

The Challenge and Opportunity of Adolescence: A Theological Diagnosis and Response

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The statistics both command and belie attention. In our culture, adolescents are facing a time of crisis – though probably not the crisis that you think. All of the traditional markers thankfully indicate health; for the past several years, rates in adolescent pregnancy, abortion, suicide, and mortality have all been in decline.¹ More youth are in school than ever, more have a positive outlook on their future, and more are involved in the civic process. However, it is not only these quite measurable “hard” statistics that determine health. There are other phenomena – we will call them *soft categories* – which defy simple quantification and are therefore usually not put forward in popular discussion of the present state of adolescence. And the colors of these soft categories do not paint a rosy picture.

While as a *sociological category* contemporary adolescence may exhibit legitimate signs of health, as a *developmental stage* adolescence is in critical condition. Most developmental psychologists agree that adolescence as a stage of life negotiates three different spheres of integration – social, cultural, and ideological. These are “soft” because they elude clear categorical quantification.² But let us try to be as precise as we can. By *social integration* I mean that adolescence is a time for learning to live in a wider social sphere, interacting with others who may or may not be like them. It is in this process that adolescents go from being social apprentices to citizens. By *cultural integration* I mean that adolescence is a time for learning to identify with a particular cultural sphere, be it defined by family, geography, or ethnicity. In this process, adolescents go from being self-proximate to a determined group to being self-identified with a chosen group.³ By *ideological integration* I mean that adolescence is a time for learning to embrace an ethical and/or philosophical sphere that dictates a worldview and set of values that may or may not coincide with their culture of identification. In this process, adolescents become individual ethical agents.

Two disclaimers must be quickly added to this probably overly-simplistic delineation of the developmental process of adolescence. First, there is obvious overlap among these three spheres of development. Often cultural and ideological spheres will overlap. But not always. It is probable that familial or national or ethnic cultures will contain different ideologies, even while in agreement on ethical specifics. Similarly, social and cultural spheres will overlap. But not always. It is probable that social interaction will be among individuals from different self-identified cultures, even while sharing various traditional practices. And finally, ideological and social spheres will overlap. But not always. It is probable that ideological adherents will interact with individuals outside their shared worldview, even while in agreement on certain moral commitments.

But while these three spheres contain significant overlap, they continue to drift apart. In fact, one might even track the gradual division of these spheres with the advancement of modernity. For most of world history, social interaction, culture of identification, and ideological commitment more or less coincided within boundaries set by geography, tradition, and philosophy. But developments within the last two or three hundred years have introduced a radical break that cannot be mended. The particularly defining aspects of modernity – *modern technology, mobility, and metaphysical agnosticism* – have split groups apart along lines that had not hitherto existed.⁴ The modern individual's call of triumph was also the death knell of the traditional holistic community, for better or for worse.

The second disclaimer is obvious but ought to be stated nonetheless. The generalizations of human development – especially when applied to social, cultural, and ideological phenomena – are just that: generalizations. There are of course communities in the world where two or all three of the spheres continue to coincide. But fewer and fewer all the time.

This present study, however, considers adolescence in the West, particularly in the United States, where modern technology, mobilization, and metaphysical agnosticism have arguably produced their greatest and most diverse set of consequences. How have the soft categories of adolescent development – the formation of social, cultural, and ideological identity – been affected, even created, by Western modernity? What spiritual consequences have flowed from these spherical shifts? And what resources might the riches of Christian theology offer to speak to these challenges?

Contemporary Adolescence

Needless to say, issues facing adolescents in the first decade of the twenty-first century are vastly different than those confronting them 50, 20, or even 10 years ago. Largely because of technological advances, previously assumed boundaries to our individual, cultural, and ideological identities are crumbling or have broken down entirely; traditional limits of time and distance and knowledge have been minimized. Of course, this collapse of boundaries is neither a good nor a bad thing, though it can bring about results tremendously positive or devastatingly negative. Adolescents, in the process of leaving childhood behind and entering into adulthood, are in a life-stage where the precise shape and content of identity formation is critical. But the seismic shifts in the West as powered by the tremors of our time have drastically altered the landscape of those who seek to apprehend identity, if it is to be apprehended at all.

The three prominent “tremors of modernity” – exponential growth rate in technology, mobility, and metaphysical agnosticism – correspond to the three spheres of adolescent development. Technological advancement has affected interpersonal *relatedness* and therefore has altered adolescent social development. Increased global mobilization has

affected cultural *fidelity* and therefore has altered adolescent commitment to values, beliefs, and philosophical systems. Increased metaphysical agnosticism has affected ideological *certainty* and therefore has altered adolescent concepts of knowledge and meaning. Among the many challenges that adolescents are facing today, three in particular correspond to these three facets of modernity; technology can breed *isolation*, mobility can breed *groundlessness*, and metaphysical agnosticism can breed *relativism*. However, these same three facets also present great opportunity; technology can encourage *connectedness*, mobility can encourage *growth*, and metaphysical agnosticism can encourage *humility*.

For each of the three modern phenomena that creates challenge and opportunity for adolescents, I would like to consider four things. First, I will define the developmental problem for adolescents by means of the most prevalent instantiation of the modern phenomenon. Second, I will pose a theological response to the developmental problem through correlative analysis. Third, I will suggest a theological solution arising from the theological response. And fourth, I will venture suggestions for practical application of the theological solution. The hope is that the church will find that she already has the resources to deal with the challenges of contemporary adolescence, and that she can use the tools of modernity to bestow blessings and not curses upon our youth and our world.

The Internet: Isolation vs. Connectedness⁵

The Challenge

Without argument, the greatest technological advancement of modernity – arguably of all time – is the digital computer. However, the emergence of the computer and computer technology was not as sudden as some may believe.⁶ Tools of analog computation like the astrolabe have been used for thousands of years, and there were programmable analog machines, such as automatons “powered” by flowing water, as many as eight hundred years ago. Though digital computational tools such as the abacus and slide rule have also existed for thousands of years, the first digital calculators were built nearly four hundred years ago, and the first programmable digital calculating machines – using punch cards – almost three hundred years ago. By the beginning of the 1900s simple calculating machines had become automated, and by the 1930s, automated and programmable analog computers were considered to be the way forward in mechanical calculation.

But less than 10 years later, with electronic circuitry taking the place of mechanical elements, digital programmable computers emerged as the new and most powerful means of calculation through the use of hundreds upon hundreds of vacuum tubes. In the 1950s, tubes would be replaced with the smaller and more efficient transistor, and in the 1960s, integrated circuits (circuits printed onto “chips” of silicon) would do the work of thousands of transistors in a thousandth of the space. By the 1970s, the

microprocessor was invented, which was able to do the work of *millions* of transistors in one small chip. Since the invention of the microprocessor, the number of circuits that can fit on a chip has doubled roughly every two years, which has increased the speed and power of computers while decreasing cost and energy demands.

But the most popularly influential technological advance of our day is not strictly the development of the digital computer, but rather what the digital computer has enabled. The infinitely powerful calculating abilities of computers – as unleashed by similarly ingenious breakthroughs in computer programming – when combined with technological advances in digital telecommunications have resulted in what has become known as the Internet. Beginning roughly with its development 15 or so years ago, the Internet – or as it was then lauded, the “information superhighway” – has changed our daily lives in ways that are nothing less than historically revolutionary.

With a terminal in nearly every home, anyone can “connect to the world” without physical relocation. Usual mediums of human contact have been rendered obsolete, or at least unnecessary. No longer do I have to go to a class to receive education, or to a library to find specific information. No longer do I have to go to a sporting event to watch a game, or to the theater to watch a movie. No longer do I have to go to the store to buy something, or to a dealership to browse cars. No longer do I have to see or even talk to someone in order to communicate with him or her. In fact, more and more of us don’t even need to go to work anymore; “telecommuting” is becoming increasingly popular as people choose to work at home rather than in an office. We can only speculate on the nature and extent of the geographic and demographic shifts that result from these changes.

Where we once saw and directly interacted with one another in everyday life, we now sit at our computers and “interact” only with our terminal, or at best an electronic proxy of another. The result is isolation. We become more and more removed from physical community to a virtual world consisting of bodiless words, ideas, and images. For adolescents, this problem becomes compounded by the startling absence of adults in their lives. The new generations of latchkey kids, double-income households, and one-parent families have generated a world of young people who look, if not to one another, to the Internet for company, entertainment, and guidance.

