



## **A Post-Enlightenment *Imago Hominis*: The Theological Anthropology of Douglas John Hall**

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The real problem is not the ‘death of god’ but...the death of man.’<sup>1</sup> In these words Douglas John Hall sums up the dual aspect of his entire theological enterprise. First, he describes the demise of the Western imperial self, an anthropology growing out of the eighteenth-nineteenth century Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, having its basis in a metaphor of mastery. Second, he seeks to work out an anthropology based instead on a metaphor of receptivity.

It is Hall’s contention, as it was Reinhold Niebuhr’s, that our understanding of human nature and destiny shapes our social and political theories and our view of eschatology. An anthropology rooted in the metaphor of mastery and the concomitant notion that individuals are essentially good and innocent is both utopian and noneschatological. It is utopian because it assumes that individuals and communities are perfectible, that evil can simply be engineered out of existence. It is noneschatological because it understands history as a redemptive process. The “not yet” of eschatology is simply collapsed into the “already” of history. Early in this century, William Hocking summarized this view as one by which we become for ourselves the objects of artful reconstruction and the judge of our own nature and its possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

Hall’s search for a new anthropology is a search also for a new social and

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas John Hall, *The Reality of the Gospel and the Unreality of the Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 98.

<sup>2</sup>William Ernest Hocking, *Human Nature and Its Remaking* (New Haven: Yale University, 1923) 6. Hocking was a professor of philosophy at Harvard University.

political theory cognizant of its own limitations. The Enlightenment drive for autonomy, Hall argues, freed humanity from what Kant described as humanity’s self-incurred tutelage. Yet autonomy itself contains a lie: the notion that we are wise enough and good enough for self-mastery and world-mastery. Far from being the realm of perfectibility, history “is the territory of hungry, selfish, fearful man.”<sup>3</sup> Since Hall writes with a view toward the North American context, I will first describe briefly how Enlightenment philosophy shaped the North American ethos. Then, secondly, I will sketch the contours of Hall’s post-Enlightenment anthropology.

## I. THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND NORTH AMERICAN ETHOS

### 1. *America: The Myth of Redemptive History*

Immanuel Kant defined enlightenment as follows:

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!" That is the motto of enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

This confident belief in autonomy as a law to the self went hand-in-glove with the belief that reason, unencumbered by religious and philosophical dogmatism, could discern the laws of nature, eradicate evils of all sorts including pain and suffering, bring about the perfection of individuals and society, and ensure happiness for all people.

Enlightenment's utopian principle was the idea that freedom would guarantee progress in society. Calvin's theocratic ideal would be realized in a secularized version in history. But America, not Europe, turned out to be the setting for Enlightenment's *magnum opus*, its greatest creation. Millennial and utopian themes permeate American rhetoric and consciousness. America is the New World, a place of essential innocence, a city set on a hill. By many in the eighteenth century it was perceived as the *telos* of the world historical drama. John Locke proclaimed, "In the beginning all the world was America."<sup>5</sup> The hero of this New World adventure was

an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritance of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his unique and inherent resources.<sup>6</sup>

Ernest Tuveson calls this American Adamic way of thinking a form of millennial-utopianism.<sup>7</sup> While Augustine had taught that the Kingdom of God is a transcendent reality not to be confused with the earthly kingdom, the American myth of origin reversed Augustine and proclaimed the Kingdom of God within history. Augustine's earthly city could never become the heavenly city short of a

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<sup>3</sup>So says cultural historian Joseph Anthony Amato II, *Guilt and Gratitude* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood, 1982) 72.

<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *On History*, ed. by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975) 3.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 5.

