The Ministerial Covenant in The United Methodist Church Today
A Quarterly Review Roundtable Discussion

Sex, Power and Ministry: The Case of the Normal Neurotic
Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Burton

Ashokaria: The Practical Theology of John Wesley’s Heart Religion
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The Ministerial Covenant in The United Methodist Church Today

A Quarterly Review Roundtable Discussion

On October 2-3, 1989, twelve United Methodist clergy members from across the country met in Nashville at the Board of Higher Education and Ministry to talk about their understanding and experience of the ministerial covenant. They struggled with definitions, issues, concepts, and practice. Their conversation, edited for the journal, reinforces one of the most distinctive aspects of ordained ministry in The United Methodist church: the special relationship of mutual care and responsibility exercised by elders in annual conferences.


Hels: Jack Tuell's book called The Organization of the United Methodist Church includes the following summary statement about ordained ministry: "The ordained ministry of The United
Methodist Church constitutes a fellowship which is precious to its members. It is a fellowship based on shared hopes and dreams, tears and laughter, successes and failures... What binds this group highly variegated group together? One thing: they are under orders to be ministers of "Word, Sacrament, and Order," accepting their calls "with a glad mind and will." Fellowship is a good word; is covenant a better one? Why introduce the theological language?

Griffith: In popular usage, fellowship is casual and voluntary. In covenant there is mutual obligation, commitment. I'm assuming that we do not mean a hierarchical relationship, but one between equals.

Link: I think we need to remember that a covenant is made with God, and that is what keeps it from being just a contract. Because it is God's covenant, there is then equality between pastor and congregation and both of us to the connection. If God is the source of the covenant, then it is not between equals.

Griffith: You are talking about two different covenants. The individual response to God's call is one form of covenant; when you make a covenant in ministry then you become part of a community where there is mutual responsibility. And covenant in ordained ministry is a covenant of equals.

Harnish: I want to respond to Don. I'm not sure that ministry is seen as a fellowship of equals in the Methodist tradition, if you go back to Wesley and Asbury. There was a brotherhood, but Wesley was in charge—he gave the orders and made the appointments. Asbury was even more authoritarian, it seems to me. When we use the word covenant to talk about what it means to be a traveling preacher in full connection, under orders in a hierarchy, we are breaking new ground.

Del Pino: But why should we use theological language to discuss this? I think this is the heart of the problem: so little of what we do in the ordained or general ministry of the church is theologically motivated. Our assumption these days is that in religious matters, everyone's an authority. So if you start talking about a special covenant, that's anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic. And we won't listen to the theologians in our church who can help us make these distinctions.
Walter: The problem is obvious—we all have different concepts of covenant. I think of the covenant as an equilateral triangle. At one point there is the congregation, at another is clergy, and the third is the connection. Clergy have a special covenant with each other because you and I are in this ballgame together. What I do or don’t do in my place will affect you when you come to serve there, and it will help us all to remember that. The congregational aspect of covenant in ministry is to accept the appointed pastor. The connection for me is represented by the bishop and cabinet, which can become authoritarian.

Del Pino: Functionally.

Walter: Yes. That part of the covenant is, and I know because it says so in the Discipline, paragraph 402.2. I agree to be in covenant, but what really puts me there is my call to ministry. The call helps me accept the covenant and, in a sense, give up some of my freedom to decide where I will be and serve. When a person comes to annual conference and answers the question—"Are you willing to live by the doctrine and polity of this church?"—that is an expression of willingness to be in covenant. Maybe the ordination service, or the yoke that I put around my neck in the form of a stole on Sunday morning, are other signs that I have accepted the covenant.

MacArthur: We all have immense freedom to decide for ourselves what is covenantal and what is not. But while it is true that the Discipline makes some very clear statements about covenant as relationship and commitment, in reality covenant is qualified to death, "Yes, I said I would go, but you need to take into account this, or that..." The word covenant has no literal meaning for me.

Link: But the covenant isn’t just about itineracy. Being in covenant is being a church in relationship to God. The church has just as much a covenant as we clergy do.

