

**HARDING, BOLL AND GRACE:
THE NASHVILLE BIBLE SCHOOL THEOLOGICAL TRADITION**

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On January 24, 1946 the Gospel Advocate published a lengthy article by Roy Key entitled "The Righteousness of God".¹ Key wrote that the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is the gift of God's righteousness through faith. Faith-righteousness is a divine righteousness which God gives to the one who trusts in Jesus as Savior whereas works-righteousness is a human righteousness which one earn for himself through obedience to law. For members of the Church of Christ, according to Key, the tendency is to "trust in the law for salvation." It is possible, he wrote, "to reject the righteousness that God offers through faith in Jesus as Redeemer and look to a plan or system of justification, rather than to the one who died on our behalf."² He feared that many had placed their hope in the system or the plan instead of Christ. The plan is, indeed, "God's revelation of man's true way of responding to the offered grace," but "if this 'law' becomes foremost in our minds and affections, then true faith as personal reliance upon Christ is weakened. This leads more and more to legalistic Pharisaism."³ Key believed this is what had happened in the light of calling repentance, confession and baptism "steps" of salvation in a "plan of salvation." "The personal element [became] overshadowed by the legal."⁴

Apparently, Key's article shocked some readers of the Advocate. G. C. Brewer

¹Roy Key, "'The Righteousness of God,'" Gospel Advocate 88 (24 January 1946), 74-75, 78-79.

²Key, 78.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

received several letters questioning the article.⁵ It promoted "some ideas," one reader said, "that I have not been accustomed to hearing." In response, Brewer commended the article as substantially summarizing the Pauline teaching of the "righteousness of God." The phrase "not been accustomed to hearing" caught Brewer's attention since it was his own experience that many were "astonished at this teaching" and others were "offended by it at first." Indeed, Brewer was anxious about both the ignorance and the "false teaching" that prevailed concerning Paul's gospel of God's righteousness.

As a younger preacher Brewer was influenced by ministers who denied the concept of imputed righteousness. He summarized the teaching of one of these ministers, whom he highly respected, as this:⁶

You hear people talk about God's righteousness or Christ's righteousness being imputed to man--of the righteousness of Christ covering a man like a garment, etc. This is all false doctrine. The Bible says, 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous' (1 John 3:7); and David says, 'All thy commandments are righteousness.' [Psalm 119:172, JMH.] So you see that a man who does the commandments of God is righteous--no one else is. You can have no righteousness except the righteousness that *you do*.

In his youngest years Brewer embraced this teaching. He taught the same message and used the same Scriptures to defend it.

However, he "learned the truth on this point" when he began to study Romans to see what it teaches rather than studying "to find something to offset what someone else teaches."⁷ Brewer underwent a theological shift from a legalistic concept of faith--a faith where we have no righteousness except our own so that we contribute to the righteousness that achieves for us a righteous standing before God--to an affirmation of the divine righteousness which is given to us through faith. It was a change from the legalism of works-righteousness to a Pauline doctrine of salvation by grace through

⁵Brewer, "'The Righteousness of God," Gospel Advocate 88 (7 March 1946), 224.

⁶Ibid., 224.

⁷Ibid.

faith.

One of Brewer's consistent themes was salvation by "faith" and not by "doing." This was his primary point at the 1952 Abilene Christian College Lectureship.⁸ God's part is giving, not selling; and humanity's part is believing, not doing. Salvation is "not a matter of law;" a matter of doing or achieving or working.⁹ We are free from law, any law, because God has "offered us a righteousness which comes to us on account of our faith in Christ Jesus."¹⁰ To affirm otherwise is to render void the grace of God in Christ. If "we are just as righteous as we do--that is, if we have no righteousness but our own, which we achieve by doing the commandments--by observing laws--we make the death of Christ unnecessary."¹¹

Further, in his commendation of Key's article, Brewer noted that many of his contemporaries had made a similar change. They had begun in legalism but now teach a doctrine of righteousness by faith and "not by doing." To counter the charge that his teaching was innovative, Brewer reminded his readers that J. W. McGarvey, E. G. Sewell, T. W. Caskey, David Lipscomb and James A. Harding "knew the truth on this great question and taught it faithfully." "Harding," he added, "was especially strong on this doctrine."¹² He recalled that on one occasion he saw "tears flow down [Harding's] cheeks and his countenance brilliant with the very thought as he shouted the story of the rich provision that God had made for our salvation."¹³ Brewer saw himself in continuity with the Lipscomb-Harding segment of the Churches of Christ. Because of

⁸Brewer, "Grace and Salvation," in Abilene Christian College Bible Lectureship (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing Co., 1952), esp. 112-4. This speech also appeared in the Advocate, "Grace and Salvation," Gospel Advocate 96 (30 December 1954), 1029-31 and 97 (17 February 1955), 124-5.

⁹Ibid., 115.

¹⁰Ibid., 116.

¹¹Brewer, "Righteousness," 224.

¹²Ibid., 224. Brewer also calls attention to T. W. Caskey and James A. Harding in his 1952 ACC lecture, "Grace and Salvation," 112-4 and Advocate, 1029-30.

¹³Brewer, "Grace and Salvation," ACC, 103.

this claim of continuity, it is important to take a closer look at our history here.

Nashville Bible School and the Theology of Grace

David Lipscomb and James A. Harding began the Nashville Bible School with nine students on October 5, 1891. This institution, now known as David Lipscomb University, and its daughter institutions (e.g., Potter Bible School) have had a profound influence on the history of Churches of Christ in the twentieth century.

In 1968, at the age of 91, Stanford Chambers recalled his days at the Nashville Bible School in the mid-1890s. He remembered that Harding proclaimed an especially powerful doctrine of grace. "To Harding," he recalled, ". . . the Holy Spirit was a personality and His help in our infirmities was real. Salvation 'by grace . . . through faith' rather than by 'works' or deeds of merit was a cherished truth."¹⁴ The students, he remembered, were divided into two camps on the issue, but that the leaders of the institution were strong advocates of grace.

David Lipscomb believed that there are two kinds of righteousness. There is a righteousness which God gives through his gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ--a righteousness from above, and there is a righteousness which we possess by our obedience to law--a righteousness from below. Imputed righteousness, the righteousness from above, "comes only when a man trusts Jesus and does what he can to obey him."¹⁵ While one is required to live "a life like that of God," this is done "by faith" as the medium through which God imputes righteousness. Lipscomb's doctrine of grace is well illustrated in the following paragraph:¹⁶

¹⁴Richard T. Hughes, Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 169.

¹⁵David Lipscomb, "God's Righteousness Saves," Gospel Advocate 38 (29 October 1896), 692. See also Lipscomb, "Righteousness Can Come Only Through Christ," Gospel Advocate 32 (8 October 1890), 648.

¹⁶Lipscomb, "Righteousness Saves," 692. This quotation is also found in David Lipscomb, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, A Commentary on the New

Even when a man's heart is purified by faith, and his affections all reach out towards God and seek conformity to the life of God it is imperfect. His practice of the righteousness of God falls far short of the divine standard. The flesh is weak, and the law of sin reigns in our members; so that we fall short of the perfect standard of righteousness; but if we trust God implicitly and faithfully endeavor to do his will, he knows our frame, knows our weaknesses, and as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities our infirmities and weaknesses, and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. So Jesus stands as our justification and our righteousness, and our life is hid with Christ in God.

James A. Harding began a new paper in 1899 entitled The Way. In its second issue, Harding commented that it is "right and appropriate" that The Way should discuss "grace through faith" at the beginning of its publication.¹⁷ This signals the centrality of the theme for Harding. He rejected any law principle as the means of justification. "There is no hope," he wrote, "that any of us can be justified by the deeds of the law (whether Gentiles under law in the heart, Jews under law of Moses, or Christians under law of Christ)."¹⁸ Rather, it is on the basis of grace, not law, that "wherever an [immersed believer] is, if he is daily, diligently seeking the truth, if he is promptly walking in it as he finds it, we may expect him to be saved. . . . But for the man who is contentedly abiding in error there is no such hope."¹⁹

J. N. Armstrong, the son-in-law of James A. Harding, was a teacher at the Nashville Bible School and later President of Harding College.²⁰ "Doing right," he

Testament Epistles, 4, edited, with additional notes, by J. W. Shepherd (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1957), 205-06.

¹⁷James A. Harding, "By Grace Through Faith," The Way 1 (23 February 1899), 18. For biographical information see L. C. Sears, The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James Alexander Harding (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970).

¹⁸Harding, "Grace," 19. Cf. p. 18: "The writer of this believes that the justified are justified by grace through faith apart from works of law; that they are not in God's sight, justified by deeds of law--of any law, ancient, or modern, human or divine; that this is a 'wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort'." See also his "Three Lessons from Romans," 242-52, in Biographies and Sermons, ed. F. D. Srygley (Nashville: Srygley, 1898).

¹⁹James A. Harding, "Questions and Answers," The Way 4 (17 July 1902), 122.

²⁰For biographical information, see L. C. Sears, For Freedom: The Biography of John Nelson Armstrong (Austin: Sweet Publishing Co., 1969).

wrote, is not the "admission fee" of entering the eschatological kingdom "or else none could enter."²¹ No one can enter on their own righteousness. Who, then, can enter? According to Armstrong, there are two groups of people: "those against whom God does not count sin and those against whom he does count sin." The former are under grace and can enter, but the latter are under law and cannot. The one under grace "has forsaken his old way and turned to God and is humbly submitting to him, bending his energies to do all that God requires;" but the one under law "is following his own way, has not turned to God, but is living in rebellion in his heart and life."²² The ground of salvation, according to Armstrong, is that "I accept the life (blood) of Christ as a sacrifice for my sins" when I believe, repent and am baptized.²³

Robert. H. Boll enrolled in the Nashville Bible School in 1895 and eventually came to lead the premillennial segment of the Churches of Christ. In the early 1900s, however, he was a close associate of Harding and Armstrong, and he reflected their doctrine of grace, just as he had sided with them on the issue of grace while at the Nashville Bible School.²⁴ He believed that God demanded that "man must be righteous" and that no one could "stand before God, except on the ground of true, absolute righteousness."²⁵ Because of sin, God made a new way, a "way of clothing man in a new righteousness, a righteousness not their own, but freely given to them from God." It is a "gift of righteousness" from above where we are "clothed in [God's] righteousness."²⁶ We accept this gift through faith, but the righteousness is not our own. It is the righteousness of Christ, as reflected in the old evangelical hymn, "My

²¹J. N. Armstrong, "Who Then Can Be Saved?," The Way 3 (15 August 1901), 155.

