

A Theology of Governance

A paper by

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Abstract

Lived-experience and art as metaphor are the subjects of this paper to be examined in light of a theology of governance rooted in understanding the Kingdom of God together with an appreciation of creative freedom as integral to rediscovering the purpose of our existence. This essay was first published in 2016, ¹ as part of a Doctoral Dissertation titled: *“The First and Last Kingdom: Rediscovering the Purpose of Our Existence.”* My proposed theology of governance is both informal and informed as a pattern by which we ought to live. Characteristics of this new theological mode comprise: roots, creativity, relationship, and personality. These unfold over time and remain emergent in *knowing, doing, and being* in Divine presence. Theology, of necessity, must also be practical, because a practical world is a functional world. It is no longer the content of our theology and worldview that are unique, but the functional experience of our practical theology and worldview. The experience becomes practical in the manner in which we continue to *be* creative, and in the manner in which we engage spiritual practices to become thoughtful and tactful action. The practical world that comprises our spirituality is inextricably bound together with the experience of creative freedom, art as metaphor, and a kingdom theology of governance.

A Theology of Governance

This paper is my account of lived-experience of theology and art as metaphor to illuminate the process of discovery as a pattern for others. My experience is not perfect or complete. Nevertheless, my experience is real. But, experience needs to be able to turn to some sense of foundations of prophetic imagination to interpret and to apply to ourselves in order to express an informal and informed theology by which we live. That theology is a theology of governance rooted in the Kingdom of God and manifested in the act of creative freedom.

Therefore, I propose a kingdom theology as a critical yet informal theology of rediscovering the meaning of our existence in the experience of governance. I am indebted to John W. Dixon’s writings in *“Art and the Theological Imagination,”* in which he posits the relationship between art and theology as serious inquiry. To Dixon, art was too important an enterprise to be reduced to ornament and theology too central to be reducible to verbal argument. “Religion,” says Dixon, “tends to ignore the concrete – our constant and implacable relation to the physical world – and to regard art not as the

embodiment of the actualities of experience but as a form of escapism at worst or an instrument of moralizing at best.”²

Even though art is not the subject of this essay about theology of governance, I am nevertheless engaged in an artistic process of creative writing that is inseparable from my inquiry. Perhaps it is akin to a metaphor of the security program on my computer as it runs quietly behind all I do. So, my creative inclination to *see* with the artist’s eye runs quietly behind all I write as I observe my relationship to a triple practice of knowing, doing, and being the artist-theologian.

Theology is a critical study of the nature of the Divine, and is usually taught as an academic discipline in universities, seminaries, and in schools of divinity. Augustine defined the Latin equivalent *theologia* as reasoning or discussion concerning the Deity. Others have defined theology as the science of things Divine. Jacques Ellul defined it as dialectic. Theologians use various forms of analysis and argument, be they philosophical, ethnographic, historical, sociological, dialectical, and biblical, to help us understand God. I do not consider myself a theologian. I posit, however, that theology is not the exclusive domain of theologians. We are all encouraged to critically examine our beliefs and our experience of such beliefs. Such examination comprises an informal and informed theology of inquiry into the nature of Divine governance in our personal lives as well as in our community. It is an appreciative inquiry that motivates and inspires all of us as we examine these things in fellowship with the Spirit and one another.

But, as an outcome of our inquiry and as the experience motivates, inspires, and delights us, is our experience to be validated by a theology of governance? Will it embrace *knowing* and *doing* in a continuum of journeying towards our final destiny and our fulfillment in a homecoming of eternal bliss?

Stephen Nichols posits thoughtfully that: “Every concept of the kingdom has to be continuously tested in the light of the revelation of the Kingdom (Divine governance) given uniquely and once for all in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Theologians and biblical scholars, as much as they would like to be driven solely by the text of Scripture in their work, tend to read Scripture through the lens of their own sociological and cultural circumstances (experience).”³ If we are driven solely by the text of Scripture, we assume a position that is the antitheses of an informal and informed theology. Critical inquiry into word-meanings of the text alone is insufficient if we have no experience of such inquiry. The lens of our personal experience is as valid as the lens of Scripture itself. Divine revelation is not just formally textual; it is also informally experiential, just as Divine revelation of kingdom governance is not just experiential; it is also textual. The two: text and experience are complementary in any serious inquiry. The validity of revelation is both an external emerging kingdom through experience and an internal emerging kingdom through illumination of Scripture.

To draft an informed and informal theology of governance, I will engage the informality of artistic process as creative writing to craft the story of my experience, and assume the discipline of an informative nature of my inquiry.

I do not suggest a repudiation of centuries-old disciplines of theology, nor do I imply there is no longer a role for the traditional mode of theology. I posit a mode of theology that embraces imaginative structures. At times we are no doubt overwhelmed by forms of rational theological intelligence that have contributed to the source of our *angst*. Many have been the thundering sermons of guilt and shame because our righteousness has been like filthy rags. The message plunges us deep into the abyss of a sinner's despair. At a crucial moment in the three-part sermon, the redemptive point of salvation is made, and we are led out of the abyss by the skin of our teeth, glad to have escaped God's wrath for another week. Theirs has been the same claim to compulsive authority angrily demanding obedience. I have chewed many a peppermint to last me through the demise of my being, hoping the twenty minutes would end quickly. In 1972, after my nervous breakdown I stopped listening altogether. I needed an experience of freedom, not imprisonment to doctrine and dogma. Divine governance is not a prison furthered by depravity and sin-consciousness embellished by an intellectual lusting for power of institutions. Nor do I suggest that all is doom and gloom in the institutions of religion. I have abandoned peppermints long ago because the new messages of revival and renewal lasted over an hour. I sat and listened with eager anticipation and Divine expectation as my spirit, soul, and body were informed of untold treasures of freedom, healing, and wellbeing. I began soaking in the informality of worship and of praying in tongues. I immersed myself in countless images to inspire not so much the subjects of my art but the process of creating art.

