

When I agreed to write this paper on the glory of God, I did not expect to write it from the oncology waiting room where my mother is hearing the treatment plan for her stage 3 throat cancer. I recognize that I am headed straight into a gigantic cliché, but I will press on in this neon homily: the doctrine of the Glory of God is the doctrine of necessity. There is no way to construct a doctrine of the church, of scripture, grace or faith, without a doctrine of glory. And it is to our great humiliation if our congregants do not pant after us for the only possible response to the inevitable indignity of suffering, sickness, and death: that Christ's Ascension, His leaving, was to leave us in the communion of His glory: in faith, in unity, in joy, in beauty.

Much of reformation thinking has centered around this understanding of glory: that God has glory, and his glory is so glorious that it must compel us to give our glory to Him. All glory in all things for all times is all God's, alone. Thus says Calvin,

*"Let us remember, therefore, that in the whole discussion concerning justification the great thing to be attended to is, that God's glory be maintained entire and unimpaired . . . ." "we never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory. It must, therefore, be regarded as an universal proposition, that whoso glories in himself glories against God."*<sup>1</sup>

And this glory is discursive of God's own nature, says Jonathan Edwards,

*"All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God, and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair."*<sup>2</sup>

Glory belongs to God, not that it is exclusive to God, but that even in the places in which we find glory - it is glory borrowed, or stolen, from God. Because God is so full of glory, and because glory, by necessity, *must radiate*, it illuminates and enlivens into the creation, even into man, and that glory dwells and overflows throughout the cosmos unleashing a manifold witness to Triune beauty, power, honor, and joy.

In terms of the Covenant/Temple ideology, SDG exists, in the popular imagination, revolving around Covenant, never escaping the orbit of justification.

*"Tis God's manner, in the great works of his power and mercy which he works for his people, to order things so, as to make his hand visible, and his power conspicuous, and men's dependence on him most evident, that no flesh should glory in his presence, that God alone might be exalted, and that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of man, and that Christ's power might be manifested in our weakness, and none might say mine own hand hath saved me."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.13.2

<sup>2</sup> 1749, Ethical writings, vol. 8

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, 139-140

Confessionally we have attached the concept of glory to covenant. Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

*“The end of creation, therefore, is not merely the glory of God, but the special manifestation of that glory in the person and work of Christ. As He is the Alpha, so also is He the Omega; the beginning and the end.”<sup>4</sup>*

A concern for orthodoxy employs SDG for the preservation of God’s glory in salvation, and in the regulation of the local worship service<sup>5</sup>, but comparatively few in the Presbyterian and reformed world advocate for the preservation of God’s glory in his present bodily ministry. Lost in worship wars and internecine debates over the *ordo salutis* is concern for God’s glory which dwells in Christ’s Ascension for the right establishment of a new *ordo humanis*. This is a doctrine of glory which is more platonic and ineffable than it is humane. The glory may not have departed the doctrine of glory, but it is disembodied.

In the film *Ghostbusters II*, Dr. Peter Venkman asks his humorless colleague, Egon Spengler, if he played with toys as a child. Egon replies, “We had half a slinky once, but I straightened it.” Perhaps in some ways we have been “straightening” the doctrine of glory, removing its potential energy and leaving it thoroughly uninteresting. One indicator of the weakness of this disembodied glory is that it can be observed and appreciated, *in toto*, in solitude.

### **In communion with His unity**

“22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17)

SDG exalts in one *body*. Unity and corporeality is an essential mark of the Glory of God. Jesus’ priestly prayer is that, following his incarnation, yet they will see “my glory” by being “where I am,” and by being “one” as the Father and Son are one. This relationship of glory to corporeality is the fermentation of temple/presence theology, it is a celebration of the vindicated Lord who said that he would save a particular people to himself. The degree to which we obscure this unity, perhaps in crass denominationalism (per Vanhoozer<sup>6</sup>) but surely by greater sins against the body: segregation, slavery, genocide, internment camps, racialization, tribalism, college football debates.

“16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol II, Part III, Chapter I

<sup>5</sup> We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone. We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self- fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel." - The Cambridge Declaration

<sup>6</sup> Biblical Authority after Babel, Chapter 5, *The Wealth of Holy Nations*

the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 corinthians 3)

SDG which is both covenant and temple is fully realized as sacred space in the profane, a temple-informed humanity. This is "where the Spirit of the Lord is present." The woman who labors unto glory, labors in a sacred space. The man who works reconciliation in his cross-cultural relationships, labors unto glory. The minister at the deathbed, labors unto glory. As we bear the Lord's presence with us into the world we are laboring unto glory, and that space is sacred. It is "Temple adjacent."

