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## 8. Professionalism, Breakdown, and Revelation

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### *Philosophical Theology*

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DAVID S. PACINI

When the Reverend Sidney Carlson came to Wiltshire Methodist Church, it was in the midst of collapse. Its principal benefactors had recently died, and the principles by which the church had been run were breaking down. Sid established new procedures for its management and new programs for its membership, effectively revitalizing the church. To all appearances, Sid was, at first, eminently successful in rebuilding the church. But quite suddenly the new principles and programs he introduced seemed to be falling apart. Again, the church was tottering on the brink of collapse. How are we to understand this?

Owing to our predisposition to conceive of ourselves as citizens of a secular world, we are inclined to use secular categories to interpret our experience. Secular categories appear different from religious categories. Indeed, it is for us a commonplace assumption that methods of secular inquiry are distinct from the methods of religious inquiry, the one the negation of the other. For example, secular inquiry, such as that of the social sciences, begins with social experience and the conditions of that experience. Religious inquiries, on the contrary, seem to be anchored in a dimension that is beyond human experience, to which humans respond. When cast this way, our current understanding of “church” appears to reflect a theological posture that emerged at the beginning of the century, that the Word of God is wholly distinct from social experience. Accordingly, reflections issuing from social experience do not lead to God. Instead, they culminate in the deification of social experience, and so in the worship of false gods.

Theological investigations, in sum, cannot arise from the analysis of social conditions.

This way of putting the issue is both right and wrong. What is right about it is the notion that there are distinctions between the analogies of social science and theology. What is wrong is the presumption that sociological analyses do not already contain an implicit theological viewpoint, or that theological analyses are not contingent upon an implicit sociological setting.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I want to bring out the force of this observation by bringing into view the underlying metaphors that are at play in the life of Wiltshire Church and that insinuate themselves into our thinking about its social collapse or breakdown. I have chosen metaphor as a focal point for my analysis owing to the ways in which it reflects the capacity of minds to make connections, transferring modes of regarding, of loving, and of acting from one context to another in order to grasp a sense of the whole.<sup>2</sup> Understood in this way, metaphor is more than a colorful addition to our spoken and written expression. Rather, metaphor is fundamental to the way in which we think and act, introducing coherence to the manifold diversities of experience. Whenever we use a word or phrase to bring different things together in interactions, we engage metaphor.

I am also interested in the relation between a knowing, acting subject and metaphor. Coherent patterns of meaning are ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Within the limits of this essay, it is not possible to expand upon this particular claim or to elucidate its implications. But this much should be said: we have come to think of the character of our time as essentially secular. And though there is a sense in which this is so, there is equally a sense in which it is not. On the surface of our languages, we do indeed appear to be secular. But at a deeper level, the structures within which our languages cohere are fundamentally theological. Thus the sense that our age is marked by secularity is, at best, superficial; the character of our time is marked more by the religious than we have heretofore recognized. For a more detailed treatment of this issue, the interested reader may wish to see my forthcoming essay, "The Character of Modern Religious Thought."

<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive treatment of metaphor, see I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), and Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study of Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

pressed by or for subjects. Thus, identifying the ways in which we understand the relation between subjects and their sense of the whole as it comes into expression in the Wiltshire Church community is essential to our task of interpretation.

To draw these themes together, I shall begin with an assessment of the collapse of Wiltshire Church from the perspective of the underlying metaphor of democratic consensus. This metaphor informs our sense of organizational process, and it was doubtlessly a part of Alan Hyatt's thinking about how the polity of Wiltshire Church had broken down. I shall look, too, at the way in which Sid Carlson's notion of being "professional" defines his relation to this metaphor. Next, I will take up a theological metaphor, "the sovereignty of God" that runs through Sid's preaching. I will attempt to show that this metaphor stands implicitly behind what Sid called "the veneer" of democratic consensus. And I shall point up the way in which the God of Sid's preaching is related *deus ex machina* to Sid's metaphor. But after observing the points at which these metaphors obscure the interplay between theological and sociological factors, I will push us further still. I will argue that the logic of the relation between the knowing, acting subject and the metaphors I have lifted up recapitulates the logic of, and constitutes a factor in, social breakdown or collapse in the larger culture. Grasping this phenomenon in its own right, and the extent to which our ways of relating to metaphor contribute to it, may help us to understand breakdown in the church. It may as well, I conclude, enable us to engage in new ways of theological thinking that grow out of such experience in our congregational lives.

