



Toward 2010: Wholistic Agendas for Theology and Ministry

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Arthur C. Clarke's two science fiction novels and movies, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and its sequel *2010*, mark off in our minds the first decade of the next millennium for considering the medium range future. The mysterious monolith which has tutored our race from its birth and now seeks our moral maturity is drawing us toward new possibilities. Science fiction writers are thinking about what may be coming. Should theologians do so as well? Yes, of course, but what should theologians be thinking about during the decade and a half before the new century? What should we anticipate, and how should we respond? What belongs on the theological agenda?

Whatever else happens during this period, I suspect that it will be full of (w)holes. Radio comedians Bob and Ray once did a skit, a news interview with the president of the International Hole Collectors Association. "Of what practical value are holes?" asked the interviewer. "Oh, they're very practical," he responded, "we can put them in the ground and stick telephone poles in them. They're good for stuffing macaroni, too."

But the holes I am talking about have a "w" in front of them. Wholism (sometimes spelled "holism"), as an "ism," is high on the new intellectual agenda. The cardinal doctrine is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Advocates of wholism tell us that we need to go beyond the scientific and technical form of thinking dominant in the modern age, a myopic form of thinking that has specialized and compartmentalized and finally fragmented our minds. "Wholism" is the watchword of a new age romanticism that tries to help us get the big picture, to integrate and reunite what has been separated, to heal what has been broken through a fragmentation of the mind.

We find wholism springing up everywhere. We find it in the revisionist physics of Fritjof Capra and David Bohm, who are looking for a rapprochement between Western science and Asian mysticism; in systems analysis according to which all parts are viewed as interrelated and interdependent; in feminist consciousness which claims to see the whole intuitively; in the new personalism

and transpersonalism of holistic health and the human potential movement; and in aquarian visions of a utopian harmony within and between people and in concert with nature as a whole.

Now I am not certain that the cardinal thesis that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts is always true. Even Jan Smuts, the South African philosopher who gave us the concept of wholism in 1926, doubted that the concept could be applied to everything. He doubted that we could talk about a "whole of wholes."¹ I do not plan on tackling this issue at the moment. Nevertheless, I believe it will be worth our while to borrow the framework of wholistic thinking

to ponder what should appear on our theological and ministerial agendas for the short and medium range futures. The very idea that we should try to get the big picture, that we should seek to understand the dynamics of interdependence and integration within a sense of broader unity, can help to frame the questions and issues about which we need to think theologically and minister wholistically.

What I intend to do here is list five items which I believe should appear on our agenda. I will formulate them as fundamentally theological issues. Some issues will be fairly speculative in character, but in other cases the implications for the church's ministry will be immediate. Like Bob and Ray, I suggest we do some whole collecting. We will discuss the cosmic whole, the spatial whole, the ecumenic whole, the temporal whole, and the broken whole.

I. THE COSMIC WHOLE: HOW BIG OF A GOD DO WE NEED?

The first whole on our agenda is the biggest whole we can think of, namely, the entire cosmos. Our question is this: given the enormous size of the cosmos, do we need a single God appropriate to the whole thing? Or would just a little godlet, big enough to take care of earth, be enough?

Before Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick decided on the title, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, they were exploring another title for their movie, *Journey Beyond the Stars*. Astronomer Carl Sagan pokes fun at these two authors for their naiveté.² If you think about this title in physical terms, it is silly. How can you get beyond the stars? What would you see if you got there? What would you film? Nothing but blackness? The cosmos within the perimeter of the stars is the only cosmos we know.

But what a cosmos! Our sun is a moderately-sized star. The next nearest star is Alpha Centauri, 4.3 light years away. There are 2 of 150 million such stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. The basic unit of the universe is not the planet or the star. It is the galaxy. The Milky Way is billions of light years distant from the nearest neighboring galaxy. And astronomers believe that 2 billion different galaxies exist. Just recently an astronomer discovered a galaxy that is 14 billion light years away. That is almost as far away as the universe is old. The scale of our universe is astronomical, pun intended.

¹J. C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1926).

²Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection* (New York: Dell, 1973) 181ff.