Theological response

By the time of Jesus, the various species of Gnosticism had emerged from the Hellenistic philosophies of the Mediterranean world. The Greeks valued abstract ideas and right thinking, and the sacralization of those values led to religions of elusive and internal “secret knowledge.”⁷ The Gnostics deemed that which was material to be evil; goodness was found in overcoming the earthly to ascend to the perfection of purely spiritual ideas. If Jesus was divine, the Gnostics reasoned that he could not have had a material

body, as that would have made him imperfect, impure. He must have been some sort of ghostly projection, only appearing to be human. Or else Jesus' divinity floated alongside his bodily humanity that resulted somehow in a synthesis of a divine and human being.

In the second century, Irenaeus named Gnosticism a heresy in his massive work *Adversus haereses* (c. 180).⁸ The bishop of Lyons claimed that Gnostics depart from orthodox Christianity in not taking seriously the full humanity of Jesus, including his physicality. If Jesus is not fully human, the biblical witness becomes unreliable. But even more critically, as later theologians would make clear, the denial of Christ's humanity calls into question the very doctrine of salvation itself. Gregory of Nazianzus' famous fourth-century dictum, "The unassumed is the unhealed,"⁹ indicated the necessity of Jesus' full humanity: whatever aspect of human nature that God did not assume in the Incarnation is not recreated in the Second Adam. In the twentieth century, Neo-Orthodoxy asserted the centrality of Christ's dual nature for knowledge of God. If full humanity does not accompany Jesus' full divinity, the doctrine of revelation is inert;¹⁰ we can sense and understand only that which belongs to our plane of existence. Therefore, we can neither sense nor understand God unless divinity is revealed in and through the earthly. Succinctly put, because Jesus is fully divine God is fully present in creation, and because Jesus is fully human we can fully sense the divine in him. Only by means of the Incarnation can we "veiled in flesh the Godhead see."¹¹

But what does Jesus as fully human have to do with *our* humanity? Two things ought to be brought to bear on our question at this point. First, if Jesus reveals to us what it means to be truly human, then like Jesus we too are more than just immaterial words, ideas, and images. We are embodied people, just as Jesus was the embodied *Logos*. Second, if Jesus is fully human, then God does not consider materiality to be evil. In fact, creation is necessary and good, capable even of perfection. The Gospel of John tells us that through the *Logos* God created all things, including humanity; we have the "fingerprints of God" in our very nature as creatures made in God's own image. Precisely *because* we are created we are ontologically good. For these reasons, the denial of Jesus' full, embodied humanity and therefore the denial of the essence and goodness of *our* embodied humanity is heretical.

A corollary of our embodied humanity is our embodied *relationality*. We do not acknowledge the humanity in others or in ourselves when we do not relate to one another directly, in face-to-face physical community. To coin a neologism, we commit the heresy of *cyber-Gnosticism* when we reduce our identities to immaterial disembodied ideas, be they in the form of instant messages, email transmissions, text messages, electronic bulletin boards, website networking, and emoticons. Technology such as the Internet does create community, but it is a *disembodied* community. However, *we* exist for *embodied* community – not only with God but also with one another, a community of physical relationality through which we may touch and see and love and talk and grow.

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber is well known for making the claim that without interaction with “the Other,” there can be no fully-formed understanding of the self as a unique personality.¹² Carrying this idea into our present study, without relational interaction in its existential entirety, adolescents in the era of modern technology face the dehumanizing threat of individualism and fractionalization. Without the Other, there is no self-understanding, and without self-understanding there is no identity formation. The absence of embodied community retards holistic adolescent development. To make matters worse, our consumer-driven culture teaches that the needs of the individual are paramount; technology, which so often acts as a sort of amplifier to the human ego, only encourages self-prioritization and personal consumption through the use of inventions like the Internet. Focusing upon and catering to the needs of the individual discourages motivation toward communal interaction, which in turn creates a demand for more technology focusing on and catering to the individual.

Adolescent identity formation takes place properly in community. But the existence of healthy community itself is jeopardized in a culture that champions self-determination and self-satisfaction, leading to a “community” of malformed or unformed individuals. We apprehend our identity only in community because we are created to be relational persons. To be a member of a community *is* our identity. Adolescents will only mature as they more and more live into a reality that necessarily and *radically* includes the Other; in Christ we see the fullest expression of humanity as being unreservedly with and for others. As beautifully illustrated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* in his theological exposition upon community, Jesus ministers to us through others, and Jesus ministers to others through us.¹³ When we do not place ourselves in God-breathed community, we handicap our ability to receive the ministrations of the Holy Spirit through others, and likewise we handicap the ability of others to receive the same through us. When we do not place ourselves in embodied physical community, we deny who we are, we keep ourselves from apprehending our full identity, and we end up dehumanizing both others and ourselves.

The opportunity

Ironically, while it can serve as a tool of dehumanization, technology can serve as an aid to proper identity formation as well. The Internet, cell phones, airplanes, wireless technologies, portable energy, video-phones, and artificial memory are all boons to those trying to maintain connection with friends and family in an era of extreme mobility. It is easier now, more than ever before, to find others and to communicate with them. However, we must remember that while these technologies can promote community, can even lead to community, on their own they can provide only disembodied or virtual community at best. When we limit our relational interactions to

the extent of human technology, holistic identity is waylaid, full communication is truncated, authentic conflict is avoided, and true relationships become rare.

But this is misuse. God has given us technology, and its best use is not as a *substitute for* but rather as a *springboard into* the communities for which we are intended. Does this mean that we are to be in a state of constant physical contact with others? Of course not. But if we aren't, we should be on our way toward it. Bonhoeffer speaks of the need for relational non-interaction. We must have time to ourselves. But he reminds us in the next breath that this personal time is meant only to equip us to then go back into community to love and serve others.¹⁴ In the same way, community building through technology can be helpful, but only as a means to propel us into embodied, physical community.

In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine defines a "sign" as that which indicates something else, and by indicating can bring about the existence of that thing.¹⁵ In this way, a sign actually participates in the thing signified, and as such is a subclass of the signified. It is a "causative pointer." Using this definition, we might say that the Internet can be a sort of *sign* of true community. But we must ensure that it is a sign, a causative pointer, and not taken to be the "thing" of community itself.

Practical Suggestions

How can we encourage proper identity formation? How can we help adolescents to find authentic social integration in a world of modern technologies that encourage isolation? I want to suggest three ways not only to mitigate the harmful consequences of technology but also to redeem it as a means of true community.

First, our Christian communities, especially (but not only) communities with adolescents, must model and teach a proper understanding of being with and for the Other. We have the great opportunity not only to encourage adolescents into proper community, but also to demonstrate for them how to personally relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. How do I love people I dislike? How do I care for those in crisis? How do I deal with conflict? How can I speak prophetically but lovingly? How do I relate to my family, my friends, my significant other? These are questions easily ignored in cyber-communication, but not in real community.

Second, our Christian communities must demonstrate how to use the Internet positively, as a *sign* of community rather than as a *substitute*. We must model using the Internet to connect with others—partially, artificially, virtually—but only as a means to promote real community. We must model using the Internet as a tool for gathering information, but only if we make that information useful for the larger community. We must model using the Internet as a fun and entertaining diversion, but only to provide a

brief respite for empowering and encouraging return to the real community in which we are meant to live.

And third, our Christian communities must serve as a prophetic voice to the world of how to “do” community properly. We must encourage one other to actively seek personal contact over mediated or virtual contact; studies have estimated that more than 90% of communication is non-verbal.¹⁶ We must encourage each other to diminish rather than increase the use of non-critical technology if such technology militates against community. And we must decide to be people who are “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another”¹⁷ toward the completely impractical and uncomfortable practice of regular and committed unmediated community.

Globalization: Groundlessness vs. Growth

The Challenge

With developments in computing, communication, and transportation, technology has also created a strikingly shrinking globe. When the information age superseded the industrial age, ideas and cultures that had never before gone beyond their traditional boundaries were now available for the world to see, know, and evaluate. But, as mentioned above, capitalism may have done more than technology in breaking down barriers. As commercial markets internationalized, so too did producing cultures.¹⁸ The globalization of previously localized phenomena has created a continuously emerging mixture of non-localized diversity. As a result, consumers – of either information or hard commodities – have found themselves awash in countless cultural offerings. And countless options mean countless choices when it comes to identity formation. Whereas for most of history our identities were limited to boundaries such as family or geography or background, many are able to transcend those limitations quite easily. Suddenly, answering the question of “Who am I?” – perhaps *the* question of adolescent identity formation – has become much, much harder to answer.

