

*Brief Introductions to Anglican Theology:
Theological Method*

Theological Methodology
and the Jesus Movement through
the Work of F. D. Maurice and Vida Scudder

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The twenty-seventh Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, has called the church over which he presides to become a part of the Jesus Movement. This call raised eyebrows for some, who feared a turn toward a Protestant evangelical tradition reflected in the legacy of people like the eighteenth-century Anglican evangelist George Whitefield. Because the evangelical tradition emphasizes individual salvation, it easily lends itself to a lack of engagement in social justice issues. But this was not the intention of the Presiding Bishop, who urges the church toward the “beloved community.” This essay will examine The Episcopal Church’s history of engagement with social justice in light of the theological methodology of F. D. Maurice and Vida Scudder, in an attempt to discern the theological failure that the historical lack of social justice leadership within The Episcopal Church reflects, and which necessitated the Presiding Bishop’s call.

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When Presiding Bishop Michael Curry called The Episcopal Church to become part of the Jesus Movement, many feared not only a return to eighteenth-century evangelism, but also a turning away

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from engagement with social issues. The Jesus Movement to which Bishop Curry has called Episcopalians, however, advocates neither; in fact, it demands involvement in issues of social justice. Borrowing from Martin Luther King Jr., Curry describes this as a movement toward the “beloved community.” This community is profoundly inclusive and defined by love. It reflects God’s promised future. In this regard, the coming of such a community reflects the core of Jesus’s message and ministry.

So, while there were Episcopalians who feared the call to join the Jesus movement as an individualistic evangelical turn, others—especially non-Episcopalians—heard the call and wondered, “What have Episcopalians been doing all this time?” While this query was perhaps meant as more of a rhetorical jest than a literal inquiry, it does point to a disquieting truth when it comes to The Episcopal Church’s historical involvement in social justice matters, particularly as they concern racial justice.

After all, it was Bishop of London Edmund Gibson who, in 1727, declared that salvation offered in baptism did not contravene the shackles of chattel slavery. He said,

Christianity and the embracing of the Gospel does not make the least Alteration in Civil property. . . . The Freedom which Christianity gives, is a Freedom from the Bondage of Sin and Satan, and from the Dominion of Mend Lusts and Passions and inordinate Desires; but as to their *outward* Condition, whatever that was before, whether bond or free, their being baptized, and becoming Christians, makes no matter of Change in it.¹

Consistent with this declaration, the antebellum Episcopal Church did not take a definitive stand against slavery. Consequently, it did not divide over this issue as did Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations. That it met as two separate bodies during the Civil War (the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America and the General Council of the Confederate States of America) was more a matter of practical necessity than a disagreement about the “morality” of slavery.

¹ David Humphrey, *An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (1730; repr., Miami: Hardpress 2017), 265–66.

Some one hundred years after the Civil War, corresponding with a tradition that has avoided “socially disruptive” practices when it comes to racial justice, two Episcopal bishops joined six other faith leaders in “An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense” during the 1963 Birmingham civil rights struggle. They warned against participation in the “extreme measures” of Martin Luther King Jr., deeming King’s actions divisive and a catalyst for violence and clearly ignoring the segregationist divisions and white racist violence that precipitated King to act. Their “appeal” prompted King to write his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” in which he reminded the Episcopal bishops and their colleagues that Jesus was an “extremist for love.”

The point is, The Episcopal Church has not been consistently focused on building the beloved community that is God’s promised future—especially when it entails racial justice. In fact, there has been a prevailing tradition that, at best, ignores social justice involvement altogether, and thus, tacitly legitimates a status quo that falls far short of any notion of the beloved community. That this has been the case is evinced by the fact that the Presiding Bishop would need to issue a call to join the Jesus Movement in the first place. It is worth noting that this call was in part a response to the growing racial tensions within the country and the church’s failure of ethical leadership in this regard.

It is against the backdrop of the Presiding Bishop’s call that I will explore the question of theological methodology. For it could be argued that the failure of social justice leadership within The Episcopal Church reflects a theological failure: a failure to embrace theological approaches that foster a social consciousness and thus compel social justice involvement. This essay, therefore, will explore two particular theological understandings and methodological approaches, one from above and one from below, with special attention to implications for social justice engagement. Before proceeding, however, it is important to say something about theological discourse and methodology in general.

Theological and Methodological Assumptions

Fides quaerens intellectum. (Anselm)

Theology is God talk. But it is not God doing the talking. Rather, it is human beings talking about the meaning of God in their lives. In this regard, theology is not abstract speculation removed from human living. As eleventh-century Anglican theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury Anselm argued, theology is “faith seeking understanding.”

Faith is possible because God has acted in human history, thus initiating a relationship with human beings. Faith is the human response to God's invitation to be in relationship. Theology, therefore, assumes divine revelation. It arises from lived faith. In this regard, theological discourse is not limited to scholars or ordained persons. The theological tasks require only a self-reflective faith. Essentially, theology seeks to understand the meaning of God's revelation for human beings in the various contexts out of which they perceive the revelation and navigate their faith. This brings us to theological methodology.

As theologian Ellen Wondra rightly points out, theological methodology itself "is a matter of lively discussion." Simply put, there is no one methodology that is prescriptive for doing theology. One's theological approach depends upon one's particular theological concern. Thus, Wondra aptly states that theological methodology represents "the way in which theologians reflect on and give voice to the experiences and insights of particular faith communities."²

Nevertheless, there are at least a couple of givens when it comes to theological methodology. First, theological methodology has to do with the discernment and use of sources for understanding the meaning of God's revelation—Scripture, tradition, experience, and so on. Even if various theologians utilize the same sources, how they employ those sources may vary, resulting in distinct methodological approaches.

