

CHAPTER 2

The Doctrine of God and Dilemmas of Power

J. Philip Wogaman

My contribution to the issues at hand must fall in the sphere of Christian ethics. I am reminded of the late Paul Ramsey's comment that in the final analysis, Christian ethics is only the little finger on the body of Christ. My wife has famously said that the only reason people would study Christian ethics is so they could rationalize better. That actually is not a bad account of the matter. But the big question is, What is it we are trying to rationalize? What are the realities and values we are seeking to understand, and how do they shape our existence in the world?

Therefore, seen through the eyes of a Christian ethicist, an intriguing question lurks behind the theme of this Institute: Does our theological view determine our perception of the problems we face? To put it more exactly: If we know a person's view of God, can we accurately predict that person's approach to factual questions? To what extent is one's theological view controlling? The late British economist Joan Robinson offered a metaphor that, though in a different context, helps us visualize the question. In a book on Marxian economics, Professor Robinson argued that Marx's "labor theory of value" really had no relationship to the main thrust of Marxist theory. In a witty aside she recalled Voltaire's line that "it is possible to kill a flock of sheep by witchcraft if you give them plenty of arsenic at the same time."¹ The Marxist theory of value was only the incantation; it was not the "arsenic."

So we can ask—indeed we must ask—to what extent is our view of God the real “arsenic” of our theories about the actual world.

Not many of us would accept the simple notion that a given theological perspective automatically entails a certain way of viewing and dealing with the problems we face. People with virtually the same theological orientation can disagree sharply about the implications of that orientation. And people with very different theological views can be in substantial agreement on particular problems in the secular world. So the relationship must not be oversimplified, as it generally is when, in moral debate, Christians sometimes state a theological view as if that automatically settled everything else.

Nevertheless there must be *some* relationship. Our theological view expresses what we worship or value most and what we consider most real. That at least affects our sense of what matters most in the world. It is what supplies the passion, the conviction. But our theological view, even if it does not tell us precisely how we should understand and deal with problems, at least sets the parameters within which we think and act. For instance, if I believe that God is the Creator of the world and cares about the world, it may not give me an answer to the environmental problems we face, but it does tell me that I cannot treat the physical world as a place of no consequence. The destruction or even deterioration of the natural world is theologically important because it is *God's* world. Similarly, if we consider that God loves every human being, we could not disregard the humanity of any. How to show our love and respect for others may challenge us, but that view of God will not permit us to treat any other person as worthless. If on the other hand our theology is of a wholly “spiritual” God, entirely above the world and having no concern for the world, the parameters within which we deal with ecological or human problems might be very different.

Our doctrine of God is thus very important. It sets the context of what ultimately is at stake. But it is not an instrument of precision saving us from all further struggle in determining exactly how to resolve the problems we face.

The Wesleyan Doctrine of God

What guidance does a Wesleyan doctrine of God have to offer to those of us who stand in the Wesleyan tradition? Those who look

there for a finely wrought system are destined to be disappointed. John Wesley had a lot to say about God, but he was not a speculative theologian. He was far more interested in the "plain" truth. He was suspicious of presentations of truth that could not be understood by simple people. He often made the point that he was uninterested in quibbling over "opinions" and pretending to know what we cannot know. In one of his sermons, on 1 Corinthians 13:9, Wesley reminds us of how very little in fact we do know:

Therefore it is that by the very constitution of their nature the wisest of men "know" but "in part." And how amazingly small a part do they know either of the Creator or of his works! This is a very needful, but a very unpleasing theme; for "vain man would be wise." Let us reflect upon it for a while. And may the God of wisdom and love open our eyes to discern our own ignorance! To begin with the great Creator himself. How astonishingly little do we know of God! How small a part of his nature do we know! Of his essential attributes! What conception can we form of his omnipresence? Who is able to comprehend how God is in this and every place? How he fills the immensity of space?²

That was an especially fitting word for the rationalists of the Enlightenment, but Wesley also had a plain word for the doctrine—a reminder that orthodox doctrine per se is a very poor substitute for a living and lived faith. In a sermon on God, Wesley warns against an idolatry of false religion. "That is," he writes,

any religion which does not imply *the giving the heart to God*. Such is, first, a religion of opinions, or what is commonly called orthodoxy. Into this snare fall thousands of those who profess to hold "salvation by faith": indeed all of those who by faith mean only a system of Arminian or Calvinian opinions.³