²²Ibid., 156.

²³J. N. Armstrong, "The Blood of Jesus," The Way 1 (1 August 1900), 123. See also his "The Faith that Saves," Gospel Herald 1 (25 September 1913), 2-3.

²⁴Hughes, 169-71.

²⁵R. H. Boll, "Word and Work," Gospel Advocate 56 (14 March 1914), 513.

²⁶Ibid., 514.

hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."²⁷ In the context of this perspective on grace, Boll asked, "How much imperfection will God tolerate?" He believed that no one can look into the heart of the Almighty, but quoting 1 John 1:7, he wrote, "if we aim high and fall below the mark, there is honor" and if we "fall below the mark, there is grace and forgiveness, for we have followed Christ" by aiming high.²⁸

S. H. Hall graduated from the Nashville Bible School in 1906 along with fellow-students H. Leo Boles and John T. Lewis.²⁹ While there Hall experienced what he described as "*my second conversion*."³⁰ He had been raised under the influence of his father who was an avid reader of the Firm Foundation and who "took a radical stand for McGary's side of the [rebaptism] question."³¹ Hall confessed that entered the Nashville school with a strong prejudice against Lipscomb and took his classes "primarily to give him all the trouble" he could. However, under the influence of Lipscomb and Harding (he also includes Larimore), Hall experienced his second conversion through exposure to a different theological perspective than what existed in the Texas Firm Foundation.³² In particular, he described himself as a "full convert" to Harding's views on special providence.³³ Moreover, it is easy to see from his early writings that Hall drank from the wells of a theology of grace that was in harmony with the Lipscomb-Harding tradition. In his Scripture Studies, published by the Gospel

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸R. H. Boll, "Babes & Hypocrites," The Way 3 (25 April 1901), 26.

²⁹S. H. Hall, Sixty-Five Years in the Pulpit, or Compound Interest in Religion (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1959), 150.

³⁰Ibid., 13.

³¹Ibid., 13.

³²S. H. Hall, Scripture Studies (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1931), 138: "When I started out to live the Christian life, the teaching I had heard so impressed me as to make me believe that I touched the blood only when I was praying. I made it a rule to pray in the morning, at noon, and at night, as did David. Am I to believe that the child of God touches the blood only in skips and jumps? No; I am in touch with it all the time, just as ready to go one moment as another, if I am faithful."

³³Hall, Sixty-Five Years, 15.

Advocate in 1931, defended this tradition of grace. For example, he asked, "Can we be faithful in spite of imperfections?" His answer was yes because of Jesus who "covers our imperfections" and all of whose "righteousness, sanctification and redemption are [ours]." Assurance in the face of God's judgment is not found in our goodness or sanctification, but in the goodness and sanctification of Jesus Christ.³⁴ But what does "faithfulness" mean for Hall? It does not mean perfection or sinless law-keeping. It means the "*yearning* in [the] heart to do it right". The "*most faithful*" one is not the one who works the best but who yearns the most.³⁵

R. C. Bell was a student at the Nashville Bible School, and later a teacher with Harding and Armstrong at Potter Bible College, and then with Armstrong at Western Bible and Literary College and Cordell Christian College. He would later become President of Thorp Springs Christian College, Dean of Harding College, and a teacher at Abilene Christian College.³⁶ The righteousness of God, according to Bell, is God's gift of righteousness by which he justifies the sinner through faith.³⁷ In Bell's autobiographical article, he emphasizes the tremendous impact Harding had on his life and thought that the church as a whole needed the kind of life-changing experience of Harding's teaching to revive it. For example, he believed Harding's doctrine of special providence, personal indwelling of the Spirit and empowerment of the Spirit as a divine-human encounter are "needed to save the church from changing divine dynamics to human mechanics."³⁸ As with R. H. Boll and S. H. Hall, Harding's influence on R. C. Bell was transformational.

G. C. Brewer also studied at the Nashville Bible School (1905-1911). His

³⁴Hall, *Scripture Studies*, 129-130.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 130.

³⁶Young, *History*, 75, 113, 118, and Sears, *For Freedom*, 75ff, 110ff.

³⁷R. C. Bell, *Studies in Romans* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1957), 8, 30. See also his *Studies in Galatians* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1954), 27, 31, 35.

³⁸R. C. Bell, "Honor to Whom Honor is Due," *Firm Foundation* 68 (6 November 1951), 6.

emphasis on the crucified Christ is apparent in a series of sermons he delivered in Ft. Worth, Texas in the fall of 1927.³⁹ All the sermons were Christ-centered messages, and reflect the Lipscomb-Harding tradition. For example, commenting on Galatians 2:21, he proclaimed: "There you are, my friends. Righteousness is not by the law--is not by any law of works, either human or divine--that is, the righteousness that commends us to God, that saves--is from Christ. The song of every real Christian--everyone who knows the Bible--is:⁴⁰

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

The gospel of grace through the imputed righteousness of Christ is clear in this series of sermons. "Only through the righteousness of our Redeemer," Brewer preached, "shall we see the face of God . . . You cannot be saved by a legal system."⁴¹ In 1927 Brewer decried the emerging practice of emphasizing the human response to the gospel rather than the redemptive divine provision:⁴²

A preacher once preached two or three sermons on the love of God and of his gracious provisions for man's salvation when a brother approached him and asked: "When are you going to begin to preach the *gospel*?"

He meant, of course, when was the preacher going to preach on the things *man* must do to be saved--faith, repentance and baptism. He wanted the preacher to prove that he--the brother--was right in his claims, and that his neighbors were all wrong. Simply a partisan desire to establish his creed. May the Lord have mercy on such brethren.

³⁹Brewer, Christ Crucified: A Book of Sermons Together with a Lecture on Evolution (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1959; reprint of the 1928 edition).

⁴⁰Ibid., 144-5.

⁴¹Ibid., 145.

⁴²Ibid., 46-47. Of interest are two articles by Brewer on this subject in 1930. "What Shall We Preach to Make Men Cry, 'What Shall I do to be Saved?'," Gospel Advocate 72 (18 September 1930), 890-1; and 72 (25 September 1930), 914-5. Brewer believed that we should preach the "holiness and majesty of God" in conjunction with the "goodness and love of God." In other words, we need to exalt God so that we might see our sinfulness, and then to exalt Christ as the remedy to our sin. Then, when they are driven to Christ as Savior, we will be able to tell men what to do to be saved.

...this obedience must come as a result of hearing and believing the sweet old story of Jesus and his love. The word gospel means "good news" or "glad tidings." In what does the good news consist? Is it not, beloved, in the fact that man was lost, perishing, without God and without hope, and that God saw him "plunged in deep distress" and loved him to the extent that he sent Jesus to the earth and to the cross to redeem man? That is the gospel--the power that attracts men.

According to Brewer, when we exemplify our trust in Jesus as Savior through baptism, we are thereby perfected through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Indeed, "this same soul is continuously perfect by imputation as long as that soul walks in the light and has a connection with God through Christ".⁴³ This is true despite our weaknesses and our faults, and "in some respects," he says, "we are still more in need of the mercy of God than we were in the beginning." Yet, "if we continue to rely upon him and to serve him, we have the promise that we shall be presented faultless before his throne."⁴⁴ Brewer viewed baptism as the moment of entrance into Christ through faith in Christ as Savior. It was an act of faith which hopes in the "merit of Christ." Once "committed to Christ, [the Christian] continues to obey him as best he can, not because his salvation depends upon his perfect obedience, but because he is committed to the Savior and because he loves him and therefore keeps his commandments. Failure to reach perfection will not mean a failure to reach heaven."⁴⁵ Thus, after baptism, while we continue "to be obedient and submissive," our salvation "does not depend upon the amount of work done or the number of acts performed."⁴⁶

The Theology of James A. Harding

⁴³Brewer, "How We Reach Perfection," Gospel Advocate 97 (10 November 1955), 1012.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Brewer, "Grace and Law: Liberalism and Legalism (No. 8)," Gospel Advocate 97 (21 July 1955), 633.

⁴⁶Brewer, "Grace and Salvation," ACC, 127. Perceptively a questioner noted that this implies the "security of the believer," to which Brewer responded, yes, "the *believer* is secure," but "if he becomes an unbeliever--has his faith overthrown or denies the faith--he will be lost."

A healthy theology of grace was central to the Nashville Bible School theological tradition, but it was not the only important theme and neither did it function at the heart of the tradition. The soteriological understanding of grace and faith was a significant component of the tradition, but it was not the single dominating theme. Rather, as a theme, it contributed to the fuller dynamics of the Nashville Bible School tradition. My task here is to more fully elaborate that tradition, and I will do so through the theology of James A. Harding.

Harding, even more than Lipscomb, was the single most influential theological teacher among the Bible Schools. While Lipscomb and Harding co-founded the Nashville Bible School, Lipscomb usually limited himself to one or two classes in his teaching whereas Harding taught a number of classes and conducted the daily chapel. Further, Harding not only taught at the Nashville Bible School, but is also largely responsible for the proliferation of Bible Schools by starting Potter Bible School in 1901 and the schools his students began in the early 1900s.⁴⁷ Harding, I think, was the clear leader as well as chief defender of the Bible School movement, and it is to him, I think, that the Nashville Bible School theological tradition is chiefly indebted.

