

DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL

ROWAN WILLIAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH AS MISSIONARY

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XTIAN THE 399: THEOLOGY OF ROWAN WILLIAMS

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
PRACTICES AS ANTIDOTE FOR WILLIAMS’S CURRENT CONTEXT:	
A. DIVISIONS IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION	
B. THE FRESH EXPRESSIONS MOVEMENT .....	4
THE FIRST PRACTICE: THE PRACTICE OF MORAL DISCERNMENT ORIENTED BY MARTYRDOM	8
THE SECOND PRACTICE: PARTICIPATION IN THE SACRAMENTS .....	16
THE THIRD PRACTICE: STANDING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE .....	23
THE FOURTH PRACTICE: THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNICATING THE GOOD NEWS .....	25
STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE FOURTH PRACTICE OF COMMUNICATING THE GOOD NEWS .....	32
1. Communicating the Good News is rooted in the reign of God.	32
2. Communicating the Good News will result in very diverse expressions of the gospel being lived out.	32
3. Communicating the Good News is fueled by participation in the sacraments.	36
4. Communicating the Good News needs to be done with an appropriate degree of humility because it is philosophically and historically incoherent and naïve to absolutely separate church and world.	38
5. Communicating the Good News is possible because Christians and non-Christians are capable of discussing issues of meaning together.	40
6. Communicating the Good News involves engaging people in thoughtful reflection over an extended period of time.	43
7. Communicating the Good News involves facilitating opportunities for human interaction.	45
8. Communicating the Good News involves taking seriously human existence.	45
9. Communicating the Good News involves a recognition that we can never comprehensively describe God.	48
10. Communicating the Good News involves embodying the message of Jesus.	51
11. Communicating the Good News involves utilizing the gifts and stories of human beings.	53
CONCLUSION .....	54
APPENDIX 1: VARIOUS WAYS OF DESCRIBING THE TWO DANGERS TO AVOID .....	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	58

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to look at the theme of “The Church as Missionary” in eight books by Rowan Williams.<sup>1</sup> This phrase is derived from an essay originally published in 1989 called “The Judgement of the World” in Williams’s book of collected articles *On Christian Theology*. He writes that “the essence of the church is missionary”<sup>2</sup> . . .

it [the church] is essentially missionary in its nature, seeking to transform the human world by communicating to it in word and act a truthfulness that exposes the deepest human fears and evasions and makes possible the kind of human existence that can pass beyond these fears to a new liberty.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The eight books by Williams drawn upon in this essay are:

1. Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness: Sermons and Reflections* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1995).
2. Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 2000).
3. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000).
4. Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1982, 2002).
5. Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).
6. Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005).
7. Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross* (2d. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1990).
8. Rowan Williams, *Writing in the Dust: After September 11* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 38. Others have also made this point. Cf. Catholic Church. Vatican II. *AD GENTES: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*. 1965. Online: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html) “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”

<sup>3</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 31; Cf. 179, 230.

A theologian who claims that the church should be at its heart “missionary” must navigate between what I would like to call two ditches. Williams writes in a 1991 address entitled “Doing the Works of God,” that

The attempt to join in God’s work, forming the communion of the kingdom, hovers between celebratory confidence and painful iconoclasm. If confidence predominates, mission becomes a kind of corporate egotism, the effort to bring the world under the dominion of a system administered by an institution possessed of exclusive rights.<sup>4</sup>

The first ditch to avoid is missionary work that is epistemologically arrogant. The missional church leader who falls into this ditch does not take seriously the need to listen to the culture and communicate in its language. The Christian speaks arrogantly to the culture – forgetting the many times throughout church history that the church has made terrible mistakes. In contrast, the church as missionary needs to have an appropriate degree of humility if it is to effectively communicate to un-churched and de-churched people.

But Williams also identifies another pitfall on the opposing side

If iconoclasm becomes an end in itself, we have no impulse or rationale for the hope that sustains the effort to move toward communion and no shape for the humanity we want to see formed in this communion.<sup>5</sup>

The ditch on the other side are is the danger of losing the distinctiveness of the church by capitulating to the receiving or “host” culture. Those who succumb to this protest so vehemently against the oppressiveness of the Christian tradition, what Williams calls “iconoclasm,” that they lose all direction. The key for the “church as missionary” is somehow to retain its distinctiveness from the world, to nurture practices that that foster obedience to Jesus Christ and yet to connect effectively with the world. Jesus prayed, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:16,18).

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 231.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 231.

Not of the world, but into it – this is Jesus’ vision – but the “church as missionary” constantly struggles to walk this path.

In his book *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Lesslie Newbigin hopes to chart a course “between two dangers.” One danger is the person who “simply fails to communicate.” The other danger is “to so far succeed in talking the language of his hearers that he is accepted all too easily as a familiar character . . . In the attempt to be ‘relevant’ one may fall into syncretism.”<sup>6</sup>

These two ditches mirror the two helpful categories introduced by Joon-Sik Park in his 2007 book, *Missional Ecclesiologies in Creative Tension: H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder*.<sup>7</sup> Park suggests that these two ditches are the primary tensions in the missional ecclesiologies of H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder. Park concludes that Niebuhr misses the first ditch by a wide margin but his ecclesiology comes close to falling into the second ditch,

His setting of the church in solidarity with the world, not only with God, also rightly calls it to exist for service and witness, and not for itself. Niebuhr’s ecclesiology fails, however, to provide specific and concrete ways for the church both to criticize and serve the world.<sup>8</sup>

According to Park, Niebuhr is very aware of the church “falling into the danger of being self-regarding and self-righteous . . . however, the church is vulnerable to losing its uniqueness and distinctiveness.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, H. Richard Niebuhr has an appropriate degree of humility about the church but perhaps does not articulate strongly enough the distinctiveness of the church.

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<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Joon-Sik Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies in Creative Tension: H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 137.

On the other hand, Yoder's ecclesiology, according to Park, while distinctively Christian, fails to articulate points of connection with culture.

Yoder's ecclesiology is rich with concrete substance and guidance for the church's social witness and service . . . However, his call for the church's distinctiveness has a danger of ignoring the fact that the church is still in solidarity with the world, which too is an object of both God's love and redemption. Yoder stresses how distinguished the church is from the world to the extent that the church may forget how much it shares with the world.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Yoder did not write in such a way that non-Christians would find him persuasive.

For example, he often made his arguments based on Scripture.

I have not cited this analyses by Park of Niebuhr and Yoder as definitive and conclusive but rather as illustrative of the topic of "missional ecclesiology." As Park intends to analyze the missional ecclesiology of those two theologians, I intend to do the same with Williams.

How does Rowan Williams address these two issues in his missional ecclesiology? In this essay, I identify four practices that Rowan Williams suggests keep the church distinctive from the world and yet engaging with it.

#### PRACTICES AS ANTIDOTE FOR WILLIAMS'S CURRENT CONTEXT: C. DIVISIONS IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION D. THE FRESH EXPRESSIONS MOVEMENT

Since becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has been forced to respond to what he calls "the current divisions in the Anglican Communion."<sup>11</sup> He writes in his 2007 Advent letter of his

profound conviction that the existence of our Communion is truly a gift of God to the wholeness of Christ's Church and that all of us will be seriously wounded and diminished

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<sup>10</sup> Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 138-9.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, *Why*, 85.

if our Communion fractures any further; but also out of the no less profound conviction that our identity as Anglicans is not something without boundaries.<sup>12</sup>

In order to prevent further fracturing, Williams's has tried to remind the Anglican communion of common features that all the churches have in common, such as participation in the sacraments and speaking the common language of Scripture. (I would like to identify what Williams calls "constitutive elements" in this letter what Alasdair MacIntyre calls "practices").<sup>13</sup> Williams argues that these constitutive elements can both unify churches and distinguish them from the world. They are foundational pieces for ecumenical (potentially unifying) discussion.<sup>14</sup> Though Williams's primary purpose is to hold the Anglican Communion together and resolve conflict among these churches, there are also implications for missional ecclesiology. This search for what is central or nonnegotiable – the distinctive features of the church – its core practices – can also be used for determining what is crucial to the gospel being preached faithfully.

In 2004, the Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Church of England produced a report called, *The Mission-shaped Church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*.<sup>15</sup> "Fresh Expressions" began as a new initiative in September 2004 with the appointment of Steven Croft as Archbishops' Missioner and Team Leader. Since then a team of

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<sup>12</sup> Rowan Williams, "Archbishop of Canterbury's Advent Letter," *The Anglican Communion Official Website* (14 December 2007). Cited 17 December 2007. Online: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2007/12/14/ACNS4354>.

<sup>13</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (3d. ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187. The definition of practice and its relevance will be argued for more fully in the section about the first practice.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, "Church," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 159-167. See Wainwright's article for the various ways "church" is conceived by different traditions. Most ecumenical discussion relates to seeking common ground regarding the Nicene Creed's description of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Ernst Kasemann, "United and Multiplicity in the New Testament Doctrine of the Church," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 252-259. Kasemann argues that "Christological" agreement must come before any discussion of ecclesiological unity.

<sup>15</sup> Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England), *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004). Available free online at [http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/mission\\_shaped\\_church.pdf](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/mission_shaped_church.pdf)

people has been appointed to work on the initiative. Their “aim is to resource mission through encouraging new and different expressions of church life.”<sup>16</sup> As church leaders began to think about how to reach the de-churched and un-churched,<sup>17</sup> they are trying to craft ways of being church that are both culturally relevant (contextualized) and counter-cultural (gospel-centered).

One of the central features of this report is the recognition that the changing nature of our missionary context requires a new inculturation of the gospel within our society . . . At the same time, any principle based on Christ’s incarnation is inherently counter-cultural, in that it aims at faithful Christian discipleship within the new context, rather than cultural conformity.<sup>18</sup>

Upon the release of a new book edited by Croft called *Mission-shaped Questions*<sup>19</sup> in February 2008, Rowan Williams said this in an address,

The hard questions that have faced “fresh expressions” have come I think from several different directions. Think about some of them.

- (1) Isn’t this really a kind of Christianity light - trying to smooth out the difficulties in order to make things more accessible to people who can’t be bothered or haven’t got the skills or the resources really to get themselves into the real thing?
- (2) Isn’t all this something which frankly brackets out a whole lot of theological questions by dropping them in the too difficult file – the waste paper basket that is, and moving on just to keep people engaged and entertained?
- (3) Isn’t this a very churchy thing, which somehow ties up our energies in recruitment to something or other, without really addressing the transformational or prophetic quality that the church needs to have in the world?

And I’ve phrased those questions so as to indicate that they come from the different bits of our church from evangelical, and catholic, and radical corners.

And they are real questions and they are very serious ones because:

- (1) Christianity light isn’t Christianity at all. A Christian gospel that doesn’t claim my soul, my life, my all, isn’t actually good news.

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<sup>16</sup> Fresh Expressions website. Online: <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/aboutus>

<sup>17</sup> *Mission-shaped Church*, 37. For example, they estimate current church involvement in the UK this way: Non-churched (40%), Closed de-churched (20%), Open de-churched (20%), Fringe attenders – less than monthly (10%), and Regular attenders – at least monthly (10%).

<sup>18</sup> *Mission-shaped Church*, xii-xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Croft, ed. *Mission-shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today’s Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008).

- (2) Likewise, a Christian expression of church life that doesn't bind people together in unities and solidarities that are given by God not by us through the sacraments, through the integral organic life of the church – that's really not worth bothering with.
- (3) And a church that doesn't actually say to the world, this is the new creation, this is an order of justice, reconciliation, a counter-cultural movement. That again is not really the church.

And the challenge for all fresh expressions of church is how they are going to live into those three enormous demanding realities. And that's what the book is about. That's why you will see here some very fundamental theological thinking.

