“MORAL USES OF DARK THINGS”:
A DISABILITY STUDIES APPROACH
TO HORACE BUSHNELL

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Using the methodology of disability studies, explores the major works of nineteenth-century Congregational pastor Horace Bushnell, whose home was Hartford, Connecticut. Introduces the nature of disability studies and its relation to religious studies. A biographical section provides context of his works in relation to Bushnell's own disabling condition, and examines changes in his attitudes during the Civil War.

Theological history section explores his theory of language and revelation, which is based on symbolic nature of theological discourse. Bushnell holds that sin introduced corruption and thus disabilities into the world, and they are present in all people, although not always manifest. Disabilities are not the result of specific sins, but of the general condition of humanity. Bushnell views science as discovering laws of God, thus giving humanity new tools to progress and draw closer to God. Bushnell emphasizes the role of society, rejecting individualism. He asserts reality of miracles and their continuation to present day, stating that if they do not occur, it is because of community's lack of faith. Bushnell's ideas of society and progress changed as a result of the Civil War; he was more accepting of human action, and also more despairing of progress.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes. Full citations will be found in the bibliography.

BE. Horace Bushnell, *Building Eras in Religion*.

CHS. Horace Bushnell, *Sermons on Christ and His Salvation*.

CN. Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*.

GIC. Horace Bushnell, *God in Christ*.

MU. Horace Bushnell, *Moral Uses of Dark Things*.

NS. Horace Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*.

SLS. Horace Bushnell, *Sermons on Living Subjects*.

SM. Horace Bushnell, *The Spirit in Man*.

SNL. Horace Bushnell, *Sermons for The New Life*.

VS. Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*.

WP. Horace Bushnell, *Work and Play*.

A note on style: Bushnell and his publishers were not consistent in capitalization. I have used modern standards, except in titles, where I follow the original style. Many of Bushnell's books had lengthy subtitles. These are cited fully in the Bibliography; only the main title is used in the citations.

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Chapter 1

AN UNREMARKED HISTORY

I

Theologian Nancy Eiesland has written that the relationship of church and people with disabilities is "at best an ambiguous one."[1] There is statistical, anecdotal, and theological evidence to support such a statement. A 1977 survey in St. Louis, Missouri, concluded that only 1% of the city's churches were accessible to people with mobility impairments. It also showed that the churches expressed little interest in changing matters.[2] The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandated accessibility in new construction or remodeling, but its provisions do not extend to churches.[3] Thus a survey in the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Kansas City in 1993 noted that most neighborhood bars were accessible, but very few of the churches, and little was being done to change matters.[4] The most recent general survey available, conducted by the National

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[1] Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 20.

[2] Harold H. Wilke, "No Steps to Heaven," *Christian Century* 96 (September 12, 1979), 844.

[3] *Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990*, Public Law 336, 101st Congress, Title III, section 307.

[4] Kathryn Hagen, "How Accessible is Your Church?," *The Leaven*, November 26, 1993.

Organization on Disability in 2000, found that while nearly equal percentages of people with and without disabilities consider their faith to be important, 15% fewer people with disabilities attended services regularly, and attributed the difference to problems with access or attitudes.[5]

Problems of initial access exclude people with disabilities, but this is not the only difficulty. Once one has managed to find an accessible entrance, access may not extend to seating, restrooms, classrooms, or the chancel. Social acceptance is often problematic. Religious traditions have often considered disabilities to be the result of sin, creating an atmosphere that is not conducive to acceptance. Such an atmosphere is multiplied when physical disabilities are presumed to indicate psychological or intellectual shortcomings.[6] An article announcing a conference on accessibility issues in 2005 told the story of a child with a physical disability who was cursed by the pastor's son at one church. Another turned him away because it had "no facilities." At a third, he was treated as incapable of understanding: at age eight, he was placed in the nursery without any cognitive evaluation. Other people recounted similar stories, which included being ignored, excluded from classes or social groups, not receiving pastoral care such as hospital visits or meals delivered while recovering at home, being viewed as inherently

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[5] National Organization on Disability, "Access to Religious Services," July 24, 2001. <http://www.nod.org>, section "Religious Participation," "Religious Participation Facts and Statistics" (accessed 15 July 2005).

[6] Eiesland, *op. cit.*, 20; Wilke, *op. cit.*, 845-846.

inferior spiritually, or presumed to be in need of healing. The writer stated that such treatment was "more common than you might expect."[7]

Beyond physical and social access, leadership roles are often restricted. Few seminaries have even minimal levels of accessibility. Competent graduates with an obvious disability are often unable to find a job. Pastors who became disabled during their service tell of being forced out, and denominational officials tell of congregations which refuse to consider a pastor because of a disability.[8]

Matters are no better in the larger public sphere. People with disabilities have often found that there is "prejudiced behavior in favor . . . of able-bodied members of society."[9] As in churches, these attitudes are sometimes explicit, and sometimes subtle. Media coverage tends to ignore many of these concerns. In late 2004, two television networks refused to air a commercial prepared by the United Church of Christ, claiming that its content was too controversial. The commercial portrayed a "bouncer" in front of a church building, turning away a homosexual couple, people from non-Caucasian ethnic groups, and a person in a wheelchair. In and out of the religious arena, attention focused almost exclusively on the portrayal of the homosexual couple. Not one of the major

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[7] Tina Calabro, "Breaking Down Barriers," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 5, 2005. This writer has experienced situations similar to most of these, both in local congregations and at the hands of seminary students.

[8] Kenneth Briggs, "If Not Throwing Wide, Inching Open Doors to Theological Education," *In Trust* (New Year 2005), 6-9; Wilke, *op. cit.*, 845-846.

[9] Terry Hyland, "Disability and the Moral Point of View," *Disability, Handicap and Society* 2 (1987), 167.

secular or religious news services took any notice that the man in the wheelchair could not have navigated the massive stairs leading to the door.[10]

II

The field of disability studies originated in the mid-1980's. It uses a multi-disciplinary approach, generally with a primary focus in either history or social science. The field has two research goals: to reclaim overlooked history, and to investigate the values which lead to justification of discriminatory treatment. As a practical goal, it hopes to bring awareness of these matters to those who formulate public policy and leaders in other fields, so that the need for change may be addressed.

In this field, the term "disability" is interpreted broadly. The body is the starting point, but cultural norms about the body and its implications are crucial for full understanding.[11] Thus, a definition of disability begins with a medical condition that results in a limitation of either bodily or mental activity.[12] It then extends to social effects. This extension follows the definition used in the Americans with Disabilities Act, which includes not only disabling or health-related conditions that would limit one's participation in various activities, but the perception that other people would consider one to be a person with a disability.[13]

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[10] See Appendix 1 for surveyed media.

[11] Eiesland, *op. cit.*, 22.

[12] Paul Abberley, "The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability," *Disability, Handicap & Society* 2 (1987), 14.

[13] *Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990*, section 3, paragraph 2.

This definition points out that disability is far more than an individual condition. It creates a social category, just as do race, class, and gender. As with all of these categories, the meaning attached to disability or some other difference, especially when it is contrasted with "normality," tells much about social values.[14] In this approach, the various justifications presented for differentiated treatment of people with disabling conditions, as well as the forms of discrimination practiced against them, mirror the experiences of women and various ethnic and racial groups. Observations of these similarities in theory and practice have been the primary source for the analytical constructions applied within the field of disability studies. As part of this investigation of cultural norms, disability studies includes the investigation of why some physical limitations are considered a handicap and others are not, and why such differences lead to stereotypes, misconstructions of identity, and social disadvantages.[15] As an example, in a parallel to observations that the physical distinction encompassed by "sex" is far different from the social status conferred by "gender," disability studies explores the social differences which arise from physical or mental distinctions that are used to characterize disabilities. Such studies show that many ideas about disability have varied through history, and that these ideas are more culturally constructed than often perceived. Religious beliefs are often a significant source of such cultural values. The differentiations ascribed to people with disabilities generally result in adverse discrimination, and this is often based on religious values contrasting divine perfection

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[14] Catherine J. Kudlick, "Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other'," *The American Historical Review* 108 (June 2003), 764-765.

[15] Abberley, *op. cit.*, 5-9, 16-17.

with the mental or physical dysfunction exhibited by a disabling condition. On the other extreme, people with disabilities have, at times, been regarded as especially gifted. This is especially true when a person exhibits a dramatic ability to function "normally" despite his or her condition. Another instance of such treatment often occurs when a person experiences a miraculous cure, and is regarded as blessed or having a gift of divine power. Whichever direction such differentiation takes, these notions are generally constructed in terms of normal or natural against monstrous or deformed, an attitude which tells much about the organization of social structures and religious institutions.[16]

The nineteenth century has received comparatively little attention in the field of disability studies, even though it marks a time of dramatic change in the modern history of many disciplines. In the religious sphere, explanations of the world shifted from a direct supernatural agency to scientific functions. As a result, some religious figures sought to accommodate religious beliefs to science, although their approaches varied greatly. Others held to traditional interpretations and began to speak of a war between science and religion. In American political history, the aftermath of the Civil War resulted in the first systems of public assistance for people with disabilities.[17] Technological developments allowed measurement on an unprecedented scale, thereby opening the way for scientific and pseudoscientific determination of normalcy and

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[16] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 17 (1977), 81-83; Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, *The New Disability History* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 16.

[17] K. Walter Hickel, "Medicine, Bureaucracy and Social Welfare" in Longmore, *op. cit.,* 236.

deviance, and their application to the idea of progress.[18] In medical history, new treatment for disabling conditions gave rise to the beginning of specialized care. This was also a period when adaptive equipment began to be developed.[19]

As this transition took place, many underlying presumptions about disabilities were reexamined. Once thought of a symbol for sin, disability came to be understood as a medical condition. As evolutionary thought brought new ideas about biology, theologians formulated new ideas about the nature of the *imago Dei* and the religious dimensions of the human body. Sometimes these changes included responses to new economic situations. For one example, although religious and social stigmas generally remained, the development of social class transformed disabilities from being a cause for repentance to an "occasion for supererogation" through charitable giving.[20]

In the middle years of the century, Horace Bushnell, a Congregational pastor from Hartford, Connecticut began to suffer from an illness that forced his retirement in 1860. He was well-known locally, largely because of an earlier heresy trial. His travels to various resorts in search of a cure for his illness had increased his range of influence. Retirement provided time to collect and refine his earlier writings and embark on new directions. As improvements in printing technology created a continuing upsurge in the

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[18] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" in Longmore, *op. cit.*, 35; "Disability: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 83.

[19] Brian Woods and Nick Watson, "The social and technological history of wheelchairs," *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* 11(September 2004), 408.

[20] Eiesland, *op. cit.*, 33, 70-72; quotation from 70.

distribution of books and magazines, the man who once complained that many people overrated the press, "as if types of lead and sheets of paper may be the light of the world,"[21] saw his works widely published and became a nationally-known figure. If, as some have claimed, the clergy were truly in decline as a source of information,[22] one would not know it from Bushnell's publishers.

III

A frequent explanation of the discomfort felt by people when confronted with disability is that it engenders fear. The human body is frail, and constantly threatened with the onset of a disabling condition. This is a frightening possibility, so fear and avoidance of any appearances of a disability are natural responses.[23] Coupled with this is a perception of disability as inability or weakness. Such fears and the accompanying perceptions were clearly an issue in the design of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt National Memorial in Washington, D.C., where the first plans did not include a statue of the former president in his wheelchair. By and large, Roosevelt managed to conceal his disability, an effort which he took on because of concern for his public image.[24]

Nearly three-quarters of a century before Roosevelt's prime, how did Bushnell respond to similar concerns? At the very least, he did not avoid these sorts of issues. In

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[21] Horace Bushnell, "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed," *New Englander* 2 (1844), 606.

[22] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 125. Also see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 25-26.

[23] Kudlick, *op. cit.,* 765.

[24] Doug Struck, "Clinton Dedicates Memorial," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1997.

a series of articles for *Hours at Home* in 1867, he wrote of many conditions we would now call disabling, and the following year, published the series as part of the book *Moral Uses of Dark Things*. In it, Bushnell wrote of illnesses and deformities:

> if Christianity squarely confronts any particular point in the moral configuration of the world, it is exactly here. It comes into the world, we may almost say, as a good angel, to look after the disgusts of it, the lunatic ravings, the blind eyes, the halting limbs, the leprosies and sores, the publicans and harlots, and their much dishonored sorrows. This is the true moral beauty, and to this God is training us, by all the revulsions through which we are made to pass.[25]

Bushnell also often wrote about matters that do not deal explicitly with disabilities, but touch on issues that are important to the people who live with them. His approach was not only pastoral. Bushnell had great interest in science and social relationships, and he adopted a similar attitude of confrontation and training as he sought to deal with scientific discovery and the nature of society.

Many conditions that are not often viewed as disabling today were, in Bushnell's time, discussed in terms that we would today consider to be about disability. In the years before and after the Civil War, the nation became engaged in three debates about equality, centering on slavery, suffrage, and immigration. In these debates, opponents cited various flaws and deviations, generally from an ideal male norm, to justify their positions. Proponents responded in kind, claiming that they were not disabled as indicated, and therefore should not be objects of discrimination.[26] Such responses left

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[25] *MU*, 227.

[26] Baynton in Longmore, et al., *op. cit.,* 33-34, 37; also see Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4-5.

open the question of whether society should accept discriminatory treatment. Did Bushnell challenge the idea that discrimination was proper?

Bushnell has been a conundrum to theological historians who have sought a unifying principle in his work. He is hailed as the first voice of liberal theology and yet as an upholder of the Edwardsean tradition. As we examine Bushnell's work in relation to disabilities, one point about this search will become more evident: there is no single key to his thought, but rather what one writer calls a ring of mutually informative themes. It is impossible to fairly characterize Bushnell without considering a wide range of writings.[27] This is especially the case when dealing with disabilities. Bushnell's statements often broke new ground–but they also frequently reinforced existing images, thus continuing the paradox that he represents to theologians and historians. Through all of this, Bushnell sought to develop his own thought in a way that remained open to God at work in a scientific world. He also maintained an almost-mystical goal of knowing God, although the methods he espoused changed dramatically through his life.

To better understand this paradox and reclaim a portion of overlooked history, I want first to set Bushnell's life in its proper historical context. This is not an exhaustive or even complete biography, although I deal at some length with matters related to his illness. I also set the works later referred to in context, and consider how his attitudes changed during the Civil War. In chapter 3, "Sin and Evil," I deal with cosmic structure: language, revelation, the functions of nature and the supernatural, and the nature of good and evil. I then turn to what Benedict Ashley refers to as "desacralization" of the body as

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[27] Glenn Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: a study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 157.

a result of science.[28] This includes the meaning of the Incarnation, and what it indicates about identity and the *imago Dei*. In chapter 4, "Redemption and Reform," I examine Bushnell's understanding of salvation, which leads to his ideas about the function of society, and his notion of progress and the ultimate call of humanity. Chapter 5, "Complementary Truths," is a summary which examines Bushnell's place in the theological spectrum on the basis of disability studies.

[28] Benedict Ashley, O.P., *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree MA: The Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center, 1995), 177.

Chapter 2

MINISTER-AT-LARGE

Horace Bushnell has been best-known from the subtitle of Barbara Cross's biography as a "minister to a changing America."[1] The title fits the man extremely well, especially when one understands "ministry" in its widest meaning, reaching beyond a strictly religious role. Bushnell's writings reflect many of the changes and concerns of his era, for he joined with most intellectuals in studying and writing on a wide variety of topics.[2] His activities included laying out a route for a transcontinental railway, finding a site for a new university, and urban planning as he proposed a new Hartford park and later, the state capitol next to that park. His writings on these topics, as well as theology, are full of classical references, historical citations, scientific observations, and, most of the time, a great amount of the hope for the future that reflected the spirit of his time. With this variety of interests he readily fits the description of "renaissance man."[3] Perhaps because of this diversity, his theological views, while remarkably consistent, do

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[1] Barbara Cross, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), ix.

[2] Daniel Howe, "The Social Science of Horace Bushnell," *Journal of American History* 70 (1983), 305-307.

[3] Randolph Miller, "Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America's Children," *Perkins Journal* 32 (1979), 1.

not fit comfortably into any single school of thought.[4] Although his theology generally affirmed the validity of traditional doctrines, he also challenged traditional interpretation and expression of those doctrines.[5]

Bushnell was born on April 14, 1802 in Bantam, Litchfield County, Connecticut. The family soon moved to nearby New Preston, where his parents continued farming and opened a carding and cloth mill. His childhood was apparently unremarkable. His later writings refer to a strict father who provided an image of a stern deity, and a loving mother who exemplified nurture.[6]

When Horace was sixteen years old, the usual age for a classical education, his parents offered to send him to Yale, but he declined. He attended local schools while working at the family business and farm. In 1821, he joined the Congregational Church in New Preston. As the carding business declined, he decided to attempt to enter Yale, and engaged a tutor. He passed the entrance examination in 1823. Although older than most of the other students, he seemed to fit in well. He was a member of a temperance group, a debate team (of which he held the presidency as a senior), and he took a leading role in the formation of a Beethoven Society. He also irritated the administration by

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[4] Hewitt, *op. cit.*, 125.

[5] David Bos, "Horace Bushnell Through His Interpreters: a Transitional and Formative Figure," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 18 (November 1977), 122-124.

[6] Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, ed., *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 3-5, 32; Cross, *op. cit*., 1; Robert L. Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: a biography of Horace Bushnell* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 9-15; Robert B. Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: a life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 16-26; Theodore Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 4-10.

joining in demonstrations for better food and gymnasium facilities. At one point he also participated in a rebellion over math exams, which resulted in a short expulsion.[7] He later wrote of those years that he "had run to no dissipations" and had been "substituting thought for everything else," leaving a gap between the life of the mind and the religious concerns arising in his heart.[8] The effort to balance mind and heart would be consistent themes of his work.

Upon graduation in 1827, Bushnell taught at Chelsea Grammar School in Norwich, but found this work unsatisfying. In 1828, he became the associate editor at the *Journal of Commerce* in New York City. Bushnell also found this work (as well as the location) not to his liking, and returned to Yale as a law student in 1829. He was soon invited to become a tutor. Near the end of his studies in 1831, a revival came to New Haven. His first reaction was to continue his way of intellectually pondering all angles, thereby resisting the religious fervor. Soon, however, recognizing that his position as a tutor held a great responsibility as an example to his students, he felt a need to reconsider his thoughts on the basis of its effect on daily life. From that examination, he found peace in a God of moral choices and law, one whom his intellect could trust, one who did not require the sacrifice of his reason but could yet have a place in the heart.[9]

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[7] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 21-40; Cross, *op. cit.*, 4; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 19-24; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 36-37; Munger, *op. cit.*, 17.

[8] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 32.

[9] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 47-56; Cross, *op. cit.*, 9-11; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 25-32; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 41-45; Munger, *op. cit.*, 20-25.

Thus Bushnell found his call, and entered Yale Divinity School. Here he encountered a long-running conflict, as the Congregational Church was becoming increasingly polarized between liberal (largely Unitarian) and conservative factions. As Bushnell's career progressed, he often found himself at the center of this conflict, and much of his work was dedicated to efforts that he hoped would resolve the conflict.

Bushnell experienced many times where he found new direction or insight. His writings identify these as a series of points where he found resolution to matters that had troubled him for some time, rather than radical reorientations.[10] One of these points occurred at Yale Divinity School, where he first read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*. Although the book first left Bushnell baffled, he later found three principles in Coleridge which remained pillars throughout his career.[11] The first was to allow doubt to explore itself and thereby find truth. Coleridge states that the process starts in the "clear distinction of good from evil." Truth is found in Christ, and one should search for truth by living a Christ-like life. The second idea that "Christianity is not a theory, nor a speculation, but a life." Its primary requirement is to live "soberly, righteously, and godly" in the world. Speculative questions, such as the origin of evil, have little to do with life, and distract one from rooting out evil from one's own life. The third idea is distinguishing the reason, which deals with moral law and God, from the understanding, which is bound by the senses. Coleridge states that the scriptures must use human

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[10] *BE*, 174-175; *CHS*, 29-30; *CN*, 197, 389; *SNL*, 244.

[11] William A. Johnson, *Nature and the Supernatural in the Theology of Horace Bushnell* (Lund: C W K Gleerup, 1963), 18-19; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 49; H. Shelton Smith, ed., *Horace Bushnell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), *op. cit.*, 27-29.

language to speak to humans. Scripture also contains two kinds of subjects: the first are moral and spiritual. These subjects draw on the feelings and images that they cause for expression. The second subjects are those dealing with things and events; these use descriptions drawn from the senses.[12]

On August 1, 1832, the New Haven West Association licensed Bushnell to preach. He began to teach a Bible class in New Haven. Here he met Mary Apthorp. In February 1833, North Church in Hartford invited him for a six-week trial. At the end of the trial period, the church unanimously offered him a permanent call, and he was ordained on May 22. On September 13, he and Mary were wed.[13]

At this time, Hartford, which had been growing rapidly, was in transition from an ocean port to a center of banking, insurance, and publishing. It was also a city of increasing tension between rich and poor, native and immigrant, and a theological battleground between the upholders of orthodoxy and the Unitarians. North Church was home to many of Hartford's elite, and divided theologically: as a Yale graduate, Bushnell was automatically suspect to about half the congregation. His ability to argue a case, and inspire, if not always unite the congregation, quickly became apparent.[14]

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[12] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection: in the Formation of a Manly Character* (London: George Routledge & Sons, n.d.) XXV, 15; LXXX, 82; CIV, 143; XXXIV, 25; CVIII, 187-188; LI, 59-60. Bushnell did not cite specific passages, but these are representative of the book.

