

desiring is aroused as much by programming as it is by advertisements, cutting down on the amount of television you watch is probably a good place to begin. And when you do watch, you should do so with the full awareness that television programmers and advertisers have more to gain if their audiences are not only continually dissatisfied with their lives, but are also looking for novel ways of filling that void.

We might also consider carefully the impact of leafing through the advertising circulars and mail-order catalogs that arrive daily in our mailboxes. How many times have we found ourselves "needing" something immediately after thumbing through these ads and finding out that this or that (previously unnecessary or even unknown) product was "on sale"? I suspect that advertisers are more than happy for us to feel as if we are doing ourselves some favor by buying at a discount something that only minutes before we didn't need at all. Perhaps it would be a small step in the right direction if we determined not to peruse these instruments of desire unless we had already determined what it was that we needed.

□ **Work to expand your and your church's repertoire of stories and songs.** For example, you might commit to reading at least one biography or autobiography each year of a Christian from another era or culture. You might also commit to learning at least one song from a culture other than your own. Rather than judging the song on whether you "like" it or whether it fits your "style," determine to appreciate the song for its ability to communicate something vital about the Christian faith.

□ **How long has it been since you have chosen to have regular and sustained interaction with young children?** If it's been a while, consider volunteering your services to a school, a church or a neighbor. Rather than insisting that the children see the world through your eyes, do your best to see the world through theirs.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)

FOUR

Cultivating Peace in the Midst of Fragmentation

Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit . . . Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (Rom 14:15-17, 19)

For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. (Jas 3:16-18)

Toward the end of my graduate work I interviewed for jobs at several academic institutions around the country. One particular year I had the good fortune of being invited to four campuses for the final round of interviews. Being wanted brought a feeling of exhilaration, and the prospect of actually securing a teaching job after so many years of preparation brought its own sense of excitement. But exhilaration and excitement were only part of the story. While flying to my second interview, I was overcome by a profound sense of cultural vertigo. I realized for the first time that I was about to land in the Midwest for a job interview at a state university, that the following week I would be on the West Coast for an interview at a large Catholic university and that shortly thereafter I would be on my way to an Ivy League institution. Moreover, each of these schools had quite different

expectations. As I began to consider how each of these very different institutions would size me up, it dawned on me that no one at any of these places had the slightest idea who I was. Sure, they had my résumé, but they didn't really know what made me tick. No one at any of these institutions knew what I cared deeply about and the inner convictions that animated my life. Suddenly I realized that I might be better off if I stopped asking, *What will they think of me?* and began to consider a quite different question: *Who would they like me to be?*

This second question structures the lives of many contemporary people. Gone forever are the days when people were in face-to-face relationships with only a small group of people who shared most experiences of life. Instead, the people we live near are rarely the people with whom we work. The people with whom we work are rarely the people with whom we play. And often none of these are the people with whom we worship. And in the electronic age of telephones, faxes and e-mail, we often have contact with countless numbers of people to whom we remain all but anonymous. In short, we regularly find ourselves moving in a dizzying number of settings whose expectations are radically different. The result is often a sense of fragmentation, a disturbing sense that not only our lives but also our very identities are fractured into scores of isolated if not contradictory fragments. How can Christians bear the fruit of peace in a culture that seems to specialize in cultivating fragmentation?

The Character of Peace

Scripture speaks of peace in more encompassing and far richer ways than our common understandings of peace. We tend to define peace primarily in negative terms: as the cessation or absence of conflict. But the concept of peace that pervades Scripture has more positive resonances. Indeed, we would be less likely to mute those resonances if we were to substitute for the word *peace*, the word *wholeness* or even *salvation*. Listen to the prophet Isaiah, who by means of Hebrew parallelism aligns peace and salvation: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says

to Zion, 'Your God reigns' " (Is 52:7; cf. Rom 10:12-15).

The Hebrew concept of peace, or *shalom*, informs both the Old and New Testaments. *Shalom* (or *einenz* in the New Testament) refers to the state of well-being, wholeness and harmony that infuses all of one's relationships. Such a view of peace is inherently social; to be at peace only with oneself is not to experience *shalom* in all its fullness. Perhaps this is why Scripture rarely speaks of peace as a purely mental state, as serenity or "peace of mind." Peace is not something confined within one's psyche; instead, peace is a way of life. In this regard, Scripture more than once speaks of the "way of peace" (Is 59:8; Lk 1:79; Rom 3:17).

Establishing and sustaining wholeness in all one's relationships is no easy thing. To be in right relationship with God and one's fellow creatures one must consistently do what is right, what God desires, what God requires. This is why Scripture again and again connects peace with righteousness:

I will appoint Peace as your overseer
and Righteousness as your taskmaster.

Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise. . . .

Your people shall all be righteous;
they shall possess the land forever.

They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands,
so that I might be glorified. (Is 60:17-18, 21)

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (Ps 85:8-10; cf. Ps 119:165)

If one of the effects of righteousness is peace (Is 32:17; cf. Is 26:2-3) and

"there is no peace for the wicked" (Is 48:22; cf. Is 57:21), then it is easy to see why we are incapable of securing peace ourselves. In our fallen state we are not capable of living righteously before God and our fellow creatures. For this reason Israel came to understand that *shalom* could only be established and sustained by God. Thus the salvation and wholeness that God grants to Israel is grounded in the covenant that God establishes with his people: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed" (Is 54:10; cf. Num 25:12; Ezek 34:25; 37:26).

