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“Twenty-four Hours of Fear and Hope”

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Donald Collier
at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Don Mills on April 4, 1965*

The Rev. Donald Collier was present at and participated in the Third March on Montgomery, Alabama, on March 25, 1965. The sermon, reprinted with the permission of the family, was preached the Sunday after the Rev. Collier's return to St. Mark's. As editor, I have updated the vocabulary from 1965 in a few places, to communicate in 2021.

Two weeks ago, this morning I sat in the study between the services and joked with some of you about the young demonstrators in front of the United States Consulate on University Avenue. We agreed that their actions were silly. We doubted the sincerity of their motives, and we said that Canadians should leave the controversy over civil rights to the Americans. Forty-eight hours later I was driving down south with three other clergy to participate in the march on Montgomery.

I mention this experience not to suggest that I am fickle-minded, but rather because it indicates what a big change has occurred in my life since I last stood in this pulpit. In theory I have long known that the Church must be involved in the world – in its political, economic, and social struggles. Two weeks ago, our Lord gave me a push and sent me out to get my hands dirty and my feet muddy learning what it means really to mix up the Christian Gospel with the world's life. I can't say I altogether enjoyed the experience. I found it disturbing to be stopped on the sidewalk in Montgomery by a kindly-looking man in his seventies who told me I was a disgrace to the cloth, and a few other things I won't repeat here. It was a bit unpleasant also to greet a policeman standing guard at the airport and then have him spit at my back as I passed. It was a

shock to discover that my clerical collar made me an object of invective and hatred.

No, the visit to Alabama wasn't a fulfilment of my dreams of visiting the southland. There was a little too much fear in it for my enjoyment – but I have come back with a much clearer conviction about the Church's real work in our day. I realize too that here in St. Mark's we have hardly even begun that work, that we are far too respectable in our Christianity, that we are much too guarded and careful in our responses to our world's need, that we have scarcely a clue what it means really to stand up for our faith. We have not listened to St. Paul when he said: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”

A few of us Canadians who went to Montgomery didn't really do much to help the civil rights movement there. We were welcomed enthusiastically by the white civil rights workers who were ingenious in giving us jobs to suit our limited experience.

We were welcomed shyly but sincerely by the Blacks, who aren't used to talking with and trusting white people. I suppose our most important contribution was that we were a few more whites identifying ourselves with Blacks in this cause. Which is not just their cause, but our cause, too.

As we joined the march into Montgomery, a row of Black teenagers in front of us began to sing an

anti-white song. We couldn't blame them. They have ample reason to hate whites. But one of them stopped in mid-verse and pointing around him, said, "We can't sing that! Look how many whites are with us." They picked up the great theme song of the march:

Black and white together
Black and white together
Deep in our hearts We do believe
We shall overcome some day.

It was worth the trip for just that experience.

But we learned much more than we contributed.

We were shaken out of our middle-aged caution and privatized religion as we talked to dedicated young students who have been risking their lives for long periods of time in devotion to the cause of Black rights. Ragged youngsters, many of them university graduates, who live on ten dollars a week plus board while they work to raise education standards and to get Black voters registered.

Young people very similar those who sat out on our own University Avenue, who willingly accept the criticism and malicious and dirty accusations thrown at them, because they believe the cause of human rights cannot wait for the slow-paced caution of their elders. I was impressed, deeply impressed, by the fiery determination of these young people. When we see a similar spirit in our own youth, let's have the wisdom to applaud it rather than treat it with cynicism and sophisticated scorn as so many of us have in the past.

But most of all we learned from the Blacks. Please don't think I have any romantic illusions about them. I know there are as many scoundrels, sinners, and parasites among them as among whites, nevertheless I could not help being impressed with the character of these people and with the practical reality of their faith. Indeed I can think of few parts of the world in which the Christian Faith is more of a practical reality than among the Blacks we spoke to and heard.