[13] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 65-72; Cross, *op. cit.*, 12-30; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 33-45; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 28-29, 50-51; Munger, *op. cit.*, 33-35.

[14] Cross, *op. cit.*, 32, 39, 53; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 41; Munger, *op. cit.*, 52-53.

Bushnell's first published sermon was "Crisis of the Church," in 1835. The sermon opened with an argument on the need for respect for law and reverence for God. Bushnell then took this beyond a popular level of easy, respectable obedience and piety to criticize the idea of a social order founded on a contract formulated by humans. Bushnell made it clear that he had the United States Constitution in mind, and that as a contract it answered to neither law nor God. Bushnell argued that divine order preceded any covenant written by humans, whether a federal constitution or a church organization. The proper foundation of society ought to be God's truth, not human constructions. He concluded that the distinction of America among the nations was its Congregational inheritance of both democracy and Protestant faith, and that the nation needed to engage its unique destiny so as to produce appropriate results.[15] In the same year, Bushnell first noticed trouble with his throat when speaking; this condition would become more serious over the next several years.[16]

Another theme that Bushnell would develop over the years appeared in his 1837 sermon "Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion," published the following year in the *Quarterly Christian Spectator*. It demonstrates the emergence of a methodology which critiqued the errors of all sides, but found truth in all as well. His examination of revivalism concluded that as commonly practiced, revivals sought quick conversion, not a revival of declining piety. Revivals, used in this way, were not scriptural; therefore, reliance on them abused scriptural precepts. The increasing popularity of revivals

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[15] Horace Bushnell, *Crisis of the Church* (Hartford: Daniel Burgess, 1835); Cross, *op. cit.*, 78; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 51; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 22.

[16] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 75-76; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 67; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 73.

resulted in continuing problems because they used emotional techniques rather than a long-term commitment to gain results. Bushnell concluded that revivalism failed to take into account that conversion is only the beginning of the Christian life, and neglected the ongoing and necessary work of Christian formation.[17]

In January 1839, Bushnell delivered "A Discourse on the Slavery Question." In this sermon, he broached the proposition that although truth is eternal, its perception is subject to changes in human understanding. He drew on this proposition to argue that despite some Biblical permission for slavery, it was an evil practice. At one time, when humans were more barbaric, it was allowed, but in a progressing society such as his own, it had no rightful place. As practiced in the American south, it denied the humanity of the slave, and corrupted the slave-owner. Then Bushnell attacked organized anti-slavery efforts as based on emotion rather than fact, creating alienation, and, worst of all, as an attempt to force God's action.[18]

Later in the year, Bushnell traveled to Saratoga Springs for treatment of his throat condition. In September, he delivered the address "Revelation" to the Porter Rhetorical Society of Andover. This essay deals with the nature of language and its use in divine revelation. Bushnell stated that humans know God because God seeks us. However, finite minds cannot comprehend the divine nature, so God must use symbols in this

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[17] Horace Bushnell, "Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion" in *BE*, 150-175; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 24. The sermon was later included in *Views of Christian Nurture* and *Building Eras in Religion*.

[18] Horace Bushnell, *Discourse on the slavery question: delivered in the North Church, Hartford, Thursday evening, January 10, 1839* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany, 1839, microfiche reprint, Louisville: Lost Cause Press, 1962); Edwards; *op. cit.*, 51.

process. Humans must use these symbols as a clue to seek the truth which they represent.[19]

In 1840, Bushnell published the sermon "American Politics" in *The American National Preacher*. It is based on John 19.12, a portion of the account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Bushnell's first claim is that preoccupation with political life was leading Americans to ignore the Gospel and divine law, a trend that would lead to moral degradation. He then took up two threads that would return in later works: that politics was generally corrupt (it was politicians, seeking popular approval, who crucified Jesus), and that women belong in the home (the hero of the trial was Pilate's wife, who, in the purity of the home, gave good advice to her husband, which he ignored). Finally, Bushnell added that democracy is not an especially blessed form of government.[20]

At this time, Bushnell also began to travel more frequently to various health resorts. Generally, on these trips, he delivered lectures. As he became more widely-known, he received many offers, such as the presidency of Middlebury College (which he ultimately declined), and honorary degrees, such as a D.D. from Wesleyan College.[21]

Bushnell began to pursue a new cause in 1841, the Protestant League. This group sought to counter Roman Catholic influence by bringing Protestants into a common front.

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[19] Horace Bushnell, "Revelation," in David L. Smith, ed., *Horace Bushnell: Selected Writings on Language, Religion, and American Culture* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 29-31; James Duke, *Horace Bushnell On the Vitality of Biblical Language* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 18-19; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 59-67.

[20] Horace Bushnell, "American Politics," *The American National Preacher* 14 (December 1840), 189-204; Munger, *op. cit.*, 59-60.

[21] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 98-106; Cross, *op. cit.*, 80-83; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 57.

The effort included finding unity in Christ, which meant leaving creeds behind. Bushnell approved; he perceived creeds and doctrinal statements as divisive efforts to maintain a particular set of beliefs which were, at best, part of the truth.

Around this time Bushnell began to further explore the contrast of permanent principle against transitory forms. This interest apparently arose from his ideas about perception of truth and the nature of revelation. In "Growth of Law," an address to the Yale alumni association, he focused on the development of ethical standards, which are based on underlying principles springing from eternal law. This contrast of present against eternal allowed for changes in external and social standards while upholding underlying principles.[22] A similar point of eternal principle also appeared that year in the essay "Taste and Fashion," in which Bushnell distinguished taste as reflecting God's love of beauty, leading closer to divine life and knowledge, from the antics of fashion, which is driven by greedy status-seeking and leads to personal and social corruption.[23]

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[22] *WP*, 78-101; Cheney, *op. cit.*, 106-107; Cross, *op. cit.*, 81.

[23] Horace Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," *New Englander* 1 (April 1843), 153-168. Bushnell also stated that taste is available to all of humanity, regardless of social status. When coupled with statements such as that people who are "careful to appear before God in a well-chosen, modest, and appropriate dress" will avoid "barbarous improprieties" (*CN*, 139), or that outer neatness reflects good spiritual practices (*CN*, 288), some have found Bushnell to be the leader of a theology of taste among the wealthy (Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* [New York: Vintage Books, 1993], 327-330). It is true that such statements often appeal to those who have sufficient wealth to acquire "tasteful" objects, but Bushnell's insistence that social status was irrelevant, although sometimes regarded as a chestnut, should be taken more seriously, for he strenuously objected to abuses such as excess (*CN*, 291-293). Here, as in many places, Bushnell was likely to have offended the wealthy (at least if they were listening carefully) more than the poor, for he added that taste requires proper character. The well-off were more likely to be lacking such character, for they have not struggled and thereby learned the ways of God.

"Politics Under the Law of God" in 1844 marked Bushnell's last foray into that area for a decade. He began by noting the tendency of members of a group to yield their beliefs to the group without considering morality or other principles. This, he stated, was exactly the case with adherents of American political parties, and the result was rapidly declining morality. One example was the Missouri Compromise, which he stated was not based on human freedom or moral values, but maintaining a balance of power. Likewise, Native Americans had been removed from their land without regard to justice. Divine judgment would be forthcoming if the nation did not repent.[24] Other 1844 writings include "The Great Time-Keeper," wherein Bushnell reminds one of the classical Puritan preacher, exploring the "moral uses" of days and seasons which mark the passage of time as a reminder of one's need for moral growth in the light of approaching eternity.[25] Also published in the same year, "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed" examined the family as an organic unit with the power to bring about Christian development. In this piece, Bushnell also protested the tendency toward reliance on external forms, including revival conversions, in place of an active spiritual life. The article later became a chapter in *Views of Christian Nurture*.[26]

That winter, Bushnell's throat irritation recurred, accompanied by coughing spells, and his health did not improve until spring of 1845. In hopes of recovery, North

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[24] Horace Bushnell, *Politics under the Law of God* (Hartford: Edwin Hunt, 1844); Cheney, *op. cit.*, 109; Cross, *op. cit.*, 80; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 63-65.

[25] Horace Bushnell, "The Great Time-Keeper," *American National Preacher* 18 (January 1844), 1-9.

[26] Horace Bushnell, "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed," 600-619.

Church paid his expenses for a trip Europe, and he departed on July 1. On board, he wrote and preached the sermon "The Moral Uses of the Sea," discussing the ocean as a symbol of the depth and power of God.[27] He landed at Falmouth on July 21. His initial tours included the United Kingdom and the continent; the last three months were based in London. Among other activities, he met leaders of the Protestant Alliance, but Bushnell lost interest in the group when its activities turned toward creedal statements. He left London in April 1846, and landed in Manhattan on June 2.[28]

A request to preach about baptism in 1838 resulted in the book *Discourses on Christian Nurture*, published in 1847. This book is best known for its proposition that one can grow up Christian, and never know a time when one was not a Christian. This caused a storm of protest among conservative Calvinists who saw such ideas as undermining the doctrine of human depravity and need for regeneration. The book's publisher, the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, quickly withdrew it. Bushnell then added a defense and self-published the result as *Views of Christian Nurture and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto*.[29]

No less important, but overshadowed by growing controversy over nurture, was the speech "Barbarism the First Danger." This was a plea for the Home Missionary Society to redeem the West from a linked trio of evils: slavery, Catholicism, and

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[27] *MU*, 344-360; Cheney, *op. cit.*, 112-114; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 67-69; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 70-73.

[28] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 172-173; Cross, *op. cit.*, 82; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 76-79; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 88-89.

[29] Cross, *op. cit.*, 61; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 87-88; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 117-120; Munger, *op. cit.*, 67, 91-93.

barbarism. In it, Bushnell argued that rapid settlement was dangerous, for the area lacked the proper foundations and structures of social order. Unless there was a tremendous effort by church and state to establish true religion (understood as Protestantism) and education, decline would be inevitable and rapid. The lack of proper guidance and rapid immigration also opened the door to the dangers of "Romanism" and the expansion of slavery. The church needed to mobilize its effort so that the new lands would be formed in a foundation of faith, thereby preventing these dangers from becoming reality. The church also needed to exercise vigilance in settled areas. In a concluding critique that reached beyond dangers of geographical growth, Bushnell singled out superstition, valuing appearance over duty, replacing taste with gaudiness, and acting as if expense equals godliness as opening the door to increased corruption of society.[30]

The year 1848 marked another turning point in Bushnell's life. He entered the year engaged in a period of introspection. In this atmosphere, he wrote the article "Christian Comprehensiveness," which argues that no single theological statement can fully express complete truth. One needs a poetic, analogical approach to understanding truth. Divisions, he argued, are the result of defending literalistic propositions, which are at best partial truth.[31] Shortly after, Bushnell awoke one morning saying that he had seen the light of the Gospel, and gained a sense of faith and the freedom of God. From this, he

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[30] Horace Bushnell, *Barbarism the first Danger: A Discourse for Home Missions* (New York: William Osborn, 1847); Cross, *op. cit.*, 82; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 153-160; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 104-150.

[31] Horace Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," *The New Englander* 6 (1848), 81-111; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 29; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 102-103; H. S. Smith, *op. cit.*, 38.

saw the key to spiritual life as the indwelling of Christ, with the new life of Christ found not only in morality, but also in building new character through discipleship.[32]

Bushnell shared and developed these insights when he was invited to deliver that year's commencement addresses at Harvard, Yale, and Andover. At Harvard, the "Discourse on Atonement" spoke of the power of sacrifice as found in poetic images, not dogma. In it, Bushnell appealed to both sides of theological controversy to widen their view and blend truths from all sides. At Yale, in "Discourse on Dogma and Spirit," he stated that Jesus was divine and human, but that traditional theological formulations obscured proper understanding of the meaning of this doctrine. He then turned to the problem of language, which must be symbolic and embrace mystery when speaking of God. A few days later he delivered "Work and Play" at Harvard, defining "work" as activity for an end, and "play" when activity is an end, in free spontaneity, which is the true nature of faith at its best. At Andover, "Dogma and Spirit" explored how, in Bushnell's view, theologians had diluted the power of the divine spirit by their efforts to create logical and rational propositions, and called for a new sense of spirit in Christian life.[33]

With some revisions, Bushnell published these commencement lectures in February 1849 as *God in Christ*. The book opened with a "Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language," an expansion of the 1839 address "Revelation." In it, Bushnell

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[32] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 192; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 96-98; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 129; Munger, *op. cit.*, 113.

[33] "Work and Play" became the lead chapter of the book *WP*, published in 1864. Edwards, *op. cit.*, 101-108; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 132-141; Munger, *op. cit.*, 115.

argued that theological language must be understood metaphorically, and that Scripture is not a series of propositions but God's effort to inspire humans by means of poetic inspiration. Bushnell was already a target of suspicion from conservatives because of his perceived denial of the doctrines of depravity and degeneration from *Christian Nurture*. Thus, it was no surprise that controversy again erupted. The Fairfield West Consociation sought a heresy trial, stating that Bushnell's ideas of incarnation, the Trinity, and atonement contained "fundamental errors" and were not consistent with Christian faith. Bushnell's Hartford Consociation investigated, and ruled the book "peculiar," but stated that it did not contain any fundamental error, leaving no cause for a trial.[34]

This marked the beginning of five years of dispute, as Fairfield West continued to seek charges against Bushnell, and also against the Hartford association for harboring him by refusing to convict him. Bushnell's legal training came in useful as the case made its way to the state association. As the proceedings continued, Bushnell published *Christ in Theology* in 1851 in self defense. In the end, the state association continued to allow local groups their freedom and autonomy. North Church also withdrew from the Hartford consociation.[35]

Bushnell also found time in 1851 to travel to his hometown of Litchfield for its centennial observation. For this event, he composed "The Age of Homespun." Although the speech is sometimes cited as a celebration of the old ways of agrarian economy and joys of farm life, Bushnell concluded that new technology and organizations have made

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[34] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 225-226; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 121-124; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 163-165.

[35] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 234-237; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 125-131; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 166-170.

the world a better place on the whole, and that he looked forward to continuing the trend.[36]

As the heresy case pressed on, Bushnell delivered the lecture "Revealed Religion" at Harvard in 1852; this later became part of *Nature and the Supernatural*. His health again began to decline; he now reported being awakened by coughing at night.[37] The following year marked the twentieth anniversary of his ministry. His sermon reflects the strains of the time, as well as his ongoing search to understand a God who was beyond human expression:

> The effect of my preaching never was to overthrow one school and set up the other; but, as far as theology is concerned, it was to comprehend, if possible, the truth contended for in both. . . . and the main question appeared for a long time to be, not what I was teaching, but on which side I was . . . .[38]

Bushnell was not alone in experiencing outrage over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854, and this goaded him to return to political involvement. In his Good Friday sermon, "The Northern Iron," he declared that the North had given in for too long on slavery. The reason for this, in his view, was that northerners lacked principle: their greatest interest was how much money they could accrue. Instead of this, they needed to stand for moral values. Otherwise, they would resemble politicians such as Pontius Pilate, who

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[36] Horace Bushnell, *The Age of Homespun : a discourse delivered at Litchfield, Conn., on the occasion of the centennial celebration, 1851* (N.p. [1851]); Cheney, *op. cit.*, 234-261; Cross, *op. cit.*, 94; Douglas, *op. cit.*, 60; Edwards, *op. cit.*,109-135; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 143-179; Munger, *op. cit.*, 142-153.

[37] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 257-265; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 117.

[38] "Twentieth Anniversary," in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 280-281.

was always willing to compromise his principles for popularity.[39] Bushnell also began a crusade for a city park, later named for him. Such parks were becoming a popular response to industrialization as leaders sought ways to promote social and civic virtue, as well as good health.[40]

The effort to establish a city park is one example of Bushnell's activity in the face of an increasingly troublesome physical ailment that would soon result in his retirement from the pulpit. Bushnell first recorded in 1835 that he experienced throat problems. His response was a climbing trip of Mount Washington.[41] This was the first of several journeys for his health. As he traveled more and more frequently to these resorts, he lectured and wrote. The exposure from his lectures and books developed a wider audience than he had in Hartford and made his ideas better-known to an inquiring public. As noted, in 1852 his health began to decline more precipitously, and in December 1854, he was forced to take two months off.[42] At this time, he traveled to Minnesota, stopping by Oberlin on the way.[43]

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[39] Horace Bushnell, *The Northern Iron: A Discourse delivered in the North Church, Hartford, on the Annual State Fast, April 14, 1854* (Hartford: E. Hunt and Son, 1854).

[40] Edwards, *op. cit.*, 172-179; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 182-183; on the parks movement, see Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (New York: Holt, 1992), 1-36.

[41] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 75-76.

[42] Horace Bushnell, *The Northern Iron* (Hartford: Edwin Hunt and Son, 1854); Edwards, *op. cit.*, 161-179; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 36-37; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 180-181.

[43] Mullin, *op. cit.*, 180-181.

Edwards diagnoses Bushnell's condition as tuberculosis.[44] This is a reasonable conclusion, and reflects Bushnell's own diagnosis. The disease was usually referred to at the time as "consumption" because it seemed to consume the victim; it was sometimes called the "indoor disease" because it most frequently struck those who lived in cities and stayed inside. The most common form was tuberculosis of the lungs; it was epidemic in New England, ranking as the most common cause of disease-related death in Bushnell's lifetime. The disease manifests in an initial primary infection and later reactivations. The symptoms include persistent dry coughing for several weeks and spitting up blood; there are often periods of spontaneous remission. Until the bacillus which caused it was discovered by Robert Koch in 1882, susceptibility to tuberculosis was thought to be hereditary, with the manifestation brought on by stress resulting from too much study and a lack of exercise. The symptoms of cough and remission fits well with Bushnell's ailments, and his regimen of travel and mountain climbing also fits the typical prescription of exercise in cold, dry air.[45]

Contrary to Ann Douglas's assertion that Bushnell, among other ministers of the era placed "relatively little value on sheer bodily energy, and increasingly assumed a conjunction between their profession and poor health,"[46] Bushnell pursued outdoor activities with great vigor. He also actively struggled with depression when he could not

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[44] Edwards, *op. cit.*, 3.

[45] S. W. Abbott, "The Decrease of Consumption in New England," *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 9 (1904); Norbert Hirschhorn, "Was it Tuberculosis? Another Glimpse of Emily Dickinson's Health," *New England Quarterly* 72 (1999), 103-108, 116.

[46] Douglas, *op. cit.*, 104.

engage in preaching. As he developed his theological and practical response to his condition, he expressed a sense of hopefulness mixed with a sense of individual challenge.

By adapting to the printed word, and lectures at resorts, Bushnell was able to remain incredibly productive. As he did this, Bushnell wrote and spoke about his own condition in more detail than ever before. Much of this occurred in his letters, but many of his lectures and sermons also contained autobiographical allusions. This fit with a developing literary direction. The middle of the nineteenth century marked the first widespread writings by people who identified themselves as living with chronic illnesses and disabilities. These works were generally about their own conditions, and sought to show that such people were essentially no different from any other people. Ascertaining that any of these writers were consciously aware of being part of a movement is difficult. All the same, Bushnell's writings show a new awareness of himself as a person who, although limited in activity, was not fundamentally different from others. His writings are also congruent with the pattern of this literary framework that pictured people with disabilities as suffering beings who struggled to live with the afflictions given them by God.[47]

As early as 1845, Bushnell wrote: "Is it possible, I said for the first time, that I am to be the victim of consumption?" As he continued to write, he referred to the struggle he felt about his family, work, sin, and feeling distant from society. Then he related that he found "at least some degree of rest" in God, whom, he concluded, would always be

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[47] Klages, *op. cit.*, 146-147.

with him.[48] The next year, Bushnell wrote to his wife that "to live is to run a kind of gauntlet" of confronting and being strengthened by such events.[49]

For some time, Bushnell held out hope for a cure for his ailment,[50] but late in 1852, he stated that he was not "quite as clear of my enemy as I thought I was," although he continued to express hope for recovery. Then, continuing to show a change in the confidence which had characterized much of his earlier correspondence, he wrote that his mind was "more clouded than it should be." He added that he suffered from discouragement and depression, thereby finding himself unable to show the joy that faith ought to display. He felt that it was a sign of unfaithfulness that he allowed "a little touch of infirmity" to do this; if God sent such a condition, he should accept it freely and trust God.[51]

After this point, Bushnell's correspondence dropped off dramatically. His daughter noted that his few letters bore the "marks of preoccupation and ill-health."[52] Two letters to his good friend, Rev. Amos Chesebrough, make this clear. In the first, he opened stating "I am very much exhausted, depressed," noting that this condition left him unable to work. He felt that it was odd that God, who was "clearing me, in a manner so conspicuous," would also injure his "force and spirit." All the same, he looked forward

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[48] Journal, September, 1845, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 127.

[49] Letter, November 30, 1846, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 177.

[50] Letter, August 1852, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 266.

[51] Letter, September 15, 1852, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 266-267.