Such cautionary comments by Wesley are not his last theological word, of course. He had very important and very positive things to say about God. His views were thoroughly trinitarian—so we do not have to abandon the theme of this Institute because of its inconsistency with Wesley's own thought! But it is the living reality, not the conceptual correctness or even the conceptual completeness, of our understanding of God that interested him. We do well to follow Wesley in the pursuit of the fundamental realities and not to engage in a scholastic exercise. In his sermon "On the Trinity," Wesley treats

the Trinity as one of the "fundamental truths" of "real religion," though insisting that it is the "substance of the doctrine" and not its philosophical illustrations that matters. What is that substance? In that sermon he states it thus:

But I know not how any one can be a Christian believer till "he hath" (as St. John speaks) "the witness in himself"; till "the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God"—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son, and the blessed Spirit "even as he honours the Father." Not that every Christian believer *adverts* to this; perhaps at first not one in twenty; but if you ask any of them a few questions you will easily find it is implied in what he believes.⁴

Wesley rejects out of hand the Calvinist doctrine "that the God of love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh, has from all eternity fixed an absolute, unchangeable, irresistible decree that part of mankind shall be saved, do what they will, and the rest damned, do what they can!"⁵ That sentence is significant, not only for its rejection of double predestination but even more for the words that summarize as well as any could the real heart of Wesley's doctrine of God: "the God of love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh."

The constant theme of God's love, reiterated in many ways, expresses the essence of Wesleyan doctrine. We do well not to quibble overmuch about correctness of theological formulation. Above all we must not subordinate the love of God to any other thing when we discuss the nature of God. God's love is the true fundamental.

From that flows the whole Wesleyan emphasis upon soteriology—how our own salvation, a free gift of God, can be received through faith and through allowing ourselves to be transformed into the loving persons God intends us to be: to be *perfected in love*. That Wesleyan emphasis requires no elaboration here among the daughters and sons of Wesleyan tradition. Our problem now is the eminently practical one: What are the implications of God's love and of our loving response to God for our responsibility in the world? Specifically, what are the implications for the way we understand and deal with power?

Positive and Negative Aspects of Power

Power is sometimes contrasted with love as though people who have been transformed by God's love could not thereafter make use of power. But power has positive as well as negative connotations. All life has some share in power—at least the simple power of being, as Tillich reminded us.⁶ Nobody has unlimited power, but nobody still living is totally powerless, either. Power per se is not a negative term. It is not necessarily against love. Indeed love itself is a form of power.

In a world of pure, uncontaminated response to God, love would be the only form of power. The power to act would be exercised only as love, as it is with God. This is not such a world, but even in a fallen world are Christians not supposed to act only in love? Surely that is the implication of Wesley's whole understanding of sanctifying grace: We are being perfected by love so as to act always out of love—and out of no other motive. It is frustrating to serious Christians, for we still fall short of this in our sinful state; but that is what the Christian life means—always to be a pure expression of love. Put differently, we are always to be channels through which God's love can be transmitted into the world. Our "power of being" must be an expression of the "power of love." This is not simply a matter of individual motivation. It is community-building. The love we have from God reaches out to others, forging the bonds of grace linking us to one another in a community of love that encompasses us all. To be a Christian in the world is to be an instrument of God helping to forge the God-intended community of love and justice. That is a very positive expression of power.

But power also has negative connotations, evident in every act that is against love and in every unjust, oppressive order. Some forms of negative power can never be an expression of Christian life. A fundamental question with which Christians have had to struggle from the beginning is whether negative power can *ever* be an expression of love. Can negative things ever be done lovingly? Can the power of love be used to *force* people to do what they do not want to do? Can we use incentives based upon greed or fear in order to get people to do the good or just things they would not otherwise do?

A persistent myth among Christians holds that this problem only emerged in Christian history with the triumph of Constantine and the ascent of Christians into imperial power. Before 313 A.D.

Christians were pacifists, the church was a harmonious community in which all things were shared, converts were gained through the winsome example of Christians ("see how they love one another"). But after Christianity became more or less official, with the prestige of imperial patronage, the church was corrupted.

Like all myths, this one has some truth to it. Pacifism was a more dominant theme in the early church. Fewer people were Christians for the wrong reasons, if only because prior to Constantine it did not pay to be! Still, from the beginning there was considerable recognition of the need for the negative use of power to constrain evil. Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 attribute the order-maintaining powers of the emperor to God's own ordinance. A late-first-century writing has this to say about earthly rulers:

You, Master, gave them imperial power through your majestic and indescribable might, so that we, recognizing it was you who gave them the glory and honor, might submit to them, and in no way oppose your will. Grant them, Lord, health, peace, harmony, and stability, so that they may give no offense in administering the government you have given them. For it is you, Master, the heavenly "King of eternity," who give the sons of men glory and honor and authority over the earth's people.⁷

I cite this not to dispute the importance of the pacifist witness, but to make the point that that witness cannot lay claim to an unambiguous history. From the beginning there were important Christian voices acknowledging the possibility—even the necessity—of a negative use of power in the divine ordering of earthly affairs.