### DEMOCRATIC CONSENSUS

Wiltshire Church had been dominated by the Adams Company, with its principles of paternalism and primogeniture. Before 1970, church officers had enjoyed uninterrupted tenure. Changes in the practices of the church that accompanied the ministry of the Reverend Sidney Carlson included abolishing the tradition of two Sunday morning services in favor of one, the removal of inactive members from the rolls of the church, and the establishment of the

principle that no individual would hold office for more than three years. In order to broaden involvement in church stewardship, the church entered into a program of debt.

Sid's personal style complemented the organizational transition to broader congregational involvement. On his first Sunday in Wiltshire, Sid admonished his congregation for their ineptitude in hymn singing, requiring them to re-sing the opening hymn. The secretary and organist/choirmaster whom Sid had inherited left their posts and he involved the congregation in the search for their replacements. Perceiving his parishioners as "secular agnostics" with "wistful hearts," as "biblically illiterate," and as disillusioned by the failures of the "American dream," Sid honored their desire to expose their children to basic religious values. Church programs focusing upon church school, music, and preaching all grew out of Sid's sensitivity toward the experiences of his congregation. Gradually, the constituency of the church changed from persons who were primarily workers in the Adams Company to persons who were upwardly mobile middle-class executives. Throughout the transition, Sid worked adroitly to retain the backing of the majority of the congregation and its votes. In this way, at least, one could say that Sid succeeded in altering the experience of Wiltshire Church from dependency upon the Adams Company to self-sufficiency. Indeed, one might argue that the focus upon democratic consensus had an emancipatory effect upon the life of the church.

From such a reading, it would appear that the Wiltshire Church program collapsed when the process of democratic consensus broke down. One event that highlights this is the church retreat. Essential to the process of democratic consensus is the free and equal participation of all parties in communication. Impediments to such freedom can only be tolerated within a range that still satisfies the generalizable interests of the participants.<sup>3</sup> When,

<sup>3</sup>For extended commentary upon this point, see: Jürgen Habermas, "A Social-Scientific Concept of Crisis," in *Legitimation Crises*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 1-31; "On Systematically Distorted Communication," *Inquiry*, 13 (1970), pp. 205-218; "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence," *Inquiry*, 13, pp. 360-75; *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

at the retreat, the concerns of a growing number of parishioners about the nature of the church were cut off in favor of discussion about staffing concerns, the process of democratic consensus broke down: staffing concerns did not reflect the generalizable interests of those who were actively pursuing questions about the nature and identity of the church.

Sid's intervention at the retreat brings into focus his relation to the metaphor of democratic consensus. Sid understood himself to be a "professional," meaning by this one who is able to manage successfully the process of democratic consensus. He came to Wiltshire Church with the charge from his bishop to "shape it up." He expected that his congregation would "push back or shut up." He was not afraid to confront the initially disaffected parishioners who were seeking his removal. Nor was he reticent about altering the discussion at the retreat from general questions about the nature of the church to specific questions about staffing and other professional matters. Indeed, his sense of professionalism was for him a strong suit, but it was as well the cause of his downfall. By putting the emphasis upon his professional capacity to manage the process of democratic consensus, rather than upon his ordination to be sensitive to the context of the process, Sid lost touch. Subsequently, speculation centered upon the person of Sid Carlson. Was Sid's aberrant behavior a reflection of his mid-life crisis, of his anxiety over economic instability, or of his desire for private housing? Why did Sid feel that his parishioners didn't give a damn about him? And what was actually at stake in his personal conflicts with various members of the church? Insofar as the church community sensed Sid's loss of control, suspicion about the nature of his "professionalism" emerged. To some, Sid appeared to be disillusioned with the tradition and practice of his denomination, insufficiently "spiritual" and "theological," uninterested in "fellowship and support," and even devoid of interest in social outreach.