Second, for Christian theologians, discerning the meaning of God's incarnation in Jesus is crucial. The belief that God became incarnate in Jesus, and hence that Jesus is Christ, is the unique claim of Christianity. All Christian theology must address this central claim in some way. For many Christian theologians, the incarnation is the norm by which all other theological sources are measured. For others, it is not. Furthermore, for some the fact that Jesus is *homoousia* defines his Messiahship. For others, it is his ministry to the poor and marginalized that reveal him as Christ. The point is, there is no singular way in which to interpret the meaning of God's incarnation in Jesus, even within the incarnational-centered Anglican/Episcopal tradition.

There is probably no Christian tradition more incarnation-centered than the Anglican tradition. This is demonstrated by the centrality of the Eucharist in Anglican/Episcopal worship, as well as

² Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2002).

the significance of the three early church creeds within the Anglican/Episcopal tradition: that is, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed or *Quicumque Vult*, which used to be recited during major Anglican church festivals. Yet even the creeds demand continual interpretation if they are to have more than simply historical relevance. These differing interpretations signal different methodological approaches. This brings us to this essay.

This essay is not a survey of Anglican theology or Christology. Nor does it pretend to provide a comprehensive overview of various theological or methodological approaches. Rather, this essay will highlight the work of two Anglican theologians whose particular approach to understanding God's incarnation fostered a social consciousness compelling them into social justice activity. These are theologians who might be described as promoting the "beloved community." Through examining the work of these theologians, this essay aims to provide readers with a general framework for understanding Anglican/Episcopal theological methodologies and their implications for how one engages in the Jesus Movement. It is fitting to start with Frederick Denison Maurice, who has been rightly described as "the fountain-head of all social reform movements within the Anglican communion and . . . a tremendous influence upon the social concern of the whole Christian church."³

*Frederick Denison Maurice: Kingdom of Christ—
a Theology from Above*

*We are living in the midst of a strange world; we have eyes and ears to take in the sight and sounds of it; but we do not know what all these sights and sounds have to do with us.*⁴

It was the age of the Industrial Revolution. Daily life was no longer agriculturally focused and centered around working the soil. Instead, at the dawn of this nineteenth-century age, life was industrially focused and centered around working in factories. People were moving from rural areas into the cities. With this migration came urban overcrowding, sanitation concerns, disease, and high mortality rates,

³ Guy H. Ranson, "The Kingdom of God as the Design of Society: An Important Aspect of F. D. Maurice's Theology," *Church History* 30 (1961): 458. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3161220.

⁴ F. D. Maurice, "Christmas Day," in *Christmas Day and Other Sermons* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 4.

particularly among infants. Moreover, the advent of mass production created a competition for cheap labor. As a result, workers were underpaid and exploited as they labored in unhealthy and unsafe environments. Given these circumstances, workers led protests for better wages and more humane work conditions. Movements like the Chartist movement emerged. And so, the time for theological reflection was ripe as people of faith had to confront the problem of “the great cities, and the Church’s responsibility for the appalling conditions in which so many of her children lived” as well as the many concerns of the exploited labor class.⁵

This was the “strange world” in which Maurice sought to understand the meaning of his faith. Maurice firmly believed that “Christian theology had solutions to social problems and he sought to set forth the social dimensions of the Christian faith.”⁶ He did this through various essays, sermons, and with the 1837 publication of his monumental work *The Kingdom of Christ*. Maurice’s understanding of God’s kingdom as revealed in Christ catapulted him into the socialist democratic movement, making him the leading theological voice in the development of Christian Socialism. Looking more closely at Maurice’s kingdom-centered theology will help us to appreciate a theological methodology that yields social justice involvement.

Maurice’s understanding of God’s kingdom begins with a theological approach from above (Maurice variously called this kingdom of God, kingdom of Christ, dominion of God, and more). Drawing upon the prologue in John’s Gospel, Maurice explains, “Christian theology does not speak of an Incarnation, till it has spoken of an ‘only-begotten Son,’ begotten of His Father before all worlds, of ‘one substance with Him.’”⁷ This emphasis on Christ’s preincarnate reality provides the essential foundation upon which Maurice establishes that Christ reveals a kingdom to which all humanity is a member. It does so in several ways.

⁵ J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Church of England*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing 1980), 355.

⁶ Ranson, “Kingdom of God as the Design of Society,” 458.

⁷ F. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1853), 84.

Trinitarian God and the Kingdom

It establishes Christ as part of the Godhead, thus attesting to the fact that Jesus as Christ is fully God. Accordingly, when humans encounter Christ they are encountering God. Maurice explains,

We are sure that in this man—this poor man . . . we beheld the living God. Not *some* unseen power—some angel or divine creature who might have been sent down on a message of mercy to our little corner of the earth . . . we declare that we saw the glory of the Father. . . . We say that the Father revealed himself fully and perfectly in this man, that he was with him before the worlds were, that he held unbroken converse with him while he was upon earth, that he is upon the right hand of his glory now.”⁸

We will later see the importance of Jesus as God incarnate when it comes to the kingdom of God, but before doing so it is necessary to explore more fully the implications of Christ’s preincarnate reality.

Establishing Christ as a part of the Godhead attests to the trinitarian nature of God. It is the trinitarian relationships inherent to the Godhead that further indicate the nature of God’s dominion within Maurice’s theology. Moreover, the Trinity makes possible the creative and redemptive story of humanity and models the relationships humans have to one another and, hence, to God’s kingdom.