This theme—that peace, wholeness and salvation come only from God—reverberates throughout the New Testament. The rule or reign of God that Jesus inaugurates is a reign of peace or *wholeness*. Jesus powerfully demonstrates this through his healings and exorcisms, which bring wholeness to those whose lives are shattered and fragmented by illness and bondage. Throughout the gospels people who come in contact with Jesus experience peace, wholeness and salvation. Simeon, upon taking the child Jesus into his arms, praises God for the peace he experiences because his "eyes have seen your salvation" (Lk 2:29-30). To both the woman who washes Jesus' feet and whose sins Jesus forgives (Lk 7:50) and to the woman who reaches out in faith to touch Jesus' garment, he says, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Lk 8:48; Mk 5:34). Finally, in the Gospel of John, Jesus offers his peace to his disciples as a gift: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27; cf. Jn 20:19, 21, 26).

Precisely, the New Testament teaches that our peace with God and one another has been established by God's reconciling work in Christ. This is why Paul can refer to the gospel as the "gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15), to God as "the God of peace" (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; cf. 2 Cor 13:11; Heb 13:20) and to Jesus as "the Lord of peace" (2 Thess 3:16). The Christian good news is that God has reconciled the world in Christ, thereby re-establishing genuine *shalom* between God and the creation. Speaking of Christ, Paul writes, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19-20; cf. Rom 5:1). Yet Paul insists that being reconciled to God brings

wholeness not only to our relationship with God but also to our relationships with others. This is affirmed most powerfully in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where he addresses the way in which the hostility between Jew and Gentile has been abolished in Christ:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. *For he is our peace*, in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, *thus making peace*, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and *proclaimed peace* to you who were far off and to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Eph 2:13-22, emphasis added)

The imagery of the temple is striking. Because of Christ, the Gentiles could no longer be excluded from the people of God or given second-class status by being restricted to the Court of the Gentiles. Rather than being excluded from the central practices of temple worship, the Gentiles had now, because of Christ, become fellow stones with the Jews in that living and holy temple called the church. Whatever hostility had existed before was now abolished in the very body of Christ, which brought them together to form a new and culturally revolutionary dwelling place for God. Out of two peoples whose hostility toward each other was legendary, God had established one new humanity. Here we have what is perhaps the most powerful and moving example in all of Scripture of the connection between peace and wholeness. With such a radical transformation taking place in their midst, it is little wonder that the early Christians began to regard Jesus as the promised "Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6).

If God has established peace by reconciling us both to God and to one

another in Christ, then we must do all we can to embody visibly the unity and harmony that are the hallmarks of our new life of peace. Not surprisingly, this peace is closely allied with love and joyful thanksgiving.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. (Col 3:14-15)

Furthermore, living peaceably requires that we pay attention to the life of Jesus, who refused to participate in the cycle of sin-violence-vengeance-death and who urged his followers to do the same. In words that echo Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Paul offers the following admonition to the Romans:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God. (Rom 12:14-19; cf. Mt 5:38-48)

Perhaps this is also the thrust of the passage from James quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Rather than participating in the cycle of violence, Christians participate in a different cycle made possible by God: peace-righteousness-peace. God's reconciling work brings peace, which enables us to live righteously before God and at peace with one another. So as James suggests, the fruit of righteousness grows when the seed of peace is sown, suggesting that the relationship between peace and righteousness is not strictly a one-way affair. Righteousness leads to peace, but peace also leads to righteousness.

Although peace is first of all a gift from God, it is also something to be pursued. We perhaps understand this seeming paradox best by returning to our horticultural metaphor: God brings growth, but the farmer's work remains crucial. So although Christians are right to affirm that God brings peace and wholeness as a gift, we should never take this to mean that what we do is unimportant. Indeed, Jesus insists that making peace so deeply reflects the character of God that those who do so are called "children of God"

(Mt 5:9). Similarly, Scripture admonishes us to strive for and to pursue peace (Ps 34:14; 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Pet 3:11; 2 Pet 3:14; cf. Rom 14:19).

Pursuing peace and being a peacemaker are lifelong tasks. At present we only experience in part the peace and wholeness of God made possible in Christ. Nevertheless, there is much that we can do to cultivate this peace and wholeness. Paul plainly tells the Philippians where to place their energies if they desire to be drawn ever nearer to the God of peace:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9)

Paul believed that there was much that Christians should "keep on doing" if they expected the God of peace to be with them. Even so, this process of sanctification—of bringing all of us to complete wholeness—is ultimately in God's hands. And we have every reason to believe that God will not be done with us until this work is finished, until we are utterly and completely whole and at peace. Thus Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is apt:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thess 5:23-24)

Obstacles to a Life of Peace

The vision of *shalom* that emerges from the pages of Scripture stands in stark contrast to most of our lives. For most people in the United States life is marked not by peace or wholeness, but by severe and often debilitating fragmentation. The reasons for this are numerous and varied, but much of it stems from the very way in which life in societies like ours is structured. In short, fragmentation is a byproduct of our *politics*. By *politics* I do not mean that relatively narrow realm that we have come to associate with that word, a realm that involves such things as political parties and platforms, periodic elections and the exercise of power through legislation. Instead, I am speaking

of *politics* in its broader and more classical sense, which refers to the myriad ways in which groups of people order their lives together. Although politics in this broader sense certainly includes politics in the narrower sense, the broader sense includes a great deal more.