Now the difficulty that accrues to the use of the metaphor of democratic consensus is that it promotes an interpretive view whose focus is process rather than content. To put that differently, the metaphor of democratic consensus unites a formal principle—majority rule—with legitimate social conduct. Because the princi-

ple of majority rule is self-referential, no appeals to external authorities are required to adjudicate social conduct: the principle of democratic consensus and its practice are co-incident.<sup>4</sup> From a historical perspective, it is easy to see that the institutionalization of this principle at the outset of modernity had an emancipatory and secularizing effect. Human conduct now would be judged from the perspective of self-legislated principles rather than from the hierarchical principles of feudal society and its church.<sup>5</sup> One could say that this historic transition from feudalism to self-sufficiency was effectively re-enacted in Wiltshire Church. But the inward turn toward self-sufficiency is simultaneously a turn away from the social world.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the ideal of self-legislation assumes greater reality than the specific social context to which the ideal is addressed.

Although the formal approach to human conduct is one way of understanding social practice, it is not the only one. Other approaches attribute greater weight to the issue of the content of the procedure, but these do not come into focus with the metaphor of democratic consensus. When viewed historically, this apparent lacuna in the metaphor of democratic consensus assumes special significance in our reflections about Wiltshire Church.

The development of the principle of democratic consensus, owing to its independence from external religious authorities, precipitated the emergence of what we call secular culture. That culture, of which we are a part, is preoccupied with organization. But it is ill equipped to deal with matters of content—especially religious content.

The dimension of religious content cannot be divorced from the interpretation of church life, however. For this reason, the meta-

<sup>4</sup>Jürgen Habermas, "Legitimation Problems in the Modern State," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 183-88. The reader is referred as well to Jürgen Habermas, "On the Logic of Legitimation Problems," in *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, pp. 95-143.

<sup>5</sup>This is the view especially of Max Weber, of Niklas Luhmann, and of Jürgen Habermas, although there are numerous others who have embraced it.

<sup>6</sup>This insight has its origins in Fichte and in G. W. F. Hegel; a more recent expression of this insight may be found in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), esp. chaps. 4 and 5.

phor of democratic consensus takes us part of the way, but not far enough, in the interpretation of Wiltshire Church. It does not, for example, tell us what were the genuine differences of religious viewpoint among the various groups who were unsettled about the direction in which the church was going. Nor does it help us to see the extent to which Sid is becoming, like his predecessors, a tired old man. It is interesting that Sid himself confessed that the decorum of the church and the process of democratic consensus was itself a veneer, behind which stood something else that was really operative. The theological metaphor, to which we now turn, brings this other dimension into view.

### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The theological metaphor of the "sovereignty of God" is operative in a subtle but continuous way in Sid's preaching, in his hymnody, and in the psalters that he uses.

On his first day at Wiltshire, Sid declared "God is in his heaven and all is well with the world." Over the years, Sid amplified this view in his sermons:

God made the heavens and the earth and his sovereignty is never usurped. It is God's will so to turn history as to "put down the mighty from their seats" and to exalt "them of low degree."

The love of God reaches out to each of us locked in our loneliness and separation. That love comes with power capable of redeeming the times of stress and peril through which we from time to time must move . . . in fact, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Hallelujah!

The fulfillment of God's power needs us. . . . Every one of us here is the end product of history. We are the focal point at this time of the creative forces of God.

Blessed are those with a living faith in the reality of the divine world and such interior fellowship with it that amid the alien pressures of the world they can live for the approbation of the highest.

It is only through the grace of God and the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit that any of us can hope for the grace of salvation.

Turn to me, O God, prayed the Psalmist. But God turned to him even in the man's seeking. We need to root ourselves in something that is greater than we ourselves.

God, so the record runs, said to him [Ezekiel]: "Get up upon thy feet, O son of man, and I will speak to thee." God cannot do business with people in a supine condition. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, uttered these encouraging words: "God has not given us the spirit of timidity, but of power and of love and of self-control." . . . The groundwork of our grit and determination is lodged in our understanding of ourselves as creatures of God.