Specifically, the trinitarian Godhead consists of three persons working in unity, a harmonious, cooperative relationship. Maurice emphasizes that it is a relationship governed by a “self-giving” love. In this relationship, there is no subjugating hierarchy or diminution of importance. Rather, each person is significant to the full working of the Godhead. The Trinity, therefore, bespeaks the intrinsically relational character of God. In essence, it tells us that God is a social being—in an eternal relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. For Maurice, this trinitarian relationship represents the very essence of God’s dominion. It is in this way that Maurice argues that the kingdom of Christ is an already existing reality “which cannot be moved.”⁹ This then leads us to the human connection to this kingdom.

⁸ Maurice, “Christmas Day,” 10.

⁹ Maurice, “The Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved,” in *Christmas Day and Other Sermons*, 66.

The Human Connection

By virtue of their very creation by God, human beings are a part of this kingdom. That is, as all beings are created by God, all are members of God's family. "I must assert," Maurice says, "that if God is my Father in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son; and if mine, then the Father of every one of those who are related to me in this or in any land."¹⁰ To be a member of God's family is to be a member of God's kingdom. This means that God's kingdom, as is God's family, is universal. It further suggests that human beings are intrinsically social beings. They are created by God to live in relationships, and these relationships are to reflect the trinitarian God who created them. Therefore, humans are compelled by their very created nature to foster harmonious relationships of mutuality and reciprocity. Just as God is fully God by virtue of the "self-giving" love that characterizes the triune relationship, humans are more fully human in self-giving relationships with one another. These relationships provide the basis of society, for society is to mirror the very kingdom of God. Maurice explains, "When we assert the doctrine of the Trinity we do so because we believe it to be the grand foundation of all society, the only ground of universal fellowship, the only idea of a God of love."¹¹ Essentially, it is the fact that humans are a part of one family that compels them into societal living. In this way, societal living is part and parcel of what it means to be a part of a triune God's family. Maurice says: "Family is the ground of human society. . . . A society is incomprehensible and disorderly which does not confess God for the Father for all of its members, Christ for their elder brother, the Spirit for their teacher, sanctifier, comforter."¹²

Yet the society that human beings have constructed falls far short of reflecting trinitarian relationality. For Maurice, this is because societies are constructed by the laws and rules of humans, and not in accordance with the dominion of God. This was certainly the case during the Industrial Age of which Maurice was a part. This was an age defined by competition as opposed to the self-giving, sacrificing

¹⁰ F. D. Maurice, *Sermons Preached in Lincoln Chapel*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 206.

¹¹ F. D. Maurice, quoted in Torben Christensen, *The Divine Order: A Study in F. D. Maurice's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1973).

¹² F. D. Maurice, *The Church and Family: Twelve Sermons on the Occasional Services of the Prayer Book* (West Strand: John H. Parker, 1850), 111.

love that is God. Such societal failing was not God's, nor the failure of the kingdom of Christ. Rather, it was a result of humanity's sin. Sin was nothing less than humans' separation from one another and hence from the very kingdom of which they are inherently a part.

Christ the Bridge

This brings us to another aspect of the human connection to God's kingdom—Christ himself, who ultimately bridges the sinful separation between humanity and the kingdom of God. He does this in two distinct ways.

First, we see again why it was so important for Maurice to stress Christ's preincarnate reality. For the fact that Jesus is God in the flesh, Christ the divine-human encounter, makes unmistakably clear to humanity their inherent connection to the Godhead, even as it overcomes their sinful separation from it. "In the flesh of Jesus Christ," Maurice says, "there is a bond between all creatures and their Creator."¹³ Essentially, Christ affirms that the human and divine realms are inextricably linked to one another. "This man, thus uniting together the invisible Godhead with humanity," Maurice argues, "established a perpetual intercourse between heaven and earth . . . [making] possible for man to approach with a pure conscience and a clean heart into the presence of God, and possible for God to hold communion by his Spirit with the spirit of man."¹⁴ Put another way, through Christ, "heaven comes down and declares itself to us in acts of love."¹⁵

Second, beyond the fact of his incarnate reality, Christ's very presence on earth is defined by kingdom talk, thereby further enunciating the bond between humanity and God's kingdom. "It can scarcely escape the observation of anyone who reads the Evangelists," Maurice points out, "that our Lord is continually speaking of a kingdom. Each of his parables is intended to illustrate some mystery of his kingdom."¹⁶ It is through Christ, therefore, that human beings "receive a Kingdom that cannot be moved." In so doing, they are to be moved to live into this very kingdom from which they have separated

¹³ Maurice, "Christmas Day," 10.

¹⁴ Maurice, "Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved," 68.

¹⁵ F. D. Maurice, *The Epistle of St. John: A Series of Lectures on Christian Ethics* (New York, Macmillan and Co., 1893), 210.

¹⁶ Maurice, "Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved," 65.

themselves. “In Him,” Maurice says, “God meets us; in Him we meet God. In Him God is satisfied with us; in Him we can be satisfied with God.”¹⁷ In short, as Christ consistently makes humans aware of the kingdom in which they are a part through his incarnate reality and through his preaching, he calls them to claim it for themselves. Maurice preached: “It is this kingdom which we assert and claim for you now, and which we beseech you to assert and claim for yourselves. We say, that you and all men are bound to claim for yourselves the dignity of being members of Christ, and children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁸ This is not a kingdom, therefore, that humans are waiting to be established. Rather, it is an already established kingdom of which humans are already a part. Left for them is to claim it for themselves.