*The more the 'fresh expressions' project rolls on, the more one is driven to ask very basic questions about the nature of the church.*<sup>20</sup>

A Christian community of Goths or surfers might look quite different from a traditional local church. They might meet in a pub, a movie theater, or under a bridge. As Williams says, these fresh expressions lead to the question about what are the distinctive features of a church. In other words, (and I do not think many others have made this connection), it is the same “basic questions about the nature of the church” which face churches that are splintering away from one another within the Anglican Communion and the questions that face the Fresh Expressions movement. Williams most often takes up the questions of the former rather than the latter but I am particularly interested in the latter.

Though these questions about the nature of the church are crucial, in his book *Why Study the Past*, Williams observes that many Christians do not know what is particularly distinctive about the church. “In a general environment of emotional and individualistic thinking about ethics, it is hardly surprising if Christians are often at sea when it comes to articulating what they think are the distinctive virtues the Church should be nourishing.”<sup>21</sup> But, as Williams said above in his 2007 Advent Letter to the Anglican Communion, being a church “is not something without

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<sup>20</sup> Rowan Williams, “Remarks on the book *Mission-shaped Questions*,” 12 February 2008. <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr1408.html> Italics mine.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Why*, 59.

boundaries.”<sup>22</sup> Throughout its history, the church has sometimes succumbed to the world in ways that have had terrible consequences. Williams cites as examples the capitulation to the world by some churches in Nazi Germany and South Africa, then says,

Definition matters, ultimately, so resistance is possible to the idolatrous claims of total power that may be made from time to time in the world. Definition matters so that the Christian is free to say with conviction that the truth of the world and of humanity is not at the disposal of this or that system of political management.<sup>23</sup>

If there are no clear features or practices of a church, there will be no grounds for resistance when the church goes astray.

#### THE FIRST PRACTICE: THE PRACTICE OF MORAL DISCERNMENT ORIENTED BY MARTYRDOM

What is the church? In his book *Why Study the Past*, Williams argues that the answer must be found through historical inquiry. Williams writes, “history is a set of stories we tell in order to understand better who we are and the world we’re now in.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, when people tell the history of the Church, they are “trying to establish more plainly what sort of thing the Church is.”<sup>25</sup> Church historians have tended to tell the “stories” in such a way as to justify their understanding of the church. Tellings of church history tend to explain why one’s particular branch of Christianity is the best one.

Williams argues that Protestant and Roman Catholic church histories typically miss martyrdom as the theme that transcends the Reformation divide and which he maintains is the

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<sup>22</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Why*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Why*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Why*, 1-2.

best way of identifying the church. Protestant history emphasizes that “the shape of the drama is one of primitive catastrophe, a devastating loss at or near the very beginning.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, what is important is the fidelity to that very early tradition before the catastrophe, not institutional continuity. Martyrs in the Patristic period are not seen as key sources of authority for the church. Furthermore, Williams argues that Protestants with restorationist ambitions cannot ignore church history and get back to the early church depicted in the New Testament. The canon itself was compiled during the later centuries.

Defenders of the Catholic tradition argue that the Roman Catholic tradition has been one continuous development. Williams believes they overstate the case when they say that “The Fathers say the same thing, and say the same thing as we now say; there is no hidden alternative history.”<sup>27</sup> They gloss over the aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition which need to be identified as inadequate. Some dissenting voices have in some periods embodied the Church better than those who were part of the Roman Catholic institution.

Williams finds the “Church’s distinctiveness and Church’s unity”<sup>28</sup> in the convictions of the martyrs. In around 156, Polycarp was burned at the stake for questioning the ultimate authority of the Roman Empire.

The story of the Christian tried and executed by the imperial power is the most dramatic but also the simplest possible demonstration of what ‘church’ means – and so of what holy power looks like and what is involved in claiming a different sort of citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

The unity of the earliest centuries, then, lies partly in this mutual recognition of language grounded in a common sense of holiness, suffering and sovereignty. The implicit test for a church as to whether it belongs in the framework of catholic fellowship is whether it

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<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Why*, 20. Cf. Mosheim, Adolf von Harnack, Bultmann, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, *Why*, 20. Cf. Petavius, Bishop Bull 21-22.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *Why*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Why*, 34.

knows how to resist, whether it speaks and behaves as an assembly answerable to the emperor's Lord rather than just the emperor.<sup>30</sup>

Williams here argues that a martyr's death served as a particularly strong picture of the distinctiveness of the Christian community.

Later in this essay, I will show that Williams believes listening to the Scriptures and participating in the sacraments are crucial foundational practices for the Church. Here, however, in *Why Study the Past*, he argues that persons who have given their lives the truth "Jesus is Lord" are recognized as "Church" universally. Whereas, Christians often bicker over the use of Scripture and over sacramental practice. He writes, "unanimity in the definition of the canon of Scripture, took some time to emerge. . . Nor do we find an absolute homogeneity in patterns of church order or governance . . . More surprisingly, we find traces of quite significant divergence over sacramental practice."<sup>31</sup> In other words, though the canon of Scripture, institutional structures, and even sacramental practice differed among Christians, recognition of the faithfulness of a martyr like Polycarp was unanimous. "Among God's new people, the way in which citizenship is most clearly manifested is in risking one's life on behalf of the sovereignty of Jesus"<sup>32</sup> as opposed to the sovereignty of the state. This "alien citizenship"<sup>33</sup> of the martyrs rejects unquestioning obedience to worldly governments (like those in Roman Empire, Nazi Germany and South Africa).

Williams's call to the Church to be characterized by martyrdom seems at first to be quite severe. Is this realistic? Does Williams expect the true church to still be characterized by literal

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<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Why*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *Why*, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Why*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Why*, 56.

martyrdom today? He writes, “It is still true that the Church will at times find its unity when it finds what it has to resist.”<sup>34</sup> He writes that the church should respond to particularly egregious abuses of power such as Nazi Germany or South Africa’s apartheid.<sup>35</sup>

And in the last century or so, it is significant that believers have from time to time had to confront just such pressure when the alliance of political power and a kind of religious mythology recreates something of the atmosphere of the Roman empire. Thus when in 1936 the Confessing Church in Germany, the network of those who resisted the anti-Semitic legislation of the Third Reich, bound itself to the ‘Barmen Declaration,’ affirming the sovereignty of God in Christ over all other claims to authority, the primitive shape of Christian self-definition became visible once more. Likewise in South Africa in the 1980s . . .<sup>36</sup>

Though, he does call for unity on this stark examples, Williams does not expect every church to be characterized by literal martyrdom in what he calls “a post-martyrdom period.”<sup>37</sup> He admits that in a “post-martyrdom period,” “when the most obvious risks seem to be past, the sovereignty of Jesus still needs some unpacking and exploration.”<sup>38</sup> He suggests the spirit of martyrdom might be seen in the contemplation of the monastic fathers and the penitence of Augustine.<sup>39</sup> It is not literal martyrdom but it significantly denies the claims of the world in order to declare “Jesus is Lord.”

Martyrdom, contemplation, and penitence are aspects of the Christian past which are not only distinctive about the church but also unifying for it. Though, as I will show later, Williams

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<sup>34</sup> Williams, *Why*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Like Niebuhr, there is a large gap between what he believes about the Church and what he sees in churches. “It was significant that Niebuhr came to locate the true church in history and reality; however, in describing it, he remained ambiguous and inexplicit. I agree with John Whitehead that ‘such utopian hopes for the church make strange reading after Niebuhr’s realistic sociological indictment of the church’s divisions.’” Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *Why*, 54.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, *Why*, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, *Why*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *Why*, 53.

sees Scripture as crucial, he also recognizes that the Scriptures have been abused and used by institutions to oppress. Therefore, Williams suggests martyrdom rooted in “the action of God in establishing his authority through the events of Christ’s life, death and resurrection,” as a particularly effective compass for guiding the church’s ethical reflection.<sup>40</sup> This process of moral discernment might be what MacIntyre calls “a practice.”<sup>41</sup> The church should be asking, “Is this something without which we could not, in the long run, makes sense of the commitments that make sense of martyrdom? . . . Is this going to make it impossible to make sense of the Christian claim to an independent citizenship?”<sup>42</sup> Williams articulates here a boundary. If a church can no longer see themselves as continuing in the path of Polycarp, the monastic fathers, and Augustine, then it is possible that they no longer deserve the name “church.” But it is not Williams’s primary purpose to identify true churches from false ones. Rather it is draw all churches closer to the ideal of martyrdom – to coax them to take up this practice.

In the following quote he names particularly flagrant examples of churches that have gone astray.

Of course, it *is* possible, and sometimes essential, to ask whether what purports to be a response to the gospel is authentic: as we’ve seen, the history of the church makes plain that the gospel can be misappropriated. What justifies such a judgment are surely idioms and practices that undermine the rationale of communion itself, whether at the level of theory (denials of the truly relational nature of God, restrictions on the scope of Christ’s saving work) or at the level of practice (racist and xenophobic distortions of Christianity, such as the ‘German Christians’ of the 1930s, or the old NGK in South Africa). Heresy

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<sup>40</sup> Williams, *Why*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Practice: “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *Why*, 57.

is possible, but before we throw that word around, we need to remember that orthodoxy is common life before it is common doctrine.<sup>43</sup>

Williams declares that there are grounds for disqualifying a church – for naming it heretical. But as the context shows and as I will make clear in the second half of this essay, Williams believes that except for these flagrant abuses (such as that of the German Christians and the old NGK in South Africa), churches need to be given a great deal of flexibility and freedom. He says that churches tend to impose their bureaucracies on other churches with the result being stagnant institutions. Sadly, he says as church leaders,

We are inclined to try to communicate the gospel with full ‘instructions for use’ – a set of approved ways of responding. Yet this really makes sense only if the gospel is information before it is communion. Jesus’ activity gives the reality of a new ‘way of being in the world.’ It *effects* the restoring of community . . . it does not itself prescribe immediately a whole set of conclusions and attitudes. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that the implications – theological and ethical – took time to clarify, and the history of the church confirms the trial-and-error element in this over all the centuries of Christian existence.<sup>44</sup>

Because the gospel is not simply information to be communicated, churches, like for example the Church of England “fresh expressions” churches, need to be given space and time to develop.

In *Why Study the Past*, Williams urges churches not to dissolve relationships over among one another over relatively minor issues but rather to recognize in one another the same spirit of martyrdom, of counter-cultural response, rooted in Jesus. If one identifies the true church as that which preaches pure doctrine or who belongs to the same institutional hierarchy, these distinctives exclude many who call themselves Christians. But if one sees those who have declared Jesus is Lord and gone to their deaths, as “one of ours,” then most Christians will be able to declare their solidarity. Williams cites the example of “Protestants of both Lutheran and

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<sup>43</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 231. Not that Williams uses the word “practices” and “practice” but there is nothing in the context or any of his writing in the eight books to show that he has embraced MacIntyre’s technical definition and usage.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 230.

Reformed tradition . . . in the face of the Third Reich” coming together in unity as the “Confessing Church.”<sup>45</sup>

Williams has discussed this distinctive of the church primarily for its unifying upshot. Martyrdom provides perspective to those who would divide over minor issues. Williams argues that the horrors of cooperation with the Roman Empire, Nazi Germany and South African governmental abuses are legitimate grounds for resistance. There are times when a church must say, “This is fundamentally unchristian.” Yet one must be very careful when using terms like heresy and apostasy. Williams writes, “The DRC’s acceptance of apartheid was seen as heresy rather than an apostasy; the German Church struggle was more serious, affecting the Church’s liberty to define itself.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, Williams distinguishes between the problems of South African and Nazi Germany. In South Africa, the moral discernment practice related to martyrdom was being answered poorly. In Nazi Germany, the question could no longer even be asked. In South Africa, the practice of ethical discernment was being executed poorly. In Nazi Germany, the practice of ethical discernment had been squelched out. Thus, in South Africa, Williams calls it “heresy” and in Nazi Germany, the more severe term “apostasy.” Again, Williams is arguing this point to urge caution before labeling and dismissing other churches as “not one of ours.” This has implications for ecumenical unity between liberals and conservatives, east and west, Protestant and Catholic. But it also has implications for mission which Williams does not spell out.