[52] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 322.

to eventual "triumph."[53] A few months later, he wrote to the same man, starting with a request for patience in the delays occasioned by his illness. In the last eight weeks, he added, he could preach only twice. He was considering another trip for his health, and added that his condition had disappointed him, for it "cuts me out . . . from all my plans and works," with the result that he was left a "wreck, a waif,–one of the vestiges of creation." He concluded that God had some good end in mind, probably a "lesson of grace" which he particularly needed.[54]

In April 1855, after a lengthy flare-up of symptoms, Bushnell took another trip for recuperation, this time southward along the east coast and then to Cuba.[55] In the early days of the trip, Bushnell wrote to his wife that he felt more and more that "I must give up my will and my plans," and that he was beginning to "rejoice" in such a need, for God would become closer and "establish me in the health of my soul" as that happened.[56] However, the inner turmoil continued, for shortly thereafter he wrote that he was often "greatly discouraged" and engaged in a struggle with God and his symptoms. He concluded that perhaps nothing but faith would cure him.[57] About a month later, he wrote from Cuba to his congregation, stating that he was "sorely baffled" by his inability to recover. He added that there was no foreseeable hope that he would be able to work

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[53] Letter, April 20, 1854, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 326.

[54] Letter, December 15, 1854, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 345.

[55] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 347; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 167-179; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 182-183.

[56] Letter, January 30, 1855, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 348.

[57] Letter, March 4, 1855, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 352-353.

that year, if ever, and concluded that it was a great struggle for him to write such words.[58] It seems that Bushnell had met with a problem of popular theology: having apparently done everything right, he found that God and the world did not wish to cooperate in his well-being. As we will see, Bushnell later expressed great sympathy with those who found at themselves at odds with the sort of popular wisdom that offered a common, easy explanation and prescription for all evils. Shortly thereafter, he wrote to his wife, apparently finding a new source of strength: he stated that different things must be done in these days, and the new inspiration from God will be more mature and "of a higher quality."[59] Although he had often written of the need for personal discipline, his writings now often spoke of a personal struggle, a point which seemed to become a source of theological renewal during the Civil War.

Bushnell's health recovered late in 1855, and in 1856, he journeyed to California by means of the new Panama railroad. While there, he preached an ordination sermon, which emphasized the need for religion as the foundation of any government. He was also offered, but refused, the presidency of the College of California. He did engage in fund raising and site surveys for this institution.[60]

Bushnell returned in January 1857, suffering from a cold, although his health had generally been good in California. When a financial panic hit Hartford later in the year, Bushnell delivered a sermon to business leaders offering direction. It seems an

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[58] Letter, April 3, 1855, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 354-355.

[59] Letter, April 21, 1855, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 361.

[60] Cheney, *op. cit.*, 365; Edwards, *op. cit.*,183-196.

autobiographical reference that he opened with a statement that there was little use in fighting disease or disaster. One should wait out the fury of such storms. He then urged his hearers to hold to faith and integrity, saying this event would shake out the less honest. He also stated that the leaders had an obligation to help the less fortunate, including their former employees, who were left with nothing.[61]

In 1858, Bushnell published the book *Sermons for the New Life*, a representative collection of twenty-three sermons that emphasized divine regeneration and the need for human ethical life. The publication of this book presented many to a faithful, conscientious pastor, not the nearly-heretical controversial figure portrayed in more sensational writings. In the same year, he finished the book *Nature and the Supernatural*, which he had begun in 1856. This book set out to rebut a "new infidelity" which, in Bushnell's view, sought to make a religion of science. To him, such an effort would be a complete failure, for science is limited to investigation of the natural sphere, and it is unable to understand the supernatural sphere. The natural and supernatural are complementary, and both must be understood in order to gain full knowledge of the cosmos.[62]

The year ended with the return of health problems, which caused Bushnell to resign his position in April 1859. In his departure sermon, he stated that "the hand of God is upon me," and that "I have struggled long with this dark necessity." He added that his

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[61] Horace Bushnell, "A Week-Day Sermon to the Business Men of Hartford, " in *SM*, 120-133; Cheney, *op. cit.*, 406-411; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 200-201; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 190-194.

[62] *NS*, 4-7, Edwards, *op. cit.*, 202–209; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 38-39; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 195-207.

greatest fault was not taking care of his own body, thereby wearing himself out. Displaying some of his old optimism, he stated that although he would probably never be able to accept another call, there was some hope for a "fractional ministry" of the press.[63] This "fractional" ministry turned out to be a tremendously successful (and timely) adaptation to his condition.

With a lump sum pension gift of $10,000 from the congregation, Bushnell traveled to Minnesota for about a year, then spent the summer at Clifton Springs.[64] On Thanksgiving 1860, he delivered "The Census and Slavery" at the Clifton Springs chapel. In this sermon, he argued that slavery would inevitably come to an end, for the plantation system could not survive in a competitive market. Abolitionist agitation accomplished nothing positive; the proper course of action would be to limit the expansion of slavery and let it die out, following God's plan. At the same time, one must campaign against the moral ills of slavery, for God calls upon humans to progress in their moral state. While at Clifton Springs, he also completed the final revision of *Views of Christian Nurture*, published in 1861 as *Christian Nurture*. He also wrote *The Character of Jesus*, which was included in later editions of *Nature and the Supernatural*. In 1861, Bushnell outlined a book project on the nature of God's kingdom and the meaning of the Atonement. It would detail how Christ fulfilled the law of sacrifice, and its realization in believers as an expression of God's exorbitant love. The result, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*,

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[63] Horace Bushnell, *Parting Words: a discourse delivered in the North Church, Hartford, July 3, 1859* (Hartford: L. E. Hunt, 1859), 9-11.

[64] Bushnell's salary had been set at $1200 at his call, and raised to $1500 in 1845. Cheney, *op. cit.*, 74, 112. His writings do not reveal any further figures, but apparently writing and lectures generated more than "fractional" income.

was not completed until 1866,[65] and it appears that the intervening years greatly affected that work.

After the April 1861 attack on Fort Sumter sent shock waves through the North, Bushnell left Clifton Springs for Hartford. There was a general feeling that the war would be short and result in an easy Union victory. In July, the first battle of Bull Run attracted crowds as if it were a picnic. The suffering and loss left people dazed.

The outbreak and early events of the war seemed to provide Bushnell with a renewed sense of purpose and a new focal point for his theology. America's destiny as part of the divine plan had long engaged Bushnell's thought. He believed that God intended America to be a great nation that would be an example to the world, and had endowed the nation with an ideally located vast land, suited to vigorous action, along with a well-suited population stock that would suit this purpose. As a new nation, it was not troubled by the encrustation of traditions such as nobility; thereby it could hear and respond to God's call alone.[66] This fit with Bushnell's ideas that God had a goal of renewing the world by spreading Christianity to all the earth, starting with a godly nation that could grow and then reach out to the world.[67] Bushnell's 1847 speech "Barbarism the First Danger" reflected early concerns about failing to heed this call. He had also

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[65] Horace Bushnell, *The Census and Slavery: A Thanksgiving Discourse* (Hartford: Lucius E. Hunt, 1860); Cheney, *op. cit.*, 423-440; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 210-219; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 208-218.

[66] Horace Bushnell, "The True Wealth or Weal of Nations," in David Smith, *op. cit.*, 153-154.

[67] *CN*, 37.

written frequently of the problems resulting from moral compromise in concessions made to the South, without regard for morality, in hope of maintaining the Union.[68]

Now another great threat to the divinely-ordained mission was occurring. As with many intellectuals, Bushnell struggled to come to grips with the unprecedented destruction and suffering which were quickly becoming evident. Bushnell found meaning and purpose in religious renewal.[69]

Bushnell had written earlier that war was the work of "barbarians," and the "bane . . . of all social order and virtue."[70] After the first battle of Bull Run, he began to speak differently: in "Reverses Needed," a sermon presenting a theological history explaining the reasons for such a disaster, he stated that "adversity kills only where there is weakness to be killed," and that this adversity would feed "real vigor." This was as true of the physical body as it was of faith, morality, and politics. Later in the same sermon, he stated that "peace will do for angels, but war is God's ordinance for sinners, and they want the schooling of it often."[71] The lesson of this particular war, which all needed to grasp, was to be found in an opportunity to correct Thomas Jefferson's error. The nation had committed a colossal mistake by presuming to write a constitution that drew its

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[68] Bushnell, *The Northern Iron*, 7-9; see also Howard Barnes, *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic* (Metuchen and London: American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1991), 51-52.

[69] George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80.

[70] Bushnell, "Barbarism the First Danger," 27.

[71] Horace Bushnell, *Reverses Needed: A discourse delivered on the Sunday after the Disaster of Bull Run* (Hartford: L. E. Hunt, 1861), 5, 24.

authority from natural order and social contracts, one which did not acknowledge divine providence. Now the nation had an opportunity to learn proper loyalty, which began with adherence to divine law and order; for these form the only true basis of government.[72]

The war was disruptive, but much business and family life continued in the North. In 1863, Bushnell published the collections *Work and Play*, largely a collection of older material, such as "The Age of Homespun," and *Sermons on Christ and His Salvation*. Some of the sermons touch on moral progress or sacrifice, but there is nothing explicit about the war. In the same year, his daughter Mary, who was later his biographer, married Frank Cheney.[73]

In 1863 Bushnell wrote the article "The Doctrine of Loyalty," which continued his effort to find meaning to the war in religious renewal. He argued that loyalty is not a legal definition, for the idea is older than any legislation. Rather, it consists of attitudes and resulting acts done willingly out of a sense of honor. One example is volunteering to risk one's life for the nation. This leads to a higher dimension, for religion is the noblest form of loyalty. Therefore, those who have died in battle were martyrs for God's cause. When the war is concluded, the nation will be stronger, for it will be "God's own nation," equipped with the strongest possible moral foundation.[74]

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[72] Bushnell, *Reverses Needed*, 8-14; Howard Barnes, "The Idea That Caused a War: Horace Bushnell versus Thomas Jefferson," *Journal of Church and State* 16 (1974), 73-83.

[73] Edwards, *op. cit.*, 242-243.

[74] Horace Bushnell, "The Doctrine of Loyalty," *New Englander* 22 (July 1863), 560-581, quote on 581.

Bushnell also continued to adapt to his physical circumstances. He wrote to a friend in 1864 referring to "my broken industry," in which he was using the press "according to the ability left me" to work in a "ministry at large."[75]

As the war continued, Bushnell made it clearer what he had in mind when he spoke of loyalty. His 1864 Thanksgiving address, "Popular Government by Divine Right," advocated a constitutional amendment that would acknowledge the divine origin of proper governmental authority. Providing this proper foundation was the cause for which soldiers had sacrificed, which bathed battlefields in "rivers of blood." Bushnell apparently concluded that nothing less than a sacrifice like that of Calvary would set things right, as he drew from Biblical imagery by asking "Without this shedding of blood, how could the violated order be sanctified?"[76]

In July 1865, Bushnell delivered the speech "Our Obligations to the Dead" at a memorial for Yale graduates who had died in the war. This provided the opportunity to urge completion of the religious task of the war by establishing divine law as the nation's principle. The speech contains frequent images paralleling the sacrifice of Christ to that of the soldiers. He called for the nation to care for the children and widows of slain soldiers. Finally, he spoke of an obligation to remove slavery in all of its forms. This required every person to give gentle and understanding consideration to the former slaves, and to assert their identity as human beings.[77]

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[75] Letter, June 10, 1864, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 471-472.

[76] "Popular Government by Divine Right," in *BE*, 287, quote from 316-317.

[77] "Our Obligations to the Dead," in *BE*, 325-353; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 234-237; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 219-226.

Bushnell's own struggles with chronic illness and theological controversy seem to have mixed and been prodded by the nation's war ordeal to produce a conviction that suffering was a learning and tempering experience. Bushnell had often written of the necessity of social interaction, the power of personal struggles against evil, and the essence of Christianity as an ethical life, but after the war he devoted more interest to the aspect of struggle and suffering. This can be seen in *The Vicarious Sacrifice,* which Bushnell had begun shortly before the start of the war, but did not publish until 1866. In this book, he placed Christ's sacrifice as part of a universal obligation: humans, who have the same ethical nature as God, are also called to suffer. The sacrifice of Calvary was not a penalty, and neither is our own sacrifice. Rather, they are examples of love and sharing. When others witness these events, they are drawn from the sickness of their soul to a healthy relationship with God, and healed. Thus, without undermining divine law, the Cross changes the hearts of humans.[78]

Three articles from the same year show continued development of Bushnell's ethical thought. "The Natural History of the Yaguey Family" drew from his trip to Cuba. In this article, Bushnell described a tree which sprouts amid the forks of another and gradually grows around its host, killing it. This growth provided Bushnell with a reflection: nature satirizes humans, for many people live in a similar manner, plundering society. Thieves do this, of course, but then Bushnell engaged in one of his extensions: the leaders of industry also act in this way. They steal from their employees by paying them as little as possible, with no regard to basic needs such as food and shelter.

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[78] Barnes, *op. cit.*, 103-104; Cross, *op. cit.*, 138-147; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 245-251; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 226-231; *VS*, 242-244.

Businessmen who arrange the laws of the land to their convenience are thieves as much as anyone who breaks into some premises. They should stop manipulating markets and be satisfied with a reasonable profit, he stated.[79] In the same month, "Religious Nature and Religious Character" was published in another magazine. This article explores the difference of having a religious nature or feeling, compared to a religious life which seeks and finds God. Here, Bushnell protested the tendency to think that good sentiments or outward forms make one a good Christian; he then emphasized the need for regeneration and a life that practices Christian virtues.[80] The third, "How to Make a Right and Ripe Old Age," extends the values of *Christian Nurture* into adulthood. It is in old age that the value of early training becomes especially important, for good habits derived from thorough grounding in faith during one's youth are often the best checks against peevishness. Bushnell also claimed that pious habits would restrain dementia, allowing full use of one's remaining strength as the body deteriorated.[81]

In 1867, North Church relocated, changing its name to Park Church. Bushnell delivered the dedication sermon, "Building Eras in Religion." In this address, he claimed that because the greatest human works are religious, churches should build great buildings. But this is only the beginning of possibilities, for "the world is but an egg unhatched as yet." The great problem of humanity, he stated, is that we have come to

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[79] Horace Bushnell, "Natural History of the Yaguey Family," *Hours at Home* 2 (March 1866), 413-418.

[80] Horace Bushnell, "Religious Nature and Religious Character," *Monthly Religious Magazine* 35 (March 1866), 156-169.

[81] Horace Bushnell, "How to make a ripe and right old age," *Hours at Home* 4 (December 1866), 106-112.

lose the possibility of envisioning greater things–not only in architecture, but in all human endeavor.[82]

Throughout the rest of the year, Bushnell composed a series of articles that sought to provide a positive view, or at least explain God's use of, the painful or puzzling elements in life. The series was completed in 1868; later in that year it was republished, along with his 1845 shipboard sermon on the sea and an 1849 sermon on pestilence, as the book *Moral Uses of Dark Things*.[83] The book's often-repeated thesis is summarized in the 1849 sermon: "all events have some definite use or meaning, which is the reason of their existence. They take place, not merely *by* causes but *for* causes . . . always for moral ends . . . ."[84] This book is rarely listed among Bushnell's more important works, an omission which leads to a distorted view of his thought. When it is mentioned, it is often viewed as quaint. In some respects, it is quaint: Bushnell's thoughts on race and heredity are at the least outdated, and often offensive to the modern mind. However, its principles – which are what Bushnell sought to understand in other writers and especially the Bible – are directed to openness and investigation of matters most people would rather not discuss. Bushnell was one of the few writers of his age to take up theological questions raised by the presence of evil and bring them to a level of practical teaching. In the course of the book, he addressed (among others) suffering, discrimination, and social

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[82] "Building Eras in Religion," in *BE*, 9-32, quote on 19; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 243.

[83] Edwards, *op. cit.*, 255.

[84] *MU*, 232.

inequity. He also showed a strong interest in applying scientific knowledge to such questions as a way of better understanding the Biblical record.

Also in 1868 he wrote the article "Science and Religion," which sought to establish that religion precedes and is prerequisite to science. Bushnell noted that bad religion has fostered bad science (he used polytheism and alchemy as examples). The role of science is to discover and apply divine law. To a concerned audience, he wrote that too many Christians worry about points where science and religion are thought to conflict. True science, however, cannot conflict with true religion. Scripture is not a book of science, but a record intended to give impressions to the religious imagination. Many of Scripture's observations that touch on science have, therefore, been wrongly interpreted. As an example, the six days of Genesis are frames for understanding time and God's work in time, not a calendar. The article concludes with a critique of Darwin, based not on scriptural conflict but scientific problems.[85]

In the following year, Bushnell continued his attack on Darwin in "Progress," which also critiques the secular idea of progress as an idol. The article draws from *Nature and the Supernatural* to extend the argument that God must direct the creation.[86] Another article, "Our Gospel, a Gift to the Imagination," also drew from an earlier work, this time the language essay of *God in Christ*, outlining the tenets of language, then continuing with practical implications: if the Gospel is about faith, it cannot be dogma,

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[85] Horace Bushnell, "Science and Religion," *Putnam's Magazine* 1 (March 1868), 265-275; Thomas Thigpen, "On the Origin of Theses: an exploration of Horace Bushnell's rejection of Darwinism," *Church History* 57 (December 1988), 499-513.

[86] Horace Bushnell, "Progress," *Hours at Home* 8 (January 1869), 197-210.

for the two use language differently. Faith speaks of imagination and metaphor, whereas dogma is literal, like mathematics.[87]

As the fledgling women's suffrage movement rebounded after the war, gaining more and more attention, Bushnell turned his attention to the cause. His 1869 book *Women's Suffrage: the reform against nature* seemed (apart from the title) to speak at first in favor of women's rights, allowing that they should be educated and could work in some professions, such as medicine. He also admitted that men had often treated women unjustly. With these statements, Bushnell went far beyond what most men would allow or admit. Then he then turned to women's role as mothers, which included their "natural" work of guarding the home and raising upright children. From the requirements of this role, which demanded the utmost purity, Bushnell concluded that women needed to be kept away from the corrupt and vulgar world of business and political involvement. Never one to overlook an opportunity on other themes, he also stated that even men had no inherent right to vote, and seemed to have little confidence in democracy. The book created an uproar, even after Bushnell later stated that he wanted to revise it.[88]

In 1870-1871, Bushnell wrote a short series for the *Advance* about prayer. He also continued his civic interests, planning a water system for Hartford, and then through 1872 finding and promoting a site for a single capital for the state.[89]

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[87] "Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination," in *BE*, 249-252.

[88] Horace Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage: the reform against nature* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869); Edwards, *op. cit.*, 260-266; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 242-248.

[89] Edwards, *op. cit.*, 270-273.

Bushnell also continued writing. In 1872, *Sermons on Living Subjects* appeared. It is a collection focused on the Christian life. His physical problems continued to increase. By 1873 Bushnell seemed to have only one working lung. His last complete book, *Forgiveness and Law*, appeared in 1874. Here he continued the theme of atonement, with an emphasis on reconciliation. Forgiveness, he stated, is not just forgetting but an act of identification with an offender, which is what God did in Christ.[90]

On January 22, 1875, Bushnell began a book dealing with the Holy Spirit, titled *Inspiration: Its Modes and Uses, Whether as Related to Character, Revelation, or Action*. He completed thirty pages, wherein he argued that the ability to respond to the Spirit is the one characteristic which distinguishes humans. He also noted that this response could be to welcome or to resist God's leading. After completing this much, he became seriously ill and unable to work. The city park he worked to establish and design was named for him on February 15, 1876, and he died two days later.[91]

Three of his works were published posthumously: *The Vicarious Sacrifice* was enlarged with the inclusion of *Forgiveness and Law*, and the whole published in 1877. In 1881, *Building Eras in Religion* appeared. This book contained several of his later speeches and articles, along with a letter to Pope Gregory from 1846. The fragment on inspiration was included in *The Spirit in Man*, published in 1903 with several miscellaneous sermons and a collection of sayings.

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[90] Cross, *op. cit.*, 151-153; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 275-279; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 242-248.

[91] Cross, *op. cit.*, 154-155; Edwards, *op. cit.*, 286-288; Mullin, *op. cit.*, 248.

Chapter 3

SIN AND EVIL

"I do not undertake to be orthodox, but to be more sufficiently and scripturally true."[1]

Theodore Munger wrote that his mentor Bushnell was "pre-eminently a preacher," and not a "technical theologian."[2] Thus, there is no formal systematic statement in Bushnell's writings. Much of his writing consists of sermons and articles written for specific occasions or audiences. Even when he sought to offer a detailed explanation of a subject, as in *Nature and the Supernatural* or his later series on atonement, he approached matters more in the spirit of offering guidance for living a practical Christian life to parishioners than setting out a systematic statement. As a result, Bushnell sometimes had little to say about things that one might like to know more about. For this study that is especially true for the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, an area where many theologians display their deepest insights on the nature of the earthly body.

The attitude of the preacher at work can also be found in an article written by Bushnell's friend Amos Chesebrough. He noted that Bushnell had three distinctive qualities: imaginative insight, willingness to explore as he sought truth, and a "soul-full"

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[1] *VS*, 16.

[2] Munger, *op. cit.*, 275.

of love.[3] In seeking to understand Bushnell's work, it is necessary to keep these qualities in mind. Many of his writings are expansions or explanations of topics covered in some earlier piece. Bushnell's advice was often pointed to specific situations. In all cases, a precise explanation of truth is elusive, so later writings often explore new images or applications. One must also not confuse principles with specifics. All of these factors may result in seeming contradictions in some of his writings. However, Bushnell is consistent in the basic points of faith and life, particularly when one allows for development and response to challenges. Another source of problems in interpretation is that, to Bushnell, the truth is often hard to understand or accept. He had a great desire not to overwhelm his audience. Therefore, when he expressed pessimism or despair, it was often tempered, for Bushnell's desire was to encourage his parish or readers.

