarization: between the true believers on both sides and everyone else.  
(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16180-2004Jun29.html>)

Perhaps you are one of those True Believers. Perhaps you are one of the turned off ones. Either way, this talk is meant for you.

In the United We Stand days after September 11, the American political dynamic was expressed as national unity. By the 2002 election it had split into two opposing varieties of the same basic message. This is the last chance to stop *our beloved America* from sliding into fascism. This is the last chance to stop *our beloved America* from losing the next Great War. *We* can take care of everyone better than *they* can.

Pitched battles reinforce every conviction that our opponents mean real harm. With each volley the True Believers' argument gets louder and louder like a feedback loop until the screech drowns out everything else. Our whole future is at stake! *We* need to prevail! *We* can't let *them* take it away! *They* aren't just wrong, they're out of touch! They're menacing! They're stupid! They're immoral! They're evil! Screeeeeeeech!!

Many of the True Believers really hate and fear each other. Those are strong words, but I think they're accurate. These people regularly pepper their speech with put-downs, dismissals, and cheap shots. Yet within each tribe the tone is intensely loyal. True Believers love and protect their own. They pull punches, tolerate exaggerations, and correct patiently, if at all.

This is even true among Samuelson's "everyone else." In the Turned-Off tribe conversational etiquette works like this: You remain calm and a little stoical. You listen respectfully and speak softly. You don't interrupt. You refute others indirectly rather than taking them head-on. You get points for hedging (*e.g.*, saying "well, I dunno" rather than "you're

wrong”), not being sure, and suggesting skepticism about the whole business. *Above all, you conclude the exchange within sixty seconds.* Break any of these rules and you are a True Believer. You’re a zealot. You’re out of the tribe. And you’re not good for America either.

Surrendering to any one of these tribes’ logics – whether by making human flags in 2001, taking sides in 2002-2004, or opting out along the way – is addicting. Throwing yourself into a campaign’s psychology is exhilarating. It’s more powerful than just rooting for your team in the World Series or the World Cup. “We get to be on the side of *good* versus *evil*!” Turning off and dropping out is not so much exhilarating as satisfying and liberating. “Can’t you see the bigger picture? Can’t we all just get along? Your bickering is ruining the country! A pox on both your parties! We independents are above the fray! *We* are better than *you*!”

So far I haven’t said anything expressly about the Church. I haven’t needed to. So-called Christian radio sounds like the rest of talk radio. Many American Christians are just as frantic as the wider electorate, sometimes even more. Others have decided they’re too spiritual for all this mess. Every year sees new scenarios of the end-times where contemporary politics turns into chapters in the book of Revelation. These dynamics are tearing the Church apart. Have you felt the pressure? For decades strident politics from pulpits has motivated True Believers, fatigued loyal dissenters, driven away visitors, turned off independents, and divided congregations.

Partisan politics’ ability to drive a sword right through the Church shows the power it has over us. The campaigns are telling us that politics is what matters in America and America is what matters in politics, *and many of us are agreeing*. They are telling us that Republican or Democratic goals are our ultimate goals, *and many of us are agreeing*. Others are disagreeing, resigning themselves to being ruled by True Believers and doing their best to tune them out.

*A different spirit: generosity through hope.* This church has been in a several month long series on the Lord's Prayer. A pastor friend of mine once summed up a series of his own in one profound line: "Because God is our Father, our lives are different." I want to develop that truth – that because God is our Father, our lives are different – by comparing the spirit of our times with that of passages from several letters of the New Testament.

Revelation is strong stuff. Its prophecies of plagues, persecutions, judgments, famines, disasters, and the end of the world dwarf even the worst threats from Al-Qaeda or whatever world villain you fear most. I think it's safe to say that things are worse here than even under a Kerry or a second Bush Administration!

Yet even after all that death and destruction the book closes with these remarkable words:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him [or her] the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his [or her] share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:17, 20).

That is about as far as it gets from a 2004 campaign ad. Revelation closes not with sunny optimism, fear, bitterness, or resignation, but with *invitations*, a warning, and a prayer.

I find this attitude astounding. It is not denial or cheap optimism or naïveté; the writer knows the danger. It is not the hypocritical conciliation our President-Elect will offer to try to get along with the party he has helped defeat. After all, here in Revelation it is still October, so to speak; the battles are still raging. This attitude is something else entirely: *generosity* born of hope in the midst of evil. "Let *anyone* who wishes take the water of life as a gift," the prophet says. Even the Romans who are killing Christians. Even the people who are handing believers over.