Reinforced by his hymnody (e.g., "O Worship the King, All Glorious Above," "Rise Up O Men of God," "March On O Soul, with Strength," "Spirit of Life in This New Dawn," "Give Us the Faith That Follows On," "Come Down O Love Divine") and his selection of psalters (e.g., "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye Righteous! Praise befits the upright," "Preserve me O God, for in thee I take refuge," "Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the Royal Son!"), Sid's theological metaphor of the sovereignty of God consists, in rough outline, in the conviction that God is at the helm, controlling the outcome of history. Through God's grace humans may exert self-control, rise up upon their feet, and do business with God. Only in this way can God's creative forces redeem the times of stress and peril; only in this way will God's plan be fulfilled in the course of history.

This metaphor of the sovereignty of God affords us a view of the content of the process at Wiltshire Church. In broad strokes, it fills in the backdrop of what Sid thought ought to happen. Through programs of self-help, humans do get to their feet, do conduct business with God, and do retain some sense of control in a world in which they are uncertain about the extent to which they have control. This view was borne out as well in Sid's programs for individuals, even though he was suspicious of their motives for involvement. Nonetheless, Sid had seen such outreach as part of his larger professional ambition of getting people back on their feet who were having trouble. Similarly, his program for the elderly, even though basically programs to feed senior citizens of Wiltshire Church, embodied the intent of keeping them on their feet so that they could do business with God. So, too, trying to provide a better Christian education program for the young people who were the future of the church reflected Sid's aim of enabling people to do business with God.



Sid frequently states the relation of God to his theological metaphor. The economy of history, for Sid, is not divine. God is clearly Other, one who can turn toward us, one who can intervene—"putting down the mighty" and "exalting those of low degree." Those are times of stress and peril, which God, through intervention, can redeem. The objectivity of God, understood as the sovereignty of God, is the fulfillment of history. But the subjectivity of God, the God who elects to intervene, is not God immanent or God with us. The subjectivity of God is tacitly understood to be *deus ex machina*, the manager who intervenes to reinforce our "self-control," our "grit and determination," and who intercedes when we are "locked in our loneliness and separation."

By virtue of the metaphor of the sovereignty of God and of the concomitant assumption about the relation of God to the divine economy, it becomes possible for us to achieve a clearer sense of what Sid thought the content of the church program should be. Moreover, the peculiar character of the metaphor and its assumption of God's relation to the divine economy to which Sid alludes is wholly co-incident with Sid's understanding of the metaphor of democratic consensus and his relation to it. Both Sid and God are managers. For Sid, the emphasis falls upon the success of managing the process of democratic consensus. For God, the emphasis falls upon managing the divine economy. Both Sid and God are to direct the process toward goals they think appropriate. For Sid, the goals are masked by the church's metaphor of democratic consensus; for God, the goals are masked by the church's metaphor of the sovereignty of God.

Once the links between the metaphors of democratic consensus and the sovereignty of God and the roles of professional and *deus ex machina* come into view, it is not difficult to see how the connections in Sid's mind, and in the minds of many at Wiltshire Church, committed Sid to the stance of an outsider, like God, whose task is to raise up other people and to align them with the will of God. For Sid, the stance of the outsider manifested itself in numerous ways. His surreptitious entry into Wiltshire under a pseudonym, his scolding of the congregation, his unilateral termination of staff, his contempt for the choir, his manipulation of denominational church polity, and his dissolution of existing

church practices are all reflections of this stance.

Grasping the extent to which Sid stood outside the church adds another dimension to our understanding of Sid and of what was going on in the church. Such understanding also affords us a glimpse into why the programs broke down. For this notion of the sovereignty of God is not something that was rooted in Wiltshire, or that grew out of the experience of Wiltshire. The members of Wiltshire Church were "wistful hearts," secular agnostics, and "biblical illiterates." Sid brought this metaphor from the outside to Wiltshire. A more formal way of putting this point is that Sid's theological metaphor is not rooted in the sociohistorical conditions of the church. For this reason, the metaphor appears to stand over against the social world of Wiltshire. Again, the parallels between the secular metaphor of democratic consensus and the theological metaphor of the sovereignty of God are striking. The secular metaphor assumes that the religious is something wholly distinct. This religious view assumes the same posture, that the religious is something distinct, not from culture as we know it. Consequently, we are now more aware of the content that informs the program of the church, but this is not the content that grows out of the actual life of the church. Insofar as the church is implicitly guided by this outside metaphor, it is unable to sustain its program, because it reflects neither the church's own identity and direction nor the church's own growth and awareness of the tensions that occupy our culture.