I

Underlying Bushnell's accomplishments is a theory of language. Although Bushnell is generally better-known for his ideas of education and development expressed in *Christian Nurture*, his writings on language deserve more attention. They are often overlooked because he was not a linguist, and therefore they do not fit the technical aspects of that field. However, as theological statements, they serve to open a new world of possibilities. For the student of theology, his ideas about language are not only a statement about communication, but a reflection of his ideas of the structure of the cosmos. Bushnell's interest in language and cosmic structure developed from his desire to devise a system of communication that would express what he saw as the truth that

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[3] Amos Chesebrough, "The theological opinions of Horace Bushnell as related to his character and Christian experience," *Andover Review* 6 (August 1886), 114-118.

was present in various sides of theological arguments, even when such statements appeared to conflict. His interest was not in forging a compromise among factions, rather, he sought to open the mind of his hearers to unseen realities whose expression lies beyond the linguistic ability of humans, and thereby open a path to unity in a diverse world.[4] This theory is Bushnell's unique synthesis of several currents of thought in his day.[5] One of his major sources is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whose writings he first became acquainted at Yale Divinity School. Coleridge wrote that the scriptures use two kinds of language, spiritual and object-related.[6] Another source was a series of discussions with John Morell, whom he met while in England in 1846. Morell drew on Schleiermacher to propose that religion stood outside of the intellectual region, and therefore revelation was presented to one's intuition. Thus, theology is representational discourse.[7] As Bushnell's ideas about language reach beyond the empirical realm, they also deal with the question of how religious discourse is able to express truths in a scientific age. He concluded that theological statements are part of humanity's imaginative or poetic nature, and thus express realities that are above science.[8]

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[4] David L. Smith, *Symbolism and Growth: The Religious Thought of Horace Bushnell* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 113-115; Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Volume 1, 1799-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 258-259.

[5] Donald A. Crosby, *Horace Bushnell's Theory of Language: In the Context of Other Nineteenth-Century Philosophies of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 10.

[6] Coleridge, *op. cit.* LI, 59-60.

[7] Mullin, *op. cit.*, 97-98.

[8] Crosby, *op. cit.*, 30; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 49-50.

The most complete statement of Bushnell's theory is contained in the "Preliminary Dissertation" of *God in Christ*. *Christ in Theology* is Bushnell's defense against the charges raised by critics of *God in Christ*, and contains some further explanations, although it focuses more on theology than language. The 1869 essay "Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination" offers a shorter explanation of the use of language and deals with the practical pastoral implications of the theory. Several sermons and essays contain shorter references.

Bushnell posits that there are two "departments" or uses and types of language, the literal and the figurative. The literal department originates with the names of natural objects, such as a lamb. These names are not necessarily an exact representation, for they are names of generic types, not individuals. Even as generic names they represent sense impressions more than the object itself, for any given lamb is not the same as another, and an attempt to define any one of them as identifying the whole would be impossible. Thus, even physical matters can be misrepresented by language.[9] The "intellectual" or figurative department is about ideas and spiritual matters. In this sphere, words fill a "representational office":[10] they are used to give clues to the real meaning. Although these words are based on the names used for things, they are not names, and should not be taken literally, for they are images of ideas, intended to spur thought. This thought is interpretive, and requires the guidance of faith to be understood. Christ is referred to as the "lamb of God," but Christ was not a lamb. We ought to understand this

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[9] *BE*, 252; *GIC*, 24, 43; also see Crosby, *op. cit.*, 23-24; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 52; Welch, *op. cit.*, 1:260.

[10] *MU*, 222.

as a metaphor, drawn from the old system of sacrifice, which served to introduce the image, making it suitable as a vehicle for higher truth, wherein we come to grasp that an innocent creature gives up its life to sustain ours.[11]

Because each person has varying experiences and thinks differently, the words used in the intellectual-figurative realm will have differing meanings to each person's imagination; thus truth can be stated in a variety of ways, depending on one's perspective. Varying expressions also arise from human nature and senses, which are means of perceptions that are always changing. Bushnell therefore argued that theological discourse is experiential. Since theological expression is so personal, it cannot be rigid and dogmatic if it is to be true to its own nature. According to Bushnell, the greatest problem in theology is a general failure to appreciate these limitations and differences in language and their effect on expression. As an example, Bushnell maintains that the will is not bound by any law; however, many people fall into habits of expression or behavior and act without thinking of the possibilities available to them. As we observe these patterns, we derive a way of speaking about this condition in terms that imply a mechanical response to stimuli, and from such speech patterns, we often think of the will as bound.[12] In the case cited, the will is bound, but it is also a condition which one can avoid by actively engaging the will.

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[11] *GIC*, 24, 45-46, 80-82, 261-263; *MU*, 222, "Our Gospel a gift to the imagination," in *BE*, 252, 263; also see Crosby, *op. cit.*, 27; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 51-52; Welch, *op. cit.*, 260.

[12] *GIC*, 11, 40, 55, 79-81; Welch, *op. cit.*, 262.

Since there are so many variations in expression, creeds and doctrine should not be "pressed to the letter," but ought to prod one into action. Bushnell states that one should embrace many creeds, thus avoiding dogmatism and recitation of words which have lost their meaning. His example here is the phrase "same in substance" of the Trinity. In affirming this phrase, we do not mean to state that God has substance as do humans, but many people are misled.[13]

In making such statements, Bushnell stated that there is an absolute ground of truth, although it is not within the ability of humans to grasp or express it fully. Truth requires a form of expression, which is like a mirror. This mirror reflects not only truth, but also our own angle of view. If one does not realize the possibilities which arise from the existence of these varieties of expression, the result is defending matters of opinion and propositions which, at their roots, are disputes over nonexistent differences.[14] Instead of defending propositions, Bushnell felt that one should search for better expressions of truth. In his own life, he remarked that he found it necessary at times to revise his works because "truth appears to be outgrowing my published expositions."[15]

Humans begin to discern truth through revelation, in which God seeks to communicate the divine nature to humanity. Bushnell allows for limited natural revelation, for the entire cosmos is like a book written by God, wherein all of the details, and its beauty, point to the author. However, the world is insufficient on its own to

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[13] *GIC*, 82-83.

[14] Bushnell, "Revelation," in David Smith, *op. cit.*, 29-30.

[15] *VS*, 11.

explain God, especially God's goodness, for that goodness reaches beyond all natural categories.[16]

Because natural revelation is limited, further revelation is needed. We already understand from the world that God is infinite, while humans are finite. Therefore, God must effect a revelation in terms which humans can grasp. The primary, but not exclusive, mode of this special revelation is Scripture. Aware of the limitations of language, we understand that Scripture and other sources of special revelation exhibit the truth of God, although we cannot grasp the ultimate nature and reality of God. Thus, proper understanding of this revelation begins with an exercise of faith, in which humans use their intelligence to apprehend the forms used to exhibit the truth, and to progress toward such understanding as is possible.[17] When humans begin to understand special revelation, there are two effects. First, we understand the reality of our sinful situation, a situation we prefer to deny. Therefore such revelation is "piercing and fearful."[18] Second, realizing our position, we are presented with the possibility of a life of Christian faith, which we ought to welcome, but are not forced to. One reason a person may not welcome this possibility is that he misinterprets it; this is often the case when he has previously been confronted with dogmatic assertions, a condition which leads to misunderstanding faith and the nature of God's invitation. Bushnell states that dogma is, by its nature, opposed to faith. Dogma is intended to be unchanging and to present literal

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[16] *BE*, 38; *MU*, 119, 289.

[17] Bushnell, "Revelation," 29-30.

[18] *CHS*, 418.

interpretations of revelation. Faith, however, must respond to the changes and conditions of life. The gospel does not argue dogma, but presents lives of faith in action, and challenges each hearer to follow Christ in a life of trust and service. Revelation is a mystery, presented to us in these living forms so that we may discern the existence of a reality that informs our faith. One of Bushnell's favorite examples of the difference is the Trinity. To him, the Trinity is a metaphor for the varied forms of divine action in the world. When we turn from this understanding to seeking a literal explanation of the "persons," we fall into tritheism.[19]

The departments of language and the consequent nature of revelation are rooted in the physical and spiritual structure of the universe. Bushnell's understanding of the cosmic structure and the role of God and humans therein is expounded at length in *Nature and the Supernatural*. A shorter explanation, with more details about the nature of "wills" or "powers," was included in his 1869 article "Progress."

In Bushnell's explanation, the universe is an expression of divine life. Therefore, although "one cosmic whole,"[20] it is divided into natural and supernatural spheres. Both must be understood in order to gain full knowledge. Nature is a created realm, and operates according to immutable laws. These laws produce a fixed response to causes exerted on the world. The supernatural is the realm where "wills" or "powers" act as causes on the natural realm. Wills are creative forces which are independent of cause in their operation. Although the effect of any given cause is fixed by natural law, wills can

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[19] *CIT*, 13; "Our Gospel a gift to the imagination," *BE,* 249-252, 264-276.

[20] *NS*, 37, 43.

act upon nature in new ways. The results will thereby be new, although they will still follow natural law.[21]

As one would expect, God is part of the supernatural realm. God is thus able to act on nature using new causes, thereby creating something new. This creation is not disruptive because the effect follows naturally in accordance with natural law. God is therefore "expressed" in nature, but not "measured by" it. God is also separate from nature, for otherwise God could not be the creator.[22]

There is another actor in the supernatural realm: humanity. Human self-awareness shows that our own actions are not the result of cause and effect. Humans are also creative, for they build houses, write books, and so forth. All of these actions are the acts of a will upon natural causes to create things which nature could not otherwise bring about. Humans can also act against God, by not following God's will and doing what they desire. As we will explore later, this type of action is opposed to God's order, and is the essence of sin. The result of this contrary action is disruption of the order created by God. As will be explored later, among the signs of this disorder resulting from sin are moral and physical degeneration, including disabilities.[23]

II

Christianity is a supernatural occurrence in Bushnell's understanding of the cosmos. In Christ, God acted on nature. The causes which this action created resulted in

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[21] Bushnell, "Progress," 206; *NS*, 3-7, 24-25, 36-42, 67-70, 238.

[22] *NS*, 52, 58, 69; "Progress," 207.

[23] *NS*, 32, 51, 87, 156-157, 476-477.

effects which nature alone could never produce–in particular, the regeneration of humanity.[24] The great distinction of Christianity in the world's religions is that in Christ, God was revealed directly on earth. Therefore the Incarnation, the Christian teaching that God became a human being and lived on earth, is the supreme example of the workings and relation of nature and the supernatural. From the viewpoint of disability studies, the doctrine opens the door to asking questions about the value of the human body and one's attitude to it. These include how one should treat the body as a physical entity, and whether embodiment is a divine gift to be treasured, or an inferior mode of being (and thus a hindrance to Christian life) from which one ought to seek release.[25]

The doctrine of Incarnation has frequently been the source of a great deal of theological friction. To Bushnell, this friction resulted from the attempts of various groups to explain how such an event could occur, and attempts to determine in detail what this meant when believers confessed to Jesus being both God and man. Working from the implications of his theory of language, Bushnell concluded that the fine points of classical theology are misleading. To him, because the qualities of Christ are unique, they are also incomprehensible and inexpressible. To attempt a detailed statement of his nature is distracting, and leads to various opinions. Each of these opinions is only part of the truth, yet is defended as if it were the complete truth, instead of being understood as complementary.[26] Bushnell therefore protested classical formulations of the Trinity as

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[24] *NS*, 30.

[25] Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus, 1979), 32.

[26] Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," 389, 393-395; *CIT*, 64-65.

efforts to transform God into an object of "mere human understanding." The result of this was the formulation of difficult-to-understand statements based on concepts which few, if any, have ever understood. These problems were multiplied by attempts to explain these concepts, leading to an accumulation of "rubbish" as time progressed.[27] Bushnell's practical and poetic approach argued that the doctrine of Trinity should open us to a wider understanding of God, especially an understanding that God exists "in terms of society and personal mutuality with us."[28]

Bushnell followed classical teaching that Christ must be divine to have the power to regenerate us, and must also be human to relate to us.[29] To Bushnell, this meant that in Christ, God both transcends human understanding and is yet in personal relation.[30] The deepest meaning of the Incarnation is that Christ was able to manifest God by acting through a body. Christ was not simply a better person, but a different person, with capabilities that reached beyond those of humanity. As the manifestation of God, he presented a "pure ideal" of "beauty, truth, and love."[31] He possessed a "superhuman intelligence" that was able to discern beyond human categories. Thus he never held a "one-sided" view of any matter, and as a result, his reforms reached all aspects of human

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[27] *GIC*, 129; also see *CIT*, 117.

[28] *BE*, 109-110, 117.

[29] *BE*, 126.

[30] *CHS*, 142; *CIT*, 137; also see Letter, December 11, 1852, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 277.

[31] *GIC*, 122-127.

need. With such a set of abilities and views, he was able to do everything according to the truth, without compromise.[32]

There were limitations to Christ's ability to express truth and be understood. Even though he was a perfect being, this manifestation of God was accomplished in finite conditions of earthly life and using earthly media.[33] So the body imposes limitations by its finite nature, but is not in itself a hindrance to attaining a spiritual life. Bushnell's discussion of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost offers further understanding of this idea. It was necessary for Jesus to leave earth in order to move beyond the limitations of incarnation, which required him to be in only one place and to work by teaching and miracles.[34]

Bushnell also noted that Jesus was not a "fastidious" Savior who refused to deal with bodies. By ministering to bodily needs, he claimed a "kinship of bodies." It is through bodies that we find our consciousness of suffering, knowledge of our limitations, and are opened to God's message of healing.[35]

Although bodies are a source of consciousness and knowledge, they are not the end of our identity; we are also creatures of "thought, feeling, intelligence, and character."[36] This portion of human identity is rooted in life. Life is an immaterial

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[32] *NS*, 296-297, 300.

[33] *GIC*, 136, 140; *VS*, 185.

[34] "Promise of the Spirit as Paraclete," in *SM*, 18-22.

[35] *VS*, 137.

[36] *WP*,14. Bushnell also refers to the growing child as "making acquaintance with the body he lives in," and using it to discover himself as his character grows: *WP*, 78.

power, one which organizes and works upon the body or form it inhabits.[37] The organizing power of life also has a root: the soul. The soul, a power which lives eternally, dwells in humans, where it carries life to fulfillment and constitutes an essential part of one's character. Humans are distinguished from other forms of life by the soul's ability to be inspired. By this, Bushnell means that humans can receive the divine nature into the soul, and then respond to it. God's desire is that humans will accept that gift, and incorporate it into themselves, and thereby become more like God. This choice is the highest ability of humans.[38] As a power, the soul is one of the causative forces of the supernatural realm. Therefore its nature is spiritual, and it does not have any physical or material form. Because it is individual and part of the person, it grows over time–but this growth is spiritual. Therefore people who are only aware of the physical senses often do not notice any of this.[39]

Bushnell also noted that the body changes many times during life, for it "takes up new matter, and throws off old matter," but one's identity remains fixed. The body is a mechanism through which the soul acts; it has no power to act on its own.[40] The body, being physical, ages and decays. The soul, being an eternal power, is not bound by this limitation; it "outlives the vigor of the body." It also continues to grow even if the body has reached its physical limitations, especially those imposed by disease and age. These

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[37] *WP*, 267.

[38] *SM*, 7-8, 39.

[39] *SNL*, 306-308.

[40] *WP*, 272-274, 277.

"shatter the frail house" which the soul inhabits, but do not limit the soul.[41] A mind with good self-discipline is more open to God, and more likely to keep the body in better condition.[42]

Because of these differences, Bushnell insisted that using spiritual terms to refer to bodies is a mistake, and *vice versa*. The use of physical terms to refer to God and spiritual entities is a figure of speech. While it is natural and sometimes necessary for us to do that, there is a danger, for such uses would come to dominate our ideas, and be taken literally. Bushnell would prefer that we use language that is based on activity to refer to God. We should speak of God as an immediate presence, a spirit at work, or an agency of preparation and transformation.[43] Presumably, then, Bushnell's use of masculine language to refer to God is a figure of speech, one necessitated by the structure of human language. Although, as we will find, Bushnell at times advanced arguments about gender roles based on physical and spiritual criteria, he never stated that men held a particular role because of any divine resemblance.

These many ways of separating the body from the soul and its identity are generally positive for people with disabilities. Human bodies are a limitation, even to Christ, so we should not be surprised that they are a limitation to the rest of us. God does not have a body, so there is no "perfect" divine body to serve as a comparison or standard for humans. The body is not the source of identity, and it changes in many ways,

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[41] *CN*, 273; *SNL*, 308.

[42] *CN*, 275-276, 280-282, 287; "How to make a ripe and right old age," 106-107.

[43] *SM*, 29-30.

generally for the worse. Therefore it would seem that being in a physically impaired or ailing body is not, of itself, cause for denial of humanity. But what of an ailment in mental capacity? Bushnell stated that an "idiot" is one who lacks "increase or development," someone of whom it may be said that "the faculties [are] all asleep as at the first." Such a person is not a "proper man." Further, an idiot is "unprogressive" and "not a power," separated from manhood by a great chasm.[44] Such statements seem to close a door to many with mental disabilities. But in his typical way, Bushnell also asserted that anyone who does not live through God's course of moral instruction has failed in this development.[45] Bushnell's dislike of slavery was rooted in its treatment of the slave as a body only, with the result that the development of his intellectual and spiritual nature were overlooked. Yet he still insisted that slaves were human.[46] In his later years, as Bushnell discussed the wants of poverty and the wastes of affluence, he stated that the purpose of such differences is to demonstrate spiritual alienation. Work is necessary to remove this alienation, for it opens a "hidden well" in our existence. The "half created" person is the one who does not have to "fight" for existence.[47] The person who has struggled with various limitations to exist would, then, seem to have developed, even if he had not overcome them. Again, the person with an easy life is the one who is less likely to have struggled. As is the case with Bushnell's other theological statements,

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[44] *SNL*, 309.

[45] *SLS*, 104-105.

[46] Bushnell, "Discourse on the slavery question," 7.

[47] *MU*, 29, 36-38.

one must explore all of his thoughts in order to form a complete view, for his apparent affirmations of traditional doctrines are filled with troublesome possibilities for anyone who would seek to apply them to a single group.

III

Another aspect of the spiritual nature is that humans are created in the image of God. Bushnell stated that Scripture uses "image" to denote an analogy of form and character. Humans are in the image of God because our design and character resemble that of God. He added that none of this refers to bodies or physical natures. Therefore, once again, use of masculine language does not imply that God is of a particular gender, an argument sometimes used to limit the role of women. Neither is there a perfect bodily ideal to measure against any person. Bushnell also noted that there are flaws in all humans, and that no flaws exist in God; this is because sin has deformed the soul. In using "deformed," Bushnell stated he was using an analogy to refer to feelings, temper and other characteristics of the soul which no longer function as they ought.[48] Sin is one such force which disrupts the soul. It acts as yet another power in the combinations of nature, leading to new effects.[49]

The origins of evil, along with the nature and effect of sin, and God's role therein, play a significant role in views of disability. Throughout history, the presence of a disability has often been thought to be punishment for a sin committed by the person or

[48] *SM*, 39-40.

[49] *NS*, 154.

his parents.[50] Therefore, it is crucial to understand what constitutes sin, and what its effects are. A related question, especially in Bushnell's time of transition and controversy over the role of science, is whether he explains disabilities in supernatural terms or as medical events.

Another matter relating to the origin of disabilities is the question of theodicy. Because of his interest in life as primarily an experience of steadily growing faith, Bushnell largely avoided this topic. He considered efforts to discuss the nature or justice of God to be an affront to divine wisdom, and a distraction from the primary need, which is finding the moral lesson which God implants in all conditions.[51] Bushnell did declare that God is "sovereign," by which he means that God governs through a plan that extends to "all events." He further stated that this does not make God the author of evil.[52]

Evil did not come to exist because of God's permission or ordination, but because in any world where it is possible for good to exist, evil must also be possible. Satan is the human name for the possibility of evil, which became actuality when humans fell to temptation, and since then has been building a structure of powers which oppose God. This necessity also does not impinge on God's omnipotence. This is because omnipotence is not the ability to "do every thing," for it excludes the use of absolute force. God does not govern by power or force, but by influence. Power is not able to control wills or violate natural law. Humans are free agents, with souls that have

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[50] Herbert C. Covey, "Western Christianity's Two Historical Treatments of People with Disabilities or Mental Illness," *The Social Science Journal* 42 (2005), 108.

[51] *MU*, 95, 113; Letter, June 15, 1858, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 416.