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<sup>45</sup> Williams, *Why*, 57-58.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Why*, 85.

Just as liberals and conservatives need to be continue to search for common ground, so young innovative missional emerging fresh churches and older, traditional churches need to stay in conversation with one another.

Furthermore, this practice of ethical moral discernment oriented by martyrdom can serve as exhortation for all churches. Are we too comfortable? Is this idea of sacrifice totally foreign to us? Do we tend to consider what is more polite over what is faithful to Jesus? In particular, as the church intentionally seeks out opportunities to communicate with the world for evangelism, it must stay conscious of its identity as holy, suffering, contemplative and penitent – countercultural in the way of Jesus. In light of our identity as inheritors of the tradition of martyrdom, the way of conquest, violence and deception would not be consistent with mission.

In addition, the message being communicated to the world must be consistent with the martyr's view of the Christian life. Repeating Williams's questions above, "Is this something without which we could not, in the long run, makes sense of the commitments that make sense of martyrdom? . . . Is this going to make it impossible to make sense of the Christian claim to an independent citizenship?"<sup>47</sup> Thus, the preaching of a health and wealth gospel, which promises prosperity to converts, would be inconsistent with the true church whose distinctive feature is martyrdom.

Though in the next part of this essay I will identify in Williams's writing the practices of (2) participating in the sacraments, (3) listening to the Scriptures, and (4) communicating the Good News as key constituent parts of a Christian church or additional important "practices", Williams emphasizes in *Why Study the Past* that moral discernment oriented by the martyrdom of Jesus is the church's most *primal* practice. Even if churches quarrel about the particulars of

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<sup>47</sup> Williams, *Why*, 57.

these other practices, they should be able to find agreement about lives that proclaim “Jesus is Lord.”

## THE SECOND PRACTICE: PARTICIPATION IN THE SACRAMENTS

In his December 14, 2007 Advent letter to the Primates of the Anglican Communion & Moderators of the United Churches, Rowan Williams appeals for unity. Though he values unity, he also says, “our identity as Anglicans is not something without boundaries.”<sup>48</sup> He identifies these three boundaries (or more positively, “constituent elements” or distinctive features or what I am calling “practices”) of the church are:

[1] The common acknowledgment that we stand under the authority of Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith . . . [2] The common acknowledgement of an authentic ministry of Word and Sacrament . . . [3] The common acknowledgement that the first and great priority of each local Christian community is to communicate the Good News.<sup>49</sup>

Williams appeals to his readers to *recognize* in one another these practices. He believes that these common elements can serve as the foundation for ministry together.

The Communion is a voluntary association of provinces and dioceses; and so its unity depends not on a canon law that can be enforced but on the ability of each part of the family to *recognise* that other local churches have received the same faith from the apostles and are faithfully holding to it in loyalty to the One Lord incarnate who speaks in Scripture and bestows his grace in the sacraments. To put it in slightly different terms, local churches acknowledge the same 'constitutive elements' in one another. This means in turn that each local church receives from others and *recognises* in others the same good news and the same structure of ministry, and seeks to engage in mutual service for the sake of our common mission.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

<sup>49</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

<sup>50</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.” Italics mine.

Williams makes clear that he does not intend to violently enforce his will on the entire “association.” Rather, unity depends on voluntary recognition that other churches are indeed churches.

Williams is not dealing with a situation within the Anglican Communion where some churches are what he calls in *Why Study the Past* “apostate” – those who have linked themselves with the state to repress, kill and destroy the innocent. He is not talking to churches who have lost all capacity to measure their community life by martyrdom like the German Christian churches in Nazi Germany. That kind of apostasy warrants the “breaking of visible fellowship.”<sup>51</sup> Less serious situations may also warrant the dissolving of fellowship, according to Williams but this must be done very cautiously. He writes that it was probably appropriate for The World Alliance of Reformed Churches to disassociate themselves from The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in the 1980’s because of heresy. But he also points out that a “common language” still remained between the two groups so that communication was still possible. Williams says this differs from the more severe situation in Nazi Germany where the churches of the German Christians were taking orders from a Nazi regime and were thus wholly severed from the common language held in common with other churches.

Williams’s Advent Letter is specifically addressing a fissure within the Anglican Communion. Some conservative churches, primarily in North America, feel they can no longer function under liberal bishops. Sam Wells summarizes the American part of the story.

The story goes like this: Evangelical Anglicanism virtually died out in the Episcopal Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but movements emphasizing personal conversion, biblical authority, evangelism, expository preaching and gifts of the Spirit reemerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The people involved in these movements found themselves out of sympathy with the Episcopal Church on a number of issues and viewed what they perceived as its progressive ethos with mounting dismay. It seemed that they had to choose between two

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<sup>51</sup> Williams, *Why*, 85.

unsatisfying options: they could compromise their convictions and stay within an errant church or split off and become a small, officially recognized Anglican body. But in the mid-1990s a new strategy appeared: they could involve other Anglicans, particularly African bishops, in their effort to reform the Episcopal Church . . .<sup>52</sup>

Williams wants the liberal and conservative churches who may see one another as heretical to recognize in one another common practices which can form a common language. Even if one side sees another as heretical for their views on homosexuality or for betraying centuries of tradition by seceding from the institutional structure, Williams believes that practices related to Scripture, the sacraments and mission can be grounds for common conversation. In his essay “Different Christs?” Williams reiterates the importance of the search for common ground even when groups disagree, “if we have two rival visions of one thing or person, at least that thing or person is central to both of us. Somewhere we acknowledge implicitly an authority we both accept.”<sup>53</sup>

The first practice that Williams suggests unifies the churches of the Anglican Communion is the practice of the sacraments. No social club, sports team, support groups, environmental organization or political lobbies practice the sacraments. These other groups may have other rites and practices but none declare allegiance to the Trinitarian God as Churches do when they practice the sacraments. Though in his writings Williams emphasizes the practices of (1) ethical discernment through the lens of martyrdom, (3) standing under Scripture, and (4) communication the gospel, he cites Richard Hooker approvingly for his view that the (2) sacraments can encompass all of these. “Hooker has this at least in common with Luther, that he

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<sup>52</sup> Sam Wells, “Anglican maneuvers: review of *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopalian Dissidents and Their African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* by Miranda K. Hassett,” *ChrCent* 125, no. 4 (Feb 26, 2008): 44.

<sup>53</sup> “Different Christs?” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 91.

is profoundly suspicious of conditions other than baptism as a test of belonging in the Church.”<sup>54</sup>

Hooker is concerned that requiring additional conditions assumes too great of a role for human beings. In the Anglican Communion, some are angry with those churches who have pursued alternative Episcopal oversight and others are angry at those who have ordained practicing homosexuals. Drawing on Hooker again, Williams writes, “Both discipline and doctrine, in Protestant eyes, can be distorted into a grounding of the Church in human action and achievement, so both need to be challenged.”<sup>55</sup> The sacraments remind of the inadequacy of human actions and the need for God.

Williams is disturbed to see those who practice the same sacraments fragmenting from one another. Williams does not put it this way, but it is almost as if he is saying that the various sides are married to one another through taking the sacraments together under God, and thus “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Williams writes, “If we believe that unity is given by God in baptism, and that any other starting point compromises the unique place of divine initiative, some other questions rearrange themselves. Baptism itself makes no sense except in the context of a robust trinitarian theology.”<sup>56</sup> For Williams, a community that practices baptism and eucharist necessarily includes a series of other Christian characteristics such as a robust trinitarian theology. “What is the Church? It is simply those who have been immersed in, soaked in the life of Jesus, and who have been invited to eat with him and pray to the Father with him.”<sup>57</sup> Because the practice of the sacraments entails so much good: the beginnings of good Trinitarian theology, focus upon the inadequacy of human beings and

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<sup>54</sup> Williams, *Why*, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Williams, *Why*, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, *Why*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 113

greatness of God, etc. Williams suggests in his Advent Letter that an understanding of the sacraments might cause Churches to be cautious about condemning one another.

*The common acknowledgement of an authentic ministry of Word and Sacrament. We remain in communion because we trust that the Lord who has called us by his Word also calls men and women in other contexts and raises up for them as for us a ministry which can be recognised as performing the same tasks – of teaching and pastoral care and admonition, of assembling God's people for worship, above all at the Holy Communion. The principle that one local church should not intervene in the life of another is simply a way of expressing this trust that the form of ministry is something we share and that God provides what is needed for each local community.<sup>58</sup>*

Williams argues in the above quotation that to trust God might mean to “not intervene in the life of another” church. In light of Williams’s other comments about the necessity of boundaries, I do not think the reader should understand Williams to be condemning all types of intervention by one local church in another solely on the grounds that “God provides what is needed for each local community.” The phrasing here is too vague to understand what Williams is talking about. Is it that the African bishops should “not intervene” in North America? Or is it that liberal bishops need to leave alone conservative churches rather than “intervene in” them? In neither case do these realities correspond well with Williams’s phrasing: a “local church” intervening in “another” local church. Local churches intervening does not seem to be the problem. Rather, it seems that conservative churches are frustrated by the intervening of their affairs by liberal bishops. Liberal churches are frustrated by the “global south” churches intervening in their affairs.

Surely Williams is not saying that bishops “should not intervene in the life of” the churches under their care, when that is part of the bishop’s responsibility. Nor that the Anglican Communion has no responsibility to intervene in the life of a congregation. Williams’s comment makes it sound as if the angst is among local churches when the explosive tensions seem to be

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<sup>58</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

between bodies of unequal authority: bishops and local churches. For example, this was the headline this week on the *Christianity Today* news website, “Diocese Threatens to Suspend J.I. Packer.”<sup>59</sup> The Diocese official news report affirms the headline, “Bishop Michael Ingham has asked eight of his clergy to formally declare whether they’re in or out of the Anglican Church of Canada . . . The notices have gone out to the Rev. Don Gardner, the Rev. Daniel Gifford, the Rev. James Packer, the Rev. Richard Roberts, the Rev. David Short, the Rev. Michael Stewart, the Rev. James Wagner, and the Rev. Trevor Walters.”<sup>60</sup> Again, it is hard to say whether Williams would urge Ingham to recognize Packer’s ministry of word and sacrament even if Packer’s church has sought alternative Episcopal oversight, or if Williams would urge Packer to recognize Ingham’s authority as bishop, when Ingham was the first bishop to authorize the blessing of same-sex unions in the Anglican Communion in 2003 drawing the explicit attention of the Windsor Report.<sup>61</sup> “Recent developments within the Diocese of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church (USA), which both took synodical action to authorise public Rites for the Blessing of same sex unions, are one of the presenting causes for the current tensions within the Anglican Communion, and thus it is part of the mandate of the Lambeth Commission to address this issue.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ted Olsen, “Diocese Threatens to Suspend J.I. Packer,” *Christianity Today Liveblog* (Feb 28, 2008). Online: [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/02/diocese\\_threat.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/02/diocese_threat.html)

<sup>60</sup> Diocese of New Westminster – Anglican Church of Canada, “Bishop asks eight clergy to say whether they remain within the Anglican Church of Canada,” Diocese News (Feb 22, 2008). Online: <http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca/News/tabid/27/ctl/ViewArticle/ArticleId/629/mid/486/Default.aspx>

<sup>61</sup> Diocese of New Westminster – Anglican Church of Canada, “Chronology of Actions taken by the Anglican Church Of Canada & the Diocese of New Westminster in regard to the Issue of Same Sex Unions,” Online: <http://www.samesexblessing.info/Overview/Chronology/tabid/72/Default.aspx>

<sup>62</sup> Lambeth Commission, “On public Rites of Blessing of same sex unions,” *The Windsor Report 2004*, Section D.136. Online: [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section\\_d/p3.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_d/p3.cfm)

In other words, Williams's stress in the quote above about the importance of recognizing a common practice of the sacraments is probably not sufficient, (nor does Williams think it should be), to keep churches together. In his Advent Letter, Williams identifies three constituent elements, and I identify in this paper the additional practice of moral discernment oriented by martyrdom found in *Why Study the Past*. All four are connected.