As I listened, soaked, and immersed myself in awe and wonder, I invariably asked if there was also a degree of informality in dealing with that theological stronghold of original sin. Not that I want to digress from the subject at hand. But, in context of an informal and informed theology of governance, original sin is embodied in the acceptance of governance or rejection thereof. Originally we relinquished what had been given to us – dominion over created order. A struggle ensued between humankind and satanic forces to gain control of such dominion. Both parties chose deception as the means. One by lying to us that it never belonged to us in the first place, and we are not fit to have dominion over a created order, and the other by manifesting a lust for dominance over others. It was and is the history of humanity – dominance. Dominance is attained through deception and conflict and by a lust for wealth and power. This is the legacy of the human race: our governance of dominance in stark contrast to Divine governance through obedience. We graduated from the brutal wholesale slaughter of millions in global wars to the sterile “smart-wars” of technology, social idealism, and finance. Yet, millions still die poor and oppressed. Original sin is the human will that says no to Divine governance. However far back we want to trace the roots of our

disobedience, we are not absolved from its consequences. Only God's kingdom governance is the antithesis of a governance of dominance. Dominion has not been given back to us. It has been given to Christ, leaving our journey as one of servanthood only. But, therein lays the secret of our existence. Being servants makes us leaders. Being poor in spirit makes us rich. Being committed to God's governance sets us free. Being humble makes us the recipients of prophetic imagination and creative freedom. Being weak in our own strategies and solutions we become strong in rediscovering the deeper, more rewarding meaning of our existence led by the Spirit of God.

John Dixon inspired me to draft a mode of theology of governance that fits the imaginative structures of our minds to embrace *knowing* and to experientially *see* the continuum of the journey towards our final destiny and our fulfillment in a delightful homecoming. We demand a life that does not shun feelings and emotions as alien to spirituality in the face of an intellectual exegesis we cannot understand. Or worse, a theology we cannot understand because every apologetic widens the gap between what we know and what we experience.

Many years ago I learned to draw in the ancient Renaissance tradition of silverpoint drawing. This tradition employs a silver stylus to draw on hand-coated paper. I prepare such paper with a *ground* of calcium-carbonate gesso. Over the years I have included other metal points such as copper, brass, and gold. I discovered a surprising similarity between qualitative research design and process and the act of drawing in silverpoint. As a result I began writing about the *Silverpoint Metaphor*. I drew a parallel among four spheres of influence in my research: the academic sphere, the artist's sphere, the social sphere, and the research sphere. These spheres are integral to my inquiry into kingdom governance. However, suffice it to summarize the *Silverpoint Metaphor* as an example of an informal structure of drawing and research that informed me to better understand the relationship between my practices of art and inquiry. My voice as an artist became evident in an interaction among inspiration, ideation, and theoretical constructs. Vision and transformation illuminated my theory of communication. Research and invention informed my hypotheses. The mastery of my crafts and the skills with which to produce quality fine art found inspiration in technology and new media. Experiences of excellence, craftsmanship, and competence, became propositional in that they pointed to an outcome of both art and informed leadership.

Looking ahead to a theology of governance, I discovered that by defining the work of the artist and researcher in the *Silverpoint Metaphor*, I was in fact describing a new mode of theology that fits our imaginative structures in response to the times in which we live. It is governance that embraces all spheres of life whether academic, creative, social, philosophical, or beyond to political, experiential, physical, or spiritual. This is not the time to explicate by fully examining what has awakened in my consciousness in order to understand the various layers of the above mentioned spheres

of life. Instead I propose a creative synthesis of my awakening as the embodiment of thorough familiarity with what I know and what I have experienced. Formal knowing informs my informal experience of *doing*, and informal experience of *doing* informs my formal *knowing* with openness to embrace my worldview as rhythms of belief that alternate freely between Christological perspectives and the diversity of my lived-experience.

My commitment to formal studies and practices at Art College became the open door to creative informality as my knowing and doing matured. My commitment to formal studies in creative freedom and spirituality (including theology) became the open door to a deeper inquiry into the phenomenon of creative freedom as an experience of ecstasy in delight of inspiration and motivation. My commitment to the Kingdom of God became the open door to governance that had illuminated a re-discovery of the meaning of my existence. The natural and the spiritual are no longer strangers where one supersedes the other. Both are equal collaborators in a grand design of Divine order. As New Testament Scripture sheds light back towards our understanding the past of the Old Testament, so the Old Testament Scripture point the light ahead towards our understanding the present and future of the New Testament. As nature sheds light on the spiritual, so the spiritual sheds light on the natural.

Deep in the rainforest of Cathedral Grove I have sat for hours and days drawing with pen and brown ink the lines and forms that occupy the overwhelming volume of space among the trees. I cannot escape the majestic wonder of towering hemlock, firs and cedars. Light often makes a feeble attempt to penetrate the canopy above. I am lost in thought and in the experience of a profoundly natural presence. My voice is the pen of a ready artist. I am conscious that I am in fact drawing inside a real cathedral. Many are my memories of standing inside Gothic cathedrals of Europe, overcome by that same awe and wonder. I look up into the canopy and immerse myself in the knowledge of God and my experience of His Spirit. I am humbled that amidst this Divine spectacle I am blessed with artistic gifts and the opportunities over many decades to develop, train, and expand these gifts into practice.