As mentioned above, adults in general and parents specifically are largely absent from the lives of adolescents.¹⁹ Human development takes place properly when there are those who have already navigated the swirling waters of cultural options – for adolescents, adults, generally parents, would fill this role – to help guide the initiate along the journey of identity formation. But without guides, adolescents find themselves as kids in a cultural candy store, wanting everything, choosing nothing. Or choosing everything.

In short, globalization has encouraged cultural groundlessness. The question of identity remains forever unanswered, or else constantly answered only provisionally. Free choice, non-commitment, and faddishness have always been the hallmark of adolescence. Exposed to a bottomless well of cultures with which to identify, and

without the guidance to “settle” upon an identity, the adolescent becomes less and less able, and more and more reluctant, to end this stage of development. It is not an exaggeration to note that this conundrum has promoted a larger “adolescent culture,” where our identities are eternally uncommitted, always negotiable, often taking a little bit of this culture and a little bit of that culture, no matter the internal contradictions.

Theological Response

The first-century followers of Jesus encountered a number of different people groups as they spread their message of redemption throughout the Mediterranean region. As the members of this new Jewish sect (as they were considered by most) took up residence in the cities of the Mediterranean and Near East, they and their theology encountered new and hitherto unknown ideas and traditions. This provoked innovative theological reflection. German theologian Martin Kähler once observed, “Mission is the mother of theology.”²⁰ In their mission of bearing the Gospel “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,”²¹ Christians had to define and clarify the dogmatic content of that mission in order to answer the questions and situations they encountered. As mission continued, Christian theology became more and more consistent, coherent, and comprehensive.²²

And this happens every day. Whenever we exceed the boundaries of our own traditions and encounter another, we must take this new culture into account as we (re)consider our own. This does not mean that we necessarily exchange our culture of identification for another, but it *does* require us to think about our foundational identity more critically, to define our identity more precisely. Often new contexts will allow us to see that a previously held assumption is erroneous or unclear; for instance, as the first Christian missionaries talked about salvation through Christ, the concept of the Trinity had to be specified.²³ This elaboration did not *deny* the core belief of Jesus’ divinity, but it *did* cause them to be more consistent, coherent, and comprehensive in the web of beliefs that made up their tradition. As a different example, when the ministerial progeny of St. Patrick evangelized Ireland, they used examples familiar to the Celts – the beauty of creation, the concept of victory, the tradition of singing – to elucidate the meaning of Christianity.²⁴ This did not change the message of the Christian missionaries, though it did evince critical thinking about their Gospel in order to communicate it with integrity and relevance.

But extra-cultural encounter does not always result in maintained and “sharpened” personal identity. Someone may encounter a tradition with which he identifies more than his own, and he therefore adopts this new culture as identity *au courant*. Someone may encounter a tradition that she makes no attempt to understand. She does not learn from it, and therefore her own self-understanding does not become sharpened and refined; this is why traditions can betray a lack of inner consistency and comprehensiveness in light of “foreign” traditions.

When encountering a novel culture, neither of these reactionary postures – adoption or rejection – compromises the basic coherent logic of either the encountering or encountered tradition. But these are not the only two postures taken. Imagine that someone discovers a new tradition or culture and finds an idea, value, or practice *within* that culture that she wants to selectively incorporate into her identity. In so doing, she claims to retain her original cultural identity but with this new component simply and uncritically appended. This is *syncretism*, when two (or more) systems of thought are melded together such that neither retains its previous integrity of properties. Thus we have Christians who practice Kabala, Muslims who celebrate Christmas, and Jews who attend workshops in Zen Buddhist meditation.

Just as the first Christian missionaries faced the challenge of understanding their faith in the presence of new cultures, so do our adolescents face every day the challenge of understanding their identity in the presence of newly discovered ideas, values, and practices. But the difference is that modern globalization presents adolescents with *countless* cultural options while encouraging them to postpone any sort of commitment. As a result, we often construct our identity as a cultural mosaic of ideas, values, and practices while retaining a willingness to switch out any component of the design. The pragmatic arbiter of “truth” is whether it “works for me.” As long as the mosaic is appealing, I can have my own personal culture, my own customized tradition.

When faced with syncretism, we ought to follow the wisdom of the first missionary. The apostle Paul *constantly* encountered Christian syncretism in his journeys – in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and Colossae, to name four. And his strategy was always the same: first, he explained the danger of syncretism, and second, he advocated an understanding of the emerging Christian faith appropriated to the new context. But while it responded to the encountered culture with novel reflection, Paul’s “new” understanding always had the same bedrocks – enduring foundations upon which evermore precise structures of faith could be built. These bedrocks concerned two things: the person of Christ and the identity of the Christian. Theologically speaking, Paul based his response to syncretism upon Christology and theological anthropology. In the midst of his consideration and pastoral “supervision” of churches situated in new cultures facing new ideas and new problems, Paul always returned to the fact that Christ is Lord, and that His followers are “in Christ.” The inevitable result of mission compelled Paul to remodel the theological structure of his faith, but he could always start his pastoral and theological reflection from those two deeply planted bedrocks.

As the years went by, the fledgling Christian church continued to encounter new cultures and traditions, new conundrums and challenges, new philosophical systems. And as it did, the foundational truths of the faith showed their integrity in their ability to adapt. Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Manichaeism, Arianism, Pelagianism – Christianity was challenged by all of these in only the first few hundred

years of its existence, and all of them helped to sharpen Christianity's boundaries into what we now consider to be theological orthodoxy. In the two thousand years since its genesis, Christianity has faced countless alternative traditions and philosophies from every corner of the world and from the furthest reaches of human thought. And through these interactions, the bedrocks of Christology and theological anthropology have become more and more carefully defined, enabled by insights or challenges resulting from the encounters with – rather than avoidance or wholesale incorporation of – new traditions and philosophies. Today we have a theological system that is far more consistent, coherent, and comprehensive than it was when the first Christian missionary was sent with the same simple foundations upon which we still base our system – Jesus is Lord, and we are his people.

In fact, it is *precisely because* these are the two truths that form the theological foundation of the faith that Christianity survives and flourishes amidst a multiplicity of cultures. Though there are many, Christ is one. *In* Christ, the many share in that oneness. The people of Christ constitute a unity-in-diversity modeled eternally in the *perichoresis* of the Trinity.²⁵ Doubtlessly, Paul emphasized these two doctrines – Christology and theological anthropology – for exactly this reason, to show that though we are many, we are one body in Christ.²⁶ Despite the plurality that we experience in the mobility of globalization, we nevertheless belong to one identity that is the same yesterday, today, and forever.²⁷

The Opportunity

Just like Paul, as we encounter new cultures, traditions, and philosophical systems, we must know our own theological variables and constants. What are the “non-negotiables” within a given culture or tradition without which its adherents cease to be of that culture or tradition? And what are, as John Calvin said, the theological “*adiaphora*” that *are* indeed negotiable within a given culture or tradition? These are critical questions today. But with these understood, we are liberated to fully and critically consider all that globalization sends our way, as was Paul in his cultural interactions. If adolescents have the analytical tools to deal with new ideas – a deluge of ideas that, in the information age, will be showered upon them endlessly – there is no need to fear the quality or quantity of what they encounter. In fact, the opposite is true.

When properly equipped, learning from a new culture, tradition, or philosophical system is one of the best things that developing adolescents can do with their time. By understanding what in their identity is foundational – if and when they choose to identify with a given culture or tradition – youth are free to developmentally “play” upon those foundations. When they claim an identity, even provisionally, they can view new ideas through the heuristic of that identity's theological constants.²⁸ The interaction with new cultures, new traditions and new philosophical traditions merely serve to crystallize in detail their formative bedrock.

However, in order for this to happen, mature adults must be present in the lives of adolescents to teach and model for them how to critically analyze new ideas. Further, when adolescents flail in their analysis and adaptation, caring adults must be present to provide a “safety net.” Without the *guidance* of adults, adolescents will not know how to negotiate cultural globalization. But in addition, without the *safety net* of adults, adolescents will be loath to ever commit to any culture or tradition for fear of making a wrong choice. But with the presence of adults, especially parents, the deluge of cultures, traditions, and philosophical systems instead can become a blessed rain of growth for adolescents, providing for more sophisticated identity formation and a wider grasp of the global Kingdom of God.