<sup>6</sup>R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971) 5.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980) 26-27.

radical and miraculous transformation of human nature itself. In the eighteenth century the Augustinian theology of history was supplanted by the myth of redemptive history and its corollary that Americans, as the special beneficiaries of God's providence, would become

humanity's tutor in the pilgrimage toward perfection.<sup>8</sup>

Humanity had become its own eschaton. Love toward God became love toward humanity; the vicarious sacrifice of Christ became the idea of human sacrifice for the sake of humanity's perfectibility; and the hope of eternal life became the hope of being remembered by posterity.<sup>9</sup> In short, in place of having to wait for the promised fulfillment of a future transcendent felicity, the Enlightenment self-understanding fostered a new consciousness of an historically attainable one. America's mission became that of bearing to the rest of the world a universal redemptive history.

Even in the middle of the 20th century, American leaders viewed American expansionism as a kind of mythic missionary duty.<sup>10</sup> American expansion and Soviet containment became an ideological consensus, shared by liberals and conservatives alike, that shaped American foreign policy following the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> This messianism of a republic "heavily thickening into empire"<sup>12</sup> was incarnated above all by John Foster Dulles.

Synthesizing the moral imperialism of his missionary background with the necessity of economic expansion of his banking experience, Dulles announced that he would liberate the Russians and Chinese from "atheistic international communism" and usher in the American Century.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. *American Exceptionalism: A Messiah Nation Dragged into Court*

This notion of American exceptionalism was challenged most vigorously in the 1960s. For many, racial violence at home and the violence in Vietnam laid bare a tragic waste in American domestic and foreign policy. An imagined innocence was challenged by the unflattering claims of the New Left that Americans, too, are part of Augustine's *massa damnata*, tragically involved in humankind's evil miscalculations. A destabilized Protean universe meant that innocence was complicity in evil, and generosity in foreign policy was now exposed as tragic hubris. In the minds of the New Left, a messianic America had become a threat to the world's future, and the liberal agenda of the New Deal, the New Frontier, and the Great Society a failed project, epitomized by the American general in Vietnam who claimed that it was "necessary to destroy a village in order to save it."<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the language of American exceptionalism did not simply disappear;

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952) 71.

<sup>9</sup>For this see Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University, 1969) 130.

<sup>10</sup>See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell, 1962) 206.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Godfrey Hodgson, "The Ideology of the Liberal Consensus" in *A History of Our Time*, ed. Wm. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff (Oxford: Oxford University, 1987) 102-103.

<sup>12</sup>William Leuchtenberg, *A Troubled Feast: American Society Since 1945* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) 15.

<sup>13</sup>Williams, *American Diplomacy*, 275-6.

<sup>14</sup>Amato, *Guilt and Gratitude*, 160.

it continued to find a voice in the rhetoric of the American Legion and in the consensus of those in power. It also found a voice, however, in the rhetoric of the New Left. The assumption of New Deal liberalism had been that fundamental changes in society would create new people. The state

was looked to as a benevolent agent of social change.<sup>15</sup> The New Left now turned this New Deal liberalism on its head by arguing that only the transformation of individuals could guarantee a new society,<sup>16</sup> thereby reintroducing the notion of American exceptionalism through the back door.

The New Left, it turns out, also had roots in Enlightenment philosophy and, to its dismay, discovered that evil cannot simply be expurgated from human nature even by a political *tour de force*. The assassinations of the Kennedys, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, the continuing violence in Vietnam, and the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago all made it clear that violence, far from being an aberration, was an abiding element in American history. Revisionist historians argued that the American experience had its roots in violence, genocide, and imperialism. The messiah nation had been dragged into court in the 1960s, tried, and convicted by its own progeny in the name of its own ideals.

After Richard Nixon's election in 1968, and especially after the ending of the war in Vietnam, ethical debate over America's national purpose was muted. The 1970s were an era of privatization, in which virtue tends to succumb to commerce.<sup>17</sup> Private interest presupposes the *laissez faire* principle of Adam Smith that pursuit of individual interests contributes to the general good. Conservatives, for whom government itself was the problem, argued that social change ought to be left to occur naturally, that is, without government intervention. They regarded acquisition of wealth, unfettered competition, and the growth of corporate monopolies as positive forces which ought to be left alone in a free market economy.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Individualism and the Atomization of Society

Conservatives and liberals alike are committed to an "ontological individualism" which presupposes that individuals are the primary reality to which community is secondary or derivative.<sup>19</sup> Robert Bellah argues that this has resulted in a radical atomization of society in which all public criteria of right and wrong are abandoned in favor of radical private validations.<sup>20</sup> The sense of fundamental relatedness, of a larger community of corporate memory and hope, is gone. There is no shared sense of an inherited past and no sense of common purpose in the present.

