

# “America! America!”: Vanishing Time and Space in Clarence Jordan’s “Things Needed for Our Peace,” Furman University, 1969

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Best known for his *Cotton Patch* version of the gospels and radical Christian community at Koinonia Farms, Clarence Jordan, a white Southern evangelical minister, translocated the events of scripture, physically mapping the life and times of Christ’s Jerusalem onto those of the 1960s American South. In so doing, Jordan aimed to implicate Southerners in the biblical narrative in a way that would not allow them to back away from the issues of racial and economic inequality plaguing the region at that time. In this paper, I track Jordan’s interweaving of past and present, analyzing the way in which he uses progressive form, metaphor, and dialogue to claim the sacred space and time of the gospel for the Civil Rights-era American South, and thereby endeavors to evoke a sense of divine responsibility to address the racial and economic inequality facing Southern communities.

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**“You nitwits. You are able to decipher the scientific facts, how is it that then you cannot decipher the signs of the times?”**

*Clarence Jordan, quoting Luke 12:56 in “Things Needed for Our Peace”*

Although he is paraphrasing Jesus Christ, Clarence Jordan, a white Southern evangelical best known for his ministerial work to end racial and economic inequalities in the Deep South, seems here not to be referring to the “times” of the first century but rather to the present moment: 1969, Furman University, “a little bit of artificial heaven” in Greenville, South Carolina, where Jordan considered members of the predominately white student body to be at risk of becoming “[pirates] on the high seas of humanity” (Jordan 7). As he often did, Jordan turned his invitation to participate in Furman’s Religion in Life lecture series into an opportunity to make real for his audience the

inequalities plaguing the South. Such a task called for a reinvigoration of the scriptures that would have no doubt been familiar to the Furman community, since Furman was associated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention until 1992. Indeed, the words in the epigraph above constitute Jordan’s own vernacular version of Luke 12:56, typically translated: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (ESV). Here and throughout “Things Needed for Our Peace,” Jordan’s colloquial translations blur the line between scriptural quotation and application, collapsing the time and distance

between the Jerusalem of Christ's day and the United States of his own.

Scholars who have studied Jordan's use of vernacular in reading and interpreting scripture typically claim its design was to so implicate Southerners in the biblical narrative that they would not be able to back away from the issues of racial and economic inequality plaguing the region as a whole (Stricklin 177-78; Marsh 56; Snider 59; Coble 180). Joel Snider offers the most complete study of Jordan's preaching style, performing a hermeneutical analysis of several of Jordan's sermons. Snider is concerned both with the way in which Jordan "[builds] an interpretive bridge" from scripture to the present moment and with the integrity of that bridge (45). Thus, he looks for evidence of carefully studied biblical exegesis and assesses the logic of the modern examples used to explicate scripture in Jordan's sermons. Snider's assessment of Jordan's exegetical accuracy, while useful for explaining Jordan's theological moves, fails to fully explain the movement and impact of Jordan's rhetoric. Snider concludes that Jordan's genius was his way of *contemporizing* biblical texts so that they took on a new and fervent meaning for Southerners in the twentieth century, but this is as far as his argument goes. Snider and his contemporaries view Jordan's updates to the gospel narrative as allegorical and not literal; that is, they underestimate the extent to which Jordan *literally* changes the text when he translocates the events it describes.

In this paper, I will track Jordan's interweaving of past and present, analyzing the ways in which he uses progressive form, metaphor, and dialogue to claim the sacred space and time of the gospel for the

Civil Rights-era American South, and thereby endeavors to evoke a sense of divine responsibility to address the racial and economic inequality facing Southern communities like Greenville. Specifically, I argue that Jordan does more than just contemporize the language of scripture. He alters its very substance, changing fundamental elements such as time period and locale and physically restaging first century events in Southern cities and with Southern actors; that is, he transmutes and translocates the New Testament, not simply analogizing between past and present but actually mapping the life and times of Christ onto the cultural and social arrangements of the South. By considering a text not previously studied, I hope to contribute to what Houck and Dixon, discussing the rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement, describe as a needed and worthwhile effort to "[publish] groundbreaking studies of heretofore unknown or forgotten speeches," affording in the process "a contemporary audience for those speeches" (4).