What is this “water of life”? It is not the oppressive stuff of the Nile, the Euphrates, or the Potomac (cf. Jer. 2:13-18), but the water of God. It is the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). It is total fellowship with the God of Israel. Generosity doesn’t get more generous.

Extending such generosity is costly. The bride will be the martyrs of Revelation 6. It would be easy to rise above the fray and join the sixty-seconds-or-less tribe. Keeping quiet would let the bride go underground and stay alive. Yet the Spirit in her is still causing her to call out, “come,” and reveal her position. Hospitality is more important than security.

And consider at the longing that goes along with it. The Spirit and the bride aren’t just inviting the thirsty in for living water. They are also inviting *the Lord Jesus* to come and deliver *them*. Their generosity depends on the conviction that Jesus will be faithful.

(That sounds wrong. The Spirit needs the Son to rescue him? Well, why not? The Son needed the Spirit to revive him after the cross! Now that the Spirit is the Church’s “down payment” on the Son’s promise to come and fulfill every promise, doesn’t the Spirit need the Son to return in order to relieve him of grieving the world’s sins and interceding with groans and sighs beyond words? In fact, isn’t the Spirit the *author* of our prayers for Lord Jesus to come?)

This is not how a campaign works. A campaign inspires confidence by describing America as strong, true, unique, proud among nations, and so on. However, voters can’t believe this *too* strongly, or we might feel safe to vote the other way! We have to believe our lives, finances, civil liberties, and national pride are at grave risk, and ultimately depend on this candidate. For the election to matter, America has to be a goal as much as an asset.

Revelation’s churches are not nearly as comfortable as America’s. Why is there no such insecurity in this passage? Because the goal was already reached! Jesus already assured John at the beginning of the vision that “I died and behold I live, and I have the keys to death and the grave” (1:17-18). The good news is a celebration, not a campaign. Jesus has freed us from

American insecurities. The wedding is on. Crucifying the groom didn't stop it. Exterminating the bride won't stop it either.

Turning from the bride's serenity back to ~~screaming~~ political anxiety rejects God's grace. It acts as if it matters more that President Bush or Kerry has the keys to the Oval Office than that Jesus has the keys to death and the grave, and that policy matters more than loving one's neighbor. It denies the resurrection.

Here is another difference. A campaign is a balancing act between being all about *us* (meaning the nation) and all about *me* (meaning the individual). Not this passage! It is not self-absorbed, because *Jesus* is the conqueror. The bride looks to the Spirit she wants to share, and vice versa. The two of them wait for the bridegroom. They call across the world to invite strangers to be engaged too. They care not about how the bride looks to herself, but about how she looks to him (Rev. 2-3, 19:7-8, 21:2-22:5).

Voting out of our own fears or our own dreams does what Jesus refused to do. It puts our own agenda ahead of the Father's. We don't pray "Father, *our* will be done in heaven as it is on earth." That is what the devil tells Jesus to do in the wilderness! We don't turn stones into dollars, armies, diplomats, prestige, or any other thing we think we need most. Instead we pray, "Father, *your* will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We cannot *manipulate* the Spirit. We can only *receive* the Spirit.

Little things like our political attitudes matter because our works and our emotions are signs of our *real* beliefs. If our lives *aren't* different, then we don't really think God is our Father.

Some signs in my own life point in embarrassing directions. Since 9/11 I have been doing a lot of "checking." I check the news often – not just because it is interesting, but also out of a

nagging worry that a disaster or big event might have happened since a few hours ago. I check the markets. I check the polls. That's not hope, and it doesn't yield generosity.

I think I do this because I want to feel safe. Yet I don't. What I learn usually tempts me to check even more. It feeds addictions that I don't like and don't want, but find hard to resist.

Am I the only addict in the room? Perhaps you don't even follow politics; but do a little adjusting and you will see this talk is about you too. We are a world of news junkies, sports junkies, envy junkies, sex-and-violence junkies, video game junkies, conspiracy junkies, talk-show gossip junkies, substance junkies, popularity junkies, shame junkies, and all the rest. What do *you* really believe in? Where does pressure drive you? To costly generosity, or elsewhere?

*(In)action items.* Now at this point a *proper* sermon is supposed to shift from convicting you about what's wrong to offering a "how-to" list for making things right. Everyone ready for three action items? Well, you're not going to get them. I'll show you why with more contrasts between American politics and Christian faith.