Now this cosmos is immensely bigger in time and space than that belonging to the mental world of the Scriptures. If we rely upon the biblical begats and tables of generations, we can date the creation of our earth about 4,000 years before Christ. Today's big bang theorists, in contrast, begin with a protohydrogen explosion that occurred 15 or 20 billion years ago. For the biblical writers mountains were considered very high, and so to convey the transcendent quality of our "most high" God they spoke of heaven as being way up there in the clouds. Our Apollo astronauts on the way to the moon, in contrast, have left such clouds behind in seconds after blastoff.

So I ask the question: how big of a God do we need? If we are true to our biblical faith, do we need a God who is creator and master of the whole shebang? Or could we get by on a smaller godlet, one whose province of influence is limited to our one planet within this one solar

system? Systematic theologians have through the years talked about God's immensity, ubiquity, and omnipresence. But maybe they didn't realize at the time just how immense the universe really is. The universe is so big and still expanding, it is difficult—is it impossible?—to conceive of a single divine consciousness being present throughout. And, in addition, when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, what could salvation mean to such a large entity as the universe? Perhaps salvation really has to do only with our own little planet and the people on it.

It seems at first glance that we could be true to the intention of Scripture by affirming that we have a deity on a terrestrial scale, one who made the heavens and the earth. Just as long as our God is big enough to give Pharaoh and the Egyptian army a bloody nose while freeing the Hebrew slaves and delivering them to the promised land. Just as long as God is big enough to take inanimate matter and through a multi-million year incubation period guide the evolution of terrestrial life toward a divinely imparted consciousness. Just as long as God is able to raise one crucified Jew from the dead on Easter.

And certainly such an earthbound godlet seems to be big enough for some contemporary schools of theology, especially those schools for whom all theology is understood as a form of ethics. A political theology that collapses all other religious concerns into the issue of terrestrial social justice might provide an example. The God of Israel is said to favor the side of the poor in the battle between the lower and the upper economic classes. All that is needed here is a deity just big enough to raise our consciousnesses, empower the weak, and overthrow the overlords. Accustomed to quoting the Marxist dictum—it is not enough to understand the world; the task is to change it!—political theology needs a godlet only big enough to render a political revolution. Trying to understand what is happening at Alpha Centauri is irrelevant.

Such political theology has its critics, especially those theologians who are ecology-minded. They complain that the liberation theologians are too narrow when they focus all their attention on economic and political justice. They argue that we should also consider the relevance and seriousness of environmental issues. What good is justice without a sustainable biosphere? Ecologically minded theologians are trying to say that even if we are able to achieve justice but find ourselves living on an uninhabitable planet we have gained very little. The ecological theologians need a bigger deity than the liberation theologians.

But let us be generous here and add these two ethical schools of thought together: we want a deity who can deliver both economic justice and environmental stability on planet earth. Now, how big of a god do we need? A strictly terrestrial godlet would still be big enough, would it not? Such a deity would certainly be much more powerful than any individual human being or even a group of us. With a deity this size we could still retain all justification for our highest moral ideals.

However, there is something within the theological mind that would find this notion of a strictly terrestrial godlet unsatisfying. Even though the worldview of biblical times was admittedly provincial and parochial compared to our present scientifically informed vision, there is in Scripture an energy or a trajectory that propels us up and out and beyond all worldviews, biblical or otherwise. When the psalmist says that God has created the moon and the stars, numbers them and even gives them names (Pss 8:3; 147:4), we get the sense that the God of Israel is by no means limited by our ability to conceive of political change or environmental

stability. It was the psalmist's sense of cosmic transcendence that led Abraham Lincoln once to say: "I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God." Perhaps God by definition is bigger than this earth.

That a strictly terrestrial godlet will not do is clear from the theological enterprise as St. Anselm engaged in it. He defined God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." And we are capable of conceiving of pretty big things. Although Carl Sagan could poke fun at Kubrick and Clarke for imagining a journey beyond the stars, this whole interchange only demonstrates the breadth of human imagination. We are not hemmed in by even the most grandiose of conceptions. If we can conceive of making a movie about realities beyond the stars, then we ought to be able to conceive of a ubiquitous God; and then conceive of a God still greater than this conception. Theological understanding permits the immensity of God to transcend our mental capacities. Even if our God is capable of rescuing a band of Hebrew slaves from oppression in Egypt, our speculative minds are capable of conceiving of a yet bigger God who created the heavens and the earth, put the stars in their galaxies, and continues to number and name them as they expand out toward spatial infinity. And if St. Anselm is right, the God to which the Scriptures witness is greater than even this one of which we have just conceived.

