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PCPJ MISSION STATEMENT

To encourage, enable, and sustain peacemaking and justice seeking as authentic and integral aspects of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity, witnessing to the conviction that Jesus Christ is relevant to all tensions, crises, and brokenness in the world. The PCPJ seeks to show that addressing injustice and making peace as Jesus and his followers did is theologically sound, biblically commanded, and realistically possible.

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Editorial Seeking Jesus

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Introduction

My context: I am a fourth generation Assembly of God (AG) kid from Kansas. My grandparents and great grandparents came into the movement in the 1920s and 30s, my parents were raised in the AG, and so was I. Almost every night of my life until I was eighteen years old and had left for college, my father would come into my room, kneel down next to my bed, lay his hand on me, and weep and pray for me, our family, the church, and the world. The essence of my father's theological and practical advice for me, that he has repeated my entire life, is "Seek Jesus." I attended an AG college, an AG seminary, AG summer camps, went on AG mission trips, taught at an AG college for nine years, and I am still an AG minister.

So, as a white Pentecostal reared in America, I am sincerely trying to listen to my father's advice to "seek Jesus" as I write these four suggestions for white Pentecostals in America. Although they are suggestions specifically for the AG U.S.A., they can be applied to other U.S. Pentecostal denominations as well.

Racism

Regarding the founding of the AG, racism was a significant factor for the 350 white ministers leaving the Church of God in Christ to form the AG in 1914 (and similar histories exist for other predominantly white Pentecostal denominations). Official AG U.S.A. publications need to refer to this openly, with repentance, and theological explanations of diversity and white privilege. Other predominately white Pentecostal denominations need to do the same.

I was a tongue-talking racist; that is part of my testimony. I once was blind but now see more clearly, and see the reality of white privilege and how deeply prejudiced I was, even though I was in church multiple times a week and youth camp every summer. In fact, I learned many of the racist jokes from my youth group leaders and friends. I gain nothing from denying that. Honesty, confession, repentance, and transformation, are marks of sanctification and maturity, and the AG U.S.A. would do wonderfully well to keep its historical sins front and center, and its reasons and strategies for addressing them and being healed from them front and center. The door for this has been opened by the AG statement against racism, which reads in part:

The church calls to repentance any and all who have sinned against God by participating in racism through personal thought or action, through church and social structures, or through failure to address the evils of racism . . . We pray for God to give us the courage to confront the sin of racism where it may be found in our lives, in our churches, in our society structure, and in our world. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in actively

rooting out racism and seeking the reconciliation of men and women to God and to each other.

Pentecostals testify, so the AG U.S.A. should do the same by sharing its testimony. It has a sinfully racist past (the origin stories should be modified to reflect this), still perhaps struggles with racism and prejudice, and that it is being delivered as it explores the intricacies of race and ethnicity as a predominantly white denomination founded primarily by white ministers who had left an interracial denomination (Church of God in Christ).

Here is a joke I heard recently: “Know why English will be the language of heaven? Because most Americans will not learn a second language.” Assumptions and practices related to the English language (or English speaker) superiority is a form of racism; knowledge and wisdom flow in all linguistic directions, not just from English into other languages. In this edition of *Pax Pneuma* we begin a practice of multilingualism with the publication of Darío López Rodríguez’ “La religión in la plaza pública: El Dios de la vida y de la justicia según Amós 7:10-17” in Spanish. Submission of articles in languages other than English are welcome at *Pax Pneuma*.

Military Service Article

Many of us know that the early AG, and most early Pentecostal denominations, were peace churches and took their stance as conscientious objectors or noncombatants during World War I and even during World War II. They justified this theologically, based on Jesus. They had a Christocentric hermeneutic (putting Jesus at the center of biblical interpretation) that compelled a commitment to loving their enemy. I should mention here that “pacifism” does not mean being “passive” and does not necessitate being “apolitical.” Pacifist simply means “peace maker,” so laying down one’s sword and supporting nonviolent direct action to attain political goals can certainly go together. Dr. Martin Luther King was a Christian pacifist, but he was certainly not apolitical.

As many people know, the AG changed its statement in 1967 to be pro-choice, leaving killing in warfare up to the individual conscience of each Christian. There is a reference to Romans 13, warfare in the Hebrew scriptures, but not much about Jesus. Combatant participation in war could be justified better than the statement currently does, and I think the just war tradition/theory/criteria should be articulated.

Therefore, I have a concrete suggestion for the AG and other Pentecostal denominations in the U.S.A., many of whom are at the crossroads between the road of uncritical nationalism and uncritical militarism and the road of thoughtful, reflective, and engaged conversations about these challenging issues.

Denominations should form task forces to write well-developed rationales for 1) combatant participation, employing just war tradition and written by Pentecostal folk who believe that it is justifiable for Christians to kill in warfare, 2) nonviolence, written by Pentecostal folk who believe in consistent nonviolence and who could speak theologically and pastorally about conscientious objection and noncombatant service, and 3) Just Peacemaking

practices that invite both just war theorists and pacifists to work for peace and justice together to prevent war and reduce violence, which is a goal of just war theory. Just Peacemaking practices are an excellent attempt to move past the age-old arguments of “it is okay to kill” vs. “Christians should never kill” to working together on the things that make for peace. I recommend Glen Stassen’s *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of War and Peace*.

Christian explanations of all three should be present in our curricula, ‘position statements’, on our websites. This would reflect what the AG officially, as a denomination, has already affirmed with their participation in the unanimous National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) vote to adopt “For the Health of the Nation.” The NAE, of which the AG and other Pentecostal denominations are members, has already stated that each denomination needs to teach just war, pacifism, and just peacemaking.

Israel/Palestine

According to a recent national survey, 11 percent of AG U.S.A. folk do not think that the U.S. should support Israel over the Palestinians in the Middle East. In other words, only 11 percent think that the US should support the Palestinians and the Israelis equally. This 11 percent is a prophetic minority and represents the road that the AG should travel if we are to be as biblically solid, theologically healthy, and Spirit-led as we claim and hope to be.

I suggest that AG U.S.A. learn from our Palestinian Pentecostal Christian brothers and sisters so that we can read scripture better and become less dispensational and less one-sidedly Zionist. We can love Israel, love Jewish people, and support the existence of the state of Israel while also helping the state of Israel make wiser choices regarding the settlements in the West Bank, the occupation of the West Bank, the wall not being built on the green line, and the emerging of a just peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

This means that American Pentecostals in general, and the AG U.S.A. in particular, could put ourselves in humble learner positions and hear the testimonies and prayer requests (the subaltern voices, theology, and experiences) of the Palestinian Pentecostal and evangelical Christians who have lived under occupation in the “Holy Land.”

Gender

The AG ordains women and has from the beginning. George O. Wood, AG General Superintendent, even defended this position against Southern Baptist and fundamentalist critiques. Other denominations, like the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), “ordain” women but call men “bishops” to ensure that there is a hierarchy and that men are ranked higher and women are ranked lower.

While the COG (Cleveland, TN) first needs to intentionally recognize women as bishops, the AG (and other denominations) needs more intentionality in promoting and empowering women in pastoral and denominational leadership. Twenty-eight percent of AG ministers do not support women serving as senior pastors, 43 percent do not support women in district or national leadership, and 47 percent do not support having women on deacon boards. These are serious

problems, and as a theologian I would suggest that these attitudes represent less than healthy, less than faithful, and less than “Pentecostal” understandings of scripture, gender, and leadership. I think it is not the road that the AG and other Pentecostal denominations should travel on in the future.

A way to pave the road for smoother travel into a more faithful future is to intentionally include women in leadership positions in district and national offices, even if there are quotas, not tokenism, to fill a slot for political reasons. Pentecostal denominations need to reduce male leadership and increase female leadership to reflect what the Spirit really would like to happen so the church can be better equipped to fulfill her potential. However, there is a lot of theological work that has to be done so that men can realize that it is not their ministry to share anyway. It is not “their” power or “their” place that they then graciously open up to women. Ministry and leadership are God’s gifts to give, and it is God’s ministry, not men’s (and it has already been given by God to women; more men and women simply need to recognize it and live into it).

Conclusion

I think the AG and other predominantly white Pentecostal denominations in the U.S. can even now “seek Jesus” and choose roads of life and that we can journey forward in confession and truth-telling regarding our racist past so that we can authentically and deeply experience healing and transformation; that we can journey forward by expanding the conversations about war and peacemaking by articulating just war criteria, nonviolence, and just peacemaking practices; that we can best support Israel by also supporting the Palestinians and listening to the voices of that part of our Pentecostal family that has been suppressed; and that we can intentionally work to change the minds of Pentecostal men (and women) who are against women in leadership and intentionally change the structure of the denominations so that women *must* be included. I believe this is part of what the Spirit is doing today, and I hope and pray that we will participate.

New Series: A Guide for Authors
Pentecostals, Peacemaking, and Social Justice
Published by Wipf & Stock Publishers

Pentecostals

Pentecostal-charismatic Christians comprise approximately 25 percent of global Christianity (600 million of 2.4 billion). This development has occurred in just the last century and has been called the “Pentecostalization” of Christianity. Pentecostals experience Christianity and the world in unique ways and this series invites discovery and development of Pentecostal-charismatic approaches to peacemaking and social justice.

Peacemaking

The majority of early twentieth-century Pentecostal denominations were peace churches that encouraged conscientious objection. They said “no” to Christian combatant participation in war, and some Pentecostals are exploring the recovery of this witness. This aspect of the series focuses on pacifism, war, just war tradition, just peacemaking, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, nonviolence, and other peacemaking related themes and issues within the Pentecostal tradition and from Pentecostal-charismatic perspectives.

Social Justice

Some early Pentecostals confronted the injustices of racism, sexism, and economic disparity. Others perpetuated it. Yet the Holy Spirit leads us to prophetically confront injustice and seek to redeem and restore. Pentecostal-charismatic Christians around the world are working for justice in a myriad of ways. This aspect of the series focuses on gender, sexuality, economics, race, ethnicity, class, globalization, trade, poverty, health, consumerism, development, and other social justice related themes and issues within the Pentecostal tradition and from Pentecostal-charismatic perspectives.

The Series

We welcome contributions from theologians, biblical scholars, philosophers, ethicists, historians, social-scientists, activists, and practitioners of peacemaking and social justice. We understand that peace and justice are not separate concerns but different ways of talking about and seeking *shalom*—God’s salvation, justice, and peace.

We especially welcome both scholarly and praxis oriented contributions from majority world Pentecostals and charismatics, for this series seeks to explore the ways that Pentecostal-charismatic Christians can develop, strengthen, and sustain a peace with justice witness in the twenty-first century around the world.

The Audience

1. Pentecostals and charismatics who are already committed to being peacemakers and justice seekers and who want to strengthen the scholarship and praxis.
2. Members of the academy (scholars, graduate students and upper-level undergrads) who are interested in Pentecostal-charismatic scholarship on issues of peacemaking and social justice.
3. Those affiliated with Christian or interfaith organizations, peace and justice networks, and Pentecostal-charismatic organizations interested in peacemaking and social justice.

Submitting a proposal

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Early Christian Pacifism and Nonviolence

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Introduction

We serve the God of life and we are called to bring the Gospel of life to all nations. Thus, we cannot kill those who we give life to. That is why the early Christians did not use violence. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have rather died than murdered someone that God gave his life to. The first church was a church of martyrs where the holy ones gave their lives as sacrifices to God—they refused to kill. They were forbidden to be soldiers and judges, who carried out the death penalty.

There were, of course, people in the early church that did not follow the right teaching within the church, even the New Testament witness about church members who do not agree with the apostles. However, the majority of early Christians and the first Christian leaders who were filled with the Spirit were against the philosophy of killing people.

“Love your enemies” was *literally* interpreted and applied in the early church. It was also the oft-quoted Bible verse. The message of “enemy love” was preached from the beginning of the church throughout the first four centuries. Although many Christians continued to affirm a nonviolent ethic, mainstream Christianity eventually adopted the “just war” theory, a Roman military ethic. The just war theory would later be Christianized in the fourth century with the help of Augustine of Hippo. There is no church father in the first three centuries of the church that justifies Christians killing in war. They only taught enemy love, grace, peace, and laying down your life for others. Following are some examples of what they affirmed.

Early Pacifist Affirmations

Justin Martyr (160 AD) wrote: “We ourselves were well conversant with war, murder, and everything evil, but all of us throughout the whole wide earth have traded in our weapons of war. We have exchanged our swords for ploughshares, our spears for farm tools. Now we cultivate the fear of God, justice, kindness to men, faith, and the expectation of the future given to us by the Father himself through the Crucified One.”¹ Tatian (dead c. 185) wrote: “I do not wish to be a ruler. I do not strive for wealth. I refuse offices connected with military command. Fornication I detest. No insatiable hunger for gold drives me to go to sea. I do not fight for a victor’s laurels. I am free from the mad thirst for fame. I despise death. I stand above every illness. No grief consumes my soul.”²

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130-202) wrote: “But the law of liberty, that is, the Word of God, preached by the apostles (who went forth from Jerusalem) throughout all the earth, caused such a change in the state of things, that these [nations] did form the swords and war-lances into

¹ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 110.3.4.

² Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Vol. II, reprint, 1979), 69.

ploughshares, and changed them into pruning-hooks for reaping the corn, [that is], into instruments used for peaceful purposes, and that they are now unaccustomed to fighting, but when smitten, offer also the other cheek.”³ Hippolytos (c. 200) wrote: “A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath. If he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected for baptism. A military commander or civic magistrate who wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If an applicant or a believer seeks to become a soldier, he must be rejected, for he has despised God.”⁴

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) wrote: “If a loud trumpet summons soldiers to war, shall not Christ with a strain of peace issued to the ends of the earth gather up his soldiers of peace? By his own blood and by his word he has assembled an army which sheds no blood in order to give them the Kingdom of Heaven. The trumpet of Christ is his Gospel. He has sounded it and we have heard it. Let us then put on the armour of peace . . . The Church is an army of peace which sheds no blood.”⁵ Tertullian (160-220 AD) wrote in *De Corona Militis*:

To begin with the real ground of the military crown, I think we must first inquire whether warfare is proper at all for Christians . . . Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? . . . Of course, if faith comes later, and finds any preoccupied with military service, their case is different, as in the instance of those whom John used to receive for baptism, and of those most faithful centurions, I mean the centurion whom Christ approves, and the centurion whom Peter instructs; yet, at the same time, when a man has become a believer, and faith has been sealed, there must be either an immediate abandonment of it, which has been the course with many; or all sorts of quibbling will have to be resorted to in order to avoid offending God, and that is not allowed even outside of military service; or, last of all, for God the fate must be endured which a citizen-faith has been no less ready to accept. Neither does military service hold out escape from punishment of sins, or exemption from martyrdom.⁶

Origen (240 AD) wrote: “You cannot demand military service of Christians any more than you can of priests. We do not go forth as soldiers.”⁷ Cyprian (200-258 AD) wrote: “The world is soaked with mutual blood. When individuals commit homicide, it is a crime; it is called a virtue when it is done in the name of the state. Impunity is acquired for crimes not by reason of innocence but by the magnitude of the cruelty.”⁸ Athanasius (298-373 AD) wrote:

³ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Vol. I, reprint, 1977,) 512.

⁴ *Hippolytos, Apostolic Tradition 16:17-19*.

⁵ *Protrepticus XI*, 116.

⁶ *On the chaplet* 11.

⁷ *Against Celsus VIII*. 7.3.

⁸ *To Donatus*, chapter 6.

Christ is not only preached through His own disciples, but also wrought so persuasively on men's understanding that, laying aside their savage habits and forsaking the worship of their ancestral gods, they learnt to know Him and through Him to worship the Father. While they were yet idolaters, the Greeks and Barbarians were always at war with each other, and were even cruel to their own kith and kin. Nobody could travel by land or sea at all unless he was armed with swords, because of their irreconcilable quarrels with each other. Indeed, the whole course of their life was carried on with the weapons. But since they came over to the school of Christ, as men moved with real compunction they have laid aside their murderous cruelty and are war-minded no more. On the contrary, all is peace among them and nothing remains save desire for friendship.

Who, then, is He Who has done these things and has united in peace those who hated each other, save the beloved Son of the Father, the common Saviour of all, Jesus Christ, Who by His own love underwent all things for our salvation? Even from the beginning, moreover, this peace that He was to administer was foretold, for scripture says, 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles, and nation shall not take sword against nation, neither shall they learn any more to wage war.' Nor is this by any means incredible.

The barbarians of the present day are naturally savage in their habits, and as long as they sacrifice to their idols they rage furiously against each other and cannot bear to be a single hour without weapons. But when they hear the teaching of Christ, forthwith they turn from fighting to farming, and instead of arming themselves with swords extend their hands in prayer. In a word, instead of fighting each other, they take up arms against the devil and the demons, and overcome them by their self-command and integrity of soul.⁹

Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 AD) wrote:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Who are these? Those who imitate the Divine love of others, who show forth in their own life the characteristic of the Divine energy. The Lord and Giver of good things completely annihilates anything that is without affinity and foreign to goodness. This work He ordains also for you, namely to cast out hatred and abolish war, to exterminate envy and banish strife, to take away hypocrisy and extinguish from within resentment of injuries smoldering in the heart. Instead, you ought to introduce whatever is contrary to the things that have been removed.¹⁰

John Chrysostom (347-407 AD) wrote:

That they may now understand that this is a new kind of warfare and not the usual custom of joining in battle, when He sent them with nothing He said: And so, marching on, show

⁹ *On the Incarnation*. See chapter 8, 51, and 52.

¹⁰ *The Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes, Ancient Christian Writers series*, Newman Press.

forth the meekness of lambs, although you are to go to wolves . . . for so will I best show my power, when the wolves are conquered by the lambs . . . For certainly it is a greater work and much more marvellous to change the minds of opponents and to bring about a change of soul than to kill them . . . We ought to be ashamed, therefore, who act far differently when as wolves we rush upon our adversaries. For as long as we are lambs we conquer; even when a thousand wolves stand about, we overcome and are victors. But if we act like wolves we are conquered, for then the aid of the Good Shepherd departs from us, for He does not foster wolves but sheep.¹¹

For more peaceful saints and their writings, check out the Pentecostal, Catholic, or Orthodox Peace Fellowships at: www.pcpj.org, www.catholicpeacefellowship.org, and www.incommunion.org. Remember that the church taught this while they were being persecuted. They taught nonviolence during times when they were violently attacked. They did not just preach, "Turn the other cheek," they actually turned it. They literally followed Christ, and many of the fathers above became martyrs.

The Bible and Nonviolence

The pacifism of the early church was not something that sneaked inside of it after a while and infected early church leaders; it was there from the beginning, and as mentioned, the first church father who said that Christians could go to war was Augustine of Hippo. A Christian justification for taking up arms did not come until the fourth century. Nonviolence is the elementary meaning of the cross, and if you look in your Bible, you will find Christian pacifism everywhere.

Isaiah 9:5-6 exhorts: "Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Romans 12:14-21 confirms:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

¹¹ *Epistle Matt.* Hom. 34, n.1:--Breviary, June 11.

Many Christians do not accept this foolish teaching of the cross (1 Cor 1) and point at Romans 13 and the wars in the Old Testament as arguments for Christians going to war. But Romans 13 does not talk about war. The “sword” mentioned here in Greek “*machaira*,” was not used in war; rather, it was a short dagger used when Roman soldiers accompanied tax collectors—the symbol of local policing. The text also shows that we shall “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21) even when it is the state that is evil. Furthermore, some biblical scholars note that Romans 13 is a text in which Paul tried to stop Christians who wanted to overthrow the government.¹² Christians are never supposed to use violence, not even in revolutions against Caesar. Instead, we shall submit to the authorities (which is not the same as obey). Christians should not sacrifice to the emperor and kill Jews in concentration camps while preaching the good news of salvation. There are two types of peace: the *negative peace* when people cannot fight, although they want to, because a foreign military or a strong police force is hindering them, and *positive peace* in which people do not fight because they do not want to. It is the second peace that we must seek.

The Apostle Paul writes that we shall not take revenge, for vengeance is the Lord’s (Rom 12:19). Also, according to Jesus, we shall not judge (Matt 7:1). When the Law came, the children of Israel tried to follow it, and they punished the ones that did not. Moreover, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Israel brought God’s wrath upon the nations, and waged war against them. The Old Testament wars were not just wars in our present day understanding of the concept. They were extermination wars, where everyone was put to death (Josh 10:29-42). Even Israel was punished by war. No one is sinless.

However, while the law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). Jesus came to free us from the curse of the Law, to free us from the death penalty which is upon us all. He who was sinless took the punishment of sin, the death penalty, upon Himself. After He defeated death He said to us to go out and to bring the news of this freedom from death to everyone. We are free from the Law, and we shall not judge, therefore we do not have to circumcise, sacrifice animals, or wage war. We shall love our enemies like Jesus. Life does not harmonize with death. It is hard to bring the gospel of love to someone that you are shooting at.

But what if shooting is the only alternative? Well, there is always another alternative. God wants us to spread the Gospel. Therefore, He will help us to do that. If He can heal the sick, He can stop people from killing each other. Instead of killing evildoers, we can, in the name of Jesus, drive out the evil spirits inside them. Instead of stopping terror and oppressing foreign countries with bombs and tanks, we can stop it by bringing love and grace to those countries. There are always alternatives to war, and they are available because we have a God in which nothing is impossible (Matt 19:26). We are not going to be passive and refuse to solve international problems. We can, with the help of God’s grace, solve international disputes in a better way (and more Christ-like way) than to kill. When Jesus said: “Do not resist an evil person” (Matt 5:39), He did not mean that we shall not resist evil at all. The Greek word used

¹² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 199.

here for resist (*antisthenai*) means resist violently, not resist generally. Rather we shall resist evil, but not by using evil ourselves. We shall overcome it with good. We shall defeat violence without resorting to violence. War is a horrible thing, and few people enjoy it (although there are some folks who do). But many believe it is a necessary evil. It would be fantastic if we did not have to use violence to feel safe and to free the oppressed. Well, the Bible says that we do not have to fear anything because God has saved us from evil, even from death. Jesus also insures us that He will help us spread the Gospel to everyone and overcome evil with good. Christian organizations like Christian Peacemaker Teams (www.cpt.org) do not ignore the needs of our world. Rather, they go out to war zones spreading peace instead of war and love instead of hate. Their slogan is: “Getting in the way” and they say: “What would happen if Christians devoted the same discipline and self-sacrifice to nonviolent peacemaking that armies devote to war?” They do not try to stop war; they embody an alternative to it.