It takes only a moment's reflection to consider how our daily lives are ordered and enriched by innumerable political agreements we take for granted. For example, most of us think it a good thing that there are rules about which side of the street we may drive on, how fast we may drive through a school zone and what we should do at a red light. Most of us think it a good thing that there are health regulations that pertain to the food we purchase and eat, the airplanes on which we fly, and the buildings in which we work and sleep. Most of us think it a good thing that there is an agreed upon method of determining the time of day, one's account balance at the bank and the legal boundaries of one's property. These and countless other ways in which our lives are ordered are the stuff of politics. Although such political agreements in themselves do not bring us peace or wholeness, they do at least keep some of the chaos at bay, which most of us rightly think is a good thing. But not every feature of our ordered life together is as concrete as red lights or building codes. Equally important to the political order are the unspoken convictions that govern our day-to-day lives. In this respect liberal democratic societies such as ours have their own peculiar characteristics.

This section examines some of the political convictions and their respective practices, virtues and narratives that make the United States what it peculiarly is, especially with a view toward the threats that these pose to the cultivation of Christian peace. This section focuses on convictions not only because these infuse our practices, virtues and narratives but also because these particular convictions are notoriously difficult to articulate.

Dividing the world into public and private spheres. What makes societies like ours *liberal* democratic societies is that their citizens take for granted, regardless of party affiliation, several tenets of classical liberal political philosophy. First, the primary political unit is the *individual*. For societies like ours nothing is considered more fundamental, more bedrock, than the individual person. Second, the role of government is to maximize individual

freedom and autonomy, stepping in only when the exercise of such freedom clearly violates the recognized rights of another. In other words, in societies like ours, governments are justified in curtailing individual freedom and autonomy only when it becomes obvious that failing to intervene would cause greater harm. (This is the justification, for example, for removing children from abusive situations.) And finally, the state is obliged to remain *neutral* on substantive questions about which there is no widespread agreement—such as the purposes of human life and the shape of morality—unless these questions can be articulated in the language of *rights*. Hence, although our society seems to share no agreed upon view of the purposes of human life, we do seem to agree that we should appeal to the language of “rights” whenever we wish to make a strong public claim that harm has been done. (Witness, for example, that both “sides” of the abortion debate routinely appeal to the language of “rights,” whether it be “the right to choose” or the baby’s “right to life.”)

These political assumptions, along with certain cultural assumptions about what counts for genuine knowledge, combine to divide the political landscape into two distinct spheres. One is the public sphere of facts, where widespread agreements in language, cultural habits and purpose make possible the identification of certain things *as* facts. For example, most people would consider it a “fact” that you are reading a book published by InterVarsity Press. However, a number of things must be in place before identifying this as a fact becomes relatively unproblematic. It assumes that you know what a book is, what it is for and the role of publishers in the process. It also assumes that you know how to distinguish a book published by InterVarsity Press from one published by someone else. What makes this fact a “fact,” therefore, is not that it is self-evident to everyone, but that there are agreed upon ways to settle disagreements about it.

Distinct from this public sphere of facts is the private one of opinions, preferences and values. This sphere includes all those aspects of life that we either (1) believe it *unnecessary* to agree about, or (2) *cannot* agree about, likely because we do not have an agreed upon method for adjudicating disagreements. An example of the first type is the vast entertainment and leisure

options available to many people. No method exists for determining which forms of leisure are in principle better than others since most of us think it unnecessary even to entertain the question at all. People are simply free to choose those forms of leisure that they think best for the reasons that they think count. The most relevant example of the second type is the arena we call "religion." Here liberal democratic orders are believed to have made an important contribution to modern political arrangements. Since people cannot agree on so-called "religious" matters, not least because they cannot agree on how to settle disagreements about them, this realm is routinely relegated to the private sphere, where people are free to make their own determinations. This has the obvious advantage of keeping the state from interfering with matters that many people believe are too important to be left in its hands. But there is also an obvious disadvantage: by relegating religion to the private sphere, liberal democratic societies tend to trivialize Christian convictions by encouraging their advocates to view them as little more than private preferences. As a result, abiding differences among different religions and among practitioners of the same religion are often considered on a par with one's personal preferences for certain vegetables. In other words, many people believe that the person who prefers Christianity to Theravada Buddhism is simply making a choice that is roughly akin to preferring green beans to broccoli.

In liberal democratic societies, therefore, most differences within the private realm are considered as little more than matters of personal preference and style. What are some of the consequences of such a political conviction? Perhaps most importantly, dividing our lives into public and private spheres creates an enormous fissure in both our corporate and personal lives. To see the fragmentation that results from this way of dividing up the world, we need only imagine the following scenarios:

□ You are employed at a job that requires you to do things that are legal but which you find less than ethical. You don't like doing them, but you remind yourself frequently that this is part of the job and that you and your family have to eat. Besides, you also know that as soon as you clock out you can go home, get comfortable, plop down in front of the television and "be yourself." Your home is your castle, your haven, where you are most free to be "you."