Christopher Lasch describes this situation as one in which individualism, while extremely potent, is also

a way of life that is dying—the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all

<sup>15</sup>Hodgson, "Liberal Consensus," 112.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Lerner, "The Legacy of the Sixties for the Politics of the Nineties," in *Tikkun* (Jan.-Feb. 1988).

<sup>17</sup>Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968) 32.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. J. Philip Wogaman, *Economics and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 16-18.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985) 276.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self.<sup>21</sup>

This narcissistic self is a minimal or Stoic self with a survivalist mentality which retreats from the public world and long-term commitments and searches for invulnerability from pain and loss “in perfect equilibrium and union with its surroundings.”<sup>22</sup> The cultivation of self, so characteristic of our time, is but a superficially optimistic form of resignation: “It is the faith of those without faith.”<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. *Nationalism: An Anthropology of Mastery*

Why does this anthropology of mastery still retain such a hold on the modern consciousness? Joseph Amato, tracing the Enlightenment ideal from its inception among European elite to its contemporary expression in North America, argues that the ideal of a rational and just society had no pure cultural transmitters. The ideal thus passed from the *philosophes* to the masses by means of class, nation, mass democracy, and consumer culture; a transmission in which modern people redefined themselves and the powerful influence of the modern nation-state caused folkways to become stateways.<sup>24</sup> Nationalism became the supreme shaper and arbiter of identity and value, as peasants were turned into Frenchmen, Germans, and Italians. The Enlightenment ideal of rationality, a just society, and progressive hope had been transmuted into the introverted interests of class and nation and the bloody crucible of war.

The Great War taught cruel truths, truths that contradicted all progressive hopes. Humanity had not transcended war as a means of settling human differences. Reason and philanthropy, though powerful in their influence upon mind and institutions, did not command states, especially states at war.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, since material life improved profoundly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, allowing many to live longer and more comfortably, modern nation-states have been perceived as the source of both the good and the demonic.

Given the fact, then, that the modern nation-state is so pervasive and so determinative of value, it is no wonder that we cannot simply divest ourselves of such nationalized patterns of thinking and acting. If in the twentieth century the Enlightenment ideal has been made to serve power, then the grim Socratic truth of our time is that humanity and humanism themselves have been called into question since 1914, when the First World War placed military sacrifice at the center of national life. Warrior cultures require warrior anthropologies.<sup>26</sup> Neither liberalism nor conservatism has challenged the suppositions of a warrior anthropology, since neither has yet found an alternative to the state as the primary arbitrator and shaper of the human condition.

<sup>21</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978) xv.

<sup>22</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984) 99, 182.

<sup>23</sup>Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 51.

<sup>24</sup>Amato, *Guilt and Gratitude*, 83-84.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>26</sup>Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 4.

## II. A POST-ENLIGHTENMENT ANTHROPOLOGY

The analytical tool which Douglas John Hall uses to address this human context is

Luther's distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. In his theses prepared for the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Luther notes that the theology of glory is forever calling evil good and good evil, while the theology of the cross calls a thing what it is. "Without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner."<sup>27</sup>

The American myth of origin, rooted as it is in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the metaphor of mastery, is, in Hall's estimation, a particularly potent version of the theology of glory. He shares with other analysts like Lasch, Amato, and Bellah the conviction that the underlying crisis of Western culture is the breakdown of the Enlightenment worldview. The utopian assumption is that experience is commensurate with expectation. This, Hall argues, has not proved to be true. Moreover, we have no intellectual categories with which to understand this failure of expectation. That our culture strives mightily to maintain a triumphalist outlook is potentially a dangerous situation, since it inevitably creates disillusionment and anger. "All through history," writes Ernest Becker, "it is the 'normal average men' who, like locusts, have laid waste to the world in order to forget themselves."<sup>28</sup> So we find ourselves at the end of our collective rope, suspended over an intellectual and cultural abyss.