Conclusion

So, do you want to join all the saints who, through the centuries, worked for peace instead of war? Do you want to be a “peacemaker?” (Matt 5:9). It may be tough and hard as making peace is as costly as waging war, but you will not be alone. Millions of people have walked the way of the cross before you, and most importantly, God will help you and care for you. He bore the heaviest cross. His death is the ultimate sign of enemy love, forgiveness, and grace. When He was struck, He turned the other cheek (John 18:22-23). He was slaughtered as a lamb. His death led to life. His cross led to resurrection. His humiliation led to glory. His nonviolent lifestyle led to victory. Together, we, His disciples, can with His help, give this world grace. Preach His peace no matter where you will end up or how people will treat you. Love them until they kill you, and then love them more, just as the saints did before us.

Lost Among Christians?

Mike Miller

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For the past ten years, I have spent more than half of my working hours with a small influential and growing band of evangelical, Pentecostal, and holiness Christians who have gathered under the umbrella of the highly decentralized Christians Supporting Community Organizing (CSCO).

What is a fallen away Jew from a radical labor movement family doing in this world? My initial interest was raised by the absence of these Christians from the faith-based community organizing work with which I have been engaged for many years, and their apparent capture by the religious right.

From a pure "people power" point of view, their numbers are important. I wanted to see if there was a way this large constituency might become involved in faith-based community building, including action on issues of economic, social justice, and democratic participation. I also wanted to see if they could be persuaded to work on these issues within community organizations which include Catholic churches (with whom these traditions are sometimes in conflict) and Protestant churches, Jewish synagogues, and others who disagree with them on most of the "individual morality" issues.

About 50,000,000 Americans call themselves evangelical, Pentecostal or holiness (EPH) Christians. While theologically "liberal" portions of mainline Protestantism have shrunk both in size and in the commitment of its believers, EPH churches are often vibrant and growing. So are caucuses of evangelicals within mainline Protestantism. These believers are in Anglo middle-class and ethnic working-class suburbs. Their store fronts are to be found in growing number in Latino, Black, and Asian inner-city neighborhoods. They are also a strong presence in Appalachia and the Appalachian diaspora. For them, faith is not a Sunday-morning-only affair. It is not unusual for them to spend ten, fifteen, or more hours a week in church and church-related activities. Many of them tithe, giving 10 percent or more of their income to their congregation.

Denominations like the mostly white Assemblies of God or mostly African American Church of God in Christ are larger in number in the United States than Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Lutheran bodies. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, they are growing rapidly. The intensity of their commitment is measured by what a Brazilian Catholic Bishop once told me: "We are 80 percent of the believers in Brazil and the evangelicals are only twenty percent, but on any given Sunday except for Easter and Christmas, we are twenty percent of the people in the pews and they are 80 percent."

Adherents in this part of Christendom share many core beliefs. They have been "born again" and personally know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and they have a high view of scripture. The Pentecostals among them lay special emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, known to them experientially by speaking in tongues and other intense spiritual/emotional experiences. Their high view of scripture makes them theologically "conservative." Liberal mainliners are likely to view scripture as allegory, metaphor or myth, and to give tradition,

experience, and reason roughly equal weight to a high view of scripture. As I was soon to learn, it is this "high view" of scripture that calls EPH believers to become engaged with issues of justice, to stand against consumerism, and to struggle to build meaningful communities in which interdependence rather than "me first" individualism is a central value.

In the 19th century, the spiritual forbears of EPH believers were at the center of social reform. They provided leadership and a base for abolition of slavery, child labor reform, women's suffrage, labor, temperance, and other movements of the day. Late 19th to early 20th century Pentecostalism was inter-racial and placed men and women in prominent leadership roles. In what has been called, "The Great Reversal," many early 20th century believers came to identify the "social gospel" with secularism, though in fact, its origins are in the same revival movements from which EPH traditions originated.

The famous Scopes Trial in which the merit of Charles Darwin was debated by Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, is emblematic of what the faithful saw going on in modern society. In the face of a judicial affirmation of Darwinism, their strategy in defeat was to retreat and circle the wagons. Increasingly, faith became chiefly a spiritualized, ephemeral relationship to God. The best way to deal with a corrupt world was to withdraw from it and live as pure a life as possible. For believers, salvation began with conversion. For non-believers, salvation was a non-reality. The reality of hell and damnation was the only thing awaiting them. However, the world would not leave believers alone. A relatively small number of them became engaged with the world during the civil rights, anti-war, and the poverty program period of the 1960s. When issues like abortion increasingly confronted them, large numbers of them began to return to their roots, but with a very important qualification. The structures of evil, like slavery or corporate exploitation, were not challenged; rather, the focus was almost entirely on individual sin.

Currently, within these parts of the church, there is a massive movement on the part of whites to apologize for past racial prejudice and discrimination and seek racial reconciliation. However, there is little talk and no collective action to end redlining or predatory lending in inner-city neighborhoods or to achieve health care coverage for all. It is through the conversion of lenders, the education of potential borrowers, and the charity of health professions that these problems are to be addressed, assuming they are even seen as part of the Christian moral challenge.

Christians Supporting Community Organizing (CSCO) began with the question: "Would you be interested in exploring faith-based (or congregation-based) community organizing as a vehicle for mission and community building in our parts of the church?" The group's national organizer, Denver-based Marilyn Stranske, has met with almost 500 individual leaders of these faith perspectives. Most had never heard of this kind of community organizing, but the concerns they expressed in the in-depth visits are precisely those addressed by community organizing: discrimination, poverty, and growing pressure on the middle class, and powerlessness to influence public decisions that affect their lives. Some grieved over the failure of EPH parts of the church to be effectively engaged in these issues. There was also concern about consumerism, "me first" individualism, exploitation of sexuality, and how the church might combat these trends. While some people were uninterested in the topic, and a few were critical, the overwhelming response was positive. An invitation to attend a CSCO workshop was extended to

those who expressed interest. By now, several hundred respected EPH leaders have participated in these or similar workshops.

Once exposed, people with a high view of scripture must take seriously a biblically-based theology of "systems." In the workshops, that is precisely what CSCO presents. In this biblical view, God has created economic, political, and cultural/religious systems. While their forms vary, no society is without them. God's intent is that the economic system provides for the fair and equitable distribution of goods and services, and acts as a steward of the earth's resources which are owned by God. Human societies are judged by how they perform as stewards and how they treat the poor. The greater the disparities of wealth and income in a nation, the less it fulfills God's original intent.

Political systems are to provide order with justice. Cultural/religious systems are to provide meaning in people's lives, which, for Christians, means leading them to know God through His son, Jesus Christ. There is a contest between the city of God and the city of Satan—systems that become corrupted and go awry. When they do, according to CSCO theologians, the economic system becomes one of exploitation, with the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. The political system becomes one of oppression, and its decisions favor those with wealth. The most debilitating factor is that our cultural/religious system rationalizes it all. Instead of loving God and neighbor, people love to consume, to be part of the status race, and to make idols of material things. During these times, prophets arise to call the systems to account and to challenge people to return to their faith. But the prophets may be seduced. All armies are told: "God is on our side." Prosperity theology says that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. Those not seduced may be imprisoned or killed such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, and Oscar Romero. It is then left to the people to rise up in direct action against the "principalities and powers" and return the systems to their Godly intent. But the systems can penetrate deeply into the consciousness of everyone. The people themselves may be seduced and become complicit in systemic evil. Groups seek more than their share of the resources available; they exclude some, stigmatize others, and believe in the superiority of their group. They say "my country, right or wrong." In this circumstance, God turns his head and lets the system as a whole destroy itself—as it did when the Jews were exiled into Babylon, as it collapsed in the Roman Empire and, more recently, as it fell in the Soviet Union.

As I sat in the workshops listening to this presentation by CSCO's principal theologian, Dr. Robert Linthicum, and as I watched the reactions of "theologically conservative" Christian leaders, I was amazed. Linthicum was not "proof-texting" (the practice of picking what you want from the Bible to prove a point of view you had to begin with). In most of his sessions, small groups engaged in exegesis of Biblical passages. The general sessions were highly interactive and questions were invited. When the day was done, participants were convinced. What I was especially struck by was the radical ("radical" meaning going to the root) nature of Biblical prescription and analysis as presented by Linthicum.

In some of the workshops, it was my job to present the theory and practice of community organizing. "If you listen to the people in your pews, what are they concerned about? What are the pressures on their lives?" The list was unsurprising. Responses included: inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, no health care coverage, failing public schools, no child care or after-

school programs for young people, crime and drugs, fear about the moral state of the nation and how it is affecting their children, and a general sense of powerlessness to do anything about any of them. Every community organizer is familiar with the list. Ask people about the things that are pressing them in their daily lives and these concerns arise again and again. Ask them what troubles of their daily lives they would come to a meeting to address, and it is these concerns. For example, community organizers I know who work in Catholic parishes where they face the hostility of religious right Catholics say they have little difficulty "out organizing" the conservatives. The reason is simple: community organizing addresses what people care most about. To provide quick exposure to community organizing's strategy and tactics, we role-played confrontations with public decision makers. Workshop participants began to see the possibilities of such community organizing for themselves, their churches, and their neighbors.

Using the method of action and reflection, as workshop leaders, we integrated faith with action in the world and, in so doing, enriched the meaning of faith. During this time, something equally important happened. I had discovered in much of my "on the ground" organizing work that many mainline Protestant and Catholic churches paid relatively little attention to the task of integrating life with faith and faith with life, and connecting both to a biblically-based theology. The power of religious belief, the source of values for the vast majority of Americans, was not tapped.

Clergy often lack the tools to make deep connections between their church's teachings and the lives of the people in the pews. Those connections are exactly what Linthicum and other CSCO leader's help people make, and when people are exposed to their teaching, there is tremendous energy in the results. The basic message is clear: the Bible not only permits, but demands, individual and group action on behalf of justice and community.

Linthicum and other CSCO members are now being asked to present their biblical and historical material to local community organizations. Organizer friends and colleagues rave about the teaching and testify to the power of its impact on their mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy and lay leaders. I think the reason for this impact is simple.

The problems of our time are social, economic, and political. They are also profoundly spiritual. If this spiritual dimension remains untouched, people are not likely to be deeply moved to act. In its work, CSCO is tapping the spiritual, the search for meaning beyond that offered in the twenty minutes of advertising that punctuate every hour-long TV show. CSCO theologians and leaders are making a direct connection between the spiritual and what goes on in everyday life. There is power for good here.

It just may be that this band of evangelical, Pentecostal, and Holiness Christians will provide the moral compass for which Americans are desperately looking. The compass points to what Martin Luther King called, "the beloved community." It is a guide that leads us to act against social, political, and economic injustices, as well as a map to identify the abuses of power by corporate and government decision makers. Ironically, among these people who are so different from me, I have found what I knew in my days on the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a band of sisters and brothers, in a circle of trust, committed to building the more humane, just, and democratic society for which we all hope.

English-Only Pentecostals? A Response to the Official Language Debate from the American Southwest Missions and Intercultural Studies

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Introduction

Illegal immigration¹ has become a front and center political hot button issue during the 2008 primary campaign season. A recent push for immigration reform in last year's congressional session failed to pass. Due to the lack of a federal fix for the situation, several municipalities across the nation have passed laws and have written city codes and policies that attempt to address the issue at the local level. Some of the key elements that are common among these cities addressing the situation are training local police officers to work with deportation agents, barring businesses from doing business with or hiring undocumented migrants, and declaring English to be the official language of the city. One such city that has implemented some of these measures has been Farmers Branch, Texas. The city council passed an ordinance banning apartment communities from renting to illegal aliens. That same day, Farmers Branch passed an ordinance proclaiming English to be the official language of the city.

It is this issue of making English the official language upon which this paper will focus. I will attempt to answer the question: "How should a Pentecostal view the idea of making English the official language of the United States of America?" This will be accomplished by focusing on the national issue, the Farmer's Branch ordinances, Pentecostal perspectives, the Pentecostal experience, scriptural application, missions, and outreach implications.

The National Issue

The United States has never had an official language. Being a nation of European immigrants, many brought different languages to its shores. One historian notes that "during the Confederation period (1781-89), various federal documents were issued in German, French, Dutch, and Swedish, thus recognizing that many Americans could not understand English but were nevertheless full members of the new nation."² However, there have been some rough spots concerning a national language such as the 1816 Philadelphia trial in which a debate over German was settled by the courts who "ultimately agreed that language choice was a voluntary matter."³

¹ The phrases: illegal immigration, illegal immigrant, and illegal alien are the terms commonly used to refer to those who have entered the country without government authorization. Because of the negative connotations of the above terms, some groups prefer the terms undocumented migration and undocumented migrant.

² Friederike Baer, "Speaking American," *American History* 42, no. 3, 2007, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

³ Ibid.

Today's undocumented immigration issues have brought English-Only legislation to the forefront. English-Only legislation is "supposed to eliminate services in languages other than English."⁴ This includes "bilingual ballots, driver's license tests and government publications," making them only "available in English."⁵ In recent years, there have been attempts to make English the official language through national legislation. Some politicians see English-Only legislation as a tool to fight illegal immigration and others see it as "code for official discrimination."⁶ When four English-Only proposals were put forth in the House, Representative Robert Underwood (D-Guam), used satire and introduced Ketchup-Only legislation when he learned that salsa was now the nation's leading condiment.⁷ In his "effort to expose the 'narrow-minded idea' of English-only," he wrote a letter to all the House members that read: "I hope you share my concern that a country built on ketchup should take steps to ensure the predominance of this vegetable as our national condiment. I am preparing to draft Ketchup-Only legislation to make the use of ketchup mandatory in all government (food) services, and I invite you to join me in co-sponsoring the bill."⁸

Media response to the proposals has been mixed. One Latina journalist called "legislation that would make English the official language and would eliminate federal bilingual education programs, a perfect complement to anti-immigration fervor."⁹ One magazine editor mocked support for English-Only legislation by writing: "It is bad enough we have to eat foreign food and answer that extra question about which language to use at the ATM. We can at least have an official language, and it's a good thing that everyone agrees it ought to be English, since most of us speak it already."¹⁰ A conservative talk show host raised over \$10,000 on the air for the Farmers Branch Legal Defense Fund by selling t-shirts that read: "This is America, please speak English."¹¹

English-Only Developments in Farmers Branch

So while both political parties agreed that illegal immigration needed to be addressed, no legislation could be agreed on at the federal level. As a response, local governments including Farmers Branch, Texas began addressing the issue at the local level. Farmers Branch, a suburb of

⁴ Domenico Maceri, "\$Spanish," *HispanicVista.com*, under "Search Articles," November 11, 2002, <http://www.hispanicvista.com/html2/111102maceri.htm> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "Latino Lawmaker Blasts English-Only Proposal," *Associated Press*, July 13, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14049845/> (accessed January 13, 2008).

⁷ Joseph Torres, "Hispanic Agenda," *Hispanic* 8, no. 11, 1995, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Valerie Menard, "English-Only Resurfaces," *Hispanic* 8, no. 3, 1995, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹⁰ Nick Gillespie, "The Decline of the English Speaking People," *Reason* 38, no. 3, 2006, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹¹ "Farmers Branch Approves Amended Ordinance," *Fox 4 News*, January 22, 2007, <http://www.myfoxdfw.com/myfox/pages/News/Detail?contentId=2143661&version=6&locale=EN-US&layoutCode=TSTY&pageId=3.2.1> (accessed January 13, 2008).

Dallas, “became the first city in the state to approve an ordinance that will fine apartment managers who rent units to illegal immigrants. It also passed, on the same day, “a resolution declaring English as the city’s official language.”¹² This action gathered national media attention. The move to adopt these ordinances was led by city councilman, Tim O’Hare. O’Hare’s own website offers this biography: Timothy O’Hare “attended law school at SMU” and “is a long-time member of the Farmers Branch Church of Christ. He is also a member of the Christian Legal Society, the Christian Trial Lawyers Association, and the Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian organization dedicated to preserving Christian rights and ideals in the U.S.”¹³ O’Hare has blamed the city’s crime, school, and property value problems on illegal immigration and hopes the ordinances will turn it around. He describes the state of Farmers Branch as “our retail establishments are in deplorable shape—half of the businesses aren’t filled, and the rest are filled with Spanish-speaking businesses [and] our citizens are still majority non-Spanish speaking by far. Spanish probably will overtake the city if we don’t do something about this.”¹⁴

During one of the initial city council meetings, when the ordinances were initially being discussed, O’Hare wore a red tie emblazoned with a flag and dotted with white stars. He began the meeting with a prayer. “Father I thank you for this country that we live in and thank you for this city that we live in. I pray for your blessings over this meeting tonight. I ask that you help peace to be maintained and that you help everyone to act with cool, calm reasonableness, in Jesus’ name I ask these things. Amen.”¹⁵ Also, during the initial city council meetings, before passage of the ordinances, residents of Farmers Branch came out to share their views on the issues. Some insensitive remarks were recorded and broadcasted by local media. One example is a resident who complained that when he moved to Farmers Branch ten years ago, he was surrounded by old people and now he’s surrounded by Mexican immigrants. “Mr. Mayor,” he said, addressing the city council, “you live in a nice house and you don’t have them next to you, but if you go to Marietta, my street, you’ll see four adults and seven kids living in one house. We need to put [these proposals] on the agenda and make it illegal to have anything to do with the Spanish, or Mexicans, in this neighborhood.”¹⁶

Opposition to the premise of the ordinances was challenged. Farmers Branch Mayor Bob Phelps commented, “Contrary to O’Hare’s assertions, crime is actually down, local schools are improving and property values have appreciated modestly. But because of the negative publicity over the proposed crackdown on illegal immigrants, Phelps said, at least one major corporation

¹² “Texas Town Takes on Illegal Immigration,” *American City & County* 121, no. 13, 2006, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹³ Tim O’Hare: A Leader for Farmers Branch, “About Tim,” Tim O’Hare for Farmers Branch Campaign Fund, <http://www.timothyohare.com/about.html> (accessed January 5, 2008).

¹⁴ Howard Witt, “It’s Official: English-Only Movement Gains Traction; Hispanic Civil Rights Groups Alarmed,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 2006, <http://www.supportfarmersbranch.com/news.php?xnewsaction=fullnews&newsarch=122006&newsid=12> (accessed January 12, 2008).

¹⁵ Megan Feldman, “Splitsville: No Border Fences Make for Mad Neighbors in Farmers Branch,” *Dallas Observer*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2006-11-02/news/splitsville/> (accessed January 12, 2008).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

that was planning to locate its headquarters in Farmers Branch has changed its mind.”¹⁷ Outside City Hall, Anglos and Latinos alike described a new climate of suspicion and fear in Farmers Branch.¹⁸ Local Business owner Elizabeth Villafranca, moved by her Roman Catholic faith, protested the city council meeting along with her six-year-old daughter with a sign that read: “Is Farmers Branch Racist?”¹⁹ However, O’Hare was undeterred in his agenda. Villafranca gained prominence as the face for the opposition. At a following meeting O’Hare approached Villafranca after a city council meeting. They had a brief conversation about faith. He wanted her to know that he had been misquoted in the press when he said immigrants live like kings and queens. He stated that he was referring to people in Jamaica. They argued about property taxes. A group had formed around them, and as they spoke, O’Hare kept taking steps back. At one point Elizabeth said, “Your behavior isn’t very Christ-like.” He replied that there’s nothing “ungodly about upholding the law—this has nothing to do with Christianity.”²⁰

For O’Hare, this is a faith-centered issue as well. He believes that these undocumented migrants have broken the law and need to be prosecuted. He believes it is his duty as a Christian to uphold the laws. At a local Republican club meeting at a Nazarene church, which consequently was picketed by a Latino pastor outside, O’Hare said, “I do feel you can be a Christian and feel this way about this issue.”²¹ When interviewed on the nationally syndicated conservative Christian talk show Point of View, he stated, “As a city councilman in the small suburb of Dallas of about 28,000 people, I think my responsibility, my primary responsibility is to protect people’s property values.”²² When a caller challenged O’Hare with a scripture verse that stated that aliens should be treated like those that are native born²³ and compared the blaming of immigrants for Farmers Branch’s problems with that of Nazi Germany blaming Jews for its problems, he responded, “I have nothing against people who are here illegally, personally, but they are breaking the law, and I don’t know anything ungodly about trying to uphold the law.”²⁴

¹⁷ Howard Witt, “It’s Official: English-Only Movement Gains Traction; Hispanic Civil Rights Groups Alarmed,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 2006, <http://www.supportfarmersbranch.com/news.php?xnewsaction=fullnews&newsarch=122006&newsid=12> (accessed January 12, 2008).

¹⁸ Megan Feldman, “Splitsville: No Border Fences Make for Mad Neighbors in Farmers Branch,” *Dallas Observer*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2006-11-02/news/splitsville/> (accessed January 12, 2008).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Katherine Leal Unmuth, “O’Hare Brings His Message to GOP in Irving,” *The Dallas Morning News*, March 28, 2007, <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/city/carrollton/stories/032807dnmetgopclub.38f3dce.html> (accessed January 13, 2008).

²² Tim O’Hare, interviewed by Kerby Anderson and Carmen Pate, Point of View, USA Radio Network, September 14, 2006.

²³ Lev 19:33-34.

²⁴ Tim O’Hare, interviewed by Kerby Anderson and Carmen Pate, Point of View, USA Radio Network, September 14, 2006.

Yet despite the protests and negative publicity this event was generating, O'Hare and the Farmers Branch city council passed the ordinances and then had the city vote on them. Every time the council moved concerning the ordinances, it made local news. The city voted overwhelmingly to support the ordinances.

Bob Phelps, mayor of Farmers Branch, commented on the English-Only resolution. We had people the next day call and say, "Are we not going to be able to have mass in Spanish? But it has nothing to do with that."²⁵ And when asked the question: "What messages do the city ordinances send to new and current residents?" He replied, "We're not racist. If they're moving into an apartment, they're going to have to be legal. I don't want [people] to think that they can't go to church or have meetings in their own language. The Hispanics really are the ones that had the feeling that they were not going to be able to talk to each other, and that's incorrect."²⁶ It is this fear and suspicion that Farmers Branch and similar cities and individuals face when they pass and support such laws. "There is a very anti-immigrant sentiment attached to the English-only movement," said John Trasvina, interim president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "In a lot of the communities where this has come up, there is a tremendous amount of ill will that is raised by these ordinances."²⁷ Future city ordinances would be examined for further anti-cultural sentiment. For example, when some residents approached the city counsel to regulate bright home colors, others felt that it was a direct attack against Latino/a culture. Local business owner Elizabeth Villafranca "perceived it as another jab at Hispanics in a city that has targeted illegal immigration." Villafranca commented, "We know who has the bright colors," she said after the council meeting, "Latin Americans."²⁸

While Farmers Branch City Councilman Tim O'Hare has emerged as the spokesman in favor of the ordinances, Farmers Branch business owner Villafranca soon became the face of the opposition. Villafranca, who was moved to action by the city ordinances, became founding president of the newly formed local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). She is living her faith convictions and "prays for God to use her for something, for anything, for whatever needs to be done."²⁹ She gathers much of her immigration information from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and believes that "Christians have an obligation to help the marginalized."³⁰ Villafranca has said in an interview that Catholics and

²⁵ "Texas Town Takes on Illegal Immigration," *American City & County* 121, no. 13, 2006, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Howard Witt, "It's Official: English-Only Movement Gains Traction; Hispanic Civil Rights Groups Alarmed," *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 2006, <http://www.supportfarmersbranch.com/news.php?xnewsaction=fullnews&newsarch=122006&newsid=12> (accessed January 12, 2008).