Here are a people who have suffered almost unbelievable oppression in a democratic country. 34% of Alabama's population is Black. Yet there is no Black in any responsible position in government. In the town of Selma there are 14,000 whites of voting age, 9,542 are registered voters. There are 15,000 Blacks of voting age, only 335 are

registered. The Blacks have to pay their taxes and fulfill all the duties of citizenship, but they cannot help determine who will rule them and who will control the police forces which apply the laws.

The nightmare accounts of their victimization are almost beyond belief, were it not for the fact that they are too well authenticated. When they dragged for the bodies of the three civil rights workers last summer (in Mississippi), they discovered the bodies of two Blacks whose absence had never been reported by the police. Justice in Alabama is a mockery. Ten civil rights workers were killed there over the last two years – yet to date no one has been seriously punished for any of those deaths.

As I walked through the streets of Montgomery and felt the surging power of that great procession, I wondered what it was that prevented these people from attempting to right their wrongs by bloody revolution. Some undoubtedly would like to use force. Others are too fearful to raise their heads. But the spirit of the crowd who marched on the capital was caught by the speaker who cried: "We're going to love the hell out of Alabama."

They tell me there were sex orgies – and the legislature referred to the "drinking of strong drink promiscuously" – whatever that means! I saw no drunkenness, no sex orgies, and heard of none. The only curses I heard came from white lips, the only hate I witnessed was in the contorted faces of white men and women and that white hate was terribly, awfully, insanely real.

Never in my life have I encountered such naked hate. It made me afraid, not just for my own safety, though certainly for that, but because here was something that can only be described as demonic. It couldn't be just the prospect of having to share their economic and political power that made these people like this. Somehow their hate seemed to have a direct relationship to the love proclaimed by the Blacks, as if the whites recognized a judgment in that love which they did not want to accept, as if deep down inside they knew themselves guilty but would rather kill and die than admit their guilt.

It is dreadfully intense reactions like this which we can expect when the Gospel of Christ really comes to bear on the world's life. Don't we know it in our own experience? Don't we have some violent reactions too when the forgiving love of Christ

is offered us? Sometimes it seems we would rather die in our guilt than admit it and accept his forgiveness.

There was hate and there was fear on the day of the march into Montgomery. That procession passed through white walls of hate, through walls of office buildings whose windows showed grim, silent white faces, and the marchers' cries reverberated,

"Old Jim Crow, you must go!"

"Freedom! Freedom! Now!"

We watched men in the buildings pointing at individual marchers and writing down names and wondered what fate lay in store for some of the marchers. Then I witnessed an incident which thrilled me more than anything else. A girl in her twenties stepped off the curb and joined the march – a white girl who not long before had been sitting behind a desk in one of those office buildings. What courage there was in that act. How many hostile eyes recognized her and planned to make her life miserable? There was faith and hope in the marching Blacks – powerful and vibrant. There was faith and hope in the determination of the civil rights workers.

But somehow that girl's act of courage seemed to me to be a sign of the dawn of a new day for human rights in Alabama – the sign that there are whites ready to ask God to forgive them their trespasses and grant them a share in the new life of black and white together.

Of course, the battle is a long from being won. There will be much suffering yet before it is won. And the battle in the southern United States is only a small part of the great struggle for human rights. We have our own problems as Canadians which have been too long neglected. I was made very conscious of this a month or two ago when I went with a group of people to present a brief to the Ontario government for changes in our law to prevent racial and religious discrimination here. Blacks in our province still encounter difficulty in obtaining work and housing. I was sorry to see only a handful or white Anglo-Saxon Protestants in that gathering who were interested in seeing that the rights of all our people are protected.

Yes, we have our own problems. But this does not mean that we have no business speaking out in the matter of human rights elsewhere. We cannot draw national lines in the matter of human rights. Surely Jesus taught this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The action of the Samaritan foreigner was needed to point up the failure of the priest and the Levite to minister to their fellow-countryman. Sometimes we need help from outside to discover our own blind-spots. I hope Americans will exercise their responsibility to point out Canadian blind-spots when they see them.

In the late thirties did not many people react with shock to the reports of the persecution of Jews in Germany? And did not the great majority also say: "We have no right to meddle in German affairs. We trust the German conscience to rectify this wrong." Well, we still bear guilt for our silence, when so many were dying. Let us not fall into a similar sin now.