Consequently, I will explore three broad themes in the writings of James A. Harding which give shape to this theological tradition. There are other themes (rebaptism, sectarianism, materialism, racism, cultural separatism) which contribute to this tradition, but I have limited myself to the following three because they most clearly reflect the theological heart of the theological tradition itself and these aspects of Harding's theology have not been sufficiently explored in the scholarly literature⁴⁸. In addition to a theology of grace, Harding's emphasis on eschatology, providence and the Holy Spirit shaped a generation of preachers at the Nashville and Potter Bible Schools.

⁴⁷Cf. Harding, "The Bible Schools in General, the Odessa School in Particular," The Christian Leader and the Way 23 (Feb 23, 1908), 8-9, for a demonstration of this influence.

⁴⁸Hughes, 137-41 explores some of these themes.

Together with a theology of grace, these three themes constitute the bulk of what I am calling the "Nashville Bible School Theological Tradition."

Eschatology

In an interview given to Green, R. C. Bell perceptively noted that Harding's understanding of Christianity was "built upon an eschatological framework--that is, that Christ's bodily return to earth to help wind up earthly affairs is an integral part of Christianity."⁴⁹ The millennial reign of Christ was not simply an end-time addendum but was the culmination of the work of God throughout redemptive history. It was the climax of God's intent in creation. Consequently, eschatology was not an afterthought in Harding's theology but its very structure.

Theological Structure: Kingdom of Christ Versus Kingdom of Satan. The broad structure of Harding's thought is rooted in the spiritual war that now pervades human existence. There is a fundamental struggle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan; between the Christian and the world; between the church and earthly governments; between righteousness and sin. This dualism dominates Harding's theology and it is the fundamental ground for his separatist approach to the struggle between the church and fallen world.

God created the cosmos for the "purpose of enlarging the family of God." God, as a triune divine community, graciously decided to create others who would share the divine reality. "There must be added to it [Trinity, JMH] a great host of 'sons of God,' of beings made in the image of God, after the likeness of God, being educated, trained and fitted to reign with Christ as members of the royal family, as children of the King."⁵⁰ God created humanity "to rule his universe. So he made man in his own image, and

⁴⁹Kenneth Wayne Green, "The Life and Times of James A. Harding," (M.A. Thesis, Abilene Christian College, 1960), 123.

⁵⁰Harding, "For What Are We Here?," The Christian Leader and the Way 5 (3 December 1903), 1041.

began at once to train him in ruling."⁵¹ God created the world and put it into the hands of his vice-regent "while he was yet in his pristine purity."⁵²

However, God's vice-regent quickly turned "it over to Satan." The Fall introduced the struggle between good and evil in the creation. But God soon destroyed the wicked and renewed his creation. "God swept Satan's servants from the face of the earth, and again gave it to the righteous men" in the days of Noah, but "they turned it over to Satan again."⁵³ The struggle continues. "The war is raging, the war of righteousness against wickedness, of Christ against Satan, of the kingdom of heaven, under the leadership of Jesus, against the kingdoms of this world, under the leadership of Satan."⁵⁴

Just as the original cosmos was intended as a pedagogical tool for the sons of the King, so the war itself becomes a tool in God's hand for the maturing of his children. The earth is "God's nursery" for the purpose of "education, development and training" until the royal family reaches "maturity, until the end of the Messianic age has come."

The Messianic age is the time in which God has revealed his kingdom in Jesus Christ. "The beginning of Christ's reign was announced on earth on the first Pentecost after his resurrection." It now continues through the church as the kingdom is advanced through its ministry, and it will culminate in Christ's return to the earth where he will reign for a thousand years. "From all this it is evident that the last thousand years of Christ's reign will be a period of perfect rest from sin."⁵⁵ Eden will return and fulfill God's original purpose in creation.

What God had created as righteous and pure, humanity turned over to Satan

⁵¹Harding, "Man Was Created to Reign for Ever and Ever," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (6 June 1905), 8.

⁵²Harding, "The Kingdom of Christ Vs. the Kingdom of Satan," The Christian Leader and the Way 5 (15 October 1903), p. 930.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

through their sin. God, however, is active in his world to condemn and destroy the work of Satan as well as to train and discipline his children. God is preparing his people for the future. God will allow "no purpose of his to be thwarted." He is preparing them to reign with Christ in the millennium. Humanity was "created to reign for ever and ever"--first with Christ in the millennium and then with God in the New Heaven and New Earth.⁵⁶

Relationship to Earthly Governments. This eschatological structure shapes Harding's understanding of the relationship between the church and earthly governments. Just as the church is the manifestation of the kingdom of Christ in the present, so earthly governments are a manifestation of the kingdom of Satan in the world. "Every government on this earth is in the hands of wicked men. The government of Christ is at war with every one of them." They are the "governments of Satan"⁵⁷ and "Christ came into this world to establish a kingdom which is antagonistic to all human authority, to all the governments of the earth. Its mission is to break down and destroy them."⁵⁸ Harding holds Lipscomb's classic position on civil government and endorses his book.⁵⁹ Jesse P. Sewell, one of Harding's students, commented that "James Harding and David Lipscomb believed the same thing concerning a Christian's participating in governmental activities."⁶⁰

Consequently, "we ought not to have any kind of partnership with" earthly governments. This means we should not participate in the political processes of human governments. This includes holding office, voting and military service.⁶¹ "We should

⁵⁶Harding, "Man Was Created to Reign for Ever and Ever," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (6 June 1905), 8.

⁵⁷Harding, "Kingdom," 931.

⁵⁸Ibid., 930.

⁵⁹Harding, "Books," The Way 2 (May 1900), 71.

⁶⁰Jesse P. Sewell, Interview, as quoted by Green, p. 119.

⁶¹Harding, "Shall I Vote in the Civil Elections?," Gospel Advocate 28 (28 July 1886), 465-6. Cf. J. N. Armstrong, "What Will Become of the Country," The Christian Leader and

have nothing to do with appointing or electing officers for the governments of Satan."⁶² Harding's opposition to both is two-fold. First, it involves one in the government of Satan. It is a participation in the works of Satan. Harding "opine[s] it is easier for an elephant to go through a needle's eye than for a modern politician to be a sincere, faithful, humble Christian."⁶³ Second, it distracts the church for its proper mission. The church must "overcome" the world "by gentleness, by meekness, by teaching the doctrine of Christ and by living according to it." It must not use the sword of Satan or take up the reigns of Satan's governments. It is the mission of the kingdom of heaven to destroy these governments. Consequently, "you must worship Satan, or you will have no part nor lot in his governments."⁶⁴

Our relationship to earth governments as citizens of the kingdom of Christ is that of a "foreigner." We are aliens in this world because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been fully realized. As aliens, however, we have the same responsibilities as any other "foreigner" in a strange country. We "pay taxes," "submit to the civil authorities," and "pray for rulers."⁶⁵ These three particulars are required of Christians as aliens because God specifically commanded them in Scripture. "The New Testament is a perfect guide to the Christian; therefore all that it requires of us is due to civil governments we must give to them; beyond that we had better let them run their own affairs."⁶⁶ As Bell noted in an unpublished manuscript, Harding "felt that more than these three was inimical to God's fundamental, eternal interests, and worse than useless as a means to help the poor world to get out of its condemned state."⁶⁷

the Way 5 (16 July 1903), 724-5 and "Why We Do Not Vote or Otherwise Praticipate in the Civil Government," Gospel Herald 3 (3 December 1914), 1.

⁶²Harding, "Kingdom," 931.

⁶³Harding, "'Vote,'" 466.

⁶⁴Harding, "Kingdom," 931.

⁶⁵Ibid., 931.

⁶⁶Harding, "Vote," 466.

⁶⁷R. C. Bell, unpublished manuscript of a 1959 lecture in Lubbock, Texas, quoted by Green, 121.

Harding will even pray for the success of certain governments and the failure of others, but the principle upon which prays is oriented toward the kingdom of God. When a nation, such as Great Britain or Germany, provides peace, security and freedom for gospel preaching, then he will pray for their success. But when the earthly government opposes the preaching of the gospel or persecutes the people of God, such as Russia or the Turks, then he will pray for their "downfall."⁶⁸

The responsibility of the Christian is to submit, pay taxes and pray. "I am sure," Harding writes, "it is not pleasing to him for his servants to be holding office in Satan's governments, or to be trying to run them." That would be a fundamental compromise of the eschatological structure of God's purpose. To side with Satanic governments is to oppose the kingdom of God. Consequently, we must abstain from all such participation in earthly governments. Harding exhorts that we "attend strictly to our business of serving Christ, and God will overrule all evil deeds, as well as good ones for our good" (Romans 8:28).⁶⁹

The Millennial Reign of Christ. Whether Harding was a premillennialist or not has been the subject of some debate in the second and third generations after Harding. However, the evidence is quite clear. Harding was a premillennialist. Though Jesse P. Sewell "never heard Harding teach premillennialism,"⁷⁰ R. C. Bell claims it was foundational to his theology and that he taught it "with both tongue and pen."⁷¹ E. L. Jorgenson, one of the first generation leaders of the premillennial movement among Churches of Christ in the early twentieth century, claims that the first sermon he ever heard Harding preach was entitled "The Millennium" and it "sank deep into my heart

⁶⁸Harding, "The Article from the American," The Christian Leader and the Way 5 (8 October 1903), 915.

⁶⁹Harding, "Kingdom," 931.

⁷⁰Sewell, in Greene, 121.