My mind is filled with questions. How do these towering giants remain standing for many centuries even when the *Qualicum* wind reaps havoc in the forest? ¹ The answer is roots – deep roots. Following therefore is a draft of what I posit as a kingdom theology of informal and informed experience to illuminate our understanding of God. Incumbent upon such experiences is to maintain a sense of process and progress that continues to unfold while we remain aware of the temptation to carve the outcome in stone. We are all works-in-progress drawn by Divine lines and form, and crafted into

¹ The *Qualicum* wind is a peculiar and violent wind that rises suddenly along the west coast and rushes through valleys to gain speed and come upon unsuspecting forests. Although casualties are often many, much of the resilient forest remains standing. I experienced the aftermath of such a *Qualicum* wind when I returned just days later to draw in Cathedral Grove.

the image of Christ. I propose four characteristics of a mode of informal and informed theology that fits the prophetic imagination. These characteristics stand on the solid rock of Apostolic tradition, not as a catholic order of service or liturgy, or the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, but as a foundation of truth the Apostles had heard and seen themselves and were commissioned to teach others as essential to submission, discernment, promises, principles, and absolutes that sustain this new kind of government. We continue our inquiry into characteristics of a new theological mode with roots, creativity, relationship, and personality.

1. Roots

I purposed to remember my spiritual roots. These roots tap into a reservoir of assurance and confidence, knowing that regardless of my senses, my feelings and emotions, God will show me a way through the wilderness, if I allow His governance to rule. One rule is to rely on no one but Him.

I have also been rooted in artistic disciplines that date back centuries, having practiced these disciplines ever since I put pencil to paper, brush to canvas, and silverpoint to coated surfaces. And I have grown as a result of my endeavors. I have been rooted in Kingdom disciplines that date back millennia. I have practiced these disciplines ever since I yielded to Divine governance. As a result I have grown by the grace of God in my understanding and lived-experience of spirituality. Therefore, I can say with confidence that rediscovery of meaning of existence begins with roots – deep roots.

In reflecting on the *Silverpoint Metaphor*, my later experiments in the oxidation properties of metals led to rewarding experiences of finished drawings that continued to mature as the lines turned from a silvery grey into green-yellow, brown, and black, giving each drawing a new face. By sidestepping the old duality of natural versus spiritual, and embracing both as colabourers, I discovered that the deeper my roots, the greater the growth of Divine mystery and majesty in revelation and inspiration.

Our rooting is in nature. We are born of and into a natural world. Even though we ascribe to our *nature* the spirit, soul, and body of existence, our first human cry is for mother's milk and not a passage from Scripture. Our informed minds act as a function of our entire being. Over time we become more informed and our roots grow deeper. Knowing becomes an integral part of our experience to nourish our understanding and thus grow our roots even deeper. The knowledge of God colabours with our experience of God and our growth reaches ever upwards to cathedral heights. The outcome is etched on our imaginative structures that embrace all spheres of life. The experience is creative as prophetic imagination in spontaneous worship, the joys of new music, the liberty of the dance and poetic musings, and a deeper understanding that freedom in Christ is a vast ocean of undiscovered depth and beauty. We need not fear the *Qualicum* winds or the logger's axe when our roots are deep in the revealed knowledge of God. We need not fear the wrangling over doctrine and dogma or the onslaught of our

modern secularization of church and culture when our roots are deep in Kingdom governance. Our discourse may be experimental or even radical in our analysis of rhythms of belief,⁴ but if our manifest evidence is birthed as peace, love, joy, kindness, *et al*, our rooting is secure in our identity as citizens of God's kingdom.

2. Creativity

Second: as we redefine our theology of governance as an informal and informed outcome of deep roots, our knowledge and experience of God takes on a new face that embodies the very essence of creativity itself and not just the outward expressions of artistic practices. "We are rooted in nature as a tree is rooted in nature. But we are not trees. We 'bear fruit' as a tree does in process, but not the fruit of the tree for we are human and not trees and our fruit is human fruit expressed in human languages and human practices."⁵ I do not imply human fruit as separate from spiritual fruit. When I first introduced the word *pneumaism* into my writings years, I meant fruit of the human spirit as inspired by the Spirit of God – inseparably. A theology of governance is not about human endeavours. It is explicitly and implicitly about Divine governance that illuminates, inspires, and embraces creativity as the embodiment of understanding God. He is the Creator and we are co-creators in every manifestation of Kingdom presence.

As governance is not an abstract concept, so creativity is not an abstract concept. As governance *is* the experience of kingdom order as Divine presence so creativity *is* the experience of kingdom life. Divine presence is the experience of Creator God, who manifests His presence in very creative ways. He speaks to us in many ways, through the voice of Nature's created order, the prophetic voice of others, through Scripture, through apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and elders, as well as through events and circumstances. The agent of His voice is His Spirit. My experience is that what He speaks is as beautifully and lovingly varied as an exhibition of Impressionist paintings. The outcome of His voice is affirmative, encouraging, comforting, informative, and it will set us free to engage the plan He has for us. For that reason I continue to be drawn to the metaphor of art as implicitly spiritual. Therefore I posit that as theology ought to be an experience of spiritual freedom, so creativity *is* the experience of natural freedom.