At the moment there is a crisis in human rights in the American south. Next year it may be somewhere else perhaps even in Canada. But at the moment the crisis is there. And we as Canadians have responsibilities with regard to it.

1. We need to study and understand it, because it has much to teach us and to teach the Church.
2. We should exert what pressure we can on the Americans for reform.
3. We should give what support we can, financial and otherwise to the civil rights movements. In addition, we should encourage white moderates and liberals in their perplexing and dangerous struggle. Many of you know people in the south personally or through business. Without being self-righteous, try to speak to them about these issues.
4. Finally, let us understand clearly what a dangerous cancer racial and religious bigotry is. In our community we seldom encounter it except in a polite form, but even in its polite form it is a devilish thing which must be driven out from us. Let us be sure that when God commands us to love our neighbour, He makes no exceptions with regard to race, colour, or religion.

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*Wonder in Cross-cultural Engagement:
The Examples of James Bassett and George Leslie Mackay,
Nineteenth-Century Canadian Presbyterian Missionaries*

By Peter Bush

This paper discusses two Canadian-born Presbyterian missionaries – The Rev. James Bassett (1834-1906) and The Rev. George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901). Bassett, born in Glenford (Hamilton), Ontario, moved as a child to the United States and was educated in there, attending Lane Theological Seminary in Ohio for his theological training and being ordained by the Presbyterian Church (USA). After serving as a chaplain in the Civil War he was eventually appointed in 1871 a missionary to Persia. On his decision, using Tehran as his base of operations. Bassett and family returned to the US in 1884.

Mackay was born in Embro township, Ontario, 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Bassett's birthplace, both coming from Canadian Presbyterianism's evangelical heartland (that is early to mid-19th century evangelicalism). Mackay took his theological training at Knox College in Toronto and Princeton Seminary. In 1871 he was sent to Taiwan, and on his own decision chose Tamsui in the northern part of the island as his base of operations. Mackay married a Taiwanese woman, and except for a couple of furloughs to Canada was to live the rest of his life in Taiwan.

Both Bassett and Mackay have left substantial written records from which to glean the role of wonder in their cross-cultural understanding.

The Reformed-Presbyterian tradition understands God to have provided two books which reveal God's person: the Bible, the Word of God, and the creation, the Book of nature. God's identity is as evident in creation as in the words of the Bible. The study of the creation, including human beings and human cultures, is a theological exercise fueling wonder at God's action.

Charles Arand¹ argues there are three factors in wonder, all of which are critical in moving cross-cultural encounter into engagement.

First, "wonder draws us out of ourselves", pulled out of normal categories of thought, the individual is dislocated opening them to experiencing the new and surprising as captivating. In cross-cultural encounter, the other gets behind rooted cultural expectations surprising the individual with beauty or elegance or even the surprise itself.

Second, "wonder opens us up to seeing the world as having its own integrity". The same can be said of cross-cultural encounter, which invites the individual to make the links between their experiences of the culture to see them not as a collection of random experiences, but instead seeking to understand the coherence and thus integrity of the other culture.

Third, wonder fuels the "prolonged engagement with life" necessary to understand these connections. This process is motivated by a desire to understand, in Arand's words "to connect with the ultimate meanings and purposes of the surrounding world." The work of cross-cultural engagement requires a commitment beyond functional purposes, it must be fueled by deeper motivations than utility or the commitment will ebb.

Sophia Vasalou² reminds us that wonder is present both in the initial moments of engaging with the surprise, the object of beauty, and in deep involved study of the object which reveals new surprises and matters of wonder. The initial wonder can evolve into deep study revealing further wonders, not evident upon initial viewing, which become recognizable only to the trained viewer. This deep wonder is essential to moving cross-cultural encounter into engagement with the other.

¹ Charles P. Arand, "God's World of Daily Wonders", *Concordia Journal*, Spring 2020, 53-71, esp. 54-55.

² Sophia Vasalou, "Introduction", in Vasalou, *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Pickwick Pub., 2012, 1-16.