⁷¹Bell, in Greene, 123.

and mind."⁷² Bell and Jorgenson are right and Harding's own writings clearly demonstrate this. While Harding never writes an article explicitly on the millennial reign of Christ, his theological interests are evident when he discusses issues that touch on eschatology. Bell explains why this might be the case: "Brother Harding was too spiritually discerning and well balanced to make a hobby of these things, or to make them a test of fellowship, but as a free Christian he taught them when he thought there was an occasion to do so."⁷³

Harding's eschatological scenario included these elements. At present the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan are engaged in a war for the hearts of people. Satan "dwells on the earth" to deceive the nations and devour Christians.⁷⁴ However, Christ will come again to destroy the works of Satan and fully establish his kingdom. He will come, raise the dead and rapture the saints with their immortal bodies. "When the saints are caught up to meet him, Christ comes on with them to the earth."⁷⁵ The kings of the earth will gather to do battle under the leadership of the beast, false prophet and Satan, and Christ will destroy them. While the false prophet and beast, along with the rest of the wicked on the earth are destroyed, Satan is chained and thrown into the abyss. During the time that Satan is bound, "Christ and his saints reign; but the rest of the dead live not again till the thousand years have expired."⁷⁶ During this "last thousand years of time, Christ and his saints shall reign unimpeded in the earth. Then the meek shall inherit the earth, the knowledge of God shall fill the earth as the waters fill the seas, and the will of God shall be done on earth as it is in heaven."⁷⁷

⁷²E. L. Jorgenson, *Faith of Our Fathers* (Louisville, KY: The Word and Work Publishers, n.d.), 309.

⁷³Bell, in Greene, 124.

⁷⁴Harding, "Scraps," *The Way* 4 (22 May 1902), 57.

⁷⁵Harding, "Kingdom," 930.

⁷⁶Ibid., 930.

⁷⁷Harding, "Man was Created," 8.

This millennial reign "will be on the earth" and it is the "Sabbath rest" for all the people of God and the earth.⁷⁸ According to Harding, the "seventh day was typical of the Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God when for a thousand years they shall rest from sin, temptation, pain and sorrow."⁷⁹ Since the earth labored and groaned for six thousand years under the burden of fallenness, the millennial reign is a rest for the earth as well as for God's people. Consequently, Harding is not above looking for the signs of Christ's coming in the present. While he rejects any kind of dating for the second coming, he still notes "that for the last fifty or sixty years many godly men have believed that the time of his coming is near," and he points to recent earthquakes and volcanoes as possible signs of that nearness.⁸⁰

The millennial reign of Christ on earth will near its end when Satan is released from the abyss. Satan is loosed to "deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth. These must be, it seems to me, the disembodied spirits of the wicked, who inhabit the regions of the air."⁸¹ These spirits gather to do battle with Christ and his saints and they are defeated. This conflict and the Judgment Day to follow will involve a purging of the earth by fire where the wicked join Satan in the Gehenna into which he is cast. It is on the purified earth, then, that the righteous will reign with God on the "new earth".⁸²

The new heaven and the new earth appear after the millennial reign of Christ and the final Judgment. In this reign "time...ends; a new heaven and earth appear; Christ retires from the throne and God the Father reigns."⁸³ Thus, when the new

⁷⁸Harding, "Kingdom," 930-1.

⁷⁹Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (17 April 1902), 17.

⁸⁰Harding, "The Second Coming of Jesus -- When Will It Be?," The Way 4 (25 September 1902), 203; reprinted "The Second Coming of Jesus--When Will It Be?," The Christian Leader and the Way 23 (March 16, 1909), 8-9

⁸¹Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (22 May 1902), 57.

⁸²Harding, "For What Are We Here?," 1042.

⁸³Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (22 May 1902), 57.

heaven and the new earth appear, "Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father."⁸⁴ The millennial reign of Christ is not the end of the story but it itself anticipates the next "great epoch in the history of God's dealing with man."⁸⁵ While the Sabbath typifies the millennial reign of Christ, the "first day of the week foreshadows the glories beginning a new life in the everlasting kingdom of God."⁸⁶ But this new heaven and new earth with its new Jerusalem is not some celestial city, but it is itself a kingdom on the purified earth. In this way God's intent in creation to have children reign with him over the earth is accomplished. It is there that we will "reign for ever and ever" with God.⁸⁷

Providence

Harding offers this succinct definition of providence: "A providence is providing; a special providence is a special providing; a general providence is a general providing."⁸⁸ His starting point is not classical theology where "providence" is "to see before," but his starting point is the provision of God for his creation (general providence) and for his people (special providence). Harding claims that his approach to providence is indebted to his constant exposure to the story of the Bible through his daily Bible reading. That exposure impressed him with God's active role in the history of his world and in the lives of his saints. Indeed, he believes that Satan has been able to debunk God's providence because "comparatively few people are in the habit of reading the Bible, from first to last, over and over again, continuously."⁸⁹

⁸⁴Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (17 April 1902), 17.

⁸⁵Harding, "Man was Created," 8.

⁸⁶Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (17 April 1902), 17.

⁸⁷Harding, "Man Was Created," 9.

⁸⁸Harding, "The Japan Missionaries and Special Providence," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (15 March 1904), 8.

⁸⁹Harding, "What Does the Promise 'Lo, I am with you Always' Mean to the Modern Evangelist," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (16 August 1904), 8. See also "Does God Work Miracles Now?," Gospel Advocate 26 (5 March 1884), 154: "Allow me to

General Providence. Simply put, God reigns and he reigns with a purpose. As stated above, God's purpose is to enlarge his family and train his children in the ways of divine rule. Therefore, everything God does, he does to accomplish this purpose.

This means that he not only provides his creation with resources for life, but that he also rules over nations in order to accomplish his ends. "God over rules in the kingdoms of men, and makes the wickedness of the wicked, as well as the righteousness of the good, work out glorious things."⁹⁰ God acts in human affairs and uses so-called natural laws in order to accomplish his goals.

Harding is disturbed by those who cannot see the work of God in history. For example, he reports a comment he heard about the Spanish-American War. Someone had remarked to him, "I do not believe God had anything to do with it." Harding's retort was: "It is safe to say that there are one thousand passages of Scripture, many of them in the Old Testament, many in the New, that are in direct and irreconcilable conflict with this idea."⁹¹ Harding is incredulous. "Is it possible that the divine members of this great partnership have ceased to have anything whatever to do with its affairs, so far as this earth is concerned?"⁹²

Harding particularly objects to any understanding that "natural law" is some kind of *lassiez-faire* divine administration of the world. "Natural law," for Harding, is not some independent, autonomous order that God passively watches and cannot control. He rejects any idea that natural laws are simply parts of a clock that God has "wound up" only to watch run.⁹³ Quite the contrary, "natural law is nothing but the

suggest the chief reason that so many have no clearly defined views about special providence is that the entire Bible--Old and New Testament--is not studied regularly and consecutively as it should be. We should never forget that God is the author of the Bible; we should read it that we may know him."

⁹⁰Harding, "God Did It," Gospel Advocate 27 (15 April 1885), 227.

⁹¹Harding, "The Evangelist, His Support, Etc.," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (9 August 1904), 8.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Harding, "What Does the Promise 'Lo, I am with you Always' Mean," 8.

will of God."⁹⁴ It is God at work, and God controls the working of that law. It does not stand over against him, but is an expression of his interests and he uses it to accomplish his goals in the world and in the lives of his people. Just as we do, and much more, God uses natural law for his own purposes. God, therefore, is not delimited by natural law because he is the "Author of natural law; it is nothing else but the expression of his own will."⁹⁵

Consequently, Harding explicitly rejects any kind of Deism, or any kind of distinction that God worked one way in the Old Testament and another way in the New Testament. The story of God's providence is consistent, and God is faithful to his own story. God is not a "silent partner." Anything less than God's active involvement, according to Harding, is "unbelief" and "more injurious to the Church" than any other lie Satan ever circulated.⁹⁶

Special Providence. God's special care for his people arises out of God's character and purpose. He quotes Richard Cecil with approval: "God denies a Christian nothing but with a design to give him something better." "Of course," Harding comments, "in the very nature of love, it could not be otherwise."⁹⁷ God intends the best for his children, so he will give them what best suits their needs. "We should pray to God to give us whatever is best for us, wealth or poverty, honor or humiliation, health or sickness, life or death; being sure that whatever he gives to his dutiful child will be a blessing."⁹⁸ God gives a person whatever best enables him to "glorify God" so as to fulfill God's purposes in the world whether it is affluence or poverty, whether death or life.⁹⁹ For example, Harding's first wife died on August 17,

⁹⁴Harding, "Scraps," The Way 5 (2 July 1903), 690.

⁹⁵Harding, "The Invisible Miracles of the Bible," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (6 September 1904), 9.

⁹⁶Harding, "Evangelist," 8.

⁹⁷Harding, "The Love of God," The Way 2 (February 1901), 182.

⁹⁸Harding, "Scraps," The Way 3 (27 February 1902), 370.

⁹⁹Ibid.

1876 after five years of marriage. Sears, based on records no longer available to the historian, comments "Carrie's death, painful as it was to bear, Harding felt later was a blessing for both her and for him. With her feeble health he could never have accomplished the great work he was destined to do."¹⁰⁰ Harding understood that God's purposes are driven by his love for his people and his goal that they reign with him for ever and ever. "He loves us and he allows no pain, no sorrow, no disappointment to come to us except it be for our own good."¹⁰¹ In 1884, after Harding had lost two children and a wife to death before he was 25 years old, his faith could still advise one to pray "as God wills" because "God knows best."¹⁰²

This care includes the promise of "temporal blessings." It is the promise of food and clothing. It is a promise that was made in the Old Testament and extended in the New. God provides for his people and ensures that everything that happens to them works out for their good.¹⁰³ God has a special providing for those who love and trust him. "God will give [his saint] wisdom, guidance, strength, protection and any and everything else, material and spiritual, that he needs for his welfare here."¹⁰⁴ God gives us daily bread and daily spiritual sustenance.

Three texts were particularly important to Harding as he taught special providence over his thirty years of writing. These three texts, along with "thousands" of others, should rid the Christian of all "anxiety."¹⁰⁵ First, Psalm 37 was one of Harding's favorites along with Psalm 34. In particular, Harding drew strength from God's plan

¹⁰⁰Lloyd Cline Sears, The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James Alexander Harding (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970), 32.

¹⁰¹Harding as quoted in Sears, 227.

¹⁰²Harding, "Does God Work Miracles Now?," 154.