### *1. Constructing a New Anthropology*

Like his teacher, Reinhold Niebuhr,<sup>29</sup> Hall rejects the mythology of two worlds—Old Europe and New America—and, in its place, offers a single world of frequent frustration and disappointment. Within history there is no escape from cultural fragmentation and decline to a place of innocence and harmony. There is, according to Hall, hope within history; but hope always comes to us *sub contrario*, under the sign of its opposite, in disguise. This means for Hall that the good news of the Kingdom of God is always a *non sequitur*, a conclusion which cannot be extrapolated from the evidence of history. The gospel is always rather a *novum*, something discontinuous with historical expectation. Left to itself

the salvific reality that is required if the historical process is to be prevented from oblivion simply could not occur. What has come to be in and through Jesus Christ is as "unnatural," as discontinuous with nature, human potentiality, or merely historical providence as a child emerging from the womb of a pure virgin.<sup>30</sup>

What the gospel requires is a new political, social, and eschatological vision grounded in a new *imago hominis*. Hall's proposal for such a new anthropology includes the following features.

First, there must be a willingness to enter into the experience of the negative. This means a relinquishment of what Hall calls "the unwarranted Prometheanism of the Enlightenment vision."<sup>31</sup> The controlling assumption of the modern age, Hall

<sup>27</sup>*Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (American Edition; St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958ff.) 31:41.

<sup>28</sup>Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973) 187.

<sup>29</sup>For a more thorough discussion of Niebuhr's position see David W. Noble, *The End of American History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985) 65-66.

<sup>30</sup>Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 328.

<sup>31</sup>Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 67.

argues, is this: from the fact that some things can be changed, it is assumed that everything can be changed.

Thus the rightful discovery of human responsibility and stewardship was transformed into the concept of human mastery; and this sense of our lordship was ontically undergirded by the “religion of historical progress.”<sup>32</sup>

Pain, suffering, and tragedy no longer have a place in an understanding of the world in which they have been rendered obsolete by the triumph of the Enlightenment ideal. For Hall, however, a new anthropology, if it is born at all, will be born of the night, in the very experience of the negative. For this reason, the works of Elie Wiesel, Shusako Endo, and Ernest Becker figure very prominently in Hall’s writing. The willingness to entertain pain, suffering, and tragedy is the first necessary step in challenging the ascendancy of anthropologies grounded in the metaphor of mastery.

Second, Hall’s proposal rejects the ethical resignation which grows out of ontological individualism. The theology of the cross, says Hall, becomes pessimism only when it ceases to be a Christology. The theology of the cross is not the denial of hope, but the affirmation of a hope which comes into being when human hope comes to an end. The theology of the cross is the entrance into the void wherein we meet the creative Word of God which always creates *ex nihilo*.<sup>33</sup> A social ethic issuing from the experience of negation is what might be called a chastened optimism or a tragic optimism. True community exists only at the foot of the cross where the image of mastery is shattered and we have left only the capacity to receive. Luther’s dictum “we are all beggars”<sup>34</sup> applies to communities as well as to individuals. The age of technocratic humanity, particularly nuclear technology, is nothing but an age of improved means to deteriorated ends. The metaphor of mastery which has created this situation is, therefore, beyond redemption. It is kept alive by powerful political, military, and business interests, but it “has the smell of death upon it.”<sup>35</sup>

Third, Hall calls into question the Enlightenment teaching about autonomy. Kant’s definition of autonomy contains within itself a contradiction which he himself poses in his lengthy discussion of radical evil.