[52] *SM*, 208; also *NS*, 92.

character and responsibility. They are open to influence by God, but God is not able to control humans or force them to do something. The human ability to act properly under divine influence must include the possibility of their doing wrong under another influence.[53]

Scriptural revelation is the primary tool for our understanding of sin and evil. In its widest terms, Bushnell identified sin as a human desire to usurp the divine role, expressed in an insistence that we "have our own way" and direct our own destiny.[54] He further defined this condition as refusing to accept our place as finite beings who are subject to God's claim of authority.[55]

Whether one was brought up as a Christian, as Bushnell advocated in *Christian Nurture*, or came to Christ later in life, every person must have come to a conviction of sin, and then to repentance. As one follows the path to this point, all things are suitable subjects for learning.[56] Those which are distasteful to us are, Bushnell stated, the most effective, for they show the true nature and effects of sin, so that we come to realize our need for God all the better. Such "moral uses" provide instruction in virtue, and are a revelation sent so that we may perceive the reality and effects of sin.[57]

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[53] *NS*, 82-83, 95-98, 134-135; *SNL*, 57; *WP*, 20; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 77-78. Bushnell acknowledged the difficulty of giving the proper understandings related to this topic in *NS*, 95-96.

[54] *SNL*, 419.

[55] *WP*, 346.

[56] *MU*, 232, 238-241.

[57] *MU*, 62, 189, 351; *SNL*, 12-13.

God also instructs us through conditions which do not reflect sin. The cold of winter, for one, is part of God's design of the world. Winter prepares the world for growth during the warmer seasons to come. We should praise God for the divine beauty in such designs.[58] We can also learn from such conditions that God calls us to grow with the change of time, and find hope in God's faithfulness over the spans of time.[59]

The third chapter of Genesis recounts the story of the Fall, marking the entry of sin into the world. Bushnell accepted this account as a true expression and revelation of the human state, although not necessarily as literal history. The story recounts that humans first existed in a "condition privative." This was a chaotic, incomplete moral situation which provided choices of good or evil. It was not necessary for sin to occur in this state, but the humans had not developed any principles which would encourage them to reject evil, nor did they have a defense against improper influences.[60] Bushnell referred to this situation as lacking "positive purity."[61] Positive purity is not the innocence of Eden, but a condition with "resolve, purpose [and] thunder, able to contrive hard things." This state requires extensive moral training.[62]

The story of the Fall is tragic, and shows the worst side of humanity, but it also shows the dignity and possibilities of being human. Animals, unlike humans, are

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[58] Horace Bushnell, "Uses and duties of Stormy Sundays," *American Pulpit* 2 (October 1846), 129.

[59] Horace Bushnell, "The Great Time-Keeper," 2-3.

[60] *NS*, 109-123; *SNL*, 265; *VS*, 248-249; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 75.

[61] *SNL*, 265.

[62] *MU*, 282.

incapable of thought or intent. Only humans had the ability to become depraved, because only humans are able to respond through deliberate choices. Thus, only humans are also capable of becoming like God.[63] Humans were created with a relationship to God, able to react fully to the divine impulse. This direct relationship and its consequent ability to react fully have been lost,[64] thereby removing us from an awareness of God. The result of this is loss of moral ability and entrapment in a world of the senses. As a result, humans have a continuing tendency to sin. A fuller study of Bushnell's ideas about inheritance will follow, but for now, we will note that he often wrote of "moral disease" as an inherited trait.[65] The entire human race is fallen; even if we were not individually sinful, the shared nature of life means that no one escapes its effects.[66]

Bushnell maintained that there is a foundational law to the universe. This law operates according to cause and effect. Morals are rooted in this law. Because sin is a violation of this law, it follows that there are effects, which we call punishment. This punishment is a change in the internal state of humans, which results in loss of harmony, creating confusion and disorder.[67] Bushnell referred to the effects of this confusion as creating a state of "moral wants and disabilities."[68] Thus, sin has wreaked havoc on the

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[63] *SNL*, 54, 64.

[64] *CHS*, 301-302.

[65] *CN*, 107-109; *MU*, 113.

[66] *GIC*, 209; *MU*, 8-9. For Bushnell, the senses are a limitation; in particular they hinder us from communicating with God. See his "Religious Nature and Religious Character," 156-158.

[67] *VS*, 238-242, 322-327.

[68] *GIC*, 208.

world. Its effects started with the loss of harmony in creation, which resulted in various deformations of its physical and moral attributes, and then proceeded to degrade the human soul and body.[69]

Although human nature, as created, was "upright," it is propagated as "damaged," but still retains some marks of the original state.[70] One of these marks is an innate longing for God; thus, we exist in a state of spiritual hunger. Although this longing can never be satisfied in any other way than being in relationship with God, humans who are in a sinful state will not turn to God. Therefore, people are always seeking new things to satisfy their longing. Many ailments have their root in this disorder; Bushnell specifically mentions irritation, anger, hatred, jealousy, miserliness, envy, neuralgia, hypochondria, dyspepsia, and the constant desire for more money.[71]

In addition to such spiritual effects, sin causes physical corruption. The soul and body are linked; the pains of bodies are felt in the soul, and the disorder of the soul becomes disorder of the body.[72] This is because sin has both a moral and "dynamic" force, so that it acts on physical nature as well as spiritual order. This corruption includes "disease, pain, sorrow, deformity, weakness, disappointment, defeat, all sorts of groanings, all sizes and shapes of misery."[73] Physical ailments are a result of this

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[69] *CN*, 83; *NS*, 167, 180-187; *WP*, 20; Johnson, *op. cit.*, 81-83.

[70] Bushnell, "Religious Nature and Religious Character," 159.

[71] *CHS*, 167; *MU*, 221; *NS*, 162; *SLS*, 27; *SNL*,72-81.

[72] *GIC*, 191; *NS*, 161; *VS*, 138.

[73] *NS*, 152-153.

disorder and the devastation caused by moral evil. Some are clearly caused by specific acts, such as overeating and drunkenness. However, Bushnell was careful to state that not all deformities are the result of a specific act of sin, and also reminded us that not all afflictions are immediately obvious or quickly manifested.[74] Their nature and origin vary according to God's inscrutable governance.

Bushnell's assertion of God's sovereignty includes an affirmation of foreordination through a plan which covers every event. Within this plan, God has a goal, not only for humanity as whole, but also for every person.[75] The fulfillment of this goal requires subduing powers of evil which oppose God.[76] We recall that as he affirmed a divine plan, Bushnell also affirmed that God made humans as free agents. This is because God prefers character to things. Therefore, humans hold the "highest nobility" in God's world. Because humans are free agents, they can make choices for right or wrong. We are able to refuse God's leading, although God will continue to seek for us what is the best possible in such a situation.[77] Thus we learn from our choices, which provides us with the opportunity to develop character and begin to understand God's greater meaning in events.

As part of this course of instruction, God "purposely" sends various "evils of life" so that we will learn from them. As we learn, we ought to more frequently make a choice

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[74] *MU*, 219-220; *NS*, 161-163; *VS*, 138.

[75] *MU*, 232; *NS*, 93; *SNL*, 11.

[76] *NS*, 125.

[77] *SNL*, 14-15.

to turn to God, and thereby come closer to God's goal. These "evils of life" are to be distinguished from "evil" as a force opposed to God's good nature. The evils of life are not inherently required by natural law or any other system; they occur solely in order to develop human character. Many of these evils are frightening and uncomfortable. God does not prefer this kind of education, but must act in this way to get our attention. God prefers to work by inspiring us with beauty, which is a reflection of God's thought in creation.[78]

Other forms of evil are necessary functions or are allowed to exist for our instruction. Natural evils function as expressions of God's "character and government." One form of natural evil is stormy weather, which is as necessary as pleasant days. These serve a function according to the laws of nature, and are not the result of a struggle between good and evil principles.[79] God also allows evil situations to occur, such as bad government. In such situations, evil forces do not gain power by God's ordination, but by seizing control or using corruption to gain influence. In doing this, they take advantage of systems set in place by humans. Because humans are free and have permission to set up their own institutions, God does not intervene by force. God also cannot abrogate the effects which follow by natural law from such occurrences, although God will continue to encourage us to do better.[80]

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[78] *MU*, 118, 188, 210, 219, 251, 280-281.

[79] Bushnell, "Uses and duties of Stormy Sundays," 127.

[80] *MU*, 54-56.

Disabilities are one of several "uncomely or revolting elements" in the world, all of which are conditions most people would prefer to avoid discussing. Bushnell admits that, along with most people, he shared the same feelings. But that is not how we learn, he stated, so we need to face such matters. Bushnell asserted that none of these conditions are present by accident, oversight, or necessity of nature, but by God's "deliberate purpose and plan" for our instruction.[81] Thus, they would seem to be one of the "evils of life." This provides an indication that Bushnell had departed from traditional Calvinist teaching, as Puritan writings of the seventeenth century show a consistent belief that such ailments are divine retribution for sinful behavior.[82]

The first thing one learns is that there are many events and conditions that work "to manufacture deformities and disgusts," and this results in a general view that they are connected with wrong-doing.[83] Bushnell repeatedly denied such connections, stating at one point that to suggest that God would inflict pain on a person in retribution for a specific sin is close to blasphemy.[84]

Bushnell separated specific sins from being related to specific conditions in several ways. He affirmed that disease, disfigurement, and similar conditions are the "common heritage of the race." He even expressed difficulty in thinking of them as inherited, however much that seemed to be the case for several conditions, for it is

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[81] *MU*, 95, 116, 210, 227.

[82] Covey, *op. cit.*, 109.

[83] *MU*, 221.

[84] *CHS*, 251.

"shocking" to think that loss of any faculty of sense, motion, or thought could occur merely from heredity. As is the case with understanding divine justice and theodicy, he stated that a full understanding of such matters must await the future, when, he hoped, "all such kinds of torment" will be cured.[85]

Bushnell also used the Bible to distance sin from specific disabilities. In a sermon based on the story of the man born blind in John 9, he noted Jesus' reply, that neither the man nor his parents sinned, and stated that the reply was intended to "repel" any "odious and half-superstitious" notion that might relate some particular sin to the occurrence of blindness. He further stated that while specific instances of an ailment cannot be linked to specific sins, one can say that "all the disabilities, and diseases," are the results of sin, for Jesus came to resolve such matters.[86]

That Bushnell had much work to do among some of his readers can be discerned from a letter written by an unnamed woman. She had suffered a broken right arm, and wrote to ask Bushnell why such a thing might have happened. Bushnell, ever the pastor, opened his reply by expressing hope that the event would bring her God as she learned to bear with the affliction. Then he continued: "you imagine that God has a controversy

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[85] *MU*, 254-257. Bushnell specifically lists deafness, blindness, consumption, and insanity as conditions which are often inherited. Hirschhorn, *op. cit.*, 104, notes that susceptibility to consumption was believed to be hereditary. Pliny Earle, "On the Causes of Insanity," *American Journal of Insanity* 5 (January 1848); reprint, Disability History Museum, <www.disabilitymuseum.org/lib/docs/1368.htm>, claims that disposition to insanity is hereditary.

[86] *VS*, 139-140.

with you because he afflicts you. Rather say or conclude that he has a friendship with you."[87]

Pain is part of the human condition, and a component of most disabling conditions. So with Bushnell's experiential orientation, it is not surprising that he discussed it extensively. As with other ailments, pain is not retribution for sin, nor is its function of leading us to seek relief its highest use. As is the case with other "dark things," the existence of pain is for "purely moral" reasons, and until we examine these reasons, we cannot understand it. The beginning point is that God himself finds pain distasteful, but necessary. Because it is a common experience, striking whether or not one might deserve it, we are reminded that we are not sovereign, and thereby God breaks our willfulness. Therefore, it is a sign of God's great goodness that we experience it. Pain also tells us that the world is not merely a place to enjoy repose, but a place where we are trained to obey God.[88] Drawing from this, Bushnell describes pain as "a kind of general sacrament for the world."[89] As such, it teaches us sympathy, which leads us to almost instinctively react to aid another person in distress. For the Christian, that reaction is the starting point to learning about sacrifice. As we endure our own pain as well as share with others, we show God's love in the world. Bushnell also consistently developed another theme that there is a unifying purpose in all of God's activities, and

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[87] *SM*, 400.

[88] *MU*, 97-108, 119.

[89] *MU*, 109.

that pain works with other conditions as a moral lesson, teaching the "most sublime virtue, fortitude." Through this, one learns to actively follow God.[90]

Pain and the conditions from which it arises are thus a sign of grace. To imagine that God would visit such conditions as a return for some specific sin is to misunderstand God's nature and that of justice. God always does better to sinners than they deserve, Bushnell argued.[91] Then Bushnell further opened the door to a path of change: through pain, we become more and more like God, enduring suffering and bearing evil in the world to bring improvement.

A common assumption about some disorders has been that the victim is possessed by a demon or other evil force, thereby becoming evil in himself as Satan seeks control of his soul.[92] Thus, insanity has often been thought to be a particularly loathsome condition. In *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, Bushnell devoted a sermon to insanity and the question of possession. He referred to insanity as "the darkest of all dark things in the catalogue of the world's suffering," but asserted that it comes from God for our good. He stated that every person who lives in a state of sin is possessed in a certain sense, for sin's effects block the proper and full use of one's God-given reason.

Bushnell found it difficult to make definitive statements about the nature of possession. In an 1851 letter, Bushnell referred to "bad angels" lurking in the fallen state of humanity. He then added that they do not cause "diabolical possession" but are

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[90] *MU*, 113-116.

[91] *VS*, 268, 270.

[92] Covey, *op. cit.*, 109.

"unhygeian spirits" which cause illness even among "the best of us." He concluded with a hope that "one of the other kind" would not attack his recipient.[93] In *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, Bushnell stated his conclusion that the gospel accounts indicate that "demons" are primarily the causes of disease, linking them to the "unhygeian spirits." At the same time, there is much more to the world than we are able to understand, and the presence of Jesus placed all the powers of the cosmos in a state of frenzy and commotion, causing strange outbursts.[94] Bushnell also allowed for other causes of ailments, as rampant wrongdoing and social pressures were able to generate sufficient cause to disrupt the soul on their own.

For an explanation of how the demons or spirits operated, Bushnell found help from science. Reading of the work of Mesmer, he concluded that it is possible for one will to be subject to another will's desires. Bushnell understood this to be exactly what the scriptures record in cases of demon possession. The mind, which is kept in order by the moral nature, has been weakened by sin. Thus weakened, both moral nature and the mind are open to outside control. This outside control results in the various ailments, physical and mental, which afflict humans. Then, again ever the pastor, Bushnell also stated that, to at least some extent, all people suffer from insanity, and all are in imminent peril of it becoming full-blown. This condition shows how weak the human self is when it is not under God's guidance. And as with other conditions, they are the result of sin in

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[93] Letter, November 18, 1851, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 250-251. I have not found any further references to the "other kind" of spirits.

[94] *MU*, 249-252. *VS*, 139, 146 also discusses the presence of Jesus as stirring up Satan and "foul spirits," which to Bushnell are again causes of disease, with the terms as symbols which indicate the power of sin.

general, but not of a specific sin.[95] Thus, although he still explained insanity in moral terms of possession and struggle for control of the soul, Bushnell extended this struggle to all ailments, and it became a condition which afflicted all of humanity.

One should not, however, think that Bushnell sought to remove the impression that no ailment is ever the result of personal actions. New diseases and disorders arise constantly, and they are clearly the result of wrongdoing. Among such conditions he lists children who are short, feeble-minded, or diseased because of a father's drunkenness. Indeed, many of our problems are self-inflicted. Bushnell found it a source of wonder that, with all the excesses of sin, there were not more problems. Bushnell also did not single out only the vices of lower classes. He claimed that overeating would disrupt the digestive system and produce depression. He also found the businessman's vice of "over-doing" to result in lack of time for reflection, leading to various ailments. The strain of maintaining subtle hypocrisies and social affectations also leads to disorders in body and soul.[96]

Bushnell also extended the effects of sin and disorder to conditions of poverty, although with much more compassion than was typical of the day, and again with his unique perspectives that confounded common wisdom. The moral lesson of poverty should be a general realization of the human need for God, for only God can satisfy our deepest needs, and God is also the ultimate source of all physical provisions. On the practical side, Bushnell states that God never intended for anyone to suffer from lack of

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[95] *MU*, 261-264.

[96] *MU*, 220, 252-255.

necessities. This divine intention opens the path to charity. If we did not have this means to relieve the physical needs of some, we would be much poorer spiritually ourselves, and would find ourselves falling into a state of self-indulgence. Acts of charity lead us to avoid thinking of God as existing and sending blessings for our own comfort; we are to understand them as something to be cheerfully shared. Thereby we are prevented from misunderstanding the moral nature and values of the universe.[97]

Bushnell has often been viewed as aligned with the values of his relatively well-off congregation.[98] Yet he had words of warning for those who were well-off. In 1847, he stated that prosperity is an attribute of the community, not any individual, and this requires character and virtue, personally and in society. Without such values, economic prosperity is dangerous, and can lead to waste.[99] Ten years later, in an address to businessmen during a financial panic, he noted that the real suffering was falling on their workers, who would have no way to provide for themselves in such a time. In an allusion to the Lord's Prayer, he stated that as those businessmen prayed to God for relief, they had an obligation to assist others in relief.[100]

Bushnell also seems to have begun to overturn a common view that the poor are solely responsible for their own condition, and therefore should be left to suffer. He stated that although everyone has the duty to prosper, this is not always a reasonable

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[97] *MU*, 29, 35-37, 42-47, 190-193, 205.

[98] e.g., Bushman, *op. cit.*, 330; Douglas, *op. cit.*, 80.

[99] "Prosperity Our Duty," in *SM*, 135-137, 148.

[100] "A Week-day Sermon to the Business Men of Hartford," in *SM*, 133.

expectation for individuals, who are troubled by health problems, inability to do some kinds of work, fraud, and other issues. However, it is rare that a community would not prosper, or would be affected on a large scale by such matters.[101] Bushnell also noted the potential inability of some disabled persons to provide for themselves, and distinguished this from the lack experienced by those who are "profligate and worthless." The former group has legitimate needs for support; the latter should be treated severely.[102]

On the whole, these statements are supportive of people with disabilities. That Bushnell distinguished legitimate needs, arising from disabling conditions, from a stereotypical view of all the poor as lazy is an important difference. To what extent this may have been spurred by Bushnell's own condition is difficult to state, but his writings as he confronted his disease, noted earlier, indicate development of sympathy toward those caught in troublesome situations not of their own making.

Some members of today's disability movements challenge that many of the organizations engaged in charity are more interested in self-sustenance, using emotional appeals which emphasize the inability of people with disabilities. By this means, they create dependence and paternalism, rather than in fostering independence. Bushnell might seem to fit into such a paternalistic mode such statements as:

> who is more truly blessed than he that, being full, loves to impart his fullness to such as are in want? And when the suffering invalid, or child

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[101] "Prosperity our Duty," in *SM*, 139, 144-145.

[102] *MU*, 204. Bushnell also allowed "feebleness of health" as a legitimate factor for not attending services, distinguishing people in that state from those who were looking for excuses: "Uses and duties of Stormy Sundays," 123-124.

> of sorrow, finds a large, free heart of brotherhood open to his want, is he not as truly blessed, though in a humbler key?[103]

Although such statements do not foster self-support, they are indicative of an attitude of social interdependence and moral duty, which Bushnell viewed as key elements of a properly-organized social system. In this regard, his ideas are more reasonable: "independence" is a relative term for a person who requires assistance from an aide or adaptive device, and Bushnell's social ideas are closer than they might appear at first glance to allowing for assistance needed for "independent" living. Bushnell's consistent hope that humanity would progress in its social and moral attitudes and scientific accomplishments also expressed his willingness to accept change in systems and attitudes, as long as the underlying principles of morality were adhered to.

Bushnell's overall approach is not without problems. Most noticeable is that he glossed over theodicy. His attempts to affirm the Calvinist doctrine of divine sovereignty would seem to clash with a primitive form of process theology that he promoted at other times. His efforts to separate evil into various forms, some being necessary, some from God, and some from a force opposed to God can also be confusing. Here, a possible solution would be pastoral: humans should not pass judgment on the source of any particular situation. Disabilities and other conditions are all the results of sin, but humans are unable to discern why they come to some and not to others. Further, all humans are disabled in a variety of ways. This can be disquieting but it also separates any individual condition from a particular sin.

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[103] *MU*, 45.

IV

Bushnell felt that because God desires for humans to learn about themselves and the world, Christianity would be the natural ally of scientific progress. He stated that while science may require new thinking about the religious matters, such thought, when properly applied, would lead to better understandings of revelation.[104] To him, advances in science were a way to better understand God's governance of the world.[105] Bushnell's writings display continued interest in learning about, critiquing, and using the scientific discoveries of the day. Some of the science Bushnell used has been discredited, but he was also, by all appearances, making the best use of knowledge available to him.

Science has several limitations in Bushnell's thought. It is always in progress, and is incapable of reaching beyond human understanding. At the same time, it has a higher use than mere fact-gathering and building machines: by it one comes to better know God, but where the poetry of theology begins, science ends.[106]

The healing ministry of Christ also marks the boundaries of science. The miracles he performed were not a suspension of law, but an act of God working with new causes upon the laws of nature. Because miracles display complete mastery of these laws at a level not possible for humans, miracles are events which exceed our experience and

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[104] *NS*, 7; "Science and Religion," 267; *SLS*, 348.

[105] Cross, *op. cit.*, 101-105. An unremarked instance is in the sermon "Life, or the Lives," where Bushnell used scientific method and findings to argue that life is a power above the body. He also noted the shortcomings of "the supposed science of phrenology": *WP*, 268-298. As previously noted, Bushnell first rejected Darwin on scientific grounds. Only afterwards did he offer theologically-based objections: Thigpen, *op. cit.*, 501, 505-6.