¹⁰³Harding first defends this point in three articles in 1883; cf. "Temporal Blessings," Gospel Advocate 25 (5 September 1883), 570; "Temporal Blessings -- No. 2," Gospel Advocate 25 (12 September 1883), 586; and "Temporal Blessings -- No. 3," Gospel Advocate 25 (19 September 1883), 602.

¹⁰⁴Harding, "How Does God Help His People?," The Christian Leader and the Way 20 (February 6, 1906), 8.

¹⁰⁵Harding, "Scraps," Gospel Advocate 29 (20 April 1887), 252.

for success in Psalm 37:5, "Trust in the Lord and do good." God is faithful and he will grant success to whoever follows that plan. Consequently, he describes it as "one of the most delightful passages in the Word of God."¹⁰⁶ Second, Matthew 6:33 was Harding's clarion call for the evangelist to devote himself to the interests of the kingdom without any anxiety about his food and clothing. "I have been working on the contract which the Lord proposes to us in Matthew 6:33," Harding writes, "and beyond a doubt it is the best financial arrangement any Christian can possibly make."¹⁰⁷ Of course, this promise extends to all of God's children, not just to the evangelist¹⁰⁸ and it applies to whoever operates "his business, whatever that may be, solely for the advancement of God's kingdom; if he should consider himself as being in the world simply and solely for that purpose, what a wonderful change we would have in the world!"¹⁰⁹ Third, Romans 8:28 was one of Harding's most often quoted texts. No matter what the circumstances it is certain that God is at work for the good of his children. Even in the midst of trouble, God is with his people working for their good and his goals. "If God is with him, though he may have poverty, persecution, hatred, imprisonment and contempt, he may confidently believed that all of these are blessings, and that sooner or later he will plainly see that they are, and will greatly rejoice in them. There is no exception to this rule; it is as eternal and unchangeable as God himself." Romans 8:28 is the "rule" to which he refers.¹¹⁰

God, therefore, has a special care for his people. Does Jehovah play favorites? Yes, he does.¹¹¹ Was not Abraham a divine favorite, or Joseph? Did not God favor

¹⁰⁶Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (June 19, 1902), 90.

¹⁰⁷Harding, "Scraps," The Way 4 (10 April 1902), 10.

¹⁰⁸Harding, "The Contract Which God Proposes to His Children," The Christian Leader and the Way 20 (20 November 1906), 8-9.

¹⁰⁹Harding, "Three Contradictory Theories," The Way 3 (4 April 1901), 4.

¹¹⁰Harding, "Scraps. For God Was With Him," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (2 February 1904), 8-9.

¹¹¹Harding, "Jehovah's Favorites," The Way 4 (23 October 1902), 234-6.

David over Goliath? "God is no respecter of persons. He respects characters."¹¹² God's care for his people is not based upon a partiality driven by "personal and selfish considerations" (that would be "mean, sensual, devilish"), but his favor is "based on character, conduct, on devotion to God and to his holy church" (and that is "pure, grand and godlike").¹¹³ God is with his people in a way that he is not with the world or the wicked. God's promise "I will be with you always" is not made to the servants of Satan, but to God's servants. This promise is made to Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph) and New Testament (Matthew 28:20) saints alike.¹¹⁴ That promise entails a special care for their material and spiritual needs. Therefore, the devoted saint has "no worries."

Miracles. Harding consistently promotes the notion that miracles have not ceased. Indeed, he believes there are "two lies" which Satan has supplied that undermine any real sense of God's special providence. "One of them," Harding writes, "is saying, 'A miracle is a violation of natural law;' the other is the still more popular doctrine, 'The days of miracles are passed'."¹¹⁵ Both of these points are important for understanding Harding's sense of special providence.

Miracles are not violations of natural law. "To me," Harding says, "it is inconceivable that God could violate natural law."¹¹⁶ On the contrary, God uses natural law for his purposes and he uses it in ways that are inexplicable to human reason. "Natural law" is a human perception, but it is not God's. It is simply the way God works and he may work however he pleases. "God continually brings about

¹¹²Harding, "Scraps," The Way 3 (20 February 1902), 361.

¹¹³Harding, "A Reply to Brother Elam," The Way 4 (20 November 1902), 268.

¹¹⁴Harding, "How Much Is There in It?," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (26 April 1904), 8-9.

¹¹⁵Harding, "What Help Do We Receive From God in Answer to Prayer?," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (14 February 1905), 8.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

results by means of natural laws in ways that are incomprehensible to us."¹¹⁷ What we call a "miracle" is "something that God does," but the "*how* of the doing of which is beyond human comprehension."¹¹⁸ Whatever humans can understand and easily explain is "natural" to them, but whatever is inexplicable is "miraculous." But, to God, everything is "natural" because there is nothing that is "unexplainable" to him or which he cannot understand.¹¹⁹ Thus, a miracle "is the manifestation of a power or sign which is evidently beyond the capability of man, unless the power of a superhuman being rests upon him."¹²⁰ So, while nothing is miraculous to God, almost everything in God's special providence for his people is miraculous to them. For them "there are, and doubtless always will be, miracles."¹²¹

Harding does distinguish between what God does through his special care and what he does through particular human representatives. God still works miracles today, but he no longer gifts individuals with miracle-working powers. During revelatory moments in history, when God acted in redemptive ways and interpreted his acts for his people, God equipped his messengers with authenticating powers. In those instances God "wrought miracles at the word of man, thereby attesting that these men were sent by him to the people to instruct and lead them."¹²² The Bible makes such miracles unnecessary today. Since there is no need for authenticating miracles today, "God no longer performs miracles through men."¹²³ But God himself continues to work miracles.

¹¹⁷Harding, "The Invisible Miracles of the Bible," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (6 September 1904), 8.

¹¹⁸Harding, "Thought on Miracles," Gospel Advocate 26 (27 February 1884), 131.

¹¹⁹Harding, "The Most Perfect of All Societies," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (2 August 1904), 8.

¹²⁰Harding, "Help," 9.

¹²¹Harding, "Most Perfect," 8.

¹²²Harding, "Thought on Miracles," 131.

¹²³Harding, "Invisible Miracles," 8.

Despite the consistent emphasis on the part of some that "the days of miracles are past," Harding insists that God is still at work in incomprehensible and miraculous ways for his people as he cares for them.¹²⁴ "Not a few people," Harding complains, "seem to be under the impression that all divine interventions have ceased since the death of the apostles, and that since then there have been no supermundane or super-human influences known on earth. They think God gave the word and stopped--a very low and very erroneous conception of the reign of Christ."¹²⁵ While God authenticated his messengers with miracles, "far oftener has he performed them I think, in protecting and blessing and guiding his children...God is ever with his saints in some way incomprehensible to mortal ken, protecting them, guiding them, supply their wants, and causing all things to work together for their good."¹²⁶ The people of God need those kinds of miracles as much today as they did in the apostolic age. Thus, God does "as much for his children as he ever did" even though that power is not manifested through man and as a work done by man."¹²⁷

While "miraculous powers in men have ceased with the apostolic age," this does not mean that "God has ceased to answer prayer." And, according to Harding, "every answer to prayer is a miracle."¹²⁸ Harding so thoroughly envisions God's active role in the world and the incomprehensible character of his work that everything God does creates wonder and awe in the hearts of people. Since God does things in answer to prayer that beyond our understanding, it is appropriate to say that answers to prayer are miraculous:¹²⁹

We must answer in the affirmative; for, in the nature of things, we can never by our unaided human powers discover the rule by which the

¹²⁴Harding, "Scraps," *Gospel Advocate* 29 (20 April 1887), 252.

¹²⁵Harding, "Prayer for the Sick," *The Way* 3. (9 May 1901), 41.

¹²⁶Harding, "Thought on Miracles," 131.

¹²⁷Harding, "Prayer for the Sick," 42.

¹²⁸Harding, "Invisible Miracles," 8.

¹²⁹Harding, "Does God Work Miracles Now?," 154.

heavenly Father works in such cases, if there be any fixed rule. We cannot know how he reads the unspoken thoughts of the heart; how he moves upon the people making large bodies of them brave at one moment and cowardly at another; how he influenced the enemies of the Jews not to desire their possession while all their males were assembled at the appointed place for worship, three times a year.

God works in ways that we cannot fathom, and these ways are miraculous to us. Consequently, what we call coincidental or accidental is God's special providence, especially in answer to prayer.

The Dynamic of Prayer. The combination of Harding's understanding of special providence and God's miraculous work for his people energizes a dynamic understanding of prayer. It means that prayer must pervade the believer's life because God is constantly engaging his people through his care in answer to prayer. Prayer, then, touches every aspect of human existence. For example, Harding quotes a sentence from the Western Recorder approvingly, "No temporal blessing is either too great or too small for us to carry to a throne of grace."¹³⁰ The Christian can, and should, pray about everything--whether great or small.

While "we do not understand the philosophy of prayer"¹³¹ (that is, there is something mysterious about how God relates to his people), we know the fundamental promise of God. Harding writes:¹³²

Indeed, all prayer is based upon the idea that God takes cognizance of us and in some way above our comprehension works in our affairs. We pray for food, for strength, for guidance, for deliverance from temptation, for the extension of Christ's kingdom, for the welfare of our families, and so on; now if these prayers avail at all, in any way, in securing for us food, strength, guidance, and deliverance from temptation...it is because in answer to them there is put forth, in some way, a power incomprehensible to mortals.

In other words, God does do something in answer to prayer. He provides for his

¹³⁰Harding, "The Love of God," The Way 2.12 (February 1901), 182.

¹³¹Harding, "Pray Ye to the Lord of the Harvest," Gospel Advocate 25 (11 January 1883), 38.