What needs to go on our theological agenda, then, is an attempt to think through the implications our expanding knowledge of the expanding universe has for the doctrine of God and creation. There is nothing wrong with an ethic that strives for political liberation or ecological stability. But yet I believe we need to pause briefly from looking down at the earth while engaging in single-minded political change. During the pause we should lift our eyes skyward and ponder the stars, asking with humility where our relatively brief history upon this miniscule planet may fit in the broader scope of cosmic destiny.

II. THE SPATIAL WHOLE: WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETI?

Theology is speculative. One of the things on which I suggest we spend at least a little time speculating is the potential significance of extra-terrestrial intelligent (ETI) life. At present there is no satisfying evidence that ETI in fact exists. Nevertheless, the statistical possibility is that there may be one million inhabitable planets similar to earth in our Milky Way. During the fall of 1984 astronomers discovered the first empirical evidence of another solar system like ours, Beta Pictoris, 50 light years distant. They also discovered a warm ball of gas which could be a large planet orbiting Van Briesbroeck 8, a star some 21 light years from earth. We just may wake up tomorrow and find our whole consciousness altered by communication with another world.

The movie *2001* was an adventure in using the imagination for profitmaking as well as fantasy making. The movie was made first, and sci fi writer Clarke wrote the book to capitalize on the publicity of the movie to increase book sales. At the end of the movie the earthling encounters extraterrestrial intelligent life, ETI. This worried Kubrick. What would happen if we were to discover genuine ETI between the time he finished the movie and the time it would take to make a profit at the box office? After all, he had 10.5 million dollars invested. If the genuine extraterrestrials looked or behaved differently from Kubrick's fictional ones, he could lose his shirt. So he approached Lloyd's of London to insure his investment. Lloyd's looked into the matter, feared that contact with life in outer space was too imminent, and declined to insure the

movie. The insurance company bet wrong, of course. But the exciting prospect remains.

One reason I would like to see ETI on the theological agenda is to dispel certain myths which have sprung up, myths regarding the fragility of our faith in God. It is widely believed by the uninformed among us that communication with ETI would invalidate the claims of our religion. On four separate occasions reporters from the *National Enquirer* have interviewed me on the question of the religious significance of ETI. They asked me: “What do you think would happen to the Christian religion should we make contact with extra-terrestrial intelligence superior to what we already know on earth? Don’t you think it would simply destroy the Christian religion? After all, Christians teach that the human race is the center of the universe, so the discovery of something superior would be devastating.” Even though the *National Enquirer* interviewers had already decided on the answer they wanted to hear, I still thought it was a good question. So I researched it.

I found out two things. First, to my chagrin, I discovered that very few prominent theologians have even discussed the matter. Second, whenever a theologian has tackled the subject, it has been greeted in a positive fashion. A conservative Protestant such as Billy Graham, more or less liberal Protestants such as Paul Tillich or John Hick or Lewis Ford, a Jewish friend and former president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, Hayim Perelmuter, all have stated unequivocally that the discovery of ETI would only enhance and expand our understanding of God’s creation. And Francis J. Connell, former dean of the theology faculty at Catholic University of America, has made it clear: “it is good

for Catholics to know that the principles of their faith are entirely compatible with the most startling possibilities concerning life on other planets.”³

When I reported this back to the reporters, they suddenly became uninterested in what I had to say. None of the four interviews resulted in having this point of view presented on the pages of the *National Enquirer*. But I was left with a rather puzzling and potentially important item on my theological agenda.

III. THE ECUMENIC WHOLE: HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND PLURALISM?

This understanding of the unity and comprehensiveness of God inclusive of the whole conceivable cosmos leads to another agenda item back here on earth. This is the concept of the ecumene. It is widely known that the Greek root word, *oikos*, means “one house” and that the term “ecumenical movement” refers to the attempt by the various churches to understand all Christians as belonging to the single household of faith. This is a perfectly legitimate use of the term; but what I have in mind here is a bit more broad. I suggest that we think of the whole creation as God’s house and that all of us are guests of equal stature in the divine living room. Corresponding to God’s oneness is a oneness of humanity.