We may summarize all this by saying that the theological metaphors that our generation avoids steer our thought and conduct as much as the secular metaphors that we accept.

### **BREAKDOWN**

At this point, it is worth recalling the central thread of my argument. Discussing the underlying metaphors of clergy and laypersons helps us to interpret the life experiences of Wiltshire Church. Moreover, inasmuch as patterns of meaning are expressions for and by subjects, it is essential to determine what relation obtains implicitly between subjects and metaphor. Then it is possible to discern the extent to which theological hypotheses are distinguished in practice from sociological factors. In Wiltshire

Church, the secular metaphor of democratic consensus, with its accompanying relation of *deus ex machina* that incorporates the subjectivity of God, broadens its focus to include ideological content. But both metaphors fail to link social context and theoretical views in a convincing interpretation of practice.

It is not sufficient to stop here. We have not yet come to an adequate understanding of why Wiltshire Church is again tottering on the brink of collapse. We are not yet able to account for the belief that the church was a one-man show. Nor can we account for the paradox that Sid, like his predecessors, is now getting older and contemplating retirement, practicing the arts of preaching, visiting the sick, and burying the dead. Finally, we have not yet found a sufficient interpretation for the differing visions of the nature of the church and the growing sense that the congregation needs to retain the services of a consultant. To understand all of this, we need to think in a more theoretical vein than we have until now.

Few social phenomena are as difficult to assess as breakdown. Breakdown, as we have seen, is a collapse of social relations. But it is, as well, the collapse of patterns of coherence; the inadequacy of basic metaphors that we use to understand social relations surely contributes to our quandary. What may have been suspected but needs to be said clearly is that the phenomenon of breakdown surfacing in Wiltshire Church is manifest as well in the larger society—in families, in communities, in states, and in nations. All of us have to contend with breakdown in one way or another, although none of us is suitably prepared for the task. As we have noted, metaphors can establish connections, or deepen our experience by envisioning more encompassing unities. We now must explore the significant power of those metaphors in our lives, especially in our attempt to contend with the dissolution of familiar patterns of relationship.

Metaphors function for us as a way to orient us to our experience. This orientation has to do with what is occurring at present. It has to do also with our ways of relating to our past. Our metaphors reflect our deepest beliefs, aspirations, and accomplishments in Western society. We hold dear such metaphors as the kingdom of God, which is a religious metaphor, or the land of the free, which is a sociopolitical metaphor, or the age of anxiety, which is

a psychological metaphor, as ways of understanding the temper of our times.

We are so accustomed to using metaphor that we don't realize how often we use it, the extent to which we use it, or its importance for our daily conduct. Rather, we take metaphors for granted. When we try to talk about metaphors, some people become confused, claiming that they don't know what metaphors are all about. Experience, however, belies this claim. That metaphor is an omnipresent principle of our thinking can be shown by looking at our situation.

In recent decades we have begun to face troubling questions with the metaphors that we use. The war in Vietnam brought us the metaphors of the light at the end of the tunnel and peace with honor. How many of us lived our lives in the belief that it was just a little bit longer before that horror would come to an end, transformed, finally, into a just cause? Similarly, the events in the Falkland Islands, South Africa, Ireland, and the Middle East have made us wonder about the metaphor of political sovereignty. Our belief in the metaphor of a democratic free society contributed to our outrage when United States diplomats were held captive in Iran. We were ill disposed to ask what the infusion of Western metaphors, practices, and gadgetry meant for a non-Western country. When members of the civil rights movement began to insist upon black power and pointed out the complicity of white liberals in the continuing practices of racism, we began to wonder about our metaphor of "freedom and justice for all." When the women's movement pointed out that we had fashioned God in the image of the white male patriarch, we began to wonder whether we could ever again easily hold the metaphor of God the Father. In short, many events of our lives in recent years have called into question numerous metaphors that we have taken for granted as ways of understanding the course of our lives. Some, in response to these questions, have attempted to reinstate so-called traditional values. Others have tried to find new, more encompassing metaphors. But all of us have to acknowledge the metaphors we employ, and all of us have come to feel the malaise caused by challenge to the metaphors we have used to orient ourselves.