[106] *SM*, 365.

thereby create a sense of wonder and point to God. A physician cures by natural means, but is often hindered by lack of knowledge. Christ, on the other hand, understood the root causes of illness and was able to use the supernatural powers to effect a cure.[107] Bushnell stated that it was not an accident that Christ began his ministry with healing of bodies, an activity that was central to his ministry. This indicates that the ministry of Christians is more than teaching: the church must also see to the well-being of the body and be concerned about its pains.[108]

Because miracles show mastery of law, and do not suspend it, Bushnell accepted the historical reality of the miracle healing stories recorded in the Bible. He did acknowledge that such stories are hard to accept. However, they show that God is active in the world, and that we can trust that God has sufficient power to effect the greatest miracle, regeneration.[109] Because they are not a suspension of law, the healing stories are not a change of natural processes, but the full and proper working of nature. So healing is not extraordinary, although it may require more knowledge than is available to medical science of a particular time. This distances healing from being a sign of forgiveness of a specific sin. It also opens the path to allowing science to discover ways to effect healing.

The nature of miracles also indicates the duties that God requires of the Christian, for they are a revelation of God rather than divine intervention in the world.[110] Miracles

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[107] *NS*, 47, 61, 322-324; "Progress," 206; "Science and Religion," 272.

[108] *NS*, 61; *VS*, 133-137.

[109] *NS*, 319, 336, 348-349.

[110] Robert Mullin, "Horace Bushnell and the Question of Miracles," *Church History* 58 (1989), 466.

are a sacrificial sign, for they show God's love to the world. From miracles we understand the vicarious nature of love, how it sacrifices and identifies with the suffering of others, and its equal acceptance of all who suffer. Miracles indicate that human bodies were the first priority in the ministry of Jesus, so Bushnell likewise emphasized that Christians ought first to attend to physical needs of the world.[111]

Miracle stories also hold interest because they often link forgiveness and healing of chronic illnesses or disabling conditions. To Bushnell, Christ's statements that sins were forgiven are nothing more than an indication of physical healing. In reading the story of the man born blind (John 9), Bushnell stressed that Jesus repudiated the idea of a specific sin causing blindness, adding that such ideas were "odious" and "half-superstitious." As is the case elsewhere, Bushnell stated that "all the disabilities and diseases" on earth are the result of sin and the causes it has loosened.[112] Thus he continued to distance disabilities and other conditions from a particular sin, but linked their existence to sin in general.

Bushnell also affirmed that miracles have occurred throughout Christian history and continued into his day. He stated that if miracles did not occur at a given time or place, it would be found that the church in question was spiritually dead, and had come to expect little from God.[113] Thus, where some would attribute a lack of personal faith on the part of a person who was not healed, Bushnell placed the lack with the church as a

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[111] *MU*, 115, *VS*, 42-43.

[112] *VS*, 139-140.

[113] *NS*, 436-437, 459-470, 474.

whole. This is an important key to his idea of society as having a corporate nature. In another section concerning miracles, he restated that there is no scriptural warrant to believe that miracles of healing have ended. He then added that Christians are called to follow the example of Christ and his disciples by practicing sympathy with all who suffer and are ill, even if exposure to them might imperil our own life. "No Christian" can withhold himself from the "ministry of love," whether it deals with "mind, or body, or sin, or sickness."[114]

For people with disabilities, Bushnell's attitude is generally positive. As noted, he was open to the use of advances in healing and uses of technology for improvement of one's life. Not only did he approve of efforts to relieve suffering, he implied that it is an area in which Christians should be very active. His emphasis on taste and dislike of fashion placed emphasis on the value of inner qualities over externals, especially items which are marketed only for enhancing appearance. His insistence on the necessity of confronting and dealing with all conditions allows for open discussion.

Science is an ally in the quest for improvement. However, as we recall from the origins of sin, where there is the possibility of good, there is also the possibility of evil. Bushnell was aware that science can be put to wrong ends, for humans share the supernatural ability with God to act on nature and bring about new effects, but lack the purity to realize all of the effects of their actions. So how does one tell if a particular use of science is right or wrong? Bushnell stated that God gave us nature as a tool and the

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[114] *VS*, 147.

freedom to use it for improvement in culture, comfort, and production, not to advance corruption or destruction.[115]

The dangers of science, and of all knowledge, come from sin. Science without God is self-development or self-reformation, which overlooks God's role. A higher, uncorrupted power is needed to effect the repair of the human condition and overcome the threat of sin.[116] This is the nature of salvation, which brings regeneration to humanity. Through it, God heals the soul and body, which have been left in "disorder and breakage" by sin.[117] We now turn to consider Bushnell's views of God's scheme of restoration and its meaning.

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[115] *MU*, 224; *NS*, 156.

[116] *NS*, 221-227.

[117] *VS*, 138.

Chapter 4

REDEMPTION AND REFORM

"Goodness, or the production of goodness, is the supreme end of God"[1]

I

In Bushnell's thought, humanity's situation of entrapment in sin and its disordering effects requires a divine solution, for human ability is not sufficient to bring about the changes needed to alleviate the condition.[2] This solution is effected by Christ, who initiates the process of salvation. Bushnell explained salvation in terms of his scheme of nature and supernatural. In this process, God acts similarly to a physician, using new healing causes to bring about a new effect. By this means, damage done when the cosmic moral law was broken is repaired, but without breaching any cosmic law.[3]

Bushnell retained this basic explanation throughout his career, adding insights that seem to spring from the experience of war. In the mid-war years, when his other writings showed a concern for honoring the proper foundations of authority and defining loyalty as risking one's life for others,[4] he wrote in *Sermons on Christ and His Salvation*

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[1] *CN*, 32.

[2] *CHS*, 162.

[3] *NS*, 30, 237-238, 242.

[4] Bushnell, *Reverses Needed*; "The Doctrine of Loyalty."

that Christ's death was not an act of substitutionary punishment, but an act of representatively bearing the sins of the world, carrying them before God.[5] In *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, completed after the war, Bushnell wrote that Christ's mission on earth was to save humans from sin, which he did by making a sacrifice on behalf of others. He did this out of love, working to bring not only reconciliation with God but also recovery. Bushnell argued therefore that salvation is not only being delivered from hell, but being brought out of sin and its penalties. As an act of love, Christ's sacrifice changes us, resulting in a response that seeks to emulate him.[6]

Regeneration is an ongoing process within God's scheme of salvation, wherein the effects of sin are removed, and one comes to love God wholly. Regeneration is a traditional doctrine, and as with other such doctrines, Bushnell sought to emphasize the intent of the doctrine, so that his conclusions were often different from traditional teaching.

In *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell placed great emphasis on the value of Christian upbringing. Such upbringing did not remove the need for regeneration, for one still must learn of temptation, human fall, and divine rescue. Bushnell stated that Christian nurture would produce a sense of order and lead to better understanding of regeneration, as well as a better knowledge of how to grow by working through problems.[7] Following traditional doctrines, Bushnell maintained that regeneration is the work of God. His

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[5] *CHS*, 397-399.

[6] *VS*, 41, 130, 242-244.

[7] *CN*, 23, 277-282, 287-288.

theory of nature and supernatural gives new insight into its operation: a divine supernatural agency is required because nature alone could never produce such an effect. Regeneration heals our own damaged nature, brings a new consciousness of God, and breaks the power of sin. One measure of our growth in regeneration is that we become more and more focused on following God and God only. This intention then makes us conscious of the proper choices in any situation. Bushnell stated that one will still sin, but that such sin is no longer part of one's goals.[8]

The reason for Bushnell's emphasis on this method of growth is found in the purpose of regeneration, a topic which held most of his attention after the war. As we saw in Bushnell's discussion of creation, he believed that God had allowed for bad possibilities. Adam fell to the temptation presented by these possibilities because he lacked "positive purity," or spiritual strength formed through experience. Now, as God seeks to subdue evil, humans are engaged in training to attain positive purity and thereby develop new ways to struggle against sin by following the example of Christ. Participation in this struggle, and attaining its consequent growth, requires facing adversity.[9]

Throughout his life, Bushnell emphasized the social nature of this regenerative struggle. He stated that growth in Christian life is every person's responsibility and an individual development. It is not, however, individualistic, for we live in a world of mutual effect and responsibility for each other, with a shared moral obligation to assist

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[8] *CHS*, 183, 237; *NS*, 207-210; *VS*, 243-246.

[9] *MU*, 320; *NS*, 90; *SM*, 94, 192; *SLS*, 108; *SNL*, 265, 365, 417, 421.

others.[10] The actions of humans in social units serve as a "kind of discourse" for humans, where they learn discipline and improvement.[11]

Bushnell's term for this structure and process in society is "organic." An organic society is one whose members are linked by love, and who work together, making sacrifices for the good of all. In an organic society, individuals live and find their identity in social units, profoundly influencing each other. In this way, humans join together in mutual assistance, constantly reaching higher levels of achievement. Such a society is also diverse, so that our learning will be well-rounded. This creates a cycle that leads to increasingly greater improvement. All of this follows the example of Christ, for the Atonement was a social act, and salvation is accomplished in a social setting.[12]

The center of organic society is the family, where "character, feelings, spirit, and principles" are propagated.[13] The family is a spiritual agency, where God works through the parents. In the family, one's depravity, or natural tendency to sin, is dealt with while it is weak and unformed. One is brought up to know and love God and to respect other

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[10] *MU*, 142-145.

[11] *NS*, 90.

[12] Bushnell, "The Census and slavery," 19-20; "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed," 601; *NS*, 164-168; *SLS*, 108. Also see Conrad Cherry, "The Structure of Organic Thinking: Horace Bushnell's Approach to Language, Nature, and Nation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (March 1972), 17; Daniel Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 176; David S. Steward, "Bushnell's Nurture Process: An Exposition," *Religious Education* 64 (1969), 300.

[13] *CN*, 92-93.

people in the family. This pattern of development and support is repeated in the local church and into larger social units, such as the nation.[14]

Bushnell held that ethics were important: living one's values reflects "putting on of Christ" in ways that reach every aspect of life. Following Christ is not only being "good and right," but becoming a new person, committed to God's way of doing things. One must join with Christ in sacrificially bearing the world through acts that show love.[15]

Bushnell's social ethics, oriented toward the good of all, were specifically a rejection of individualism. Although individualistic ideas permeated the civil state and church, Bushnell stated that they are not scriptural.[16] Individualism, to Bushnell, is nothing more than self-centeredness, and when society adopts such ideas, the only common point it then shares is selfishness. This opens the path to more sin, for evil, which also operates organically, would become more powerful.[17]

Bushnell's hope for improvement through social life reached beyond morals to all aspects of human endeavor. According to him, there was much to be done in society and science, for the "world is but an egg unhatched as yet."[18] And although organic society holds hope, it also holds danger, much as did the situation in the Garden of Eden. Because humans learn their values from society, living with people who do wrong will

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[14] Bushnell, "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed," 611.

[15] *CHS*, 183-185, 396, 424, 431-432.

[16] *CN*, 39, 91.

[17] *NS*, 167, 170.

[18] *BE*, 16-19.

lead to decline.[19] To presume that we have accomplished all that can be done is parallel to the assumption that we are at the peak of Christian growth. This pleases our vanity, but is not an attitude of holiness.[20]

Bushnell often made optimistic statements to the effect that in an organic setting, humanity would progress as the society became increasingly closer to God's ideal.[21] However, God does not bring change by fiat, but allows humans to make mistakes, so that they will learn from the result.[22] Thus Bushnell's optimism was tempered by statements that progress is never a clear path, even though it is ultimately guided by God. In his early years as a pastor, he wrote of humanity as moving from one error to another, and "unwilling or unable to hold more than half the truth at once."[23] Shortly before the Civil War, he wrote "sometimes it seems that only by doing wrong do we come to realize the value of what is right."[24] After the Civil War, this feeling intensified: he wrote that sometimes only when tragedy strikes do humans truly seek to reform.[25]

II

God is perfect, therefore, Bushnell held to traditional teachings which stated that divine principles cannot improve. However, Bushnell also noted that humans, with their

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[19] *MU*, 144, 148, 150, 153.

[20] *CN*, 13.

[21] Bushnell, "Science and Religion," 267.

[22] *CHS*, 29-30.

[23] Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," 389.

[24] *NS*, 84.

[25] Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," in *BE*, 325-326; *VS* 31.

limited ability to discern truth, err frequently, and therefore human ideas must change to fit new knowledge, even when those ideas concern God (this presumes, of course, that the principles remain intact). Thus, Bushnell found a course of development when surveying history and revelation. At first, God was forced to reach out to primitive people, and this required comparatively primitive methods which drew on force and fear. The time of the Gospels was more advanced, and required different methods, such as teaching and miracles. In both approaches, God has been constant, always being just, merciful, and seeking radical change. As humanity continues to progress, God will continue to reach out in new ways.[26]

Viewing this progression of humanity, Bushnell adopted a hermeneutical position that specific moral provisions and directions in scripture spoke to what people understood at the time they were given. The principles behind these moral statements did not change, but as humans have moved and continue to move closer to God, the expression of these principles becomes "more and more refined, and brought closer to God's own perfect beauty."[27] As language changes over time, so will understandings about specific conduct be revised over time. And as circumstances change, specific laws should change. True morality is therefore progress toward the divine goal, and not twisting Scripture to fit ideas with which we are comfortable.[28] Bushnell specifically

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[26] *SNL*, 145; *VS*, 63-67, 279-280; *WP*, 81.

[27] Bushnell, *The Census and slavery,* 19.

[28] *WP*, 98-100. He wrote along similar lines in *Discourse on the slavery question*, 10, concluding: "this advance is the law of human existence, which you can no more controvert than you can the law of the heavenly bodies."

condemned what he calls "immoral conservatism," an effort to give divine approval to the *status quo* standards of society and business. At the same time, change simply for its own sake will not endure, for it does not follow divine principle either.[29]

We can see how Bushnell's ideas played out in the practical world as he dealt with four topics of his day. Three of these were great debates that touched on ideas related to disability: heredity, race, and gender. As he wrote about these controversies, Bushnell drew on scientific thought, his ideas of society, and his religious beliefs. A more neglected area which drew Bushnell's interest was the rise of consumer marketing. Combined with progress in medical science, such marketing has resulted in people become less likely to accept the body without alteration. The changes sought have often been to accommodate new styles and fashions.[30] Bushnell addressed some core issues of this practice.

Change, of itself, was not frightening to Bushnell. In 1851, commenting on the increasing use of water and steam power, which led to (among other things) factory-made clothing, he stated that if this transition held "something to regret" there was "more, I trust, to desire."[31] Change could, of course, be for good or ill. Bushnell wrote that the advancement of human society should liberate truth and reason from the bonds of force, as well as freeing taste and beauty from fashion. Bushnell distinguished taste and beauty

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[29] *MU*, 89.

[30] Bottomley, *op. cit.*, 170.

[31] Bushnell, "The Age of Homespun," 4. Douglas, *op. cit.*, 90-93, 134-196, reading the opening paragraphs, cites this address as evidence that Bushnell was an anti-intellectual, ineffective sentimentalist who spent most of his time longing for the past.

as qualities found by internal discipline from fashion as an external display, unrelated to true character. Both reach beyond clothing, including music, morals, and social standards. Taste can be found by examining God's creation, which is the greatest act of taste and originality.[32]

Often overlooked in Bushnell's distinction of taste and fashion is a challenge he mounted to a trend of his day. In the early years of post-revolutionary America, the qualities which defined refinement and taste had changed from an aristocratic shell of polite action and refined appearance toward a more egalitarian set of standards which valued personal virtues, ingrained through education and experience. These "republican" virtues, such as self-discipline, the value of labor, inculcation of personal piety, and avoiding pride and excess through thrift were, according to Bushnell, under assault from the growth of fashion and advertising industries. These forces sought to return to the old aristocratic ways of fashion, which reflected one's ability to purchase and display items which confirmed one's refinement.[33] Bushnell's standards sought to return taste to the average person, for to him, even the poorest may sense and appreciate beauty. Neither would it be necessary to own an object to enjoy beauty.[34] By linking taste and beauty to God's act of creation, he made them into religious values; their appreciation is the sign of a soul in a state of good religious development.[35] Fashion, on the other hand, originates

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[32] Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion,"153-156.

[33] Bushman, *op. cit.*, 327.

[34] Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," 167.

[35] *CN*, 288.

from a desire to create and maintain social status. Bushnell traced the popularity of fashion to the relative ease of purchase and display of items as opposed to engagement in the effort required to develop taste.[36]

Fashion is a problem because it is essentially selfish, and also seeks to place oneself outside of the roles and duties of an organic society.[37] It encourages the development of artificial rather than natural life styles, and a step which contributes to the destruction of genuine society.[38] But fashion's greatest offense, to Bushnell, was that it denied the place of poetry. In this view, poetry is an imaginative form, much like theology. Poetry expresses taste through higher ideas, reaching beyond logic and "common expression." By means of fashion, poetry was being replaced by objects which exist for their own sake. Thus, fashion undermined the Scriptures and one's path to understanding God.[39]

Fashion's selfish nature creates a danger which reaches beyond clothing and furnishings. As part of his polemic, Bushnell raised an issue that is also important to people with visible disabilities: making changes to the body to make it look better to others. Part of the problem of fashion is that it seeks to enact a human standard and override the natural laws of beauty, thereby creating its own "gallery of deformities." As he continued, Bushnell admitted that disabilities create problems of appearance, but that

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[36] Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," 155-156.

[37] *MU*, 86-87.

[38] *MU,* 12-13.

[39] Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," 164-165.

they still reflect "the inherent beauty of nature's forms," and should be left as is. His writings would seem to deny a legitimate place for manipulation of the body simply out of a desire for appearance. However, when a deformity is involved, he referred to some styles as "excellent disguise."[40]

Bushnell's statements about fashion contain several positive reflections for people with disabilities. He emphasized the value of the individual as he or she is. We all stand before God as sinners, so there is no use in trying to disguise ourselves. Other than basic neatness, he was opposed to evaluations based on appearance. He allowed for reasonable use of clothing to minimize the appearance of a disabling condition. However, his attitude raises a question that recurs as one reads Bushnell's writings. He stated that beauty is as God makes it, and this includes deformities. But deformities are the result of sin being unleashed on earth. If God is not the author of evil, where do deformities arise? Bushnell's statements elsewhere that God is not the author of evil, and that there is no problem at all in dealing with this question,[41] lead to asking if such deformities are God's design or the result of sin (which would, of course, be sin generally, not individually). Bushnell's answer would probably lie in his distinction of the "evils of life" from "natural evils" or "moral evils." It is a way out, but one that continues to raise questions which, for most people, will not be satisfied by an appeal to an inscrutable, sovereign deity.

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[40] Bushnell, "Taste and Fashion," 156-158.

[41] *NS*, 92; *SM*, 208.

A matter that has generally gathered more interest is heredity, which was one topic that informed the debates over slavery and women's rights. Bushnell, along with most Americans of his day, held to the theory of hereditarianism, or the inheritance of acquired characteristics. This inheritance was thought to embrace both physical and mental characteristics. This theory placed great importance on the role of parents in shaping future generations and their morals.[42] Bushnell was one of several ministers who used hereditarian theory to incorporate science into their beliefs, believing that an inclination to faith could be propagated along with a good physique.[43] In 1848, John Humphrey Noyes wrote of its spiritual value, and later proposed a full-scale eugenic breeding program at his Oneida community.[44]

Bushnell used hereditarianism to explain the persistence of sin in human life, and as a platform for spiritual advancement. Hereditarianism proposed that inheritance reaches beyond physical characteristics: intelligence, good habits and good character are part of one's inherited makeup. Thus, Bushnell stated that a pedigree of Christianity would produce pious offspring. Not only that, it would work through future generations to erase any wrong tendencies, and by this means, faithful Christians will transform the

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[42] Mark Haller, Eugenics: *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1963), 23, 26; David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 21-22, 472; Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7-9.

[43] *CN*, 197-198, 206; *Women's Suffrage*, 136-137.

[44] John Bozeman, "Eugenics and the Clergy in the Early Twentieth-Century United States," *Journal of American Culture* 27 (December 2004), 422; Haller, *op. cit.*, 37.

world.[45] One can also inherit disordered character. It was not until 1875 that Richard Dugdale surveyed the Jukes family, and concluded that tendencies toward crime were inherited, a tendency which he extended to other social ills.[46] But as early as 1861, Bushnell wrote that "savage" characteristics result in the loss of any hope of future improvement.[47] In 1868, he added that sin produces a "virus, or poison" which accumulates through generations, resulting in "moral and physical debility."[48]

This theory has obvious implications for anyone with a disabling condition, but it also plays a significant role in Bushnell's statements on race and later, the role of women in society. As sectional tensions about slavery sharpened, racism was no stranger to north or south. Although opposed to slavery, northern whites all but universally believed that people of color were inferior, and buttressed such claims with various theories. One, used by Bushnell (among others) was based on hereditarianism.[49] Walt Whitman wrote that blacks would be eliminated with time, for they were hereditarily inferior, and could not improve, let alone become equal, especially in American society.[50] In his objections to abolition societies, Bushnell expressed similar opinions: slavery would come to an

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[45] *CN*, 197-198, 202-205.

[46] Haller, *op. cit.*, 21-22.

[47] *CN*, 203.

[48] *MU*, 236; for similar descriptions, *MU*, 159, 219-220.