In his book, *Resurrection*, Williams links what I have identified as the first two practices: martyrdom and eucharist – calling ethical discernment oriented by martyrdom “living eucharistically.”

We have noted already that the Eucharist is a reminder to the whole Church of its liability to desert and betray: the eucharistic Church ‘locates’ itself in Gethsemane before it finds itself finally in and with the risen Jesus. Thus the memory of the martyrs (all the martyrs) can and should be for the Church a part of its eucharistic life, where it identifies itself as oppressor and traitor, yet also the penitent and restored kin of Christ. When the Church lives ‘eucharistically’ in this sense, we can once again speak of an eloquent proclaiming of the resurrection gospel to the world. A Church which is not only divided but cements its dividing walls with the blood of martyrs cannot but be a stumbling-block for the faith of humanity at large: it fails to show forgiveness as a style of living. This should make very plain to us the indispensability within the Church not merely of a mentality of self-criticism and penitence, but of signs which continually impress on the Church that it is called to penitence . . . when the Church performs eucharistic action it is what it is called to be.<sup>63</sup>

In the last couple of sentences in the quote, Williams distinguishes between the practices of martyrdom and eucharist, though they reinforce one another. Moral discernment oriented by martyrdom (practice #1) is called “style of living” and “a mentality of self-criticism and penitence” whereas the sacraments of eucharist and baptism (practice #2) are “signs which continually impress on the Church that it is called to penitence.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 51.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 51. Williams goes on to discuss baptism on pp.52-56.

The sacraments are also related to the practice I will discuss in the next section. Their significance will remain hidden without the teaching of Scripture. In *Why Study the Past*, Williams writes that baptism and eucharist represent “not some general proclamation of generalized divine good will . . . So the continuity of faithful reading and exposition of the Bible becomes crucial in defining where and what the Church is.”<sup>65</sup> The practice of the sacraments reminds the church of penitence, of solid Trinitarian theology, of God’s greatness, and of the other practices.

### THE THIRD PRACTICE: STANDING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Williams, in his Advent Letter, names standing under the authority of Scriptures as a third constituent element of the church. He appeals to the Anglican Communion leaders to recognize that they share a common standard.

*The common acknowledgment that we stand under the authority of Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith', in the words of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral; as the gift shaped by the Holy Spirit which decisively interprets God to the community of believers and the community of believers to itself and opens our hearts to the living and eternal Word that is Christ. Our obedience to the call of Christ the Word Incarnate is drawn out first and foremost by our listening to the Bible and conforming our lives to what God both offers and requires of us through the words and narratives of the Bible. We recognise each other in one fellowship when we see one another 'standing under' the word of Scripture. Because of this recognition, we are able to consult and reflect together on the interpretation of Scripture and to learn in that process. Understanding the Bible is not a private process or something to be undertaken in isolation by one part of the family. Radical change in the way we read cannot be determined by one group or tradition alone.*<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, he says in *Tokens of Trust* that

When Christians meet for worship, they don’t just share bread and wine; they gather to be told who they are, not only in action but in word, in story and song and above all in the

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<sup>65</sup> Williams, *Why*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

story and song that is the Bible. The Church shows itself as what it truly is as it listens to the Bible.<sup>67</sup>

It is quite impossible to separate the church's other distinguishing features (moral discernment oriented by martyrdom, practicing sacraments, and going on mission) from listening to the Scriptures. Williams believes the authority of Scripture is a unifying element among the churches but knows it can also be divisive if it is identified as the single constituent feature. "Debates about the interpretation of Scripture are regularly at the centre of Christian divisions throughout the centuries. Yet the *fact* of Scripture has remained as a unifying and focal element within and between the churches."<sup>68</sup> Or as he says in his essay "The Discipline of Scripture,"

Our time . . . is characterized by profound conflict in many areas as to what is authentically Christian . . . Honesty compels the admission that none of these questions is likely to be 'settled' in the foreseeable future, certainly not by appeal to what is commonly taken to be the 'literal sense of Scripture' . . . [Yet] the common discipline above all of reading Scripture in the public, sacramental worship of the Church . . . should stand as a foundation for hope and hold before us a model of faith.<sup>69</sup>

Williams wants to remind Christians that reading the Bible as authoritative is both distinctively Christian and unifying despite the differences in interpretation.

As I have said above, Williams's primary concern in *Why Study the Past* and his Advent Letter is to address the simmering conflict within the Anglican Communion. He identifies the major features of the church in order to encourage angry church leaders to recognize the basic practices of historic Christianity in one another and to begin conversations from these points of commonality.

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<sup>67</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 121.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, *Why*, 86.

<sup>69</sup> Williams, "The Discipline of Scripture" in *On Christian Theology*, 57-59.

This means some hard reflective work in preparation for the Conference - including pursuing conversations with each other across the current divisions . . . direct contact and open exchange of convictions will be crucial.<sup>70</sup>

However, as I have said above, this material also has great potential for missional ecclesiology. These constituent elements provide a very important set of values that might constrain and guide an innovative missional church. “The more the ‘fresh expressions’ project rolls on, the more one is driven to ask very basic questions about the nature of the church.”<sup>71</sup> Though it may use Hip-Hop, or country music, or minister primarily to heroin addicts, it still needs certain minimal features to constitute a church. In addition to the practice of moral discernment oriented by martyrdom discussed above, the practices of listening to Scripture, practicing the sacraments and engaging in mission, provide this type of framework.

#### THE FOURTH PRACTICE: THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNICATING THE GOOD NEWS

Based on the previous three practices, it might be possible to get the idea that Rowan Williams supports some type of internal focus – discerning ethical responses through the lens of martyrdom, reading Scripture, and receiving the sacraments. However, this would massively distort the work of Rowan Williams.

Williams explains William Tyndale’s position that because we are so indebted to God, everything we have been given should be used for others.

a recognition that God’s gifts are restless in the hands of the receiver until they are given again, and that our rights of possession in and over the material world are systematically undermined by the awareness of the givenness of all things, spiritual and material.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

<sup>71</sup> Williams, “Remarks on the book *Mission-shaped Questions*,”

<sup>72</sup> Williams, *Why*, 76. This concept is closely related to Lesslie Newbigin’s understanding of election. God’s people have been given special blessing that they might bless others. In both of the following books, Newbigin has a chapter on election. Lesslie Newbigin, “Proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father: Mission as Faith in

Tyndale's point is that anything, for example any truth, that we might feel we have in our possession, which we might be tempted to use to declare someone else heretical, might instead produce in us gratitude that we have received it. Furthermore, not only is it from God, but it is not to be used exclusively for our benefit but for the benefit of others. Thus, Tyndale's concept of indebtedness invites us to praise God for his grace and to share that grace with others in mission. "The Church's unity . . . is at one level always 'past' – that is, always achieved, because grounded in God's purpose 'before the foundation of the world' – and, for us now, grounded in the history of God's covenant and incarnation."<sup>73</sup> Thus, the "common language" we have with other Christians is most fundamentally "praise."<sup>74</sup> Thus, for Tyndale and Williams, truth is not something to be hoarded. Rather, it is given graciously by God and is to be used to build others up.

This language of grace and praise or what Williams in other places calls "dispossession" is really quite closely related to the practice (#1) of orienting oneself by martyrdom. If the primary practice for Williams is discernment through the lens of martyrdom, witness (#2) must be intimately related as the words are rooted in the same Greek word. Witness is testimony of what one has seen and heard. Related to this, Williams calls evangelism one of the central constituent elements of the church.

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Action," in *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 30-39. Lesslie Newbigin, "The Logic of Election," in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 80-88. Park argues that Newbigin's concept of election helps meld the strengths of Yoder and Richard Niebuhr's missional ecclesiologies. "I think that Newbigin's logic of election could serve as a thread by which the contrasting ecclesiologies of Niebuhr and Yoder are held together in creative tension." Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 143.

<sup>73</sup> Williams, *Why*, 85-86.

<sup>74</sup> Williams, *Why*, 86. Cf. "Different Christs?" in *A Ray of Darkness*, 90. "If we were really preoccupied with, really in love with our vision [of Christ], we'd have less time for fussing about someone else's."

*The common acknowledgement that the first and great priority of each local Christian community is to communicate the Good News.* When we are able to recognise biblical faithfulness and authentic ministry in one another, the relation of communion pledges us to support each other's efforts to win people for Christ and to serve the world in his Name. Communion thus means the sharing of resources and skills in order to enable one another to proclaim and serve in this way.<sup>75</sup>

Churches that care nothing for communicating the gospel have fallen into the ditch of what Williams has called “iconoclasm.”<sup>76</sup> Though the practice of evangelism can sometimes fall into the other ditch of overconfidence, Williams implies here that a complete loss of evangelistic fervor will understandably raise questions among other churches about our identity as a church. A church that does not take care to communicate the gospel is missing a key practice of the church. Though there are other constituent practices, the church should take care that they have not become so wholly relevant to the culture that they have ceased to speak to it the good news of repentance.

In an important essay on this topic, “The Judgement of the World,” Williams addresses George Lindbeck’s concern that the church as missionary will inevitably accommodate itself unfaithfully to the world.

Professor Lindbeck suggests that those who give primacy to the question of how the Gospel is preached in a post-Christian environment ‘regularly become liberal foundationalists’, preoccupied with translating the Gospel into alien terms, or at least redefining it in response to secular questions. I am not so sure. For one thing, as I have argued, preaching is not something extraneous to the identity and integrity of the Church; we are not allowed to sidestep the question. But equally, it is not clear that the only alternative to intensive in-house catechesis is translation into a foreign language in a way that sacrifices the distinctiveness of the Gospel.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Williams, “Advent Letter.”

<sup>76</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 231.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 38.

Williams disagrees with Lindbeck's conclusion that unfaithful compromise can only be resisted by a focus on "intensive in-house catechesis."<sup>78</sup> Williams continues, "Professor Lindbeck has outlined a church heavily committed to the refinement and deepening of a scriptural speech and culture within its own territory."<sup>79</sup> But Williams admits that Lindbeck's concern is a valid one. "I'd agree entirely, by the way, with Professor Lindbeck that a deeper catechesis in that theology and its images is indispensable, *but I think it is so because of the testing it will endure in the process of 'playing away from home,' conversing with its potential allies.*"<sup>80</sup> In other words, Williams agrees that the distinctive practices of the church are important for catechesis. (I have described three of them above in the first half of this paper). But the church engages in these practices precisely because

it is essentially missionary in its nature, seeking to transform the human world by communicating to it in word and act a truthfulness that exposes the deepest human fears and evasions and makes possible the kind of human existence that can pass beyond these fears to a new liberty. The Church, in claiming to exist for the sake of opening the world to the fuller life in which God can be discerned as the controlling meaning of things, claims to have something to contribute to all human cultures.<sup>81</sup>

The church has something to share with the world. The practices of moral discernment oriented by martyrdom, catechesis under Scripture, and the sacraments form the Christian community in the tradition. But that "truthfulness" nurtured in these practices should spill over into the world.

In *Tokens of Trust*, Williams comments on the phrase about the Church in the Nicene Creed. The church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic: *one* ("the one Christ is reflected"); *holy*

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<sup>78</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World" in *On Christian Theology*, 38.

<sup>79</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World" in *On Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World," in *On Christian Theology*, 39. Italics in original.

<sup>81</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World," in *On Christian Theology*, 31.

(in Christ); *catholic* (“tells the whole truth to the whole human race”); and *apostolic* (“sent”).<sup>82</sup>

He writes this about being apostolic:

It is about recognizing the challenge now to share the same mission, to go where people are and invite them to come in . . . learning how to speak not for ourselves but for Jesus.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, the church is sent to all people (apostolicity) and then tries to speak to them in such as way that is consistent with Jesus (catholicity).