We begin to comprehend more fully, perhaps, the import of

metaphor for our lives when we recognize that certain among our metaphors assume for us a central position, around which other metaphors coalesce. We refer to such a configuration as a world view, meaning by this a pattern of ordering that characterizes our sense of objective totality. Thus, the world view of democratic consensus shapes what we mean by the metaphor of freedom and justice for all, just as the metaphor of the sovereignty of God shapes what we mean by the metaphor of redemptive grace. Moreover, the distinctive ordering of a world view functions as a principle to which we appeal in order to justify our actions. Metaphors that function as world views, then, not only orient our conduct, but also incorporate principles of legitimation to which we appeal as warrants for our conduct.

Throughout history, of course, metaphorical world views have changed. The transitions accompanying the breakdown we experience today have prompted some to suggest that nothing more is required of us than has been required of generations in other historical periods: we need to adopt more realistic metaphors that reflect the temper of our time. Some would even say that, if we were to develop more realistic metaphors, we would be able to stabilize our present situation. We would not feel shaken by threats to our world views and so to fundamental ways of orienting and legitimating our lives. These observations seem sound, but there is a sense in which they are not sound at all.

Though it is true that world views undergo change, it is not true that we really know how metaphors change or why some assume the role of world view. Thus, to suggest that what we need is more realistic metaphors is to engage in sleight of hand. We don't make metaphors by introducing a rule regarding the manner in which they are to function. Nor can we make metaphors more inclusive by appealing to some unstated principle of inclusion. For example, the metaphors of the social sciences begin with a keen sensitivity toward culture-specific expressions. They then move beyond those expressions to lawlike generalizations and probability formulations with strong predictive powers. In this way, the metaphors of the social sciences achieve, ostensibly, greater inclusivity. But what kind of inclusivity? What does it mean to say that we can develop metaphors that are governed by laws? For a law

to be law it must be always and everywhere efficacious; otherwise it is not a law. If a law is always the case, it is so on its own merits alone, and not with reference to human beliefs, intentions, reasons, fears, and the like.<sup>7</sup> But is this not a very odd way for us to conceive of human behavior? Does not the view that there are fundamental laws, which operate independent of human beliefs, reasons, intentions, fears, pains, and the like, but which are the key to interpreting human life, seem impoverished?

Odd or impoverished as it may be, there are those who hold such "inclusive" metaphors to be useful devices. To what does holding such a metaphor implicitly commit us? Implicitly we are bound to the notion that human life is essentially mechanistic, that is, that life processes take place according to mechanical sequences that admit of predictability. Worse, if we think that this is true of life, then we are committing ourselves to a preoccupation with social mechanisms and the way in which they function, while averting our gaze from questions about values, beliefs, intentions, and the like. So if we think that metaphors can be made more inclusive by virtue of some covert appeal to the formulation of lawlike generalizations, we are aligning ourselves with a very narrow view of life indeed.

This narrowness is one of the key factors that comes into play in breakdown. If we become preoccupied with a world view that we think is inclusive and all-embracing, without recognizing the extent to which it is simply a reflection of our own notion of inclusivity, then we are implicitly excluding all whose world views differ from our own. Moreover, in the case of the so-called secular society in which we find ourselves, the use of such metaphors that claim this form of universality reflects nothing other than the world view of the middle class, ordered by its penchant for management and its conviction that life processes are to be

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<sup>7</sup>For systematic exploration of this point, see: W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), esp. chap. 6. The reader is referred, as well, to the views of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), chaps. 7 and 8; Charles Taylor, "Hermeneutics and Politics," in *Critical Sociology*, ed. Paul Connerton (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976); and Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), esp. chaps. 1 and 5.

managed according to standards of predictability and lawlike generalization. Although this world view has its origins in the Enlightenment and historically is the basis for the rise of the middle class, it is nonetheless a world view whose legitimation principles of management have been employed by the middle class to safeguard its interests. Oftentimes this has meant exploitation of working class people, through subtle reinforcement of their bondage to their station in life. By imputing status to ourselves and thereby giving ourselves a form of leverage over the lives of others, the phenomenon of social breakdown is, in part, set into motion.