Luther made the point, perhaps overwell, with his notion that the restraint of evil can be an expression of love. As Paul Tillich restated it: "It is the strange work of love to destroy what is against love."⁸ So long as the motivation is entirely positive, altogether loving, the negative action can be judged pragmatically. Christian realism in its various forms has always taken that view—chastened to some extent by the fact that so often the negative actions have been motivated not by love but by greed, lust for power, worldly ambition, and other motivations that are themselves against love. Historically, those who oppose such realism have generally argued that when love takes the "strange" form, it always ceases to be love. But such critics, including pacifists, must themselves face the weight of actual history and what has happened when evil has been permitted to go

unchecked. Only a few pacifists have been entirely consistent, renouncing all forms of violence (including police protection) and economic property.⁹ Those who are rigorously consistent at this point are likely, with Tolstoy, to assume that in fact there will be less, not more, evil set loose in the world if we do not "do evil that good may result." Or, like John Howard Yoder, they may simply trust God to deal with the consequences in the *long* run—that is, eschatologically.¹⁰

In the minds of many Christians such trust can border on irresponsibility. Their point is that evil has often been checked, even decisively checked, by resolute use of force. While negative use of power can lead to corruption, it does not have to do so. Disavowal of all negative actions to restrain evil can lead to its own kind of acquiescent corruptions. How ultimately could there be a structure of justice in the world, protecting the weak from the strong, without a regime of force of some kind to back it up? How could there even be a system of taxation, enabling a redistribution of wealth in the service of justice, if taxes were to become only guidelines for voluntary contributions by the wealthy? Arguably, tax laws in many countries are already too much like that.

Those who oppose all negative uses of power must look elsewhere than to John Wesley for theological support—even though Wesley's writings contain one of the sharpest criticisms of war to be found in Christian literature. That little essay appears in his consideration of original sin, and appropriately so, since Wesley properly regards war as one of the best illustrations of human depravity.¹¹ But that did not mean that Wesley disapproved of the state, with its mechanisms of reward and punishment and its possession of the *ultima ratio* of police and military power.

Above all, Wesley was a theologically principled realist. He was deeply grounded in his faith in the God of love. He was also deeply sensitive to the actual workings of human society, to the concrete effects of actions and policies upon real people. Sometimes it is said (cynically?) that we should "follow the money" if we want to know what is really going on. With Wesley it is more "follow the people." See what is happening to people if you want to know what is really going on. Go to the slums. Go to the prisons. Go to the mines and the fields, even in a sense to the battlefields. See what is happening to the people. How does that help us sort out the questions of power in our time?

Dilemmas of Power

We discover sooner or later that we must work our way through serious dilemmas. A true dilemma is when we face equally attractive or unattractive options, each side of which can offer compelling arguments or compelling evidence. We cannot follow one or the other of the options without making due allowances for the alternative. Of course, some decisions are more clear-cut. Sometimes it is simply a choice of good versus evil. And then, as Lowell's hymn suggests, it is only a question whether we will choose the good or evil side. Where the contrast between good and evil is stark and clear we are not facing a dilemma. But there are real dilemmas in the world, many of them having to do with power.

I wish to consider two dilemmas of power in the contemporary world. Both are of enormous importance. The way in which these dilemmas are resolved will affect human life on this planet for good or ill for a very long time to come.

While the questions of *exercise* of power may appear to be the special province of the powerful, the *consequences* of the way power is exercised may be felt more by those who are relatively powerless. Christians are numbered among both the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless, and both have a hand in determining how the dilemmas will be worked through. I speak as a citizen of the most powerful nation on earth—a nation whose policies inevitably affect the destinies of all the rest of the world. I am most conscious, most concerned about how my country exercises its power. My present ministry has forced me to struggle with those questions as never before. But I am also conscious of how important are the attitudes and decisions of the people of other countries. It is well that Christians of the whole world, coming from many different kinds of situations, can explore these issues together and, where possible, act together as well.