Creative freedom is a reflection of transformative spiritual freedom. But, what exactly *is* creative freedom? At the heart of my daily practices lies the concept of transformation through the experience of creative freedom. The answer is not a simple definitive statement confined to a specific practice. Creative freedom is as multi-faceted and inter-disciplinary as it is singular. Just as we discover one way to describe our surroundings, we discover yet another way to express our sentiments. Just as we engage our spiritual journey and the way seems clear from beginning to end, we change our course and embrace our freedom by venturing elsewhere. Just as I have diligently prepared to give a sermon from a raised pulpit, or to teach a series of lessons in a workshop setting, I have frequently abandoned my notes to speak *off-script* with

prophetic imagination. Therefore words such as unfolding, emerging, transforming, and transcendence, readily describe my experience of a process I call creative freedom. These words are also embodied in the spiritual quest for E'veden, the name I have given to Scripture's City of God, not built with human hands, which I penned in epic poetry. Yet, at other times, my focus is singular in order to develop a historical chronology and plotlines for times and people I write about in my novels. Once more I reflect back again to silverpoint drawing.

Working with the Renaissance tradition of silverpoint drawing is an exacting form of engagement. The singular act is the drawing itself. It is an act akin to submission to governance as silverpoint drawing is *governed* by a specific technique. But, in the singularity of its exactness there is a freedom beyond words that can only be experienced as time slowly matures the drawing through oxidation of metalpoint on specially-prepared paper. I cast the net wide, knowing that when oxidation is completed the drawing will have taken on new meaning. The drawing emerges and unfolds. It is transformed into a mature work. The phenomenon is exhilarating because I know that the metal point lines I have drawn will change over time. I may even work on the drawing years later. The transformation is ever-emergent with new experiences of awe and wonder. The silverpoint metaphor extends to theology of governance as well in ever-emergent discoveries of new meanings of awe and wonder, experienced with creative freedom. A theology of governance will inspire us.

Creative freedom unfolds as we live the experience. My experience is the unfolding of artistic inspiration. It is a spiritual experience of transformation. Creative freedom is the natural manifestation of joy and pleasure of my outer journey as it reflects my inner quest. Creative freedom is a disciplined practice of transcendent artistic expression where the only limit is the media available with which to express myself. It is a life without temporal man-made boundaries. The sky is truly the limit. All I need is a revelation of how to get there. Creative freedom embodies patience and endurance. It comprises the heart of a servant who is vulnerable whenever the artist steps out of his or her private domain to inform culture. It comprises the heart of a pioneer who in daring and confidence shows the way for others. It is an experience of ecstasy and delight. Living in Divine governance, as is living in creative freedom, is as complex as it is simple.

I therefore posit that as integral part of my worldview, creative freedom is a transformative experience of ecstasy and delight through inspiration by the Spirit of God that mirrors the kingdom life. As a result, the experience has a profound affect on my writing and my art, and this are symbolic of the greater work, that is, Divine truth written and drawn on my heart.

The creative experience of artistic expression serves as both a motivational *and* inspirational purpose that finds practical applications in everyday life. Creative freedom, in the words of Jennifer Raab, is an "ecstatic liberation." ⁶

Creativity is therefore a natural manifestation of our inner journey that reflects our quest for spiritual meaning. The manifestation of transformation during my quest became evident during research as I witnessed a gradual shift away from mere analysis of literature to understanding the effect my research was having on me. The shift moved away from empiricism to embrace the experience itself. My journey encountered a shift away from factual meaning towards the experience of a pilgrim on the road to fulfillment. My quest became a pilgrim story.

Juxtaposed in light of the question what *is* creative freedom, is the question what is *not* creative freedom? Creative freedom through making art is *not* primarily a narrowcast use of art with an expository function to enhance any form of communication such illustrated lessons. Nor do I propose that creative freedom is an art-driven spiritual practice, such as making art for the purpose of liturgy, devotion, worship, and ritual. These can be secondary functions of art-making, but not primary ones in context of creative freedom.

I remember many years ago during a special mission trip, when I had illustrated the meaning of scriptural truth on a big piece of construction paper. My audience was a large group of children in the *Pink Orphanage* outside Tijuana, Mexico. Art in that place was expedient and functional because I did not speak Spanish. Instead, my translator found it exhilarating to translate in Spanish what I spoke in English and illustrated in images. Art was a practice of effective communication to breach a language gap. Had I spoken Spanish, the illustrations may not have been necessary. The purpose of the event was not to bridge the gap with creative freedom. I was merely an illustrator.

Nor is my experience of transformation an artform for civic protest or political and social commentary. By creative freedom I do not mean art as therapy, whether clinical or recreational. All these no doubt have intrinsic value in themselves as they employ various forms of art for specific educational, therapeutic, or recreational purposes. But, I do not posit these as evidence of creative freedom. Nor is art's function of expediency the subject of my research. Art is not an exclusive servant to spiritual practice or religious ritual, or therapeutic methodologies. Yet, nothing is ever cast in stone and art will find its own way to express creative freedom when and wherever.

My research aims to go deeper, that is, to inquire into the spiritual essence of the phenomenon I am investigating. That essence is a particular freedom I experience in being transformed from the inside out rather than from the outside in. My experience of freedom is profoundly creative and immeasurably nurturing, yet paradoxically it is definitively practical at the same time. The phenomenon is not *about* creativity and spirituality. The phenomenon *is* creativity and spirituality. Inspired creativity is foundational to motivation.