Do you know that electric atmosphere at the polling place as it hits us all over again that that *it is now up to us*? For two years it has been out of our hands. Now, for this one moment, the government is on our shoulders. There is a kind of sacred stillness as we step inside the booth into total political privacy and self-determination. In that instant of constitutional sovereignty *we vote alone*. Finally, there is a sense of decisiveness to putting the ballot in the box. *It is back out of our hands*. There is nothing else to do but go home and watch the returns (and nowadays the lawsuits).

If the bride were in this position, then writing a task list for her might make sense. But she is not, because *the Spirit is with her*.

American politics cannot even dream of the assurance that conviction brings. Look at the assurance in Paul's letter to the Romans:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but *we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* (Rom. 5:1-5).

The Spirit is with us, so suffering leads to hope. Our politicians try to use the word "hope," but they can't bring hope in the Christian sense at all. Hope is what you still have when your brothers and sisters are perishing for the crime of believing, the stars are falling from the sky, the seas are turning to blood, the water supply is radioactive, the sun no longer shines, and people are begging for death to come (Rev. 8-9). Real confidence doesn't wait for comfort!

Times are bad in the first century for Christians and just about everyone else. But listen to the joy surging through this passage in 1 Peter, written to churches that feel like "aliens and exiles" (1 Pet. 2:11) in a hostile world:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, *because the spirit of glory and of God rests on you*. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God. ... Therefore let those *who suffer according to God's will* do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator (1 Pet. 4:12-19).

The Spirit is with us, so suffering leads to joy and honor. Christians squabble about what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Do we speak unknown tongues? Do we get other gifts like supernatural knowledge and healing? Well, whatever else it does, the Holy Spirit's anointing gives us the power to do the Father's will, just as it empowered Jesus to obey the

Father from the wilderness all the way to the cross, and that it lets us rejoice and glorify God even when that takes us disciples along the same paths of suffering.

I think one reason why the Spirit and the bride are calling for the Son to come is that they need his courage. They need his glory. Jesus is the one on which the Spirit first rested. He has already walked this path. He has already loved his enemies and prayed for his persecutors. They need the Son not just to return in glory at the very end to rescue them once and for all, but also to stay with them in glory until the end of the age. They need him to lend them his patience and generosity while they suffer and grieve.

Falling back into fear, bitterness, or resignation acts as if we were alone when the Spirit and the Son are actually seeing us through. It forgets that Christ is faithful. It denies his gift of the Spirit. It fails to acknowledge him before others. That in turn invites Jesus to deny us before the Father (Matt. 10:32-33).

I said that *the Spirit is with the bride*; but it might be better to say that *the bride is with the Spirit*. In an election, it is momentarily up to us, then out of our hands. But in our passage, it is never just up to the bride. The Spirit speaks first. In fact, the Spirit has taken the lead right from the beginning of this book. The Spirit has showed John the opening vision of Jesus and inspired Jesus' stack of letters to his churches. Indeed, the Spirit has taken the lead in realizing the Father's will ever since brooding over the waters in Genesis 1:2!

Yet it is never just up to the Spirit either. An amazing thing happened when Jesus poured his Spirit into the heart of his bride and anointed her head: he delegated the Spirit's authority. In effect, he gave us the Spirit's initiative. Now the bride has taken the lead! Not *from* the Spirit, of course – “the Spirit blows where he wills” – but *with* and *in* the Spirit. Having the Spirit puts us on the leading edge. We aren't just aliens and exiles; we're pioneers and settlers. What *we* do on

earth – testifying, forgiving, binding, loosing, opening eternity’s gates, inviting the world to enter them, and calling on the Son to come too – will have been done in heaven.

I love the doctrine of the Trinity for the crazy truth it uncovers. The Father has brought us into his Word, which is the Son. And the Father has realized his will in us, which is the Spirit. To appreciate this fully requires mixing metaphors. In the Son we follow Christ, as the body follows the head. Yet in the Spirit we lead, as the bride calls for the bridegroom. We do not trade off leading and following, being in charge and being out of power, the way we do on Election Day. Instead, we work together. “We know that we *abide* in [God] and [God] in us,” 1 John says, “because he has given us of his own Spirit” (4:13). We *always* follow and we *always* lead.

You can feel the difference this makes throughout the New Testament. Because we abide in each other, “love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but *perfect love casts out fear*” (1 John 4:17-18). Hatred and resignation too (1 John 4:20-21). Anxiety, aggression, and despair give way to the calm confidence of knowing we are never alone.