²⁸ Stephanie Sandoval, "Farmers Branch Residents in Paint Brawl: Some See Shades of Racism to Tone Down Home Colors," *The Dallas Morning News*, October 9, 2007, <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/101007dnmetfbpaint.3641f66.html> (accessed January 12, 2008).

²⁹ Megan Feldman, "Splitsville: No Border Fences Make for Mad Neighbors in Farmers Branch," *Dallas Observer*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2006-11-02/news/splitsville/> (accessed January 12, 2008).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Christians need to fight racism and xenophobia. “It’s not enough to show up to Mass and service; it’s about living the Gospel,” she said. “It’s about welcoming the stranger.”³¹ So she believes, as O’Hare does, that she is obeying the convictions of her faith. For her, these issues have “everything to do with Christianity,” and comments on how easy it is to help people in other countries and ignore “the people in our own neighborhoods.”³² Thus, with both sides claiming to have been driven by Christian convictions, what should the proper perspective be?

Perspectives from Pentecostals

Farmers Branch is home to and is served by the Assemblies of God, Church of God, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Pentecostal Holiness, and other Pentecostal and charismatic ministries. John English, Youth Pastor at Christian Center Assembly of God Church, stated that the church does minister to Latino/as both in and around Farmers Branch, and that he is unsure of how the city ordinance will affect ministry in the future.³³ Metro Church of God is a Pentecostal church with a large Indian congregation in Farmers Branch. Reverend Sathish Kumar, a pastor at Metro Church of God, said that the English-Only ordinance did not affect ministry at his church because most of the people at his church speak English. “The church,” Kumar proclaims, “is open to all people.” Classifying the services at Metro as bilingual, Kumar adds, “Language is not a problem in the church” as he joyfully describes the bilingual worship of an African national that attends as evidence.³⁴ Kumar is a wonderful example of how Pentecostals are a very outreach-oriented group that has tended to be open to language expression in worship and ministry among minority groups. Attempts were made to reach all Pentecostal and charismatic in Farmers Branch for input towards this study. The author feels that perhaps many felt that the English-Only ordinance was merely a political issue as opposed to a spiritual one and contends that it is much more than just a political issue as evidenced below.

Some Pentecostals have joined other Latino/a evangelical leaders to form the Hispanic Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in response to the government’s handling of the immigration issue. In response to one particular immigration bill, Samuel Rodriguez Jr., a Pentecostal pastor and president of the coalition, which represents some 15 million Latino/as decried, “This legislation is anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant and anti-Christian.”³⁵ This outspoken group has joined World Relief, the humanitarian arm of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) to “advocate a biblical mandate approach to the issue—one that commands us to care for

³¹ Sergio Chapa, “Bishop Takes Issue with FB Ordinance,” *The Dallas Morning News*, January 15, 2007, http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-bishopfb_15met.ART.State.Edition1.3d44e05.html (accessed January 13, 2008).

³² Megan Feldman, “Splitsville: No Border Fences Make for Mad Neighbors in Farmers Branch,” *Dallas Observer*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2006-11-02/news/splitsville/> (accessed January 12, 2008).

³³ John English, interview by author, Farmers Branch, TX, January 15, 2008.

³⁴ Sathish Kumar, interview by author, Farmers Branch, TX, January 15, 2008.

³⁵ Suzy Richardson, “Hispanic Christians Tackle Immigration Reform,” *Charisma*, July 2006, <http://www.charismamag.com/display.php?id=13288> (accessed January 12, 2008).

the poor and suffering among us.”³⁶ Jesse Miranda, an Executive Presbyter for the Assemblies of God General Council, joins a growing number of Latino/a scholars and ministers that have recently joined the coalition. He serves on the executive leadership team as president of the Advisory Board.³⁷ While this organization has not issued a direct stance on English-Only legislation, it is a growing organization addressing legislation like English-Only which is aimed at immigrants.

English-Only and the Pentecostal Experience

What should the attitude of a Pentecostal be toward English-Only in light of the Pentecostal experience? The Pentecostal distinctive is a multilingual experience. On the day of Pentecost, God poured out the Spirit upon the church and they praised the works of God in the languages of the foreigners that were in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast.³⁸ Fifteen people groups are mentioned as the audience of this experience. The languages that they spoke were created by God and were not the original learned languages of the Apostles. This was a miraculous move of the Spirit. When believers are baptized in the Spirit today, they also speak in a language that they have not learned. According to this practical application, it is quite possible for an English speaker to be baptized in the Spirit and speak Spanish. And consequently is it possible for a Spanish speaker to be baptized in the Spirit and speak English or even some other language. Because God seems to want to use many different kinds of languages to reach people, it seems safe to say that God is definitely not English-Only. “Speak to [God] in His language,” Assemblies of God Pastor Peter De Jesus once urged the youth during a bilingual service, “not in English or Spanish but the language of the Spirit of God.”³⁹ God’s language is love. It is the message of redemption through Jesus Christ. As evidenced on the day of Pentecost, God has not intended the message for limited distribution in one’s national language only.

Therefore, it would seem contrary for a Pentecostal to, on the one hand, practice such a multilingual spiritual experience that God uses to empower the church in the spread the Gospel, and on the other hand, believe that government, which is also ordained of God, should only function in one language. In other words, if the church is to proclaim its message in the languages of the world, then should not the church call for the government to conduct business in the language of its constituents? Access to the functions and services that a government offers should not be reserved for the language majority only.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, “Dr. Jesse Miranda Joins NHCLC Executive Leadership Team,” http://www.nhclc.org/about/news/jul2007_1.html (accessed January 15, 2008).

³⁸ Acts 2:1-13.

³⁹ Peter K. Johnson, “Welcome to Our Revolution,” *Charisma*, April 2001, <http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:xX4ePh8NDT4J:www.charismamag.com/display.php%3Fid%3D1018+%22peter+DeJesus%22+english+ministry&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us> (accessed January 12, 2008).

English-Only and Scripture Application

Besides the Pentecostal experience, there are some passages that can be applied to this English-Only debate. Evidence can be found to support multicultural and multilingual ministry. Concerning the life and ministry of Peter, he was rebuked for acting differently towards Gentiles when men from James came to him.⁴⁰ He did this even though ministry to Gentiles is explicit in the teachings of Jesus.⁴¹ He did this even though he received a vision from God to minister to the Gentiles.⁴² Therefore, it is possible for the quintessential Pentecostal, Peter, to get it wrong. He should not have adopted a view of ministry centered on one people group, but instead to what the Lord was leading him to—an inclusive view of ministry. In the same way, ministers should be open to ministering to all people that God brings their way and not just the people group who share the same culture and language as the minister.

In another passage, Paul was dragged off, beaten, arrested, and accused of smuggling an illegal alien, Trophimus the Ephesian, into the temple area.⁴³ When he addressed the Roman officer, Claudius Lysias, he did so in Greek, the common language of the day. Due to this and the commotion, Claudius Lysias accused Paul of being a terrorist leader of a band of assassins. But in order to capture the attention of the Jewish audience he switched from Greek to the Hebrew dialect and shared his personal testimony and ministry calling to the Gentiles. In other words, Paul deviated from the common or official language of communication to the language of his audience in order to accomplish ministry. Therefore, if language needs to change in order to accomplish ministry to a particular audience, one should be willing to minister or allow ministry in that language. Additionally, one should avoid being like the Roman officer who suspected Paul of being a criminal due to the language he spoke and the commotion surrounding him. However, this seems to be the case of Latino/a immigrants who fear being classified as criminals simply due to the language they speak.

English-Only and Missions-Mindedness

In light of missions work, what will an attitude like Farmers Branch do towards the Spanish language for future ministry opportunities in a city? What would happen to ministry opportunities of those that sided with the city's ordinances? The implication that such a position has on missions must be discussed. Missions, always a driving force among Pentecostals, may stand to lose ground if such a position is taken. Latino/as tend to be warmer to the Pentecostal faith than non-Latino/as.

According to a pew study, based on bilingual interviews of about 4,000 Hispanics nationwide, 29 percent of Hispanics who attend worship services say they speak in tongues—a hallmark of Pentecostal and charismatic worship—compared with only 11 percent of non-

⁴⁰ Gal 2:11-14.

⁴¹ Luke 24:47.

⁴² Acts 10:9-17.

⁴³ Acts 21:27—22:21.

Hispanics.⁴⁴ There are “about 8 million . . . [Latino/a] evangelical Christians, reports Jesse Miranda, professor at the Graduate School of Religion at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California, and Director of the Center for Urban Studies and Ethnic Leadership. He estimates that 60 to 70 percent are Pentecostal and that most Hispanic Pentecostals worship in independent congregations.”⁴⁵

Concerning the recent wave a Latino/as in his region, Rev. Robert Allen, a Southern Baptist missionary to Hispanics in Northern Kentucky proclaims, “God brought them to our country for a purpose.”⁴⁶ It used to be that God was sending His people to the mission field, now churches are scrambling to find ways to reach out to the mission fields that God is bringing to them. This includes bringing in Latino/a missionaries and offering services in Spanish.⁴⁷ Jim Garcia, Coordinator of Ethnic Missions for the Baptist General Convention, states: “Those who come from other countries, they have come leaving their past behind, and that may include even their religion, and they are open to whatever this country has to offer, including a faith.”⁴⁸

However, Latino/a ministers have voiced concern about their treatment by their Anglo counterparts. They “admit to experiencing condescending and paternalistic attitudes from their brothers and sisters in the Anglo church,” and “many Anglo church leaders acknowledge their sentiments.”⁴⁹ “I think we have treated the Spanish church terribly,” says Eddie Rentz, National Youth Director for the Assemblies of God. “We have treated them as stepchildren. God forgive us for that.”⁵⁰ Hopefully, the immigration and English-Only issues will not cause a divide in the body of Christ. However, there is strong sentiment against these language-exclusive policies by Latino/as.

Outspoken Latino/as view the English-Only position as not being pro-English, but anti-Spanish. This leads many to protest that this position is essentially anti-Latino/a. Interestingly enough, one study concerning support for English-Only laws found that there is “little evidence that support for [English-Only] emanates from cleavages based on partisanship, social class, or racial and ethnic hostility,” but “attitudes regarding this issue are most closely tied to attitudes regarding national identity and individual normative views about common identity and cultural

⁴⁴ Jeffery Weiss and Dianne Solis, “Hispanics Leaving Imprint of Religion in Dallas, Across US,” *The Dallas Morning News*, April 26, 2007, <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/religion/stories/042507dnmethispanicsreligion.8927ae6.html> (accessed January 12, 2008).

⁴⁵ Peter K. Johnson, “Welcome to Our Revolution,” *Charisma*, April 2001, <http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:xX4ePh8NDT4J:www.charismamag.com/display.php%3Fid%3D1018+%22peter+DeJesus%22+english+ministry&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us> (accessed January 12, 2008).

⁴⁶ Stephen Huba, “Catholics, Protestants Vying to Bring Latinos into the Fold,” *The Kentucky Post*, April 3, 1999, <http://www.kypost.com/news/1999/hisp040399.html> (accessed December 12, 2008).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Jaime Jordan, “Increasing number of Hispanics are Drawn to Evangelical Faiths,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 11, 1999, http://www.hollandsentinal.com/stories/121199/rel_evangelical.html (accessed December 8, 2008).

⁴⁹ Peter K. Johnson, “Welcome to Our Revolution,” *Charisma*, April 2001, <http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:xX4ePh8NDT4J:www.charismamag.com/display.php%3Fid%3D1018+%22peter+DeJesus%22+english+ministry&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us> (accessed January 12, 2008).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

diversity.”⁵¹ It is my contention that those nationalistic attitudes can very easily be understood as racial and ethnic hostilities, which are often interpreted that way by Latino/as. “English-Only measures are divisive and incite discrimination against those Americans whose first language is not English,” said Representative Ed Pastor (D-Arizona), chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.⁵² Actor James Olmos, one of the most recognized Latino figures in this country today, said the following regarding English-Only legislation. “[They] have put together two of the most destructive words in the last century. Nothing has destroyed our human survival more than those two words put together—English-Only. The person who created this should know that what they have done is destroy the very cultural dynamic that makes this the finest country in the world.”⁵³

One of the documents on the LULAC website compares English-Only with Jim Crow laws, declaring that it is “linguistic racism” that makes “discrimination the nation’s official language.”⁵⁴ One scholar even sees “the narrow-minded cultural superiority of the English-only movement” as one aspect that could fuel the possibility of “launching ourselves into a long-term adversarial relationship with our Latin American neighbors and our Latin American Heritage.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

One Latino journalist wrote: “The English-Only movement has not tried to influence business since corporations don’t really care what language their customers speak. Buying power speaks only one language—dollars.”⁵⁶ In the same manner, the English-Only movement should not be able to count on Christians for support since we should speak the language of love towards others above love for one’s native language. Let us not be accused of putting our nationalism before our humanity. Therefore, viewed through the lens of Pentecost, English-Only laws should not be supported because they contradict core values of the Pentecost faith. The Pentecostal experience itself as evidenced on the Day of Pentecost is one that is open to and uses diverse languages to inform others about the works of God. The scriptures call for multicultural ministry as evident in the lives of Peter and Paul. The atmosphere of uncertainty and fear caused by the English-Only ordinance in Farmers Branch runs contrary to Gospel of peace. The missions implications that could be effected by an English-Only ordinance may cause ministry

⁵¹ John Frenreis and Raymond Tatalovich, “Who Supports English-Only Language Laws?: Evidence from the 1992 National Election Survey,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (June 1997), 354.

⁵² Valerie Menard, “English-Only Resurfaces,” *Hispanic* 8, no. 3, 1995, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2007).

⁵³ Katherine A. Diaz, “Man of Influence: Edward James Olmos Changes Lives through His Actions,” *Hispanic Magazine.com*, under “September 2000 Issue,” <http://www.hispaniconline.com/magazine/2000/sep/CoverStory/index.html> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁵⁴ Frank M. Ortiz, “English Plus Verses English Only,” *League of United Latin American Citizens*, <http://www.lulac.org/advocacy/issues/language/plusonly.html> (accessed January 5, 2008).

⁵⁵ Michael E. Conroy, “Past Meets Future: Texas and Latin American in the 21st Century,” LANIC Etext Collection, no. 89-06 (1989), under “Texas Papers on Latin American,” <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/tpla/8906.pdf> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁵⁶ Domenico Maceri, “Spanish,” *HispanicVista.com*, under “Search Articles,” November 11, 2002, <http://www.hispanicvista.com/html2/111102maceri.htm> (accessed January 8, 2008).

opportunities to, with, and among Latino/as to be lost and add a cultural barrier to ministry between Latino/as and other groups. Due to all of these considerations one should seriously reconsider pledging their support for an English-Only ordinance.

The Litmus Test of God’s Children: Solving a Johannine Contradiction by Re-reading 1 John 3:9-10 in Light of an Epexegetical Rendering of *KAI*

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Introduction

Does 1 John contradict itself? The author seems to say in 1 John 1:8, 10, 2:1 and 5:16 that Christians do in fact commit sin. Yet, in 1 John 3:6 and again in 3:9, he seems to indicate that Christians do not sin. How can these two seemingly diverse statements be reconciled? This article will seek to make sense of what John is saying in his epistle while arguing for total consistency in his theological thought. To do so, we must investigate the issues surrounding this possible internal contradiction penned by John and then propose a reading that brings solution to the issues. Then, as a result of the new proposed interpretation, we will discuss the social implications of John’s arguments for modern Church and society. This final portion of our study will include an important methodological consideration for the role of biblical studies in the Church’s social mission in the world.

The Parameters and Rhetoric of the Texts in Question

1 John 2:29 begins the section pertinent to our discussion. The section runs from 2:29—3:10 and is marked off by an inclusion statement: “Everyone who does right is born of him” (2:29b) and “Whoever does not do right is not of God” (3:10b). The topic or theme of the section could be titled, “How people’s behavior and character reveal whose children they are.” Within the overall argument and context of 1 John, the polemical rhetoric attacks the Johannine community’s opponents by arguing that their actions and character reveal that they are begotten by the devil, while the Christian community’s actions and character reveal that they are children of God. Below is the text, 1 John 2:29, in question as found in the NRSV: “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.” 1 John 3:1-10 continues,

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was

revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

The Statement of the Problem: Christians and the Possibility of Sin in 1 John

The statements found in 1 John 3:6, “No one who abides in him sins,” and in 1 John 3:9, “Those who have been born of God do not sin,” have created theological problems for centuries. The dilemma is that the meaning seems very clear when John states “no one who abides in him sins.” It does not take too much thought to see that this statement cuts at two levels: an experiential and textual level. On an experiential level, it is apparent that Christians do sin. Both our history and our experience support this reality. So, if it is true that Christians do sin, what might John be saying to his audience that does not contradict the reality of continued sin in the Christian experience?

Second, on a textual level, the statements found in 1 John 3:6 and 1 John 3:9 also seem to contradict what the author has said elsewhere. For instance, John 1:8 states that, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Then again in 1 John 1:10, the writer argues, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” Additionally, John adds later in an enigmatic verse that we are to pray for brothers and sisters who sin so that they will be forgiven (1 John 5:16). So, in one place, John seems to state that Christians do not sin and in other places he states that we do sin and if we say that we do not sin, we are lying.

The issue then becomes one of internal theological consistency. Does John simply contradict himself? Or are there deeper theological and social issues at stake? As one can imagine, theologians and Bible scholars have attempted many such reconciliations over the decades, but no one real solution has prevailed in resolving all the theological problems in the text. In addition, the modern translations based on the Greek text continue to enable such controversy by the lack of clarity with which they render the text.

Social and Theological Background to the Letter/Homily

We must begin our study of Christian sin by quickly examining the social context out of which John wrote. John is writing an epistle/homily to the Johannine community of churches in which John is positioned as the elder based on his eyewitness account of the events of Jesus’ ministry (1 John 1:1-5).¹ Within these churches, a split has arisen in which a portion of the community has departed from sound orthodox teaching represented by the apostle. The issues

¹ This article will not question the authenticity of authorship of the epistles or the gospel of John. So, for our study, we will assume that the apostle John wrote all the texts associated with his name.

causing the split center on matters of Christology and ethics. The tone of the apostle toward those who left the community is so harsh that he deems them to be “antichrists” (1 John 2:18; 2 John 7-8) who were never a true part of the community as evidenced by their willingness to leave (1 John 2:19) and by their ultimate denial that “Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 2:22-23). The problem facing John is that these opponents are now trying to proselytize the Johannine churches (1 John 2:26). John warns of their deception and urges the members of the community not even to allow them into their homes (2 John: 10-11).

When John speaks about the opponents who went out of the community, he writes in a very harsh and polemic tone. He has no patience for their positions and argues that they are children of the devil (1 John 3:8), as evidenced by their denial of Jesus as the Christ and their lack of love (1 John 2:23). Conversely, when John speaks to those who remain in the congregation, his tone is encouraging and pastoral. He urges them to avoid the corrupted Christological position of the opponents and to “remain/abide” in Christ. The purpose of the letter/homily is to urge the continued faithfulness of the Johannine community by dealing harshly with the opponents who left the community. It is out of these diverse polemic and pastoral tones that the rhetoric of the letter is to be examined.

1 John 1:6—2:2: Those Who Say They Have No Sin Are Liars

The place where John argues that those who state they have no sin are liars is found within a portion of rhetoric where John is dealing harshly with the opponents’ views while trying to assure believers of their correct position in Christ. In it, John includes three erroneous boasts made by the opponents and their consequences (1 John 1:6, 8, 10), followed by three positive assurances made to the believers and their implications (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1). The three claims made by the opponents are translated in the English texts as “if” (*ean*) clauses. They can be divided into three pairs of boasts that show an AB, AB, AB pattern. Most English translations render the A statements with the phrase “if we say...,” which represents the boasts of the opponents followed by the B “if” statements made by the author, which represents the positive assessments given to believers. Charles Talbert’s outline of the section’s rhetorical argument is helpful:

The First Pair (1 John 1:6-7)

A **Error** (*If we say* we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness) +
 consequence (we lie) (vs. 6)

B **Positive contrast** (*If we walk* in the light) + consequence (we have fellowship
 and the blood cleanses us) (vs. 7)

The Second Pair (1 John 1:8-9)

A Error (*If we say we have no sin*) + consequence (we deceive ourselves) (vs. 8)

B Positive contrast (*If we confess our sins*) + consequence (he will forgive and cleanse) (vs. 9)

The Third Pair (1 John 1:10—2:2)

A Error (*If we say we have not sinned*) + consequence (we make him a liar) (1:10)

B Positive contrast (*If any one does sin*) + consequence (he is the expiation for our sins) (2:1-2)²

For our study, we will concentrate on the second and third boasts made by the opponents followed by the positive statements made by the apostle. Although the two boasts, “If we say we have no sin” and “If we say we have not sinned” at first sound very similar, it appears that the two boasts are indeed different. The first boast, in which the Greek *echo* is governed by an abstract noun, likely is referring to the state of sin or sin nature.³ John counters the opponents’ boast with the statement: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1:8). John then provides a positive assurance for the believer by stating that, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). Here, the apostle, in a pastoral tone, assures believers that they have access to God’s forgiveness for sins they commit.

The second boast made by the opponents is found in verse 10: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” Here, the boast, which is made in the perfect tense, seems to indicate that the opponents are denying that they do indeed commit actual sins. This differs from the previous claim of denying that they possess a sin nature from which they need redemption. Here, the claim is that they do not commit sin in their daily lives. The author counters this false assertion by saying that the one who makes such a boast is claiming that God is a liar, and in such a person, God’s word does not exist. Then John turns from his polemical tone to a very pastoral one in 2:1 to address the believers by penning: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we

² Modified from Talbert, 18-19.