[49] Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 372; Lewis Weeks, "Horace Bushnell on Black America," *Religious Education* 68 (1973), 29.

[50]Haller, *op. cit.*, 52; Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 372-373, 472.

inevitable end as the members of an inferior race died off. Freedom would not aid the slaves, for there was no example in history of such a group surviving.[51]

These attitudes changed dramatically after the Civil War. Whitman wrote admiringly about the courageous service of blacks in the Union army and the place of respect which they deserved.[52] Bushnell wrote similar words of admiration, and also charged the nation to remove every vestige of slavery, and to give emancipation a genuine opportunity to work.[53]

Bushnell's change of attitude is most clearly expressed in the sermon "Of Distinctions of Color" in *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, composed after the war. He was still concerned that the former slaves would have difficulty in daily life, for they would easily fall prey to vices, even if no one sought to take advantage of them.[54] But he also voiced new optimism, for Christianity had the potential to lift people and races out of a weak and untutored state. He rhapsodized of their future in an apocalyptic vision, where at the Last Judgment the African race stood as the last great people to arise.[55]

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[51] Bushnell, *The Census and slavery*, 12. Bushnell allowed that there were occasional exemplary characters, but not enough existed to "get any sufficient spring of advancement," *The Census and slavery*, 13. Bushnell also objected to slavery on moral grounds, for it broke up families, allowed physical abuses, and did not recognize the slaves as people with spiritual qualities. Thus it taught disregard of moral law. It also could not progress above its own level, thereby impeding organic progress; *Barbarism the first danger*, 18; *The Census and Slavery*, 17; *Crisis of the Church*, 19; *Discourse on the slavery question*, 6-7.

[52] Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 469.

[53] Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," 352-353.

[54] *MU*, 296-297.

[55] *MU*, 316-317.

Bushnell's exploration of the moral significance in color distinctions opens several paths. First, diversity gives us an understanding of what a human being is. It is not the exterior sameness, but the "moral personality," that makes one human. He also affirmed that diversity is good for human progress, and the humanity of various races. It did not matter to him that any have a different appearance. He tells us, in explaining questions raised by scholars about the Genesis account of creation, that humans may have originated in several places. He assumed that white people are descended from Adam, although even if blacks were not directly descended from Adam, they are also still human, for they are social, moral beings with human intelligence. With this moral base, he also asserted that making discriminatory decisions based on physical variety are to overlook God's ultimate use of moral law and learning for all things.[56]

From all this, Bushnell found an opportunity to probe the nature of equality. He claimed that there must be some inequality in life, for there are varying gifts in all people. It is also the order of the cosmos that some lead and some follow. Every person should strive to fill the role which God has allotted, and in turn allow every other person to be what God has called them to be. Only by admitting this inequality, this variety, can humanity embark on the path to real equality. It is only when we allow people to be what God made them to be that we can focus on the moral nature. Then we exclude "all distinctions of type and appearance," along with "diversities of quantity and force," and understand how alike we all are. In the United States, there is a divinely-inspired "civil

[56] *MU*, 300-306.

equality" which teaches that everyone has equal rights, "simply in the fact that we are all men." He adds that being lame, poor, or uneducated has no effect on this equality.[57]

Bushnell has been condemned as racist,[58] viewed as a culture-bound person struggling with racism,[59] and praised for his advanced attitudes to race, as well as other forms of social discrimination.[60] None of this would surprise a student of his theology; for he has likewise been characterized as in a range from conservative to moderate to opening a new day of liberal thought. Bushnell's attitudes toward women, and the responses, bear many similarities to what he wrote about racial issues. After breaking new, positive ground by writing that differences of appearance are not important, he then assumed that Adam was of his own race. He advocated education and opening professions to women, then wrote a book which advocated denying them a significant place in public life.

Through much of history, women may be considered a disabled group. They have been socially limited based on physical characteristics, and various forms of pseudo-science have been used to justify such views. As the women's suffrage movement grew, these restrictions were justified in terms of disability: claims were made

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[57] *MU*, 311-313.

[58] Charles Cole, "Horace Bushnell and the Slavery Question," *New England Quarterly* 23 (1950), 19-30; Cross, *op. cit.*, 41, 49; Douglas, *op. cit.*, 38.

[59] Weeks, *op. cit.*

[60] Howe, "The Social Science of Horace Bushnell," 318; Ralph E. Luker, "Bushnell in Black and White: Evidences of 'Racism' of Horace Bushnell," *New England Quarterly* 45 (1972), 408-416. It should be noted that Bushnell condemned taking Native American land in *Politics under the Law of God* (Hartford: Edwin Hunt, 1844).

that women were not capable of the same levels of intellectual development as men, and therefore were incapable of voting responsibly. Many men claimed that women would become ill if educated, and pointed to a variety of ailments allegedly peculiar to women as proof. Suffragists rarely challenged the idea that disability justified inequality, but they did claim that women did not suffer from the alleged impediments.[61]

Bushnell first admitted that men have oppressed women with "weights of disability," but he claimed that this was not deliberate oppression, although it had been real and laws have discriminated against them.[62] He objected to such oppression, for both women and men are "made in the image of God" and are of one species, being "equally human." However, he stated that there are also great divisions: women are also very different, and if they were a different species, they would be far removed from men! They are "unlike in kind," for they are shorter than men and have physically smaller brains. While men have a natural attitude of authority and inclinations to government and business, women have a natural attitude of submission, trust, and sympathy.[63]

In the course of his argument, Bushnell engaged in two social critiques. He introduced the first by stating that men had no inherent right to vote, because the ballot was not the best way to choose leadership. Instead of the current system which placed unqualified men in government, resulting in corruption, leaders ought to be drawn from

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[61] Baynton in Longmore, *op. cit.*, 41-43.

[62] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 9-11.

[63] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 49-52.

an educated group, and chosen by a trial of merit and qualification.[64] In his second critique, Bushnell stated that his call for women to be submissive was not an attack on them, for Americans as a whole did not understand the true meaning of subordination and submission.[65] This was not his first excursion into the meaning of equality and subordination. He had previously commented that too often, people think of power as effort and accomplishment, and that those who do not have power in the world have no purpose. To this, Bushnell countered that true Christian power is exhibited in patient, forgiving forbearance that imitates Christ. Such power is distinctively Christian, and all suffering is a testimony of power. This power is open to "the invalid, the cripple, the neglected" and particularly to women. Men, in contrast, overlook the true nature of power and engage in the sin of self-centered willfulness.[66] Bushnell stated that we do not remember the characters of the Bible for their greatness by human standards, but for obeying the divine call. Significance is found in God's use of a person or event, and the obscure are often the great forces of history.[67] As may be expected from such statements, Bushnell elsewhere placed little value on human standards of social rank-measurement. Other sermons state that everyone has a call from God, and the great person is the one who fulfills that call. This, and this alone, is what completes a person's life.[68] Further,

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[64] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 38-48.

[65] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage,* 56-58.

[66] *SNL*, 400-401, 411-413, quote on 412.

[67] *SNL*, 10-12.

[68] *SLS*, 99.

God intends that every person will have a place, and because of that, all places are worthy of honor.[69]

As Bushnell continued his argument, he returned to these ideas of power and moral significance. The nature of women shows that they are designed by God to be good mothers, a position which is superior,[70] and one that is an essential for strong families and a properly functioning organic society. His attitude toward women in 1869 does not seem to be very different from that which he expressed in 1845: as guardians of the home, they should be "perfectly pure": pious, modest and beautiful, well-mannered, even-tempered, compassionate, self-effacing and unselfish.[71] In assigning this role, Bushnell neatly outlines Barbara Welter's four points of the "Cult of True Womanhood": piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, all pointing toward the woman's role at home of raising God-loving children and using persuasion to bring wandering husbands back to God.[72] In such statements, Bushnell reflected a commonly-held value of the era which contrasted the home, a place which required such purity to defend it as a religious refuge, against the savage world of business.[73]

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[69] *SM*, 92.

[70] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 56, 59, 66, 71.

[71] Letter, October 6, 1845, in *SM*, 393-394.

[72] Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 21-41.

[73] Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 63-65.

Bushnell concluded that allowing women to vote would disrupt the family and society. But he also went beyond this, drawing on hereditarian notions to express concern that if women were to vote and participate in business and government, children would start growing up confused, and would pass on such characteristics, thus leading to a decline in physical well-being and spiritual life.[74]

Bushnell's assertion of distinct roles for men and women is often read as discriminatory. However, he did not base these distinctions on incapacity (except for physical labor, where he also excluded many men), but on social roles, an area where the sexes held complementary positions. He expressed openness to women in medicine, literature, art, law, education, science, and other professions, and as preachers. He placed limitations on women as police, judges, or pastors, where they would become governors or have to engage in physical labor.[75] None of his arguments were based on a notion that men held a particular role because of any divine resemblance or distinction.

Many of Bushnell's allowances went far beyond those granted by most people of his day. He insisted that his daughters receive a well-rounded education, including the classics.[76] By the time he wrote *Women's Suffrage*, he approved of collegiate coeducation. In stating this, he confessed his own earlier prejudices against women in colleges, but justified the change by noting that his 1845 visit to Oberlin showed the advantages of such a system–not the least of which was that it reduced the amount of the

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[74] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 136-137.

[75] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 10-11, 18-20, 26.

[76] Letter, October 6, 1845, in Cheney, *op. cit.*, 140. See Welter, *op. cit.*, 71-78, for some typical limitations of the day placed on women.

sort of pranks and rebellions in which he had engaged as a student.[77] Bushnell's approach to allowing women to preach is of particular interest. He argued that women were generally more pious than men, and had equal or greater gifts in religion, and that this alone should allow their participation. He further argued that Paul's restrictions on women speaking in public were created for a particular situation which no longer applied.[78]

Bushnell's is not the voice of a man who believed women incompetent to handle anything beyond bearing children and housework. His willingness to allow women entry into many other areas of social life indicates that he was open to new ideas, and sought to fit such ideas into his understanding of eternal principles, in this case, the necessity of a pure home life. Although far more open to a public role for women than many, Bushnell was still in many ways bound by conventions of the time, much as he had been in writing of slaves before the Civil War. His proposed revision might have clarified some of the problems, or even revised his views (as occurred with his attitude toward slaves) but, unfortunately, we do not know what he had in mind.

Unintended consequences are often a problem in considering historical figures. Ideas that women belonged in the home (although stripped of Bushnell's openness to other endeavors) were often used as the basis of discrimination, and as an industrial system developed, keeping women at home effectively created a second-class status, instead of a place of honor. In this regard, Bushnell expressed hope that women would

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[77] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 13-14.

[78] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 21-24.

be treated fairly, and be allowed to enter and progress in business.[79] Although some of his arguments seem flawed today, his insistence on honor, fair treatment, and openness are still matters of great importance.

Another area where unintended consequences deserve further notice occurs from Bushnell's ideas about heredity. The hereditarianism of Bushnell's age soon developed into the practice of eugenics. This term was first used in 1883 by the British scientist Francis Galton (1822-1911). He combined observations from his anthropological expeditions and his cousin Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to propound a theory of the possibility of using selective breeding. Humanity could be improved through evolutionary control by deliberate breeding of desirable characteristics.[80] Eugenics became a popular tool of clergy who sought to show their acceptance of science, and a way to improve humanity.[81] To speak of Bushnell as part of the eugenics movement would be an anachronism. However, Bushnell's popularization of hereditarianism, his interest in science and religion, and his emphasis on a right upbringing coupled to his advocacy of improvement certainly opened the door to later, wider applications.[82] Although his intentions were undoubtedly good, it cannot be forgotten that as hereditarianism and the desire to improve humanity led to eugenics, eugenics became the foundation of the atrocities of Nazi Germany, where people with

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[79] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 26.

[80] Nicholas Gillham, "Sir Francis Galton and the Birth of Eugenics," *Annual Review of Genetics* 35 (2001), 84-86, 98.

[81] Rosen, *op. cit.*, 5-6.

[82] Bozeman, *op. cit.*, 422-423.

disabilities were included with Jews as undesirable people. Eugenics also resulted in forced sterilization and institutionalization, as well as restrictive marriage and immigration laws in many American states.[83] Such results show the need for comprehensive reading and thought, for certainly Bushnell would have been as horrified as we are by some of the results which arose from hereditarianism.

Bushnell's ideas about society are otherwise generally a positive statement for people with disabilities. His emphasis on an ethical life, reaching beyond being "good" to being "new" in Christ, led to a new set of standards. His statements that Christians must take on responsibility for all members of society are a significant change from the day's emerging economic status-oriented values. His explicit statement of the need for diversity in society places a value on each member that is often missing in individualistic groups. Coupled with his beliefs about fashion and taste, diversity opens the door to wide acceptance of many conditions. This is furthered by Bushnell's commitment to early egalitarian values, which give importance to people that reaches beyond their economic contribution or cost. Theologically, Bushnell's hermeneutical method opens the door for a change in views about the nature of disabilities, especially with the progress of medical science. His portrayal of Christ as one who heals bodies gives importance and legitimacy to ministries of healing. That humans should follow Christ, who brought new methods of healing into play, also emphasizes a role for research in ways to relieve suffering. Bushnell's statements that existing standards are not necessarily those of God allow for continual examination and refinement. Of course,

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[83] Haller, *op. cit.*, 49-50, 95-96.

progress is not always smooth or consistent, but Bushnell offered long-term hope. Because progress is achieved through adversity and suffering, people who suffer are those who reclaim the power of Christ, and, in a properly-ordered society, are considered leaders.

Bushnell also made an effort to instill into his readers that the implications of disability should be taken more seriously than they often are. Because all disabilities, and other ailments, result from the consequences of sin, every person is liable to them. He made this point particularly about insanity. Any person who allows any impulse to take hold without self-restraint is already on that path, for the bonds that keep the mind in order are already broken. Not all are insane, of course, but no one is in "perfect equilibrium" and therefore we must strive to know our true self. This knowledge would teach us that we all are different and changing, and are always susceptible to such problems. Therefore we should not trust ourselves, should never claim to own the whole truth, and ought to be tolerant of others in their foibles, misunderstandings, and moods.[84]

An attitude of tolerance and serious self-consideration is necessary in other ways. Most of Bushnell's audience would readily have joined in his condemnations of drunkenness. Most would probably not have been as comfortable when he took up the underlying principle of control and balance, adding "over-doing" and being "relentlessly driven" without time for reflection to the list of addictions which disrupt family and

[84] *MU*, 263, 267-270.

society.[85] Again, we see a man whose writings require serious analysis to avoid the traps of frequent efforts to classify him with a given group.

III

Another consideration of language and its effects in relation to the values of society is the nature of metaphors one uses. As with many other writers, Bushnell often used images drawn from disabling conditions. The use of such images to signify a sinful state can reinforce the notion of a causal connection. Such use also creates an atmosphere in which the impact of a disabling condition is exaggerated (e.g., linking mobility impairments to lack of mental capacity), thereby further increasing discriminatory treatment. This kind of language is frequent, for disabling conditions which provide images for such metaphors are frequent. Most of these images gain their power by drawing on fear, thereby further distancing people with disabilities from gaining acceptance. Such images are so often accepted without thought that it is difficult to dissuade people from their use.[86]

The most immediate and noticeable example of images from disabling conditions is the title of Bushnell's book dealing with many of them, using the phrase "dark things." Bushnell was scarcely alone in such a use of "dark" to indicate bad or undesirable and "light" to refer to good or advancement. But such metaphors, especially from a person

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[85] *MU*, 252-253.

[86] Kudlick, *op. cit.*, 765; Linton, *op. cit.*, 126.

whom some consider to have been racist, do little to argue his cause. They also continue a tradition of inherently associating undesirable conditions with people of color.[87]

Another image that pervades religious discourse is the use of "blind" to convey spiritual unawareness. Traditional interpretations of Old Testament texts often emphasize that blindness is the result of sin or a lack of faith.[88] Bushnell often drew on this metaphor. He stated that because sin pulls one away from God, "the condition of sin is a condition of blindness and spiritual darkness,"[89] or that sin is so "closely yoked" to disease that it one "scarcely counts it as a figure to say that his soul is blind."[90] At various points, Bushnell used such terms in a more straightforward way, for example stating that we are "blind" to the true nature of women, implying a lack of perception.[91] In the sermon "The Capacity of Religion Extirpated by Disuse," he asked what would happen if one blindfolded the "bodily eyes" for some time, or if a hand was bound so it could not be used. The answer is that they would atrophy. Likewise, spiritual capacity must be used, and if one does not engage it, he grows "blind to God."[92]

Bushnell also used metaphors drawn from physical conditions. He referred to an unconverted church as an "army of spiritual invalids."[93] Preaching from Hebrews 12.13,

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[87] Weeks, *op. cit.*, 36.

[88] Covey, *op. cit.*, 109.

[89] *GIC*, 209.

[90] *VS*, 146.

[91] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 170.

[92] *SNL*, 163-164, 178.

[93] Bushnell, "The kingdom of heaven as a grain of mustard seed," 615.

he stated that all people suffer from "lameness of our feet" on the path of Christian discipleship.[94]

Although metaphors of this nature are intended to be illustrative, they often imply a link of a disabling condition to sinfulness. Although Bushnell refused to link specific instances of disabilities to specific sin, the portrayal of sin as deformation still implies some link. Discussing the human condition, he stated that our higher consciousness of God was lost in the Fall, and that therefore we cannot know God, becoming "too blind to see, too deaf to hear."[95] Sin removes the image of God; leaving a soul that is a "deformed creature" with "ugly and perverse shapes," a temper that is "angular and crabbed," and a mind in a state of "limping by."[96] People who trust themselves and not God are "crippled in their inventiveness."[97] The only remedy for those with the chronic disease of sin is a comprehensive re-making from outside.[98]

Several defenses or mitigating factors temper a harsh conclusion to an evaluation of Bushnell's use of these images. One is that Bushnell's use of disability metaphors derived from his theory of language. When Bushnell wrote theologically, he was, by his definition, not being descriptive, but poetic. An illustration that will be explored further, that of sin's disruptive effect as similar to a grain of sand in an eye, changing the eye

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[94] *CIT*, 13.

[95] *CHS*, 301-302.

[96] *SM*, 40.

[97] *SLS*, 98.

[98] *GIC*, 262.

from a sight organ to one of pain,[99] is one which is clearly poetic. It is also a description of a condition that would have afflicted all of his hearers, and therein is the core of the problem.

A frequent response to concerns about disability-image metaphors is that "we are all disabled in some way," an attempt to claim a shared condition.[100] Bushnell often made this claim when explaining the moral uses of disabling conditions. But to what extent would people identify themselves as incipiently insane, or otherwise disabled, when not confronted with such concerns? Bushnell realized that the answer to the question would generally be "not at all," however correct it would be to say otherwise.[101] Although Bushnell sought to change such perceptions, a problem remains with the overall effect as such answers remove personal identification and connection, undercutting personal acceptance of the condition.[102]

Another problem with claims about shared disability experience is that a disabling condition significantly affects one's life, resulting in limitations rarely experienced by others. Does any sighted person truly understand blindness? Would others understand what it is like to find various buildings off-limits, along with the experiences and associations they bring?

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[99] *NS*, 154.

[100] Valerie C. Jones Stiteler, "Singing Without a Voice," *Liturgical Ministry* 1 (1992), 140.

[101] *MU*, 213.

[102] Linton, *op. cit.*, 13.

To his credit, Bushnell did not always use such metaphors. Writing of a spiritual sense that recognizes the supernatural, he stated that it is often "slumbering or closed up in souls."[103] He wrote that many do not notice growth of the soul "just because they cannot see it with their eyes."[104] Metaphors of this nature are likely to be meaningful to more people; we all sleep (however well or poorly), and most people have had trouble finding something they cannot see readily. Further, the idea that not everything that is real can be seen by the eyes opens the way to understand that both sighted and blind people have limitations and senses which reach beyond the physical level. It is worthy of note that Bushnell, unlike many of his predecessors and successors, did not use disability images as polemical remarks intended to degrade his opponents.

Bushnell also stated that no one can claim to have a perfectly formed body that would meet all ideals of beauty. In every person, some part is awry, either too long or short or out of balance.[105] Perfect conditions exist only in art, where the artist draws from various forms to create an ideal. Not only does no perfect body exist, "three-fourths" of the living are "so ugly" that no one would care to use them for a model. Here Bushnell also engaged in another uncomfortable extension: deformity is not only about bodies, but ought to include taste or neatness, hearing problems, musical discord, disease, and temper, all of which reflect the disorder in the soul caused by sin.[106]

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[103] *CHS*, 438.

[104] *SNL*, 308.

[105] *MU*, 212-213.

[106] *NS*, 179-180.