Mackay has left three kinds of written material: letters to mission agency bureaucrats in Canada, which were primarily administrative in nature but do at times reveal Mackay's connection with Taiwan's geography and people; a journal which at times is self-consciously aware that it will be read by others in the future, but frequently is less guarded; and a book, *From Far Formosa*, published in 1895, which quite consciously is an apology for Mackay's quarter-century in Taiwan. In the book Mackay describes his wonder at the place and people wanting his readers to experience wonder as well.

Wonder for Mackay was first attached to the flora, fauna, and geology of the place. This ranges from letters describing outrunning raging floods caused by typhoons to detailed descriptions in *From Far Formosa* of flora and fauna (especially the poisonous kind) using proper scientific terms. Here the Reformed tradition's openness to science is evident for Mackay saw no conflict between faith and science. A sense of adventure permeates Mackay's writing, he was on a journey that had unexpectedly landed him in Tamsui in northern Taiwan, and he was open to experiencing the adventure to the full. Adventure allowed him to bring together diverse events, locating them into a cohesive narrative which takes both the storyteller and the reader outside of the common and the normal. Adventure disorients those entering into it, confronting the adventurer with the challenge of understanding their experiences in categories that no longer fit the ones they previously used to describe the world. The wonder of adventure forces a re-working of the old constructs, including the rejection of some.

Implicit in Mackay's writing is a view that entering the other culture with wonder is essential to the work of cross-cultural missionary engagement. Failing to do this would, Mackay believed, undermine the work of the mission. Mackay has been often been regarded as a lone ranger because of his inability to get along with other Canadian missionaries sent to Taiwan. An analysis of Mackay's letters back to Canada reveal Mackay was critical of colleagues who were unwilling to be drawn out of their Euro-Canadian culture and into the culture of

Taiwan. Mackay rented a regular Taiwanese house as his base of operation upon his arrival in Tamsui, and he expected new missionaries from Canada to do the same. When a colleague's wife and infant child died, Mackay was ordered by mission leaders in Toronto to have "mission" houses built which looked more North America than Taiwanese. The houses were built inside a mission compound. Mackay was frustrated by this turn of events, arguing that few missionaries from Canada was better than more. Worthy of note is that colleagues willing to be drawn out of their cultural selves and to find an integrity in the culture around them were able to work well with Mackay.

Mackay was willing to take on the role of itinerant teacher, a model arising from the cultural context, travelling the northern part of the island with his students in tow, teaching as he went. He understood himself to be other than the people of Taiwan, even as he married a Taiwanese woman, but he was willing adopt the practices and patterns of the culture in order to accomplish his mission. His ability to make such an adaptation effectively arose from paying attention to the culture around him and how to act in ways that would create space for engagement. While Mackay was not Taiwanese, he is regarded to have been a son-in-law of Taiwan, that is, identified as part of the family.

Bassett has left two book length accounts of his time in Persia along with articles in both popular level and academic publications in English, as well as a number of pieces, including the Gospel of Matthew, translated into various languages spoken in Persia at the time.

Bassett, a gifted linguist, used his own transliteration of Persian place names, attempting to come as close as possible to the Persian names, eschewing the "agreed upon" Anglicized spellings. In his writings he used Persian units of distance and currency. Drawn out of his own culture into the Persian culture, a culture Bassett came to see as having coherence. Bassett, however, was unable to leave everything of North America culture behind, being critical of the lack of cleanliness, comments that moved beyond observation to become evaluative.

Bassett described with accuracy the beliefs of the various religious groups present in Persia in the 1872-1884 period. His outline of Shia Islam's beliefs was done with precision and care, noting its distinctions from Sunni Islam. He was among the first writers in English to document the religious evolution and beliefs of the Bahai. He also wrote about the Yazidis, the Nestorians, and the Armenians. His interest in these religious groups appears to be rooted in two things. Certainly, present was a desire to understand how best to proclaim the gospel to each group, but Bassett wrote with the energy of a discoverer excited to tell others what had been found.