Treese: When the Discipline talks about the ministerial covenant it does not mean the church, or polity, or connectionalism. It means a special relationship, a special spirit, a special covenant, whereby each individual member of the annual conference is in relationship with all the other ordained
ministers. This is a very personal thing characterized by virtues such as mutual trust, mutual concern, unquestioned moral character, genuine piety, sound doctrine, and faithfulness in the discharge of ministerial duties. That is really what the church intends the ministerial covenant to be all about. But we shy away from that and become pragmatic and literal and concerned with the system. I think, brothers and sisters, that this is part of the reason why there's a lot of concern among the laity today, who think our covenant is no more than a union that makes sure we take care of each other in a materialistic way.

Del Pino: I want to point out that historically the covenant between pastors was the context within which mission was agreed upon. And Wesley's high understanding of ordination led to the annual conference of pastors being sent out to engage in that mission.

Harnish: It would certainly help if we agreed to focus on the special covenant that exists between ministerial members of an annual conference. Don, I think you are absolutely right about theory, and unfortunately right about practice also. In practice, the special relationship hardly exists. That's why the executive session is so boring, why people go only because its business and they have to, rather than thanking God for allowing them to be a part of it.

McArthur: In thinking about this subject, I come back to the need to distinguish between full connection and elders' orders. At one point they are very close: you are brought into full connection, and out of that you are ordained as an elder. But increasingly I need to separate these two. Ordination is something that is done once and for all. But full connection is not given for life; it is something that needs to be maintained, that calls me to a certain accountability. In the future we may see that full connection is something to be consciously preserved, rather than permanent unless it's taken away through trial or misconduct.

Garcia: Some years back, my bishop told me that I needed to think of each appointment as if that were the last one I was going to receive, that I was going to retire from there thirty or
forty years hence. And therefore I needed to work with that congregation, make adjustments. He moved me after two years, but that's neither here nor there. The point is that attitudes toward appointments, particularly in a local church, set a standard of relationship that is more than simply connectional. It is a pact that one enters into with the annual conference. You are supposed to be responsible not only to your colleagues but also to the people to whom you are appointed. Russell: I would suggest to you that the covenant is in force during annual conference, but not always at executive session. As with any other covenant body, there is stratification, and covenant groups meet in the hallways and around restaurant tables and so forth, and there is a sense of excitement about meetings and shared activities. To me, covenant has to do with how you live out your relationships with those other people. But I also firmly believe in the covenant between pastor and congregation.

Link: But the laity is also deeply covenanted. We are so intrigued with, or enamored by our covenant with each other that we feel exclusive about it. Until we know that we are covenanted together as the body of Christ, each with a special job to do, we're going to have more stratification than we can endure.

Cho: I too would like to expand the concept of covenant. Why? Because if this is indeed a kind of relationship then we can look into the Bible and see God relating to human beings, selecting certain people to covenant with, and demanding responsibility and honor from these people. I think we all have different kinds of covenant relationships. I have a covenantal relationship with God, with my colleagues in the ministry, with my wife, my children, and with my church members. The problem is in determining which covenantal relationship becomes most important, so to speak, in relation to the appointment.

Harnish: Well, I'm not afraid to say that there is a special and unique covenant that exists for ordained full members of the annual conference. That is not to minimize the role of the laity, but I'm committed to the life of this annual conference in a way that the lay member of the annual conference is not.

Garcia: Baloney.
Harnish: I'm not questioning the lay member's commitment to the larger concept of ministry, and that is the context for our own function. But persons are set aside for a particular function within that context; we commit ourselves in vocation and career in a way that our lay brothers and sisters do not. I'm not saying that's better, but it is different. And there is something unique about the covenant that the ordained members of the annual conference make to the body.

Link: Yes, our covenant with each other has that special quality. But we are not sharing it with the annual conference or with the people we are supposed to be leading. If the littlest church in my district, which has 13 members, doesn't have that vital desire to be in connection with the annual conference, or realize that it is a vital part of the annual conference, then we will fail as the United Methodist Church.