This evil is radical because it corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is, moreover, as a natural propensity, inextirpable by human powers, since extirpation could occur only through good maxims, and cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt; yet at the same time it must be possible to overcome it, since it is found in man, a being whose actions are free.<sup>36</sup>

Radical evil is radical precisely because it cannot be overcome by natural human powers. Yet, Kant argues, it must be possible to overcome radical evil, since human actions are by definition free and not in bondage to evil. The autonomy of reason and of the individual, therefore, must be preserved even in the face of radical evil.

Hall maintains that this notion of the autonomy of reason with its denial of

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 149, 151.

<sup>34</sup>“Wir sind Bettler, das ist wahr.”

<sup>35</sup>Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness*, 163.

<sup>36</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper, 1960) 32.

the radicality of evil is a theology of glory. It ends with a doctrinaire optimism,<sup>37</sup> according to which history is unfolding in a rational and positive way. Doctrinaire optimism stresses enhancement, possibility, and fulfillment, to which the only logical alternative is cynicism. Accordingly, false hope, based on the repression of anything in experience which is painful or unpleasant, is better than no hope at all. The alternative to such false hope is to let go of the vacuous hope born of the illusion of autonomous reason. Such reason has been eclipsed and

presents itself today as an articulation of human frustration and, not infrequently, despair; it has discovered the depths of questions to which no purely rational answers can be given.<sup>38</sup>

Fourth, Hall calls for a rejection of millennial-utopianism. To call the modern Western world utopian, at least in its First World expressions, is to assert that what previously had been an impossible dream, has now become a blueprint for society. Utopia—literally, no place—has in modern times become someplace. When nineteenth-century liberalism removed from its *credo* original sin, the wrath of God, and the tragic view of life, otherworldliness was replaced by an uncritical this-worldliness. Early twentieth-century reformers like Walter Rauschenbusch discovered that in such a situation “the church has no alternative vision to propose for the world’s transformation, and it is reduced to echoing and sanctioning the world’s fallen wisdom.”<sup>39</sup>

In Hall’s thought, the Kingdom of God transcends history, yet history is included in God’s kingdom. Eschatology has to do with hope, not only for the transcendent kingdom, but for the earthly kingdom as well. A theology of glory instinctively avoids the experience of suffering and for that reason ends up quite naturally in world-denial. The theology of the cross, on the other hand, embraces the broken and suffering world and is an expression of God’s commitment to this world, not as God would like it to be, but as it actually is. The church’s task becomes one of being stewards of life in the kingdom of death.<sup>40</sup>

This is not to introduce a new form of utopianism, for Hall does not regard history as self-redemptive. Rather, he shares Niebuhr’s realism, according to which we are called not to transform history, but to seek after proximate renewals. As one of Niebuhr’s biographers wrote:

In demolishing the idea that history is redemptive, Niebuhr did not mean that history is not creative. There are, he says, frequent renewals and rebirths in history, but there is also the likelihood that destructiveness will link itself to creativity at each new level of achievement.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. *A Metaphor of Receptivity*

To state Hall’s proposal positively, the metaphor of mastery and its concomitant theology

of glory must be replaced with a metaphor of receptivity grounded in Luther's theology of the cross. A metaphor of mastery does not form a viable

<sup>37</sup>Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 164.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>39</sup>Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York: Macmillan, 1988) 79.

<sup>40</sup>Douglas John Hall, *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>41</sup>June Bingham, *Courage to Change* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961) 280.

basis for community. "Mastery defies distribution. It moves toward mastery of one over others, of each over his neighbor."<sup>42</sup> In his discussion of the meaning of community Hall introduces his metaphor of receptivity.