So a ‘catholic’ Church is one that is always concerned with wholeness – being faithful to the whole of its own treasury of faith, but also trying to relate to the whole variety of human experience, cultural and individual, confident in its capacity to speak the same truth to everyone in terms they can make their own. This creates many tensions, because its isn’t always clear what is a proper adaptation and what is giving way to what is easy or fashionable . . . Being catholic is being ready to live with the difficult job of discerning truthfully and with integrity in this area.<sup>84</sup>

Williams describes these realities in a slightly different way in his in the Prologue to *On Christian Theology*. He identifies three legitimate styles of theology. The first is the “celebratory” which functions primarily within the Christian community – “an attempt to draw out and display connections of thought and image so as to exhibit the fullest possible range of significance in the language used.”<sup>85</sup> Though Williams is here talking about types of theology and I am describing various practices, the celebratory style of theology is similar to the practice of “participating in the sacraments” (#2). Both attempt to raise the Christian’s imagination to contemplate the greatness of God.

The second type of theology is the “communicative” which

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<sup>82</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 126-127. I find quite a bit of overlap in the way Williams describes the catholic and apostolic church: catholic “to the whole world” and apostolic “sent” seem to be almost synonymous. But “catholic” differs in its emphasis on the nature of the message – “the whole truth” which apostolic does not address. These are fine distinctions which need not be pressed too far. The church is supposed to be both catholic and apostolic.

<sup>83</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 127-8.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 127.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, “Prologue” in *On Christian Theology*, xii.

seeks also to persuade or commend, to witness to the gospel's capacity for being at home in more than one cultural environment, and to display enough confidences to believe that this gospel can be rediscovered at the end of a long and exotic detour through strange idioms and structures of thought.<sup>86</sup>

This communicative style of theology is quite similar to the practice of communicating the Good News (#4). Williams models this type of theology in his books *Lost Icons* and *Writing in the Dust*. This style of theology and this practice are similar in trying to witness to the gospel outside of Christian environments using some of the idioms and structures of thought of that unchristian context.

When Christians begin to do this communicative theology, speaking the language of the culture effectively, people begin to ask about what is fundamentally “Christian.” This is why the third style of theology is needed.

The third style of theology Williams calls “critical theology.” Williams describes critical theology this way,

But there can come a point here where the passage through unfamiliar media of thought provokes a degree of crisis: is what is emerging actually identical or at least continuous with what has been believed and articulated? This is a question that prompts further probing of what the ‘fundamental categories’ really mean. Is there a stable conceptual area in the discourse of belief that will always remain unaffected by mediation in other idioms? And, if not, what, if any, kind of continuity and coherence belongs to this discourse? This nagging at fundamental meanings is what constitutes *critical* theology.<sup>87</sup>

This is related to the quote I have already cited twice in this essay, “The more the ‘fresh expressions’ project rolls on, the more one is driven to ask very basic questions about the nature of the church.”<sup>88</sup> When we hear about pub churches in the UK and Joel Osteen’s Lakewood

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<sup>86</sup> Williams, “Prologue” in *On Christian Theology*, xiv.

<sup>87</sup> Williams, “Prologue” in *On Christian Theology*, xiv. Italics in original.

<sup>88</sup> Williams, “Remarks on the book *Mission-shaped Questions*,”

Church in Houston, Texas with weekly attendance of 47,000, we begin to ask “very basic questions” like: what is the church?<sup>89</sup> Trying to answer this question is critical theology.

This essay you are reading and much of Williams’s work is critical theology. The practice of ethical discernment oriented by martyrdom (#1) is closely related to this style of theology. Williams explores “fundamental meanings” in *Why Study the Past* – what is the church? It is closely related to the practice of moral discernment through the lens of martyrdom. In his book *The Wound of Knowledge*, he argues that Christian spirituality should be oriented by reflection on the cross. The practice of listening to the Scriptures (#3) is utilized by Williams in this work reinvestigating familiar doctrines in *Tokens of Trust*, *Resurrection*, and *On Christian Theology*.

Few theologians attempt to do the communicative work of theology – trying to translate theological concepts in such a way that un-churched and de-churched persons can understand the Good News. Williams does attempt it in *Lost Icons* and is quite conscious in all of his work that nonchristians may be reading it. As Archbishop of Canterbury, he is in a unique position in the UK to speak from a Christian perspective about many “worldly” issues though Williams knows he is more likely to be heard if he speaks the language of the people. Williams also knows that this involves danger and he engages in critical theology in order to demonstrate that he has not compromised what is fundamentally Christian.

In this final section of the paper, I will describe, to use MacIntyre’s phrasing, a number of “standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of”<sup>90</sup> this practice of

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<sup>89</sup> Sam Hodges, “Joel Osteen attracts hundreds in Plano,” *Dallas Morning News* (Nov 12, 2007). Online: <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/111207dnmetosteen.203d86b5c.html> “The 44-year-old Mr. Osteen is pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, the nation’s largest, with weekly attendance of 47,000.”

<sup>90</sup> Practice: “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of

what he calls in the Advent Letter “communicating the Good News” and what he calls in “The Judgement of the World,” the “communicative” style of theology.

## STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE FOURTH PRACTICE OF COMMUNICATING THE GOOD NEWS

### **1. Communicating the Good News is rooted in the reign of God.**

Williams does not explicitly in his book *Resurrection* refer to the *missio dei* (the mission of God) as the foundation of mission as some missiologists like David Bosch<sup>91</sup> do but he refers to the same concept in the following quotation.

Jesus, exalted to God’s throne, is already Lord and King, already the context of understanding and the ground of hope throughout the world: the fact of his exaltation is what stirs the Church to ‘mission.’ His lordship, the fact that God’s ‘Kingdom’ is his too, is what makes the Church catholic by drawing it further and further into the world.<sup>92</sup>

Mission is not just something the church does but rather something Jesus has already enacted and the church merely proclaims. The Kingdom cannot be reduced to just the Church.

### **2. Communicating the Good News will result in very diverse expressions of the gospel being lived out.**

Williams continues his discussion from above.

The Kingdom, mission and catholicity cannot be understood apart from each other. All kinds of distortions are liable to arise if these ideas are divorced. The ‘Kingdom’ can be identified with the visible Church, and treated in terms of fully realized human dominion and authority, ‘mission’ can be seen as an exercise in communicating information from

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excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>91</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>92</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 56.

those who possess it to those who do not (and Christian worship too can, in this perspective, be reduced to an exercise in the clear communication of propositions); ‘catholicity’ can be interpreted as numerical magnitude, geographic universality, or even theological comprehensiveness.<sup>93</sup>

In other words, if the Church is assumed to be the totality of what God is doing in the world, mission would be reduced to growing numerically the number of parishes and parishioners who attend for example churches of the Anglican Communion. Furthermore, the missionary would simply “talk down to” the world in a patronizing way because the church “has all the answers.”

Instead, Williams goes on to say, the church is to be open to fresh expressions of the gospel.

But when these concepts [Kingdom, mission and catholicity] are drawn together, it is possible to see how both catholicity and mission are dimensions of the Church’s form of life, a life endlessly sensitive, contemplatively alert to human personal and cultural diversity, tirelessly seeking new horizons in its own experience and understanding by engaging with this diversity, searching to see how the gospel is to be lived and confessed in new and unfamiliar situations; and doing this because of its conviction that each fresh situation is already within the ambience of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, open to his agency, under his kingship . . . [what is catholic and missionary] strives to show, to embody, the way in which the incalculable variety of human concerns can be ‘at home’ in and with the confession of faith in Jesus. It does not seek to impose a uniform Christian culture or a preconceived Christian solution: it aims only to keep open and expanding the frontiers of the community of gift.<sup>94</sup>

In this quotation, Williams emphasizes what might seem to be the *unbounded* flexibility which should characterize the communication of the Gospel. As I have tried to make clear in the descriptions of the first three practices, Williams does in fact believe there *are* boundaries for the Church’s form of life, core practices: moral discernment oriented by martyrdom, participating in the sacraments, and the listening to the Scriptures. These form people in catholicity. But for Williams, this catholicity *can* be sufficiently strong to, as he says in “The Judgement of the

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<sup>93</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 56-57.

World,” “play away from home.”<sup>95</sup> Williams sees flexibility and openness as a demonstration of deep trust in a great God: “the incalculable variety of human concerns can be ‘at home’ in and with the confession of faith in Jesus.”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, playing away from home is not just a necessary evil but a core part of the church’s purpose to be about mission and the work of the Kingdom. Redemption will come in as many forms as the creation which needs to be redeemed.

He makes this point in his essay “The Judgement of the World” as well:

Its [the Church’s] integrity is bound up in encounters of this kind, and so in the unavoidable elements of exploratory fluidity and provisionality that enter into these encounters. At any point in its history, the Church needs both confidence that it has a gospel to preach, and the ability to see that it cannot readily specify in advance how it will find words for preaching in particular new circumstances.<sup>97</sup>

Again we see the emphasis on catholicity (the need to have “a gospel to preach”) and the diversity of expressions of this gospel.

In his book *Resurrection*, Williams says that Eucharist does not make sense if the participants are not committed to Jesus. (He supports a “closed” or “bounded” table.)

. . . the problem remains of how the Church is to show its openness without simply abandoning its explicit commitment to the one focal interpretive story of Jesus. To share Eucharistic communion with someone unbaptized, or committed to another story or system, is odd – not because the sacrament is ‘profaned’, or because grace cannot be given to those outside the household, but because the symbolic integrity of the Eucharist depends upon its being celebrated by those who both commit themselves to the paradigm of Jesus’ death and resurrection and acknowledge that their violence is violence offered to Jesus. All their betrayals are to be understood as betrayals of him; and through that understanding comes forgiveness and hope. Those who do not so understand themselves and their sin or their loss will not make the same identification of their victims with Jesus, nor will they necessarily understand their hope or their vocation in relation to him and his community. Their participation is thus anomalous: it is hard to see the meaning of what is being done.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World,” in *On Christian Theology*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 57.

<sup>97</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 31.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 61-62.

Yet he suggests that mission may mean providing other ways for the uncommitted to taste or try Christian worship. His explanation of the need for “para-liturgies” helpfully describes an entrance ramp for many unbelievers who would not understand the Anglican liturgy.

Yet, a request to share the Church’s worshipping life with no more than a vague awareness of the significance of its symbols is not uncommon, and not simply to be rejected. It may be part of the Church’s task in some places to develop what have been clumsily dubbed ‘para-liturgies’ – corporate symbolic actions which do not so deeply presuppose the kind of symbolic identification involved in the Eucharist, yet still open up some of the resource of Christian imagination to the uncommitted. Such experimentation is another facet of catholicity and of mission – of the credibility of the Church’s invitation. Far from reflecting a doctrinal indifferentism, it speaks of a very serious assimilation by the Church into the patterns of its life of the resurrection gospel: it is a way of showing itself to be essentially and fundamentally the Church of *Jesus*.<sup>99</sup>

In other words, it is quite catholic (faithful to Jesus) to experiment with church forms to try to make accessible Christian worship to the outsider (mission). I would suggest that the Alpha course designed by a Church of England congregation in London “Holy Trinity Brompton” attempts to bridge the “open / closed,” “accept / reject,” “insider / outsider” distinctions. They do it by holding ten-week “Introduction to Christianity” courses where people hear talks like “Why Did Jesus Die?”, share a meal together, and have wide open discussion. This incorporates some of the great aspects of Eucharist (meal, fellowship with others, learning about Jesus) without the full significance of Eucharist. “Over 2 million people in the UK and 11 million worldwide have now attended an Alpha course, an opportunity to explore the meaning of life, running in tens of thousands of churches of all denominations across the world.”<sup>100</sup> This is just one example of Williams’s point that a commitment to the practice of “communicating the Good

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<sup>99</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 61-62.

<sup>100</sup> The Alpha Course website. Online: <http://uk.alpha.org/>

News” will lead to the church expressing the gospel in a language de-churched and un-churched people understand.