Harnish: I agree with Jody [Link] one hundred percent. What it means to be a part of the United Methodist connection, the body of the whole, needs to be shared by all United Methodists. But there is a sense in which a person can be set apart for service within the body. Within that context we make commitments to each other and to the body that are not made by the lay members of the annual conference or the members of local churches. That's where the real struggle is.

Walter: The common ground is Christ. And that, in a sense, is a covenant both for the ordained and lay person. Most church members don't know what a covenant is, they don't study the Discipline. But they do know what commitment is, what being part of the body is, and that is their covenant. So you are talking about the same thing from a different point of view.

Griffith: Building on what both Jody and Ted said, I think the overarching mission of the church is an important part of the puzzle. In the area of mission, clergy and lay are in covenant. One of the problems of the church today is the diffusion of mission—we don't really know what we're doing or why. So we think we need to tinker with the machine.

Walter: We are generally agreed, aren't we, that there is no real biblical precedent for a special relationship among members of the clergy.
Griffith: The nearest parallel would be the Mosaic covenant where God said on Mount Sinai, "I am Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt...you shall be a kingdom of priests."

Walter: But that applies to everybody—that's general ministry.

Griffith: Then there were people with specialized functions within the community who helped the community recall its heritage, renew its covenant, keep its faith alive. That's the difference in function.

McArthur: I think the point at which the word covenant begins to take on a certain shape for me is right at the beginning of the executive session of the annual conference, where a very important question is asked: Are the members of this executive session blameless in their life in covenant? Now I don't see this question being asked anywhere else. We don't know quite how to deal with this issue.

Del Pino: The real power and significance of covenantal relationships for ministerial members in the annual conference is that we do not refuse to go to places because they do not appeal to us. If itineracy works through covenantal relationships, then ordained members in full connection are taking the gospel to the dark places of human experience. The notion of professionalism has upstaged that, and turned the question that begins executive session into an embarrassing one. Professionals, of course, don't have to deal with that sort of thing.

Russell: I would like to return to the definition question one more time. We can talk about covenant on at least two levels. One has to do with theory—theology. The other has to do with the practice of covenant. Theologically I suggest to you that the covenant was born in the desert, where the Israelites lived together, and it began to fall apart as soon as the tribes spread out in Canaan. It's difficult to answer the question about being blameless if we see one another only once a year. We either don't know what's going on, or we get it third hand.

Cain: My understanding is that, biblically speaking, a covenant is only that which is made by persons in and around the presence of God. It isn't just agreement between two people. The very way we enter into the ordained ministry is an
acceptance of that covenant. We are able to do so because we're ordained, we're ordained because the Holy Spirit acts, and the church agrees to that act. We must never forget that, in a sense, we are God's people. Now that doesn't erase or efface the initial covenant we have in baptism. We all share in that. But in addition there is a special covenant, if you like, of those who have agreed to be God's people in a very particular and special way. And Tim, I think we do live together, whether we like it or not. For the rest of our active lives we have said that we would be accountable and responsible to those with whom we are in covenant, namely the elders of the annual conference. Part of that is the official accountability of the bishop, cabinet and board of ordained ministry. Part of it is the discussion and conversation that goes on in less formal circles. I would plead for us to be very careful about how we use the word covenant. I do not see how we can use it with a local congregation, for instance, because they do not enter into that except as they receive an appointment. We join with them in the covenant of the baptized and in the covenant of the church in that place, but that is not the same thing as the covenant which we share in the annual conference with each of the elders, with whom we are bound for life. I have always been taught that covenant, once entered into, is immutable, not changeable. You do not ever repeat baptism or leave your state as an ordained person. Even though the church may withdraw your authority to act as such, you are still within the covenant.

Del Pino: I find it interesting that in New England, among congregational groups, there has been an unusual renewal of clergy associations. They want some common ground where they can stand, and not always feel like the Lone Ranger. Those brothers and sisters say to me, 'you've got this mechanism all set up!' and all I can say is, 'in so many ways it doesn't work.' There are people looking at our structure from the outside who see it very clearly and have great respect for it. Perhaps we have the letter of the law, but we have lost the spirit—what happens to a church with an unconverted clergy?