¹³²Harding, "Scraps," Gospel Advocate 29 (20 April 1887), 252.

people. Prayer is a mechanism of special providence. "When a man believes in God, and looks to him as a child to a father, believing that God will give him anything that is good for him, anything that can be given to him in righteousness, his prayers are listened to and his petitions are granted. God never withholds from such a man anything unless it be to give him something better."¹³³ This is the confidence of faith and it serves to confirm faith experientially. Thus, "the man who is accustomed to pray, and to receive prompt answers to his prayers, knows that God is, and he blesses those who love him."¹³⁴

Harding's writings on this topic respond to a growing Deism that he senses among the churches. For example, he tells about a person who told him that prayer is only good because it is a "reflex influence on him who prays." Harding thought that seemed like "pure infidelity" and that soon that person would stop praying.¹³⁵ On another occasion he heard someone say that we should "endeavor to answer our own prayers." Harding responded: "That idea is altogether wrong. God is the hearer and the answerer of prayer. Our business is to please him, to live towards him so that our hearts shall not condemn us."¹³⁶ In another example, Harding offers this extended report:¹³⁷

We should be careful not to pray for what we do not expect. A brother was accustomed to pray at the opening of meetings in which I was to speak, that God would bless me and help me, and that I might speak as the oracles of God, and so on; but on one occasion when I told him I believed God had helped me in answer to the prayer, and that I had been providentially led to speak what I did speak and to leave out some things I had been accustomed to preach when discussing that subject, he was incredulous. He did not believe God had anything to do with my leaving out what had been omitted. He seemed to think that prayer was a form

¹³³Harding, "Praying for Rain," The Way 3 (28 November 1901), 276.

¹³⁴Harding, "Scraps," Gospel Advocate 29 (20 April 1887), 252.

¹³⁵Harding, "What Help Do We Receive From God in Answer to Prayer?," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (14 February 1905), 8.

¹³⁶Harding, "Kingdom of Christ V. The Kingdom of Satan," p. 931.

¹³⁷Harding, "Praying for Rain," 276.

which should be complied with but that we need not expect it to bring any blessing from God. Nor would it have brought anything from God but indignation and wrath, if none of us had believed any more than he did. We need not expect the prayer of doubt or of unbelief to be answered with a blessing.

Harding believes that the Deistic understanding of prayer is a form of infidelity. It is more "deadly" than any sectarian doctrine¹³⁸ and through it the Christian becomes a "veritable unbeliever".¹³⁹ It is no wonder, according to Harding, that the kingdom of Christ is stumbling when its churches are filled with people who neither read the Bible nor pray. Indeed, for Harding, the greatest hindrance to evangelism is a lack of Bible reading, prayer and trust in God's special providence.¹⁴⁰ The denial of the dynamic of prayer is a denial of the power of God at work in Christ's kingdom.

Holy Spirit

All the students of Harding have testified that he fully invoked the presence of the indwelling Spirit as the means of sanctification in the believer's life. For example, R. C. Bell testified that he "caught [Harding's] contagious enthusiasm for God as a Father who personally cares for each child in His family, for Christ as a Brother who personally identifies Himself with each of His own, and for the Holy Spirit as a Comforter who personally resides in and empowers every Christian."¹⁴¹ R. H. Boll also noted that one of his most prominent teachings was "the actual, personal, indwelling of

¹³⁸Harding, "Saving Souls, Special Providence, Dr. Holloway," The Christian Leader and the Way 21 (29 January 1907), 8.

¹³⁹Harding, "The Evangelist, His Support, Etc.," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (9 August 1904), 8.

¹⁴⁰Harding, "The Most Perfect of All Societies," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (2 August 1904), 9; "If it is so, Account for these Facts," The Way 3 (January 23, 1902), pp. 330-2; "Scraps," The Way 4 (April 10, 1902), pp. 9-12; "What Is It To Trust in God -- Who Does It?," The Way 4 (July 31, 1902), pp. 137-40; "Questions about Special Providence," The Way 4 (April 16, 1903), 514-16 and "Why This Unbelief?," Gospel Herald 1 (May 8, 1913), 3, 6

¹⁴¹Bell, Unpublished Manuscript, quoted in Greene, p. 113. Bell wrote something similar in his Studies in Ephesians (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, n.d.), ii.

the Holy Spirit in the Christian."¹⁴² Students were impressed with the vitality of his doctrine of the Spirit. According to Jesse P. Sewell, "to him the Holy Spirit was as real as was the spirit in his own body."¹⁴³

Harding's writings testify to this emphasis. In 1905 alone Harding penned ten articles on the indwelling of the Spirit as he engaged Dr. J. C. Holloway and others in a discussion of the subject.¹⁴⁴ Harding's perspective stood in strong contrast with some of his contemporaries, especially those who were influenced by the Firm Foundation and the American Christian Review. Indeed, Harding's emphasis was so strong and the influence of the Bible School's so wide that many accused the Bible schools of originating this emphasis.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, Harding's twenty years of teaching this perspective in the Nashville and Potter Bible Schools had a tremendous impact on forming a theological tradition where the Holy Spirit was understood as a vital, transforming and divine personal presence in the life of the believer.

Two Extremes. Harding believed that there were two dangerous extremes concerning the Holy Spirit. One extreme was to teach that the Spirit immediately and

¹⁴²Robert H. Boll, "James A. Harding," Word and Work 15 (May 1922), 164.

¹⁴³Jesse P. Sewell, "Sewell's Eulogy," in Faith of Our Fathers, 306.

¹⁴⁴Harding, "What Help Do We Receive from God in Answer to Prayer?," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (14 February 1905), 8-9; "The Holy Spirit in the Church," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (28 February 1905), 8-9; "Lessons From the Falling of the Holy Spirit Upon Cornelius and Company," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (21 March 1905), 8-9; "Brother Crownover's Question Concerning the Holy Spirit," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (4 April 1905), 8-9; "The Holy Spirit: Does He Dwell in Us? What Does He Do for Us?," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (13 June 1905), 8-9; "The Gift of the Holy Spirit: A Reply to Dr. Holloway," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (18 July 1905), 8-9; "Notes on the Holy Spirit's Work, with a Remarkable Illustration," The Way 19 (1 August 1905), 8-9; "The Holy Spirit: A Reply to Dr. Holloway," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (22 August 1905), 8-9; "Another Effort to Get Dr. Holloway out of the Fog," The Christian Leader and the Way 19 (10 October 1905), 8-9; "The Indwelling Presence of the Spirit and the Eternal God -- A . Campbell," The Christian Leader and the Way 48 (28 November 1905), 8-9.

¹⁴⁵R. L. Whiteside, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," Gospel Herald 1 (28 August 1913), 2: "Recently some writers have sought to make the impression that the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a new doctrine taught principally by the Bible schools of the country."

directly enters the heart of the sinner in order to convert it or change it prior to faith. The Spirit convicts the world of sin, but not by a "mysterious, miraculous, and irresistible power injected immediately into the heart."¹⁴⁶ Harding, along with the whole tradition of the Stone-Campbell Movement from its beginnings, opposed this "Calvinist" understanding of conversion. He called it "one of the most popular and hurtful errors in the religious world."¹⁴⁷ It was often a proposition Harding debated with opponents in public disputations. For example, Harding denied while J. B. Moody affirmed the following thesis: "The Scriptures teach that man is so depraved that he is unable without a direct enabling power of the Holy Spirit to obey the Gospel of the Son of God."¹⁴⁸ Harding, like most in the Stone-Campbell movement, believed that the Holy Spirit only enters a person after conversion and never before conversion. The Holy Spirit cannot enter a sinner, but he does make his abode with saints.

The other extreme equally concerned Harding. It was an extreme which he saw in his own fellowship and it greatly disturbed him. "Many readers of the New Testament," he notes, "stagger at the thought of the Holy Spirit entering into Christians and abiding in them. They seem to think that he enters into them only in his Word, and he himself remains on the outside."¹⁴⁹ Indeed, some seem to equate the Word and the Spirit¹⁵⁰ or to say that the Spirit dwells in the Word just as our human spirits dwell in our own words. Consequently, the Spirit dwells within us only in the sense that the word dwells in us because the Spirit dwells in the word. But Harding objects that the "Bible nowhere teaches, either expressly or by necessary implication, that the Holy

¹⁴⁶Harding, "The Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," The Way 1 (1 August 1899), 117.

¹⁴⁷Harding, "The Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (31 May 1904), 8.

¹⁴⁸J. B. Moody and James A. Harding, Debate on Baptism and the Work of the Holy Spirit (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1955 reprint), p. 409.

¹⁴⁹Harding, "The Indwelling of Demons and of the Holy Spirit," The Christian Leader and the Way 22 (12 May 1908), 8.

¹⁵⁰Harding, "Brother Crownover's Question," 8: "...some seem to believe that the word and the Holy Spirit are identical."

Spirit dwells in the word."¹⁵¹ Harding regards such a reductionistic view of the Holy Spirit as a "perversion" that is just as "sectarian" and "unjustifiable as any Methodist or Baptist perpetrated upon this much abused text [Acts 2:38]."¹⁵² He waxes eloquent when he writes, "I am as far as the East is from the West from believing that neither God, Christ, nor the Holy Spirit can help us except by talking to us."¹⁵³

"Of the two errors," Harding commented, "I do not know which is the worse."¹⁵⁴ One denies that anyone receives the Spirit and the other affirms that sinners receive the Spirit. Neither is biblical and both lead to troublesome errors. The former undermines sanctification and the other hinges justification on the mourner's bench. The former reduces sanctification to studying the word without the empowering presence of the Spirit. The latter forces the seeker to wait for some tangible expression of the Spirit's testimony before they obey the Gospel. Harding affirms a mediating position.

As Harding sees the problem, the two extremes have mixed oranges and apples. The "Calvinists" apply texts that are about Christians to sinners and the reductionists apply texts about sinners to Christians. Both make the mistake of leveling all texts concerning the Holy Spirit to one idea, and consequently both go to extremes. Harding offered this assessment in his debate with Moody:¹⁵⁵

My friend is, I admit, at times a very ingenious apologist. And one of his most skillful tricks is, while affirming and trying to prove the direct operation of the Spirit on the *sinner's* heart in order to his conversion, to weave into his argument a large number of passages which speak about his dwelling in, working in, strengthening and helping *Christians*. Of course the ingenuity consists in so introducing these passages as to lead the unsuspecting hearer or reader to suppose that they apply to the sinner. That the Spirit dwells in the Christian, helps his infirmities, and makes intercession for him with unutterable groanings, the Scriptures clearly

¹⁵¹Harding, "Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," *The Way*, 115.