### **3. Communicating the Good News is fueled by participation in the sacraments.**

I have discussed above how some of the four practices are related. Similarly, this practice of communicating the Good News is related to participating in the sacraments. In his “Palm Sunday” sermon in the book *A Ray of Darkness*, Williams argues that though it may seem that a ritual (like a sacrament) is designed for the insider (the Christian), rituals should ultimately help the insider focus on the outsider. In telling the story of Jesus cleansing the temple, Williams points out that Jesus was criticizing the “religious” as “a busy, satisfying, and distinctive area of human action and experience.”<sup>101</sup> Jesus instead set up an alternative vision of holiness. When he is crucified “in an unhallowed public place, a rag-and-bone heap beside the road,” the temple curtain is torn. The barrier between the everyday and ritual purity is torn apart.

The Temple is rebuilt as the body of the crucified Christ, not a place of exclusions, a house of merchandise where we must barter to be allowed in, trading our daily lives, our secular joys and pains for the sacred currency of ritual and the acceptable pure gifts that will placate God, but the cross by the roadside, unfenced, unadorned, the public and defenseless place where God gives us room.<sup>102</sup>

Jesus’ death outside the city should propel us outward as well. Jesus critiqued those who were focused solely on insider rituals. Williams then points out that he is delivering this sermon at an Anglican church “in a holy place, in the context of an archaically strange liturgy, by a priest wearing ritual garments; the irony shouldn’t escape us.”<sup>103</sup> But Williams reiterates that the point of the Christian liturgy *should be* to point people to the “the divine scarecrow on the rubbish

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<sup>101</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 45-46.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 46.

heap”<sup>104</sup> – something very non-religious in the traditional sense of religion. He says that it is easy to take up the religious attitudes of those in the stalls Jesus cleared. We can think of God as someone “we do business with . . . [who] is pleased by our religious professionalism.”<sup>105</sup> If we are not careful, “We live down there a good deal of the time without even noticing, with the God who needs both pleasing and managing – occupations that substantially eat into the time we have for the concerns of the world.”<sup>106</sup> The point of Holy Week is not pageantry for Christians but rather “Jesus himself, displayed to the world as the public language of our God, placarded on the history of human suffering that stretches along the roadside.”<sup>107</sup> Williams is stressing that liturgy should point us to the cross at the side of the road and thus to outsiders and the concerns of the world. Thus, the practices of participating in the sacraments and communicating the Good News are related.

Earlier in the essay, I described how in the book *Resurrection* Williams linked participating in the sacraments with moral discernment. He said the Eucharist reminds people to live with “a mentality of self-criticism and penitence.”<sup>108</sup> The sacraments remind people that the “the memory of the martyrs” should influence ethics.<sup>109</sup> But in the “Palm Sunday” sermon, he links the sacraments with communicating the gospel.

The rituals of Passion Week remind the Christian that the gospel must move beyond religious activity to communicate the Good News to others. His comments about the meaning of

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<sup>104</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 46.

<sup>105</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 48.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 51.

the sacraments in *Resurrection* and the “Palm Sunday” sermon do not contradict each other. In the following quote, we can see both effects of the sacraments. “This liturgy tells us that behind and beneath the smooth wheels of the socially constructed world are two abiding facts: unreconciled pain and unexhausted compassion, the history of men and women and the history of God with them (with us).”<sup>110</sup> The sacraments remind people of pain and compassion. This fuels both ethical reflection and the need to communicate the gospel. Christians who remember their own pain and Christ’s compassion for the world exhibit a more distinctively Christian kind of moral discernment. They are also moved with compassion to communicate the gospel to others who are in pain.

**4. Communicating the Good News needs to be done with an appropriate degree of humility because it is philosophically and historically incoherent and naïve to absolutely separate church and world.**

Williams criticizes George Lindbeck for his naïveté about applying the Bible to the world.<sup>111</sup> In his essay, “The Judgement of the World,” Williams takes aim at Lindbeck’s “project of inserting the human story into the world of scripture: ‘Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating scripture into extrascriptural categories.’”<sup>112</sup>

Williams does not feel that Lindbeck adequately takes into account the degree to which our

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<sup>110</sup> Williams, “Palm Sunday” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 46.

<sup>111</sup> Williams also criticizes Lindbeck’s theological predecessor Karl Barth for this. “For Barth, the sovereign liberty of God manifested in the bare fact that speech about God is made possible and authorized in a Godless world, the world where, by definition, God is not – this is the touchstone of theological integrity, the unifying perception.” Williams, “The Unity of Christian Truth” in *On Christian Theology*, 19. Williams disagrees fundamentally with the notion that the world is by definition the place where “God is not.” However, Williams also admits in the introduction to *Wrestling with Angels* that others have shown him that Barth is more complicated than the way Williams depicts him in the two essays dealing with Barth in *Wrestling with Angels*. Rowan Williams, “Barth on the triune god” and “Barth, war and the state,” in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 106-170.

<sup>112</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 30.

understanding of “the world of scripture” or the “scriptural framework” has itself been shaped by the world.

I believe that the reality is more complex, and that it sits less easily with the picture Professor Lindbeck has outlined of a church heavily committed to the refinement and deepening of a scriptural speech and culture within its own territory . . . The Church may be committed to interpreting the world in terms of its own foundational narratives; but the very act of interpreting affects the narratives as well as the world.<sup>113</sup>

Williams argues that the texts of Scripture have been influenced by history and culture. “The ‘world of Scripture,’ so far from being a clear and readily definable territory, is an historical world in which meanings are discovered and recovered in action and encounter.”<sup>114</sup> At a minimum, Williams is pointing out that the scriptures and our churches have been influenced by Christians interacting with culture throughout history and thus to imply that there is a “pure” world of Scripture is naïve. Williams wants the church to have an appropriate degree of humility before saying to the world, “Thus saith the Lord.” The church’s sometimes ugly history should give the person preaching to the world some degree of humility. A Christian will sometimes need to admit to a non-Christian: “I have treated you badly. Trying to serve God, I acted like a jerk.”<sup>115</sup> The Scriptures do not always tell us that the world is wrong but sometimes that we have been wrong. This is what I think Williams is saying in this quote:

And part of my thesis is that the interpretation of the world ‘within the scriptural framework’ is intrinsic to the *Church’s* critical self-discovery . . . an activity in which the

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<sup>113</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>114</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Donald Miller, “Confessions: Coming Out of the Closet,” in *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 113-128. “I said we should build a confession booth in the middle of campus and paint a sign on it that said ‘Confess your sins.’ . . . ‘Okay, you guys.’ Tony gathered everybody’s attention. ‘Here’s the catch.’ He leaned in a little. ‘We are not actually going to accept confessions.’ We all looked at him in confusion. He continued, ‘We are going to confess to them. We are going to confess that, as followers of Jesus, we have not been very loving; we have been bitter, and for that we are sorry. We will apologize for the Crusades, we will apologize for televangelists, we will apologize for neglecting the poor and the lonely, we will ask them to forgive us, and we will tell them that in our selfishness, we have misrepresented Jesus on this campus. We will tell people who come into the booth that Jesus loves them.’

Christian community is itself enlarged in understanding and even in some sense evangelized.<sup>116</sup>

Williams wants to see churches that have an appropriate degree of humility as they communicate the gospel. They are not above hearing in the conversation something that convicts them.

### **5. Communicating the Good News is possible because Christians and non-Christians are capable of discussing issues of meaning together.**

In “The Judgement of the World,” Williams writes that Christians need to be “discovering whether there is any sense in which the other languages we are working with can be at home with our theology.”<sup>117</sup> He rejects Lindbeck’s idea that “translating the Gospel into alien terms” cannot help but “sacrifice the distinctiveness of the Gospel.”<sup>118</sup>

Williams attempts to do this translation in his book *Lost Icons*. He writes in the introduction that “this is an essay about the erosions of selfhood in North Atlantic modernity.”<sup>119</sup> Though he does not say this, Williams is trying to articulate the consequences of sin but without using theological language. He hopes non-Christians will be able to recognize the problem of sin when he disarmingly describes it in non-theological language. Williams is “attempting to articulate anger” or “cultural bereavement” at the “recent history of public corruption and barbarity compounded by apathy and narcissism” he sees.<sup>120</sup> In other words, if persons (secular and religious) recognize something is wrong in the world, he wants to give them a common language to talk about it. Williams believes Christians and non-Christians can begin

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<sup>116</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 31. Italics in original.

<sup>117</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 39.

<sup>118</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 38.

<sup>119</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 9, 7, 9.

conversation over common goals like supporting governments that do justice, supporting art that deepens humanity's care for the other, and encouraging education of children that prepares them to be good citizens.<sup>121</sup>

In *Lost Icons*, Williams never refers to Christian theology or Scripture as authoritative. He is trying to argue in the public sphere, with reason for better ways of thinking about humanity. Williams wants to engage other fair-minded secular intellectuals. He does not assume that they believe in God or will accept Christian creeds or Scripture as grounds for discussion. He meets them at their level, anticipates their objections, and carefully builds his case.

Williams argues that human life is characterized by time and loss. Thus there is a need to recognize the importance of the development of wisdom over time (chapter 1) and to express remorse for our past (chapter 3). Those who reject these realities, seeking to instead quickly build their identities by buying things and ignoring the past will lose their selves. The only way to find coherence is to be loved authentically by an other who lives life with you and forgives your past.

His argument culminates on the last few pages of the book – concluding that it may be impossible ultimately to see society transformed without relationship to an Other (capitalized) – “the non-contingent other.”<sup>122</sup> He hints at his conclusion in the introduction, “the issue finally raised here is whether a wholly secular language for the self can resist the trivializations and reductions outlined in the book as a whole.”<sup>123</sup> No other has enough grace as *the* Other. “The

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<sup>121</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 180.

<sup>123</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 7. Cf. C.S. Lewis *The Abolition of Man* (new. ed.; New York: HarperCollins, 2001). In both *Lost Icons* and *Abolition of Man*, the discussion of education of children (vs. scientism), the search

self that is present to itself and others . . . the self that might possibly be called a soul, exists in the expectation of grace.”<sup>124</sup> On the last few pages of the book, Williams reveals the final linchpin of his argument.

. . . because the contingent other is an other like me, the shadow of rivalry is never wholly absent. That is why this chapter has returned repeatedly to the language of the non-contingent other, the other that is sufficiently other not to compete with me.<sup>125</sup>

Williams explains in theological language these same realities in *Tokens of Trust*. Williams in chapter four describes sin as self-absorption, unreality, and untruthfulness.<sup>126</sup> “And the Christian belief that is summed up in the language of ‘original sin’ is basically a way of saying that this is a tangle that goes back to the very roots of humanity . . . We learn how to be human only as we also learn the habits of self-absorption.”<sup>127</sup> He calls this self-absorption “erosions of self-hood” in *Lost Icons*.<sup>128</sup> In *Lost Icons*, he says that humans need an Other. In *Tokens of Trust*, he writes,

Something needs to reverse the flow, to break the cycle. Fearlessness in giving has to find its place at the heart of things, within the world of human exchange and interaction. It is only a tangible historical act, a human act that can break through all this; yet human beings, caught up in the cycle of rejection and defense, are not human enough to perform it. So we begin to see the outline of an answer to the question about why the life, the identity, of Jesus is needed.<sup>129</sup>

Williams believes there is enough common language between Christians and nonchristians to make the case for the Good News in a way they both understand. He demonstrates this communicative style of theology or the practice of communicating the Good News in *Lost Icons*.

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for common features of humanity (“men without chests,”), and the ultimate apologetic nature of the argument (arguing for the universality of ‘The Tao’) seem very closely related to the features of Williams’s argument.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 175.

<sup>125</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 180.

<sup>126</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 82, 86.

<sup>127</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 8.

<sup>129</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 83.

**6. Communicating the Good News involves engaging people in thoughtful reflection over an extended period of time.**

In chapter two of his book *Lost Icons*, Williams argues that children must be given freedom and time to develop the capacity to make choices. Williams is not talking about the practice of communicating the Good News in this chapter. However, this section reveals some of Williams's thinking about how people learn, which is certainly pertinent in considering how to communicate the gospel.