In comparison, Bassett's discussions of interactions with government officials feel flat, tasks that did not energize Bassett. In fact, he notes quite frequently being able to hand such tasks off to others so that he could work on what he was passionate about, translation work.

Bassett's first translation attempts were translating Christian hymns into Farsi. He offers a detailed discussion of the important place of poetry in Persian culture, and that the meter of Persian poetry required not just the translation of an English text, but the complete reworking of the meter of hymns so that they were not "offensive" to the aesthetic expectations of the Persian hearers. This aesthetic crossed the religious groups he identified, the poetic ear he argued it was part of the Persian identity independent of religious conviction.

Wonder is on full display in Bassett's description of the Turkmen people. Everything from their social structure to their dexterity with horses is of interest. Bassett is full of wonder at their nomadic life, and fully aware of how that life pattern would bring them into conflict with political powers in both Russia and Persia. His wonder drew him into learning the Turkmen dialect well enough that he was able to translate the New Testament's Gospel of Matthew into Turkmen. He also oversaw the printing of the gospel. The effort involved in learning a language well enough to be able to translate into it involves "prolonged engagement." Such language acquisition grows out of building relationship and connection with native speakers, a close

enough relationship that the other can be trusted to give honest feedback on the quality of the translation being produced. Such connection grows out of an appreciation for the other and a regard that the language and the person of the other is of such value that this kind of work is worth doing. Wonder is a central motivator of such action.

Both Bassett and Mackay were motivated by more than utilitarian and functional concerns, they were driven by wonder. Having been captivated by the objects of their wonder they sought to either surround themselves with others who fed that wonder, or to manage their work so there were opportunities to feed their wonder. Wonder fed their cross-cultural engagement creating the space for interaction and a deepening connection with the other culture, the people and the land.

Wonder is an important factor in the mission enterprise, for the hearers of the gospel message need to not only hear the story of Jesus, they need to experience the care and appreciation of those telling the story. As the preamble to the ordination questions says, "Being assured of your love for God and for people." Unless there is love for and wonder at the people and place they have been sent, the messenger (missionary) will be severely hampered in their work, never being able to enter fully into the necessary cross-cultural engagement.

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Living Christian-ly in a Economic World:
A Review of three books
by Peter Bush

A number of years ago during a conversation about the meaning of “stipend” and how “stipend” should be calculated, I was using theological language to make my point. I received the response from my conversation partner, also a minister, “Not everything is theological.” Kenneth Barnes, Michael Barram, and Scott Gustafson would suggest that the payment of money to people in exchange for their time, attention, and labour is a deeply theological matter.

More recently in an on-line conversation about the application of a particular Biblical passage referring to wealth, a response was posted, “The Bible is not an economics textbook. It is about theology.” Certainly Barram would suggest that the Bible because it is about theology is in fact an economics textbook.

Those vignettes highlight what all three authors would agree on, the church, particularly the church in North America, must find ways to engage the worldview behind the market economy and the rise of global capitalism. Money may be morally neutral, in that it can be used for good or it can be used for evil, but the economy which uses money as its fuel is not morally neutral.

At the Altar of Wall Street looks at the global economy through the lens of religious studies and finds that the global economy has all the trappings of a religion, including the rituals and practices that ensure the followers of the religion of the economy remain faithful to it. The lay-out of the book includes text boxes which provide summaries of Gustafson’s argument. Three of those give a sense of the book’s direction. Central to the argument is: “Economics concerns all things related to the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Until very recently, religions, not the market, sanctioned and justified the distribution of goods and services.” (5)

For example, think about how we determine the viability of a congregation or ministry. One question dominates, does the congregation have enough money to pay the bills? Congregations

rarely come knocking on the door of Presbytery for help when here have been no baptisms in the last five years, they do come asking for help when the money threatens to run out. The measure used to determine something’s “true” value is the most important measure, and for the church in North America that metric is money. As Gustafson writes, “Money is the sacrament of The Economy because it is an external expression that embodies our subjective trust in The Economy’s promises. Without such subjective belief, money would not “work.”” (p. 109)

A deeply chilling quote: “The Economy is concerned with the “spiritual growth” of its young people. From cradle to grave it teaches people to be good consumers and devoted employees.” (p. 158) The “priests of the economy” have developed the teaching tools to form the young into consumers, so that throughout their days they would worship at the altar of The Economy.