The Dilemma of Intervention in Support of Human Rights

The first dilemma is whether (and when) the world community should intervene in the affairs of particular countries or regions to protect the most basic of human rights. What should be done when

an elected government is subverted by a *coup d'état* installing a corrupt government by sheer force of arms, as in Haiti or more recently in Cambodia? What about protecting people against genocide or "ethnic cleansing" (what a terrible word!) in Bosnia or Rwanda or (only a few years ago) Cambodia? What about protecting a weak country from invasion by a strong neighbor, as when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1990?

Most Christians would agree that genocide and international aggression are evils to be condemned. Most would at least favor strenuous dialogue and diplomatic negotiation to try to end such things. Some would go further and support severe economic sanctions. But what about *military* interventions? The case for and the case against can both be made persuasively. The dilemma lies in the fact that serious evils can result from either using or not using military force. Christians have always known that war in any form is an evil, the cause of untold suffering, death, and destruction. There is nothing glorious about it. Wesley's own sarcastic characterization of war, if anything, understates the evil because he deals only with the injury and death of the poor soldiers, most of whose souls will be sent "into everlasting fire."¹² But war is far more than soldiers killing soldiers: It is little children killed or maimed for life. It is little children even induced to become killers themselves. It is families made homeless. It is women violated and men corrupted. It is starvation and disease on a massive scale. It is agony in the day and terror in the night. It is the kindling of hatreds and the nurturing of self-righteousness, often the birth of endless cycles of vengeance and retaliation. War is *never*, in itself, a good thing. Let no Christian be deluded about that! So where is the dilemma?

It is that massive evils can also result from the *failure* to intervene militarily. The case of the Gulf War, still much debated in Christian circles, may be too ambiguous to provide clear evidence. We do know that Iraq invaded Kuwait and seemed bent on invading Saudi Arabia as well. At the time, it was argued by many Christians in the United States that diplomatic pressures short of war could induce the Iraqis to withdraw from Kuwait—or at least not continue into Saudi Arabia. But there is little evidence of that. Some also argued that since Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are both governed undemocratically by superrich elites, the invasion did not matter much. And it was argued that the only reason for the intervention by the U.S. and its allies was to preserve access to the oil reserves of the Arabian

Peninsula. But what would have been the effect of a failure to intervene? One result would have been to teach all of the small nations of the earth that they can count only on themselves for defense against international aggression. "To each his own, and the devil take the hindmost!" The Gulf War at least illustrates the dilemma.

The genocides and atrocities of Bosnia and Rwanda and Liberia and Cambodia are clearer illustrations of the effects of failing to intervene. In Bosnia, prior to the NATO intervention, some two hundred seventy-five thousand dead in brutal ventures of "ethnic cleansing" and vengeance—and very few killed in the two years since. In Liberia, some one hundred fifty thousand killed from 1990 through 1996 as the world watched. In Rwanda, estimates of genocide ranging from four hundred thousand to one million dead. Earlier in Cambodia at least a million killed during the savageries of the Pol Pot era in the late 1970s.¹³ If the "hawks" who urge intervention in such situations must bear the burden of what war can bring—and what interventions run awry can mean—then the "doves" who oppose all such military interventions must answer for all of this killing that might have been prevented. Both the "hawks" and the "doves" try to make the case easier for themselves by asserting that if the intervention were done right or if the nonviolent diplomacy were done right, things would work out. But we must all face the hard realities of an often sinful world more realistically. There is no light way to avoid the dilemma. Real justice, real respect for human life and human rights, requires the existence of a dependable international order. But the means used to establish and maintain that order carry also the possibilities of further disorder.

One point seems clear. There will be no solution to the recurring inhumanities in many parts of the world if people of goodwill are not prepared to run risks and accept costs. For Christians of the West it at least means that isolationism is not morally acceptable. It means that a "national interest" criterion of involvement in the agonies of other peoples is unacceptable unless the healing of other nations is considered (as it should be) to be a vital national interest of all nations.

The Dilemma of International "Free Trade"

The second dilemma is whether Christians should support or resist the vast trend toward free market economics on a global scale.

In North America the question was posed by the debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement, in Europe by the even stronger ties of the European Union, and on a global scale by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the virtual collapse of socialism as a dominant ideological force mark the emergence of a new era in international economic life. Capitalism has become much the order of the day; those who urge all countries to become democratic often couple that with the demand that they also become free market economies.