In the end, the kingdom of God comes to us through Christ who sacrifices his very self to free humanity from their bondage to this world, so that they can live in relationship to the kingdom of God that is theirs. This brings us to the significance of baptism and Eucharist.

The Sacraments

“By your baptism,” Maurice says, “God hath given you a portion in him who was made flesh.”¹⁹ Baptism is important to Maurice because it is the sacrament through which humans claim the kingdom for themselves. Maurice proclaims, “It is [Christ’s] kingdom which your parents and your sponsors claim for you at baptism.”²⁰

If baptism affirms membership in God’s kingdom, then the Eucharist witnesses to the nature of that kingdom and the very society we are meant to build.

Specifically, since all manner of people share in the body and blood of Christ at the time of communion, it indicates that “we are all assumed to be members of one family under one Father, members of one body, rejoicing in one Head; and by virtue of their common union with him, sharing in each other’s sorrows and delights.”²¹ Maurice, therefore, points out how the Eucharist has stood the test of tumultuous times. As such, it “has been the most holy symbol to nations,” for

¹⁷ Maurice, *Epistle of St. John*, 65.

¹⁸ Maurice, “Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved,” 70.

¹⁹ Maurice, “Christmas Day,” 15.

²⁰ Maurice, “Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved,” 70.

²¹ Maurice, “Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved,” 80.

even during times of “endless conflicts between rich and poor, nobles and plebians,” the Eucharist has been “the highest gift to the great, and yet as one in which the lowest were intended to share.”²² Simply put, Maurice considered the Eucharist “the bond of a universal life, and the means whereby man becomes partakers of it.”²³

But perhaps more importantly for Maurice, the Eucharist signals how “real the union is which the living Word of God established with the flesh of man; how truly that flesh is given to the life of the world.”²⁴ The Eucharist essentially sums up the human story of creation and redemption, for it affirms humanity’s intrinsic created relationship to God’s kingdom, or family, as well as Christ’s sacrifice to restore that relationship. In this regard, the Eucharist bears witness to the kingdom of Christ, as it reveals the universal connection that all have to one another through God, and the self-giving sacrifice of Christ that models and restores that connection. “The Communion of the Lord’s Supper,” Maurice preaches, “is the true teacher of all these mysteries. How we may present the spotless sacrifice of Christ before God, how we may partake of that sacrifice, how the blood of Christ may purge us from dead works, and fill us with a new and pure heavenly life.”²⁵ In the final analysis, Maurice says that the church, with its liturgy, creeds, and sacraments, points to the truth revealed in the Bible: the reality of the kingdom of Christ to which humanity belongs, which is perfectly revealed in Christ. This truth provides the core of Maurice’s theology. For this reason, Maurice believed Christmas to be a most important “festival” of the church, saying, “This is the festival which makes us know, indeed, that we are members of one body; it binds together the life of Christ on earth with his life in heaven.”²⁶

Theological and Methodological Implications

Maurice concluded that it is virtually inconceivable for a person to “be a good Christian and only be concerned about himself.”²⁷ For to be a good Christian meant reflecting the very kingdom of which

²² F. D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ or Hints Respecting the Principles, Constitution, and Ordinances of the Catholic Church from the Second London Edition* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843), 307.

²³ Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, 308.

²⁴ Maurice, “Christmas Day,” 16.

²⁵ Maurice, “The Perfect Sacrifice,” in *Christmas Day and Other Sermons*, 104.

²⁶ Maurice, “Christmas Day,” 16.

²⁷ Maurice, “Christmas Day,” 13.

one was a part. Maurice was clear: the privilege of being a part of God's kingdom *and* knowing it was "the privilege of not being under the dominion of the world . . . [and thus] the privilege of entering into that service which is perfect freedom."²⁸ Put simply, Maurice believed that to be a Christian was to, without excuse, foster a society that reflected God's trinitarian nature. In such a society, "there could be no class-distinctions, no rich and poor, no oppressor and oppressed."²⁹ This was to be a society characterized by the self-sacrificing love that fostered harmonious, cooperative relationships.

It was, therefore, as he sought to understand his faith in the midst of a competitive Industrial Age defined by class divisions that Maurice was compelled into the socialist movement. To have remained on the sidelines in a society in which workers were exploited, people were poor, and children suffered would have been a betrayal of the family of God of which he was a part, and hence sinful. And so, even though he believed that no one movement or even church denomination adequately reflected God's dominion, he did conclude that Christianity and socialism were inherently compatible. "I seriously believe," Maurice wrote, "that Christianity is the only foundation of Socialism, and that a true Socialism is the necessary result of a sound Christianity."³⁰ As for the church, Maurice believed that it was to be nothing less than a reflection of the kingdom of Christ, thereby leading society to God's very rule.

With this understanding of Maurice's kingdom of God theology, what can we glean about Anglican theological methodology, particularly as it might lend itself to working for "beloved community"?

As earlier mentioned, Maurice employed a theological methodology from above. However this very methodology was informed, he said, by Scripture: "My desire is to ground all theology upon the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; not to begin from ourselves and our sins; not to measure the straight line by the crooked one. This is the method which I have learnt from the Bible. There everything proceeds from God; He is revealing himself. He is acting, speaking, ruling."³¹ This rationale for his methodological approach is

²⁸ Maurice, "Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved," 74.

²⁹ Moorman, *History of the Church of England*, 356.

³⁰ Ellen Wondra, *F. D. Maurice: Reconstructing Christian Ethics; Selected Writings* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1995), 196.