The Economy remains a powerful force through the ways in which “debt” as a mythologizing force has shaped virtually every human relationship, leading to the commodification of human life on all levels. Gustafson calls for the demythologizing of debt so that “a new social arrangement that does not use debt as a fundamental component of its order” can emerge. (p. 205) This is a call to the unseating of The Economy as a religion.

Gustafson’s important book is a bracing challenge, but not it is for the faint of heart.

Reading Gustafson’s book, will leave readers seeking for resources to bolster resistance to the power of the new religion of the Modern Global Economy. In *Missional Economics*, Barram argues we need look no further than the Bible. For in its pages, Barram might suggest on virtually every page, Old and New Testament alike, we find the tools to stand against the onslaught of The Economy.

Opening with a call to transformed minds, a la Romans 12, Barram lays out a pattern of Biblical formation, which pays special attention to the

ways in which the Biblical material seeks to shape our economic lives. His reading on the Mark account of the rich man's inability to sell everything and Jesus' shocking statement about the camel and the eye of the needle is particularly helpful. In part Barram comments, "Salvation is possible for God, but...we must participate in the process, even if it is merely to turn away from what most captivates us and demands our loyalty – such as...wealth – and to turn toward God, choosing to follow Jesus from that point onward." (p. 162) In conversation after conversation that I have with North American church leaders I am struck by how quickly money is the thing that attracts attention over all else. It is the bright shiny object that so frequently stands at the center of conversations. Church leaders have been captivated by it, and Barram's call to be transformed is both timely and painful. Painful because hard choices will need to be made.

But as Barram points out in the case of Zacchaeus, "He reverses course. He opens himself up to the abundance of the kingdom rather than staying self-protected against what he might lose." (p. 214) Zacchaeus' choice to believe in the abundance and generosity of the kingdom, to in Gustafson's words demythologize debt, promises to bear fruit in the lives of others. Zacchaeus demonstrates what can happen when people are transformed and shaped through engagement with the One *who* stands at the center of the Biblical story. This kind of engagement creates the space for not only individuals, but whole communities to imagine new patterns of life, patterns that place loyalty to Jesus above all.

Reading Barram's book within a covenanted and accountable community would be particularly rich, for resisting the power of The Economy on one's own is a very lonely experience.

If Gustafson believes the only way forward is the demythologizing of debt, which is nothing short of the overthrow capitalism; Barnes in *Redeeming Capitalism* suggests that while postmodern capitalism is corrosive, it can be fixed, being redeemed from the bottom up and from the top down. This process of redemption will require a recognition

that left to its own devices postmodern capitalism is without an ethical core beyond the famous line from the movie *Wall Street*: "Greed is good."

For Barnes individuals can both on a personal and on a community-level begin to dethrone the present forms of capitalism by adopting patterns of thrift. Not going into debt, using capital for useful (common good purposes), reducing waste and foregoing conspicuous consumption. Thrift is stewardship of ourselves to take back the economic power from the agents of post-modern capitalism. Fulfilling one's commitment to thrift is more easily done through processes of mutual accountability and support with family, friends, and neighbours. The simplicity of the bottom-up approach is attractive.

But Barnes recognizes the ethical core of capitalism has to be remade if capitalism is going to be redeemed. To that end, he argues for nothing short of a heart transplant. Here Barnes' book falters. While there is no question that the transformation he calls for is needed, short of a complete tearing down of post-modern capitalism, it is hard to imagine how that change would be accomplished. Leaving readers unconvinced that capitalism can be redeemed without a conversion.

Of critical importance for North American Christians is a committed conversation about what it means to be economic beings who so easily serve the god of The Economy. Only when free of the colonizing power of The Economy will the church be able to point to the true freedom it has in Christ.

Kenneth J. Barnes, *Redeeming Capitalism*, (Eerdmans, 2018), Foreword by Miroslav Volf.

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