The case for a free market system, both within and beyond individual nations, is more persuasive than many critics have perceived. It is grounded in one of the most fundamental principles of economics: the "law" of "comparative advantage."¹⁴ According to this principle, the production of goods and services is greatly enhanced by each person or community producing those things that they can do best in comparison with others. Even if theoretically some people could do everything better than others, it would still pay them to concentrate on the things they do best while leaving the rest to others. Economist Paul A. Samuelson offers an illustration:

[Consider] the case of the best lawyer in town who is also the best typist in town. Will she not specialize in law and leave typing to a secretary? How can she afford to give up precious time from the legal field, where her comparative advantage is very great, to perform typing activities in which she is efficient but in which she lacks *comparative* advantage? Or look at it from the secretary's point of view. She is less efficient than the lawyer in both activities; but her relative disadvantage compared with the lawyer's is least in typing. Relatively speaking, the secretary has a comparative advantage in typing.¹⁵

At the moment, the comparative advantage of the United States ranges from such things as electronics and automobiles (a recovering industry) to agricultural and forestry products (because of abundant arable land). The comparative advantage of many developing countries is with cheap labor. It pays North American industries to "farm out" as many labor-intensive operations as possible to countries with cheap labor. With modern means of communication and transportation, actual production for many North American, European, and Japanese industries is conducted all over the world.

Is this a good thing? This vast increase in world trade has cer-

tainly enhanced the efficiency of much economic production, with all sorts of goods and services available at lower and lower prices. In many parts of the world it has accelerated the process of economic development—one thinks especially of Asia, where South Korea, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, and other countries have made dramatic gains in per capita income.

At the same time one hears thoughtful voices of alarm. The U.S. labor movement has opposed the NAFTA treaty, voicing serious criticism of the effects of such developments upon workers in the U.S. One labor spokesperson minced no words in a recent statement:

The North American Free Trade Agreement is an abysmal failure. . . . [It] had nothing to do with "free trade," but everything to do with creating wealth for investors and financial speculators. . . . NAFTA has cost the United States between 420,000 and 600,000 jobs since it was enacted on Jan. 1, 1994. . . . In industry after industry, American manufacturers are abandoning our shores in droves, enticed by cheap labor and duty-free imports back into the United States.¹⁶

Within the theological community John Cobb has been the most persistent critic of world trade. In one thoughtful essay he cites some of the dangers.

Free trade means that capital is invested wherever it is most efficiently, that is, most profitably, employed, regardless of political boundaries. Since political entities and the people they represent have no power to control these investments, they must instead compete for these investments by making themselves attractive to the investors. This requires that they compete against all other peoples within the free market. Much of the competition consists in offering low wages, docile workers, few safety standards, and low requirements for protecting the environment.¹⁷

Again we are faced with a dilemma. The vast oceans of poverty in, especially, Third World countries mean that there must be great economic development if the hundreds of millions of poor people are to have anything like a chance to become what God would have them be. Realistically, Cobb and other critics notwithstanding, free trade seems to be the engine that works on a very large scale to increase prosperity. But, on the other hand, the export of capital and productive enterprises from the richer to the poorer countries does throw many people out of work and can also disrupt the social fabric of the

poorer countries as well. Much more needs to be said about this dilemma than we have space to consider here, but I am persuaded that this too is a genuine dilemma, not to be avoided by simple endorsement of free trade with no holds barred nor by returning to a world with high-tariff barriers in which the globalization of economic life is flatly opposed.

Resolving the Dilemmas of Power

Does a Wesleyan doctrine of God help to resolve these two dilemmas? It certainly helps reinforce a certain humility in the face of such difficult questions. We must not leap too quickly to conclusions about either God's will or the factual situation, remembering Wesley's words that "the wisest of men 'know' but 'in part.' And how amazingly small a part do they know either of the Creator or of his works! This is a very needful, but a very unpleasing theme; for 'vain man would be wise.'"¹⁸ Remaining open and tentative about big questions is a mark of strength, not weakness; above all it is service to the One of whose works we know so "small a part."

Of course that needful word is not enough. A Wesleyan doctrine of God does not immobilize; it energizes. It is not enough to bow humbly before all the complexities, letting events take their course. We are called to be engaged. It is better to risk being wrong than to do nothing and thereby be certain of being wrong.

What further guidance do we get from the doctrine of God? Surely the guiding principle is always the love of God, with its implication that we are all a part of the God-intended community. That may not tell us what, exactly, to do about genocide in Rwanda, or the North American Free Trade Agreement. It does tell us *what is at stake*.

Theological Light on the Dilemmas of Intervention

In relation to the dilemma of intervention, that understanding of God clearly eliminates two tempting alternatives. On the one hand, the powerful must never intervene for the sake of their own political and economic dominance. Imperialism, in retreat since World War II, must continue to be opposed by prophetic Christianity. On the other hand, no nation should be isolationist, either for its own sake or because of a misguided view that all intervention is in principle

wrong. Christians in the stronger, wealthier countries currently face these opposing, unacceptable, but tempting alternatives.