Walter: Maybe the real place for us to start is setting forth the experience of covenant. You know, when someone dies in
my family, these people are at the funeral. We want to know about each other's problems and difficulties as they are happening, not after the crisis has already occurred. The damage is done when someone comes to the Board of Ordained Ministry to face some grievance and ends up saying, "when I was having all those troubles with my wife, nobody said anything." Covenant only means something when it is fleshed out, one on one, in groups where we really share with one another. And it does happen. I hope it happens for everybody.

**Hels:** What is the relationship between the covenant and the appointment system? Does the covenant "work"? What are the main pressures on it?

**Harnish:** I sense a conflict between the personal experience of covenant and the appointment system. At the deeper level of personal relationships between people, and in small groups, the covenant is really lived out. But most of us don't have a sense of excitement about the church's mission being carried out through the appointment system. So where is the real commitment?

**Garcia:** I have a feeling that there are different attitudes toward clergy covenant at different levels of clergy. Around this table we have talked about "ordained, full member of an annual conference." The fact that we're arrogant enough to think of clergy covenant as being among these people and not all clergy says something about us, and probably also about the atmosphere that we've created in the conferences. Even among the ordained full members there are different classes of clergy; there are some who for a variety of reasons may feel that they are less than part of an inner circle of covenanting clergy, mostly brothers. Maybe brothers and sisters, I'm not sure. But the core must exclude some people. There is pressure on the covenant that comes from our tendency to be exclusive and discriminatory in our attitudes.

**Cho:** I think the covenant works, but it works very poorly, especially when it comes to deploying ministers according to their gifts and graces. Salary is a factor that makes trouble constantly. Suppose there is a minister who is really gifted in rural ministry, but he or she has to have a salary that is better
than that. We have a system that should solve or prevent that kind of problem, but it doesn't.

**McArthur:** Does a covenant work, or does it just exist? If a covenant just is, then you can either keep it or break it. Don't you really want to ask what happens when people keep the terms of the covenant? The covenant appears mysteriously in some places, and then we can celebrate it; there are other places where our expectations are not met, and one of those places, obviously, is the appointment system.

**Walter:** You know, California is a long way from South Carolina, but if you and I have a covenant it makes a difference to me. In my mind it creates some assumptions on my part...you have put yourself on the line as ordained clergy.

**Russell:** If we are now talking about the covenant in practice, how it works out in process, then we're talking about consultation. Does consultation work? Do pastors and clergy go where they are sent? How well do churches receive the clergy that the cabinet and bishop send them? What are some of the criteria for the appointment-making covenant? If I knew the answers to these questions, then I could say if I thought the covenant worked.

**Griffith:** Tim, I've heard two parallel questions. One is if the covenant is successful, does it function? The other question is, how does the covenant relate to the appointment system? Is there loyalty to the itineracy on the part of the covenant? Those overlap but they are not the same question.

**Russell:** I wonder how excited Asbury's itinerant preachers were when they were sent off to who knows where every six months? On the other hand, they went. So even though they weren't enthusiastic, the appointment system worked. Now at our annual conferences we know what the appointments are ahead of time and yet people come to hear the bishop read them off. The bishop reads them off and we do our litany of response, and that's it. I used to think there were criteria for making appointments, but I gave that up after my experience on the cabinet. One thing is still important in the cabinet: you put everything on the table. So the minister needs to ask the cabinet and the bishop some questions, too, such as: 'Do you
talk about all the churches, pastors, and clergy, whether it's lay pastors, professionals, or elders? Do you yourselves work together as a cabinet?"

Treese: It distresses me that we have a difficult time talking about covenant without moving almost immediately into appointment making. Perhaps it is better to ask whether the covenant is a reality. Unless we talk about this and get our heads around it we are going to continue having trouble with appointment making. Appointment making assumes that certain other kinds of commitments are in place. I return to my list: mutual trust, mutual concern, unquestioned moral character...it's in the book. Really creative appointment making is a consequence of the covenant.

Link: I think living in the covenant can be taught. Under the leadership of some bishops, it is being taught. If pastors are aware of the covenant anywhere besides appointment, it's in spiritual cluster groups, where people get together as a community of faithful sojourners.