Ecumenic consciousness and the idea of a universal humanity did not always exist. It was born about the time of the great multi-cultural empires and was nourished by universal ideas in metaphysical philosophy. Ancient tribal peoples had a tendency to equate what is human with their own tribe and to draw the line between ordered cosmos and suspicious chaos at the perimeter of their sphere of influence. Following a war it was not unusual for the victors to kill all the men of the losing tribe, sometimes even the women and children as well. Then they would

pull down the statues of the loser's gods and erect images of the victorious deities. One god could replace another. One reality could replace another.

But with the advent of the great empires such as those of Cyrus of Persia and Alexander the Great, rule could not be monolithic. Local control was required. So in many cases liberty was granted to sub-societies within the empire to continue their diverse religious practices and traditions. Although such liberty was not uniform and was sometimes ruthlessly denied, the principle of a plurality of worldviews and value systems living at peace with one another amidst a single political entity was developed.

This was complemented by the rise of speculative philosophy, especially that of Plato, and the development of the notion of a single universal humanity which transcends tribal identity. Although the tribal mentality and sense of peoplehood remained, Israel's contribution came through her experience of Yahweh's continued existence and faithfulness century after century, in time of peace or time of war, in time of loyalty or time of apostasy. God was understood to be independent of the ravages of time as well as the relativities of culture. God will always be here to guarantee the ecumene.

³Francis J. Connell, "Flying Saucers and Theology," *The Truth about Flying Saucers*, ed. Aime Michel (New York: Pyramid Books, 1956) 258.

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The reason the ecumene should appear on our theological agenda today is that it is currently being undermined by an ideological stance I will here label "radical pluralism," i.e., a pluralism which fails to shoulder responsibility for its corresponding unity. Although the problem is by no means unique to theology, we have our version of it in current North American liberation rhetoric. We are being told by theologians that white people simply cannot understand black people, that the rich cannot understand the poor, and that men cannot understand women. What is being demanded is a hands-off policy. To some extent this is justified, of course. We need to right past wrongs. But if left to persist in its own logic, such thinking will lead to baptizing a radical pluralism which will justify a return to tribal narrowness and the loss of a sense of the common ecumene.

What we need to affirm, I believe, is ecumenic pluralism, the side-by-side existence of various and contradictory perspectives, worldviews, or approaches to human understanding and living. The spectrum ranges from simple differences of opinion at one end to mutually exclusive definitions of reality and allegiances to differing value systems or lifestyles on the other end. The religious atlases of the world are becoming obsolete. No longer can we label North America "Christian" or India "Hindu" or Indonesia "Islamic." More and more Americans are investigating Asian philosophies and adopting the mystical disciplines of the East. Third World Christian churches have come into their own and, in the case of the Church of South India, are showing exceptional leadership in ecumenical affairs. In any given geographical location, increasing numbers of alternative commitments to ultimate reality can be found.

Not only are these alternatives all around us. They exist within us as well. We have begun to internalize pluralism, so that the confrontation between the various reality-defining agencies takes place within us as we wrestle with truth questions. This is possible because there speaks within our soul the still small voice of the ecumene, the sense that we belong to a single universal humanity sustained by a mysterious but single divine reality.

We call this “ecumenic pluralism” because it makes an assumption, namely, that there is only one human race to which people in diverse times and cultures belong. Whether it is immediately visible or not, we believe all people have something in common. It is this trans-cultural unity that makes pluralism possible, that provides the warrant for our respecting and appreciating people who differ from ourselves. Although sometimes proffered by humanists over against the prejudices of competing Christian denominations, this belief in the universal *humanum* fits well with such Christian beliefs as the *imago dei*, natural revelation, original sin, and the universality of God’s love.

But, as I have suggested, there is growing a second conception of “pluralism” which, like other words ending in “ism,” indicates a value system, an ideology, a stance. Here in its radical form we have a belief that plurality, variety, and diversity are in themselves a positive good. In its extreme form, radical pluralism defends what is different and opposes the combining of various traditions. It judges the integrity of any existing approach to life inviolate, so that any attempt to change it on behalf of trans-cultural or trans-ethnic unity is considered culturally immoral. It is anti-wholistic.