¹⁵²Harding, "The Gift of the Holy Spirit. A Reply to Dr. Holloway," 9.

¹⁵³Harding, "How Does God Help His People," *The Christian Leader and the Way* 20 (6 February 1906), 9.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵Harding, *Debate on Baptism*, 478-9.

teach, and I believe as firmly as I believe any thing....You see, my friends, the temple must be holy before the Spirit will move in, and if it then be defiled he will move out. I repeat, no one is a stronger believer in the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of God's children than I am; the faith fills me with joy; I believe he helps, guards, guides and strengthens me. he came to earth nearly two thousand years ago to remain till the end of time, and he is not here as an idler; he is the life (the sap) of the vine, the spirit of the body, the dweller in the temple. He does for us just what he did for the Christians in the apostolic age.

In the same way, reductionists apply texts that about sinners to Christians. Harding argued that we should understand that sinners received the word and then became Christians through faith and obedience. Likewise, Christians receive the Spirit after faith and obedience. "The Spirit is received after faith and obedience; the Word before faith and obedience."¹⁵⁶

A Biblical Theology. Harding's deep impression of the Spirit's role in the history of redemption arises out of a biblical-theological construct of redemptive history. In a key article, which he reprinted several times with various changes, Harding lays out a redemptive-historical understanding of the presence of God among his people.¹⁵⁷ In this article Harding unfolds the progressive nature of God's presence. Israel experienced God's presence through the tabernacle and temple where God's angel was "God's representative on earth" (see Exodus 23:20-23; 32:34). Then God himself dwelt among us in Jesus Christ. The incarnate Son of God was the presence of God among his people. Jesus, in that sense, represented the Father through his incarnational presence. In this sense, God was "with" his people and, as John 14:17, the Spirit was "with" them in the ministry of Jesus.

However, something decisive happens at Pentecost that breaks open a new era. It is the "peculiarity of the new covenant" that God now dwells "in" his people through his Spirit. This was the promise of John 7:37-39 and it was fulfilled on Pentecost when

¹⁵⁶Harding, "Another Effort to Get Dr. Holloway Out of the Fog," 8.

¹⁵⁷Harding, "The Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," The Way 1 (1 August 1899), 114-8; The Christian Leader and the Way 18 (May 31, 1904), 8-9 and 18 (7 June 1904), 8-9; and Gospel Herald 1 (29 May 29 1913), 1.

God poured out his Spirit and made his dwelling in his people through the Spirit. God the Father, then, still has a representative on earth. But unlike his angelic presence with Israel, or the Son's incarnational presence, now God dwells in his people. God's representative on earth is now the Holy Spirit. He abides in the hearts of saints. God and Christ dwell representatively through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). Thus, "as in former dispensations God dwelt among his people, so does he now; then, in the presence of an angel, now, in the presence of the Holy Spirit;" then "with" his people, now, "in" his people.¹⁵⁸ "We are nearer to God than they were."¹⁵⁹

Yet, even this is not the final story in the history of God's redemption. Just as "a greater age, a greater people and a greater temple required a greater representative from the Celestial City"¹⁶⁰ -- and we now have that by the presence of the Spirit in the church, God's temple -- so we anticipate a fuller presence of God in the new heaven and the new earth. This fuller presence is the presence of the Triune God among us in the everlasting kingdom. Though, "as far as we know," the baptism of the Spirit has only been "granted in the two cases referred to [apostles and Cornelius]," there, in the new heaven and new earth, all the saints will receive the full measure of the baptism of the Spirit just as the baptism of fire will be administered to all the wicked.¹⁶¹

Harding's theology of the Spirit, then, is partly a function of his eschatological structure. God dwelt with his people in Eden, but sin destroyed that communion. God could no longer dwell with a sinful people. Nevertheless, by his grace, God revealed himself and represented his presence among his people by an angel, and then God came among them through the incarnate One, the Christ. Now the Holy Spirit dwells

¹⁵⁸Harding, "The Holy Spirit in the Church," 8.

¹⁵⁹Harding, "The Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," The Christian Leader and the Way, 18 (31 May 1904), 9.

¹⁶⁰Harding, "The Gift of the Holy Spirit. A Reply to Dr. Holloway," 8.

¹⁶¹Harding, "The Holy Spirit -- A Bible Reading," The Way, 118.

within the church in the present stage of redemptive history. But the millennial reign is the time when Christ will return to dwell among his people, and the new heaven and new earth will be the time when God himself returns to Eden. The history of redemption is the history of God's progressive presence among his people to restore them to Eden and thus fulfill his original intent. The denial of the personal presence of the Spirit in the Christian, then, undermines the very structure of Harding's theology. It is no wonder, then, that he regarded the denial of that personal presence as perverted and tantamount to a denial of the reign of Christ in the world.

The Function of the Spirit. Harding believed that sanctification is as much a struggle for the Christian as it was for the Jew in the Old Testament. "Under Christianity no man can do right any more than he could under Judaism" and "the Christian has precisely the same sort of struggle as did the faithful Jew in trying to do the will of God." But there are basically two differences between Judaism and Christianity when it comes to the command "Do and Live." The first is the atonement of Jesus Christ in the light of which "there is no condemnation; in him all these shortcomings are overlooked; in him our sins are blotted out." As long as we remain in Christ, his blood covers us and there is no condemnation, and the Christian "remains in Christ just as long as 'he wills to do his will;' as long as he strives earnestly and prayerfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil."¹⁶²

The second advantage the Christian has in this struggle against sin is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. According to Harding, the Spirit is an enabling presence in the life of the Christian. By the strength of the Spirit the Christian is able to do things he could not otherwise do. Does all the Christian's strength for the struggle against sin come through the Bible alone? Harding responds: "Dr. Holloway ridicules the idea of any man getting any help from God except what he gets by studying the Bible. Does the

¹⁶²Harding, "What I Would Not, That I Do," Gospel Advocate 25 (1 July 1883), 442.

Doctor never pray?"¹⁶³ The struggle against sin involves the personal work of the Spirit and without that strength we could not remain faithful. "When Paul teaches that 'the Spirit helpeth our infirmity,' I understand that he supplies to us that which we need for the greatest efficiency in the Christian's life, but which we, unaided, can not secure."¹⁶⁴

Thus, Harding emphasizes the human inability to "do right." We are unable to remain faithful on our own strength. "Who does not know that he is unable to care for himself, to guide, to guard and to strengthen himself?," Harding asks.¹⁶⁵ Further, we are not even able to do the "best we can." The test of faithfulness is not doing the best we can, but the willingness to do God's will. "I have yet to meet the man who does the best he knows. If Brother Clark's definition is correct, there are no Christians; for, of all men, Christ is the only one who did the best he knew how. What we need is a Savior to save people who have not done the best they knew, to save sinners; and Christ came to do that."¹⁶⁶ It is the faithfulness of Christ then that saves us from our own weaknesses and failures. There is no condemnation in Christ for those who seek to do his will. But it is precisely because we are weak and unable to fulfill the will of God that the Spirit dwells within God's saints to help their infirmities and to strengthen them. Believers who deny this presence evoke Harding's pity:¹⁶⁷

I feel sorry for those who are afflicted by these dreadful, blighting, semi-infidel, materialistic notions, that leave God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the angels wholly out of the Christian's life--for those who think all these spiritual beings left us when the Bible was finished, and who think that we now have to fight the battle alone. Some of these people pray, but what they pray for is more than I can tell, unless it is for the 'reflex influence': and when they are praying for that they are praying to themselves, not to God.

¹⁶³Harding, "The Holy Spirit. A Reply to Dr. Holloway," 9.

¹⁶⁴Harding, "Another Effort to Get Dr. Holloway Out of the Fog," 8.

¹⁶⁵Harding, "Notes on the Holy Spirit's Work," 8.

¹⁶⁶Harding, "From Exchanges," *The Way* 2 (April 1900), 50.

¹⁶⁷Harding, "Does God Help His People," 20 (6 February 1906), 8.

What, then, does the Spirit do? He helps our infirmities in the sense that he strengthens us in our fight against sin. "Do we not feel the need of divine help every day?," Harding asks. "No man is competent to direct his own steps, to express his own thoughts, to do the simplest duties, to pray the shortest prayer, without divine help. I am glad in believing that in each child of God the Divine Helper dwells."¹⁶⁸

What does the Spirit do? He guides us in our daily walk and in our ministries. In Harding's first printed article (as far as I have been able to discover) he affirms his resolve "to go from day to day where it appears we can do the most good, and where in the providence of God we are led."¹⁶⁹ This language is not uncommon for Harding. He will often speak of being "led" by God to do something or to go somewhere. For example, he thanked God that the Lord "led" him to the American Missionary Society convention in Lexington, Kentucky in 1883.¹⁷⁰ Claiming the promise of Matthew 6:33, Harding suggests that all evangelists pray "Father, lead me where I can do the most good in thy service. 'My times are in thy hands.' Do thou direct my steps."¹⁷¹ Harding links this divine "leading" to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and does not shrink back from calling it "miraculous." Indeed, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is itself "an incomprehensible, miraculous thing necessary to the well being of the Christian and the church."¹⁷²

What does the Spirit do? The Spirit aids in the understanding, application and teaching of the Bible. Harding writes: "The greatest need that I feel in living the Christian's life is divine help to handle aright the word of truth. I constantly realize my inability in and of myself to say what I ought to say, as I ought to say it, to whom I

¹⁶⁸Harding, "The Indwelling of Demons and of the Holy Spirit," 8.

¹⁶⁹Harding, "The Church of Christ, Plum St., Detroit, Mich.," The Old Path Guide 3 (May 1881), 266-8.