³ See Wallace, *1 John*, 19. If the state of sin is represented by the argument of grammar, then the opponents are contending that they possess no sin nature out of which they need to be saved. The opponents, therefore, are questioning the relevance of a sin nature as a condition that would hinder their relationship with God. Therefore, if they had no sin nature, then they would have no need to be saved, and, as a result, would need no Savior. Perhaps this flawed line of reasoning helped move the opponents to the erroneous conclusion that Jesus was not the Christ. See also Westcott, 22.

have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John assures his readers that if they do sin they can look to Jesus Christ as their advocate.⁴

How can these texts help to answer our question concerning Christians and sin? First, sin is a reality even in the lives of believers. Second, although Christians continue to sin, we can have an assurance that we can come to God through confession and know that God’s forgiveness remains available to us. In addition, we may be assured that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

1 John 2:29—3:10: Attempts to Satisfy the Problem

Moving back to our principle text where the contradiction seems to lie, we are forced to bring with us the conclusions about the reality of sin in the lives of believers drawn from 1:6—2:1. When we arrive at 3:6, we come face to face with an apparent inconsistency with what John has said previously. Here, John states: “No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” Then, in 3:9, John adds: “Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them.” At first glance, these verses seem to teach a sinless state for believers, which appears to contradict what the author has already said. Internal consistency becomes a big issue if this problem cannot be reconciled. As one can imagine, many proposals have been presented by interpreters who have attempted to reconcile these statements. The most popular attempt to reconcile the apparent inconsistency is made by those who want to make a distinction between individual acts of sin committed occasionally by a believer represented in 1 John 1—2 and habitual sin or a lifestyle of sin committed by unbelievers represented in 3:6 and 3:9.⁵ Scholars base this idea on the different verb tenses found in 2:1 and 3:6/3:9.⁶ They argue that the aorist tense of 2:1 refers to individual acts of sin that Christians occasionally commit, while the present tense of 3:6 and 3:9 should be translated as a habitual present: “No one who abides in him *practices* sin” (3:6).⁷ The verses that follow would therefore reveal that the one who habitually practices righteousness is born of God (3:7), while the one who habitually practices sin is a child of the devil (3:8). The distinction serves to emphasize the

⁴ Added to these statements of the reality of sin in the believer’s life is another statement in the epistle where the author indicates that Christians do in fact commit sin. In the interpretative problematic verse of 5:16, John writes: “If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal.” So, even by avoiding the controversy of putting a label to the mortal sin, the text at the very least indicates that believers should pray for a brother or sister who is sinning a sin that is not mortal or unto death because forgiveness continues to be available for those brothers and sisters.

⁵ See Burge, 150; Painter, 57; Culpepper, 63-65; Westcott, 104; Ross, 183; Stott, 135-136; Hiebert, 210-214; cf. Brown, 136; and Morris, 1265.

⁶ However, as Dodd has pointed out, it is doubtful “whether the reader could be expected to grasp so subtle a doctrine simply upon the basis of a precise distinction of tenses without further guidance,” 79. Moreover, as Kubo posits: “To say in this context that the author means only that the Christian does not habitually sin is appreciably to weaken his point,” 50.

⁷ On the grammatical use of the habitual or customary present, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 521-522. First John 5:16, however, serves as an example of the inconsistency of such an argument since the participle for “committing sin” in 5:16 is in the present tense specifically referring to individual sins committed by believers rather than habitual transgressions.

contrast between the true Christian, who practices righteousness and the opponents, who practice sin. The opponents who love the darkness do not think that sin is significant, while the apostle argues that though believers may fall on occasion, they love the light and ultimately their character looks like their Father who is righteous.

Yet, while this suggestion based on grammar at first blush seems to answer the apparent inconsistency found in the argument as well as provide some theological satisfaction, there is a problem that remains unanswered by this proposal. While the habitual present works in the first part of 3:9, “Those who have been born of God do not *practice* sin, because God’s seed abides in them,” the next problematic phrase tends to get overlooked: “they *cannot* sin, because they have been born of God.”⁸ The phrase “cannot (*dunati*) sin,” which indicates that Christians are not capable of sin since they have been born of God, creates an interpretative problem for the habitual present solution. It is one thing to say that believers do not practice sin, but another to say that they *cannot* sin.⁹ So, although the habitual present suggestion helps to a point, it ultimately falls short.

1 John 3:9-10: In What Way the People Who Are Born of God Cannot Sin

I propose that the key to understanding how believers cannot sin is found in 1 John 3:10, if translated correctly. Not only does 3:10 provide the explanation to the “cannot sin” statement in 3:9, it also contains the solution to the apparent inconsistency about sin in the life of the believer that plagues 1 John as a whole.

The translation of 1 John 3:10 found in the NRSV is as follows: “The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.”¹⁰ I propose that this translation

⁸ Other prominent English translations translate 3:9 as follows: ESV: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.” NIV: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” NASV: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

⁹ Some scholars attempt to solve the shortcomings of the grammatical argument by positing that the inclusion of “cannot sin,” in vs. 9 appeals to the ideal life of the believer. A life “which ever fights the battle of goodness, a life which has never surrendered to sin, a life in which sin is not the permanent state, but only the temporary aberration, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way, but the abnormal moment of defeat;” Barclay, 96-97. However, if John is comparing the practical life of a believer in which sin remains a part with the idealistic life in which sin has no part, the interaction between the two positions still creates a contradiction in the perpetual experience of the unperfected life of the believer; see Dodd, 80-81, Kubo, 49-50, Marshall, 180, and Smith, 84-87. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, moves further by speaking in terms of an ideal “projected eschatological reality” as compared to the present experience, 525. However, the same problem remains. Believers, although anticipating the “not yet” reality of perfection, still reside in the contemporary experience of imperfection in their relationship to sin.

¹⁰ Other prominent English translations translate 3:10 as follows: ESV: “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” NIV: “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not

confuses the argument and in fact helps to promote the questions of internal inconsistency. I would posit a different translation that I believe satisfies the problems at hand: “By this, the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: all who do not do what is right, that is, those who do not love their brothers and sisters, are not from God.” The key difference in this translation and those of the major modern translations is found in the rendering of the *kai* in 3:10. While most modern translations see the *kai* as introducing another clause that is simply in conjunction with the previous one and is usually translated with an “and” or a “nor are” (“all who do not do what is right are not from God, *nor are* those who do not love their brothers and sisters); I prefer to translate the *kai* epexegetically, which would in essence explain the sin that Christians cannot choose to commit in 3:9 (“all who do not do what is right, *that is*, those who do not love their brothers and sisters, are not from God”).¹¹ Thus, whereas the more popular translations add a clause that does not seem to fit the argument being made and actually adds another thought that is not consistent with the argument being made, this new translation supports the theological argument by explaining for the reader the sin to which the author is referring in 3:9 and of which the person born of God cannot choose to commit.

If the *kai* in 3:10 is translated epexegetically, then the sin that the apostle is referring to in 3:6 and 3:9 is the opponents’ refusal to love. This rendering is consistent with the author’s arguments elsewhere since the specific sins that the opponents are accused of in the Johannine letters are essentially twofold: failing to love others (2:9; 3:11-12; 3:14-15; 3:17-18; 4:8; 4:20) and denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In addition, this rendering also solves the apparent inconsistency between 1 John 3:6, 9 and 1:6—2:1 in that Christians do commit sin according to 1:6—2:9; yet, with regard to their confession of faith in Christ and their love for one another they cannot waiver. In fact, the commandments given to the Church in 1 John are summarized into these two specific commands: “That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us” (2:23). In the end, whereas the opponents failed in both of these commands, the church simply cannot fail in them and still be the church.

The Key: God’s Children Cannot Refuse to Love

Moreover, 3:9-10, when interpreted correctly, serves as a hinge that connects what has gone before in 1 John with what comes after in the remainder of the epistle where the dominant theme is love. The second half of the epistle emphasizes that love is the distinguishing characteristic of the one who has been born of God. The reason that the attribute of love is certain to be found in the children of God is because it is consistent with the character of their father: “God is love” (4:16b). In fact, love for God’s people is to serve as an assurance for believers that they are truly born of God: “We know that we have passed from death to life

love his brother.” NASV: “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

¹¹ On the validity of the epexegetical use of *kai* as an explanatory conjunction, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 673; BDF, 228 [442 (9)]; BDAG, 495. For more on a possible epexegetical rendering of *kai* specifically in 1 John 3:10, see Bultmann, 54; Smalley, 181; and Strecker, 105.

because we love one another” (3:14). Conversely, John states that the opponents who refuse to love their brothers and sisters do not love God (4:20-21) and “do not have eternal life abiding in them” (3:15).

When believers “love one another,” they exhibit their Father’s character and have assurance that they have been “born of God and know God” (4:7). In fact, the presence of love in the believer’s life is to generate boldness even for the day of judgment (4:17). The assurance that comes from the Father’s character in the earthly lives of believers is culminated in the declaration, “as he is, so are we in this world” (4:17). This assertion is explained in 4:16b (and earlier in 4:8) when the apostle reveals that “God is love.” If God is love in this world then his children are also to be love to those around them in need. This same idea permeates John’s Gospel when Jesus states in John 13:34-35: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Implications of Love as a Command that Christians Cannot Ignore

If John is stating that a person who has been born of God cannot refuse to love his brother or sister then what are the implications for modern church and society? Such a reality must impact how we conduct ourselves in this life. In fact, John supplies a rhetorical question in 1 John 3:17 for the believer who would ask about how love for others should impact one’s life: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” The implied and obvious answer to John’s rhetorical question is that the love of God does not exist in such a person. John goes on to explain that God’s love is not found “in word or speech,” but rather “in truth and action” (3:18). The irony is that the people who claim to possess God’s love but refuse to help those in need stand in direct contrast with the statement about Christ’s love for us found in 3:16: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” The greater irony lies in the fact that Jesus was willing to lay down his very life for us but those represented in 3:17 who claim to possess God’s love are not even willing to lay down a part of their possessions to help one in need. John would say that in such a one the love of God is not found because love is revealed in action not in words and that believers cannot refuse to show such love to those who are in need and still be called the children of God.

Without dwelling on obvious synoptic allusions that support this point (e.g., Matt 25:40: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”) or the strong parallel in James 2:18 (“But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith”), the Johannine Gospel itself provides a strong case for the support and development of this theological position. For, the epistle points back to the words and actions of the supreme Teacher who took the posture of a slave and washed the feet of his servants. Afterwards, Jesus states, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I

have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:12b-17).

Clearly, what is applicable to the master is applicable to the servants. We as servants and followers of Christ are commanded to love one another, to serve one another, and to sacrifice for one another. If one has a need, we are called to do everything in our power to see that the need is met. If one is suffering, we are called to relieve that suffering. Possessing love for one another is not only a command to be fulfilled; it is the fruit that naturally stems from the branch that is connected to the vine as its source of life: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

Such implications should have a profound impact upon how we conduct our daily lives. When God’s children practice biblical love and justice within the walls of the church (local and universal), it should provide a powerful witness to the surrounding culture where injustice continues to be the common trait. Jesus’ words in John 13:35 (“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”) can serve either as a promising charge or a condemning reality. Not only does John’s emphasis on love within the community make it inconceivable that Christians could think that they were not required to love their fellow believers, but also the church does the world a disservice when it fails to practice justice, since the failure to love makes it impossible to carry out God’s central mission in the world.

Thus, John’s words bite at the very essence of our Christian existence. John states that we will look like the Father who begat us. The real question we must ask ourselves based on the text of 1 John 2:29—3:10 is: “Does the fruit of my life serve as assurance and evidence that I have been born of God, or does my lack of love for others reveal instead that I am a child of the devil?”

An Important Methodological Consideration for the Role of Biblical Studies in the Social Mission of the Church

Since a natural result of the present argument is to posit that the love and justice commanded within the community of faith should also extend out to the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised in the world,¹² there is a lesson evident in this study at the methodological level for those who wish to address matters of justice from a Christian perspective. Far too often, biblical studies concerns itself with opaque discussions of esoteric minutia without arriving at implications for how the studies address issues of Christian living in the world. On the other hand, ethical and theological studies frequently carry on their discussions by making reference to the biblical text without rigorous attention to the exegetical issues of the text in view. If one were to examine the issue of how Christian love informs our engagement in the larger social arena with reference to the English text of 1 John 3:9-10 alone, the discussion would necessarily fall

¹² Issues of social justice come into play here. As J. P. Miranda states, “Love is not love without a passion for justice;” 93-94. N. T. Wright’s recent work, *Surprised by Hope*, also helps to explain how the transformation of the church in love will make it more of a witness for justice in the world; 207-232.

short of its potential because of a reliance on translations that chose not to take into account the exegetical considerations highlighted in the present study. In other words, the standard translations stand as stark reminders that all translation is at some level interpretation. Here the biblical scholar has a contribution to make to the church's witness for love and justice in the world. The biblical scholar brings the tools of his or her trade to the texts, and, in conversation with those in other disciplines, helps to formulate an exegetically rigorous biblical foundation for the ethical and theological aspects of the Church's mission in the world. While the focus of the present study does not include many specific applications for social justice, it does provide an exegetically rich potential for a creative and prophetic call to the Church to own a crucial dimension of its social witness in the world.

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La religión en la plaza pública

El Dios de la vida y de la justicia según Amós 7:10-17

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Introducción

Uno de los déficits más notorios del movimiento Pentecostal latinoamericano y una de sus más grandes deudas con los pobres y los oprimidos de esta región del mundo ha sido su limitada preocupación por los asuntos de la agenda pública. Una separación radical del mundo basada en una pésima comprensión de la relación iglesia-mundo, con su correlato de pasividad, indiferencia y silencio frente a asuntos críticos como la violación de los derechos humanos y la escandalosa pobreza en la que viven miles de latinoamericanos, jalonó buena parte de su presencia misionera por estas tierras.

Aunque esta situación ha cambiado un poco en los últimos años¹, sin embargo, hace falta todavía seguir reflexionando teológicamente sobre la responsabilidad social y política de las iglesias y los creyentes pentecostales, partiendo de la premisa de que la defensa de la dignidad humana y la lucha por la justicia social, son dos formas legítimas de vivir en el Espíritu y expresiones concretas de la dimensión social de la santidad. Esta reflexión teológica contextual es necesaria y urgente, particularmente, porque en las frágiles democracias latinoamericanas marcadas por diversas formas de injusticia institucionalizada, los que detentan el poder político y económico atropellan impunemente la dignidad humana de los pobres y los oprimidos, entre los cuales se encuentran, miles de miembros de las iglesias pentecostales.

En este ensayo, teniendo en cuenta la deuda pendiente que las iglesias pentecostales latinoamericanas tienen con los pobres y los oprimidos de la región, examinaremos desde una perspectiva teológica contextual, un pasaje clave del libro de Amós tratando de responder a las siguientes preguntas concretas:

1. ¿Cómo tienen que relacionarse con las autoridades temporales de su tiempo los profetas a quienes el Dios de la vida ha llamado y comisionado para que sean artesanos de la paz y pregoneros de la justicia y el derecho?

¹ Actualmente, existen sectores del movimiento pentecostal que en situaciones sociales y políticas altamente críticas, fueron descubriendo que la defensa de la dignidad humana formaba parte de la misión integral de la iglesia y constituía una forma legítima de vivir en el Espíritu. Existen también sectores del movimiento pentecostal que en realidades históricas de desmantelamiento paulatino de la legalidad democrática, comprendieron que la defensa del Estado de derecho representaba una forma de dar testimonio de su amor por la vida. Lo mismo se puede afirmar con respecto a la presencia cada vez más visible de las mujeres pentecostales que insertadas en los movimientos sociales luchan día a día, junto con mujeres de otras confesiones religiosas, contra la pobreza y la falta de oportunidades en una sociedad estamental que ha condenado a los pobres al basural de la historia.

Para mayor información sobre la presencia de creyentes pentecostales en los movimientos sociales, en la lucha contra la pobreza y en la defensa de la dignidad humana, ver los libros *Pentecostalismo y Transformación Social* (López 2000), *El Nuevo Rostro del Pentecostalismo Latinoamericano* (López 2002), *La Seducción del Poder* (López 2004) y *Pentecostalismo y Misión Integral: Teología del Espíritu, Teología de la Vida* (López 2008).

2. ¿La vocación profética tiene que ser ajena a los temas que forman parte de la agenda pública de los pueblos y tiene que ser indiferente o complaciente frente a la forma como manejan el poder los políticos de este tiempo?
3. ¿Cómo se reconoce quien es un profeta auténtico llamado y comisionado por el Dios de la vida y quien es un profeta falso disfrazado de “mensajero celestial”?

Para responder a estas y a otras preguntas relacionadas con la presencia visible de la religión en la plaza pública, será de mucha utilidad examinar experiencias particulares como la del profeta Amós, porque en su caso se observa que fue una figura pública bastante incómoda para los religiosos y los políticos de su tiempo. Fue así, porque este profeta, antes que acomodarse al status quo y de legitimar «teológicamente» las acciones políticas de los poderosos, resistió de manera activa a los poderes que oprimían y explotaban a los sectores sociales indefensos de Israel de mediados del siglo VIII a.C.

Amós no entendió ni su vocación ni su ministerio profético como una aventura individual que apuntaba a fortalecer su protagonismo como personaje público o como una simple empresa humana cuya rentabilidad podía garantizarle un futuro promisorio en la plaza pública. La entendió como una tarea innegociable, cuyo punto de partida y cuyo horizonte, tenían como centro la acción de Dios en el escenario de la historia y el cumplimiento de su voluntad soberana en un marco temporal preciso. Esto explica porque no negoció en ningún momento su vocación y su mensaje ni buscó obtener ventajas económicas temporales y, menos aún, subastar su mensaje al mejor postor o maquillar el mismo para complacer al gobernante de turno. Para él siempre estuvo claro que los profetas llamados y comisionados por el Dios de la vida no tenían que convertirse en instrumentos políticos de un Estado ni en los justificadores y operadores religiosos de un régimen político en particular.

Para conocer un poco más de la experiencia pública del profeta Amós, examinaremos con cierto cuidado *Amós 7:10-17*, tratando de ubicar este texto en su contexto histórico preciso, y buscando dialogar con los desafíos sociales, políticos y éticos que tienen los lectores contemporáneos. En este pasaje clave del libro de Amós se pueden encontrar dos discursos religiosos acerca de Dios bastante diferentes entre sí, dos formas distintas de dibujar un rostro público o de entender la presencia pública de la religión, y dos formas diferentes de relacionarse con el poder político de turno.

Aparecen así dos figuras públicas; por un lado, el religioso Amasías como representante de la religión establecida y defensor a ultranza del status quo; por otro, el profeta Amós como vocero autorizado del Dios de Israel y como profeta de la justicia divina. Esto indica que los religiosos pueden actuar como siervos del Dios de la vida o como instrumentos de las fuerzas de la muerte, como defensores de la verdad y de la justicia o como agentes de la mentira y de la injusticia institucionalizada, como canales de transformación social y política o como defensores del status quo y del sistema predominante. ¿De qué lado estuvo Amós? ¿De qué lado tienen que estar los discípulos de Jesús de Nazaret en los marcos temporales en los que el Dios de la vida los ha puesto como artesanos de la paz y pregoneros de la justicia y del derecho?

Los profetas del Antiguo Testamento

Una rápida lectura de los profetas del Antiguo Testamento da cuenta de que el tema de la justicia social fue uno de los ejes centrales de su discurso público. Están en lo cierto, entonces, quienes puntualizan que el ministerio y el mensaje de los profetas hebreos estaban íntimamente entrelazados con las condiciones en que vivía el pueblo al cual estaba dirigida su prédica (Thomson y Motyer 2003:52).

Así, por ejemplo, Isaías un contemporáneo de Amós, cuyo ministerio profético tuvo lugar en el siglo VIII a.C, durante los reinados de Uzías, Jotam, Acaz y Ezequías, hizo la siguiente denuncia pública en la que se describe las condiciones sociales, políticas y económicas de ese período: “¡Ay de los que dictan leyes injustas, y prescriben tiranía, para apartar del juicio a los pobres, y para quitar el derecho a los afligidos de mi pueblo; para despojar a las viudas, y robar a los huérfanos! ¿Y qué haréis en el día del castigo? ¿A quién os acogeréis para que os ayude, cuando venga de lejos el asolamiento? ¿En dónde dejaréis vuestra gloria?” (Isa 10:1-3).

Isaías no fue el único profeta que denunció públicamente la crítica realidad de opresión, explotación y abandono en la que se encontraban los sectores sociales indefensos como los pobres, las viudas y los huérfanos. La denuncia pública de Miqueas de Moreset no fue menos enérgica que la del profeta Isaías. Miqueas, contemporáneo de Isaías, irrumpió en la plaza pública con estas palabras: “Dije: Oíd ahora, príncipes de Jacob, y jefes de la casa de Israel: ¿No concierne a vosotros saber lo que es justo? Vosotros que aborrecéis lo bueno y amáis lo malo, que les quitáis su piel y su carne de sobre los huesos; que coméis asimismo la carne de mi pueblo, y les desolláis su piel de sobre ellos, y les quebrantáis los huesos y los rompéis como para el caldero, y como carnes en ollas. Entonces clamaréis a Jehová, y no os responderá, antes esconderá de vosotros su rostro en aquel tiempo, por cuanto hicisteis malvadas obras... Oíd ahora estos, jefes de la casa de Jacob, y capitanes de la casa de Israel, que abomináis el juicio, y pervertís todo el derecho; que edificáis a Sión con sangre, y a Jerusalén con injusticia. Sus jefes juzgan por cohecho, y sus sacerdotes enseñan por precio, y sus profetas adivinan por dinero, y se apoyan en Jehová, diciendo: ¿No está Jehová entre nosotros? No vendrá mal sobre nosotros. Por tanto, a causa de vosotros Sión será arada como campo, y Jerusalén vendrá a ser montones de ruinas, y el monte de la casa como cumbres de bosque” (Mic 3:1-4, 9-12).

La enérgica denuncia de Miqueas, indica que el paulatino abandono de la ley de Dios tuvo como correlato una cruda situación de inmoralidad e injusticia que afectó notablemente a los pobres de la tierra, debido a que la clase dirigente los oprimió y explotó abusivamente. El Dios de la vida no fue indiferente a esa situación ni se quedó en silencio. Él llamó y comisionó a profetas que presentándole a él como el protector de los débiles y de los indefensos, denunciaron la conducta social voraz y la religión hipócrita de la clase dirigente de ese tiempo. Al respecto, las palabras del profeta Sofonías, son bastante claras: “¡Ay de la ciudad rebelde y contaminada y opresora! No escuchó la voz, ni recibió la corrección, no confió en Jehová, no se acercó a su Dios. Sus príncipes en medio de ellos son leones rugientes; sus jueces lobos nocturnos que no dejan hueso para la mañana. Sus profetas son livianos, hombres prevaricadores; sus sacerdotes contaminaron el santuario;

falsearon la ley. Jehová en medio de ella es justo, no hará iniquidad; de mañana sacará a la luz su juicio, nunca faltará; pero el perverso no conoce la vergüenza” (Sof 3:1-5).