Del Pino: Yes, in these groups people are going to talk about what's going on in their respective ministries and what is pushing them up against the edges of their faith. But when I gather with my colleagues we talk about who is being moved where, who has just gotten an appointment to a certain committee from the bishop, or who has been asked to do what by who else. The covenant is not really being nurtured, and it isn’t intentional, but it’s hard to see it as a source of identity in ministry.

Link: When you realize that we’re a group of people who have lived in each other’s houses and know where the bathroom is and where the kids sleep and all that, you’d think the bond would just spring forth.

Taylor: In my experience clergy women seem to be able to intentionally support each other and be in covenant. I wonder whether part of that isn’t the fact that in suffering we are able to recognize our need for one another.

Russell: You can’t really divorce the smaller group from the larger group, though. Wesley’s societies were to interact with
society as a whole. You experience it more intensely in the small
group, but you live it out in the larger body.

_Cain:_ I think this discussion itself is evidence of the

_covenant_. The reason I ask you whether the bishop appointed

_you_ to a certain committee is because of my concern for the
total mission of the church which is identified, at least at this
point, with that appointment. Therefore what goes on in
Winchester or in Santa Ana is of concern for me. And when
trouble comes, and the crisis point hits, the covenant becomes
very, very real. A funeral is one expression. Over and over again
I have seen extremely busy ministers drop everything to be
present for a service, or come when there is a crisis at home.
Now that also happens in other ways, but in this kind of
situation there is a special sense of my involvement and respon­
sibility to the church. I think the covenant is working and it's
time to give it some credit.

It also happens in the appointment process. When a person
is in pain, and the appointment is not working, the cabinet can
listen and work with the person without destroying the person
and his or her ministry as a whole. I think that's what so
attractive to clergy in other denominations. My guess is that
everyone around this table has had the experience of going to
appointment you did not want. And in fact you tried not to have
the appointment, but you finally went because the connection,
rightly or wrongly, came to the conclusion that this is where
you were supposed to serve. So you went. I think every time the
appointments are read there is an indication of the covenant at
work.

_Garcia:_ But the wrong appointment is a sign that the
covenant is not working. We do not deal with each other respon­
sibly and we allow those who should not be in ordained ministry
to continue.

_Griffith:_ The two hardest things that I have ever heard a
board of ordained ministry say are "no, you aren't qualified" or,
"it's time you..." But usually we dely and delay. We use the
covenant to try to rescue people in a pastoral way, but it might
be more redempitive to say "you'd better practice your faith
somewhere else."
Treese: What you're talking about, Dan, are violations of the covenant on the part of those charged with implementing certain procedures within it. The covenant has evolved certain humane, pastoral, loving and caring ways to remove people from ministry. We don't do it without a support system, and that's been there for the last eight years. But the covenant is violated when the procedures are not carried out, when ineffective pastors are moved from A to B to C. The covenant is violated, the churches are violated, but even more than that, the individual is too.

Link: If we have a strong covenant, then people who are in trouble can be helped out by one of the others in the covenant. It seems as though when we notice that a pastor is ineffective we don't rally around as a group of pastors. We could help so much if we offered to teach the pastor how to do this or that, and not leave him or her in isolation to flounder until someone notices that they cannot go to another congregation. The word that I keep thinking of is trust. If we really don't trust each other, we will tend to talk about appointments and hope that will mean mission. But we are afraid of revealing our souls because then everyone will know how shallow we are and how much we still need to grow.

McArthur: It seems to me that if I can escape using the word covenant to describe procedure, and avoid questions about whether the covenant works or not, then the covenant becomes something I am invited to live. To live in the covenant means I have to find ways to restore relationships when they are broken. The covenant then becomes an invitation to live in a very daring and culturally innovative way.