Does all this apply to the world of politics? You bet. Titus is told to

exhort and reprove with all authority. Remind [the church] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by people and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, *which he poured out upon us richly* through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace *and become heirs in hope of eternal life* (Titus 2:15-3:7).

Doesn’t that sound like an antidote to power politics – whether it’s in the polling place, the workplace, the classroom, or around the dinner table? The Spirit is with us, so submitting displays authority. Oh, *we* remember our old vices. That’s why we sympathize with our poor

rulers! Yet God has freed us from having to beat them, join them, surrender to them, imitate them, or leave them alone. Now we can freely *respect* them as we go about our own business as God's Church. We have gone from being fellow rebels to God's heirs. The Spirit has given us a new style of politics: a gentle obedience that is really authority, leadership, and evangelism.

Are you ready to abide in God and submit with courtesy, whoever wins in November?

"But Bush is a fascist!" "But Kerry is an appeaser!" Well, first, let me suggest very gently that you *might* need to get a grip. Your trustworthy friends who support these people might not be as deluded as you think. (You do have some, right? I do.) Remember, there are True Believers on your side who *want* you scared. It makes you pliable and puts them in control. What they *need* is Christians who won't be played, who don't panic, and who hold onto our authority. *That* would change the rules of politics.

However, maybe you're right. Maybe Bush *is* a dictator. Maybe Kerry *is* a defeatist. I have trusted friends who think both of those things. Then keep in mind that Paul is referring to *Roman emperors and governors*. They demand to be worshipped! They are killing Christians who refuse! You see, even if all the conspiracy theories circulating through your wing of the ideological spectrum *are* true, Titus still applies. Withholding generosity towards your enemies would *still* be self-defeating. It would turn you back into the very people you fear.

Remember, *because God is our Father, our lives are different*. The Holy Spirit is with us! That means the mindset of moving ourselves from a bad place to a good one is dead wrong. God has *already* moved us into a life in his church that frees us to be faithful under these pressures. (Not from them, mind you, but under them.) These biblical passages are not treating our fears as imaginary. The threats can be no less real than the cross that saves us from them. The Son was crucified so people like Simon the zealot and Matthew the tax collector – people who work for

each other's mortal enemies – could be liberated from their sources of animosity and share the table in Christ's new community of peace. Think of that when you see a bumper sticker you want to rip off of someone else's car! Your serenity was won by the blood of Jesus.

In fact, there is also a place at that table for Nathanael the jaded independent. (See his line in John 1:45-46: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?")

After Jesus has done this beautiful new thing, can you imagine Simon or Matthew going back to their old rivalry? Can you imagine Nathanael going back to his old cynicism? I can imagine them being tempted to, when politics comes up around the campfire. But after all they have been through, can you imagine them giving into those temptations?

That is what we do when we surrender to conventional politics: we spurn the atonement. We shrug off the Father's will and try to secure our own salvations – like the Galatian churches surrendered to ethnic politics and re-segregated their Jews and Gentiles. Ironically, our task is a kind of *inaction*: not to backslide into our old lives of frenzy, anxiety, and resignation.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and miserable worldly things, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal. 4:8-9).

You can hear Paul's amazement here. After becoming an heir of the Spirit, you want to go back to being a hack?! "For *freedom* Christ has set us free! Stand fast, then, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

The Spirit is with us, so we are free. If we Christian tax collectors, zealots, and skeptics surrender to our old ways, we will find ourselves consumed by each other – conceited, competitive, and envious. Our nostalgia will strangle our hope. "Do not gratify the desires of the flesh," Paul says. It leads to what we see in American politics at its worst: idolatry, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, partisanship, envy, and the other bad habits of the violent

world that tried and failed to defeat Christ (Gal. 5:19-21, cf. 4:29). Instead, walk by the Spirit. Then we produce fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-26). And we show the world another way.

I am *not* saying not to vote! You have the authority. I am not saying whom to vote for! Reasonable people can disagree, and reasonable people can be undecided. I am not saying anything goes! There are political stands the Church has to take *as the Church* – one famous example was the Barmen Declaration in Nazi Germany. I am not saying to be unconcerned when things go wrong! *Lots* of things will go *very* wrong in the next four years, no matter who wins. Grieve them, speak up against evildoers, and work for change, all as the Spirit prompts us. And I am not saying that all political views are equally valid. *I* am right.