La denuncia de Habacuc tuvo también la misma textura profética²: “¡Ay del que codicia injusta ganancia para su casa, para poner en alto su nido, para escaparse del poder del mal! Tomaste consejo vergonzoso para tu casa, asolaste muchos pueblos, y has pecado contra tu vida. Porque la piedra clamará desde el muro, y la tabla del enmaderado le responderá. ¡Ay del que edifica la ciudad con sangre, y del que funda una ciudad con iniquidad!” (Hab 2:9-12).

En suma, los profetas en su denuncia pública dibujaron un cuadro desgarrador de corrupción y violencia, explotación y degradación moral, acaparamiento de tierras y de alimentos, injusticia y cohecho, ruptura del derecho y economía abusiva, usura y cosificación del ser humano (Isa 3:14-15; 5:26-31; 22:14-17; Amós 2:6; 4:1; 5:11-12; Mi. 3:1-12; 6:6-12). Ese fue el contexto concreto de violencia y muerte en el que se encontraban los pobres y los excluidos como las viudas, los huérfanos y los extranjeros.

Pero el Dios de la vida no los abandonó. En el Antiguo Testamento él se presenta como su *go'el*, su liberador, su refugio, su vindicador, su protector. En la legislación mosaica y en el mensaje de los profetas está bastante claro que Dios es el que libera a los sectores sociales indefensos y desprotegidos (huérfanos, viudas y extranjeros) de la condición infrahumana en la que se encuentran. No se trata, sin embargo, de un aspecto del carácter de Dios restringido al marco cultural del Antiguo Testamento.

En la aldea global contemporánea, un mundo en el que los pobres y los oprimidos son tratados como cosas de escaso valor, o sin ningún valor, y han sido confinados al basural de las relaciones sociales y reducidos a simples datos estadísticos; Dios los valora y los trata como seres humanos creados a su imagen cuya dignidad no puede ser menoscabada ni pisoteada, ya sea por razones de Estado, por intereses políticos egoístas, o por las exigencias de las políticas económicas. El Dios de la vida no ha dejado de ser el *go'el* de los indefensos y de los desvalidos del mundo. Él todavía continúa exigiendo la práctica del derecho y de la justicia en un mundo en el que la injusticia institucionalizada marca el paso de las relaciones sociales, de las decisiones políticas, de las regulaciones económicas y de la administración de justicia.

El mensaje del profeta Amós

Amós fue un profeta proveniente de Tecoa (Amós 1:1), una aldea situada como a 10 kilómetros al sur de Belén y unos 17 kilómetros al sur Jerusalén, en Judá, el reino del Sur, cuya actividad profética ocurrió entre los años 760-750 a.C. (Sicre 1984:87; Padilla 1993:17). Antes de su llamamiento para que sea profeta del Dios de Israel, trabajaba como un pastor de ovejas y recogía higos silvestres (Amós 7:14-15). Aparte de estos datos, nada más se sabe sobre su historia de vida o su trasfondo familiar.

² Los estudiosos del Antiguo Testamento sitúan el ministerio profético de Sofonías durante el reinado de Josías en el siglo VII a.C. y el ministerio profético de Habacuc quizá un poco después del año 605 a.C. (LaSor, Hubbard y Bush 1995:297).

¿En qué período de la historia de Israel profetizó Amós? Sobre este asunto, al inicio del libro que lleva su nombre, se menciona el marco histórico en el que cumplió su ministerio profético: Las palabras de Amós, que fue uno de los pastores de Tecoá, que profetizó acerca de Israel en día de Uzías rey de Judá y en días de Jeroboam hijo de Joás, rey de Israel, dos años antes del terremoto (Amós 1:1).³ ¿Qué ocurría en ese tiempo en el reino del Norte, Israel, cuya capital era Samaria? ¿Qué factores sociales, políticos, económicos y religiosos, dibujaban el rostro público del país al que Amós dirigió sus palabras?

Unos cuarenta años antes del reinado de Jeroboam II, bajo el mando de Adad-Nirari III, Asiria había aplastado militarmente a Siria, eliminando así a la principal potencia que podía haber limitado los planes de expansión geográfica del rey de Israel. Según J. A. Motyer: “Fue así como Jeroboam, un hombre vigoroso y capaz, quedó en casi total libertad de acción. Restauró las fronteras salomónicas del reino por primera y única vez después de la muerte de Salomón (véase 2 Reyes 14:23-29). Tras consolidar su dominio sobre las rutas mercantiles, Israel comenzó a acumular riquezas... pero éstas se concentraron principalmente en las manos de poderosos comerciantes...” (Motyer 1980:17).

Este mismo autor, junto con otro experto en el tema, puntualiza además que: “Lamentablemente la riqueza de que gozó Samaria no estaba bien distribuida entre el pueblo. Permaneció en poder de los príncipes mercantiles, que destinaban sus nuevas riquezas a mejorar su propio nivel de vida (3:10, 12, 15; 6:4), y descuidaron completamente la clase campesina que hasta entonces había constituido la columna vertebral de la economía de Samaria” (Thomson y Motyer 2003:52).

La realidad descrita previamente, puede explicar porque dentro de ese contexto en el que unos se enriquecieron rápidamente, mientras que otros apenas podían sobrevivir, ocurría lo siguiente en el pueblo que no disfrutaba de los beneficios del desarrollo del comercio internacional:

“En la época de Amós la opresión de los pobres por los ricos era común (2:6s), como también una cruel indiferencia entre los pudientes para con la aflicción de los hambrientos (6:3-6). La justicia estaba del lado del mejor postor (2:6; 8:6). En épocas de sequía (4:7-9) los pobres sólo podían recurrir al prestamista (5:11s; 8:4-6), ante quien con frecuencia tenían que hipotecar su tierra y hasta su propia persona” (Thomson y Motyer 2003:52).

Además, según otros autores, durante esos años: “La riqueza trajo aparejada la injusticia y la avaricia; los pobres eran olvidados y luego fueron perseguidos. La religión se tornó formalista. Los ricos dominaban todo y a todos, desde los profetas y los sacerdotes hasta los jueces y los pobres que buscaban justicia” (LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1995:315).

Fue en ese marco histórico preciso que irrumpió Amós con su mensaje de justicia y de juicio.⁴ Viendo la situación de opresión, explotación y abandono en la que se encontraban los

³ El rey Jeroboam, conocido como Jeroboam II, hijo de Joás, reinó en Israel entre los años 793-753 a. C. (Motyer 1980:17; LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1995:314) Aunque autores como Gerhard von Rad creen que gobernó entre los años 786-746 a.C. (von Rad 1990:170).

⁴ Raymond Brown señala que «Amós comprendió lúcidamente cómo se había difundido el pecado en Israel. Afectaba sus relaciones sociales, degradaba sus prácticas religiosas, pervertía sus transacciones financieras y

indefensos, los que apenas podían mantenerse en pie, los que habían sido abandonados totalmente por los poderosos de ese tiempo.⁵ Amós sacó la cara por los pobres de la tierra, demandando que el derecho y la justicia, prevalezcan sobre la arbitrariedad y la impunidad con la que a menudo actuaban los príncipes, los sacerdotes, los falsos profetas y los comerciantes.⁶ Anunció su mensaje a los burgueses satisfechos, aquellos que se consideraban seguros de sí mismos, capaces de crear, organizar y dirigir el mundo con fuerza (Pikaza 1985:122). ¿Por qué? Porque para Amós: “Dios no era solamente el Dios del templo, de la contemplación religiosa o la vida transmundana. Para él, Dios era, simplemente, el Dios de la vida: El Dios que está interesado intensamente en las relaciones de los hombres en el plano económico, político y social de la vida diaria; el Dios que demanda justicia y que no puede estar satisfecho con ser “adorado” en el templo, mientras es olvidado en el negocio, en el hogar, en el palacio o en el tribunal” (Padilla 1978:167-168).

Además, porque para Amós, la justicia era: “...el atributo moral más importante de la naturaleza divina. Todo ultraje de la ley moral, ya sea que fuera perpetrado por las naciones paganas (1:3-2.3) o por Israel (2:4-16), era un ultraje a la naturaleza de Dios y

corrompía sus procedimientos legales. Los hogares, los santuarios, los puestos del mercado y los tribunales... se habían degradado» (Brown 1975:161).

Washington Padilla, sobre el mismo tema, añade que las «notas más distintivas de su mensaje son la denuncia del pecado, la demanda de justicia, el anuncio de juicio sobre la injusticia, y todo ellos en nombre del Dios Dueño de los cielos y de la tierra que está conduciendo la historia de todas las naciones—no solo de Israel—hacia una meta final: El cumplimiento de su propósito de restaurar todas las cosas por medio de un descendiente del rey David que realizará la reconciliación universal (Padilla 1993:20).

⁵ Para José Sicre, las principales víctimas de la injusticia institucionalizada en el tiempo de Amós, las más frecuentes, son ese grupo de personas que el profeta designa con las palabras *dal* (Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6); *ebyon* (Amos 2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4, 6); *anaw* (Amos 2:7; 8:4) y *saddiq* (Amos 2:6; 5:12)... (Sicre 1984:145). La palabra *dal* se refiere a la persona de escasos bienes, *ebyon* al necesitado, *anaw* al humilde o piadoso, y *saddiq* el inocente. Este mismo autor precisa que en el libro de Amós, del *ebyon* se dice que son vendidos por un par de sandalias (Amos 2:6); son vejados por las señoras de la clase alta (Amos 4:1); son atropellados en los tribunales (Amos 5:12); son pisoteados por los mercaderes (Amos 8:4) y son comprados por un par de sandalias (Amós 8:6). De los *dal* indica que los pisotean (Amos 2:7); los oprimen las señoras de la clase alta (Amos 4:1); los cargan de impuestos y les exigen cargas de trigo (Amós 5:11) y los compran por determinada cantidad de dinero (Amos 8:6). Sobre los *anaw* o *anawim* afirma que los poderosos los ponen al borde del abismo (Amos 2:7) y que los mercaderes pretenden eliminarlos. Y, acerca del *saddiq*, subraya que los venden porque deben determinada cantidad de dinero (Amos 2:6) y que los atropellan en el tribunal (Amos 5:12) . . . (Sicre 1984:147-148).

Además, según otro autor, es «de notar que Amós no denuncia pecados individuales sino pecados sociales, específicamente los pecados cometidos por la clase alta contra “los justos”, “los desvalidos”, “los humildes”, “los menesterosos” de la sociedad israelita (2:6-7; 4:1; 8:4-6). Según Amós, estos pecados se dan en las relaciones de un sector social con otro, a través de los mecanismos que ofrecen las instituciones y las costumbres de la sociedad: La institución eclesíástica, los tribunales de justicia, el gobierno (los impuestos), la esclavitud, las relaciones económicas, etc. Es decir, están presentes en la forma misma que funciona la sociedad (Padilla 1993:21).

⁶ José Sicre, comentando sobre el significado de las palabras derecho (*mispal*) y justicia (*sedaqá*), puntualiza que «numerosos comentaristas interpretan *mispal* como algo objetivo (derecho), el recto ordenamiento de la sociedad, y *sedaqá* como algo más subjetivo, la actitud interna de justicia o rectitud. Ambas cosas deben ir unidas. Una actitud interna que no se manifiesta en la vida práctica es puro engaño; y un ordenamiento jurídico que no se basa en el sentimiento profundo de la justicia se presta a grandes injusticias . . . La sociedad se base en estos dos pilares (Sicre 1984:126).

constituía, por consiguiente, una provocación a la justicia divina. Si Yahvéh es justo, luego la injusticia, la deshonestidad, la inmoralidad no pueden ser toleradas por él, y deben recibir una severa retribución de su parte” (Thomson y Motyer 2003:53).⁷

Esta cruda realidad de injusticia institucionalizada o injusticia legalizada, explica por qué Amós denunció públicamente la insensibilidad, el derroche y el lujo con el que vivían los ricos y la clase gobernante. Estas fueron sus palabras: “Duermen en casas de marfil, y reposan sobre sus lechos; y comen los corderos del rebaño, y los novillos de en medio del engordadero; gorjean al son de la flauta, e inventan instrumentos musicales, como David; beben vino en tazones y se ungen con los ungüentos más preciosos; y no se afligen por el quebrantamiento de José” (Amós 6:4-6).

Para José Sicre, estos versículos están considerados como la mejor y más amplia descripción de la vida lujosa de los ricos de todo el Antiguo Testamento. El profeta habla de los muebles refinados, de la calidad de los alimentos, de la música en los banquetes, de la abundante bebida y de los perfumes de primera calidad . . . (Sicre 1984:134).

En suma, al profeta Amós le preocupaba especialmente la situación de los campesinos pobres quienes apenas tenían lo suficiente para su subsistencia diaria y que estaban en serio peligro de perder sus casas, sus tierras e, incluso, su propia libertad (Sicre 1984:149). Y, por eso mismo, anunció por las plazas y mercados de los hombres la exigencia de justicia y transparencia (Pikaza 1985:123).

Este profeta, sin maquillar para nada su punto de vista, denunció que el mal social no solamente radicaba en el que corazón del ser humano, sino que se manifestaba y se visibilizaba en instituciones concretas de la vida social, política, económica, jurídica y religiosa de un país, las mismas que necesitan ser abolidas (esclavitud, préstamos) o cambiadas profundamente para que beneficien a todos (impuestos, tribunales). ¿Hemos entendido así el mensaje de Amós o lo hemos “espiritualizado” para justificar nuestro punto de vista político partidario o nuestra perspectiva teológica “conversadora”?

Dos formas de actuación pública

La discusión previa respecto al mensaje de los profetas del Antiguo Testamento y al mensaje particular del profeta Amós, será el telón de fondo y el piso teológico, sobre el que examinaremos con mayor detalle el pasaje de *Amós 7:10-17*. Ya hemos señalado que se trata de un texto clave del libro de Amós en el que afloran dos formas de relacionarse con Dios y dos formas concretas –bastante distintas entre sí– de actuación pública. De acuerdo a un experto en Antiguo Testamento:

“Este trozo de narración personal acerca de Amós lo revela en el más alto nivel de su valentía, pero además, nos da una profunda enseñanza sobre la naturaleza y función del hombre de Dios, las experiencias que puede encontrar, los recursos de que puede disponer y la perseverancia de la fortaleza que ha de marcar su trayectoria” (Motyer 1980:171).

⁷ Sobre el tema de la justicia, Eldin Villafañe, acota que: “El mensaje de Amós puede ser presentado bajo tres temas básicos o tres motivos teológicos definidos por la justicia: 1. Justicia entre las naciones; 2. Justicia en las naciones; 3. Justicia y piedad de una nación” (Villafañe 2006:67).

¿Qué temas están presentes en este pasaje de cuya relevancia para este tiempo tienen que estar conscientes los discípulos del Dios de la vida que viven en marcos temporales en los que la opresión y la explotación de miles de seres humanos indefensos son el “pan de cada día”? ¿A quién representa el sacerdote Amasías y en qué sentido su conducta pública puede reproducirse en nuestros contextos históricos particulares? ¿Qué se puede aprender de la conducta pública del profeta Amós, particularmente, cuando se tiene que decidir entre el acomodo al status quo o la resistencia no violenta al mismo?

1. Amasías: El operador político-religioso del status quo

En la figura del sacerdote Amasías, el “capellán” del rey (Villafañe 2006:59), se puede notar hasta que punto la religión se puede convertir en un instrumento político del Estado y en qué sentido los religiosos pueden funcionar y actuar como una suerte de “alcahuetes” y “sobones” de las autoridades políticas. Las acciones públicas de este personaje indican que la religión oficial de ese tiempo, uno de sus cuyos santuarios era Bet-el, estaba subordinada al poder político a quien le convenía tener un “dios” títere del Estado, sujeto a los designios de las autoridades temporales y legitimador de sus acciones políticas.⁸ ¿Qué características marcaban la actuación pública del sacerdote Amasías?

En primer lugar, del texto se deduce que como sacerdote de Bet-el, el santuario real o la catedral nacional del reino del Norte (Padilla 1993:167), Amasías tuvo que haber sido un personaje público de mucha influencia en Israel.⁹ Un personaje acostumbrado a codearse con lo más graneado de la sociedad de su tiempo, habituado a transitar en los pasillos del poder, y con acceso directo al rey Jeroboam II. Esto explica por qué, como se señala en el texto, *envió a decir a Jeroboam rey de Israel: Amós se ha levantado contra ti en medio de la casa de Israel; la tierra no puede sufrir todas sus palabras* (Amós 7:10).

El sacerdote Amasías, valiéndose de las relaciones y de los contactos que tenía en los niveles más altos del poder político, le comunicó al rey Jeroboam II del peligro que significaba dejar que Amós siguiera proclamando públicamente el juicio inminente de Dios sobre la casa real y sobre Israel (Amós 7:1). ¿Qué pretendía Amasías? Aunque en el texto bíblico no se precisa con lujo de detalles cuales fueron las intenciones de Amasías, de una lectura del mismo se puede deducir que esperaba que el rey tomara alguna acción política en contra de Amós, como amenazarle, silenciarle, deportarle, o sobornarle.¹⁰

⁸ En la denuncia pública de Amós hubo constantes referencias poco favorables al santuario religioso de Bet-el (Amos 4:4; 5:5; 7:13). De acuerdo a un autor: «Amós condenó los ritos del santuario real israelita (Amos 4:4; 5:5-6; 7:13; cf. Os. 10:15), y Jeremías puso de manifiesto su futilidad (Jer 48:13)...» (Millard 2003:178). Según otros autores: “En los santuarios religiosos nacionales (5:5) se mantenía el ritual (4:4s), pero este iba de la mano con la infidelidad y la inmoralidad” (Thomson y Motyer 2003:52).

⁹ Quizás, como parece sugerir von Rad, Amasías fue el sumo sacerdote del reino del Norte (von Rad 1990:119).

¹⁰ Sobre este tema, Padilla en su comentario sobre el libro de Amós, sostiene que “la mayoría de comentaristas están de acuerdo en que lo que lo movió fue el deseo de desembarazarse de un “conspirador” que estaba perturbando “el orden establecido”, del cual él –Amasías– y la religión que él representaba eran parte vital” (Padilla 1993:167).

Sin embargo, como aparentemente el rey Jeroboam II no hizo nada o no reaccionó en contra del profeta Amós (Motyer 1980:171), Amasías tomó la iniciativa, ordenando a Amós que se fuera a otro lugar (*huye a tierra de Judá*), y que se gane allí la vida profetizando (*come allá tu pan*). Fue esa una manera directa de pretender silenciar al profeta y de intentar deportarlo, para que no siguiera incomodando con su mensaje a los que oprimían y explotaban a los pobres y a los desvalidos.¹¹

También en este tiempo se pueden encontrar a personajes como el sacerdote Amasías cuyo acceso a los niveles altos del poder les permite, además de disfrutar de ciertos beneficios materiales temporales, desacreditar a aquellos que no encajan en sus preferencias políticas o que –desde su punto de vista– son sus eventuales competidores en el terreno de las relaciones casi siempre cambiantes entre la religión y el Estado. Estos personajes acostumbrados a ser las únicas “figuras estelares” en la escena pública o los únicos “voceros autorizados” de Dios ante las autoridades políticas, casi siempre “mueven” sus contactos para continuar siendo los únicos nexos entre el mundo religioso y los que detentan el poder político, aunque para ello tengan que desacreditar, acusar, silenciar o desaparecer de la escena pública a las figuras religiosas que les resultan demasiado incómodas porque atentan contra sus intereses personales.

En segundo lugar, el sacerdote Amasías, había captado tanto la textura como las implicaciones sociales y políticas que tenía el mensaje profético de Amós.¹² Un mensaje que, según su opinión particular, atentaba contra la “seguridad nacional”. Pero se trataba, indudablemente, de una lectura política sesgada –desde su posición privilegiada en la estructura social y política del Israel– del mensaje del profeta que lo condujo a acusar a Amós del delito de conspiración.¹³ De acuerdo al texto bíblico, estas fueron las palabras de Amasías: *Porque así ha dicho Amós: Jeroboam morirá a espada, e Israel será llevado de su tierra en cautiverio* (Amós 7:11). Sobre esta acusación del sacerdote Amasías, en contra del profeta Amós, un autor ha observado lo siguiente:

“Se lo acusa de conspiración (es decir, se arrojan sospechas sobre su lealtad, ¡táctica predilecta de aquellos que quieren desacreditar a alguien aunque saben que los meros hechos en su sentido más claro no los acompañan!); se tuercen sus palabras para significar lo que en realidad no dijo” (Motyer 1980:173).

Así fue en efecto ya que en el texto bíblico no aparece ningún indicio de que Amós estuviera conspirando.¹⁴ Lo que sí se observa es que Amós, como vocero de la justicia de Dios, proclamó

¹¹ Comentando sobre el sacerdote Amasías, un autor afirma lo siguiente sobre este controvertido personaje: “El sacerdote de Jeroboam II que procuró silenciar al profeta Amós en Bet-el” (Williamson 2003:46).

¹² von Rad señala que las palabras de Amasías indican que se trataba de *la* “conclusión de un observador notable que sabía captar muy bien el poder de la palabra de Amós” (von Rad 1990:120).

¹³ Al respecto, Padilla, precisa lo siguiente: “Según Amasías, el efecto que tiene el mensaje de Amós es intranquilizar al pueblo (“la tierra”), el cual “no puede sufrir todas sus palabras”; es decir, el profeta está “perturbando el orden” (Padilla 1993:166). Más aun, este mismo autor, puntualiza que “el sacerdote Amasías veía la predicación de Amós como una amenaza a la “paz social”. Es evidente que él estaba comprometido con el con el sistema imperante y era parte del mismo. Para él lo importante no era una transformación de la sociedad hacia la justicia, sino la preservación del “orden establecido”, aunque éste estuviera en abierta contradicción con la voluntad de Dios” (Padilla 1993:175).

¹⁴ Según José Sicre: “La acusación es muy grave, porque todas las anteriores conspiraciones, si exceptuamos la de Absalón contra David, terminaron con el asesinato del rey. Antes de Amós se dieron las de Basa contra Nadab (1 R. 15:27), Zimri contra Ela (1 R. 16:9, 20) y Jehú contra Jorám (2 R. 9:14), las tres en el reino del

públicamente que Dios había decretado su juicio inminente sobre la casa de Jeroboam II y sobre Israel. Amasías, sin embargo, acomodó las palabras de Amós a sus intereses políticos y religiosos. Una práctica que con mucha frecuencia acompaña el derrotero político de aquellos que defienden el status quo y que anteponen sus intereses personales a los intereses de los que sufren las consecuencias de la injusticia “legalizada”.