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When the logic of making an “ism” out of cultural integrity is pressed to the extreme, then the principle of supra-cultural unity evaporates. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz gives us a hint regarding which way things might go. He suggests that “the basic unity of mankind” might become an empty phrase. To view the diversity of custom across time and over space not merely as a matter of garb or appearance but rather as an affirmation that humanity itself is various in its essences and expressions, he contends, is to cast off the moorings of philosophical humanism, thus leading to an uneasy drifting into perilous waters.⁴ In other words, if we are so intent on emphasizing the diversity or plurality, we will lose the sense of unity. We will sacrifice the very idea that there is one house for humanity.

What all this comes down to is this: *the concept of a universal humanity must become an article of faith*. We cannot prove it empirically on the basis of present experience; yet it is something which we both assume and strive after. To make this an article of faith represents a modest change. Up until now its status among us Westerners has been that of a commonly held assumption—one of those things everybody simply accepts, and to which one could appeal to justify human action. It was this belief in the unity of humanity that ignited the fires of religious liberty, that energized revolutions against monarchical tyrannies in the name of democracy, that burned in the hearts of abolitionists and civil rights martyrs, that still stokes the fires of opposition to apartheid and the caste system, and that keeps ablaze the desire for equality between the sexes and the generations.

But now this assumption may become threatened if the principle of radical pluralism, like the Trojan horse, makes its home within the city of theology. In the face of challenges in the past, the Christian faith has responded with confessional statements. Perhaps the time is coming when we will need to confess our faith in a universal humanity, a faith based not upon empirical proof but upon trust in God’s will for the consummate unity of the creation.

IV. THE TEMPORAL WHOLE: WHAT DO WE OWE FUTURE GENERATIONS?

The concept of the ecumene, which requires the assumption of a universal humanity of

which we are apart, can be thought of temporally as well as spatially or multi-culturally. We share a single reality with those who have gone before us and with those who will be born into the generations which follow. How our actions today might affect the life of our grandchildren in the future is an item that belongs on our ethical agenda.

Many fear the destruction that could result from a nuclear war. But a nuclear peace may be just as deadly. We want cheap energy and lots of it. There is a myth making the rounds that nuclear fission can give it to us. After all, just one ounce of highly processed uranium-235, when fissioned, produces as much heat as one hundred tons of coal. It sounds cheap and easy. But things do not always turn out as well as we plan.

⁴Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Harper Colophon edition, 1973) 36f.

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When Pacific Gas and Electric Company planned to build its twin unit nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon in California, it estimated its cost at \$188 million. So far it has spent \$5.1 billion, 30 times the original projection. Currently the customers of PG&E pay \$1 million per day in interest alone.

And despite these staggering costs, we have not yet figured in what it will cost to protect the environment from our waste for future generations. After we are all done burning our light bulbs and running our air conditioners, we are fooling ourselves if we think our liability has come to an end. Our atomic refuse remains.

Waste already exists. Six thousand tons of high-level waste (HLW) in the form of spent fuel assemblies are sitting in pools next to operating reactors, together with 75 million gallons of radioactive liquid waste, plus 27 million cubic feet of transuranic waste (TRU). All of these by-products have a high-intensity, penetrating radioactivity. The TRUs are especially dangerous because they emit the highly carcinogenic alpha particles. Many of these materials will remain toxic for 10,000 years, plutonium waste for 250,000 years. For decades now the HLW liquid had been pumped into stainless steel or concrete tanks which have an effective containment life of 30 years. Because of the relentless activity of the waste, such as its tendency to boil at 1,200 to 1,400 degrees Fahrenheit, some of the tanks must be continually cooled, or else the steel containers will melt and spill their contents. At the nuclear processing plant at La Hague, France, air conditioners are run 24 hours per day, 365 days per year...and for how many thousands of years yet to come? On one occasion the electricity went out for a period of six minutes, stopping the cooling units. The community was stricken with fear while waiting the restoration of power. We must hope that no earthquake, storm, or human error will accidentally pull the plug on those air conditioners for centuries if not millennia.

In the U.S. plans are being currently readied for long term HLW storage. There can be no disposal, only storage. Sandia Laboratories is experimenting with a canister for containing radioactive waste that can withstand a broadside crash from a train traveling at 60 miles per hour. This is promising. But just what the storage canisters may suffer in the way of metal fatigue over the centuries is not yet known. The plan is to place the storage container in a concrete sleeve or overpack and then bury it at a depth of 2,000 to 4,000 feet in a carefully chosen rock formation such as granite or a salt dome. The object is to prevent a leak and, if a leak occurs, to minimize the chance of its migrating back to the biosphere.