### **Jordan's Perspective on Race**

A unique perspective forged by several events in his early life and career shapes Jordan's rhetoric. Racial and economic inequality, central concerns in "Things Needed for Our Peace," were deeply personal issues to Jordan. Born in Talbotton, Georgia, in 1912, Jordan began questioning racial hierarchies at a young age. He recognized a disparity between the message imparted by the classic children's hymn, "Jesus Loves All the Little Children," and the way he observed African American children treated (Marsh 58); he once questioned his father's chastisement of a young African American deliveryman who came

to the front instead of to the side door of their home (Marsh 58; Stricklin 167); and he was troubled after learning that a member of the local Baptist congregation had readily tortured an African American man serving in the local chain gang (Marsh 59; Stricklin 167-68). Jordan studied agriculture at the University of Georgia. At the end of his senior year, he accepted a call to ministry, declining his ROTC commission due to a conviction that military service broke Christ's command to "Love your enemies" (Marsh 60-61; Stricklin 168; Snider 10).

Jordan would draw on both his agricultural and seminary training in establishing, jointly with Martin England, Koinonia Farm, described by Marsh as an "experiment in radical Christian community" (52). Koinonia, located in Americus, Georgia (Sumter County), sought to combine a deep-seated belief in the "transforming power of the gospel" with a lived practice of Christ's teachings, particularly his commands to help the needy regardless of race or ethnicity and to love one's neighbors as oneself (Stricklin 163). Likely modeled after the first Christian community chronicled in the biblical book of Acts, Koinonia operated, more or less, as a commune wherein all who lived and worked on the Farm were treated equally. Jordan and England employed black and white farmers indiscriminately, paying them fair and equal wages, and at mealtimes the entire working crew sat around the same table. Members of the community contributed their earnings to a common treasury, a pool which likely helped Koinonia subsist through boycotts by whites and white-owned businesses angered by the Farm's purposeful rejection of dominant Southern ideologies reinforcing segregation (Stricklin 164-65). Koinonia also came under gunfire and suffered at

least one bombing. Jordan and his family were dismissed from a Baptist church as well as threatened by the Ku Klux Klan (Stricklin 165).

Jordan acquired a "reputation as a powerful speaker," popular on many college campuses, at conventions of Baptist denominational groups and, at the height of Koinonia's struggles, in the pages of national newsmagazines (Snider 12). Jordan positioned himself as a social-change agent, becoming one of the "many regional and local voices" who "helped to contextualize the national [Civil Rights] Movement for a local audience," an important and impactful group of speakers often overshadowed by attention paid to national Civil Rights leaders (Houck and Dixon 9) and downplayed in historical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement that fail to appreciate the movement for the great "theological drama" that it was (Marsh 6). The positive role played by local white ministers like Jordan has been particularly overlooked, the result of a "historiographical bias" that favors a narrative in which black and white religious leaders were always depicted as being at odds with one another (Houck and Dixon 10). Like other ministers, both black and white, Jordan approached the social injustices he sought to correct through a radical theological lens, grounding his appeals in scripture and religious doctrine. Civil Rights ministers, including Jordan, incorporated elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition variously, using a diversity of specific appeals—appeals to Christ's life and ministry, to the Apostle Paul's thought, and to the Old Testament narrative of a chosen people freed from slavery, to name a few (Houck and Dixon 11-12).

### **In the Local Arena: Civil Rights in Greenville, S.C., c. 1969**

In 1969, Jordan spoke at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, as a part of the university's Religion in Life lecture series. At the time, Greenville had still not desegregated its public school system; Greenville County finally integrated its public schools in 1970 by order of a federal appellate court (O'Neill 293). The decision met with protest from "the all-white school board... city and county politicians, businesspeople and the *Greenville News*" (O'Neill 293). Greenville's political and business elite likewise vehemently resisted desegregation of other public facilities, which were, like the schools, ultimately integrated as a result of court orders. Thus, despite widespread disagreement over how to date the Civil Rights Movement (Houck and Dixon date the Movement from 1954 to 1965, but Jacqueline Dowd Hall urges a longer view) the situation in Greenville and Jordan's presence at Furman in 1969 demonstrate the persistence of racial unrest and the need for redemptive work in Southern communities as late as 1969. In "Things Needed for Our Peace," Jordan recognizes the persistent racial tensions in Greenville when he expresses a continuing need for "national and racial humility" (4).