But if the "public you" at work for forty hours each week isn't the "real (private) you," then who is it? And just as importantly, what is the connection between these different "yous"?

□ You are at the bookstore, video-store or music store. On what basis do you determine what to purchase? How many of us read certain books, watch certain movies, or listen to certain music "in the privacy of our own homes" that we would not be entirely comfortable reading, watching or listening to in the ("public") company of our Christian friends? (I should underscore that the point of this example is *not* to level one more diatribe against certain activities, but to suggest how often we appeal, even if unconsciously, to this division between public and private spheres.)

□ You are having a serious discussion with one of your peers about human sexuality. Once it begins to be apparent that the two of you have deep disagreements, the discussion rapidly deteriorates, with one or both of you trying to deflect criticism by exclaiming, "Well, that's just your opinion!" Both of you realize that this exclamation is not an invitation to further dialogue. The discussion is over, because everyone in our culture recognizes that "people are entitled to their own opinions." Arguing over what people consider to be opinions is as futile as arguing over one's preferred vegetables. We might not like someone else's tastes, but we usually acknowledge that nothing is to be gained by arguing about them. As the old Latin proverb states: *de gustibus non est disputandum* ("There is no disputing about tastes").

This last example illustrates the close connection between the conviction that the world can be divided into public and private spheres and the conviction that people are entitled to their own opinions. Certain public conversations are expected to get nowhere because they involve what are widely believed to be privately held opinions. This conviction is so commonplace that its self-evident nature cloaks its underlying assumptions. The private world is the world of opinions, which are personal and therefore exempt from critique. Because they are exempt from critique, most people assume that one set of opinions is just as good as any other as long as they are sincerely held. This leveling of all opinions ahead of time often appears to make discussion at best frustrating and at worst pointless.

What happens when even our most deeply held convictions are relegated to the status of opinions, preferences or tastes? More often than not this strips them of their power to function *as* convictions, which is nothing less than the power to shape our daily decisions and potentially those of others as well. Moreover, if one crucial feature that makes a community possible and gives it its depth is a sense of shared convictions (and not just shared personal opinions, preferences or tastes), then perhaps the current eclipse of authentic community is partly attributable to our inability to see the important role that convictions play in nurturing and sustaining a common life. If this is true, then paradoxically this shared conviction about opinions does not necessarily draw people together but often divides them by encouraging people to think of their "opinions" as inhabiting their own private and therefore sacrosanct domain. The result is that people come to believe that their convictions, because they are private, are immune from criticism.

My hunch is that many people reading this book will have experienced the deep tension created by holding the above convictions while trying to remain a disciple of Jesus Christ. Most of us realize that being a follower of Jesus has implications for *all* aspects of our lives, not just a few "private" or "religious" ones. But trying to embody such integrity (that is, a fully integrated life) is difficult in a society that cultivates fragmentation rather than the wholeness of *shalom*.

The problem, of course, is not just "out there," that is, in the wider culture. The church itself often contributes to the privatization of our Christian faith. For example, when one speaks of one's "personal relationship with Jesus," one can easily (and often does) mean one's own private relationship. Thus we have personal pan pizzas, personal computers and personal relationships with Jesus. Many Christians seem to believe that having an individual and private relationship with Christ is the bedrock of Christian faith. The church is nice if it helps, but it certainly isn't essential to who I am as a Christian. This may account for why so many self-professed Christians believe they can be perfectly good Christians apart from the church. It may also account for why even those who are part of a congregation admit to being involved primarily as a means of supporting that which is more fundamental: their individual—

and many times private—relationship with Jesus. This also helps to explain why most Christians find the notion of church discipline so incomprehensible. When the issue is broached (a situation that is itself rare and therefore telling), Christians find themselves asking, What *right* does the church have to examine my personal or private relationship with Jesus? Here we see that most Christians have dragged their commitment to political liberalism—with its conviction that the individual is the primary political unit—right into the sanctuary.

Christians have also been more than willing to identify themselves as adherents of a particular religion. But in our culture "religion" defines a sphere that is fundamentally private and personal. Many Christians often reflect this way of thinking, for example, in the way in which they presume that Christianity concerns something called the "spiritual" realm (which certainly sounds like it ought to be invisible), while other, more "material" (and presumably nonspiritual) concerns such as politics and economics, remain peripheral. But we also see this in the way many Christians think about conversion. Most Christians at other times and places believed that disciples of Christ needed to make a public profession of faith. But with the privatization of the Christian faith, people are now often encouraged to pray a silent prayer to themselves (and presumably to God) in order to welcome Jesus into their hearts. No one else need know of this decision; it is strictly a matter between that individual and God.

As significant as the above convictions are in contributing to our sense of fragmentation, they are not the whole picture. We are also daily engaged in numerous political practices that cultivate and embody certain political virtues and narratives, all of which contribute to our plight. Because several of these have been alluded to or assumed in the above discussion, only brief mention is necessary.