A corollary of this is that institutions and lifestyles that appeal to the world view of the middle class are committing the same kinds of errors as individuals who subscribe to this world view. Insofar as institutions reinforce anonymity, the responsibility for their role in breakdown is more difficult to identify. But the corporate force of metaphor is certainly pervasive.

No single one of these factors, but their interplay, constitutes the social phenomenon of breakdown. The inadequacy of world views and related metaphors to orient us in the face of complex experiences generates questions about the ways in which we orient ourselves. These questions, in turn, precipitate the search for more inclusive metaphors. And our search for more inclusive metaphors brings us face to face with the ways in which our conception of inclusivity commits us repeatedly to narrow views of life. Confusion is rampant in the collapse of institutional forms of twentieth-century social life. Family, community, church, and nation exhibit the phenomenon of breakdown. The extent of the collapse is underscored by the shrill claims of conservative religious and political groups that are attempting to reimpose that posture as traditional values. In fact, what they advocate are simply old world views that purport to give us security. What these world views negate, however, is the multiplicity of lifestyles to which we are heir and of which we have become unavoidably aware.

In what ways do these theoretical remarks bear upon our capacity to understand breakdown in Wiltshire Church and to discern new avenues for theological thinking? This question hinges, in key part, upon our readiness to concede that our metaphors fail

to bring about the greater portion of their declared ends.

At one level, the metaphors of democratic consensus and the sovereignty of God fail because they are inadequately conceived. The metaphor of democratic consensus, for example, lifts up its pattern of ordering as a principle of legitimation, while simultaneously suppressing its function as world view. Specifically, its preoccupation with form that is self-sufficient overrides its recognition of its determinative role for other metaphors. The sovereignty of God is thus tacitly determined by the metaphor of democratic consensus. What this points up is that the attempt to separate a principle of legitimation from world view falters; although we have taken over this assumption, which has been shown to be characteristic of modernity, in the belief that it is justified, it is wrongheaded.<sup>8</sup> Metaphors and principles of legitimation or obligation are co-eval. In the absence of this recognition, patterns of social relations are bound to embody the same mistaken assumption. The sense that Wiltshire Church is a "one-man show," that there is no room for differing world views, and that Sid has become a "tired old man" reflects this assumption, as does the growing sense that a consultant is needed. Neither the metaphor of democratic consensus nor the metaphor of the sovereignty of God can bring about or sustain a comprehensive interpretation of the life of Wiltshire Church.

At a deeper level, the recurring problem in Wiltshire Church's use of metaphors is the way in which they tacitly understand their relation to metaphors. They, like us, suppose that metaphors are made according to some preconceived notion of inclusivity. Indeed, we frequently act as if metaphors lead us to some hidden central principle, to some basic underlying order of life. To be sure, the metaphors we use embody patterns of coherence that inform the course of human events. Yet when we think of metaphors as a means of access to independent underlying principles, we are also inclined to suppose that our relation to metaphor is simultaneously a relation to the principle that orders the course of human

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<sup>8</sup>The distinction I am challenging here has been drawn by Habermas, if I understand him correctly, in "Legitimation Problems in the Modern State," pp. 179-83.



events. In this way, we imagine ourselves as getting to the center of things. This understanding of our knowledge of principles we express by means of another metaphor: the center of meaning.

However innocent that metaphor may appear to be, it is, in fact, anything but innocent. We assume that our metaphors are heuristic devices, enabling us to identify fundamental life-ordering principles that are actually at work. In order to identify such a principle, such a center, we tacitly think of ourselves as standing over against that center, looking at it objectively, naming it amongst other principles as "the" principle that is governing life. When we adopt the standpoint of the outside observer who is picking which of these principles is the actual principle that is ordering life, we are implicitly positioning ourselves outside of life.

This is a very curious place in which to stand. We are claiming that somehow we are independent from life structures. We are also claiming, implicitly, that the life principle is independent of life structures. For example, when we survey a situation such as Wiltshire and claim to identify the life principle that was operative, even as we survey the collapse of Wiltshire Church, we are suggesting that, somehow, that life principle continues to operate even independent of the life structure in which it was supposed to be functioning. Simultaneously, we are standing independent of that life situation, looking at it. So both we and the life principle now turn out to be independent!