Jordan likewise recognizes the remaining work to be done in the nationwide effort to end widespread poverty, an issue that, again, impacted Greenville locally. As in other cities, class differences in Greenville were closely linked to racial differences. As Stephen O'Neill notes, pre-Civil Rights Greenville's white population was "strictly divided by class" and felt threatened by "black efforts at uplift and self-improvement" (287). At one end of the social scale, white mill workers, fearful of losing their social status, turned to violent means of oppressing

such improvement efforts; at the other end, white business elites, eager to reap the economic advantages sure to result from an integrated black working class, sought to "control black efforts and coopt black institutions" (287). Jordan touches on the persistent economic challenges faced by much of the nation's working class. He claims that Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" had been and would continue to be ineffective at solving the problem, as its principle way of tackling the issue (increased taxes on the wealthy) would be forever circumvented by the richest Americans who would simply pass down the burden in the form of lower wages for workers and increased prices for goods and services. Motivated by this conviction, a great deal of Jordan's effort in "Things Needed for Our Peace" is concerned with stirring his audience to hold themselves responsible for tackling the poverty problem.

Although no records detailing the makeup of Jordan's audience could be located, his audience is likely to have been primarily comprised of members of the university community—faculty, staff, and students, nearly all of whom were white and most of whom were Christian. The moment in his lecture in which Jordan expresses contempt for college graduates who go on to become "[pirates] on the high seas of humanity" (7) suggests that Jordan envisioned his primary audience to be collegians. His message would not have been a new one for Furman's campus and, in all likelihood, would have been fairly well received. In the decade prior to 1969, Furman students and faculty alike promoted socially progressive values on campus and in local media. The student editor of the 1955 issue of Furman's literary magazine, *The Echo*, wrote an article in which she criticized the blatant disregard many Southern politicians had for the 1954 *Brown v. Board*

of *Education* ruling, and Furman faculty took a stand against measures by the South Carolina Baptist Convention, with which Furman was affiliated until 1992, to censor faculty who expressed views contrary to those held by the Baptist church (Tollison 12-13). In short, as Courtney Tollison notes of the years leading up to Furman's desegregation in 1965, "student and faculty opinion continued to be more progressive than mainstream political sentiment in South Carolina" (14).

Perhaps for this very reason, Jordan seems to consider his audience especially important to the continuation of the work to end racial and economic injustices; yet, he also worries that they will grow complacent. Furman's first African American student, Joseph Vaughan, graduated in 1968 (Neumann 45); several others graduated shortly thereafter. There may have been a tendency, then, to see the tough work of desegregation as mostly "done," at least at Furman. But the controversy of the previous decade raged on, especially in Greenville County Schools, still segregated 15 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. (For more on Greenville's Civil Rights battle, see Hill, and O'Rourke.) Jordan's lecture thus came at a critical moment, one he fears Furman's privileged collegians will pass over. Jordan articulates this fear most clearly when he says, "One of the things that really frightens me about a school such as this, you come here... and then you get out and you think that this is the kind of world... with its beautiful landscape and its flowing fountains and its singing birds and its magnificent buildings, you think is the kind of stuff the world is made of. But it simply isn't." (7).

### **Vanishing Time and Space in Jordan's "Things Needed for Our Peace"**

To prevent the moment from being lost—to identify his audience with the social issues still weighing on communities like Greenville—Jordan reinvents the gospel as he speaks, combining scriptural and present-day history so fluidly that the two become difficult to distinguish. He claims the sacred time and space of Jesus' Jerusalem for the American South, thereby compelling his audience to see themselves as present-day enactors of scripture. Three rhetorical techniques enable Jordan's effective conflation of sacred and real time/space: his use of progressive form, metaphor, and dialogue.

Jordan achieves his aims largely through formal techniques. Burke tells us that "form in literature is an arousing and fulfilling of desires" (124). Form refers both to the mechanics of arrangement and to the anticipations particular arrangements set up. On a certain level, "Things Needed for Our Peace" exemplifies what we might call conventional sermon form, adhering to a pattern of arrangement typical of religious lectures since the development of the "thematic" sermon in the medieval *ars praedicandi*: Jordan reads—or, more accurately in this case, translates—three passages from Luke's gospel; enumerates four "themes" to emerge from them, or "things that could have given some peace to Jesus' people;" and illustrates each of the themes with anecdotes and additional scriptural references (schematic of the sermon form adopted from Kneidel). But despite its having a clear organizational pattern, "Things Needed for Our Peace" comes across as thematically loosely tied together. Jordan treats each of the four "things needed for our peace" independently, neither making explicit connections between the themes as he moves from one to another nor

bringing them into meaningful relationship in his conclusion. He likewise gives some points more extensive treatment than others. For example, whereas he speaks only briefly—479 words—about the first necessary “thing,” “a sense of national and racial humility” (3), he goes on at length—1,186 words, nearly a quarter of the speech—about the second necessary “thing,” “a realistic understanding of the nature of violence” (4).