Only beggars can have community; only they know that they are quite incapable of independence. The first prerequisite for the community of men...is the willingness to receive. That is more difficult than the willingness to give, because the giver can still think of himself as independent. His independence and mastery of the situation is even confirmed, however subtly, by his giving.<sup>43</sup>

In proposing this shift of metaphors, Hall is careful to avoid certain misunderstandings about it. First, to speak of receptivity is not to imply passivity. Although the experience of grace begins in passivity, it goes on to express itself in works of love. Second, we must be aware of our resistance to this shift deriving from the fact that we daily benefit economically, socially, and politically from the culture of mastery. We are conditioned to define expectancy in terms of growth, expansion, and progress. What Hall is proposing is what Ernest Becker termed "a creative illusion," that is, "a *mythos* which can permit a maximum of realism about the world and at the same time point beyond the terror of existence towards transcendent meaning."<sup>44</sup> Third, Hall argues that theology itself must give up claims to mastery implicit in its "thirst for finality."<sup>45</sup> While Hall is appreciative of the work of Paul Tillich, he is critical of Tillich at this point. Tillich wanted his theology to be an answer to the twentieth century's cultured despisers of religion. Yet Hall sees in Tillich little awareness of the offensiveness of the gospel to reason precisely because it is the right answer. According to Hall, theology's task in the North American context is not to give answers, but to entertain the questions posed by our context, among them, the fact that popular Christianity remains popular because of its willingness to supply lightweight answers that form the cultic foundation for our deeply-rooted Promethean optimism.

What sort of eschatology, social philosophy, and political theory might the metaphor of receptivity be expected to generate? Although detailed working out of specifics is yet to come, Hall has given some tantalizing suggestions, particularly in *Lighten Our Darkness*. In general, his proposal begins with the experience of negation which seeks God under the sign of opposites. God is the *deus absconditus* who is revealed in suffering. This hiddenness of God places us always in the position of being beggars, not masters. A perspective like this that assumes an inherent failure in the American dream will never become a popular ideology. It may well, however, become the heartbeat of a creative minority, an *ecclesia crucis*, a community of the

cross. As in the past and in other parts of the world, those who adopt this perspective will be “exemplars of a thin tradition.”<sup>46</sup> Yet the theology of the cross is not the discovery that humanity is without hope. It is, rather, the confession that the hope which exists is a judgment against the hopes that humanity conjures up. “It does

<sup>42</sup>Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness*, 180.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>44</sup>Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 186.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 357.

<sup>46</sup>Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness*, 115-16.

not fix its sights on the darkness, but on the light that can only be seen in the darkness....”<sup>47</sup>

In terms of eschatology there is great similarity between Hall and Jürgen Moltmann. Both stress the radical discontinuity between God’s promised future and the present. The future comes as a *novum*, as something which cannot be extrapolated from the past. Yet hidden deep within this discontinuity is a continuity, not in history—it was the mistake of liberalism to look for it there—but in the God who creates *ex nihilo*.

It remains to be seen what Hall’s anthropological proposal might suggest for social and political theory. Like Niebuhr before him, Hall is a powerful critic of theological and political liberalism, which in its writings is often synonymous with cultural religion, the religion of empire. Can liberalism be rescued and redefined? The post-World War Two liberal-conservative consensus focused on Soviet containment, American expansionism, and American messianism. With the decline of the Soviet empire, America’s self-understanding will also undergo a radical change. Since the 1950s it has become less and less clear what liberalism is.<sup>48</sup> Conservatism in the 1980s redefined itself by reconstructing the American past. A journey into the past with Ronald Reagan as guide is always a safe and pleasant experience.<sup>49</sup> Neoconservatism has become the party of nostalgia; its vision of America has proven powerfully attractive. Liberalism, in the meantime, continues to flounder.

Given this situation, Hall has given us some suggestive insights for our own reformulation of the liberal agenda for our time. Perhaps liberalism in the 1990s can be defined in terms of an “engagement” that is the “participation of a suffering love which alters the world, not through power but through solidarity with suffering humanity.”<sup>50</sup> Such engagement refuses to abandon history. It grants that evil is radical, but is convinced that historical existence—social and political existence—is meaningful nevertheless.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

<sup>49</sup>Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America* (New York: Doubleday, 1987) 386.

<sup>50</sup>Douglas John Hall, “The Cross and Contemporary Culture” in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. Richard Harries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986) 198.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 199.