El sacerdote Amasías utilizó, entonces, un recurso político bastante habitual en los pasillos del poder cuando se quiere desprestigiar o anular al oponente potencial o real. En realidad, parece que lo que Amasías buscaba era, además de cuidar su propio espacio en el escenario público y en el epicentro del poder, desprestigiar ante la autoridad política al profeta Amós a quien veía como un personaje público sumamente peligroso para su proyecto personal de seguir siendo el único vocero religioso autorizado ante las autoridades políticas. ¿No ocurre lo mismo en este tiempo?

En tercer lugar, las palabras y la conducta de Amasías, revelan que se trataba de un religioso acostumbrado a disfrutar de los privilegios temporales que otorga el poder, y de un personaje que creía tener el derecho de delimitar las acciones de Dios en la historia de los pueblos. Amasías pretendía ajustar la palabra de Dios a sus presupuestos teológicos y a sus intereses políticos particulares y, por eso mismo, consideraba que él podía decidir quien tenía que hablar en nombre de Dios y cual tenía que ser el contenido del mensaje que se anunciaba públicamente. Lo dicho previamente puede explicar por qué le ordenó lo siguiente al profeta Amós: *Vidente, vete, huye a tierra de Judá, y come allá tu pan, y profetiza allá; y no profetices más en Bet-el, porque es santuario del rey, y capital del reino* (Amós 7:12-13).

Las palabras del sacerdote Amasías revelan que este religioso confundió a Amós con los profetas asalariados que había en ese tiempo, profetas acostumbrados a complacer con sus palabras a los monarcas que les contrataban, y habituados a acomodar sus predicciones al gusto de sus eventuales clientes políticos.¹⁵ El profeta Amós no era ese tipo de profeta mercenario, dispuesto a venderse al mejor postor y siempre listo para acomodar sus palabras a las preferencias de los políticos de turno. Una conducta pública que siempre deben tener en cuenta aquellos que “maquillan” o “sazonan” su mensaje según el auditorio humano en el que se encuentran. Lo hacen porque no se atreven a denunciar los pecados sociales y la injusticia institucionalizada, porque les interesa más las ventajas personales que pueden obtener antes que la ética del reino de Dios y contar con el beneplácito de los políticos antes que proclamar todo el consejo de Dios –el mismo que incluye el anuncio de la justicia y del juicio de Dios– a todos los auditorios o públicos humanos.

norte. Es claro que Amasías deforma la actitud de Amós, porque éste no es un conspirador habitual. Quien conspira contra Jeroboam es Dios, y Amós se limita a anunciarlo” (Sicre 1984:155).

¹⁵ De acuerdo a Padilla, Amasías: “. . . lo confunde con los “profetas” profesionales que se ganaban la vida en los santuarios adivinando . . . En la mente de Amasías no cabe que Amós tenga ninguna otra motivación que no sea la ganancia económica” (Padilla 1993:167). Sobre este mismo asunto, otros autores han señalado que en ese tiempo: “Los “hijos de los profetas” eran miembros de la cofradía profética, en la que se entrenaban para ser profetas profesionales. En los días de Elías y Eliseo, aparentemente se los tenía en alta estima (ver 2 R. 2:3,15.); pero también existían profetas profesionales que, junto con sus discípulos, se prostituían en el ejercicio de sus servicios, diciendo lo que los gobernantes deseaban oír (ver 1 R. 22:6-23) . . .” (LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1995:314).

En cuarto lugar, el sacerdote Amasías creía que Dios era propiedad del Estado y que estaba obligado a bendecir todas sus acciones políticas. Esto explica porque luego de ordenarle al profeta Amós que se fuera a la tierra de Judá (Amós 7:12), le exigió también lo siguiente: *...y no profetices más en Bet-el, porque es santuario del rey, y capital del reino* (Amós 7:13). Una actitud que revela por qué este líder religioso fue tan complaciente con el régimen de turno y por qué se presentó a sí mismo como uno de sus defensores incondicionales. ¿Por qué actuó así este sacerdote de Bet-el? De acuerdo a Padilla, actuó así, porque: “Amasías era el sumo sacerdote que se codeaba con el rey y la alta sociedad y... se identificaba plenamente con el “orden establecido”. Su manera de pensar y ver a Dios y la vida no se diferenciaban mucho de las concepciones de la clase dominante de Israel. Precisamente esto era lo que le impedía aceptar el mensaje de denuncia de Amós, y su llamado al cambio a favor de la justicia” (Padilla 1993:176).

Consecuentemente, desde la óptica político-religiosa del sacerdote Amasías, el mensaje de figuras públicas como el profeta Amós, tenía que estar en “sintonía” con el “discurso religioso oficial”, tenía que “amoldarse” a los requerimientos de las autoridades de turno, tenía que “legitimar” las acciones sociales y políticas de los que estaban en la cima del poder. Según Amasías, Amós tenía que ajustarse a las exigencias propias del santuario nacional de Israel, o irse a otro lugar en el que encajara mejor su mensaje.

Lamentablemente para todos aquellos que se alinean en la óptica político-religiosa del sacerdote Amasías, el Dios de la vida no es propiedad de ningún Estado ni está obligado a bendecir todas sus acciones políticas, como tampoco está obligado a “asistir” a las ceremonias públicas que organizan en su nombre religiosos a quienes poco o nada les importa denunciar la injusticia institucionalizada y la condición infrahumana en la que viven miles de seres humanos.

El Dios de la vida no está amarrado tampoco a ninguna teología en particular, cultura, ideología política, partido confesional, o intereses de las burocracias religiosas. En tal sentido, nadie puede ponerle límites a su acción soberana en los procesos sociales y políticos de los pueblos, amordazar sus palabras, silenciar a los profetas que él mismo ha llamado y comisionado. Nadie puede encerrarlo en un templo, presuponiendo que a él no le interesan los problemas estructurales, y que él se desatiende de asuntos críticos como la violencia legalizada o la situación de carencias materiales en la que se encuentran los pobres y los oprimidos.

2. Amós: El “subversor” del status quo

El sacerdote Amasías ha definido su campo de acción político-religiosa. Él ha apostado por la preservación y la defensa del orden establecido, ha decidido “sacar la cara” por el status quo, ha optado por “legitimar” los intereses y las acciones de los que detentan el poder político y económico. Sin embargo, él no está solo en el escenario público, ya que en ese mismo escenario ha emergido otra figura pública cuyo mensaje “subvierte” el orden imperante y desacomoda a los acomodados de ese tiempo. Amós irrumpe así, en la sociedad israelita de mediados del siglo VIII a.C., como un «subversor» del status quo, como una figura pública bastante incómoda para aquellos que oprimen y explotan a los pobres de la tierra.

¿Qué vio Amós en el marco temporal en el que vivió que le impulsó a proclamar la justicia de Dios y su inminente juicio? ¿Por qué, antes que acomodarse al status quo, resistió de manera no violenta a la tentación de convertirse en un profeta asalariado del régimen de turno y en un líder religioso complaciente con las acciones de los poderosos de ese tiempo?

Aunque ya se ha descrito previamente cómo era la sociedad a la que Amós dirigió su mensaje, sin embargo, la información que proporciona von Rad puede ser útil para captar un poco mejor cómo fue el cuadro social, político, económico, jurídico y religioso en el tiempo en que el profeta irrumpió en la escena pública con su mensaje de justicia y de juicio. Así describe von Rad el marco temporal en el que el profeta de Tecoá emergió en la plaza pública:

... Amós nos muestra una sociedad dividida desde un punto social: una clase alta, propietaria, y por tanto económicamente independiente, vive a costa de los “humildes” (Amós 5:11; 8:6), y esa iniquidad se ve más claramente en la administración de justicia, pues en la comunidad jurídica solo los burgueses poderosos tenían voz y voto; al mismo tiempo constituían, en cuanto propietarios, una comunidad de intereses, y en el ámbito jurídico eran a menudo jueces de sus propios asuntos; siervos, extranjeros, huérfanos y viudas no tenían ningún defensor de sus derechos. El soborno estaba a la orden del día (Amós 5:7s, 12) y la vida económica llena de engaños (Amós 8:5b). Sin embargo en la vida religiosa existía un gran celo. ¡Se emprendían peregrinaciones (Amós 4:4s; 5:4) y se celebraban lujosas fiestas de culto (Amós 5:21s)! Amós ve en eso una provocación a Yahvéh. ¿Qué valen ante Yahvéh las ofrendas de los que desprecian sus justos mandatos? (von Rad 1990:173).

Frente al cuadro desgarrador de un país en el que el derecho se había pervertido y la justicia estaba notablemente ausente.¹⁶ Un país en el que los sectores pudientes habían encontrado en Amasías al instrumento religioso dispuesto a justificar «teológicamente» la opresión y explotación. No exagera Amós cuando, sin maquillar para nada su mensaje de justicia y de juicio, “pone el dedo en la llaga”, y opta por Dios y por los débiles, en contra de quienes tienen el dinero y el poder (Sicre 1984:114). Fue así, porque para Amós, la justicia y la integridad eran ingrediente claves de una verdadera adoración a Yahvéh y no podían ser sustituidas (Klingbeil y Klingbeil 2007:173).

¿Qué características particulares modelaban el ministerio profético de Amós? ¿De dónde le venían las fuerzas para resistir a pie firme los embates de la oposición político-religiosa de figuras públicas como el sacerdote Amasías? ¿Por qué no aceptó la oferta, aparentemente «conveniente» en términos económicos y de seguridad física, que le hizo Amasías como representante del status quo? ¿Qué podemos aprender de las palabras y de la conducta pública de Amós?

En primer lugar, del análisis del texto bíblico, se deduce que Amós tenía conocimiento de primera mano de la realidad histórica en la que estaba situado como ser humano de carne y hueso.

¹⁶ En ese contexto, según José Sicre, la administración de la justicia se había convertido en instrumento de explotación económica en beneficio de los opresores y en veneno mortal para los pobres (Amós 5:7, 10—12) . . . (Sicre 1984:128).

Conocía no solamente los pecados sociales de Israel, sino también, tenía conocimiento directo de la escena mundial de su tiempo (Klingbeil y Klingbeil 2007:167-171), particularmente de las prácticas de injusticia de los países extranjeros (Amós 1:3-2:5).

Amós no fue entonces un profeta desenchufado del entorno de misión, ajeno a las relatividades de su tiempo, alienado del marco temporal en el que le tocó vivir. Lo que se nota en sus palabras y en su conducta social y política es que articuló un discurso público basado en un fino análisis de la realidad social, política, económica, jurídica y religiosa de su tiempo. Esta parece ser la razón por la cual Xabier Plkaza, teniendo en cuenta el modelo de vida pública forjado por Amós, señala que: “Quien hoy quiera actuar como profeta tendrá que comenzar denunciando la injusticia de aquellas relaciones internacionales, que en nombre de un tipo de seguridad estatal o defensa de confusos ideales, condenan a gran parte de los hombres al hambre y la miseria” (Plkaza 1985:124).

De esa manera, con su mensaje y con su práctica profética, Amós articuló todo un modelo de conducta social y política. Un modelo en el que se subraya que aquellos que quieren incursionar en la plaza pública, deben tener un conocimiento de primera mano de la realidad histórica en la que están situados y deben ser capaces de traducir esa información en acciones sociales y políticas orientadas a una transformación radical de las estructuras de pecado y de las prácticas corrientes de injusticia institucionalizada como la opresión y explotación de los pobres.

En segundo lugar, de una lectura del texto bíblico, queda claro que Amós tenía una profunda conciencia de su llamado y sabía quien le había enviado como profeta al reino del norte. Amós no se había auto-convocado o auto-designado, ni se había auto-enviado o auto-comisionado. Él sabía cual era su tarea específica, su misión concreta y, por eso mismo, no se distraía en otros asuntos o en ocupaciones secundarias. No confundía los papeles. No tambaleaba ni se acobardaba frente al peligro. Así, cuando el sacerdote Amasías, le dijo: . . . *Vidente, vete, huye a tierra de Judá, y come allí tu pan, y profetiza allá; y no profetices más en Bet-el...* (Amós 7:12-13).¹⁷ Amós fue capaz de responderle con estas palabras: *No soy profeta, ni soy hijo de profeta, sino que soy boyero, y recojo higos silvestres* (Amós 7:14).

Las palabras de Amós al sacerdote Amasías dan cuenta de que él sabía quien era y cual era su misión concreta en la sociedad de su tiempo. Amós tenía plena conciencia de que Dios mismo le había llamado y comisionado como su profeta en un contexto histórico específico, y estuvo dispuesto a pagar el precio que esa tarea exigía. Como en el caso de Amós, la misma conciencia de llamado y de envío se le exige a los profetas de Dios de este tiempo, para que no capitulen frente al peligro y para que no rebajen ni acomoden el contenido de su mensaje, cuando tengan que enfrentarse públicamente a los que tienen en sus manos el poder político, económico y religioso.

En tercer lugar, de la respuesta de Amós a los requerimientos políticos de Amasías en Amós 7:13 (. . . *no profetices más en Bet-el, porque es santuario del rey, y capital del reino*), se deduce que para el profeta, el Dios de la vida a quien él representaba, era Señor incluso del Estado y de las

¹⁷ En su análisis de este pasaje, algunos autores han observado que cuando “Amasías advertía a Amós que retornara a Judá “si quieres ganarte la vida profetizando (7:2 VP), estaba sugiriendo que Amós era profeta de carrera” (LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1995:313).

autoridades temporales: *Y Jehová me tomó de detrás del ganado, y me dijo: Ve y profetiza a mi pueblo Israel* (Amós 7:15). La comprensión que tenía Amós de la Soberanía de Dios, explica por qué habló claramente, por qué no subastó su mensaje, y por qué no se vendió al poder político de ese tiempo. En tal sentido, Amós no era de aquellos que convierten a la religión en instrumento político del Estado, ni de aquellos que se venden al sistema o se acomodan al mismo, como en muchas ocasiones a lo largo de la historia lo han hecho los profetas espurios que a menudo se vendían –y se venden todavía– por un “plato de lentejas”.

En cuarto lugar, Amós habló directamente, no disfrazó ni maquilló el mensaje que tenía que anunciar, no contemporizó ni se alquiló al poder de turno. Amós no retrocedió, no pactó con el poder, no rebajó su mensaje, no fue un timorato, no tembló, cuando tuvo que hablar de parte de Dios: *Ahora, pues, oye la palabra de Jehová. Tú dices: No profetices contra Israel ni hables contra la casa de Isaac. Por tanto, así ha dicho Jehová . . .* (Amós 7:16-17).

¿Por qué actuó así Amós y por qué no le tuvo miedo al representante de la religión establecida? Porque, como ya se señalado, teniendo conciencia de su llamado y la seguridad de que Dios mismo le había enviado, sabía que su fuerza para la misión le venía de Aquél que le había sacado de su trabajo habitual para convertirlo en su vocero autorizado, sabía que estaba en las manos de Dios, sabía que Dios le guardaba y le sostenía. ¿Tenemos la misma seguridad nosotros? ¿Denunciamos, sin hacer concesiones de ningún tipo, las distintas formas de injusticia institucionalizada que atropellan despedazan impunemente la dignidad humana de los pobres y de los oprimidos?

Finalmente, el mensaje de Amós fue un mensaje que enjuiciaba y que denunciaba las acciones sociales y políticas injustas de los opresores y de los explotadores, dentro y fuera de Israel. Esto está sumamente claro en las palabras que Amós pronunció, de parte de Dios, delante del sacerdote Amasías: *Tu mujer será ramera en medio de la ciudad, y tus hijos y tus hijas caerán a espada, y tu tierra será repartida por suertes; y tú morirás en tierra inmunda, e Israel será llevado cautivo lejos de su tierra* (Amós 7:17). Sobre estas palabras de Amós, al sacerdote Amasías, Washington Padilla comenta que: “Aquí vemos el terrible juicio que Dios pronuncia sobre Amasías: Tendría el dolor de ver a su esposa violada por los asirios, sus hijos muertos, sus posesiones repartidas, y él mismo llevado al exilio. Juntos, templo y sacerdote y todo lo que simbolizaban, serían arrastrados a la ruina juntamente con la nación impía. Eran parte integral del “orden establecido: y correrían la misma suerte que éste” (Padilla 1993:176).

Años después, cuando Asiria derrotó al reino de Israel y capturó su capital Samaria entre los años 722-721 a.C. (Padilla 1993:23), se cumplirían las palabras del profeta Amós. Así, las palabras de justicia y de juicio del profeta de Tecoá, no demoraron mucho tiempo ya que, finalmente, Dios castigó duramente a Israel que conoció la traumática experiencia del exilio. Mós no claudicó, entonces, del encargo que había recibido de parte de Dios. No cedió ni un milímetro, incluso, cuando rondaba sobre él el peligro de muerte. No aprovechó las “condiciones objetivas favorables” para venderse al poder de turno. No amordazó la palabra de Dios. No se amoldó al status quo ni se convirtió en un “legitimador” religioso de las acciones sociales y políticas de los explotadores y de los opresores. Apostó por el Dios de la vida y sacó la cara por

los pobres de la tierra. ¿No es ésta la ruta que tienen que transitar también los discípulos del Dios de la vida de este tiempo en los marcos temporales en los que están situados?

Las lecciones para este tiempo

Como ya se ha señalado insistentemente, aquí tenemos dos modelos distintos entre sí de religiosos en la plaza pública, dos personajes con teologías completamente diferentes, dos vías por las que los religiosos se pueden relacionar con el poder político, dos mensajes que los públicos humanos siguen habitualmente. Uno de ellos somete a Dios a la ideología predominante y el otro proclama la soberanía y la justicia de Dios. Uno opta por ser complaciente con el régimen de turno y el otro desacomoda a los acomodados del mundo. Uno se convierte en un instrumento servil al sistema y el otro resiste de manera no violenta a la violencia de los opresores y de los explotadores. ¿De qué lado estamos nosotros? ¿Cuál de estos dos personajes describe mejor nuestra teología y nuestra conducta pública?

El sacerdote Amasías señala una ruta específica y el profeta Amós otra ruta completamente distinta. Ambas rutas han marcado y jalonado, con frecuencia, el peregrinaje público de la religión y de los religiosos a lo largo de la historia. En ocasiones, siguiendo la vereda que transitó el sacerdote Amasías de Bet-el, la religión y los religiosos se convirtieron en instrumentos políticos de un Estado y de los gobernantes temporales, justificando y legitimando “teológicamente” todos sus atropellos. En otros momentos, siguiendo la calzada que caminó Amós, las minorías proféticas cambiaron el rumbo de la historia, defendiendo el derecho y la justicia, a pesar de la intimidación, la persecución y de las amenazas de muerte de los defensores del status quo.

Así, una y otra vez en todos estos años, ambas rutas fueron dibujando el papel público de la religión y la conducta pública de los religiosos. ¿Qué ruta estamos siguiendo nosotros en nuestros contextos particulares de misión? ¿La del Dios de la vida o la de las fuerzas de la muerte? ¿La del reino de Dios y su justicia o la de la sociedad de consumo? ¿La de la defensa de los pobres y de los oprimidos o la de la defensa del status quo? ¿La del derecho y la justicia o la de injusticia institucionalizada?

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Nonviolent Direct Action in Acts 2: The Holy Spirit, the Early Church, and Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

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Introduction

A trajectory is “a path, progression, or line of development.”² As a Christian, I believe that Jesus has provided the trajectory that our lives of faithfulness are to follow. Jesus’ life of faithfulness is central to the narrative we call “Luke,” and his followers’ lives of faithfulness (and occasional unfaithfulness) are central to the narrative we call “Acts.” Their faithful lives continued in the trajectory of Jesus. In this essay, I explore theologically and ethically the way in which God’s followers on the day of Pentecost confronted murderers and injustice. I see similarities between the structure of Luke’s account in Acts 2 and Martin Luther King Jr.’s practice of nonviolent direct action, and I hope this comparison will yield spiritual fruit that empowers Christians to live lives of faithfulness along the trajectory that is revealed in Jesus Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther King, Jr. worked and prayed nonviolently for reformation of an unjust system and named in public the personal and governmental sins that were committed against undeserving people. He espoused and participated in action that was direct, yet not violent. Addressing problems often takes action rather than passivity, and that is why many Christians advocate the use of violence in defense of justice. This essay is not about whether or not violence is ever justified as a Christian action, it is rather an exploration of how the early Christian community, depicted in Acts 2, addressed the injustice of their Messiah’s murder on the day they “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).³ I hope to accomplish this by exploring four aspects of nonviolent action advocated by Dr. King and see how they weave together with the broad contours of the public witness and action on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

¹ This article was originally published in *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff*, Paul Alexander, Rob Reid, and Jordan May, eds. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), it has been slightly revised for publication in *Pax Pneuma*. John Wyckoff taught me to read Scripture carefully and value it highly. He taught me to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and prayerfully engage in the hermeneutical journey so that the church would be strengthened and God would be glorified. I am profoundly thankful he was my undergraduate hermeneutics and theology professor, and I was honored to serve as his colleague for nine years on the faculty at Southwestern Assemblies of God University. This essay is inspired by John’s commitment to a healthy relationship between Scripture and practical theology, and by his deep and enduring desire to help the church be faithful to Jesus. I do not blame him for the observations I make herein, but I proudly acknowledge his positive impact on my life and scholarship and hope that this essay honors him. This is not an exegesis of Acts 2, but rather a conversation about some intriguing parallels between the Acts 2 narrative and the concept of nonviolent direct action as articulated and practiced by Martin Luther King, Jr.

² “Trajectory” in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2009).

³ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the NIV.