¹⁷⁰Harding, "Inconsistencies," Gospel Advocate 25 (1 March 1883), 131.

¹⁷¹Harding, "Bro. Metcalfe's Question Answered," Gospel Advocate 24 (21 December 1882), 806.

¹⁷²Harding, "Thought on Miracles," 131.

ought to say it. I feel no lack of truth, for I have in the Bible all the inspiration man needs. But to remember that truth, to apply it to saint and sinner as it should be applied, to handle it aright at all times, is far beyond my unaided powers."¹⁷³

This does not undermine the sufficiency of Scripture because we "are limited absolutely to the Bible for instruction in righteousness. It is abundantly sufficient to lead the sinner to Christ, and to guide the Christian all along the way to heaven." It is sufficient for knowledge, but it is not sufficient for that which it was never intended. It supplies sufficient knowledge, but wisdom comes from God through prayer. Harding asks, "has not Dr. Holloway yet learned that we need more than knowledge?"¹⁷⁴ 1 Timothy 3:16-17, then, "does not teach that the Bible alone thoroughly furnishes the man of God for every good work, but that the Bible in addition to what had already been given does so."¹⁷⁵ God has given us Scripture and he has given us his Spirit who equips his people through leading, strengthening and guarding them.

God, then, through his Holy Spirit, is present among his people to help them. He has provided a text which guides us, but we need more than cognitive information. Harding writes: "we need more help from God than knowledge. We need love, wisdom, protection from unseen dangers, our daily bread; we need to be guided where we can do the most good; we need to be strengthened to do what good we can get there."¹⁷⁶ God gave us Scripture but he also gives us much more. With Scripture and through the power of the Holy Spirit the saints of God are enabled to live faithful lives before God as they seek to do his will.

¹⁷³Harding, "The Holy Spirit. Does He Dwell in Us? What Does He Do For Us?," 19 (13 June 1905), 9.

¹⁷⁴Harding, "Another Effort to Get Dr. Holloway Out of the Fog," 8.

¹⁷⁵Harding, "Does God Help His People," The Christian Leader and the Way 20 (6 February 1906), 8.

¹⁷⁶Harding, "The Prayer of Faith," The Christian Leader and the Way 20 (April 10, 1906), 8.

Conclusion: The Loss of a Theological Tradition

Within the lifetime of James Harding himself, or at least during the initial twenty years of the Bible School movement (1891-1911) when Harding was a President of either Nashville or Potter Bible School, a theological tradition existed which formed a coherent paradigm. It is epitomized by James A. Harding though substantially shared by others (including David Lipscomb, J. N. Armstrong, R. H. Boll). Richard Hughes has called this an "apocalyptic" tradition.¹⁷⁷ Whatever we call it, it is correct to understand the Lipscomb-Harding tradition as a particular theological frame which shaped a generation of preachers at the Nashville and Potter Bible schools.

This theological paradigm included not only an appreciation of the gospel of grace, but also a preference for the poor, a strong view of providence and prayer, opposition to rebaptism, millennial eschatology, an insistence on the personal work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of the believer, pacifism, non-participation in human governments, sociological sectarianism in distinction from both denominations and the world, and an inclusive approach to racial concerns.

What was at the heart of this "apocalyptic" vision of the kingdom of God? What gave coherence to this vision so that we might perceive it as a distinctive theological tradition which shapes every thought it embraces? Every component of this tradition, as listed in the above paragraph, reflects a central concern, and it is this center which serves to frame and shape the understanding of each of those components. While it is difficult to formulate a sentence that embraces and fully entails that center, I would suggest the following: God is dynamically introducing his kingdom into the fallen world. God takes the initiative (grace). God is dynamically active to care for his people and advance his kingdom (providence, prayer, miracle, Holy Spirit). God opposes the Satanic kingdoms of the fallen world (apocalyptic eschatology). The theological tradition is theocentric, eschatologically structured, and kingdom-oriented. It entails

¹⁷⁷Cf. Hughes, 141, as it applies to Harding.

pacifism, non-participation in human governments, sociological sectarianism, cultural separatism, opposition to materialism (including a preference for the poor), and even a understanding of faith and baptism that focuses on trust in Christ rather than the design of baptism as the central concern.¹⁷⁸

This paradigm did not remain intact. Indeed, it was never a dogmatic creedalism, but more of a fundamental consensus. But this consensus broke down during the mid-20th century. A subtle Deism emerged among Churches of Christ. Pacifism almost disappeared. The Lipscomb-Harding understanding of rebaptism became a minority position, even in Tennessee. Premillennialism was driven out. The personal indwelling of the Spirit became the minority view. Special providence was ridiculed and secularism dominated. Churches of Christ became middle class, patriotic and nationalistic citizens of the United States. We embraced segregation instead of integration. The church as a whole moved across the tracks and gained cultural respectability as a "denomination" in the 1940s-50s. This breakdown was a slow process, but by the late 1940s it was rather complete. By that time a new consensus had replaced the old and it would dominate the Churches of Christ until the beginnings of a new paradigm(s) arose in the 1960s.

Robert H. Boll, Harding's student, colleague and theological heir, probably embodied this theological tradition more thoroughly than anyone else. Others continued to embrace parts of Harding's theological vision, such as S. H. Hall (providence), R. C. Bell (grace) and G. C. Brewer (grace). But the unity of this theological vision began to disintegrate as even Harding's heirs and students rejected certain aspects of his vision (e.g., pacifism, non-participation, rebaptism, providence, etc.).

Boll's exclusion from the fellowship of the Churches of Christ in the 1920s-30s is

¹⁷⁸The integrated character and exact relationship between these themes is a subject for another paper. I do not have space to elaborate their coherence here.

probably the most significant indicator of this paradigm shift within the Churches of Christ. By the 1940s Boll was an outsider as he continued to embrace and teach Harding's apocalyptic vision. He maintained the central core of Harding's theology and held its component parts together in a coherent way unlike any other of Harding's students (perhaps with the exception of J. N. Armstrong). When the Churches of Christ lost Boll's voice, they lost James A. Harding. All that remained of his apocalyptic vision in Churches of Christ was the fragmented minority voices that had little impact of the broad landscape of theological thought among Churches of Christ from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Christian Piety... piety practice (bio material)...Bible reading and prayer are keys, esp. holistic reading of the Bible. Bible is sufficient, but sufficient in conjunction with what God has supplied.

The Means of Grace... the four (1) Bible; (2) Giving; (3) Lord's Supper; (4) Prayer.

"Questions and Answers," 4.16 (July 17, 1902), pp. 121-23. "four great means of grace": same as above, except (2) is stated as "diligence in ministering to the needs of one another" and (3) "promptness in attending to the meetings, ordinances and appointments of the Lord's house; and (4) to the prayers. He who uses these means faithfully will surely become stronger continually. Unceasingly is he being conformed to the image of God's Son. He who habitually neglects these great means of grace need not expect to be able to stand. It is literally and absolutely impossible." p. 130

"The Habits that Save," 4.41 (February 5, 1903), 353-56.

1. Bible Study. 2. Ministering to Others. 3. "regular attendance every Lord's Day at the Lord's Table." (p. 355...breaking bread). 4. Praying. "I believe the Holy Spirit has given us these four duties, not in the order in which they should be observed in the meeting, as some excellent brethren hold, but in the order of their importance." p. 356.

"Questions Concerning the Way to Heaven," 4.42 (February 12, 1903), 369-71.

the purpose of the assembly is the four habits (means of grace) in Acts 2:42. p. 370.

"Will God hold us responsible for little mistakes?" inquires a reader of THE WAY. God will hold everything against us we do that is wrong, whether it be in ignorance, weakness or willfulness, if we are not in Christ. If we are in Christ and abide in him, he holds nothing against us. All who live and die in Christ will be saved....So the matter of being delivered from our sins, great and small, depends on our being in Christ." p. 401. If one develops the four habits "as he ought"... "he will surely abide in Christ. These four are God means of grace to transform a poor, frail, sinful human being into the likeness of Christ....He who faithfully uses these means unto the end of life can not be lost; he who neglects any of them endangers his soul's salvation." pp. 401-2.

"How are we saved? A Reply to the Liberty Baptist," 4.50 (April 9, 1903), 498-500.

on baptism and Harding's discussion of the four habits that save.

"Scraps," 5.14 (July 23, 1903), pp. 737-8. "The life of a successful Christian is a continual growth in purity, a constant changing into a completer likeness to Christ." p. 735. emphasis on four habits again, p. 736.

JAH, "The Way of Peace, Gladness and Joy," 1.1 (October 31, 1912), 5, 7. Phi.. 4, Mark 11:24; Mat. 7:7-12; Ps. 1; Ec. 2:26... "The man who has these three things is marvelously rich, wonderfully prosperous. The people generally may suppose that he is poor, very poor, may even sympathize with him on account of his straitened circumstances, may deplore the stupidity (?) that brogught him into such starits. But the man (or soman) to

whom God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy is infinitely rich." p. 5 "He may not appear to be prospering, but he really is all of the time. If he needs chastisement, God gives it to him in the wisest and best way. If he needs hardships to develop him, to fit him for higher fields of usefulness, the Father knows just where and how this development may be most effectively secured....four great means of grace...." address is still Bowling Green KY on 1266 Kentucky St. on Oct. 19, 1912.

at the heart is a divine dynamic -- God is at work

Sectarianism

Distinction between Church and the World

Distinction between Moral and Positive Commands

Unimmersed and Apostate are not in the Church -- Call for Separatism

Soteriology

Faith, Grace and Works...lecture on Romans...not saved by works, but saved on the condition of obedience to a condition...salvation is by grace and not based on doing the "best one can."

Faith and Rebaptism...faith in Jesus (trust....), baptism as a positive command, obedience to the positive command is sufficient as long as there is a trust in Jesus. sectarianism to require rebaptism.

Goal of Salvation cf. scraps on p. 20 of notes for Christ, HS and individual organization of the church