Creative freedom is a practice of artistic expression that transcends temporal and material boundaries, because the essence of the experience is not confined to the natural, that is, the making of a work of art itself, or the writing of an epic poem. The

essence is spiritual transformation. Creativity is a Divine gift with which to *express* transformation. Freedom is also a Divine gift with which to *live in the flow* of transformation. As I write or draw and paint, as I contemplate a theology of kingdom governance, I am transformed because I continually reflect on these Divine gifts to explore meaning-giving experiences. Reflections turn into a form of confession that exposes as much the motive behind my actions as it describes the actions themselves. However, we all need an inquisitive mind and a discerning eye to discover the depth of meaning as it pushes to emerge, for example, from the words of Scripture.

But, is it as simple as mere reflection? There are times when we can feel that we are right but we cannot prove it. Yet, we long to be in harmony with the Spirit who leads us. Over time, however, meaning does unfold and our lived-experience is validated.

Creativity is complex and yet it is simple. It is complex because its multi-layered experience requires a lifetime to understand, and simple because it begins with the singular act of a first-response, an initial encounter, with the transforming influence of the Divine. The evidence of such a first-response is my story.

Compounded by the urge to explain myself is an urgent need to explain myself *to myself*. It confirms that the principle of examination is to expose myself to myself. I become increasingly more self-aware. Art takes me deeper into the emergent experience with a greater awareness that there have been and continues to be no familiar signposts that say this is the acceptable and proven way. As such there is no economy of words with which to proceed. If kingdom life is any indication of our need to explain ourselves *to ourselves*, there will be many volumes in our collective stories of transformative experience over many years, because we will always continue the process of discovering who we really are.

My creative world comprises domains of integrated understanding.

I am inspired by the domains of art and philosophy, of theology and theory, as well as domains of communication and spirituality. I am motivated by the experience of creating art to embody inspiration, innovation, imagination, and discipline. These function in real time and space with the energy of personal and professional practices that span five decades. The aim of my inquiry into this “energy” is to unfold greater understanding of transformation through the experience of creative freedom. The outcome transforms my practices into a deeper passion for art as a motivating influence for spiritual transformation. The result is a personal and exponential growth of faith in Divine governance. I become the informed leader. My experience becomes a model for transference to others who desire to participate in a similar transformation. My invitation to others is to be transformed by their own creative worlds.

Art, whether as the artist, or as someone who appreciates art, enables us to experience the presence of Divine in a physically and spiritually complex community. It is of primary concern that we need to keep our peace and sustain our motivation.

Engaging creativity enhances our understanding of the quest as long distance voyagers bound by kingdom governance in a kingdom culture of freedom.

A Divinely orchestrated phenomenon *is* the source of our energy.

But, is my creative world a common ground with which others can identify in their respective journeys? I posit that there is a common ground for others to experience, because transformation and illumination remain experiential and not empirical. Transformation and illumination are not science. For these reasons and more, mine will never be a finished story bound only by factual evidence. The journey of faith will always retain a degree of assurance of things hoped for and a conviction about what cannot be seen. God's kingdom will never be reduced to a vernacular of ordinary and natural. Governance will always be extraordinary and supernatural.

I will briefly illustrate the lived-experience of creative freedom as a theology of governance in the form of a metaphor first described as the mystical *Valley of Dry Bones* in my epic poetry and in my book, *Creative Worlds*. Whether enigmatic or mystical, the valley is a real place known as Combers Beach on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It is in this valley where I discover time and time again, that my meaning-giving methodology continues to emerge as a paradox. Any attempt to methodologically and systematically integrate my inquiry into a cohesive and replicable pattern, such as a heuristic model perhaps, the outcome remains a paradox, because I cannot measure the immeasurable, nor can I define factually what is undefinable as faith.

The experience of creative freedom, as is the experience of kingdom governance, is immeasurable and beyond definitions. Any measure as such is but a glimpse of what is truly a revelation of the immeasurably Divine Spirit. I will visit the valley as often as time permits, but never has the experience been replicated. It is fresh *manna* every time I walk the length of the beach surrounded by the flotsam and jetsam of miles of driftwood *bones* that have gathered above the high-tide mark. While there, the essence of creative freedom is a dynamic encounter with the Spirit that permeates and transforms my thoughts, informs my decisions, and governs my actions.

The metaphor of the *Valley of Dry Bones* prefigures a process of discovery of *bones*, bones being the words I write often in poetic streams of consciousness. My discovery of bones is likened to a method or approach to writing about the experience-based context of prophecy, much like prophetic imagination. Bones are investigated in light of pertinent literature and Scripture. When I describe in detail the very nature of the experience, I articulate my findings as a result of *speaking to the bones*. In fact, the experience endeavours beyond speaking to bones, specifically when I offer my interpretations as a result of engaging the act of not just speaking to bones but *prophesying to the bones*. The combined outcome of speaking and prophesying leads me to conclude that there is a Divine manifestation of governance when life is given to the words I write. Even if I am the only one reading those words. As a result I am revived with motivation and inspiration. This then is the essence of a kingdom theology of

governance: to experience God's presence in creativity and to know and do everything by the leading of God's Spirit. For therein lies all our incubation, immersion, inspiration, illumination, with as an outcome a freedom that even surpasses all knowledge.

Freedom is also an invitation to play.