"For from him and through him and to him are *all things*. To him be glory forever. Amen."

This means we do not simply *do things unto the glory of God*, we do them *in God's glory, amidst God's glory*. Our labors are glory-kissed. We should expect then for our work and every cultural artifact to bend toward the sacred.

### **In communion with His joy**

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 **For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.** ... So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, *our inner self is being renewed day by day.* 17 *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

### **In communion with His beauty**

N.T. Wright's construction of SDG is helpfully out of place. He sees two primary elements, (1) the vindication of God in the resurrection and resulting unity of God's people, and (2) the participatory element of our *dying and rising* in Christ by faith. This gets us closer to a robust Edwardsian view: the "refulgence" springs from the beauty of the Gospel as it embodies a radiant, whole, healed creation, a sacred power which is constantly breaking through the profane. In this way we are in communion with the glory of God as it unfolds in the beauty of the earth.

"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!

Let your glory be over all the earth." (Ps. 108)

### **Pastoral concerns at stake**

1. The doctrine of vocation. SDG should shape a believer's ambition so that they labor and live unto glory, but when we live in spaces that stage a lesser glory (like suburban spaces and livable cities), the love of the Good Life leaves us without our true vocation. The Lord's glory is in the creation but the creation yawns.
2. When the pastor is the vicar not only of Christ, but of his glory. The pastor must be the vicar of glory at death, speaking a contrary truth than the next-to-last truth of death, and helping the dying to commune with God's glory.
3. Disembodied justice (churches with a low ecclesiology who attempt to minister in reconciliation). Constructing a view of the body that understands injustice (racial and

otherwise) as a sin against the whole body. Eugene Debs (“I am not free”) should not understand the glory of God in our humanity better than the ministers of the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

4. How is glory so *disembodied* in the worship of SDG churches? No joy, expression, love, power. Think of the disciples who were so filled with the spirit (filled with GLORY) that they were thought to be drunk. The best food should smoke from the temple of God. The human *body* should strain toward the eschaton in anticipation during a Christian worship service! There is a holy robustness - we should be instituting the Lord’s supper with port wine, we should be involving the body in worship - we should hear AMENS and people should laugh and cry, they should get angry, they should experience the full range of Godly physicality in their weekly experience of the Body of Christ. Glory should be FULL i

### **PASTORAL APPLICATION: Vicar of Christ for the Sick and Dying**

How can I explain the pastoral privilege of communing with the glory of Christ in dying?

I received the text from one of the men in our congregation going through officer training - his mother, who had been battling cancer for 13 years through at least 5 recurrences, her heart was damaged from all the chemo and moved into failure. I knew Mary pretty well. She was a single mother, and a widow, for years, very tough, an old saint. In the last few weeks she had started to question the weird faith healing cult that infiltrated her conservative Lutheran church and it labeled her a bit of a trouble-maker. The faith-healers told her part of her cancer issue was that she wasn’t demanding her healing. Her pastor visited, asked how she would like him to pray for her, then left without praying, presumably to pray for her at another hour, on his own.

I thought too long before I replied via text offering to come to the hospital at 10pm the night after flying home from family vacation. In this I was not a vicar of Christ’s presence but of his absence. Thankfully he didn’t let me off the hook. He told me I should come.

On instinct I grabbed the anointing kit, vials in a nice case, my mentor gave me when he retired. Older ministers always seem to know what you can’t know until you know, you know? I’ve never anointed the dying, only the sick, so this was new to me - most of my parishioners have been younger. The only deaths have been sudden and my pastoral care amounted to grief counseling in those situations. I sent a message to some pastor friends asking for scriptures to share at the bedside.

She was in rough shape when I got there, hunched over a discomfort bag and her son, my friend - who is a renowned doctor - looked at me helpless while he rubbed her back. I don’t think I’ve ever entered a room so glad to see a pastor. Not a friend, not comic relief. But the vicar of Christ. The presence of God. What they needed was to have the sacred break into the profane. They needed the profane to be profaned by God himself.

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<sup>7</sup> In approaching issues of systemic racism, sexism, injustice the church tends to borrow vocabulary from the social and political sciences. While I believe that academic disciplines have much to teach us in the church, this abdicates the role of the church as the vanguard of the glory of Jesus in the world. It is a reversal of the role the church played during the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, and the abolition movement that preceded it. In these movements the church provided a vocabulary for those who spoke and a legacy of exodus for those who marched. The glory of God, mediated through the temple presence of Jesus, provides a radical unity. Thus the segregationist is not sinning against black people alone, but all people. The segregationist can not be said to merely suffer a theological error, but commits violence against the bodily presence of Jesus, ripping apart that which the Ascension raises whole. This is a higher category of justice than the balancing of the scales, though it leads, by necessity, to restorative reparation. Conservative churchmen may re-tell the story of the civil rights movement as a political and a-scriptural revolution, but perhaps the fact that the lines of engagement seemed to fall along ecclesiological tribes tells us something. Can I say that we should investigate low church ecclesiology as an instigator toward low love?