Compartmentalizing life. The conditions of modern life have created seemingly autonomous spheres, each with its own rules, its own norms and its own expectations. For example, the rules and norms that govern the workplace are not widely accepted to be the same rules and norms that should shape our family and church life. And because each of us is forced to negotiate

more than one sphere, we find ourselves constantly being pressured to conform to whatever is expected in that sphere. Moreover, in the course of a week or a month many of us find ourselves in a staggering number of different situations, and in many of those our complete anonymity is presumed if not guaranteed. These situations, coupled with our desire for novelty, often entice us to be someone else, to try on a new identity or to engage in what would normally be viewed (by us and those who know us) as uncharacteristic behavior. (It is hardly coincidence that business people who travel widely and regularly often succumb to the temptations of unfaithfulness and deceit.) Finally, rarely do we deal with the same group of people across these spheres or situations. As noted earlier, we often work, commute, live, eat, worship, shop, vacation and pursue common interests or hobbies with quite different sets of people. As a result, it's easy to be a "different" person in each of these spheres.

Within such contexts a premium is placed on cultivating the virtue of plasticity. In other words, in a cultural environment like ours the ability and willingness to adapt fluidly to one's situation appears to pay handsome dividends, especially in the short run (which is, of course, where most of us specialize). In some circles this creation and maintenance of multiple selves and identities has come to be known as "multiphrenia." And although some inhabitants of contemporary societies find this "freedom" exhilarating, others find themselves torn by these fragmented identities.

Such fragmentation does not leave our embodiments of the Christian faith unscathed. To put all of this in more conventional lingo, we might say that even though the variety of plant known as the "Sunday Christian" is not now making its first appearance in the world, the environment in which we live strongly favors such forms of Christian life. Without some attempt to cultivate a different understanding and embodiment of the Christian life, our attempts at discipleship will quite naturally be circumscribed within the arena of private religion, and the power that the Spirit might have to shape our behavior in all areas of life will be effectively dissipated.

Propagating interest-group politics. More than one commentator on contemporary life has observed that our political life is ordered by what is

commonly called "interest-group" politics. Within such a scheme like-minded individuals band together to form lobbying groups that seek to advance legislation that is considered to be in that particular group's best interest. During the past few decades we have seen an enormous proliferation of interest groups like the American Association of Retired Persons, the American Medical Association, the National Rifle Association, the Sierra Club and the Christian Coalition. Such a system is often defended in the same way in which free-market economies are defended, by the so-called invisible hand. The assumption in both is that if each person looks out for his or her own interests, then everyone's interests will be secured. That most of us have been formed to think this way is why politicians often ask us such blatantly self-serving questions as, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" We are rarely, if ever, encouraged to consider what would be good for anyone else, especially if what would be genuinely good for them would require some sacrifice on our part. As a result, "politics" no longer involves the search for the common good, but a competition between warring factions, each bent on securing or protecting its own interests. All of this contributes to the further fragmentation of our lives, both as individuals and as a society.

Because our lives are so fragmented and because we are so accustomed to viewing issues in terms of our own interests, we commonly bring our multiple selves into the church and expect them to be serviced. This often creates strife between factions who see themselves competing for limited resources and attention. Who am I when I gather with others as the body of Christ? Am I primarily a young married man with a family whose utmost concern is to insure that my family's "spiritual" needs are met, even if this means going toe-to-toe with the college group or the retired-person's group? Or am I in some way part of a larger whole where the parts are best understood not as in competition with each other, but as engaged in mutual service for the welfare of the entire body?

Interest-group politics affect not only the way we relate to each other in the church but also the way we think of our relationship to the wider society. Too often Christians function as little more than one more interest group vying for their own interests and agenda. As a result, we find ourselves offering not an alternative vision of how God would have us live together that is rooted

in God's peace or wholeness, but merely a legislative agenda we would like to see advanced that would make us feel more at home in society.

Defending our rights. As suggested above, the primary moral language of contemporary life is that of "rights." For example, we know from our country's founding documents that one of our "inalienable" rights is the pursuit of happiness and that we are free to pursue it as long as we do not violate the recognized rights of others. But such a way of thinking and acting creates a culture of fear and suspicion. In short, the assumption behind "rights" language is that we need to be protected from one another. By encouraging us to view each other as potential threats to our well-being, we inadvertently create a culture that thrives on adversarial relationships. One obvious manifestation of this is our society's current obsession with lawsuits. Such a climate of fear and suspicion cultivates habits of noninvolvement. I know of many people, for example, who will not stop to help a person with a medical emergency for fear of being sued.

The language of rights is likely essential in a society like ours, since it often serves to protect minorities from the will of the majority. Plenty of times in our country's past the language of rights has been an important touchstone in debates about how people should be treated. This has also been the case in the world arena, where disagreements are often deep and seemingly intractable. Given the prevalence of rights language and its usefulness in certain situations, Christians often have a difficult time seeing why the language of rights is not the church's first language. As a result, the language of rights often appears in odd places in our corporate life. For example, many Christians believe they have the right to interpret Scripture in whatever way they see fit. Others believe that they have the right to have their preferred style of music played during worship. Still others believe that they have a right to certain services or church programs. For example, I once heard a group of single adults complain that their rights were violated when the church planned a retreat for married couples without planning a comparable retreat for them. Given that the language of rights is rooted in the notion that people need to be protected from each other, it seems safe to say that when people in the church find themselves appealing to the language of rights, something has gone terribly wrong.