The invitation to play suggests a mode of diverse practice in spirituality. In play there is "an innocence of promise and delight in the experience of playfulness as a sense of being on the other side, and of having passed through darkness into a spirituality of promise." ⁷ Creativity is play. Freedom is play. Creative freedom is ecstatically and delightfully playful. Playful to such an extent, "that this strange (and playful) rhythm of the spiritual life comes and goes as it wills, having no essential relation whatsoever to our perplexity." ⁸ Playfulness not only appeals to my sense of wonder and delight, it also *just happens*.

Philip Sheldrake says in *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction*, that he craves for a spirituality of "the ordinary human world and everyday life as the principal context for the spiritual path and for the quest of authenticity." ⁹ We ought to crave a spirituality that is playful. The essence of spiritual practice therefore should include a creatively free sense of play.

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." ²

We cannot *be* unless we are free and we cannot *be free* unless we are creative. Creative freedom is *being* who we are – playfully. Yet, the experience is not limited to specific individuals such as artists and spiritual practitioners. The experience is for all who aspire to help others. It is therefore equally important to ask, how can our experience of creative freedom have meaning for others? It will have meaning if we demonstrate transcendence above mere forms of creative expression to reach that playful state where all the years of practicing our skills finally pay off. All the years of being governed by Divine rule yields abundant fruit. Our state of being is transformed into comfort in times of pressure, a retreat in times of busyness, a solace when we search for meaningful expression, healing for wounded souls, and a joyful expectancy of playing every day.

Yet, sometimes a theological crisis does arise from a conflict between whether we deserve such creative freedom or whether we should humbly resign to our inevitable shortcomings, our actions intimidated by criticism we are sure will come. But, that conflict does not come from within. It is not the threat of Divine judgment. It's a judgment of people. It comes from without because we have chosen to embrace a theology of governance with creative freedom that suggests play is indeed spiritual. It's

² John 3:8

a price we pay for stepping into a journey of freedom, independent of organizational practices or as a subset of an existing institution or denomination.

But, as *play* is a response to the human condition of experiencing spiritual encounters, so *pay* is a response to the spiritual condition of human obedience to kingdom governance. There is a price to pay for the play of creative freedom.

A call to pay is the *cost-of-living* in an experiential and experimental domain against the currents of convention. There is a price for play and that price is a sacrifice of self-image in exchange for Divine-image. It's a price to pay for being *in* this world but not *of* it. Cost is measured in subtle rejection and marginalization within an existing community. To stand for what we believe often means accepting a Divine solution rather than entertaining our own strategies for resolution. Whoever said, "no one said it would be easy," was right. By going against the current we will invariably experience conflict. It appears to be part of the human condition: freedom begets conflict. But fear of conflict such as criticism, is not a motivator. Freedom is a motivator. A compulsion *to flee from the wrath (criticism of people) to come*, is a deterrent to creative freedom. We must take great self-care and protect the experience of wonder and play as the essential rhythm that flows back and forth between kingdom governance and creative freedom.

I concur therefore with the evocative terms used by Max Van Manen and Clark Moustakas that indeed my theological foundations evoke ecstasy. It is my experience of the phenomenon that turns Van Manen's *ecstasy*¹⁰ into Moustakas' *delight in inspiration*.¹¹ These evocations thrive in my creativity. These evocations are ours to discover..

"This 'stepping outside of oneself' in ecstasy," says Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei in *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature*, "is experienced as a deranged astonishment or distracted wonder: re-seeing the world ecstatically through the re-turning and re-focusing of the phenomenological glance of the world as lived."¹² And to which Moustakas adds, "If I am investigating the meaning of *delight*, then ecstasy hovers nearby and follows me around."¹³

Some will no doubt argue that creative freedom is a deranged and distracted view of reality. But have they paid the price for inquiry into the phenomenon and a practice that is not just for a season, but for a lifetime? Thankfully, ecstasy and delight do hover nearby wherever we are, in a studio or outdoors, in a coffee shop or in a prayer meeting, or wherever we find playful sources for motivation. Jones says, "I *live* the intersection"¹⁴ of my domains or spheres of influence.

The price to pay for *living there* also presumes a disciplined approach to the sacrifice of time in exploring a theology of governance. This is not some blissful devotional once in a while. This is an intense search.

Theology of necessity must also be practical, because a practical world is a functional world. Living and working in a positive environment is a practical strategy to keep a steady course in all our initiatives. Writing epic poetry and the appreciation of art are two examples of such practical strategies. It is no longer the content of our

theology and worldview that is unique, but the functional experience of our practical theology and worldview. It is *doing* rather than *knowing*. Doing is always emergent. Jones declares the need for, “a greater impetus for understanding theology functionally as emerging,”¹⁵ in a practical world, “on which we wager our lived-meaning.”¹⁶

Therefore, lived-experience embodies the essence of creative freedom both conceptually *and* practically, play *and* pay. The experience becomes practical in the manner in which we continue to *be* creative, and in the manner in which we engage spiritual practices to become thoughtful and tactful action. The practical world that comprises our spirituality is inextricably bound together with the experience of creative freedom. Although our worldview may seem essentially theological, our view must also be primed by other factors that point to practices of play. Yet, whatever the cost of being in the world with new ideas, including creative freedom, it’s worth the price when experienced in light of a transformation that embraces Divine governance. We are encouraged to heed the call to play and a call to pay. Between these two we will find a rhythm that leads to transformation.