It is not, then, close adherence to the conventional sermonic form that gives “Things Needed for Our Peace” its internal coherence. Rather, the lecture is tied together by a qualitative progression of images and figures. For example, Jordan’s choice of “storm” in translating Luke 12:54 directly anticipates his comparison, later in the lecture, of the racial conflict to a storm. Jordan translated Luke 12:54 as follows: *And he said to the crowds, “When you see a dark cloud gathering in the west, right away you say ‘there’s a storm a coming.’ And sure enough, it comes.”* The choice of “storm” here represents a marked departure from most versions of the Bible, wherein “there’s a storm a coming” is translated “it is going to rain” (NRSV) or “a shower is coming” (ESV). Similarly, Jordan emphasizes Christ’s masculinity when contextualizing the passage in Luke wherein Christ weeps over Jerusalem. Commenting on Christ’s request, before his triumphal entry, for a “mule where no man had ever sat,” Jordan said, “Now if you think Jesus is one of these sissy little, namby-pamby guys with long hair... with toenail and the fingers... polished fingernails, you’re wrong.” This emphasis on Christ’s masculinity sets up Jordan’s later description of God’s “unquenchable love” as one that “makes men out of its practitioners. Finally, Jordan’s choice to translate “Jerusalem” as “America” not only anticipates his call in the last

sentence of the lecture to “live as a new people in a new Jerusalem” but also clarifies where, for Jordan, the “new Jerusalem” is to be—not heaven in the distant future but America in the present moment.

Images and frames like those above bind the discourse together. They also link past to present, as they are first used to describe biblical and therefore historical people and events and later used to describe contemporary ones. Thus, the progressive form of “Things Needed for Our Peace” begins the work of breaking down the historical distance between scripture and the South of Jordan’s day. Metaphors collapse the distance even further.

One of the four master tropes, metaphor establishes connections between seemingly different things, creating an image meant to engage both the rational mind and the imagination, or, as the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* puts it, conjuring a “vivid mental picture” (quoted in Nate). At its core, metaphor describes one thing—to use Richards’ 1936 formulation, some *tenor*—in terms of something else—a *vehicle* (Jasinski 550-551). I mentioned above the way in which Jordan uses metaphor to depict the racial conflict (*tenor*) as a storm (*vehicle*)—a dynamic, moving force with an unstoppable power to demolish the standing social order. The storm metaphor is powerful, as it intimates both the destruction and potential for restoration harbored by the racial conflict: like the racial conflict, a storm is violent and can devastate landscapes and livelihoods. At the same time, the rains of a storm nurture the earth and ready the land for new growth; so too can the racial conflict ultimately lead to the growth of new and healthier social relations.

As he told his audience in “Things Needed for Our Peace,” Jordan first used the storm

metaphor in an earlier sermon given the morning after a tornado had passed through the city he was visiting. In that sermon, he intimated that the storm was rising—the destruction and devastation were on the way. In “Things Needed for Our Peace,” he declares, “the storm has come and we have not yet passed through the eye of it” (5). Here, then, Jordan describes the racial conflict as having “arrived” but not yet dissipated; the Civil Rights Movement may have resulted in a legal end to segregation, but racial discrimination persisted in more elusive forms, and thus the work of restoration had yet to truly begin.

In addition to characterizing the continuing force of the racial conflict, the storm metaphor makes a subtle connection to the verses Jordan reads from Luke 15, lamenting how America (Jerusalem) kills its prophets. In his use of the storm metaphor in the earlier sermon, Jordan framed himself as a prophet—he saw the storm “gathering on [the] horizon” and warned the people of its coming. Yet white Southerners, too complacent or fearful of change, were known to “[hurl] smears at those who tell [them] the truth, calling them all kinds of names” (Jordan 3), sneering at, boycotting, and attacking if not quite killing their prophets like Jordan. Jordan’s own experience at Koinonia offers a testament to the suffering typically endured by prophets; for, as James Darsey writes, “the role of the prophet is not a role one seeks; it is a role with which one is burdened” (28). The metaphor thus positions Jordan as an actor in scripture, giving him the agency of a prophet and equating the bigoted Southerners with the insolent citizens of Jerusalem.