³¹ F. D. Maurice, *Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced from the Scriptures* (New York, Macmillan and Co., 1893), 5.

further telling of his theological sources. For, consistent with his theology, Maurice rejects human experience as a starting point for his theology and as a source for understanding God. Instead, his most authoritative source is the Bible. This, of course, is evident throughout his theological discussions.

Even as Maurice's theology is thoroughly grounded in Scripture, he takes seriously the central creeds of the Anglican Communion. While they are not a primary source for his theology, he draws upon them as witness to his theological understandings. He firmly believes they reflect the central message of Scripture: "Christ's Godhead and Manhood as the ground of theology."³² He thus argues that the creeds, particularly the Apostles' and Nicene, bring the Bible alive, keeping it from becoming "a set of dry propositions," or "reduced to a set of dreary truisms." The creeds, he says, "proclaim that which the Bible undertakes to reveal . . . that faith by which the Bible affirms we are saved."³³

Interestingly, however, Maurice's incarnational focus is quite different than that of the creeds. While the creeds emphasize the metaphysical nature of Christ as the divine-human encounter, Maurice emphasizes Christ as the meeting of heaven and earth. Thus, that Christ is kingdom takes precedent over Christ being *homoousia*, notwithstanding that it is because Christ is *homoousia* that Maurice can affirm Christ as kingdom. Nevertheless, it is the emphasis on the kingdom of Christ in Maurice's theology that lends itself to social justice engagement. For this emphasis means that those who are baptized as members of the kingdom are compelled to witness it in their lives. The metaphysical emphasis of the creeds compels only right belief, that is, belief in the fact that Christ is *homoousia*.

Ironically, however, Maurice's kingdom-centered Christology does share something with the creeds, thus circumscribing his social engagement. Maurice's theology, like the creeds, virtually ignores Jesus's earthly ministry. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds move from Jesus's birth to resurrection with no attention at all to his earthly ministry. The focus is on God's actions in Christ as opposed to Jesus's actions on earth. This is one of the inherent dangers of a theological or christological approach from above. But what makes this surprising for Maurice is that while he places such a high premium on the Bible

³² Maurice, *Theological Essays*, xx.

³³ Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, 277.

as the fount of his theology, he gives comparatively little attention to Jesus's actual ministry—which in fact constitutes virtually the total content of the four Gospels.

What is clear is that Maurice's focus on the cooperative, harmonious relationality of the trinitarian godhead was his normative theological principle. It was the measure by which he engaged the Bible, and by which he discerned his participation in the social arena. Subsequently, Maurice dismissed as irrelevant, at best, anything that threatened the notion of harmony—including Jesus's ministry. For if in fact Jesus's ministry had more prominence within his theology, Maurice might have recognized the disruptive nature of the kingdom of Christ in relationship to an unjust society. That he did not give Jesus's disruptive ministry theological prominence perhaps explains why he never sided with the poor in their demand for the vote and universal suffrage. His preoccupation with trinitarian relationality as understood from above apparently prevented him from recognizing how universal suffrage follows from universal membership in God's family, as well as the universality of the kingdom of Christ. Lost to Maurice in this regard are the very implications of the sacraments he valued—baptism and the Eucharist.

Maurice's support of English society's class hierarchy also bespeaks his trinitarian focus at the expense of Jesus's earthly ministry. Again, Maurice's understanding of the kingdom of Christ derived from theologically speculative notions about a trinitarian godhead that took precedence over how that kingdom was actually manifested in Jesus's earthly ministry. And so, while a theological methodology from above did not deter Maurice from engaging in the social arena, it did prevent him from appreciating the earthly reality of the incarnation—and thus again the actual historical reality of the kingdom of Christ as it was manifest in Jesus's ministry. As a result, a concern for unity and harmony prevailed over concerns for equality and justice. We will see later what this might suggest in terms of The Episcopal Church's history in relationship to social justice involvement. For now, let us briefly explore a kingdom-centered theology from below, as put forth by Episcopal "lay" theologian Vida Scudder.

Vida Scudder: The Kingdom of God from Below

*American people to-day is united only in outward seeming.
 . . . We breathe the same air, we are governed by the same
 institutions, but to the eye of truth we move in different*

*worlds. . . . Racial hostility blends with religious antipathy. . . . But at no time is the lack of common atmosphere . . . so menacing as when we pass from the society on the privileged to that of the working people.*³⁴

The early twentieth-century world in which Vida Scudder sought to understand her faith in America was not much different from Maurice's nineteenth-century English world. Scudder's world, like Maurice's, was marked by the ravages of industrialization: urban overcrowding, poverty, crime, and disease, not to speak of class divisions and "racial hostility." Arguably the most prominent woman's voice in The Episcopal Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as a pioneering voice in the Social Gospel movement, Scudder was clear that there was no better time for Christianity to flourish than during this particular time of angst. It was, as she described, a period when people were filled with anxiety, grief, and disappointment generated by the gap between the country's "pretensions" and "achievements" of a just democracy. The realization of a just democracy, she believed, required the elimination of the unjust and debilitating class divisions. Until this happened, Scudder contended, "not one [person] needs to be simply a passive spectator of the sad social pageant,"³⁵ especially Christians.