3. Relationship

Third: Our examination of characteristics of a new theological mode, or theology of governance, continues from roots and creativity to include relationship. Faith in a contemporary modern culture has exalted the *now* moment and relegated the past of traditions to a forgotten hinterland. If our experience does not match our emotions in the moment, we risk letting our emotions govern what we believe. Paradoxically, we should never subject ourselves to the past traditions, neither should we attempt to escape from them. What we learn from the past and its many (and rich traditions), says Dixon, “are the methods and modes of being human – the methods because they are part of our humanity and the modes because they are a part of our response and responsibility.”¹⁷

We employ the methods and modes of kingdom governance by examining our own hearts to reveal what hindrances are buried there. Hindrances such as criticism, unforgiveness, and bitterness, linger long to become the obstacles to our faith. However, we can only employ such methods and modes if we embrace our relationship to God the Father. We cannot escape the evidence of history, nor should we. We cannot escape the footsteps of those who have walked the journey of spirituality before us. Nor can we resign the past to insufficient understanding and incomplete revelation by exalting the modern era as more informed, technologically more sophisticated, and culturally more advanced, than were the Egyptians, the Greeks, Chinese and Africans, Romans and Celts, Gauls and Franks, and many others. They have all taught us various possibilities of being human and they have all contributed to the grand dialogue of spirituality. For whatever reasons, all posit some sort of relationship between the domains of humanity and spirituality.

Out of a lived-experience relationship with Divine presence, we learn how to walk in kingdom governance. Relationship is more about *who* we relate to than it is *what* we know. Yes, the two are inseparable, but relationship came first. Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden without a bible in their hands. They, as did the patriarchs of our Christian faith (matriarchs notwithstanding) lived the experience long before it was penned on papyrus or parchment, or carved in stone. The account of Scripture gives us a glimpse of how they lived with Divine governance in a richness of methods and modest with success and failure that were not meant to become liturgical patterns or ceremonial rituals for the present. The Apostolic traditions of their past were not meant to become a doctrinal and dogmatic theology depleted of the experience of delightful informality, playful creativity, prophetic imagination, and informed freedom.

At the risk of sounding boastful, I have nevertheless immersed myself in the classical forms of Renaissance traditions of fine art drawing to experience a genuine relationship with the artists themselves. I have immersed myself in the historical forms of church traditions, such as the writings of the apostles, the commentaries of ancient church fathers, the mystics, the Reformers, and contemporary scholarship, to experience a relationship with the men and women themselves. I have immersed myself in Scripture, meditative prayer and inquiry, illumination and revelation, to experience the presence of God's Spirit – *Soli Deo Gloria*. Out of our roots and our creativity and out of our immersion in the Divine/human relationship, emerges the development of our personality. For uniquely personal we are, each a treasured chapter in the book of life, and each a story worth listening to.

4. Personality

Fourth: our human personality is inseparable from nature, from history, and from the modes of governance that have shaped our response to life itself, inherent in the structure of things. We till the soil governed by natural laws. We raise our children governed by traditional and informed parental practices. We behave socially and communally governed by a moral compass embedded in our very being. We respond to what we know and what we experience with discernment of spirit and fluency of cognition to make the necessary decisions for everyday living. We relate to one another governed by love and compassion, by respect and honesty. We relate to God the Father, to Jesus Christ, and to the Spirit of God, by yielding to kingdom governance to experience the essential truth of unlimited freedom. Or so we should.

"Thus the realization of the human requires, absolutely, the discipline of quiet and submissive reception of things as they are as well as the active and forceful construction of the new things that pull together what has seemed dissimilar and disconnected." ¹⁸ This active and forceful construction is the shaping of our personality in response to Divine governance. Only such governance will pull together what is unfamiliar and disconnected into a coherent understanding of the purpose of our existence. Implied, however, is not an active forceful construction that makes or bullies

us into compliance, but a spiritual inquiry and discovery as a result of an unveiling of our personality one gentle step at a time. Indeed I posit that the *flesh and bones* of our discovery comprises submission, discernment, promises, principles and absolutes as patterns of knowing and doing, in particular the absolutes of Christ's teachings. However, at all times these absolutes and other patterns are our freewill choice of decisions without pressure of time, circumstances, or the systematic breaking of our will. My spiritual father said that the "Holy Spirit is a gentleman," and as such He shapes our personality with illumination, enlightenment, inspiration, and gradual transformation. He did not say it would be easy.

"There is no substitute for the hard work of learning the intense reality of things and the language for dealing with things,"¹⁹ both as incumbent upon the personality to change through discipleship.

Personality refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, social adjustments, and behaviors exhibited over time, that strongly influences our expectations, our self-perceptions, values, and attitudes. It also predicts our human reactions to other people, to problems, and to stress. Even though there is still no universal consensus on the psychological definition of personality, nevertheless, personality is a dynamic and organized set of characteristics. We possess them to influence our environment, our cognitions and emotions, and to motivate us in various situations. Our personality is therefore shaped by all the assumptions, questions, strands of influence, observations, transitions, changes, *flesh and bones*, and attitudes, we have experienced over time. Regrettably when such shaping turns into extreme practices we create personality cults. But, that is a social phenomenon left to psychology students and practitioners to unravel. Our interest is the evidence of transformation and change *in us* as we examine the influence of kingdom governance in our lives.