Jordan achieves a similar effect when delivering an extended anecdote about being confronted in public by a staunch racist, against whom Jordan had a difficult time

not lashing out. Acting out of love, Jordan concludes, does not “[keep] a guy from calling you names and insulting you and spitting on you... it does make a man out of you” (7). Again, Jordan presents himself as one who was persecuted, only this time he heightens the comparison, likening himself, by way of the masculine framing of both Christ and his (Jordan’s) actions, to Christ more so than to the prophets of Jerusalem. Just as Christ was spit upon and ridiculed while being led to his crucifixion, Jordan was publically degraded by the racist’s insults; and just as Christ suffered all mistreatment without retaliating, Jordan waited patiently for his assailant to lose steam and walk away.

The move from a prophetic voice to a messianic voice seems strategic, as the latter more forcefully links Jordan to the scriptural context he maps onto contemporary times. Rather than comparing himself to some (any) prophet, Jordan compares himself to Christ, the most authoritative figure in the New Testament and the human voice in all of the scriptures Jordan chooses to translate. Furthermore, as Anson Rabinbach notes of modern Jewish Messianism (which, while not Christian Messianism in its fullest sense, shares roots with the Christian tradition), “the Messianic concept is... intimately connected to the idea of a return to an original state which lies *both* in the past and the future” (84, emphasis added). Considering Jordan’s efforts to portray history as fluid, his use of the messianic voice serves to point out proper actions—Christ’s in perpetually turning the other cheek and his own in response to the racist farmer—that are both historical *and* contemporary.

The framing of Jordan’s response to his attacker as “masculine” is worth revisiting, for it is both central to the Jordan-as-Christ



metaphor and a curious rhetorical turn in its own right. For Jordan, a man of a Deep South culture more inclined to look to the Old Testament than to Christ when it came to adjudicating wrongs, the confrontation would have presented a challenge to his manhood. The dominant cultural response to this affront would have been to, as the man with whom Jordan discussed the altercation after his attacker's departure put it, "clench him (the attacker) of all righteousness" (Jordan 6). Jordan felt compelled, therefore, to do more than just demonstrate the appropriate, Christ-like response to persecution. He also felt it necessary to justify that response against cultural norms. The response, in order to be acceptable to proud, Southern men—and perhaps also to Southern women reinforcing dominant cultural conceptions of manhood—had to be manly. Jordan makes it so by teasing out Christ's masculinity and using it as the benchmark for his own.<sup>1</sup> More so than Jordan's passive response, which might, in another context, just as easily have been labeled Gandhi-like, the masculine frame binds Jordan to Christ.

In addition to his use of progressive form and metaphor, Jordan's incorporation of dialogue into "Things Needed for Our Peace" works, by minimizing the diversity of the "voices" in the lecture, to eliminate difference between biblical actors and those in the 1960s American South. Specifically, Jordan employs the classical rhetorical strategy of *sermocinatio*, defined by Gideon Burton as "speaking dramatically in the first person for

someone else, assigning language that would be appropriate for that person's character (and for one's rhetorical purpose)" (*Silva Rhetoricae*). Dialogue operates as an important shaper of the character Jordan aims to project for his audience, serving to equate his own voice with that of the "common man;" when giving the illustration about his confrontation with the racist farmer, Jordan recounts a dialogic exchange between himself and another farmer, speaking both his own part and that of the farmer. This move allowed Jordan to downplay his education—he had a Ph.D. in Greek New Testament and often translated the gospel from the original Greek as he was delivering a lecture—and present himself as just another good ole Southerner.

When read against the scriptural backdrop laid out at the beginning of the sermon, the dialogue also reinforces the image of Jordan as a Christ-like figure. In nearly all of the verses Jordan selected, Christ is speaking. Translating them, Jordan thus assumes the character of Christ; however, because the particular version of Christ's words is Jordan's, Christ also takes on a sort of Jordan-like character, using phrases such as "clap you in the clink," "paid through the nose," and "like an old bard rock hen gathers her little biddies under her wings" (Jordan 3). Because Jordan is refashioning Christ's words using his own vernacular (rather than simply reading a standard English version of the text), the dialogue creates reciprocity between original speaker (Christ) and translator (Jordan), giving Christ a Southern persona and Jordan a messianic

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<sup>1</sup> It's interesting to note that Jordan misses an opportunity here to challenge hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, one implication of Jordan's insistence that love is manly is that manliness is a precondition for the "rightness" of anything a man does, a troubling proposition to say the least. It is possible he is simply "picking his battles," choosing not to overwhelm his audience with radical views on both race and sexuality at the same time. It is equally possible that his views on sexuality were in fact not radical; nothing I have come across in my research suggests that they were.



air. Again, the overall effect is to reduce the time and space separating Christ and his followers from Jordan and his audience.