The point could be expressed most simply by saying that children need to be free of the pressure to make adult choices if they are ever to *learn* how to make adult choices. For them to be free for irresponsibility and fantasy, free from the commitments of purchasing and consuming, is for them to have time to absorb what is involved in adult choice.<sup>130</sup>

Many people, argues Williams, are not capable of making good choices because Western society works against the development of this capacity. Because they have not had the opportunity to pretend, to try out different identities in play situations without consequences, adults end up living their real lives by trial and error with terrible consequences for themselves and others.

Protecting the human young from some of the pressures of adult choice implies a recognition that such choice is weighty, potentially tragic, bound up with unseen futures for the agent and other agents. To learn about this, I have argued, requires a space for fantasy, a license for imagination, where gradually the consequences, the self-defining knots, of adult choice can be figured, fingered, experimented with.<sup>131</sup>

Healthy adults have the capacity to imagine the consequences of a decision in their minds. But this capacity takes time. It is possible then to further deduce that for Williams communicating the gospel should be done in such a way that it engages this adult reflection, rather than pushing for a hasty decision. Williams assumes that identity formation or what he calls “constructing

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<sup>130</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 27. Italics in original.

<sup>131</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 47.

identities,” such as that which happens when someone decides to follow Jesus, will be an extended process.

What happens to our sense of the human when it is divorced from a grasp of the self as something realized *in time*? The ‘iconic’ issue here is how far a picture of the human as constructing identities in would-be independence of the temporal flow can serve as a structure for human sense.<sup>132</sup>

Williams is saying that people are rooted in time. The problem is that rush, hurry, and the tendency to think of decision-making as “which product should I buy?” do not contribute to sound decision-making. Similarly, Williams says, often political discussions fail to consider the negative ramifications, the losses that necessarily result from, decisions.

[we] lose the awareness that choice means loss, and that the morally taxing questions are about how that loss is ‘distributed’ . . . will triumphs over the messy and time-consuming business of reflection, the thinking through of our relationships and dependencies.<sup>133</sup>

Mature ethical reflection involves facing the realities of the many negative consequences of our choices.

It is possible to infer then that communicating the Good News will involve helping people consider the cost of what it means to trust Jesus with their lives. An “adult choice” will involve deliberation and time. Evangelistic techniques which push for a quick “decision” to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord often insufficiently support “converts.” Rather, a person should be encouraged to declare their allegiance to Jesus and to commit to pursuing the meaning of the commitment and deliberating further about it with other Christians.

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<sup>132</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 5. Italics in original.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 38.

## **7. Communicating the Good News involves facilitating opportunities for human interaction.**

Williams argues in the second chapter of *Lost Icons* that games, theater, dance and eating together help people to “bond.” He calls these activities “charity.”<sup>134</sup> These type of “mechanisms in society . . . control or limit rivalry.”<sup>135</sup> They “interrupt and overcome” our tendency toward individualism.<sup>136</sup> These type of activities help us remember that people are people.

There are direct implications here for the practice of communicating the Good News. Williams argues that throughout human history there have been opportunities for people to rub shoulders and interact with people different from them. In an age of garage door openers, ATM’s, and cubicles, it is possible to leave one’s home and go to work and return home without ever speaking with another human being. Only the highly intentional effort of “coordinating schedules” with others ensures people will converse with other human beings. It may thus be necessary for the missionary church leader to facilitate opportunities for rudimentary social bonding. In this way, it is possible that people may be drawn into significant conversations with others which provide the necessary foundation for more serious personal reflection – such as whether to follow Jesus.

## **8. Communicating the Good News involves taking seriously human existence.**

Williams is concerned that the Christians are sometimes not taken seriously because Christians have failed to grapple with the pain and tragedy of human existence.

The weightiest criticisms of Christian speech and practice amount to this: that Christian language actually fails to transform the world’s meaning because it neglects and

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<sup>134</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 54.

<sup>135</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 5.

<sup>136</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 54.

trivializes or evades aspects of the human. It is notoriously awkward about sexuality; it risks being unserious about death when it speaks too glibly and confidently about eternal life; it can disguise the abiding reality of unhealed and meaningless suffering.<sup>137</sup>

Williams suggests that Christians need to be catechized in the Christian tradition but also trained in the skill of listening to artists.

It is certainly true that, for any of this to be possible, there must be a real immersion in the Christian tradition itself, and to this extent Professor Lindbeck's programme is rightly directed. But if I were devising schemes of Christian education, I should be inclined to set such immersion side by side with an exposure to political and cultural issues that might help focus doctrinal language in a new way.<sup>138</sup>

Before one communicates, they must know who they are communicating to so that their communication is heard.

Preaching is more than mere verbalizing; but it cannot do without language, and undermines its own authority if it arrogantly refuses the ordinary speech of humanity, whether by developing a pseudo-mystical, abstract and technical idiom, or by retreating into a 'prophetic' key of pure assertion ('political' theology is all too liable to do this). Charismatic utterance, as Paul make clear in 1 Cor. 12, is more than tongues of ecstasy: it may equally be the language of education and of organized planning.<sup>139</sup>

Williams suggests that Christians have too often talked in such a way that no one wanted to listen to them. In order to be heard, they need to spend more time listening to and learning the language of other human beings.

The difficulty appears equally in the consequent need to know when to be silent, when to wait. This account of the Christian mission is not a recipe for talkative and confident activism; it requires something like a contemplative attention to the unfamiliar – a negative capability – a reluctance at least to force the language and behavior of others into Christian categories prematurely, remembering that our understanding of those categories themselves is still growing and changing . . . This is emphatically not a 'liberal' observation or a demand for better translations into modish secularity, but a sober recognition that, in the world as it is, the right to be heard speaking about God must be earned. The Christian is at once possessed by an authoritative urgency to communicate the good news, and constrained by the awareness of how easily the words

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<sup>137</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World" in *On Christian Theology*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Williams, "The Judgement of the World" in *On Christian Theology*, 40.

<sup>139</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 62.

of proclamation become godless, powerless to transform. The urgency must often be channeled into listening and waiting, and into the expansion of the Christian imagination itself into something that can cope with the seriousness of the world.<sup>140</sup>

Again Williams insists that hard truths of the gospel should not be watered down to make them more palatable. He calls that the “liberal” way. Rather, he wants Christians to avoid trivializing the difficulties of human life. When they do so, people stop listening to them.

In his book, *Writing in the Dust: After September 11*, Williams sounds these same themes. Words, even religious words, have little power to comfort and bring meaning immediately after tragedies. Rather, “breathing space” is needed.

Perhaps it’s when we try to make God useful in crises, that we take the first steps toward the great lie of religion: the god who fits our agenda. There is a breathing space: then just breathe for a moment. Perhaps the words of faith will rise again slowly in that space (perhaps not). But don’t try to tie it up quickly.<sup>141</sup>

Williams urges Christians to hesitate, to reflect, to look for good in others. “The trouble is that this means work of the kind we are often least eager for, work that will help us so to understand an other that we begin to find some sense of what they and we together might recognize as good.”<sup>142</sup> If Christians listen well, then perhaps their message will be able to be heard – “the right to be heard speaking about God must be earned.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 39, 40.

<sup>141</sup> Williams, *Writing*, 9, Cf. “Breathing spaces again: if the cross is what we say it is, it requires that kind of hesitation, that kind of silence.” 73.

<sup>142</sup> Williams, *Writing*, 23

<sup>143</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 39, 40.

**9. Communicating the Good News involves a recognition that we can never comprehensively describe God.**

In his early book, *The Wound of Knowledge*, Williams describes the history of Christian spirituality. He points out that the diversity of the ways the great saints expressed their Christian faith may sometimes cause confusion.

The pages that follow are meant as an introduction to the ways in which a succession of Christian saints attempted to articulate their vision of the Christian calling, the diverse ways in which they responded to the call toward wholeness. In the life and work of each of them, we may see the conflict and puzzlement that follow inevitably from the nature of their data.<sup>144</sup>

But Williams says that this diversity can partly be explained by Christianity's paradoxical launching at the cross of Jesus.

The first question, then, must be about the nature of our datum itself, the nature of God's alleged presence and work in Palestine. More specifically still, we must turn our attention to that aspect of the story of God-in-Christ that most sharply focuses the problems posed here for religious language. The final control and measure and irritant in Christian speech remains the cross: the execution of Jesus of Nazareth . . . If the new age had dawned, it was with the slaughter of the Anointed . . . If God is to be seen at work here, he is indeed a strange God, a hidden God, who does not uncover his will in a straight line of development, but fully enters into a world of confusion and ambiguity and works in contradictions.<sup>145</sup>

In other words, the Good News itself is complex. The early church did not find the gospel completely paralyzing – they still preached the message. But the paradoxes of the Good News push human language and explanation to its limits and beyond.

In his work, Williams regularly refers to the proper limits of human judgments. All religious language, including communicating the Good News, is human speech. However, it also claims to have a message of unique significance. Williams writes in his essay “Theological Integrity,”

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<sup>144</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 13.

<sup>145</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 13-14.

Religious talk is in an odd position here. On the one hand, it is making claims about the context of the whole moral universe, claims of crucial concern for the right living of human life; it is thus not likely, *prima facie*, to be content with provisional statements. On the other hand, if it really purports to be about the context of the moral universe, it declares itself to be uniquely ‘under judgement,’ and to be dealing with what supremely *resists* the urge to finish and close what is being said.<sup>146</sup>

Williams suggests that every theologian (every communicator of the Good News) needs to recognize this dilemma. Christians communicate the Good News but they are not under the illusion that they ultimately possess God’s knowledge about everything. “In other words, religious and theological integrity is possible as and when discourse about God *declines the attempt to take God’s point of view* (i.e. a ‘total perspective’).”<sup>147</sup>

Similarly, in his essay, “The Finality of Christ,” Williams seeks to call into question overconfident certainty about doctrinal issues. His argument is complex and nuanced but Williams is at least saying this: the point of Jesus coming and dying on the cross is not to give his followers the answers about everything. God is still God. Human language cannot fully explain God. Barth emphasizes the transcendence of God “but the cross of Jesus is stranger even than the Barthian might suggest: God’s difference is beyond all the words and institutions in which it is inevitably articulated, and through which it may be turned into a means of control.”<sup>148</sup>

God cannot be easily tamed and explained. Communication of the Good News faces the same problems that theology does:

people emerge who see their essential job as pushing forward the considerations of coherence and transparency that are already at work in more ‘informal’ ways. And of course, when this happens, . . . when you try to tidy up an unsystematized speech, you are likely to lose a great deal.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Williams, “Theological Integrity” in *On Christian Theology*, 5. Italics in original.

<sup>147</sup> Williams, “Theological Integrity” in *On Christian Theology*, 6. Italics in original.

<sup>148</sup> Williams, “The Finality of Christ” in *On Christian Theology*, 106.

<sup>149</sup> Williams, “Prologue” in *On Christian Theology*, xii.

It is very tempting for the communicator to deliver an overly simplified message, which unintentionally loses something vital. Williams writes that Athanasius protested an overly simplified description of the Good News which ended up reducing God. Athanasius rejected the “preconceived definition of the divine simplicity. The constructs with which the unknowable and unique nature of God had been explained and defended turn out in practice to be constraints upon the divine freedom.”<sup>150</sup> “The one truth of which we can be sure is that God escapes all definition in his freedom.”<sup>151</sup> What Williams means by limiting God’s freedom is that an overly neat, simplistic theology “puts God in a box” or imprisons God.

Williams cautions that clear communication can deteriorate into slogans that undermine the complexity of the gospel. He writes, “When Christian speech is healthy, it does not allow itself an over-familiarity with, a taking for granted of its images – its Scriptures, its art, its liturgy; it is prepared to draw back to allow them to ‘strange’, questioning and questionable.”<sup>152</sup> In his sermon “Touch of God,” Williams returns to this theme, pointing out that the book of Revelation makes clear that “the touch of God *is* dangerous” not predictable and that we too often think of God as grace, quiet and beauty.<sup>153</sup> Rather, quoting Annie Dillard, “we should all be wearing crash helmets” in worship.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 60.