Practical suggestions

Often in the process of identity formation adolescents respond to the cultural inundation of globalization in one of two ways.²⁹ Sometimes they defensively adopt a *rigid identity structure*, adhering strictly to a determined culture – often parent-mandated – while “protected” from exposure to new or undesirable cultures. Some would term this a “fundamentalist,” “fanatical,” or “foreclosed” posture. Conversely, sometimes adolescents adopt a *loose identity structure*, adhering permissively to a chosen culture – often self-determined – while “protected” from adopting “false” or undesirable cultures. Some would term this a “diffuse,” “protean,” or “unforeclosed” posture. This latter posture cleaves to all and none of an unlimited number of cultures and traditions, never having to foreclose upon an identity that would force them to identify strictly with anything or anyone. This is a syncretistic cultural commitment, and is far, far more common among adolescents in the modernized global West today.

How can we encourage adolescents toward honest and critical evaluation of culture while helping them attach to a perspective? How can we provide them with the tools to analyze ideas from a position of security? An answer is suggested in Erik Erikson’s psychological analysis of one of history’s greatest cultural revolutionaries. In *Young Man Luther*, Erikson describes the role of the “adult guarantor,” a guide and mentor to the developing adolescent who serves as a fixture of security within the uncertainty and instability of a quickly expanding world.³⁰ Christian adults become adult guarantors to adolescents by self-consciously building long-term relationships with them. In the context of cultural globalization, when risk associated with the *quantity* of developmental options and the *quality* of developmental insecurity is ratcheted up infinitely, the adult guarantor serves two critical functions.

First, adult mentors can serve those adolescents who tend toward the loose identification of protean permissiveness by being an object of stability that escorts them in the midst of confusion. In short, adult guarantors can serve as *guides*. They can help adolescents understand the fundamentals of their particular culture or tradition, and

they can help them to understand those ideas, values, and practices that are cultural *adiaphora*.

But this pedagogical role of the adult guarantor is not limited to cultural catechesis. The mentor can also help the adolescent to understand that she *already* belongs to a culture or tradition. Syncretism often occurs when the new observer believes herself to be culturally “neutral,” as if he is in the objective position to judge the value of an encountered culture or tradition. But one of the lessons of postmodernism is that there is no such thing as objectivity.³¹ No one belongs to *no* culture or tradition. We make choices of identity every day. We are constantly making cultural commitments.

Therefore, in addition to teaching them how to analyze the cultures presented to them in globalization, adult mentors can help adolescents to see the culture to which they already belong. Only by owning their own cultural commitments can adolescents properly evaluate the offerings of globalization critically and authentically. They may indeed end up rejecting the culture with which they currently identify, but by recognizing that they are rejecting *something*, development can occur with a greater degree of health and integrity. But none of this can happen unless adults help adolescents negotiate the impact of globalization by looking at new ideas, values and practices with them, teaching and modeling for them how to judge critically, without fear or prejudice. Only by going *through* globalization – not around it, and not getting stuck in the midst of it – will adolescents appropriate a culture of consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness. And in order to go through it, they need a guide.

Second, adult mentors can serve those adolescents who tend toward the strict identification of fundamentalist rigidity as an object of continuity that encourages them in the midst of instability. In short, adult guarantors can serve as *safety nets*. As those who have (ideally!) made their way through the adolescent identity formation, adults are in a unique position to offer support, encouragement, and refuge to adolescents as they go through a difficult stage of development.

The empathetic role of the adult guarantor involves showing adolescents love and forgiveness when they “try on” a culture that proves difficult or inconsistent, and then helping them to understand why commitment to some ideas, values, or traditions can be harmful to themselves or others. The security an adult guarantor provides can encourage culturally fundamentalist adolescents to engage with the ideas, values, and practices of new cultures without fear. Adults can encourage anxious adolescents as they encounter all sorts of new cultures to see the incredible breadth and depth of the world that God so loves. Adults can provide them with the confidence that mature Christians are present to help them in their growth. And adults can pray for them, trusting that the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to take care of them.

Postmodernism: Relativism vs. Humility

The Challenge

With the famous "*cogito ergo sum*" of René Descartes, the Western world plunged headlong into the rationalism of the Enlightenment.³² Modernistic rationalism declared that truth could be found if we think carefully enough. But this "clear and distinct" thinking had to be based upon reliable fact, not conjecture. The thought of empiricists John Locke and David Hume promoted the importance of measurability and the common parlance of perception.³³ This set the stage for Immanuel Kant, who claimed that the real essence or "*noumena*" of an object is unknowable. All we can only really know is our own perception of an object, or its "*phenomena*."³⁴ By the mid-twentieth century, ontological skepticism gave way to the epistemic extreme of "logical positivism," which asserted that anything beyond what is measurable by hard science has no meaning, and therefore no existence.³⁵ The positivists of modernity considered metaphysics useless at best, and deceiving at worst.

In a very real sense, modernistic rationalism led to its own demise; by thinking very hard, we discovered that there is very little that we can know for certain. The foundationalist outsmarted himself. This led to the rise of postmodern epistemology, which calls into question the conclusions of the modern rationalists and foundationalists. Is it ever possible to know anything with certainty, even if we think carefully? Is our reason truly infallible? Are there paths to knowledge outside of traditional rationalistic methods? Is our perception really that reliable? The postmodernist might sportingly been called a "depressed modernist"; he does believe that "truth" exists *in some sense*, but we have no way to access it. The result is that we can never really know anything with certainty. And since we can never label anything as true, everything has an equal claim to truth.³⁶

This is relativism. Today's adolescents have grown up in a world reluctant to make truth claims. The question is no longer "What is true?" but rather "What works for me?" The formative question of "Who am I?" is answered pragmatically rather than substantially. Since there is no way to find out what is true, it is useless even to try. Instead, the adolescent adopts any understanding that helps her make sense of life at the moment. Logical inconsistencies don't matter since reason is faulty anyway. And with all the new people and cultures to which adolescents are exposed, it is much harder to declare what was previously foreign as "wrong."

Theological Response

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argued that because metaphysical claims cannot scientifically be proven true, we must base our religion on the rationalistic conclusions of ethics.³⁷ Though religious concepts such as eternal life are quite helpful in the maintenance of morality, they do not indicate noumenal fact.³⁸ Jesus, rather than being

divine, is instead an ethical symbol of how humanity can achieve self-transformation through a life of morality, as delineated by Kant's famous categorical imperative: "I am to act in a way in which I could affirm my action as a universal law."³⁹

Metaphysical agnosticism dictated the realm of theology through the eighteenth and early nineteenth century; theologians tried to found their theology on scientific rather than metaphysical grounds. Friedrich Schleiermacher based his theological system on feeling.⁴⁰ Albrecht Ritschl and his followers based their theological systems on the claims of historical investigation.⁴¹ Walter Rauschenbusch based his theological system on social and political reform.⁴² Rudolf Bultmann based his theological system on a demythologized understanding of Jesus as a symbol for finding our own understanding of redemptive life.⁴³ Succinctly put, post-Kantian theologians reasoned that since the noumenal world – including metaphysical claims involving the existence and intentions of God – is unknowable, we must found our religion upon reliable "truths" and present needs. This means, then, that any non-rationalist claim made by Scripture or orthodox Christianity was moot at best, misleading at worst.

And that claim is not wrong. If God is totally independent of the world – if God did in fact create existence "*ex nihilo*"⁴⁴ – then there is indeed no system of thought within created existence that would be able to conceptually circumscribe the nature of God. Kant and the theologians that followed him were right; we cannot ourselves "get to God" epistemologically. But that does not mean God can't get to us.

In the midst of modern Christian rationalism, a Swiss theology student named Karl Barth was educated as one of its proponents.⁴⁵ However, after he took a pastorate in working-class Switzerland, he came to recognize the practical uselessness of his teachers' theoretical academic systems. Informed by the ideas of theologians such as Søren Kierkegaard, Barth began to comprehend the radical "otherness" of God, following the Danish existentialist's concept of God's "infinite qualitative distinction."⁴⁶ Because of the infinite qualitative gulf that separates us from God, Barth concluded that nothing in creation – including rationality – has the capacity lead us to understand who or what God is. However, from the eternal side, God *is* able – and willing – to bridge the gap.

And indeed, God has. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God entered into creation to reveal to humanity exactly who God is. In an eminently anti-rationalistic move, the eternal and transcendent God was made manifest within a finite and immanent medium, namely our existence. The Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ created the possibility for us to know about God through divine *self*-revelation.