Sanctioning violence. Though the violence that characterizes our culture will be discussed more fully in a later chapter, we might pause here to consider briefly the ways in which fragmentation and suspicion foster violence. Rather than seeing violence primarily as that which occasionally interrupts our otherwise placid lives, perhaps we can see how violence is all but a natural consequence of a context that is characterized by deep-seated fragmentation and suspicion. If something like this is not the case, then how else do we explain our capacity for violence against not only those whom we admit to disliking but also—and even more disturbingly—against those we claim to love? Or asked more bluntly, how is it possible that Christians can abuse their spouses and children on Saturday night and then drive off to church the next morning in their Sunday best as if nothing had happened? It seems to me that several pertinent factors contribute to such a phenomenon. Once I see myself primarily as an individual, once I regard everyone else (including my own family members) as a potential threat to my own well-being, once I am schooled to think of my life as a conglomerate of disconnected spheres of which my Christian faith is only one among many, once I am trained to view any objections to my way of life as merely rooted in somebody else's opinion; and once I am encouraged to regard the wholeness or harmony that people seek as rooted in a view of justice that entails people getting what they deserve; then the way is cleared for me to employ and sanction violence (in any of its various forms) in whatever ways seem most likely to offer me the security and stability that my fragmented life continually denies me.

In sum, there are few voices in contemporary life that would encourage us to try to narrate our lives in any coherent way. Indeed, the most prominent voices seem to be those assuring us that such integration is no longer possible. These stories about the rise of the modern world and about the increasing fragmentation of contemporary life insist that to try to pull together all the fragments of our lives into any kind of whole is a mistake; one simply needs to learn how to dwell in the newly emerging world where the search for fixed and stable identities is understood as a form of pathology. Perhaps those who say this are right. Perhaps it is a mistake to try to pull together all the fragments of our lives into some kind of whole. But Christians, when they have been at

their best, have not told that kind of story. Our story is not one of heroic action taken on our part to salvage our hopelessly fragmented lives. Rather, the good news is that God has stepped in and offered us resources to live in ways that are unthinkable apart from God. The good news is that God has intervened and made it possible for us to live lives that are a foretaste of the wholeness that is promised when God's kingdom comes in all its fullness.

Cultivating Peace

In a culture that aggressively cultivates fragmentation, strife and violence, Christians are in dire need of resources that can be used to cultivate a way of life that more adequately reflects the character of the God to whom our lives bear witness. By the grace of God such resources do exist. Here are some places where we might begin such cultivation.

Incorporating baptism. Reflecting on this central practice may offer the church a valuable resource for countering the drift toward increased fragmentation. In many Christian traditions baptism is understood as a participation in the death of Christ. In baptism we are *all* called to die. The classic passage is found in Paul's letter to the Romans:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. (6:3, 6)

What Paul calls crucifying the "old self," which entails crucifying our sinful desires and ways of life, is necessary whether one has a single "self" or many fragmented selves. According to Paul, this death of our wayward desires makes possible a whole new way of being that the world does not know. As Paul writes to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

But baptism is wrongly understood if it is understood merely as the act of an isolated individual. Rather, baptism involves incorporation into the body of Christ. As such, baptism stands as a sign of a new politics, a new way of ordering our lives together (Gal 3:27-28). Paul reminds the Corinthians: "In

the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). This suggests strongly that it is a mistake to drive a wedge between the body of Christ and its constituent body parts. The body parts are not more fundamental than the body as a whole any more than the body is more fundamental than its parts. You cannot have one without the other; they mutually constitute each other. This is only one important lesson that reflecting on the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ might teach us. Given the rampant individualism that pervades much congregational life, the contemporary church in this country would do well to reflect seriously on this metaphor. For example:

- Bodies are wrongly understood if their parts are considered to be in some way more fundamental than the body itself. The parts exist to serve the well-being of the entire body, a well-being in which each part participates and facilitates to the extent that it looks beyond its own immediate welfare.
- Bodies are wrongly understood if they are regarded as conglomerates of parts that have their own integrity apart from the body. No one would mistake a severed finger on the sidewalk for a body. Such a condition is not only a problem for the part but a problem for the entire body.
- Bodies are wrongly understood if their parts are considered to have unmediated access to the head. Each body part facilitates and participates in vital connections to the head, yet none can sustain this connection to the head alone.

I realize that such statements may make us squirm, for they are a direct challenge to the way many of us have come to view the Christian life. Although a later chapter will discuss the body metaphor at greater length, here we should note that the vision of the church as the body of Christ, with Christ as the head, offers us an extremely potent image that God might use to heal this fragmented body. Such an understanding of our corporate identity might give new urgency to Paul's admonition to make "every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). This leads us to one of the seeming paradoxes of the Christian faith: when we die to self and the desires of the flesh, we live at peace with God and each other. In short, death brings life. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their

minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:5-6).

As a central and abiding practice of the church, baptism is a public and political act that announces to the world our change of allegiance and proclaims to our fellow members our interdependence as members of the one body of Christ. Once such a radically "political" view of the church is in place, several other political practices take on added urgency.