When we think theologically about the world, we see it as a single moral community, not several. Intervention, when called for, should be the work of more than one nation. It should optimally be the business of all. Both the Gulf War and the intervention in Haiti were endorsed, at least formally, by the United Nations, although the principal military power was supplied by the United States. The United Nations has found situations like Somalia and Bosnia frustrating; and in the case of Bosnia, the stabilizing intervention was through NATO. The brutalities of civil war in Liberia were addressed by a West African coalition of nations, with some modest success. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, firmly committed to *non-intervention* in the internal affairs of member states, has (summer of 1997) put pressure on Cambodia to restore democratic government. So the idea of collective international response to gross human rights violations within individual nations has begun to take hold.

I believe that idea needs to be nurtured vigorously and courageously. In some situations the inhumanities have become absolutely intolerable. The persons whose lives have been ruined are all God-beloved. What happens to them matters to God and, as we are responsive to God, to us. Moreover, when countries have disintegrated into anarchy or descended into oppression by militaristic cliques, their possibilities of development as real communities are destroyed. Some order, respectful of human rights, is essential to the realization of community. In that respect Haiti and Bosnia bear watching. Haiti has never had much of a chance to develop as a real community. The international intervention in 1995 brought order, even though it could not in itself bring community. I do not think the intervention in any way has prevented the slow development of community; the real question may be whether the policing function by international forces will be maintained long enough to allow that internal evolution to take solid root.

Perhaps the same thing can be said of Bosnia. The transformation from bloody interethnic warfare to relative peace was dramatic; it remains to be seen what will happen when the "lid" of the NATO presence is removed. Again, the question may be whether the forces would be maintained long enough to allow civil society to develop. In the case of Central and West Africa, observers are hopeful that regional coalitions of nations will be able to facilitate the return of

legitimate government to Sierra Leone and the stabilization and progress of democratic government in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹⁹

One learns, case by case, that no single formula can be applied to every situation. One learns that risks have to be taken and costs assumed. One also learns that utterly deplorable conditions can be changed, and with relatively little further bloodshed. There is a fair amount of evidence that if military power is to be used, it had better be decisive. One observer puts it quite directly:

Half-measures often make sense in domestic politics, but that is precisely because peace already exists. Contending interests accept compromises negotiated in legislatures, adjudicated in courts, and enforced by executives because the state has a monopoly on organized force; the question of "Who rules" is settled. That is the premise of politics in peace. In war, that premise is what the fighting is all about. A middle course in intervention—especially a gradual and symbolic use of force—is likely to do little but muddy both sides' calculations, fuel their hopes of victory, or kill people for principles only indirectly related to the purpose of the war. If deadly force is to make a direct contribution to peace, it must engage the purposes most directly related to war—the determination of borders and the distribution of political power.²⁰

That is hard language to us, theologically. Many would prefer to turn away from the dilemmas of intervention that this suggests. And yet we are left with the consequences of not acting in those situations where even the harsh response of military intervention might have made the difference. Richard Betts's article, from which this quotation has been taken, can remind us that each situation must be addressed in its uniqueness and with careful attention to what can be done as well as what ought to be done—knowing that in the final analysis what ought to be done falls within the range of those things that can be done.

As I contemplate this period in the world's history my mind goes back to the sons and daughters of Wesley in an earlier generation. During World War II, U.S. Methodists (led primarily by Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam) mobilized millions of Christians in a "Crusade for a New World Order" (so the term was not coined by President Bush!). Above all, they sought to avoid the failure of the United States to enter the League of Nations following the First World War—

a failure that contributed greatly to the second great war of this century. The "platform" of the crusade stated:

The peoples of the world must choose between international collaboration, in which lies the possibility of enduring peace; and isolationism, in which lies the certainty of continuing war. As Christians, we choose international collaboration and such international organization as, in the judgment of experts, may be necessary to establish world law and order based upon justice and brotherhood. As Christians, we reject isolationism which subordinates the well-being of the world to national self-interest, and denies the Christian doctrine that all men [and women] are children of one Father and members of one family.²¹

The statement concluded in fine Wesleyan fashion: "Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the World. The World is our Parish."