However, the Incarnation alone does not guarantee our internal apprehension of God. It merely makes it possible. The Holy Spirit, in a "second act" of revelation, enables us to see and understand the historical being of Jesus Christ *as* revelation.⁴⁷ In

epistemological terms, the Holy Spirit makes objective revelation subjectively existential. This understanding of theological revelation not only answers the Kantian objection of noumenal inaccessibility, but it also presents a doctrine of revelation that is Trinitarian in nature: Creator God eternally generates a Divine Word that, in the fullness of time, became incarnated within nature, and that Word becomes apparent to us presently by means of God's own procession as Spirit.⁴⁸

But exactly *how* does the Holy Spirit reveal the person of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God? It is here that Barth's understanding of the "Threefold Word of God" is helpful.⁴⁹ According to Barth, God's Word is revealed in three forms: primarily as the eternal *Logos*, secondarily in Scripture that witnesses to that *Logos* made flesh, and tertiarily through preaching (or any communication) based upon Scripture. The Holy Spirit testifies to the Incarnation of the eternal *Logos* through referring and enlightening us to the witness of Scripture and the communication of the Gospel arising from Scripture.

Barth's God-initiated, Christocentric, and pneumatological understanding of revelation solves the problem of God's ontological *and* epistemic unattainability. Jesus can fully represent and enable God's presence because Jesus *is* God, the begotten *Logos* incarnated. The Holy Spirit can enable the comprehension and presence of God because the Holy Spirit *is* God, the eternal procession of Father and Son. When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our minds and hearts, Christ becomes pneumatically present and we become able to existentially apprehend him – or become able to be existentially apprehended – ontologically and epistemologically. This is possible because it is not *we* knowing God, but rather *God* knowing God. It is not *we* apprehending God, but rather the Spirit enabling God to be radically present, both ontically and noetically.

The Opportunity

Many "postmodern" adolescents do not consider it possible to know any metaphysical truth – ironically, the postmodernist will usually accept as "true" the foundationalist's two bedrocks of logically necessary truths and scientifically empirical data – with certainty. It is useless to say anything definitive about God, they reason, because such knowledge is beyond us, therefore meaningless. Instead, because metaphysical claims cannot appeal to certainty, the arbiter of "truth" becomes usefulness. Epistemological skepticism leads to a kind of ontological utilitarianism. All religious claims have equal claim to truth if they are equally useful or meaningful to someone.

Christianity is unique amongst the world's monotheistic religions in that God's self-revelation is through his self-condescension in the humanity of the Son. However, even though God was fully revealed in Christ, our human minds still lack the ability to comprehend God; Barth reminds us that in Christ, God was both fully revealed and "fully hidden." It is the purpose of the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what he will about the

nature of God. However, there will always be aspects of God that we can never know, realities that will always remain hidden, because the finite human mind cannot contain the infinite. Our God-knowledge, while real, will always be imperfect. Therefore, while the Christian doctrine of revelation offers a metaphysical solution to our epistemic limitedness, it still does not let us off the hook. God is in control of self-revelation at all times, which means that we are not. We must remain humble in our claims concerning knowledge of God.

Instead of the postmodern (and modern!) epistemological position that nothing certain can be known about God (if there is a God at all), the *Christian* epistemological position in relation to God would best be described as “critical realism.” Christians believe that God is a real entity, and that things about God can be known. But this hopeful epistemic posture must be balanced with the understanding that the extent of God-knowledge is always under God’s control, and always imperfect. This entails a posture of humility.

But again, this humble realism is also critical. We must be wary of any claim of certainty concerning God. Ludwig Feuerbach,⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud,⁵¹ Karl Marx⁵² and various feminist theologians⁵³ have all pointed out that too often humanity rather than God defines the divine. As we have said, God can only be known by *divine initiative*, and because of the infinite qualitative distinction between humanity and divinity, God can *never be fully known*. If we believe these two truths of Christian revelation, we are driven not only to a posture of humility, but also to a careful and critical analysis of any claims about God – all the more so if those claims are “certain.”

But despite the humility and healthy skepticism it promotes, critical realism is not agnosticism. Quite the opposite. Critical realism is still realism. We are called to be humble and critical precisely *because* there is truth out there that can be known. And by motivating them toward that truth, critical realism can help both postmodern reactionary postures. For the foreclosed identity that rejects postmodernism out of hand, it encourages careful analysis of truth claims. For the unforeclosed identity that rejects metaphysical knowability out of hand, it encourages confidence in truth and the dedicated pursuit of it. Critical realism begets both humility and hope.

Practical Suggestions

The vast majority of adolescents in the West measure the truthfulness of religion by its utility. Does it provide a good ethical structure? Does it provide a feeling of blessedness? Does it provide a sense of meaning or security? The ontological utilitarianism of adolescents is not necessarily because they disbelieve in God, but rather because they cannot be *certain* about who God is. This metaphysical agnosticism, particularly for Christians, is thanks in part to faulty theological instruction. But Christianity can answer the postmodern dilemma by teaching and modeling an appropriate means of God-knowledge – *faith*, in both form and content.

First, we must explain the form of Christian faith. We may do this by teaching the doctrine of the Incarnation and the role of the Holy Spirit *ex Trinitatis*.⁵⁴ Christianity agrees with modern metaphysical skepticism. We cannot *on our own* know anything about eternal realities. However, *God* provides a means to be known. In the Incarnation, God became fully revealed. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, God empowers us to recognize this revelation. There is indeed an epistemological gap between God and humanity, a gap that cannot be surmounted from the created side.⁵⁵ But there does exist a bridge across this gap; it is one-way and originates from the divine side. This bridge is the Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit draws us across. The postmodern dilemma is both predicted and solved within Christian orthodoxy. The Holy Spirit births within us the form of God-knowledge through the gift of faith; we can know God via the *analogia fidei*.⁵⁶

Second, we must explain the content of Christian faith. We may do this by teaching the doctrine of revelation and the sovereignty of God. While teaching and modeling confidence in our *ability* to know a transcendent God, we must also teach and model humility in what we *say* about God. One of the reasons adolescents reject commitment to religious truth is because they have seen religious “certainties” proven wrong before; slavery, as a popular example, was once held to be God’s intended order. We must show that proper discernment about God includes a posture of humility; we can only pray, listen, read, think, and then hope for God’s self-revelation. And we do this admitting that as sinful humans we will get some things wrong. We must teach and model how to listen to God’s self-revelation in spiritual disciplines. Through such practices as Scripture study, communal discussion, meditation and prayer, the Christian community can encourage adolescents to listen to the Holy Spirit rather than only rational thought processes. By teaching and modeling that *God* informs the content of faith, we teach and model humility *and* certainty in regard to truth.

Conclusion

As traditional boundaries – geographical, informational, linguistic, relational, etc. – collapse, the ramifications for spirituality are nothing less than monumental. And we cannot turn back the clock. We cannot reverse these trends. Nor should we want to. God has given us technology, mobility, and epistemology, and it is up to us to use these advances in thought for good. However, the world is changing so rapidly that we are still struggling to understand it, still trying to figure out an appropriate response within our faith traditions. Religion has always tended to move slowly in the face of change. But to insist that world is *not* changing, or that we want the world to “go back to how it used to be” is both unrealistic and irresponsible.

Instead, we must use the tools that constitute our faith traditions – community, history, and theology – to respond to these cultural changes. The phenomena of the Internet,

globalization, and postmodernism have created a new Western *ethos* that has in turn has affected human spirituality. Adolescents, in the midst of figuring out exactly who they are, have lived their whole lives immersed in the waters of these cultural currents; it is not surprising to discover that these trends have affected their development more than any other age group. For them, isolation, cultural groundlessness, and relativism are usually the result. But this is largely the fault of the church. It is up to the church to lead our youth, to teach them the truths of the faith. It is up to the church to model the Christian life. And through modeling and teaching the church can help adolescents to understand the need for community in a fragmented world, the need for theological analysis in a world of countless cultural offerings, and the need for truth and humility in a world of relativism. The church has the advantage of owning answers to the challenges that come with the phenomena of our time. Indeed, it is the only place where answers will ever be found.

¹ Statistics on youth and health are available in many places. The website for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) has a wealth of resources, including information on youth and critical areas of health, including alcohol and drug use, injury and violence (including suicide), tobacco use, sexual risk behaviors, and mental health (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/healthtopics). The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs) is also valuable. The Department of Health and Human Services (www.hhs.gov) offers lots of information as well, including links to other sites. The National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov), The National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (www.samhsa.gov) – especially their Office of Applied Studies (www.oas.samhsa.gov) – are quite helpful. I am also indebted to two recent groundbreaking studies on the state of adolescents, spirituality, and various health and at-risk activities: Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Mark D. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² Though, as mentioned, most developmentalists agree that the life task of an adolescent is “identity formation” (a term used more often in developmental psychology) or “individuation” (a term used more often in philosophy), my main interlocutor is probably the most well known developmental psychologist when it comes to human development, especially in adolescence: Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950). For more information on adolescent identity formation, see John W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, 12th Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007); Laurence Steinberg, *Adolescence*, 8th Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007); Nancy J. Cobb, *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*, 6th Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006); John S. Dacey, *Human Development Across the Lifespan*, 5th Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Kim Gale Dolgin & F. Phillip Rice, *The Adolescent: Development, Relationships, and Culture*, 12th Edition (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2007).