Even so our radioactive garbage will remain a threat for 10,000 years or more. What is our responsibility to people yet unborn? I suggest that here is a point where our concept of one God, one cosmos, and one humanity has direct implications. I sum up these implications in what I call the *protect posterity* principle. The reason for protecting the environment is not simply to make life more enjoyable for us in the present generation. It is to pay honor to God's creation as a whole, and we pay it this honor when we take responsibility for its safety in the centuries yet to come. This applies to all environmental issues, of which nuclear waste is only a salient representative.

This may mean that we set aside an endowment fund taken from current profits, so as to share future management expenses and to provide accident in-

surance. Most government experts assume that site monitoring will be required for at least the first 700 years. Suppose there should be an emergency leak 300 years from now, requiring great effort and expense to protect the people then living. Who should pay for it? We today are enjoying the benefits of nuclear energy. Do we have the right to enjoy those benefits yet shrug a large portion of the costs onto the budgets of our future children? Such an endowment fund might prove expensive for us. If so, then perhaps we might find domestic nuclear power as a whole too expensive and choose another form of energy.

V. THE BROKEN WHOLE: CAN THE CROSS SATISFY WHOLENESS HUNGER?

The fifth item on our agenda for theology is to listen directly to the stirrings of the new romanticism, what I call the emerging post-modern consciousness. Andrew Greeley calls it the 'personalist revolution' indicating that modern people in the West are tired of manipulating the world around us through technology and wish now to borrow the mystical insights of the East and press them into the service of life-long personal growth and self-fulfillment.⁵ Martin Marty uses the term "wholeness-hunger," commenting that this is an ageless human quest.⁶

I believe there are two identifiable phases to this wholeness hunger: the hankering for a snack, and the demand for the full course meal. At the snack phase we find holistic medicine. The genuine and worthwhile insight here is the observation that the theory of medicine developed in the modern world has been reductionistic. It has worked with a mechanical model of health, according to which one waits for the physical machine to malfunction and then fixes or replaces the appropriate part. Fixing the broken part is called a cure. Holistic theory is postmodern in the sense that it wishes to go beyond the mechanical model to something more personal and more comprehensive.

Practitioners of holistic health view the patient as something more than just a symptom-bearing organism. In addition to one's physical condition, the mental and spiritual conditions are factored in. So is the family context. So is the socio-economic and political context.⁷

In addition, good health is seen as a positive value. Medicine is more than just curing diseases once they break out. It involves preventive programs as well as promotion of good diet and exercise. So when it comes to the conversation between the patient and doctor, more needs to take place than simply diagnosis and cure. As Granger Westberg puts it: the most important thing a physician or nurse can do is talk with the patient at a deep level about the whole of who he or she is.

That is the hankering for a snack. But some people have an appetite for a great deal more wholeness than this. The human transformation movement wants a whole meal, perhaps even the last supper beyond which we will need nothing further to feed us. Advocates of human transformation represent anew romanticism that goes beyond the modern mentality. They recognize the limits

⁵Andrew M. Greeley, *The New Agenda* (New York: Doubleday, 1973) 86f.

⁶Martin Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 28.

⁷James S. Gordon, "The Paradigm of Holistic Medicine" in *Health for the Whole Person*, ed. Arthur Hastings, James Fadiman, and James Gordon (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1980) 3-23.

of our preoccupation with mechanical manipulation and technological progress and contend that we are on the brink of something new. Each of us individually and all of us as a race have untapped potential—unlimited potential—which is being inhibited by now outdated forms of thinking. Like lava smoldering deep within a volcano, our potential is building up pressure. It is time that we open ourselves up to let this potential explode onto the stage of human history. We are treading on the doorstep to the world of tomorrow, the transition to the Aquarian age. Marilyn Ferguson writes in her *Aquarian Conspiracy*:

For the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change—an understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in the age of change, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing institutions.

The paradigm of the Aquarian conspiracy...promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralized society. It sees us as stewards of all our resources, inner and outer. It says we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions or conditioning. Heirs to evolutionary riches, we are capable of imagination, invention, and experiences we have only glimpsed.⁸

The root metaphor here is evolution to higher consciousness, and the mood is one of Promethean optimism regarding our future.