We talked for a bit while the staff performed several indignities to try and make her more comfortable. The oxygen was chapping her lips, her bowel movements were nearly sending her into shock from the pain. Her body was wasting away. After a bit, while they readied her room upstairs, I asked if she would mind if I read some scripture while she tried to focus on something other than the pain. The first couple of passages resulted in her asking me to stop while she dealt with severe nausea. That was a pastoral confidence builder. But eventually we made our way through several psalms, Ephesians 1, Philippians 4 - her requests.

I left the room while she had another painful bowel movement and her son fell apart. "I know she's dying." He just cried all over me. He's the guy you see on TV when the American Academy of Pediatrics needs a person to give testimony to congress or an interview on the news. But he has to be a son, not a doctor, and as a son *he can't keep his shit together*.

This is why he needs a pastor.

He tells me that she's been his rock and the one who always drives the conversation toward Jesus. And he knows God is good but this is a bad good. A lot of hugs. This ministry of presence is something I often forget. People need Jesus in the flesh.

When we get to the palliative care floor Mary sees the sign and bursts into tears. She knows what palliative care is, since she spent years as a hospital chaplain. It's a shock when the doctors tell you, after years of helping you fight, when you're a fighter by nature, that you're not allowed to fight anymore. She says she knows Jesus hasn't left her but she still fears death and wishes she could feel that everything she knows is true, is really true.

I tell her that she doesn't need to be strong, that God knows we need to feel his presence at times like this, which is why he gives us the anointing - a physical representation of his presence with us. He loves us so. The healing we always need most is to be healed of our estrangement. I anoint her hands and head and tell her how much Jesus loves her; of his finished work on the Cross and how his strength bears her up, that there is not one second between the last breath of life and the first breath of glory. I pray for the comfort of Jesus while I stroke her head.

She prays that if there's anything that would keep her from Jesus would he please forgive her. She's so scared, she says. I take the opportunity to offer her the pardon in Christ. It's the one I offer every week from the pulpit.

"Lift your head you precious daughter of God. Having hoped in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins I tell you, as one ministering in His name, that you are clean; your sins are forgiven you. Your Jesus, He loves you. Amen." Her son and his wife pray a sweet prayer. I ask everyone to leave the room so I can speak with Mary alone.

Another mentor told me once that the dying need a chance to hear that they're dying, alone with a minister. So I tell her, "Mary, you know you're dying. Is there anything you want to talk about?" She tells me about how she knows the faith healing cult is wrong but she worries. Am I sure she has enough faith? Now I'm just slinging the gospel here at this point. Truth. Truth. Truth. All the little faiths stuff. Jesus to the Centurion, the thief, Peter, Paul, the woman at the well, the scoundrel in all of us, atonement, resurrection, ascension, glory. I rub her hand while telling her the story about how she is beloved. She says, "I think I felt like a second class citizen all my life until now." That — — — cult, is one thing that runs through my mind. I tell her that I can't wait to see her in the new earth and have her meet me at the gates and tell me that it was all true.

When life is being swallowed up by death you get to see the glory revealed not only in them but in you. In the hospital room the manifold witness of God's glory, the refulgence Edwards mentions, flows together from little faiths in hospital beds and little faiths in clerical collars.

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I can't do better than bullet points. Here is the intersection between ministry to the sick and dying with the glory of God:

\* Of all conditions, those who are sick unto death are most likely to gain clarity on the difference between their own glory and the glory of God.

\* The coming of the Kingdom of God, in glory, is often tied to the experience of bodily healing. Thus it is a ministry of glorification to anoint the sick and dying. We are vicars of Christ, testifying to the persevering of the Kingdom of God against all evils, even the evil of bodily suffering. (Edwards' grieving bracelet)

\* Christians die unto glory. The point at which pastoral care may be most helpful, the point at which glory is least believable, is the point of dying. All the glory seems to depart, but the presence of glory is unmistakable for the Christian. Christ is present in his church.

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Questions for group engagement:

1. As you minister the glory of God in your congregations, how do you escape the gravitational pull of glory as *only* covenant reality?
2. What are some creative ways you've learned to minister the presence of God for the suffering?