³ When I use the word “culture” (or “tradition”) – a notoriously difficult word to define – I am referring to a group of people that share a set of values, beliefs, liturgies (“ritual” practices), relationships, geography, and/or philosophical ideals. However, cultures can also transcend any one of these boundaries. For instance, I may belong to a culture because I am a native to a certain region, but I may also belong to a non-geographical culture because of my ethnicity, religion, etc. One of the effects of modern technology and communication is that we are able to belong to several cultures at once. For a classic book on culture, its meaning and effect, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁴ A brief comment: Some will claim that we have come through the era of modernity and have entered an era of “postmodernity.” More will be said on the characteristics of the latter further below, but let it merely be said presently that there are a several obstacles to labeling the current Western culture as postmodern. First, there are too many definitions of “postmodernism” to be able to make any sort of

generalizations about the present era being a cultural postmodernity. Second, postmodern epistemology and values tend to apply mostly to academic, middle and upper-middle class circles only. Third, when calling a culture “modern” or “postmodern,” it is probably more helpful to apply such descriptors to individual phenomena rather than to the culture as a whole; in fact, one of the lessons of postmodernism is that to apply a general descriptor to a broad base is to commit the modern fallacy of reductionism. Fourthly, it is very difficult to describe an “era” when one is in the midst of it; again, postmodern thinkers point out that we cannot make objective statements about anything with which we have intimate contact. Fifthly, because those who label the current culture as postmodern would be hard pressed to show that the current culture has exhibited such traits for more than 10 or at most 15 years, how can we know whether the culture has indeed entered a new era after modernity or if we are just experiencing a cultural fad, such as Romanticism or Classicism or Victorianism? And finally, we may safely say that the three phenomena under study – technology, mobility, and metaphysical agnosticism – are modern in that their development has significantly coincided with modernity, and their doxastic tendencies are modern in every sense of the word. This does not mean that postmodern characteristics do not result from the continued development and application of these three phenomena, but merely that it is more accurate to call them modern than postmodern.

⁵ I model the crises within each of the soft-categories of adolescent development upon the stages of development in the work of Erikson. For Erikson, “crises” implicit in each stage of human development determined the progress in and through the different stages. For instance, in late childhood, we face the conflict of industry vs. inferiority; in comparing abilities to others we can gain a healthy sense of competence or a pathological sense of inferiority. In adolescence, we face the conflict of identity vs. role confusion; in our search for identity we can gain a healthy sense of fidelity or a pathological sense of role-confusion. In early adulthood, we face the conflict of intimacy vs. isolation; as we develop relationships with others, we can gain a healthy sense of love or a pathological sense of isolation. Crises like these exist for each stage, but the stages of adolescence and young adulthood have particular bearing for us here. See Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985); Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980).

⁶ There are many, many books on the history of computers and computing. A few useful ones: William Aspray & Martin Campbell-Kelly, *Computer: A History of the Information Machine*, 2nd Edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004); Neil Barrett, *The Binary Revolution: The History and Development of the Computer* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006); Paul E. Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, 2nd Edition (Boston: The MIT Press, 2003).

⁷ Gnosticism, which existed in many different forms, was generally speaking built upon Platonic philosophy, postulating that all observable things are imperfect facsimiles of ideal and eternal forms. The forms are perfect in that they are unchanging, unlike the objects of our senses. The highest or most perfect form is the Form of the Good, from which all other forms are derived. Truth is found through the soul’s internal exercise of reflection upon the forms, especially the Form of the Good; we cannot find truth by reflecting on created objects. Radical dualism, the priority of ideal forms over physical matter, and the “salvation” found in the internal seeking of truth can both be seen as precursors to Gnosticism. See Hans Jonas, “Gnosticism,” in *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (New York: The Word Publishing Company, 1958), 144-147; E. M. Yamauchi, “Gnosticism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright & J.I. Packer, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 272-274. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

⁸ There were likely others that understood Gnosticism as unorthodox, perhaps even before Irenaeus. But *Adversus Haereses* (which is formally titled *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis*) is the earliest document we have to label Gnosticism as heretical. See Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, trans. William Rambaut & Alexander Roberts, 309-567 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, "To Cleodionus the Priest Against Apollinarius (Epistle CI)," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. VII*, ed. Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne & James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 440.

¹⁰ Dialectical theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, themselves products of the nineteenth-century liberal theology that had questioned orthodox Christology, insisted that full revelation is reliable as and only as the "totally other" God fully present in Jesus of Nazareth. But because God is totally other, divinity cannot be apprehended; God is fully revealed in Christ, but at the same time God is also "fully veiled." Barth was particularly strident in his belief that God cannot be perceived using only natural perception and reasoning: God cannot be epistemologically grasped through the *analogia entis*, or analogy of being. However, the presence of God *can* be apprehended in and through Christ's veil of humanity by means of the *analogia fidei*, the analogy of faith. But the object of our faith is nevertheless based upon an entity that can only be apprehended via the senses. Therefore Jesus must be fully material, fully natural, fully human. For a helpful and succinct definition of dialectical theology, see C. A. Baxter, "Dialectical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 198-199.

¹¹ This line is from the hymn, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." The hymn was originally written by Charles Wesley, first appearing in his *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1739. Wesley's hymns were always filled with profound theological content. While the original first line was "Hark! How all the welkin [heaven] rings / Glory to the King of Kings," it was later changed by fellow Anglican revivalist George Whitefield (to Wesley's dismay) to its current words. At first, the hymn was sung to various tunes; Wesley preferred it to be sung to slow and somber melodies. The tune to which we now sing this carol is based on a chorus ("*Gott ist Licht*") composed by Felix Mendelssohn in 1840 (adapted by William H. Cummings) as part of his *Festgesang an die Künstler* ("Festival Song"), a cantata written in tribute to Johannes Gutenberg and the invention of the printing press. Ironically, Mendelssohn did not want the tune to be used with sacred music.

¹² In Buber's psychological existentialism, we gain existence only in the act of encounter with another person. We are not fully formed when engaged in I-It ("*Ich-Es*") relations, whereby we reduce the other to an object. We only gain personhood when engaged in I-Thou ("*Ich-Du*") relations, whereby we recognize the other as an independent subject, or "the Other." The theological ramifications of these ideas, though unexplored here, are inescapable. See Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

¹³ "But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure." Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 22-23. (Besides the ordinary writing habits of the early 20th century, the masculine pronouns reflect the fact that *Life Together* was written in reference to Bonhoeffer's resident community at the seminary in Finkenwalde, which was all male.) Though this quote claims that community is necessary for mediation of the Word, it should be added that for Bonhoeffer, the Word is far more than words. It is the presence of God's love and fidelity. If it were just words, then perhaps disembodied communication alone would be fine. The Word is ministered to others directly and immediately in response to present needs.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*, "The individual must realize that his hours of aloneness react upon the community. In his solitude he can sunder and besmirch the fellowship, or he can strengthen and hallow it. Every act of self-control of the Christian is also a service to the fellowship.... We *are* members of a body, not only when we choose to be, but in our whole existence. Every member serves the whole body, either to its health or to its destruction. This is no mere theory; it is a spiritual reality.... One who returns to the Christian family fellowship after fighting the battle of the day brings with him the blessing of his

aloneness, but he himself receives the blessing of the fellowship. Blessed is he who is alone in the strength of the fellowship and blessed is he who keeps the fellowship in the strength of aloneness. But the strength of aloneness and the strength of the fellowship is solely the strength of the Word of God, which is addressed to the individual in the fellowship" (88-89).

¹⁵ See Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. II*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Shaw, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 513-597, especially I.2 and II.1-3.

¹⁶ Noted UCLA psychologist Albert Mehrabian (retired) famously declared the findings of his study as the "7%-38%-55% Rule." Mehrabian asserted that in face-to-face interpersonal communication, 7% of the meaning depends upon words, 38% of the meaning depends upon the tone of voice, and 55% depends upon physical expression. See Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*, 2nd Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981). Using these striking percentages, email is at best only 7% as effective as face-to-face communication; texting probably even less. Even phone calls, while more than six times more effective than emails, are only 45% as effective as face-to-face interaction.