Jordan's way of making discrete chronologies and geographies fluid is his rhetorical genius, his way of expressing his conviction that scripture should not just be considered as possible historical precedent but lived, that is, made real in the present moment. Indeed, Jordan's concept of time and space comes to be a guiding force of arrangement in "Things Needed for Our Peace." Leff writes that time and space are the two "basic coordinates of rhetorical action," pointing to the way in which "spatial metaphors," such as Abraham Lincoln's depiction of the nation as a "house divided" and John C. Calhoun's conception of the "union as a container," work to give the discourses in which they are employed a conceptual substructure. Likewise, dimensions of temporality often undergird a speaker's discourse, for the rhetorical mode demands attention to timing: discourse "develops in time through the progression of spoken or written words" and "directs itself toward what the Greeks called *kairos*—a fitting, appropriate, or timely response to a given situation" (Leff 383).

Jordan alters his audience's sense of their own public responsibility by condensing time and space, by imagining events as neither distinctly historical nor contemporary but as existing on a kind of continuum or loop. We see this when, for example, Jordan speaks of Christ's triumphal entry and says, "*And then all these preachers and big-wigs coming out there wanting to arrest him for parading without a permit*" (4, emphasis added). Presumably, Jordan is recounting a gospel narrative, but the reference to being arrested for parading without a permit is a contemporary one, referring to one of the

tactics used against Civil Rights demonstrators. Moments later in the lecture, Jordan claims of the people of Christ's day: "Their scientists... were able to split an atom and put a man in space and put him on the moon" (4). Again, Jordan maps one time and space onto another. Jordan moves the biblical scenes from first-century Jerusalem to twentieth-century America. Translocating the scenes and actors of the New Testament effectively conceptualizes the sacred space and time of the Bible and the real space and time of the American South as one and the same. In turn, this conceptualization which hums beneath the surface of "Things Needed for Our Peace" drives Jordan's principle argument, namely that Southern evangelicals cannot abide racial prejudice and economic injustice.

Jordan's conception of "sacred space" runs counter to traditional definitions of the term, a point worth pausing over, as it demonstrates the unconventionality of Jordan's approach. Eliade writes, "When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse" (21). *Contra* Eliade, Jordan seems to reject the existence, at least in relation to scripture, of an "absolute reality." While the Bible is not a space in the strictest sense, its events are situated in real, locatable places. But Jordan swaps one landscape for another, dismissing the possibility that the Bible's events are tied to the physical spaces in which they took place. Likewise, while many Christians may view the Bible as a "fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation" (Eliade 21) in their lives, the events of Jordan's version of scripture are far from fixed. On the contrary, Jordan depicts them as un-fixed, scalable to the present moment.

## **Conclusion: Jordan's Rhetorical Legacy**

Despite the attention he has received from religious and Civil Rights Movement historians, Clarence Jordan, “an embattled but remarkable witness to radical Southern Christianity” (Harvey 309), has remained a relatively obscure figure in the annals of American rhetorical discourse. My effort has been to show how Jordan’s rhetorical equation of biblical time and space with that of present day America animates his previously unstudied 1969 lecture “Things Needed for Our Peace.” Jordan’s message seems as relevant for contemporary audiences as it did for Furman’s community 46 years ago. Despite the triumph of desegregation, racial tensions persist throughout the United States. Recent episodes of race-related violence in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, and elsewhere are indicative of a continuing need for voices like Jordan’s. Studying Jordan’s rhetoric leads us to a richer understanding of how

changing religious arguments put forth by courageous white ministers, many of whom are understudied or overlooked altogether, worked to change Southern evangelicals’ minds about race. Recovering the strategies used by these ministers may create opportunities for the strategies’ redeployment in the current fight against racial injustice as well as in the ongoing battle for gender equality, in the disability rights arena, or in service of other social change movements. Further, understanding Jordan’s techniques in “Things Needed for Our Peace,” particularly the way in which he incorporates dialogue, enhances our knowledge of the way time and space can be altered by language, made at once past and present, distant and near, a concern explored by such scholars as Leff and James Boyd White. Understanding the possibilities and limits of language will better equip us to, as Jordan’s “Christ” puts it, “decipher the signs of the times” and respond accordingly.

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