<sup>151</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 61.

<sup>152</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 66.

<sup>153</sup> Williams, “The Touch of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 96.

<sup>154</sup> Williams, “The Touch of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 98.

### 10. Communicating the Good News involves embodying the message of Jesus.

In his lecture “Doing the Works of God,” Williams defines mission in terms of outreach by a community of people demonstrating the life of Jesus together. Only then will people receive the Good News.

If we want to locate mission in the New Testament frame of reference, then, this is how we must do it: it is, before all else, God’s authorizing or empowering agents of the divine purpose for the world, a purpose now made known as the formation of unrestricted community. Negatively, this means the destruction of barriers between hostile or indifferent groups of individuals, and the challenging of all ways in which human beings enshrine separation from each other and superiority to each other. Positively, it is the construction of communities in which behavior is tested above all by what it contributes to the common life – whose goal is to realize in everyone the love and boldness, the intimacy and authority that Jesus has in relation to the God he called Abba. Ethics is about forming this likeness of Christ in each other; it is neither simple law nor undifferentiated or utilitarian benevolence, but the shaping of a humanity that can show God’s faithfulness and God’s transfiguring compassion as Jesus did and does. This is what is involved in being an apostolic church, a community sent by God through Jesus. But what this picture entails—and what we are not always alert to—is that mission is not first of all communicating information or persuading people to adopt your point of view. The mission of Jesus is his concrete reality: God’s purpose is satisfied when the lost and lawless come into a specific relationship with him, especially at table) and are thus brought into the people of God. There is no mission that is not this sort of involvement.<sup>155</sup>

Mission or being an apostolic church means living in loving relationship with one another in such a way that others want to be part of the community.

Similarly, in *Tokens of Trust*, Williams says that rational apologetics are somewhat helpful but not most important when people decide to follow Jesus.<sup>156</sup> Rather, for most, it is trustworthy Christians who inspire people to want to live as the Christians live.<sup>157</sup> These people

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<sup>155</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 222.

<sup>156</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 20-21.

<sup>157</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 21. Cf. 41-43.

demonstrate what God is like to outsiders. They recommend God to others by their lives – in William’s words, “they take responsibility for God.”<sup>158</sup>

Williams says in his sermon “Loving God,” that human beings see the beauty of God through the beauty of Christian lives well lived. Thus, mission will include living lives that manifest the risen Christ.

the gospels and the figure of Jesus come alive when viewed and grasped in the whole personal and social context of Christian life. And – I suggest – the *attractiveness* of Jesus will most come alive through our experience of the attractiveness of forgiven, grace-penetrated, Christ-filled lives in those around us . . . there is still a quality, hard to define, a sense that life in them is somehow as it should be, rooted in the soil of the deepest and truest reality of all.”<sup>159</sup>

In *Resurrection*, Williams stresses that Christians need to manifest the risen Christ in their life together as a Christian community.

The believing community manifests the risen Christ: it does not simply talk about him, or even ‘celebrate’ him. It is the place where he is shown. And the baptismal rite imprints upon the believer the mark of Easter, committing this or that particular human life to manifesting Jesus killed and raised. The believer, and thus the *community* of belief, is charged with actualizing in any and every circumstance the Easter transaction, the Easter restoration.<sup>160</sup>

In *The Wound of Knowledge*, Williams approvingly cites Gregory of Nyssa who “says simply that since ‘intellectual’ knowledge of God is impossible, God must be found and known in the converted heart of the believer and in the purity of his or her life and actions.”<sup>161</sup> Williams argues that the monks found God by living and working in close quarters with one another.

the monastic insight is to recognize how much of this moving and drawing is mediated by human community . . . The will ‘co-operates’ precisely because it is limited and

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<sup>158</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 22. Cf. 92-93.

<sup>159</sup> Williams, “Loving God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 131. Italics in original.

<sup>160</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 56.

<sup>161</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 63.

constrained, attracted or repelled, irritated and tantalized by the boundaries set by others around it. God is to be apprehended under the form of those boundaries.<sup>162</sup>

Benedict found that the most serious development of Christian spirituality occurred when others were loved and challenged by close relationships with other believers.

### **11. Communicating the Good News involves utilizing the gifts and stories of human beings.**

Christian community inverts patterns of destruction by turning past experiences into gifts. In chapter five of *Tokens of Trust*, Williams describes the role of ministry in the Christian community, “If you have a gift, it’s there to so that you can help another become a giver in turn.”<sup>163</sup> Earlier, in *Resurrection* he also described the Christian community as the exchange of gifts. He contrasts this “redeemed” system with the pattern of mutual destruction in “fallen” humanity. The past experiences of Christians can be used to minister to others. Thus, God wants to redeem past struggles for his purposes. People say to themselves, “God wants to use me? With my background and baggage? What gifts do I have?” The church leader responds, “Yes, your life is a gift for others.”

. . . we might say that the community lives in the exchange, not simply of charisms in Paul’s sense, but of *stories*, of memories. My particular past is there, in the Church, as a resource for my relations with my brothers and sisters – not to be poured out repeatedly and promiscuously, but as a hinterland of vision and truth and acceptance, out of which I can begin to love in honesty. My charism, the gift given me to give to the community, is my *self*, ultimately; my story given back, to give me a place in the net of exchange, the web of gifts, which is Christ’s Church. My self is to be given away in love, not because it is worthless, but because it is supremely precious, given to me by the hand of God as he returns my memory. Out of my story, the Spirit of the risen Jesus constitutes my present possibilities of understanding, compassion, and self-sharing. My identity as lover in the community is uniquely coloured by the loves in which I have already struggled, failed, learned and repented: they are the reason for my present love being in this ‘key’ or

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<sup>162</sup> Williams, *Wound*, 115.

<sup>163</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 108. This is similar to what I pointed to in the introduction to the fourth practice. See above p. 25-26.

‘mode’ rather than that, the irreducible particularly of my gift. ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’: love in the mode that emerges from the past that is yours and no one else’s, out of the process in which you have learned to accept yourself. Begin to see your self as gift, love it as gift, from God’s hand, and learn how the neighbour too is a gift, to himself or herself, and to you. In the first chapter, we considered the state of ‘fallen’ humanity in terms of a chain of mutual deprivation, robbery with violence: here see how ‘redeemed’ humanity inverts this system into a change of mutual gift: exchange of life. And the pivot is the learning of one’s own self as gift, allowing it to be returned – whatever the initial pain or shame – by the risen Christ, hearing one’s true name from his lips.<sup>164</sup>

Communicating the Good News, then, should involve the releasing of followers of Jesus to share their stories, gifts, and selves with others.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has three main benefits. First, Christians might use the four “practices” as a guide for evaluating their own churches. Does our church embrace fully the four practices in Williams’s work that can help ensure our faithfulness to the gospel?

The terms “practices” and “standards of excellence” are borrowed from MacIntyre and are not used by Williams but I think they are an enlightening way of organizing his arguments related to the mission of the church.

Second, Christians might use the “standards of excellence” for the practice of communicating the Good News to evaluate their own church’s outlook toward mission. Does our practice of communicating of the Good News adhere to the standards of excellence which should characterize that practice according to Williams?

Third, this paper brings together in an organized way the diverse thought of Rowan Williams for the edification of the church. Williams tends to be misunderstood as the recent

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<sup>164</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 37-38. Italics in original.

furor over his comments about Sharia exemplify.<sup>165</sup> His writings have different audiences and content so that one could get a skewed understanding of Williams's thought if they are unaware of the scope of his work. For example, if someone only read *Lost Icons*, they might be unaware of his explicitly Christian writing such as *Tokens of Trust*. This paper allows both liberals and conservatives, critics and fans, to better appreciate and understand Williams. By organizing it in these categories and explaining it, I hope to set Williams's work "on a lower shelf," that is, making it somewhat more accessible than it might otherwise be. I have also quoted liberally from Williams in order to point readers toward the places in Williams's writing where he makes these arguments so that further research can be done.

When one understands Williams's work in its breadth, it is difficult not to appreciate the beauty and sensitivity and brilliance of his writing. His writing truly can help churches who are attempting to do innovative mission work to do so with faithfulness to the Christian tradition as well as great effectiveness and flexibility. The difficulty in reading Williams is that his essays tend to be so occasional, that is, trying to address a specific situation. Therefore, it is possible to misinterpret them if they are taken to be representative of Williams's approach to related issues. I think this essay helps to relieve some of those possible misconceptions by framing the issue in terms of practices and standards of excellence and bringing together eight of Williams's works.

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<sup>165</sup> Mike Higton, "Rowan Williams and Sharia: A Guide for the Perplexed," *kai euthus* Blog (Feb 11, 2008). Online: <http://goringe.net/theology/?p=120> "The stir surrounding Rowan Williams' recent lecture on 'Civil and Religious Law in England' has been quite incredible - not least for the depth of misrepresentation that has shaped so many of the responses . . . I'm not any kind of official spokesman for the Archbishop. Although I have written one book on him, and edited a book of his essays, we've met (I think) only three times, and not at all since 2003, and the last contact I had with him was a brief exchange of e-mails after the publication of *Wrestling with Angels*. What follows is simply my take on what Williams said, based entirely on what I know of his public statements."

## APPENDIX 1: VARIOUS WAYS OF DESCRIBING THE TWO DANGERS TO AVOID

Rowan Williams wants the Church to be distinctively Christian and yet also to engage with the world. This is an issue Williams regularly addresses in his work but he describes it in a number of different ways. In the chart below I have delineated some of the different ways of stating this problem in my essay.

Churches often fall into either ditch 1 or ditch 2. The key is to recognize the two poles and to chart a path between them, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of them both. I identify four practices in Williams's work that he suggests help churches navigate this issue.

	<b>DITCH 1</b>	<b>DITCH 2</b>
Other theologians according to Joon-Sik Park	John Howard Yoder “Yoder stresses how distinguished the church is from the world to the extent that the church may forget how much it shares with the world.” <sup>166</sup>	H. Richard Niebuhr “Niebuhr’s ecclesiology fails, however, to provide specific and concrete ways for the church both to criticize and serve the world.” <sup>167</sup>
John 17:16,18	Not “in the world” enough	Too much “of the world”
Lesslie Newbigin <sup>168</sup>	“simply fails to communicate.”	“In the attempt to be ‘relevant’ one may fall into syncretism.”
George Lindbeck’s cited by Williams in “The Judgement of the World” (1989) in <i>On Christian Theology</i> <sup>169</sup>	“intensive in-house catechesis”	“translation into a foreign language in a way that sacrifices the distinctiveness of the Gospel”
Rowan Williams		
“Doing the Works of God” in <i>A Ray of Darkness</i> (1991) <sup>170</sup>	“celebratory confidence . . . corporate egotism”	“painful iconoclasm”
<i>Tokens of Trust</i> (2007) <sup>171</sup>	Not “apostolic” enough	Not “catholic” enough
“Advent Letter” (2007)	Not valuing “communicating the Good News.”	Not valuing “standing under the authority of Scripture” and “participating in the Sacraments” enough.
Williams’s styles of theology in Prologue of <i>On Christian Theology</i> (2000) <sup>172</sup>	Only “celebratory” and “critical” styles of theology	Only “communicative” style of theology
<i>Resurrection</i> (1982) <sup>173</sup>	Only “catholic”	Only “mission”

<sup>166</sup> Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 138-9.

<sup>167</sup> Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 137.

<sup>168</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 7.

<sup>169</sup> Williams, “The Judgement of the World” in *On Christian Theology*, 38.

<sup>170</sup> Williams, “Doing the Works of God” in *A Ray of Darkness*, 231.

<sup>171</sup> Williams, *Tokens*, 127.

<sup>172</sup> Williams, “Prologue” in *On Christian Theology*, xii-xv.

<sup>173</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 56-57.

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