Edifying one another. As the passage from Romans 14 that opens this chapter suggests, Christians are urged to view their freedom in Christ not as a private possession, but as an opportunity to build up the body of Christ. Just as Paul admonishes the Philippians to be like Christ in looking out first of all for the interests of others (2:4-5), so Paul, in his well-known warning about causing a brother or sister to stumble, urges the Romans not to use their freedom as an opportunity for sowing discord and confusion within the church.

Paul's understanding of the church as an alternative *polis*, as an alternative way of ordering social life, also stands behind his instructions to the Corinthians about lawsuits. How is it possible, Paul asks, that Christians would allow their disputes with one another to be judged by the principles and standards of the pagan courts? Such a practice is thinkable, Paul seems to suggest, only if the Christians of Corinth hold in disdain their deep connection with their brothers and sisters in favor of defending their own personal rights and interests. "In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Cor 6:7). Of course, our knee-jerk response to Paul's questions is simple, "Because I've got my rights, that's why not." But to answer in such a fashion is merely to assert that our primary citizenship is in another *polis*, a *polis* where other people are regarded as threats and where one's first task is to safeguard one's own well-being. In contrast, this new *polis* made possible by Christ is one where the well-being of each member of the body of Christ is secured, but not by that member itself. Rather, like any well-functioning body, each member is intimately connected with other members who nurture and sustain it. Only such a body is marked by *shalom*, wholeness and salvation.

Admonishing one another. It is only within the broader political framework of the body of Christ that we dare raise the possibility (let alone the advisability) of mutual admonition. As long as we hold on to the illusion that we are primarily individuals who stand alone before God, attempts by other Christians to admonish or correct us will feel like an unwarranted imposition. "Who are you to admonish me?" we find ourselves saying. "It's none of your business. It's between me and God." Such a view makes perfectly good sense in a society where we have been trained since birth to think of ourselves primarily as individuals. But such a view won't do once we have been incorporated into the body of Christ.

Jesus did not come to bring a cheap peace, nor did Jesus come to turn a blind eye to deep-rooted problems or divisions. Although a cease-fire may be preferable to all-out war, a cease-fire is not peace. Indeed, Jesus clearly states that on one level his coming will not bring peace but division: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three" (Lk 12:51-52; cf. Mt 10:34). Jesus *descries* what we would have liked for him to have said, "My coming has abolished any need for conflict and confrontation. I just want you all to live in harmony, so feel free simply to ignore each other's shortcomings and faults (and your own!) and above everything else, be nice to each other."

A friend of mine has a "lazy eye," that condition where one eye seems to stray a bit, almost as if it had a mind of its own. Although it's a bit unnerving the first time you talk to someone with such a condition, one can only imagine what a ghastly sight it would be if *every* body part had its own agenda, if *every* body part "had a mind of its own." In contrast to such a state we are called to have the mind of Christ, who directs our common activities toward a common purpose. If our common life is to serve as an embodied sign of God's present and coming reign, then the sickness of any body part is a concern of the whole body. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor 12:26).

We all know that the manner in which we offer and receive admonition

makes all the difference in the world. If our attempts at admonition are framed by the reigning politics of our culture, such correction will be offered and received in an adversarial spirit. The one doing the correction will come across as self-righteous and the one receiving the correction will feel rejected. But if our attempts at mutual admonition are framed by the politics of the body of Christ—if we truly believe that we are in this struggle together and that at another time and place the roles of admonisher and admonishee will need to be reversed—then we have reason to hope that God will use our clumsy efforts to bring a greater measure of well-being to the entire body.

Nevertheless, we need to be honest about how difficult it will be for the church to begin engaging in such a practice again. Given the way most of us have been formed by our culture, there is no reason to believe that our experience of being admonished will be anything other than painful and awkward. We're used to going our own way and to assuming that no one will interfere with our lives. With such expectations firmly implanted within us, someone's intervening for the health of the body will inevitably feel like an imposition. At such times we would do well to remember the words of Hebrews: "Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11).

Forgiving one another. The good news that Christians have to tell is this: God is in the process of restoring the created order to a state of harmony and order. This harmony and order, which we might name in many different ways—*shalom*, justice, righteousness—is rooted in God's superabundant grace, a grace we see most clearly in God's gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. This is truly good news! Yet as good as this is, it is only part of the story. God's intent was not that this one divine act of forgiveness would itself magically transform the creation into God's intended paradise. Rather, this supreme act of forgiveness in Christ is the very large rock dropped into the middle of a pond. The resulting ripples are not themselves the rock, but they are inescapable apart from it. In the same way God calls us to extend his forgiveness demonstrated on the cross into all areas of our lives.

This well-known note—that we are called to be forgiving people because

we ourselves have been forgiven—must continually be sounded, for too often we are like the unmerciful servant in Jesus' parable (Mt 18:23-35). Rejoicing that God in Christ has made it possible for *us* not to get what *we* deserve, we immediately rush out and insist that everyone else in the world get what *they* have coming to them. In acting thus we usually commend ourselves for upholding God's justice. But if God's justice, God's *shalom*, God's plan to restore order and harmony to all of creation, has at its very heart God's forgiveness of me, might it not also include God's forgiveness (and my forgiveness?) of those who have wronged me? And if I refuse such forgiveness in the name of justice, is it possible that my view of justice falls short of God's view, where justice, *shalom*, wholeness and salvation are not opposing goals, but different names for God's singular desire?