To renew our ways of thinking and revive our ways of doing we are encouraged to examine our strengths and weaknesses, our similarities and differences, as they pertain to the shaping of our personality. But, it is not our spirit that others see. They see our personality. Our outward personality is evidence of our inner person. An outward personality that bears witness to the inner change we proclaim must be consistent in the patterns and themes of our spiritual journey as the outcome of being led by Divine governance.

Our duty and our pleasure are to immerse ourselves in nature, in the past and present, in the endeavors of human creativity, and in the ordinariness of our lives. Our duty and pleasure are also to immerse ourselves in the actions, passions, and the sufferings of our times, in order to demonstrate the extraordinariness of our lives. Our duty and pleasure is to discipline our personalities to embrace inspiration, delight, awe, wonder, and the expectations of the supernatural. As we structure our thoughts and actions accordingly, not as weapons of coercion and persuasion, but as helping hands for healing and comfort, we will become fruit of the Spirit.

Our roots and our creativity, our relationships to one another, and our lived-experience of relationship to God, as well as our personalities, are the *flesh, bones, and blood* of our human spirit. Our spirit is led by the Spirit of God to engage in worshipful service of Divine praise. They are our passionate services of mind and body in the love between a wife and husband and in the loving nurture of those who care for children and the building of family. They are our passionate services of the human will to love our neighbour as ourselves, to love humankind regardless of differences or similarities. This is the practice of our freedom: to embrace a sustainable and caring social order and minister to those in need. It should also be our passionate regret when we mourn for having participated directly or indirectly in the failures and corruptions of this world for our own gain. Yet, it is our passionate celebration that we have been redeemed and set free from all bondages or hindrances that threaten to ensnare us.

A theology of governance and rediscovery of the purpose of our existence are not encounters with words only. They are encounters with the unavoidable language of the human spirit in words *and* deeds as instruments of human response to kingdom governance. Our starting point is the same for all. It is the conviction we must passionately allow the Spirit of God to reveal ourselves to ourselves. Our starting point is our initial encounter with kingdom governance as illuminated by Christ in His sermon on the mount.³ I posit the content and context of that sermon as the Law of the King, or Laws of the Kingdom, set forth as *Codex Rex*. It will be the beginning of a lifelong examination with extraordinary and supernatural outcomes manifest in not just being free, but “a freedom that is free indeed”⁴ to experience that which Christ heard the Father say and saw the Father do, things that will make us glad to be alive.

This starting point is also the place where I lost most of my students during the formative teaching years. Not everyone wants to know who they are, especially when they discover that they are more often than not, their own worst enemy, and the cause of their distress points directly to their own hearts. That favourite and contemporary concept of spiritual warfare is more a battle for our minds than the engagement of dark spirits and demonic encounters. Needless to say, dark spirits and demonic encounters are endemic to the human condition, but they are not the adversaries that should preoccupy our thoughts when we submit to the examination of God’s Spirit. Therefore, I proclaim with conviction and patience, “let the examination begin.”

And let it begin by becoming servants. Servanthood is the secret of God’s kingdom and the secret of our response to His theology of governance.

Endnotes

(Adapted from: “*The First and Last Kingdom: Rediscovering the Meaning of our Existence*,” Doctoral Dissertation, by Gerrit Verstraete, 2016)

³ Matthew, chapters 5 - 7

⁴ John 8:32,36

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- ¹ Gerrit Verstraete. *"The First and Last Kingdom: Rediscovering the Purpose of Our Existence."* Seattle, WA: Create Space. 2016. This essay is adapted from the published text.
- ² John Dixon (1919-2004) *"Art and the Theological Imagination."* NY: Crossroad, Seabury Press. 1978. p. 27
- ³ Stephen J. Nichols. *"The Kingdoms of God."* Christopher Morgan, Robert Peterson. "The Kingdom of God: Theology in Community." Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books. 2012. p.47 (brackets added).
- ⁴ W. Paul Jones. *"Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief."* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1989.
- ⁵ John Dixon (1919-2004) *"Art and the Theological Imagination."* NY: Crossroad, Seabury Press. 1978. p. 157
- ⁶ Jennifer Raab. "Precisely These Objects: Frederic Church and the Culture of Detail." College Art Association. *The Art Bulletin*. Vol.XCV, No.4, NY: December 2013. P.587
- ⁷ W.Paul Jones. *"Trumpet at Full Moon."* Louisville, KY. Westminster, John Knox Press. 1992. p.121.
- ⁸ Karl Barth. *"The Word of God and the Word of Man."* Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publ. 1978. p.184. (bracket added)
- ⁹ Philip Sheldrake. *"Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction."* Oxford: UK. Oxford University Press. 2012. P.28.
- ¹⁰ Max Van Manen. *"Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing."* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press. 2014. pp.139-143.
- ¹¹ Clark Moustakas. *"Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Application."* Newbury Park, CA: 1990. p.11.
- ¹² Max Van Manen. "The ecstatic-poetic phenomenology of Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei." *Phenomenology & Practice*. (7) 1. 2013. pp.139. (bracket added where van Manen cites the Greek Ekstasis, as well as referencing a writing of Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, titled: *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature* – 2007). *Ekstasis* and the *Ecstatic Quotidian* is the recurring, daily experience of ecstasy.
- ¹³ Clark Moustakas. *"Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Application."* Newbury Park, CA: 1990. p.11.
- ¹⁴ W. Paul Jones. *"Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief."* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1989. p.29.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. p.13
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ John Dixon (1919-2004) *"Art and the Theological Imagination."* NY: Crossroad, Seabury Press. 1978. p. 158
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.