When people in our congregations and the wider society become involved in the new romanticism, the positive fruits are obvious. They exhibit a renewed sense of self-esteem, confidence, hope, and belief that they are part of an ecumenical, if not mystical, reality which is greater than the individual.

This new wholism belongs on our theological and pastoral agendas, I believe. But I am not sure which is the best way to go. There are two possibilities, a positive one and a negative one.

The first possibility is a full-fledged theological and pastoral endorsement of the concepts of wholeness and transformationism. I can even suggest a heuristic name: "redemptive integration." Much of what makes us sick, saps our energy, disorients us, and causes failure in life is fragmentation, brokenness, or, as Paul Tillich puts it, disintegration. We lose our center and thereby lose the power to integrate the various aspects of our life. What wholistic thinking does is to retrieve the notion of integration, of putting things back together again.

On the other hand, there is a second possible theological analysis, one that is not so favorable. The central symbol of the Christian faith is the cross. The cross is a symbol of brokenness, not wholeness. It tells us that all is not right with the world. When the Aquarian age—in the case of Jesus it was called the Kingdom of God—makes its influence felt amidst our lives, there is something within us that rises up to break it. The cross is a sign of soiled purity, tarnished beauty, unactualized potential, and smashed hopes.

So we must honestly ask: can a theology of the cross satisfy the appetites of people with wholeness-hunger? On the basis of Easter we can promise fulfillment in heaven. But self-transformation seekers are too impatient. They are much more concerned about this life than they are about heaven. Strictly transcendent promises are no longer good enough for modern or postmodern

⁸Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1980) 29.

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people. As Christians we can say that it is into this life that God has come, of course. The only problem is that upon arrival God was met with a cross. Truth in advertising standards will not permit us to dress up the cross like a gourmet meal and serve utopian promises about human transformation just around the corner. The wholeness between God and the creation is a broken wholeness, and the cross symbolizes this brokenness.

But the cross does have something of value to offer. It signals God's faithfulness amidst brokenness. It just may be of considerable comfort to those people who hope for wholeness but get only brokenness, who work for transformation but get only stagnation if not disintegration. Not everybody grows continually. Not everyone can look forward to self-fulfillment and the next stage of evolutionary consciousness. When overcome by disease or old age we can feel our very selves slipping away into oblivion. Not everybody has his or her hands on the "control panel of change." A theology of the cross understands that. It looks forward to a resurrection to be wrought by God, not wrought by our own hands which seem to be growing feebler as age and arthritis take their toll.

In scrounging through the dusty books of the ancient church fathers, I found a passage in the works of Gregory of Nyssa that understands the cross wholistically. If you can imagine a Greek cross, one with four lines of equal length that looks like a plus sign, note how everything converges at one point, at the crux. Gregory writes,

the cross...is divided into four parts, so that there are the projections, four in number, from the central point where the whole converges upon itself; because He Who at the hour of his pre-arranged death was stretched upon it is He Who binds together all things unto Himself, and by Himself brings to one harmonious agreement the diverse natures of actual existences.⁹

Through the brokenness of the cross, God brings all broken things together into a higher harmony. You and I at our point in time cannot embrace that higher harmony in itself. We still live amidst the aeon of brokenness. What we can do in our ministry is live at the crux.

How do we live at the crux? Seward Hiltner once proffered the idea of "pre-counseling." He described the good pastor as one whose demeanor in the chancel and during day-to-day

activities conveys the impression of receptivity. The pastor who is constantly looking at his or her watch, running for appointments, and bragging about how busy he or she is, constantly conveys the message: "I'm too busy to bother with you." What Hiltner wants is a different message. When someone looks at the pastor, notices the posture, the smile, the lack of hurriedness as he or she moves across the room, all of these subtle forms of body and soul language have one message: when you're in trouble, I'll be here to listen to you. I'll be here to bear your cross with you. I cannot make flamboyant promises about unlimited human potential and imminent evolutionary transformation. But I will not leave you alone in your time of need. This is living at the crux, the point where in God's plan things come together and are made whole.

⁹Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 32. Quoted from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (14 vols.; New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890-1900; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 5.500.