At the end of the book of Hosea we are offered a powerful vision of God's *shalom*, God's wholeness, God's salvation. Through the prophet Hosea, God calls Israel to turn away from trusting in foreign nations and idols and return to the true God, who alone offers healing and subsequent fruitfulness:

I will heal their disloyalty;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily,
he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.
His shoots shall spread out,
his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.
They shall again live beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish as a garden;
they shall blossom like the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. (Hos 14:4-7)

Reflection Questions and Practical Suggestions

□ Reflect on the ways you experience the distinction between "public" and "private" in your own life. Do you find this a helpful distinction, or does it

create unresolved tensions as you think and live in the world? How does the dominant culture's tendency to place "religion" firmly on the "private" side of the divide affect the way you think about and live out your Christian faith? Are you ever tempted to think that the Christian faith is primarily about "me and Jesus"? Do you see any evidence of how the cultural distinction between "public" and "private" affects your church's understanding of its identity and mission in the world?

☐ Evaluate your own experience of cultural vertigo and fragmentation that are generated by functioning in a dizzying number of different contexts. Do you ever find yourself creating distinctly different personas as you move among these different settings? (When you travel, for example, or when you visit online "chat" rooms?) Do you remember being primarily troubled or exhilarated by such attempts? Do you think that the fragmentation that marks your life contributes to your willingness to respond harshly or violently in some settings while not in others? For example, do you ever find yourself being more violent in "private" settings, such as your home, than you do in more "public" ones? What do you think accounts for this?

☐ Make a list of the different groups of people with whom you regularly associate. In what ways do these groups pull your loyalties and affections in different directions? Are there people in these different groups who know you in more than one setting? For example, do you work with anyone you worship with? Attempt to cultivate at least some friendships that cut across the boundaries that fragment your life. The more people who know you in more than one of these settings, the less you will be tempted to be a "different" person in each of these settings.

☐ Do you think it matters whether the church urges people to make a "public" profession of faith or whether it simply encourages people to accept Jesus into their hearts? What difference do you think these different practices have on the way people conceive of the kind of commitment they are making? If your church does not already do so, consider asking those in authority to make baptisms as public and communal as possible. Rightly understood, baptism is neither a private nor an individual affair.

☐ Think back on those instances in which you have heard "rights"

language crop up in the church. Do you think this language helped to resolve the matter, or do you think it made matters worse? Do you think Christians should ever use this language in their dealings with one another? In other words, if a Christian has a complaint against another Christian, does it make sense to couch that complaint in terms of rights? Can you imagine other settings or situations in which Christians might legitimately appeal to their or another's rights?

☐ Reflect on your previous experiences with admonition and correction in the church. Can you think of examples where such admonition was edifying to yourself or another? Can you think of examples when you or someone else found it harmful? What factors do you believe account for these different outcomes? Try to learn from these experiences as you seek to open yourself once again to mutual admonition and correction.

If the church in our day is to recover the practice of mutual admonition, such a recovery will take place not when certain self-appointed Christians begin correcting those around them, but when Christians who recognize the importance of mutual admonition begin giving each other permission to examine their lives. With this in mind, consider talking to a brother or sister in Christ who knows you well about the importance of mutual admonition, giving them permission to admonish you when they see something in your life that needs attention.

☐ In the same spirit and with a renewed sense of your own frailties and shortcomings, begin to make a list of people from whom you have withheld forgiveness. Our unwillingness to forgive is often rooted as much in our own pride (we don't believe *we* need to be forgiven) as much as it is in our being hurt. With the grace of God and your own sinfulness in view, resolve to offer those on your list the same forgiveness you have received from Christ. Further steps toward reconciliation might include writing these persons a letter asking them to forgive you for withholding from them the grace and forgiveness of Christ.

☐ Finally and above all else, remember that God's ultimate desire is to heal your broken and fragmented life, and to present you whole and complete. God's ultimate desire is to bring peace, reconciliation and wholeness to the

entire created cosmos, of which we are but a small—but nonetheless significant—part. Pray that God will use the church not only as an instrument of that peace but also as a sign and foretaste of the reconciliation made possible in Jesus Christ.

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20)

FIVE

Cultivating Patience in the Midst of Productivity

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom 8:22-25)

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You must also be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (Jas 5:7-11)

It's hard for me to imagine my day apart from the clock. Before we had small children, the squawking of my alarm clock normally ushered in my day. Now our children wake us early each day, yet I still instinctively glance at the clock during my first few conscious moments, responding to some deep impulse I have to know what time it is. I next stumble to the kitchen, help to fix breakfast for the children and myself, quickly peruse the newspaper, and then take up a few small household tasks, all with an eye on the clock and my schedule. I jump in the shower for seven or eight minutes, dress and leave for school. I know that it usually takes me twelve minutes to drive to work and only ten if I'm not impeded by any stop lights or school zones. I'm one of those people who prides myself on being "on time," and so I likely check my watch more than most. I hate to be late, and I'm often irritated by those who