All I mean by “inaction” is not losing our focus. Resist the assumption of American politics that we have to be our own saviors. Christ defeated it like God defeated Pharaoh. Don’t go back! Don’t even think of going back! Buying into that assumption effectively changes the words of Revelation, conjuring new fears and removing their comforts (22:18-19).

*Greater freedom from a greater problem.* I have developed all this using national politics, and some of you apolitical types have been patient with me, but the problem is much broader and deeper. Fortunately, so is our freedom. You have probably heard many times how Christ has freed us from sin and death. Well, Christ has freed us from much more than those. Christ has also freed English speakers and Spanish speakers in California from having to take sides against each other. Christ has freed women and men from the battle of the sexes. Christ has freed the old and the young from the generation gap and the fight for Social Security. Christ has freed the world’s peoples from the clash of civilizations. Christ has freed athletes from obsession with winning and artists from preoccupation with fame. Christ has freed the powerful and the poor

from having to tie each other's hands. Christ has freed workplaces, schools, and churches from petty power politics. Hallelujah! All these things have been transcended – not just wished away, but put away – through the blood of the cross and the breath of the resurrection.

(By the way, these are not only American problems. The same assumptions and dynamics drive other nation-states, as well as NATO, the European Community, and other regional blocs, the United Nations, what's left of communism, radical and militant Islam, international business, ethnic tribes, and linguistic-cultural groups. Craig M. Gay calls the spirit of our times "practical atheism," or living as if God doesn't exist (Gay 1998). Today the headlines across the world are frantic. If you recall, they were frantic even before September 11. The War on Terror only increased the anxiety. This is because *we* – whoever *we* are – are always in danger. We are in peril whether we are winning or losing, in power or out of power, many or few. America's heart is the world's heart.)

There is no better summary of this new reality than Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13. "These three things remain," he tells the church in Corinth: "faith (which means living through trust in God's goodness), hope (which means acting with confidence in God's power to fulfill his intentions), and love" (which means putting God and neighbor before oneself). A trusting, hoping, loving church is a fearless, hateless, self-denying church. It is also a refuge for those who fear, hate, and are self-centered. It heeds the good news. It pursues the will of the Father. It loves its enemies like crazy and prays without ceasing for its persecutors. It does not worry about tomorrow, but acts generously out of trust in its providential Father. It does not follow its flesh back to Egypt but follows the Spirit forward to the frontier. It looks like the Sermon on the Mount, like Paul on his missions, like the young Church in Acts, and above all like Jesus on his way to the cross and to the Father's right hand.

When I think about how these virtues might look today, the picture I get in my mind is the black Church during the civil rights movement. Talk about fear, hate, persecution, bad faith, and all the rest! But in a leader like Martin Luther King, Jr. you find trust, confidence, and unselfishness. Those three things remained, and so they and he and his movement overcame their

own hatred and fears and needs for self-assertion over others, and helped white America do the same thing. The Church in America hasn't seen victories like that since, I think because it has never been as faithful, hopeful, or loving as it was then. Can you imagine either "the Christian left" or "the Christian right" acting this way nowadays?

*Conclusion.* I have a few final questions. I sense this is a pretty healthy church in these matters. But we all have our quiet addictions, political or otherwise. So:

- Are we burdened with fears, divisions, and battles like these? I certainly am. Then let's stand fast with the Spirit and the bride. Let's identify our weaknesses, understand them, and repent of them. Let's live like the free people of these New Testament letters and the saints who have followed them. Here's a suggestion: when you and I face temptations to turn back, let's resist them by praying the Lord's Prayer. Just those few words will reframe everything.

- Do we know others with these burdens? If our neighbors are breaking under the pressure of self-determination, then let's extend God's own generosity. Let's include them in the bride's and the Spirit's life of peace, security, and freedom and then invite them to stay.

- Someday things will get harder, and not just because the Olympics will end. We can expect further terrorist attacks. Eventually one will probably succeed. Do we want to be generous *then*? Then let's cultivate a spirit of Christlike generosity *now*. We can do that with prayer for our enemies, forgiveness, mercy, courage, non-violence, compassion, sacrifice, and fellowship.

- And if God hasn't moved you into this new place, then come and take the water of life as a gift. Come and be our sister or brother. Our opinions will sometimes drive each other crazy ... but it sure beats politics as usual.

God's ultimate response to these needs is as full as the Father's will and as filling as the Holy Spirit. It is the whole life of the bride. And it has already been given.