Christians had a special "duty" to move society toward the yet-to-be realized democracy. This duty was compelled by the same two aspects of the Christian faith that Maurice believed compelled Christians into social action: the Trinity and the kingdom of God. What differentiates Scudder's views from Maurice's in this regard is her approach from below. Before we look at her understanding of the Trinity to see how this is the case, it is important to note that in her diverse and numerous writings Scudder develops a very nuanced theology. In many respects, though she did not consider herself a theologian—she was a professor of literature at Wellesley College—she is a more systematic theological thinker than Maurice. Considering Jesus "the greatest gift of Christianity to the world," she supports this claim with careful, systematic attention to doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation,

³⁴ Vida Scudder, "Hidden Weakness in Our Democracy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May, 1902, 639.

³⁵ Vida Scudder, "Democracy and Society," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1902, 354.

and atonement and sacrifice.³⁶ In so doing, she places Scripture in conversation with the creedal tradition of the church.

Clearly, as was the case with Maurice, Scudder's theology demands more detailed study and attention than will be given here. This essay will look only at her understanding of the Trinity and the kingdom of God, so to contrast her theological approach with Maurice's, along with its implications for social engagement.

The Trinity

While many Christians consider the doctrine of the Trinity an abstract and confusing Christian doctrine, Scudder regarded it as the "most practical ever formulated."³⁷ She points out that while, like other doctrines, the trinitarian doctrine is "tentative and symbolic" and does not "solve any mystery," it "summarizes and fuses the aspirations of the ages."³⁸ These are aspirations for human fulfillment and democracy, which, as we will soon see, are inextricably related. For now, this begs the question: How does the doctrine of the Trinity actually reflect these aspirations?

Scudder answers this question by first pointing out that "the Christian ideal is not a divine Person, but a divine Society."³⁹ This is a Divine Society that proclaims "Three Persons in One God,"⁴⁰ in a relationship that is defined by love. What the "great reality of the doctrine" signals, she says, is that "Love is in its nature eternal and absolute," as it makes clear that "God is Love."⁴¹

Moreover, the doctrinal affirmation of a trinitarian God signals to humanity that the only sort of Oneness that can be "substantial and complete" must come in loving relationships characterized by different persons with different functions, yet working in unison and regarded as equals.⁴² Scudder explains, the "perpetual interchange of love which is the life of the Divine Unity, is possible only between equals."⁴³ This understanding is the "practical import" to which she

³⁶ Vida Scudder, *Socialism and Character* (Boston: Mifflin Company, 1912), 349.

³⁷ Vida Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year: Lectures Delivered at the Cambridge Conference, 1918* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1921), 224–25.

³⁸ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 224–25.

³⁹ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 229.

⁴⁰ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 227.

⁴¹ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 225–26.

⁴² Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 227.

⁴³ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 231.

says the trinitarian doctrine points. This is expressed best, she contends, in the church's Athanasian Creed: "What was Athanasius doing when he fought the great fight for Homoousion? Nothing more than this: he was defending the truth yet unborn that social harmony depends not on differentiation of rank but on diversity of function. The great Creed . . . is a magnificent manifesto of faith in social equality."⁴⁴ With this creedal recognition, Scudder argues that the responsibility of humanity is to "evolve a society" that reflects the "unity of love that shall bear some likeness" to the trinitarian God "in Whose Image" humans are created.⁴⁵ Such a society would, like the Trinity itself, lift "over a world ravaged by hate and selfishness," and be characterized "in an equal interchange of love attaining the highest unity which only differentiation can produce."⁴⁶ In other words, individuals would find their fulfillment not in fending for themselves alone through competition and greed, but by working harmoniously toward the common good.

Atonement and Sacrifice

It is at this point that Scudder discusses the doctrine of the atonement and emphasizes the importance of sacrifice. In general, she says, these aspects of Christian faith—initiated and modeled by the trinitarian God—call humanity away from self-centeredness toward self-giving, and repudiate "all easy-going hedonism."⁴⁷ This all culminates in the cross. "If the Doctrine of the Trinity means that love was at the beginning, so Calvary means to the Christian heart that love is at the end also."⁴⁸

"The Way of the Cross which is the Way of Life," Scudder argues, compels individuals to make sacrifices for the good. Scudder in fact suggest that the very doctrine of the atonement, and thus sacrifice, has throughout history "been a germ of growth, training the selfish peoples to a dim and confused perceptions that no man liveth or dieth to himself, and that there are no depths, spiritual or physical, at which he is powerless to help his brother."⁴⁹ She makes clear that "For those

⁴⁴ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 231.

⁴⁵ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 232.

⁴⁶ Vida Scudder, *Socialism and Character* (Boston: Mifflin Company, 1912), 352.

⁴⁷ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 357.

⁴⁸ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 364.

⁴⁹ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 361.

who can receive it the teaching of the Cross will meet the last needs of the socialized community.”⁵⁰ Herein lies the duty of Christians, and indeed, the church.

Trinitarian Democracy

Scudder was clear that the time had come for democracy to be more fully realized. The key to a realized democracy was trinitarian social relationality, replete with loving sacrifice. Scudder summarized it this way: “The Threefold Name becomes the heavenly prototype of earthly society, as soon as we recognize God to be the Spirit within as well as the Father and the Redeemer; and our Christian duty is plainly seen to be the release and reproduction of the Divine Nature in the corporate life of the race.”⁵¹ Put simply, this would be a society where people act “in unison while forfeiting in no degree the miracle of individual life.”⁵² In the end, she says, the Trinity establishes the “norms” of human and social relationships.

Differences with Maurice

If one were to simply look at both Scudder’s and Maurice’s understanding of the Trinity, one would see no substantial theological difference. This is in large measure due to the fact that they both draw not only upon the Bible, but also upon the creedal tradition of the early church—which is authoritative in the Anglican/Episcopal theological tradition. Nevertheless, their approach to the creeds, and hence the Trinity, are quite different.