Now this way of presenting the problem of our relation to metaphors is nothing other than a more general expression of the forms of relatedness to metaphors that we encountered earlier, namely, "professionalism" and "deus ex machina." Insofar as it depicts accurately a more diffuse assumption about our relation to metaphors in which we all participate, it helps us to see the extent to which the members of Wiltshire Church, and in a larger sense, all of us, play into the phenomenon of breakdown. This way of relating to metaphors is, at bottom, self-serving.

Let me elucidate one way in which this is so. The problem with the claim that both we and the life principle are independent, aside from the difficulty of how we would ever make good such a claim, is that we are presuming a kind of absolute sovereignty for

both ourselves and the life principle. We are suggesting that the life principle is sovereign because it does not collapse when structures collapse. We confer sovereignty upon ourselves, because somehow we are on the outside of the structure that collapsed. We and the life principle turn out to be one and the same. This is nothing other than a way of imposing our view upon the structure from the safety of an outside standpoint.

To me, this suggests that the notion that we can have an objective report of breakdown is a distortion. In breakdown, which is the loss of a center, any interpretation imposes a new center. It is the center of the person who is looking at the structure. In a very subtle way, our imposition of centers upon structures undergirds our aspirations to universal empire over the affairs of life, reflecting our bourgeois orientation. It is, therefore, inherently opposed to the sensitive interpretation of persons whose culture, position, and life experiences differ radically from our own. Again, our metaphors fail to achieve their avowed intent.

Breakdown, then, is a sign of our times, of our imperiousness, and of our pretentiousness. What we are called to is a way of being faithful that encourages us to step outside the confines into which our world views deliver us. But this step, as I hope this account has made clear, is more difficult than is generally imagined.

Doubtless, it will be said that I, to maintain this theses, am also standing outside, as an objective observer witnessing breakdown. But that would be said wrongly. I am as much a victim of the patterns of our language, our institutional practices, and our patterns of conduct as is Sid or anybody else in our culture. Even so, we still turn to the church in an attempt to bring faithful witness to the gospel. From this an important theological insight emerges. It is not finally our way of understanding the kingdom to which the gospel points. Rather, the gospel points repeatedly to the in-breaking of the kingdom that overturns our ways of understanding. In stating that we are all caught then in the phenomenon of breakdown, I am urging the view that it may be possible for us to catch some glimpse of the in-breaking of the kingdom in our own time. I say a glimpse because I think that our predilection to hold

fast to metaphors that are self-serving is greater than our faithfulness to the God who would be God in spite of us and because of us.

This breakdown may be disquieting but it is also a sign of hope. We may perhaps begin to reconceive of our ministry not primarily in terms of professionalism and of the various resources of the professional, be they ethnography, sociology, organization development, psychology, or, indeed, theology. In the proper light—which, as yet, has not been determined—each of these may be instructive. But of greater importance, our responsibility is to a calling that cannot be neatly packaged in the metaphors of our time. This is the distinctiveness of theological thinking that needs to be understood and reclaimed. To respond faithfully to revelation as a calling, and to think deeply about its meaning, may well mean that we are for our own generation sentinels, standing guard, watching over a church that has grown weary with the insipid metaphor of our age. To abandon the bourgeois dimensions of professionalism may enable us to peer out into the darkness of the night and to make bold our attempt to discern the as yet unnameable, proclaiming itself both in our midst and beyond.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR RELATED READING

Connerton, Paul. *Critical Sociology: Selected Readings*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1976.

A superb anthology of readings that traces themes of critical thought from Hegel and Marx through such contemporary figures as Habermas and Marcuse.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

———. *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

Both volumes by Habermas are difficult going, because they present working papers that Habermas has shared with colleagues at the Max Planck Institute and presuppose a working knowledge of numerous theories that are not widely known in United States circles. Nonetheless, with the aid of the introductory material in both volumes, Habermas's views reward the patient reader.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

A provocative assessment of the reasons behind contemporary moral disagreements, with far-reaching theological insights.

Tipton, Steven M. *Getting Saved from the Sixties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

A model of sociological inquiry, guided by philosophical and theological reflection.