At times, Bushnell's explanations sought to stretch the limitations of language. When this occurred, his insistence on poetic imagination as the heart of theological discourse provided solutions to this problem, and he used them very well. His ability to combine imagination with experience and scientific discovery, resulted in the creation of illustrations which make clearer what he sought to teach, and could stand as a model for disability discourse. As an example, to explain sin and its effects, he likened sin to a grain of sand in the eye. The eye has not changed, but it is now a source of pain, rather than an organ of sight. This is a new combination, one that was not in the original course of nature, although it is a proper response to the cause. Drawing on this image, he then explained the origin of deformities in a way that leaves intact one's humanity. For another example, an incubating egg, which had somehow been infected with a small speck or bit of matter inside the shell, would not develop properly, as its process of growth is disrupted. The embryo may stop developing, or the chick may have a missing wing, or some other deformity. This is all the more the case with humans, who have such great power over the causes in nature, all resulting in changes from the workings of natural law. Because sin disrupts the proper order of nature, these changes are generally toward disorder.[107]

So while Bushnell did use metaphors which some could easily find offensive, they are also limited, especially in comparison to other writers. His uses of such imagery are also often different in kind from those of many others. He often sought to be descriptive, rather than metaphorically linking sin to disability. As a pastor, it would be

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[107] *NS*, 154-158.

second nature for Bushnell to draw images from the Bible. As we have seen, Bushnell often noted the comparatively primitive nature of much Biblical imagery. One must ask what other image sources might be available when doing this. His private letters sometimes refer to classical works, but that would likely not have been practical in sermons to businessmen or laborers. Further, his interest in dealing with people in everyday, real settings required the use of images drawn from life's pains. In the end, although some of this imagery is troubling, he also used the Bible to refute many claims and assumptions regarding disability. He also often moved beyond such imagery in a way that either reminds all of us that there is no such thing as a perfect body, or gives new insight into the nature of disabilities. As has been the case with other areas, one must consider everything Bushnell had to say before jumping to a conclusion based on one passage. His insistence on the importance of society, and his statements that all people are afflicted with sin and thus disabled in some sense opened the door to understanding disability in social sense, as it is often studied today. And although he stated that disability and related conditions are in general the result of sin, his scientific statements indicate acceptance of medical causes in understanding their specific occurrence.

The overall goal of disability studies as it examines attitudes leading to discrimination is to promote equality in society. This is not only a matter of adaptive construction and devices but also social inclusion. A first question to consider in relation to this goal is whether Bushnell considered differences such as disabilities to be part of

the spectrum of individual variation. A second question is whether his moral framework upholds respect and justice for all people.[108]

On the first question, we have already seen that Bushnell generally placed disabilities in the context of a spectrum of human problems. He built a case that equality does not require sameness, and deplored the idea that some believe humanity must be a "bin of seeds all just alike."[109] He also noted that diversity in society and experiences are good for our development as humans.[110]

On the second question, we have seen how Bushnell called for loving sacrificial care of others and opposition to tendencies to selfishness in society,[111] thereby providing a foundation for respect and justice. In a post-war sermon on disasters, he reinforced earlier statements, stating that destruction should lead to unity, and that disasters "compel the higher and more privileged ranks" to acknowledge their oneness with others.[112] In a similar vein, he listed "oppressions of the weak" with other evils such as fraud, crime, and war.[113] It does no good to give God his due, but not one's fellow men. Bushnell's words express strongly the need for personal ethics as a matter of justice:

> Does it give one a title to be called humane, that he will not stick a fly with a pin because of his tenderness, and yet will stab, in bitter grudge, his fellow man? Does it fitly entitle one to the name of a just man, that he is

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[108] Hyland, *op. cit.*, 168, 170.

[109] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 58.

[110] *SLS*, 108.

[111] e.g., *NS*, 168.

[112] *MU*, 242.

[113] *NS*, 170-171.

> honest and fair with men of one color, and not with those of another, honest and fair on three days, or even five days in the week, and not on the days that remain?"[114]

Throughout his career, Bushnell admitted the existence of widespread injustice. His early protests against slavery centered on the unjust treatment of persons with a need for God.[115] Much later in life, as he argued that women should not vote, he did agree that they had often been treated unjustly.[116] Bushnell also found in Jesus a figure who had an holistic view of the world and its needs, and therefore was never part of a "school or party." Thus Jesus engaged in all reforms, not just a single one. Even when a reform is for a good cause, working for only one cause leads to a polarized, human perspective that leads to overlooking the real needs of people.[117] Much of this concern seems to have originated in the doctrine of divine sovereignty–a doctrine often taken by others to enforce social divisions. To Bushnell, the sovereignty includes service, and that requires loving concern.

Another indication of Bushnell's advocacy of inclusion can be found in his writings about education. In 1853, he wrote that all children should be included in common public schools, for separation creates prejudice, isolation and division. Although this article focused on including Roman Catholic children, it is also significant

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[114] *CHS*, 184.

[115] Bushnell, *The census and slavery*, 17; *Discourse on the slavery question*, 6-7.

[116] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 11.

[117] *NS*, 296-297.

that Bushnell argued for adjustments in curriculum to include all of these children.[118] *Christian Nurture* also includes statements that all should be included in the process of learning.[119]

Although Bushnell sought inclusion and ethical action as a Christian imperative, his application of the doctrine of divine sovereignty resulted in a mixed attitude toward protest and activism. In our day, religious-oriented activism for change in perceived unjust structures is a frequent tactic on all sides of the political spectrum. Protests of various kinds are common events among disability advocates, and the movement owes much of its existence to such events.

Before the political crises preceding the Civil War became acute, Bushnell's counsel generally ran against active intervention in political systems. This was based on the doctrine of divine sovereignty: God orders the world, and humans should not interfere. God would, in good time, conquer evil. In 1839, Bushnell wrote that progress toward liberty and equality was inevitable, and that one could no more impede such progress than the movement of the planets; it was God's plan, and would come to fruition whether people cooperated with, ignored, or opposed it.[120] Therefore, it did little good to interfere with God's plans and operation. In the 1857 sermon about the financial panic, he cited Acts 27.15 as grounds that submission to conditions was good discretion,

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[118] "Common Schools," *BE*, 84 and Cheney, *op. cit.*, 300.

[119] *CN*, 36-37.

[120] Bushnell, *Discourse on the slavery question*, 10-11.

particularly when "fury is irresistible."[121] In an 1858 collection, he stated that rather than complain, Christians should "sharpen our desire of knowledge" and await the day of God's change. Another sermon in the collection advises that Christian joy comes from harmony with God, not external conditions of the fleeting present time.[122]

As a tool for this growth, Bushnell placed much confidence in his ideas of Christian nurture. Children needed to be taught right ways while young, before evil became a habit. They could learn to live and cope with injustice as the world increasingly came to reflect divine order.[123]

As sectional tensions sharpened, Bushnell's ideas began to change. Apparently he was spurred by the Fugitive Slave Law, which he found particularly offensive. Of it, he wrote that some injustices cannot be ignored, and that this law was an insult to God, law, and reason. However, he was careful to separate himself from abolitionists, whom he saw as a threat to the whole social order. Their agitation was a usurpation of God's governing role, and would not change God's plan for the world. Instead of disobedience, he counseled repeal of the law.[124] After the war, he continued to advise that one should "suffer patiently," but now there was a new dimension: one should also "fight bravely" when confronting unjust conditions.[125] It is to this shift which we now turn.

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[121] *SM*, 120-122.

[122] *SNL*, 163, 225-227, 230-240.

[123] *CN*, 16-22.

[124] Bushnell, *The census and slavery*, 13-16, 18, 21-22.

[125] Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage*, 12.

IV

This shift in attitude toward some forms of protest was not Bushnell's only change in the course of the war. Nor was he alone in such changes. One change throughout the nation was the attitude toward public assistance. As we have seen, Bushnell held to the idea that poverty was generally the result of indolence, while making allowances for extenuating circumstances, such as disabling conditions. However, one was still dependent on charity. After the war, a sense of responsibility led to pensions for those injured while engaged in military action. These were the earliest, and for years, the only large scale governmental programs to aid people who were disabled, and mark the emergence of a new attitude toward all forms of aid.[126] As part of that trend, Bushnell called on the nation as a whole to become a great relief organization on behalf of those who were suffering loss from the war, and specifically to provide for the welfare of widows and children of soldiers, by insuring their education and adopting orphans.[127]

In his early years, we may recall, Bushnell wrote that war was for barbarians. In 1854, he again decried war, stating that God uses power as "vehemence but not violence." He added that violence was a sign of weakness, a state which humans were called to advance beyond.[128] The onset of war brought a sudden change of attitude. In his sermon after the first battle of Bull Run, he concluded that "peace will do for angels, but war is God's ordinance for sinners." Leading to this conclusion were statements that

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[126] K. Walter Hickel, "Medicine, Bureaucracy and Social Welfare" in Longmore, *op. cit.*, 236.

[127] Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," in *BE*, 342.

[128] "Personality Developed by Religion," in *SM*, 193.

adversity killed only that which was weak, thus bringing improvement, and that one weakness the war should correct was the error of the founding fathers as they sought to form a nation without acknowledging the divine origin of all authority and social organization.[129]

Bushnell did not view the war as divine judgment, but as the result of the course of natural law, which was responding to a cause–in this case, failure to establish a proper foundation for authority. Because of this error and the consequent lack of proper government, the nation had not developed loyalty to God, and used its resources for private gain instead of spreading the gospel.[130] Although the war resulted in the end of slavery, that would have occurred anyway as natural law worked its course, for both the race and the economic system behind it would have disappeared.[131] The war was critical, however, as an opportunity to correct the error of authority. If this did not occur, the nation would become engulfed in a morass of corruption from which it could not recover.[132]

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[129] Bushnell, *Reverses Needed*, 8-10, 24. There are implications for people with disabilities when one speaks of allowing the weak to die off, but Bushnell's pursuit of "weakness" as the lack of divine order in the Constitution makes it evident that he does not, at least here, have such an idea in mind. His statements elsewhere about the positive nature of charity and the value of diversity, as well as humanity generally being in a state of disease, would mitigate any claim that the sermon encourages such an approach toward people with various ailments.

[130] Bushnell, "Popular Government by Divine Right," in *BE*, 287; *Reverses Needed*, 10, 19; *SLS*, 165.

[131] Bushnell, *Discourse on the slavery question*, 11.

[132] Bushnell, "American Politics," 191; "Popular Government by Divine Right," in *BE*, 315-316.

Thus, in his sermon of Thanksgiving 1864, Bushnell repeated the call for a constitutional acknowledgment of the religious basis of society, and concluded that this was the cause for which soldiers had sacrificed "blood, blood, rivers of blood." In an obvious reference to Christ's sacrifice, he asked "without this shedding of blood, how could the violated order be sanctified?"[133] He completed this line of development in the 1865 address "Our Obligations to the Dead," which opened with an argument that most of the improvements in the world rise from tragic events. To him, it seemed that until people died, nothing of great consequence would happen. He lauded those who had fought in the war as "God's ministers" whose actions vindicated divine law.[134] Such thoughts were present as he wrote the sermons for *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, stating that to "bear, and dare" are the great lessons of life, without which it has little purpose. If there were no martyrs or heroes, the "highest inspirations would be needless."[135]

There is an element of bravado to this writing which might be taken to confer heroic stature on war. However, even if it was God's ordinance, Bushnell remained aware of the human cost of such actions. As he did in his writings on disabling conditions, Bushnell confronted these topics which some would have preferred to pass over, writing of "maimed bodies, and the disfigured, once noble forms," returning home.[136] He also confronted the greatest cost: if war was an ordinance of God, it was for

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[133] Bushnell, "Popular government by divine right," in *BE*, 287-288.

[134] Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," in *BE*, 325-326, 341.

[135] *MU*, 113-114.

[136] Bushnell, "Popular government by divine right," in *BE*, 317.

sinners in a fallen state–a state which called for regeneration. This awareness can also be found in *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, where he wrote that long and severe suffering resulted in a "gentled" or "broken feeling" wherein "the gait is softer, the motions less abrupt." Completing the illustration as an example, he added that "many of the best and holiest examples of piety are such as have been tried and finished in the crucible of suffering."[137] There is no grandeur here, only faithfulness in the midst of suffering.

Statements about the cost of suffering lead beyond war itself to a far-reaching change that became evident in Bushnell's discussions of sacrifice and forbearance. He attributed much of this change to life-long learning,[138] and there is ready evidence that the experience of war was a profound influence on this learning. In the same collection, he wrote that virtue came only from "the resolute, upheaving power of individuals against the crushing weight of bad or opposing solidarities."[139] This indicates a new direction, requiring more active involvement opposing the forces of evil.

Another change related to active opposition against evil can be found in Bushnell's ideas of progress. In his earlier years, Bushnell had written that progress was inevitable, and that the human choice was whether or not to cooperate with God in the effort. We have seen how his own struggle with disease first undermined his optimistic outlook, while leading to a new sense of challenge and struggle. Now, his struggle to understand the war changed his ideas further. By 1858, he wrote that "real manhood"

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[137] *MU*, 108.

[138] *MU*, 256.

[139] *MU*, 160.

required perseverance in the face of "severities and toils."[140] After the war, it seemed that progress was no longer assured, although one still had assurance of God's final victory. In the meantime, the Christian was engaged in a "holy discipline" that involved "danger, toil, and hardship."[141]

Through all this, Bushnell retained his view of an ultimate moral goal.[142] Before the war, recall that Bushnell had written little about human involvement in such efforts; for progress would occur no matter what humans sought to do, and nurture was the key to working with God. After the war, Bushnell was far more aware of the acute need for human involvement in this struggle.

Bushnell also had a more refined vision of the divine goal and what would be required to achieve the goal. In *Christ in Theology*, a relatively early book, Bushnell stated that there was a single principle behind his work: to bring understanding that religious truth is presented as an analogy. Continuing, he claimed that all differences and errors have their root in failure to perceive this necessity. In one of his few statements about the heavenly life, he added that there we would be able to "read God's eternal language without mistake or hindrance."[143] Because human nature requires that language

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[140] *SNL*, 232-233.

[141] *MU*, 351.

[142] Ellis Rece, Jr., *Teleology in the thought of Horace Bushnell* (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1971), argues that unity can be found in Bushnell's conviction that everything is directed by God toward fulfillment of a goal. That goal is the vanquishing of evil. I accept the overall idea, but seek to understand it in the light of Bushnell's writings about the human situation of sin and disability.

[143] *CIT*, 31.

about God be metaphorical, Bushnell's hope implies that in heaven, humans will be fully restored to their original perfection. In the meantime, it would seem that however much we try, perfection will elude us. There is a constant struggle to find truth. This struggle requires seeking justice "every where, every way, every day" as a means of letting go of partial truths which cause polarization.[144] His postwar spirit is reflected in *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, where he called for Christianity to instruct humanity by confronting the morals of the world, thus becoming a "good angel." As part of this confrontation, the work of the Christian is to seek alleviation of suffering in all its forms, including its "disgusts" and "revulsions." To act in this way is to show the "true moral beauty" to which God leads us.[145]

Bushnell had long objected to notions of worldly power, but after the war he developed an increased insight into the cross as an expression of the divine paradox of loving sacrifice and power. As maimed bodies moved him to consider beauty, evil moved him to consider suffering as beauty. No longer was evil overcome with nurture, leading to a bright new day. Now there was the continuing pressure of evil which required diligent watchfulness. The ultimate goal remained to reach to the highest forms. Earthly forms display the principles of the higher forms, calling us to embrace the paradox and reach beyond the senses.

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[144] *CHS*, 203-204, 216.

[145] *MU*, 227. Among the "disgusts" listed are "lunatic ravings . . . blind eyes . . . halting limbs . . . leprosies . . . sores . . . publicans . . . harlots . . . sorrows."

Chapter 5

COMPLEMENTARY TRUTH

I

> I am well aware that Christianity has hitherto failed to realize the noble consummation of which I speak. We have been too much in opinions to receive inspirations; occupied too much with fires and anathemas, to be filled with this pure love; too conversant with mock virtues and uncharitable sanctities, to receive this beauty or be kindled by this heavenly flame.[1]

Bushnell's view of God's purpose was that through Christianity, evil would be defeated. However, he repeatedly found that Christianity was too much occupied by its own divisions, with various groups arguing for the accuracy of their particular interpretation, to sense God's grand purpose and strive for the common goal. In an effort to reach beyond this strife, he sought to embrace paradox in doctrine, finding the truth which lay behind apparently opposing views. Only in this way could humanity liberate truth and grow closer to God, leading to God's eventual victory.

Bushnell's theory of natural and supernatural provided humans with a role in which to cooperate with God in progressing toward this goal. This theory also opened the path to acceptance of people with disabilities. Disabling conditions, although the result of humanity's unleashing of corruption in the world, are the inevitable result of the

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[1] *WP*, 89.

actions and reactions of natural law, not a special visitation of divine wrath. As such, disabilities are one reminder of the shared weakness of humanity and our need for a well-organized social system that would direct us toward God. In this society, diversity teaches us what humanity is like and how to care for each other as God cares for us.

In a relatively new nation that was not encrusted with social traditions, Bushnell sought to remove the encrustations of tradition on the gospel and give it new life. In that way, the gospel would find a home in and be a guide for the nation which Bushnell believed held a place of destiny. To accomplish that purpose, and to change lives, the gospel must confront the reality of the world. In *Moral Uses of Dark Things*, Bushnell called upon the nation to be open to and examine the reality of the world, and to engage the conditions of his day with a view to the future.

For disabilities studies, the first result of this engagement is that bodies, although so important that Jesus gave them his first attention, are not the final source of identity, for life holds elements that reach beyond the physical senses and dimensions. The demand to confront the reality of the world, good and bad, expressed in *Moral Uses of Dark Things* thus gives a purpose to the divine-human interaction in the world of *Nature and the Supernatural* and fulfills the goals of *Christian Nurture*. As a proper understanding of doctrines, such as the Trinity, would open us to a wider understanding of God, a wider acceptance of the diversity inherent in society would open us to a better understanding of God and ourselves.

II

> Perhaps it is *one of the highest errands of our life to learn the method of finding truths in their forms*; to learn how easy it is, by a false use of words, to fill our minds with the most contradictory and mischievous errors . . . . Perhaps this will be the crowning distinction of heavenly minds, that they are able to read God's eternal language without mistake or hindrance.[2]

In Plutarch's *The E at Delphi*, the reader learns that an enigmatic inscription at the ancient oracle is a gift, given by the deity in a way that ought to inspire us to ponder the wonder of the world, learning from old teachings but not being bound by them. This is because the quest to understand the divine truth which shapes the world is not merely a search for a source of ready answers, but a source of never-ending development.[3]

Bushnell's understanding of the world fits Plutarch's characterization. Through the "dark things" of the world, Bushnell found that God is still active, and gives us mysteries to ponder, mysteries which ask us not only to learn about God and the nature of the world, but to become involved in the world with compassionate love. To be kindled by the "heavenly flame" is to use the greatest gift of God, our ability to ponder the world and find the truth that God presents through mystery. Only as we do this are we able to better understand God, and learn to discern the truth which God shares with us.

This study has often noted many positive aspects of Bushnell's attitude toward people with disabilities as part of society. In those places where he leaves something to be desired in today's perspective (such as his attitude toward women), his thought was still generally ahead of most of his contemporaries, and he expressed openness to further

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[2] *CIT*, 31.

[3] Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos* 1.

change. Although he was, in some aspects, bound by the standards of his time, and thus perhaps not a prophet, in other areas, he reached out well beyond those standards. In this respect, the implication of his thought about disabilities reaches into the wider theological spectrum. Bushnell heightened our awareness of the shortcomings of human language, and thus pointed toward the need for openness and tolerance. He opened a way to acknowledge the reality of things not seen while providing for a world learning the ways of science. As he sought to uphold the inexpressible truth which informed Scripture, he engaged in many explorations of the cosmos that allowed God to operate in a manner consistent with science, without turning science into a god. By doing this, Bushnell laid a foundation for future growth that could embrace science and Christianity, integrating them into a society where every person had a contribution. This allowed him to uphold traditional doctrines while making their meaning accessible to the person living in the world.

As noted in the opening of this study, Bushnell has been a conundrum to theological historians, for he upheld tradition, yet spoke in ways that heralded the introduction of emerging liberal theology. Perhaps, instead of disputing Bushnell's place on a scale that he despised, we ought to examine his role as an astute observer, searching for truth, whose life reflected the changes of seasons while holding fast to his faith in God. Bushnell's search for truth began with an emphasis on lifelong nurture. In these first writings, he was optimistic that truth could be found through proper education. As he experienced the trials of his own illness, his optimism began to falter, and he explored the nature of the cosmos, seeking to understand how all of this came to be. After the experience of war, he found a new purpose and hope in an heroic struggle against sin.

Throughout, there is a vivid sense of the reality of God in everyday life in a world where sin seems to abound.

Within this feeling of divine reality in everyday life, there is still mystery. Disabilities are one of those mysteries, including the one from which he suffered. In the end, Bushnell found peace with his condition by trusting in God, and maintaining God's active role in the world. His careful exposition of nature and the supernatural maintained a place for God in a scientific world. His insistence that variety was good and constituted the norm indicated his resistance to the beginnings of a shift from a God-centered world to a human-centered world which sought measurement in terms of "natural" or "normal" against "deformed.[4] Bushnell's insistence that a moral lesson lay behind all physical conditions and events reinforced a sense of divine presence. Thus, Bushnell maintained the reality of God, and the reality of God's involvement in the world, as science increasingly separated God from the world. Faith was not an other-worldly matter for Bushnell, but active interest and participation in the world on a daily basis. There was no need to carve out a spiritual domain where God could rule, untouched by the advance of science in his day, and separated from daily life. In that wholeness, he found a path to learn the highest truths of God.

[4] cf. Baynton, "Disability: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 83.

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I am indebted to members of the H-Disability Discussion Network, <http://www.h-net.org/~disabil/> and Disability Studies in the Humanities, <http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/interests/ds-hum/> for some of these articles and links. The commercial may be viewed at <http://www.stillspeaking.com>.

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