¹⁷ "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25, NRSV).

¹⁸ In a less obvious way, capitalism also internationalized consuming cultures. In order for businesses to sell products to a given "foreign" culture, it must understand that culture, at least to the degree that it can perceive a cultural need in order to create a product that addresses that need. For a fascinating look at global culture from the perspective of a business marketer, see Clotilde Rapaille, *The Culture Code: An Ingenious Way to Understand Why People Around the World Live and Buy as They Do* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).

¹⁹ It is not a stretch to note that adolescents are the largest, most segregated people group in the history of Western culture. See Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), in which the journalist Hersch details the lives of suburban youth who have virtually no meaningful contact with adults, let alone parents; see also Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), for a helpful history of the emergence of adolescence as a life-stage. Hine makes the point that 100 years ago, adolescence (which he defines as a time of life in which the child moves toward individual identity as separate from parents) was relatively short, perhaps only a few years. However, the segregation of adolescents – coinciding roughly with the creation of the high school and the removal of adolescents from the workforce – has extended the length of adolescents to more than 10 years in most cases.

²⁰ See Kähler, *Schriften zu Christologie und Mission* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971).

²¹ "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NRSV).

²² In philosophical logic and linguistics, consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness are three means by which a theory, statement, or philosophical system is judged to be legitimate. *Consistency* refers to the absence of logical contradiction within a set, largely in terms of syntax. It judges the "fittingness" of component parts. *Coherence* refers to the presence of logical meaning in terms of semantics within a set; it judges the interrelated structure of the component elements. *Comprehensiveness* (similar to, but not the same as, completeness) refers to the quality of completeness in terms of inclusion; it judges the presence of needed components for full meaningfulness or "completion" within the theory, statement or philosophical system. For helpful definitions using more traditional philosophical terms and symbols of logic, see Virginia Klenk, "Axiom of Comprehension," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65; David Harrah, "Axiom of Consistency," in *ibid.*, 66; Michael R. DePaul, "Coherentism," in *ibid.*, 154-155; George F. Schumm, "Completeness," in *ibid.*, 162-163; Klenk, "Comprehension," in *ibid.*, 163; Wilfried Sieg, "Consistency" in *ibid.*, 177-178; Penelope Maddy, "Set Theory," in *ibid.*, 836-838.

²³ The doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly evident in Scripture. The word “Trinity” is (of course) never used, and the three persons of the Trinity are only mentioned twice together, in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28 and the Pauline benediction in 2 Corinthians 13. From the writing of Scripture, Christ and the Holy Spirit were described in name and deed to be divine, but neither their relationship with each other nor with the Father was clear. As evangelists were challenged upon this point – how Jesus and the Holy Spirit could be declared divine without believing in two or three gods – reflection was demanded. Church Fathers including Ignatius and Irenaeus reflected upon interaction of the three Persons, and a letter from Theophilus of Antioch in the latter half of the second century is the first evidence we have of the word “Trinity” being used in relation to God. In the next century, the Latin theologian Tertullian created several neologisms to use in describing the Trinity, including “*persona*” (person) and “*substantia*” (substance), and he popularized the use of the term “*trinitas*” (Trinity). He was the first to declare the basis of Trinitarian orthodoxy: three persons in one substance (“*tres Personae, una Substantia*”). Over a hundred years later, at the Council of Nicaea (325), the Trinitarian formula was codified in what would become the Nicene Creed. Further reflection by Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus) developed the doctrine by the end of the fourth century to the point where it more or less stands today. See Claude Welch, “Trinity,” in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, 366-369; G. L. Bray, “Trinity,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 691-694; R. Kearsley, “Tertullian,” in *ibid.*, 675-677; Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 172-225.

²⁴ See George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West ... Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

²⁵ “*Perichoresis*” is a Greek word that means, literally, “around the circle.” Translated into Latin as “*circumincession*”, it refers to the “mutual indwelling” of the three Persons of the Trinity. The image to which *perichoresis* refers is one in which three figures dance around so quickly and so in rhythm that they cannot be distinguished from one another. In this image, there is an indissoluble unity in the Trinity even as there is maintained a distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This idea that obviously emphasizes the “threeness” of the Trinity was much more popular in Eastern Christianity than it was in the West, where the “oneness” of God was emphasized.

²⁶ “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:4-5, NRSV).

²⁷ “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8, NRSV).

²⁸ *Everything* is encountered from the standpoint of a claimed cultural identity, even if that identity is provisional and inconsistent, and even if the cultural adherent doesn’t realize it. There is no such thing as belonging to no culture, as we will examine in the next section. We always consider things with presuppositions. In the encounter with new cultures, the adolescent may wish to leave the culture with which he presently identifies. But in addition to leaving a cultural identity, he will always be taking on a new one. That is why it is important to know the foundational elements of a given culture, in order to know what it means to depart from a culture or adopt a new one.

²⁹ As mentioned above, according to Erikson, the developmental task of adolescence is found in the negotiation of the crisis of identity vs. role confusion. Fidelity to identity is the result of facing the crisis and negotiating it properly. Role confusion is the result when the crisis is avoided through over-identification or avoidance of identity. See Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 261ff. For a theological account of the negotiation of adolescent identity formation as based upon Erikson’s role confusions, see James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 203-250.

³⁰ See Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958).

³¹ Multiple disciplines have posited denial of objectivity, a truth grounded in the essential connectedness of all things. If objectivity depends upon detached observation that is unaffected by the object under examination, connection with said object militates against objectivity. Philosophy, sociology, linguistics, psychology have all asserted that essential relationships inexorably exist between individual realities.

This connectedness has also been discovered in the hard sciences. British physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne expounds upon the scientific-theological significance of relationality in *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (Dover, CT: Yale University Press, 2006). “Einstein ... showed that quantum theory implied that once two quantum entities have interacted with each other, they remain mutually entangled however far they may eventually separate. This counterintuitive togetherness-in-separation (non-locality) seemed so ‘spooky’ to Einstein that he supposed it indicative that there was something incomplete in the quantum account” (73-74). Note the similarity between the scientific naturalism of “togetherness-in-separation” and the Trinitarian “unity-in-distinction” of which we bear an image. “It is striking that so methodologically reductionist a subject as physics has pointed us in a relational or holistic direction. ... the general character of physical reality seems to correspond to a web-like character of interconnected integrity” (74). This “web-like character of interconnected integrity” is the triumph of postmodernity, that all things are in some sort of connection, and that this connection denies bare objectivity or atomistic locality. The theological reality of this scientific truth is profound. “With physics moving in a more holistic direction, we might expect by analogy to need to challenge the individualistic atomism that is so characteristic of contemporary thinking about human nature. ... [T]he Christian understanding of the community of the faithful as the Body of Christ, constituting a web of relationality [is] vastly more comprehensive than the one-to-one exchange of I and Thou” (75). For Polkinghorne, the essential relatedness of the universe mirrors a proto-relationality in God and therefore in humanity. “These remarkable developments in relational and holistic thinking that are taking place in the fold of science are deeply congenial to Trinitarian way of thought... They are profoundly consonant with a theology of nature that sees the relation of perichoretic exchange between the divine Persons as lying at the heart of the Source of all created reality” (75).

³² See Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981); Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. LaFleur (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960). Descartes’ epistemological method was to doubt everything – even his own existence – unless something could be known with clarity and certainty. Knowledge was then gained by building upon certain knowledge. The one thing that Descartes could know with clarity and certainty, he reasoned, was that he was doubting. This is what he meant by his well-known, oft-repeated and seldom-understood “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes’ revolutionary epistemological method signalled a formal beginning of the Enlightenment in that it declared individual human rationality (as opposed to tradition or authority) as competent to know truth and meaning. Not only did this announce a victory for humanism and enable rationality to take center stage, but it was also a cultural death knell for the ultimate power of traditional authority, especially the Church, in terms of its role as arbiter of truth.