The hope voiced by the crusade was that the international community, through the new United Nations organization, could be a successful venture in collective security and a sturdy defender of human rights. While the UN has done much good in the half century of its existence, the ventures into collective security and defense of human rights were persistently frustrated by the Cold War in which two superpowers effectively canceled each other out. With the end of the Cold War a whole new era has emerged. Will the world community be up to its challenges? Will the world's Christians, along with other people of good faith, be a strong voice of hope and encouragement?

Theological Light on Dilemmas of "Free Trade"

Again, in relation to the dilemmas of "free trade," a certain theologically informed humility is in order. In my experience, most noneconomists need little tutoring on that. Most people are so thoroughly intimidated by economics that they are content to leave it all to the professionals and the policymakers—which is a sure prescription for disaster. The theological principle of reference is again the well-being of all of God's children, and the health of the God-intended community of humankind—supplemented, of course, by the economic principle laid out with clarity in Psalm 24: "The earth is *the LORD's*, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (KJV, emphasis supplied).

The center of the dilemma is a quite old question of economic ethics: Can we really trust Adam Smith's "invisible hand" to bring about the well-being of all when the individual participants in production and exchange are primarily motivated by their own self-interests? Elsewhere I have argued that that is misplaced trust, particularly if we trust it blindly. The free market can be a danger to individual spirituality, a danger to the poor, and a danger to community if it is allowed to be unchecked. What is good, economically, for some—or even for most—can be very bad for some and for the community as a community.

"The miraculous market mechanism may be a good servant, but it is almost certainly a bad master."²² In 1977, when I penned those words, I was not sure whether the free market could even be a very good servant. In a study of competing economic ideologies, I argued that the serious debate for Christians had to be between democratic socialism (a combination of economic socialism with political democracy) and "social market" capitalism—a form of capitalism in which the democratic state intervenes with regulations, assuring the common good, and with taxation and social welfare programs assuring adequate opportunity and economic well-being for all. I felt then that we simply do not know which of these alternatives should become dominant.

I am prepared to say now that, at least for the foreseeable future, the second alternative is the preferable one. Let the market mechanism do its work, both internally within nations and internationally through increased trade. That really is needed for the stimulation of production, the efficient allocation of resources, and the increased involvement of people who previously have been marginalized.

What we need to work harder at in this era are the mechanisms of public control, both within nations and in the international order. The increasing global "market" in human labor must be mitigated by labor standards, including the hard-won gains by labor in some countries of safe working conditions, adequate income levels, reasonable numbers of hours for work (such as the forty-hour work week), and so on. Similar things can be said about environmental impacts, which also need to become the business of the whole world community.

I am less pessimistic than some (like Professor Cobb) about whether the international community can address such problems effectively. True, we do not have a global political regime. But the

rapidly developing fabric of regional and global agreements do provide the mechanisms for control, if we insist upon their being used.

Through it all, economic life can truly help to forge a real world community.

Conclusion

We could speak of other dilemmas—relating to culture, race, gender, environment, population, and political organization—some to be confronted globally, others more specific to particular nations and regions. Through it all, the question of power continually pressed upon us by unavoidable realities is how shall we lovingly organize the world for community?

It remains true, as the old saying reminds us, that “the devil is in the details.” Perhaps there are also angels lurking there, awaiting our attention to the factual problems we face. Let us hope they are guardian angels, protecting us from ourselves, from our ignorance and our impetuosity. I am sustained in all this by the hope, surely also a legacy of John Wesley, that this is God’s world and God, the Lord of history, can be trusted in the end. For those of us in the Wesleyan tradition, activist as it has always been, that does not mean folding the hands and trusting God to do it all for us. It does mean that our best efforts will be brought to good in the end if we are faithful to the light, as it is given to us to see the light.

30. "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:8-12).

2. *The Doctrine of God and Dilemmas of Power (Wogaman)*

1. Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 22.

2. Sermon 69, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," *Works* 2:569.

3. Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being," §15, *Works* 4:66. In sermon "On the Trinity" (§1, *Works* 2:374), Wesley comments that "persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all. And on the other hand persons may be truly religious who hold many wrong opinions."

4. Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," §§17-18, *Works* 2:385.

5. *Ibid.*, §1, *Works* 2:376.

6. See Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954) for an especially helpful analysis.

7. 1 *Clement* 61.1-2, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 72.

8. Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 49. According to Tillich, "Nobody felt the weight of this question [how compulsory power can be united with love] more than Luther, who had to combine his highly spiritual ethics of love with his highly realistic politics of absolutistic power. Luther answered with the statement that compulsion is the strange work of love. Sweetness, self-surrender, and mercy are, according to him, the proper work of love, bitterness, killing, condemnation are its strange work, but both are works of love." Critics of Luther can argue that a willingness to accept compulsion as a form of love led directly to some of the reformer's excesses—as in his well-known diatribe against the peasants. But such critics must face the question of what *they* would do to counter what is "against love." The usual answer is direct, positive love is itself the most effective counter to all that is "against love." But we shall have to struggle more with that question later in this essay.