Noncooperation with Evil

First, Dr. King “became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with the good.”⁴ “Noncooperation with evil” informed the decision to boycott nonviolently the segregated bus system in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955–56. This led to his home being bombed and the daily in-pouring of scores of threatening letters, yet he “heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on.”⁵ “We came to see that, in the long run, it is more honorable to walk in dignity than ride in humiliation. So in a quiet dignified manner, we decided to substitute tired feet for tired souls, and walk the streets of Montgomery until the sagging walls of injustice had been crushed by the battering rams of surging justice.”⁶

Acts 2 begins with the Spirit’s overwhelming noncooperation with evil. Jesus, who had also not cooperated with evil, had been murdered unjustly by religious and government leaders who had colluded to kill him. Religion and government often collude for evil purposes, yet the Spirit’s response in Acts 2 is neither violent nor passive. The Spirit responds actively, directly, nonviolently, and powerfully by enabling the gathered believers to speak in the tongues of the marginalized, dispossessed, and disenfranchised of the Roman Empire. The Spirit’s filling did not enable everyone to speak in Greek, Latin, or even Hebrew. Neither the governmental language of the dominating empire nor the historical religious language of the local religion was affirmed as superior, the *lingua franca* was complexified. The Spirit did not cooperate with the evils of monolingual or ethnic arrogance and uniformity but instead affirmed the importance of the diversity of languages, ethnicities, ‘races,’ and nationalities. Arabs, Africans, Asians, and Europeans all declared “the wonders of God in our own tongues” (Acts 2:11). This is the Spirit’s noncooperation with the evils of exclusion and xenophobia, for Christians on the day of Pentecost broke the bounds of linguistic and imperial confinement and spoke in unlearned languages heard by sixteen particular ethnicities from throughout the empire.

The day of Pentecost would have been very different if the Spirit had enabled everybody to speak the same language. That miracle would have supported a theology and ethics of uniformity, homogeneity, and universality that would justify the suppression of difference and the oppression of those who can be exploited. But that is not the Acts 2 Pentecost. It is instead a powerful move of the Spirit in cooperation with particularity and diversity and in noncooperation with evil.

⁴ *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (ed. Clayborne Carson; New York: Warner Books, 1998), p. 14. Don S. McKinney, “Brer Rabbit and Brother Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Folktale Background of the Birmingham Protest,” *JRT* 46.2 (Winter/Spring 1989/90): p. 49. Noncooperation with evil does not mean that talking with adversaries or diplomacy is unacceptable, it actually means quite the opposite. Both Dr. King and the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and early Christians stayed in relationship with their adversaries while at the same time refusing to cooperate with their injustice. For a biblical, theological, and practical argument in favor of international cooperation written by evangelicals and Pentecostals, visit <http://www.Matthew5Project.org>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Arouse the Moral Conscience of the Oppressor

Second, Dr. King believed that noncooperation with evil and faithful witness could “arouse the moral conscience of the oppressor.”⁷ It took great faith to believe that those who would pass and enforce racist laws that supported lynching and restricted voting, marriage, inheritance, freedom in housing, and a host of other injustices might have a moral conscience that could be aroused. Evil is real, sin is painful, and to think that the conscience of sinful people can be aroused is a powerful Christian concept that maintains hope in the most dire of situations. Dr. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” strikes a humble balance of truth-telling, love, and appealing to the moral conscience of people who justified their racism and injustice while viewing themselves as morally superior to African-Americans (and other non-Whites). Simply asking for investigations into the most “unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation” and the removal of “humiliating racial signs” brought about harsh resistance from many Christian clergy.⁸ So Dr. King and many others continually explained their faith in God’s goodness and how it invites all to be better human beings, and how that sometimes nonviolent direct action is necessary to help folks see their own sin and be transformed. Dr. King explained,

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action . . . As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted . . . we had no alternative except to present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification . . . We repeatedly asked ourselves, ‘Are you able to accept blows without retaliation?’ ‘Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?’

I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth . . . Isn’t negotiation a better path? Indeed, that is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue . . . We must see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.⁹

Arousing the moral conscience of sinful people sometimes entails public confrontation, like Jesus’ public confrontations with religious elites and Peter’s public confrontation with those gathered on the day of Pentecost. Peter stood up in public and proclaimed that the Spirit of God was now empowering both women and men, young and old, slaves and free, to speak and live

⁷ McKinney, “Brer Rabbit and Brother Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 49.

⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 78–80.

prophetically and powerfully. Peter made this claim to Jews, Romans, and other ‘foreigners’ who had assembled in the crowd (Acts 2:14). Claiming that the Spirit is for *all* people is a challenge to any person, ideology, worldview, or theology that would claim the Spirit is for a limited set of humanity. Following the radical linguistic and ethnic embrace of the Spirit-enabled tongues speech, Peter’s quote of Joel challenged divisions and domination based on class (even slaves!), gender (even women!), and age (even younger and older people!). Religious communities that focus on maleness, monetary resources, race, nationality, ethnicity, age, or language superiority are being nonviolently and directly challenged by this prophetic proclamation—let your moral conscience come alive. And then on that open street corner, knowing full well that he could die for such a public statement, he told the onlookers that they had participated in the torture and murder of an innocent man. Let your moral conscience come alive. Jesus had been tortured and killed, and we know that Stephen, Peter, and many others would later be tortured and killed as well for seeking to arouse the moral conscience of sinners.

Like prophets before and after him, Peter told a story that implicated his audience. “You, with the help of wicked people, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23). Storytelling that challenges the hearers is quite dangerous, even Jesus the Christ was taken to the edge of a cliff to be murdered when he told the Elijah and Elisha stories ‘wrongly’ and pointed out the xenophobia and limited mercy of his Nazareth friends (Luke 4:1–30). But our moral consciences must be aroused by people who are willing to risk their safety by telling us stories that invite us to be transformed by the loving God, even if those stories challenge our righteous perceptions of ourselves.

Prophetic storytelling and making claims about God’s wide embrace on the street corner serves as a paradigmatic narrative in Acts that has inspired the church, especially the Pentecostal movement. Prophetic storytelling and making claims about God’s wide embrace on the street corner is active, not passive; direct, not indirect; and nonviolent, not violent. It is the nonviolent direct action of God. The very incarnation of Jesus can be seen as a nonviolent direct action of God. And the church is called to be a continuation of God’s initiative to transform and heal the world. This means that we must allow our moral consciences to continually be enlivened by the Spirit as heard in the voices of those who experience or witness suffering or injustice.

See Our Evil, Repent, and Convert

Third, Dr. King hoped that the oppressors “might see [their] evil and repent . . . nonviolence [is] the means to the oppressor’s conversion to the pursuit of justice.”¹⁰ Noncooperation with evil and arousing the moral conscience of sinners (which includes us) are not ends in themselves; they are intended to produce repentance, conversions, and transformation. Being able to see our own evil or sin is difficult and we all need help. Sometimes a dramatic encounter offers us the possibility either to admit we are wrong or to ignore our sins, but the opportunity to see is at least presented. We see better in light than in darkness, and more light can yield better sight. The turning on of this light sometimes means the naming of the sins

¹⁰ McKinney, “Brer Rabbit and Brother Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 49.

and pains that have been perpetrated—and those suffering in darkness appreciate the light being turned on while those who are benefiting from the sin wish the prophets would just leave the light switch alone. Dr. King writes:

We have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily . . . we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the sting of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’

But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim¹¹ . . . when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people . . . when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness’—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws . . . A just law is a man-made [*sic*] code that squares with the moral law or the law of God . . . Any law that uplifts human personality is just . . . All segregation statues are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority . . .

One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake.

We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is

¹¹ Thousands were killed like this in the U.S. between the 1880s and 1950s. “On the average, a black man, woman, or child was murdered nearly once a week, every week, between 1882 and 1930 by a white mob.” Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1992), ix.

covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates . . .¹²

Peter concluded his street corner light-switching-on, conscience arousing, self-endangering story by saying, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” Immediately following his bullhorn message exposing deceit, injustice, and murder, the people “were cut to the heart” and said, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:26–37). Peter told them to repent (to completely change the way they see and live in the world) and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They did exactly what Dr. King desired for the society and church that he loved and with which he worked—they saw their evil and repented.

Peter did not threaten them with violence or passively allow them to continue in their sinful ways, he instead nonviolently and actively confronted them with their sins and invited them into a new way of living, a new life shaped by the Messiah and empowered by the Spirit. Later in Acts, this entailed Peter’s imprisonment and repeatedly being commanded not to speak the truth in Jesus’ name. But he and John famously declared, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19–20). Challenging the *status quo* of sinful people and sinful institutions means that we speak truthfully about the good and the bad that we witness—we protest the pain and injustice and we testify to the healings and wholeness. We protest/ify.¹³ Protest/imonies about the good, bad, and ugly brought about Stephen’s death (Acts 7), James’ death (Acts 12:2), and Dr. King’s death (April 4, 1968). But the goal of each of these followers of Jesus was to bring about repentance and conversion both to Jesus Christ and to the pursuit of justice/righteousness.

Beloved Community

Fourth, Dr. King’s “beloved community” was “a vision of a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice wherein brotherhood would be an actuality in all of social life. In his mind, such a community would be the ideal corporate expression of the Christian faith.”¹⁴ He avoided both “superficial optimism” and “crippling pessimism” while realistically working for transformation in both the church and society.

This beloved community is seen clearly in the final sentences of Acts 2 as the newly Spirit-filled Christians sold their possessions and goods and gave to anyone who had need. They challenged the injustices of greed, materialism, and ethnic exclusion within their community and continually attracted more adherents (Acts 2:42–47). Acts 2 relates that three-thousand people who certainly represented the diversities and particularities described previously (geography,

¹² King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait*, pp. 80–84.

¹³ Paul Alexander, “A Pentecostal Protest/imony about Justice, anti-Theodicy, and HIV/AIDS in Africa,” (paper presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies annual conference at Duke University Divinity School, Durham, N.C., 7 March 2008).

¹⁴ Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., “Martin Luther King’s Vision of the Beloved Community,” *ChrCent* (3 April 1974), 361–63.

languages, gender, class, age, ethnicity) became unified around a distinction other than their class or ethnicity—their common commitment to Jesus as Messiah. Luke makes sure to communicate to his readers that these conversions led to the embodiment, at least within the community, of that which was taught in Torah and proclaimed by the Hebrew sages and prophets.

. . . there will, however, be no one in need among you . . . If there is among you anyone in need . . . do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought . . . and view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so . . . I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’ (Deut 15:4–11 NRSV)

. . . Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (Prov 30.8–9)

Maintain justice and do what is right . . . Yet on the day of your fasting, you exploit all your workers . . . Is not this the kind of fast I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice . . . and to set the oppressed free? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them? Then your light will break forth like the dawn! If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness . . . (Isa 56:1; 58:3–10)

Then the righteous [just] will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers [or sisters] of mine, you did for me.’ (Matt 25:37–40)

From Deuteronomy to Jesus, we see a trajectory that was continued in Acts by the power of the Spirit. The Acts 2 community not only had their consciences aroused and repented of their evil; they also began to practice community restoring justice/righteousness and economic sharing in harmony with the biblical vision of Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Jesus. How could a community that lives like that not help but attract people? This kind of community is also inherently controversial as it challenges the *status quo* of people who would justify their accumulation, scant generosity, and injustice in the name of God. In fact, this kind of Spirit-inspired reality portrayed in the paradigmatic chapter for Pentecostalism has been called extreme, radical, and naïve. But I argue, along with many biblical scholars, that Luke certainly

did not intend to portray this Jesus-shaped, Spirit-filled community as naïve. Luke instead described the result of what I am calling God's noncooperation with evil (the life of Jesus himself followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the empowering of the church); Peter's arousing of the moral conscience of the crowd, and the crowd's repentance of their evil and conversion to Jesus as Messiah. This immediately resulted in a visible community of justice where resources were shared. It is worth pointing out that the Greek words for righteousness and justice are the same—*dikaion/nh*. This beloved community—a community of justice—revealed the kingdom of God concretely and practically embodied in real people's lives. The world was different because of Jesus, the Spirit, and the church's nonviolent direct action.

Although humanity's moral pilgrimage may never reach a destination point on earth, our never-ceasing strivings may bring us ever closer to the city of righteousness. And though the Kingdom of God may remain not yet a universal reality in history, in the present it may exist in such isolated forms as in judgment, in personal devotion, and in some group life. . . . Above all, we must be reminded anew that God is at work in his universe. As we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, the God of the universe struggles with us. Evil dies on the seashore, not merely because of our endless struggle against it, but because of God's power to defeat it.¹⁵

Conclusion

The Spirit is at work in the world today, and the trajectory of faithfulness runs throughout Luke-Acts. I sincerely hope that the church's careful attention to scripture, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will increasingly enable us to engage in nonviolent direct action like that which is shown in the life of Dr. King and in the prophetic and faithful communities of the Hebrew scriptures and the early church. By being neither passive nor violent, and neither superficially optimistic nor cripplingly pessimistic, we can perhaps keep our moral consciences alive and repent of our sins as we offer the same hope to others. In this way, we might at least partially realize the counter-intuitive, embracing, diverse, just, and beloved community of Acts 2.

¹⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Struggle to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 64.

Spiritual Conflict and the Pauline Doctrine of Principalities and Powers: An Alternative Pentecostal Perspective from Latin America

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Introduction

The whole area of spiritual conflict, civil government, and the responsibility/relationship that Christians have to it has been a question that has perplexed the church since the advent of Jesus Christ. In this brief study, I intend to grapple with this problem, first of all, as a confessed disciple of Jesus Christ, and from the perspective of a Pentecostal missionary educator with many years of experience in the various contexts of Latin American church and society, with particular attention to the country and peoples of Guatemala. This study grows out of my own personal pilgrimage with the peoples of Latin America in seeking to apply the principles of Paul's teaching on the subject of civil authority to the oppressive situations in which the Latin American church finds itself.

From liberation theologians coming from the perspective of the church, and socialist-oriented groups coming from the secular forces in society, we hear cries as voices in the wilderness calling for the allegiance of the church. It is time that those of us involved in the Pentecostal Church and missionary circles think through this whole matter and come up with at least some tentative conclusions as to the responsibility we have before the state in oppressive situations.

A Setting of Spiritual and Material Oppression

Guatemala is a beautiful country when one speaks of its natural beauty. The inhabitants are a proud and industrious people, the majority being direct descendants of the ancient Maya indigenous people of pre-conquest civilization fame. Today, more than 23 ethnic Mayan groups plus the mixed Latin, Black, and White elements, comprise a population of approximately 14 million inhabitants.

The irony of this whole scene, however, is the utter despair and misery in which the majority of these people live. With 63 percent of the population over seven years of age illiterate, the average life expectancy is 49 years. The mortality rate, 16 per thousand, is the highest in the hemisphere, and over half of all deaths are children under four years of age. There is one doctor per 3,600 people with 80 percent of the entire medical force concentrated in the capital, which leaves one doctor per 23,000 people outside the capital city. Seventy-five percent of all children under five years of age are malnourished. Eighty-eight percent of all homes have no electricity, while in the urban areas above 60 percent of the homes have no sewage service.

Why all of these miserable statistics? Why mention all this gloomy data? If for no other reason, we want to point out the insupportable conditions in which millions of Guatemalans live. This explains their increasing nonconformity with the oppressive political systems under which

they have lived for centuries. These systems have perpetuated the injustice behind the fact that 2.1 percent of the population own 72.2 percent of the land while half the population receives an average per capita income of \$81 dollars. Here, we are referring to a series of right-wing military governments, and more recently, the fragile, ineffectual constitutional governments which historically have been kept in power by their close ties with the government of the United States and huge multinational corporations which represent the economic interests of big business/government of the Western world.

All this brings us back to our original question: What does Paul's theology have to say to this kind of oppressive situation and to our Christian responsibility in terms of spiritual warfare? Perhaps we should now go to the biblical data to attempt an understanding of where Paul was coming from.

The Biblical Record from Paul: Government as Demonic and Sinful

At the outset of this section, it should be stated that it is very easy for Christians to become polarized over this whole matter. We do want to arrive at some basic conclusions that will help us maintain a biblical posture as well as speak out prophetically for the poor and marginalized of the majority world.

It seems that Paul's experience with civil authority presented a difficult situation in which the tension always existed between the divine and demonic spheres. "On the one hand, the state is instituted, ordained or created by God, and therefore good and useful; on the other hand, it is sinful, hostile to God, and of demonic character."¹

This is Paul's basic understanding of the world (created order) and reflects itself in his understanding of civil government. The problem is this: Paul has very little to say in a direct way about the demonic aspect of government. In 1 Corinthians 6:1, he does make a slanted statement concerning the judges of the gentiles. He seems to contrast the "saint" and the "unrighteous" which would imply that these judges belong to "this present evil world."

When Paul elaborates in 2 Corinthians 11:23, his sufferings for the sake of Christ, we can be quite certain that he had come into conflict with the Roman state on one of more occasions. He does speak of being in danger from Gentiles, and having been imprisoned and harassed as we have recorded on more than one occasion, in the Acts accounts (16:11-40; 17:1-9; 18:1-17; 19:23-41; 20—28). Furthermore, it may be that the opponents of Philipians 1:28 were the official representatives of the government and local magistrates.

When we see all of these experiences together, we can conclude that Paul did learn from experience that the state was capable of becoming hostile to the cause of Christ.

Government as Instituted by God

The Biblical data from Paul seems to point to the fact that Paul had generally profited by the protection of the state and therefore does not present an outright negative picture of it. In fact, we must honestly say that Paul overwhelmingly presents us with the picture of civil government

¹ Eric H. Wahlstrom, *The New Life in Christ* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950), 268.

as being a gift to humanity instituted by God. This, of course, is set forth in his only extensive passage related to the subject in Romans 13:1-7. The passages in 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and Titus 3:1-3 support what is said in Romans.

There are several factors to be taken into consideration here. Although the Roman government was known for its imperialist tendencies,² from 54 to 62 A.D, as it was in the hands of the capable Seneca, it satisfied the basic requirements of authority in Paul's eyes. This is also evident from his readiness to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11).³

It seems what Paul is saying in Romans 13, as well as in other passages, is that institutions of civil government have been ordained of God for the benefit of humanity and as such should be obeyed. Perhaps the main point of Paul's argument was that Christianity does not release a believer from the necessity of obedience to the civil government. Evidently, this had been the understanding of some. A Christian might not remain married to an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:10ff.), a slave might disobey and desert his pagan master (Col 3:22f; 1 Cor 7:31), or a Christian might rise in rebellion against the foreign oppressor as the Zealots advocated. Such action was clearly contrary to Paul's conception of the Christian life. Furthermore, Paul relied on the Roman government to maintain some degree of peace and order and restrain the violent intentions of evil people with which he came in contact. Robert Duncan Culver notes: "He trusted the due process of law to conserve his civil rights, to protect his liberty against persecution and suppression by rival religious people, to preach his message and to protect the infant churches which he founded. Though well aware of the limited number of benefits from government, the possible dangers of it, its numerous failings, and even intermittent persecutions, he was aware of no right of armed resistance to tyrants."⁴ In summary, a wise balance of obedience to authority to a point against a conscientious disobedience at a point appears in principle in the life of Paul.

Contextual Interpretation and Application

Where does all this leave us in terms of our responsibility to the government in an oppressive situation? Are we to sit by in quiet passivism to the atrocities that oppressive governments such as that of Guatemala can commit, or may we join forces with others of like-mind in overthrowing the government? Here again, the entire issue must be approached from a contextual point of view. We may be able to absolutize a basic Pauline principle—basic respect for government as a gift of God—but the practical implications of that principle must be dealt with in the everyday life and death situations of each given culture and context. To illustrate, we will attempt a brief interpretation of the biblical data with its corresponding application to the current political scene.

² Sir Frederick Catherwood, *A Better Way: The Case for a Christian Social Order* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1976), 73.

³ J.G. Davies, *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 47.

⁴ Robert Duncan Culver, *Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 240.

The Responsibility of the State to the Church

Linder and Pierard⁵ mention three duties of the state toward the church and society in general. First, the state must provide and maintain law and order. Civil government was ordained for the good of humankind (Rom 13:4), and it should allow believers to "lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim 2:2). They argue the opposite of order is anarchy, which, for them, is unsatisfactory. Anarchy, they note, is a form of tyranny, and where it exists a tyrant will eventually exploit the opportunity to seize control and restore some form of law and order.

If the government refuses to fulfill its responsibility to uphold law and order, the Christian has the right to insist that it do its job properly. In the Guatemalan context that would mean speaking out through various means such as letters to the senate members and public announcements in the media so that the civil authorities will do all within their power to restore law and order where anarchy now reigns.

Second, another duty of the state is to provide justice, for without justice law and order are empty words. A major emphasis of the Old Testament is God's demand for justice. Establishing righteousness in society is associated with protecting and providing for the orphan, widow, stranger, poor and oppressed. Surely Paul, with his rich Hebrew heritage was fully aware of this emphasis. In Guatemala today, this would call for a prophetic denouncement of the wrong doers in government who are subverting the noble cause of justice to meet their own selfish ends.

Third, the responsibility of the political order is to preserve liberty for its citizens. The Bible makes plain that God intends for human beings to be free and that government is God's servant for humankind's good (Rom 13:4). This means that the state was instituted to keep men free from oppression and provide the measure of peace and tranquility that will allow each person to pursue his affairs unhampered. Here again, in Guatemala, the biblical recourse would be for the Christian community to ask the government why there is no liberty to carry on the everyday affairs of life.

The Christian's Obligation to the State

Even though Rome was a pagan and militaristic state, as long as it preserved justice and order in society, it had a legitimate claim to the support of all its citizens, especially the people of God.

First, Christians are to pray for their rulers (1 Tim 2:1-2). Government is an institution within God's order, and to pray for it is to share in God's concern for it. This suggests that Christians must receive the state as a gift of God and encourage it to a godly fulfillment of its calling. Such an attitude to the state will include prayer for those in authority. This kind of prayer will recognize that government is good because God has given it to the community for its welfare. It also recognizes that those who carry out the tasks of government must be committed to political behavior which reflects the character and purpose of its divine author. The

⁵ Robert D. Linder and Richard V. Pierard, *Politics: A Case for Christian Action* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1974), 45-7.

Evangelical Church in Guatemala does offer up prayer for those in authority that they will come to repentance and be God's instruments of mercy and justice.

Then, secondly, Paul calls upon Christians to submit to government. Submission speaks of the divine provision and order for human life. It resists the private individual who seeks to overthrow God's plan and pattern for government in the community. In recognition of the divine source of the state, Christians are expected to give honor to its officials. Believers ordinarily should pay taxes for the support of the state and by implication should even render personal service if the opportunity presents itself (Rom 13:6-7; Titus 3:1). In the context of Guatemalan reality the church does, in most ways, submit to the civil authorities and cooperates with them in many ways. Recently the evangelical churches were "asked" to join in with the government in launching a literacy campaign. Consequently, many of the church buildings are now being used as schools where the illiterate come to learn.

The third action which is necessary and biblical in today's world in relation to government is to challenge. Where government seeks to fulfill its role in God's order, there is little problem with submission, at least, in the Christian realm. But a regime may become so corrupt as to forfeit its status as "the minister of God" and degenerate into a demonic beast that demands not only the obedience and submission of its citizens but also their worship. Paul challenged the authorities on occasion. After having been treated roughly by the officials in Phillippi, he asserted his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:19-40). Paul was acting on behalf of the community at large when he brought some disgrace and humiliation upon an authority which had treated him badly the night before. Having suffered at their hands, he takes the opportunity as a Roman citizen to challenge their unjust way of exercising authority.