³³ Along with George Berkeley, Locke and Hume belong to the school of thought called “British Empiricism.” According to Locke, we are born with a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, and attain knowledge only through experience, or reflection upon experience; this is also called “*a posteriori* knowledge.” Hume further developed the understanding of all knowledge based upon sensory impressions and relations of ideas that result from those impressions. Thus our lives and beliefs are built upon habits that emerge as a response to our perceptions. For instance, we have no way to know that there will be air in the atmosphere to breathe tomorrow, but since our experience is that there has been air in the atmosphere every day of our lives, we live according to that belief. For the seminal works of British Empiricism, see Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

³⁴ Just as Descartes’ epistemology both championed reason and skepticism in the 17th century, so did Kant’s transcendental idealism in the 18th century. Because we cannot know the essence of an object as it exists in itself (or “*Ding an sich*”), there is effectively no meaning outside the self. Instead, we are left with our perceptions of objects. But even here, we do not have pure perception. Sensory data enters the mind and is organized according to internal “categories.” But because these categories can differ from person to person, even the images of objects in our minds have no universal basis. The only things that can be known with certainty are “objects” that are in the mind before any sort of perception takes place, which

he calls “*a priori* knowledge.” See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (London: The Macmillan Company, 1933).

³⁵ Founded in the group of thinkers referred to as “The Vienna Circle,” the logical positivists developed an epistemological philosophy that valued empiricism and reason, and was influenced by the mathematics of Ernst Mach and the linguistics of (early) Ludwig Wittgenstein. Logical positivists rejected all metaphysics; this is not because ontology does not exist, but rather because any discussion of things that cannot be confirmed scientifically or observationally is meaningless. For examples of the thought of perhaps the most well known logical positivists, see: Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World - Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, trans. R. A. George (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936). Ayer, ed., *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959).

³⁶ Of course there are many flavors of postmodernism. Some postmodernists would claim that we *can* claim truth in some way, though not simply through rationality. Some would claim that we collectively *decide* upon truth. Some would claim that we can approach *approximations* of truth based upon our present perspective, though they are unsure of how to know that truth that has been approximated. Often, as we examined above, truth is understood as that which “works,” what “feels right,” or what promotes “flourishing.” However, this only pushes truth back one level; how do we define what it means to work, or feel right, or flourish? But the uniting principles of the different stripes of postmodernism – at least when it comes to epistemology – is what we have stated. Everything has an equal claim to truth, no matter the source. Our ability to adjudicate between these claims is questionable. Objectivity is a fiction. Absolute certainty is impossible. And meaning is much more important than certainty. In a sense, by its nature as a reaction against constructive modernism, postmodernism is much better at critically tearing down ideas than it is in affirming them.

³⁷ See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Radford, VA: A & D Publishing, 2008).

³⁸ For instance, the idea of eternal blessedness or punishment can serve as motivation for, or deterrent to, morality.

³⁹ More formally, “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” Kant’s ethics, called “deontological,” are derived from reason and therefore should be obeyed by all people at all times, regardless of the circumstances. Because they are determined by pure reason, they are universal. Therefore, the “categorical imperative” that determines all ethics is to act in such a way that everyone should reasonably act. See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Radford, VA: A & D Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, while silent on the nature of God’s ontology, defined faith as a surrender to unconditional “givenness,” or a dependence upon that over which we have no control or effect. Jesus was a human who had a perfect “feeling of absolute dependence” or “God consciousness,” and then mediated that feeling to his disciples, thus creating the church. See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

⁴¹ Ritschl fathered a school – “The Ritschlian School” – that began theological enterprise in the investigation of historical Christianity. Since it is useless to speak of metaphysical reality, Ritschl reasoned, we instead ought to base our theology upon the religious community’s *experience* of faith, and not upon philosophical speculation or pietistic individualism. The Christian community began in the historical life of the human Jesus – who illustrated the vocation of the ethical agent – and is even now based upon Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. The communal experience of faith includes value-judgments, the fulfillment of which defines the Kingdom of God. Ritschl has far less interest in an ontological “God,” and much more in the experience of freedom for (justification) and orientation to (reconciliation) ethical reality. See Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh & A.B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900).

⁴² Rauschenbusch is often credited as the father of the Social Gospel movement. He believed that the redemption that comes from Jesus is not from a substitutionary atonement, but rather through the way that he lived his life as a model for a new kind of society. Religion ought to deal with our present

experience; the Kingdom of God is a social movement that Christians ought to help bring about by living for others, just as Jesus did. See Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917).

⁴³ Bultmann is well known for his efforts at “demythologizing” of the New Testament, and making a distinction between the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith.” For Bultmann, salvation is found not in the actual death of Christ on the Cross; it is doubtful that there was any sort of mythical transaction. Besides, there is no way to know what actually happened two thousand years ago; the Jesus of history is inaccessible. But more important than the Jesus of history is the message of Jesus that was preached – the “*kerygma*” – beginning with Paul. The preaching of Cross of Christ has the power to draw us into an existential moment of self-examination, whereby we grasp our own finitude and the need to depend upon God. See Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951-55).

⁴⁴ The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* affirms that God created everything out of nothing. This disallows any sort of ontological connection between God and creation, as with pantheism or panentheism. If God was complete before creating anything, and if there was nothing in existence besides God, then everything that God created was in addition to who God is. If for some reason all of creation ceased to be, God would not be any less God that at present. See O. R. Barclay, “Creation,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 177-179; Fred Denbeaux, “Creation,” in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, 65-67.

⁴⁵ For the early development of Barth’s theology, including his break from the liberal school in which he was educated, see Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Barth claims this influence of Kierkegaard in the introduction to the second edition of his *Römerbrief* in 1922; see Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans, 6th Edition*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Barth almost certainly garnered this idea from Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity*, in which the idea of this infinite distinction is mentioned several times. In addition, *Practice in Christianity* was one of only two books by Kierkegaard that Barth had in his library. See McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 235 n. 92.

⁴⁷ The difference can be distinguished in this imperfect example. If two men were standing before the Crucifixion, one would see it as the crucifixion of a criminal, and another would see it as the crucifixion of the Son of God. Though God has given Christ as a full divine self-revelation, one sees this as God’s revelation, and the other one does not. The ability to see revelation as revelation is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁸ Using the classical Scriptural and theological verbiage (codified in the Nicene Creed in 325 and in the revised Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in 381), the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father and the Son (only from the Father in the East), and the Son is “begotten” or “generated” by the Father. The Father alone is “unbegotten.” Of course, none of these words have definitive meaning.

⁴⁹ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics Vol. I Part 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975).

⁵⁰ “Feuerbach’s critique,” as it is known, states that humanity has created God in its own image. After humanity determines what its ideal state is, it simply imagines that perfection, so that “in the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature.” The qualities of God are merely answers to the wants and needs of humanity. God is the human projection of his own ego. See Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989).

⁵¹ Freud claims that religion is an illusion, merely the “fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most urgent wishes of mankind.” God is the divine wish-granter. See Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: H. Liveright, 1928). Interestingly, Freud did say that simply because something is an illusion does not make it false, just highly unlikely.

⁵² Marx believed that religion was a means by which ordinary people could find comfort, solace, and distraction in the face of maltreatment by those in economic power. Those in power can use religion, including their understanding of who God is, to assuage those who are not in power, and in so doing

keep the power structure intact. Marx's famous observation that religion is the "opiate of the masses" can be found in Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁵³ Feminist critiques of doctrines within Christian theology – including the doctrine of God – are legion. The critique I reference here is general; because in its two thousand years of history Christian doctrine has been developed almost exclusively by males, and almost exclusively in paternalistic cultures, it is hard not to think that the doctrine of God has been influenced with male overtones. Are we sure that the character and attributes of God we embrace in Christian orthodoxy are biblical and not dictates of male culture, male values, and male power dynamics? Is the way that God interacts with us truly represented within theology that has been written entirely from the male perspective? Feminist theologians that have raised these important questions include the following (in alphabetical order): Mary Daly, Mary McCintock Fulkerson, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schuessler-Fiorenza, and Phyllis Trible. For a succinct overview of the main tenants of feminist theology, see H. M. Conn, "Feminist Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 255-258.

⁵⁴ "Outside the Trinity." Traditionally, Western theology has described the role of the Holy Spirit within the immanent Trinity as being the "bond of love" between the Father and the Son. However, the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation history is similar and different. In witnessing to the divinity of Christ, the Holy Spirit continues as a bond of love within creation, but also serves as the ontic and noetic presence of God in time and space. However, in light of the maxim *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the operation of the Trinity outside of itself is indivisible), it is more accurate to say that the "making God present in time and space" is the act of God, but attributed to the person of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁵ Needless to say, the theological model of revelation is the same as that for salvation. However, while revelation speaks of bridging the epistemic gap, salvation speaks of bridging the ontological gap. Just as with revelation, we cannot bridge the divine-human ontological gap from the human side. God must do it. The correlation of these models appropriately intimates the relation and interdependence of God's epistemological revelation and ontological salvation.

⁵⁶ See n. 10 above on the *analogia fidei*.