9. Leo Tolstoy was one of the few who have been consistent at this point, renouncing all violence, police, jails, property, and the like. See his *My Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1885) and *Tolstoy's Writings*

on *Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence* (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1967). Tolstoy argued that the removal of coercive institutions would liberate the human spirit to blossom in altogether positive ways and that nonviolent civil disobedience (of evil, coercive laws) is the way to achieve this future. His lack of realism and his neglect of the doctrine of original sin have been faulted, but even critics have acknowledged his influence on twentieth-century movements of nonviolence, such as those of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

10. See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). It is not quite accurate to say that Yoder leaves all responsibility in God's hands. Christian responsibility is, however, to be wholly faithful to Jesus' way, to create communities of trusting love, and to serve the world—but not to take responsibility for managing society and definitely not to engage in evil deeds, like violence, in order to restrain evil.

11. Wesley, "The Doctrine of Original Sin," pt. 1, §2.10, *Works* (Jackson) 9:222.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Source: U.S. State Department and journalistic accounts. The numbers of dead and missing in these countries have been so great that precision is impossible. No responsible observers dispute that the killing in these situations has been on a vast scale.

14. The theory of comparative advantage was first set forth by the early nineteenth-century economist David Ricardo. For a clear exposition of the principle, see the various editions of Paul A. Samuelson's *Economics* (International Student Edition, Tokyo: McGraw-Hill Kogakusha, 1973).

15. Samuelson, *Economics*, 669.

16. Peter diCicco, "NAFTA: Killing U.S. Jobs," *The Washington Post* (12 July 1997).

17. John B. Cobb Jr., "Against Free Trade," *Theology and Public Policy* 4.2 (Fall 1992), 12. See also Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), in which Daly and Cobb express particular concerns about the environmental consequences of increased world trade. In a dust jacket blurb on a book broadly supporting increased international trade, Cobb remarks, "Those of us who are fundamentally opposed to the globalization of the economy will not be persuaded by his arguments, but we will have to formulate our objections to increasing international trade more carefully, and we will be helped by Finn to do so more accurately." This appears on the cover of Daniel Finn, *Just Trading: On the Ethics and Economics of International Trade* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

18. Sermon 69, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," Preface §4, *Works* 2:569.

19. For an optimistic report on Central African developments, see Philip Gourevitch, "Letter from the Congo: Continental Shift," in *The New Yorker* (4 August 1997), 42-55.

20. Richard K. Betts, "The Delusion of Impartial Intervention," in *Foreign Affairs* 73.6 (November/December 1994), 31.

21. Quoted in Walter G. Muelder, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), 187.

22. J. Philip Wogaman, *The Great Economic Debate: An Ethical Analysis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 97.

3. Praying "Our Father" and Formation in Love (Bondi)

1. Quoted from "Thoughts on Christian Perfection," *John Wesley*, 288.

2. From Matthew 23:9. Please notice that the context in which this saying is preserved makes it very clear that what Jesus is about here is not the shoring up of the authority of God at the expense of "puny" human beings; it is the dismantling of the everyday structures of authority and respect in order to allow us to stand next to each other in a radical equality of love.

3. John 14:8.

4. Luke 11:1ff.

5. Poemen, Saying 8, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, translated by Benedicta Ward (London: Mowbray, 1981), 167.

6. For an ancient description and classification of the passions, see "The Praktikos" in Evagrius Pontikos, *The Praktikos: Centuries on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970). For a modern discussion, see "The Passions" in my *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1987). For why I believe it is important that we recover this tradition of understanding the passions, see chapter 1 of my *In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

7. For a fuller discussion of what I consider to be the problems around the language of God's fatherhood, and the solutions to those problems, see chapter 1 of my *Memories of God: Theological Reflections on a Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

8. "Before all things the Teacher of peace and Master of unity is unwilling for prayer to be made singly and individually, teaching that he [or she] who prays is not to pray for himself [or herself] alone. For we do not say, *My Father Who art in heaven*, nor *Give me this day my bread*. . . . Prayer with us is public and common; and when we pray we do not pray for one but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one." In *St. Cyprian on the Lord's Prayer*, trans. T. Herbert Bindley (London: SPCK, 1914), 32-33.