At what point then should we Christians begin to challenge? First, when government makes exaggerated claims for its power and assumes to itself an absolute significance, it is setting itself up as a rival to God. Secondly, power might be so abused as to lead to tyranny and the collapse of just order. When this happens we must challenge. In the biblical sense, submission is not to be equated with a quiet and uncritical acceptance of the status quo. The Bible teaches the sovereignty of God over all the power of the world.

The problem becomes more acute when the power of the state is used corruptly to attack the life of sections of the community which it is supposed to protect and provide for. What attitude should the church adopt when the state becomes the one to grind the faces of the poor under its heels? At this point Christians are divided. There are those who oppose any form of resistance. Others oppose only violent resistance. Some, although certainly not all, liberation-oriented theologians advocate violent revolution in circumstances of the misuse of power.⁶ Neither of the two extreme positions has any warrant in scripture, and even less in Pauline theology in particular.

Let us look more closely at the idea of nonviolent resistance. First, any resistance to the disorderly behavior of rulers must always be in the interests of order in the community and never for the selfish acquisition of power. Secondly, revolutionary paths to power encourage the use of force to achieve ends and can, therefore, be diverted from just ends to corrupt ends. The oppressed of today can become the oppressors of tomorrow when they discover what force can

⁶ Davies, 73.

accomplish. Third, the use of violence undermines respect for the institutions of government, and can do extensive damage to the social order. Fourth, violence invites violence in response.

However, to encourage Christians to seek peaceful means of political pressure does not mean that violence is completely avoidable under all circumstances. In certain extreme situations the pacifist's option may militate against the proper claims of justice. Justice is not the price to be paid for peace. For example, if my weak neighbor is being beaten up by my strong neighbor, I have a duty to act in order to restrain this unjust abuse of the weak by the strong. Likewise, there are extreme cases in society when only responsible action, aimed at restraining the tyrannical use of power against the weak and the poor, will fulfill the obligation we have to the neighbor in need. Such action may be resisted violently by those who abuse their power, but is unavoidable if justice is not to be sacrificed in the community.⁷

⁷ John Gladwin, *God's People in God's Word: Biblical Motives for Social Involvement* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 160.

Book Reviews

***Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God.* By Paul Alexander. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2009. Pp. 429. \$26.95.**

In *Peace to War*, Paul Alexander has produced the most comprehensive, scholarly-informed yet readable and provocative study of pacifism within the Assemblies of God (AG) to date. Professor Alexander has mined the primary writings of AG leadership and ministers on pacifism from the time of the formation of the AG through the periods of World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the Vietnam War, Gulf War I with Iraq and Gulf War II with Afghanistan, and the continuing War on Terror since September 11, 2001. Not only has Alexander incorporated these AG primary sources into his narrative to demonstrate “the shifting allegiances in the Assemblies of God” that have occurred between World War I and the present War on Terror, he has summarized and interacted with the secondary works of AG scholars and others who have provided various diversified interpretations of AG pacifism.

From these primary and secondary sources, Alexander has constructed a narrative that invites the engagement of his readers into a substantive dialog on the decline of pacifism and the influences that have led to its almost complete marginalization. As a committed AG pacifist himself, Alexander explicitly expresses in this book his hope that this “forgotten heritage” of AG pacifism can once again enliven the hearts and minds of today’s generation of AG, Pentecostal, evangelical, and Christian youth to become Christ-followers of Jesus’ teachings. In short, this book is not only a scholarly treatise; it is also an advocacy manifesto for his readers to follow Jesus and his teaching on the core beliefs and values of love, justice, and peacemaking.

While there are many issues that a review could raise for the reader in this multi-layered narrative, I decided to identify three major contributions of Alexander’s study on AG pacifism for the reader.

The first contribution is that Alexander identifies two competing strains of thought and practice within AG leadership: the pulpit and the pew, that were both influential, yet not always compatible with each other on issues of war and peace during the period from 1914-1940, the precursor to the year of the bombing of Pearl Harbor that brought the US into World War II. While these factors have been identified before by other studies of AG pacifism, the way that Alexander uniquely juxtaposes these two strains of thought as competitors for a single-minded loyal allegiance highlights a factor that helps to make sense out of the demise of pacifism in such a short period of time.

After identifying the historical context in which “first-generation” AG pacifism arose, and the solidarity of thought these AG pioneers had with the pacifist theology of the Peace churches, especially the Quakers, the Holiness movement, and the development of a theology of the “full Gospel,” Alexander focuses on these two strains of thought that co-existed within AG psychology between 1914 and 1940. On the one hand, there was the view during this period of time that pacifism is grounded in Jesus’ ethical teachings for his followers to practice and therefore, “war is not consistent with the doctrines of Christ.” As a consequence of this strain of thought, Alexander chronicles “*The Assemblies of God Peace Witness from 1914-1940*” (p. 131-176).

On the other hand, during this same period of time there was the view that the AG gave “unswerving loyalty to the Government,” and that this loyalty coexisted consistently with Pentecostal pacifism. There was deep concern among the AG denominational leadership at the time of World War I, however, that pacifism and its normative position of Conscientious Objection (CO) might be viewed by outsiders as an act of disloyalty to the US government. Therefore, on April 28, 1917—only about three weeks after the United States declared war on Germany—denominational officials stated its allegiance to the government in the resolution that it sent to President Woodrow Wilson in these words: “While affirming Human Government as of Divine ordination, and affirming our unswerving loyalty to the Government of the United States, nevertheless we are constrained to define our position with reference to the taking of human life.” After citing the biblical support for pacifism, the resolution concludes with these two strains of thought existing side by side: “THEREFORE we, as a body of Christians, while purposing to fulfill all the obligations of loyal citizenship, are nevertheless constrained to declare we cannot conscientiously participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life since this is contrary to our view of the clear teaching of the inspired Word of God, which is the sole basis of our faith.” Alexander points out how this strain of thought played out with unintended consequences between the world wars: “*Unswerving Loyalty to the Government: The Seeds of Nationalism and Militarism from 1914-1940*” (p. 177-199).

What Alexander has captured in this juxtaposition of two strains of thought is analogous to Jesus’ parable of “the wheat and the tares” growing together from 1914 through the eve of the U.S. joining World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. joining the war effort on what was considered the “moral grounds” of defending the nation, the strain of pacifistic thought began to be “choked out” within the AG leadership and its rank and file membership as fewer Pentecostal believers claimed CO status in WWII. As Alexander notes, “the seeds of nationalism and militarism” continued to germinate from 1941-1967 and stimulated major shifts in the theological and philosophical thinking in the AG about war and peace. These currents of change finally culminated in the 1967 change of the General Council bylaws on Military Service adopted by the General Council that stated: “As a movement we affirm our loyalty to the government of the United States in war or peace. We shall continue to insist, as we have historically, on the right of each member to choose for himself whether to declare his position as a combatant, a non-combatant, or a conscientious objector.”

Although Alexander follows the broader list of factors identified by Jay Beaman in accounting for the demise of pacifism within the AG, and adds to the list the flat out post-1967 promotion of the AG leadership of military service in a variety of its publications, Alexander has brought a fresh perspective on a major force in the demise of AG pacifism in the way he has framed the parallel strains of AG theological belief affirming the “unswerving loyalty to the government,” on the one hand, and “conscientiously objecting to participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life,” on the other hand. When I read again the same lead phrase of “loyalty to the government of the United States” in the 1917 resolution and the 1967 resolution, “the light bulb” went on in making some sense out of the fact that the majority of the AG voting membership believed—mistakenly, I believe—that the 1967 statement that allowed for freedom of choice on military service was consistent historically with

the way the 1917 statement was actually practiced by the AG faithful in “loyalty to the government to the United States.” That “unswerving loyalty” strain of thought in AG psychology, that was the lead phrase in both 1917 and 1967 resolutions, became the defining factor in the attempt to legitimate the transition from pacifism to the individual freedom of choice. As Alexander notes, from 1941-1967, “the ethic of nonviolence among member and ministers began to diminish and the preponderance of articles in the Pentecostal Evangel on issues of war and peace were fighting the battle against conscience with realism” (p. 200-253).

The second contribution of Alexander’s study is found in his analysis of the changes in theological beliefs and philosophical underpinnings on the war and peace issue that transpired between the 1917 and 1967 statements on military service. Alexander observes that the rationale in support of pacifism that was articulated in the 1917 resolution was based exclusively on the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus, and concluded with the resolution that “armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life . . . is contrary to our view of the clear teaching of the inspired Word of God, which is the sole basis of our faith.” In contrast, Alexander notes that in the 1967 statement, “The theology reflected in the resolution centered on national loyalties and the authority of individual conscience.” He notes that “. . . the framers of this resolution and article made no appeal to scripture or to Jesus. Not a single verse or reference is employed. The only reference to God is qualified by the fact that God required loyalty to the government because God ordained it.” Alexander could not resist stating the irony that “the individual freedom of conscience . . . had not justified the consumption of alcohol, smoking, gambling, dancing, or women wearing slacks. But the authority of one’s own conscience served as the trustworthy principle that allowed killing in war.”

While Alexander has pointed to the theological and philosophical shifts from a Christian community-formed “conscience” in 1917 to an individually-based “realism” in 1967, the characterization of Christian realism may be a bit too generous to identify the rationale in support of the individual freedom of choice on military service. In fact, the AG constituency provided no philosophical theology that grounded the issue of participation in war in a conception based on human nature, its sinful will to power, and its capacity to fuel the national interest of countries. There is no just war theory that was adopted by the AG at the time pacifism was abandoned as the fellowship’s normative position, a critique that Alexander makes. As a consequence, there is no teaching from the AG church to provide some kind of guide for young people to distinguish between just and unjust wars. As Alexander rightly points out, AG believers are left to their own conscience without the capacity to make discriminating judgments about participating or not participating in particular wars. I think of the model of Reinhold Niebuhr who was a pacifist in the Fellowship of Reconciliation during WWI but adopted Christian realism with its just war tradition during WWII. He said he did so because “History has overtaken us.” Niebuhr argued with passion that the way to stop the Axis will-to-power, which seemed to possess a ravenous appetite in conquering its neighbors through the brutality of war, was to create an Allied will-to-power to stop the injustice and restore a balance of power among nations. Instead of taking a journey like Niebuhr took, AG young people, when facing a call to war, are left only with their own individual conscience as a basis for their decision-making, a consequence that Alexander deeply laments.

The third contribution that Alexander makes in his study is profoundly personal and courageous. In his afterword, Alexander tells his readership about his personal faith journey as a first-generation Pentecostal “crucifist” in which peace-making and justice-seeking are a way of life. Alexander explains that a “crucifist” is “a follower of Jesus’ way of nonviolent, cross-carrying, enemy love.” Thus, this identification is more of a holistic term than the term pacifist, which focuses primarily on a position about participation in war rather than a comprehensive way of life that is centered in Jesus and therefore that also includes conscientious objection to participation in war and the destruction of human life. He tells the story of his journey that led to a non-renewal of his faculty contract at an Assemblies of God university after serving there for nine years. His positions on American nationalism and warfare did him in, although he understood that his positions on Americanism, war, and peace would ultimately lead to a question of his institutional fit even though he was a credentialed AG minister.

Probably the most defining moment in Alexander’s pacifist journey came in a chapel service at a time after the towers were hit on September 11. There was a surge of patriotic nationalism and violent rage that was pervading the campus community. He admonished the University President as they walked together to the chapel, “We have to remember who *we* are; we’re followers of Jesus. We have to remember who we are. A lot of people will be saying a lot of things that are hateful; we have to remember who we are.” Professor Alexander sat in the chapel and prayed and squirmed in his seat listening to apocalyptic, prophetic fulfillment talk about “the Middle East, the rapture, Israel, the battle of Armageddon, tribulation, the antichrist, the United States, patriotism, war, and Muslims.”

The chapel was filled with students and Faculty colleagues, with about 1,000 in attendance. After nearly one and a half hours, he finally went forward believing that he was prompted by the “leading of the Holy Spirit,” asked the President if he could speak, and with microphone in hand he began. He admonished everyone to view America through the eyes of the rest of the world and to recognize that this tragedy is beyond an American tragedy; it is a human tragedy. He critiqued American greed and hypocrisy and urged the members of his audience to be followers of Jesus and to make sure that their allegiances, loyalties, purposes, visions and dreams are lined up with “what God wants us to be.” The remarks he made that day are found in the book transcribed from an audio CD of the chapel service. He recognized that he spent most of his “capital” that day; he wrote, “That was my coming out of the closet as a peacemaker at my alma mater in front of all the people who had educated, loved, and hired me. There were faculty who did not talk to me for years, and some who tried to get me fired.” Even so, Alexander’s identity as a “crucifist” was crystallized that day.

Alexander went on to be a co-founder of the organization Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice (PCPJ). Alexander is hopeful that PCPJ can provide the social network that will stimulate “the reemergence and resurgence of a powerful Pentecostal peace-with-justice witness that blesses the world far beyond what we could ever imagine” (p. 350). This book is a must read for Pentecostals, charismatics, and Christians of all stripes who are desirous to join in giving an authentic witness to God’s love, justice, and peacemaking in the world.

***The Pentecostal Heritage of Slavic-Americans (Пятидесятнические истоки Славян-Американцев)*. By Anton Goroshko. Renton, Wa: National Slavic District Council. 2009. Pp. 70. \$5.00. Available from: *Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center*. To order, call toll free (877-840-5200) or email (archives@ag.org).**

What is the future of Christianity? Demographers predict that it will look more Pentecostal and less Western. While Western Europe and North America long viewed themselves as the center of the Christian world, cultural and religious decline among people of Western European origin, combined with the robust growth of Christianity (and in particular Pentecostalism) among non-Westerners, portend a significant shift in the religious landscape.

American observers do not have to travel overseas to witness these changes. Most U.S. cities are now home to large immigrant communities, and these immigrants have added their own languages, churches, and values to America's cultural mix.

Slavic immigrants from the former Soviet Union are among those who have been growing in visibility and influence in the United States. Since the 1980s when Mikhail Gorbachev began to allow Pentecostals, who long suffered persecution in the Soviet Union, to leave, many put down roots in America. For the most part, these Slavic Pentecostals initially kept to themselves and did not integrate into the broader American society. They grappled with their newfound freedoms and cultural challenges, reasserting their cultural boundary markers as a means to retain their religious and familial values. Many of these immigrants are now well established in their communities, and their children who were born and raised in America often feel just as home in America as they do in their ancestral communities.

An estimated 300,000 Slavic Pentecostals now live in the U.S., mostly in congregations that are either independent or loosely affiliated with one of several Slavic Pentecostal unions. Increasing numbers of Slavic Pentecostal leaders are recognizing the value of being in fellowship with non-Slavic Pentecostals in America. In 2002, several Slavic Pentecostal churches in California joined the Assemblies of God and formed the Slavic Fellowship, which provided both a structure for Slavs to organize themselves within the Assemblies of God and also representation on the Fellowship's General Presbytery. In September 2008, the leaders of the Slavic Fellowship, in addition to other Slavic Pentecostals interested in affiliating with the Assemblies of God, came together in Renton, Washington, and organized the National Slavic District. This new district gives greater strength and visibility to Slavic Pentecostals, both within the Assemblies of God and within the broader society.

Slavic Pentecostals have an important story to tell. American evangelicalism is at a crossroads. Evangelicals who closely identify their faith with declining American cultural and political themes have led some to question evangelicalism's identity and future. However, the character of Slavic Pentecostalism has developed along a quite different trajectory. This story has been largely inaccessible to English-speakers. To help remedy this, Anton Goroshko, a Slavic Pentecostal minister and historian who emigrated from the Ukraine to America in 1990, has written a small book, *The Pentecostal Heritage of Slavic-Americans*, published by the National Slavic District, in conjunction with the Intercultural Ministries Department of Assemblies of God US Missions and the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center.

The Pentecostal Heritage of Slavic-Americans includes Goroshko's account in Russian and translated into English, written "at the request of the many Slavic Pentecostals in North America who have expressed a desire to learn about the origins of the faith and ministry of their forefathers" (p. 5). Goroshko begins by placing Pentecostalism within the context of Christian history in the Ukraine. He proceeds to tell the stories of two heroes of the faith, Gustav Herbert Schmidt and Ivan Efimovich Voronaeff. Both men were born in Slavic lands, immigrated to America about 100 years ago, and returned to Europe as Assemblies of God missionaries. Schmidt helped to organize the Russian and Eastern European Mission and formed a Bible school in Danzig that trained many of the earliest Pentecostal ministers in Eastern Europe. Voronaeff, revered by Slavs, was the most prominent early Pentecostal Slavic leader and ultimately was martyred for his faith by the Soviet government.

Goroshko's account of Voronaeff is particularly important, because he provides details not included in other English-language histories. For instance, he writes that Voronaeff was actually an assumed name (Nikita Petrovich Cherkasov was his given name), taken to escape a military trial. Influenced by his newfound evangelical faith, Voronaeff felt that he could no longer serve in the military: ". . . young officer Cherkasov declared to his superiors that he had become a Christian and could no longer carry arms. His weapon from then on, he said, would be the Word of God – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nikita was brought to trial. In order to protect Nikita and to help him avoid the military court tribunal, a Christian brother in the Tashkent Baptist church, Ivan Efimovich Voronaeff, gave his citizenship passport to Cherkasov. It was under this new name that Nikita went into the history books. (p. 9)

Voronaeff arrived in San Francisco, entered the Baptist ministry, switched his allegiances to the Assemblies of God, and in 1920 received a prophetic word: "Go back to Russia." With the support of the Assemblies of God, he engaged in energetic missionary work and helped to organize the first Slavic Pentecostal unions, consisting of several hundred congregations. Partly because of his steadfast opposition to any compromise of the faith by working with the communist government, Voronaeff was imprisoned. According to Goroshko, unverified rumors report "that Voronaeff was torn to pieces by prison dogs in the forests outside of Leningrad."

Following the biographical sketches of Schmidt and Voronaeff, Goroshko outlines the development of Pentecostalism in the Soviet Union and among the new Slavic immigrants to America.

In addition to providing an important pedagogical tool for teaching new generations of Slavic-American Pentecostals about their heritage, Goroshko's book aims to accomplish several other tasks. First, Goroshko demonstrates the historical connections between the American Assemblies of God and the development of Pentecostalism in the former Soviet Union. He even goes so far as to claim, "The Assemblies of God is the spiritual father for the Slavic people" (p. 15). Second, Goroshko is concerned about the future of Slavic-American Pentecostals and believes it would be advantageous to affiliate with American Pentecostals. He notes, "The immigrant churches are undergoing an irreversible process of assimilating to the American social environment. . . It is important to place our children and grandchildren on the correct spiritual path, so that they will not disperse among American churches of other faiths" (p. 15). Third, Goroshko sees an opportunity for Slavic Pentecostals to help renew American Christianity. He

states, “Assemblies of God pastors have told us, ‘Have an influence upon us, work for the awakening of America’” (p. 15).

What kind of influence can Slavic Pentecostals have on American Pentecostals?

While Goroshko does not provide a detailed answer to this question, two areas where contemporary Slavic and American Pentecostals often differ might provide fertile soil for reflection: 1) spiritual discipline and devotion; and 2) conflation of faith with nationalism/patriotism.

The character of Slavic Pentecostalism has been shaped by believers’ great dedication, which resulted in great suffering and persecution. This is in contrast to American Pentecostalism, which in some ways has accommodated the materialism, selfishness, and hyper-individualism of the surrounding culture. Where the American church has become like the world, it also ceases to provide a meaningful critique to the evils of western society. Early Pentecostals, in the U.S. and in Slavic lands, encouraged all believers toward full devotion to Christ. This meant a rejection of sinful or unwise activities that were likely to compromise one’s faith and witness. In many American congregations, it is increasingly difficult to see a difference between the church and the world. Younger American Pentecostals have largely rejected what they view as legalism, but in the process some have embraced an equally-dangerous heresy—antinomianism (the rejection of rules that are based on either specific or general revelation). Slavic Pentecostal churches have tended to be more intentional in maintaining clear ethical codes for members than American Pentecostal churches. Exploring the differences between Slavic and American practices could challenge Pentecostals to think more carefully about the importance of spiritual discipline and devotion.

Interestingly, one of the primary concerns of Slavic Pentecostals about the Assemblies of God is the perception that the Assemblies of God is too pro-militaristic. Most Slavic Pentecostals have maintained their historic opposition to killing in war, a belief they had in common with other Slavic evangelicals. Voronaeff and numerous other Pentecostal believers suffered at the hands of the Soviet government and maintained their pacifistic stance to the point of death. Now in America, many Slavic Pentecostals are uncomfortable with what they perceive as a conflation of faith with nationalism and patriotism.

Slavic Pentecostals, importantly, can show American Pentecostals that critiquing the structures of one’s own society is not the exclusive domain of sixties radicals and political leftists. Slavic Pentecostal’s critique of American nationalism was not birthed out of the sexual revolution and the drug culture. Rather, Slavic Pentecostals have been faithful to an early Pentecostal teaching that American Pentecostals have largely forgotten. As Paul Alexander demonstrated in his recent book, *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God* (Cascadia, 2009), the American Assemblies of God also maintained official opposition to war and killing in war until 1967. The Assemblies of God now supports “the right of each member to choose whether to declare their position as a combatant, a noncombatant, or a conscientious objector” (Article XVII, Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God).

Slavic Pentecostals’ pacifism and concern for the separation of church and state comes out of an experience of intense persecution by the state, while American Pentecostals grew perhaps too cozy with the state. American Pentecostals often affirmed the American civil

religion (a Christless religion which serves nationalistic purposes, while using Christian language, and which is not necessarily accompanied by personal faith). However, Slavic Pentecostals were often forced to choose either their faith or societal affirmation. As Americans seemingly enter into a post-Christian era, they may no longer have the luxury of being able to affirm both Christ and society/state. The resilience and lessons of sturdy Slavic Pentecostals may prove an invaluable resource to American Pentecostals as America becomes less friendly toward biblical Christianity.

Anton Goroshko wrote *The Pentecostal Heritage of Slavic-Americans* for a Slavic-American Pentecostal audience, but the lives, sacrifices, and lessons of these believers merit attention far beyond their own communities. This book, hopefully, will encourage Slavic-American Pentecostals to better appreciate their own legacy and to reflect about how they can share that legacy with the broader Pentecostal movement.

Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center

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