As we saw earlier, Maurice was loathe to start from human experience, which he described as “crooked” due to sin. Thus, he approached the Trinity strictly from above, stressing what it revealed about the Godhead. Scudder, on the other hand, enters the Trinity from below. Her starting point is the human doctrine, as it says not only something about God, but also about the evolution of a democratic society. Thus, she emphasizes its practical import and plays down, if not denies, its “mystery” in terms of the Godhead. Moreover, she emphasizes the doctrine of the Trinity as “the chief force which has slowly instilled democracy into the world,” again reflecting

⁵⁰ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 360.

⁵¹ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 233–34.

⁵² Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 352.

a decided perspective from below.⁵³ Scudder's theological approach from below becomes even more obvious in her discussion of the kingdom of God. With this discussion, we can begin to see how the implications for a social engagement from below differs from that of Maurice's approach.

Kingdom of God

To reiterate, while there are many aspects of Scudder's theology that make up her understanding of the kingdom of God, such as her discussion of the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement, for purposes of this discussion I will focus only on her approach to it from below. Indeed, she says that even as our understanding of Jesus comes to us most clearly through the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement, what makes them "distinctive" is the relation they bear to "historic Jesus." Such is the case, as well, for the kingdom of God.

The Historic Jesus

As Scudder speaks of the kingdom of God, she relates it to the historical Jesus, as opposed to the Godhead. While she, like Maurice, affirms Jesus as Christ—God incarnate—she relates her discussion of the kingdom by emphasizing Jesus's ministry and teachings. She says that Jesus was "a man of power, inspired by one permanent relentless purpose which shapes all of his activities of word and deed," the purpose being "the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth."⁵⁴ With this we find a crucial difference between Scudder and Maurice.

With Maurice's focus on what God did in the incarnate reality, his emphasis is on Christ as the embodied kingdom. But with Scudder's focus on the historical Jesus, her emphasis is on how Jesus represented and revealed the kingdom through his actions.

With this emphasis on the historical Jesus, Scudder discusses the reality of the kingdom by looking at the historical context and traditions that shaped Jesus's understanding of it: an understanding, she says, that is enunciated most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. She therefore examines Jesus's "Hebraic background" to fully comprehend the laws/Beatitudes put forward in this sermon. In doing so, she points out that within Hebraic law, there was a fundamental

⁵³ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 225.

⁵⁴ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 374.

“passion for social justice” that stressed “social equality and the protection of the rights of the poor.”⁵⁵ These concerns shaped their notion—and hence Jesus’s—of the kingdom. These concerns reflected both an inward and outward change. However, even though Jesus recognized that spiritual growth was required to sustain and foster the kingdom, the kingdom was about a real, outward change in society. Thus, to interpret the Beatitudes as simply about individual spiritual change would be to miss their core message. “To construe this stress on the personal life into indifference to the social whole,” Scudder explains, “is strangely to misread the Master’s mind. Life in the society he contemplates has its wellspring in the heart; but the waters are to flow forth for the healing of the nations.”⁵⁶ For Scudder, it could not be stressed enough that the kingdom of God was, for Jesus, “no mere phantom nor promise of heavenly consolation for the individual, but a kingdom of effective justice to be possessed on earth by bodily men.”⁵⁷ The incarnation in fact indicated this as it signaled that care of the spiritual is inextricably connected to care of the body.

Yet with that said, Scudder acknowledged that the perfection of the kingdom “is in eternity and not in time.”⁵⁸ But again, it would be a distortion of the truth to suggest that this meant simply waiting for the kingdom to be realized in heaven. Scudder explained that the kingdom required a revolutionary change, and hence, disruption of the status quo. “Jesus and his gospel,” she says, “are a disturbing rather than a conservative force.”⁵⁹ So while she recognized that Jesus spoke, especially in his early teachings, about a more evolutionary process for the emergence of the kingdom, she also pointed out that he made clear that “in a dislocated and imperfect world” a more catastrophic and revolutionary upheaval will usher in the kingdom.⁶⁰ Therefore, even though the goal of history is to reflect the kingdom of God as it is defined by the more harmonious love of the Trinity, unlike Maurice, Scudder recognizes that on the way to that goal, disharmony and disruption must occur. This brings us to the implications of Scudder’s theological approach.

⁵⁵ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 382.

⁵⁶ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 383.

⁵⁷ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 394.

⁵⁸ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 400.

⁵⁹ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 373.

⁶⁰ Scudder, *Socialism and Character*, 390.

Theological Implications

To reiterate, there are many aspects of her theological methodology Scudder shares in common with that of Maurice. As suggested earlier, these commonalities perhaps reflect their shared Anglican heritage. For instance, Scudder values the creeds as a source for relating the truth of the biblical story, as does Maurice. She goes so far as to say that the very liturgical seasons of the church year, “the solemn recurrent rhythms of the Sacred seasons,” as she calls them, “reveal ever new depths of meaning” in regards to the divine mysteries and doctrines of faith, and that “taken together, they are for the Christian the ultimate source of all good theory and the guide to all right social action.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, her approach from below reflects a substantive difference between her and Maurice. This discussion has highlighted the difference in their discussions of the Trinity and the kingdom; what is important to point out now is the difference that their approaches suggest for social engagement.

Scudder’s theological approach from below is characterized by a focus on the historical Jesus and the impact of his kingdom-centered ministry in his context. Scudder recognized the disruptive nature of it, and was not consumed with a concern for unity and harmony over a concern for justice and equality. Consequently, she was not opposed to unions or protest, as Maurice was. Moreover, she had no patience for maintaining any social relationships of inequality, such as the English hierarchies that Maurice upheld.

It is also interesting to note that Scudder was very clear that the way to a just democracy, which meant a socialist society, required a thorough identification with the poor.⁶² Scudder’s approach took her beyond the speculative realities of the doctrines and creeds that both she and Maurice valued. She realized that they were relevant only as they made a difference in history. This meant, as she said, that they had to be understood in relationship to the historical Jesus. Hence, she did not fall into the trap of the creeds themselves: ignoring the ministry of the one who was incarnate.

So what can we glean from our brief look at Maurice and Scudder about Anglican theological methodology when it comes to the call to join the Jesus movement?

⁶¹ Scudder, *Social Teachings of the Christian Year*, 2.

⁶² Scudder, “Hidden Weakness in Our Democracy.”

Conclusion

Anglican theological methodology, inasmuch as it is shaped and informed by the creeds of the church, is decidedly a methodology from above. Such a methodology lends itself, at best, to a passive engagement in social justice issues—that is, an engagement defined by the divine unity and harmony highlighted in the understanding of the Trinity and Christ as *homoousia*. It is no wonder then, that The Episcopal Church has a long history of avoiding positions that may be disruptive to the church or society. The antebellum church’s “neutrality” in terms of slavery, as well as the two Episcopal bishops’ responses to King’s actions in Birmingham, are reflective of a theological approach from above.

There is another aspect shared by Maurice’s and Scudder’s theology that further obscures a concern for matters of racial justice, and is perhaps telling of Anglican theological methodology: neither takes seriously the cross from below, ignoring the meaning of crucifixion within Jesus’s historical context.

In Jesus’s first-century world, crucifixion was the brutal tool of social-political power. It was reserved for slaves, enemy soldiers, and those held in the highest contempt and lowest regard in society. To be crucified was, for the most part, an indication of how worthless and devalued an individual was in the eyes of established power. At the same time, it indicated how much of a threat that person was believed to pose to society. There was, without a doubt, a crucified class of people—those who were castigated and demonized as well as those who defied or disrupted the status quo.

Jesus’s crucifixion revealed his absolute solidarity with the crucified class. To approach the crucifixion from above as simply a divine salvific sacrifice is to miss what it meant for the historical Jesus to empty himself of privilege in order to identify with the crucified people. Jesus fully divested himself of all pretensions to power and privilege, not only in terms of his divinity, but also in terms of who he was as a Jewish male. In doing so, he refused to save himself from crucifixion. It is in recognizing Jesus’s divestment of privilege that the salvation/atonement signified on the cross is about more than what God did through Jesus. Rather, Christians are challenged “to take up their cross and follow Jesus” by divesting *themselves* of any pretensions to privilege that thwart utter solidarity with the crucified class of people in their own day.

That both Maurice and Scudder ignored the meaning of the cross from below no doubt contributed to their inability to address matters of race within their context. In effect, their approach did not lead them to take up the cross and empty themselves of the privilege of whiteness, which allowed them to overlook matters of racial justice. This is most ironic for Scudder, who did recognize the significance of the historical Jesus in compelling identification with the poor. Nevertheless, in overlooking the historicity of the cross, she was not able to overcome the blind spot of her own racial privilege.

Furthermore, the very creeds that were theological sources for both Scudder and Maurice, as well as central to the Anglican/Episcopal theological tradition, also fail to appreciate the historical significance of crucifixion. Instead, the creeds imply that Jesus was born to die, as they completely neglect his ministry.

It is no wonder that The Episcopal Church's relationship to racial justice issues is, at best, ambivalent, for its prevailing theological tradition does not compel one to take up the cross in such a way that compels one to let go of privilege that alienates them from "crucified persons" in their time—which a concern for racial justice requires of a predominantly white church. Put simply, a theological approach from above does not pull the Anglican/Episcopal church beyond the privilege of its "whiteness."

Approaches from the Marginalized

There are, however, Anglican theological approaches that take seriously the historical reality of crucifixion and Jesus's identification with the crucified classes of people in his time. These are theological approaches that begin from the perspectives and experiences of crucified peoples, from those marginalized and oppressed by dehumanizing social injustices. These theologies start with the faith experiences of the oppressed and the ways in which they understand God's revelation and navigate their faith. The voices of the oppressed and marginalized in the Bible, as well as Jesus's relationship to them, are centered in this approach. Such an approach naturally lends itself to an appreciation of the historical significance of crucifixion. Moreover, to engage theology from the vantage point of the marginalized demands identification with crucified persons in one's own context, and thus compels social justice engagement.

It is perhaps no surprise that it is Anglican theologians from racial/ethnic or gender/sexual marginalized communities, such as

Carter Heyward, Patrick Cheng, Kortright Davis, or myself, that employ such a theological approach. Moreover, given the prevailing Anglican/Episcopal theological tradition, it is also no surprise that this theological approach, and the communities from which it emerges, are often marginalized, if not ignored, within the Anglican/Episcopal theological tradition itself.

In light of this, the Presiding Bishop's call for Episcopalians to join the Jesus Movement is fitting. For given the historical influence of a theological approach from above that virtually ignores the historical Jesus, it is astute to call Episcopalians' attention to the Jesus that moved through history. Doing so calls our attention to a movement toward building the beloved community that is the kingdom of God, especially during a time of heightened racial injustice.

In the end, while there is no doubt much more that can be said about the thought of Maurice and Scudder and Anglican theological methodology, what we have learned in this brief essay is that theological methodology matters.