Cain: I want to come in along the same lines. I wonder how frequently trust is taking place and the care is being given, but we don't advertise it. I'm amazed, having been on both a cabinet and a Board of Ordained Ministry how much is really done to assist persons, either to improve their skills or exit them if that is what it comes down to. But as a superintendent you don't want to go advertising, because that would not be in keeping with the relationship with the colleague you're trying to help. As one who is involved with theological education, I really
appreciate the care and training of probationers in several conferences represented around this table. One annual conference that I know of takes every probationer in their first full-time appointment and puts them in a covenant group and assign an elder to work with them for two years. It's understood that everything discussed is confidential and will not be passed on to the board for evaluative purposes. Spouses are invited to be a part of the covenant. This begins to build some habits, it provides support, it gives hope when things seem to be falling apart.

**Walter:** In South Carolina we are giving direct attention to two areas that have been mentioned. We assign a counseling elder to the beginning candidates until they become full members of annual conference. That may take up to eight years. We try to keep those people together, but we will reassign if it is necessary, just to continue the process. This helps make the covenant work, because the individual knows someone to call on, to ask questions of, to help set goals to meet. The second thing is we are developing a process of career assessment and exiting the ministry. There is the possibility that we will work with the counseling center of Emory University on this. We will know how to deal better with the person who moves every year—to either improve the situation, so that it doesn't happen again, or exit. We want to do that in a way that is kind and not detrimental to the person, his or her family, or the congregation. I think those are two ways in which the covenant is working.

**Cain:** The probationary training I've seen in CalNevada involves requiring attendance for three or four events per year so that there is a support group and counseling. Where that is being done there I see more and more younger colleagues exhibiting a sense of covenant, because they've lived it.

**Link:** I'd like to think that this started in 1976, when Don Treese told me, as a person in charge of support systems [the Board of Ordained Ministry], to start a mentoring program. It has just spread out in a hundred different ways.

**Russell:** What I've seen in the past fifteen years is that the church as a whole is giving annual conferences, boards, and
cabinets more tools and models with which to deal with people in the covenant process. The difficulty comes in helping these persons know that the qualifying and exiting processes are not just hoops that you jump through, but that they model how you are going to live out the rest of your ministry.

Trees: If we really think the covenant is so strong and healthy, why is there so much clergy bashing in the United Methodist Church? Itineracy seen as careerism, or what's best for me, not the church. Guaranteed appointment looks like a haven for mediocrity, and professional standards are making us technically competent rather than spiritual. We hear that the ministers' union is protective of clergy rights and privileges, that it bleeds the churches for salaries and insurance benefits and pensions. The laity stands back and sees all this covenant language as mysterious. So they think if they are more involved with the covenant they can rectify these injustices. Because of course if you leave the clergy to themselves, what you'll get is careerism, competition, hypocrisy, professionalism, all the rest. Why do we as a denomination blame all our problems on pilot error?

Griffith: I think we can add to that the sense of confusion about the church's mission. Another problem is our lack of pastors: we have to keep ineffective ministers because there has got to be a warm body in every church. But clergy themselves put pressure on the covenant. I don't know how to describe this other than to say that there is a tendency to whine. "It's just terrible being a minister. They only gave me a 3% raise next year and they devote $125,000 to a building fund!" My other concern is passivity among the clergy. "I want somebody to come in and raise my apportionments for me!" I've got a wonderful layman in my congregation. I was having a rough time, and I spent some time talking to him, and he looked right at me and said, "Well, Don, that just goes along with the office." That really worked.

Harnish: Don's expression "clergy-bashing" is colorful. But it is very important. Why is there such negative emotion directed at the clergy? I think part of it comes from ourselves. We don't want to be elitist, or arrogant, and we certainly don't deny the
importance of the ministry of the laity. But we have a very
difficult time affirming what it means to be an ordained mem­
ber of an annual conference. I remember going to summer camp
and having a big commitment service on the last night. Part of
the service was the invitation to give yourself full-time to
Christian service. Greatest profession in the world, greatest
thing you can do with your life. They repeated this year after
year. We're afraid to say that now about ordained ministry.

Russell: I wonder if we think we're different from the rest of
society. I think what's happening in the Methodist church is
not unique. Values are changing very rapidly.

Link: The media has contributed to a distorted picture of
ordained ministry. You know, when the Jim Bakker sex scandal
case broke my attendance went up markedly.

McArthur: I think that there are any number of school
teachers who would say, "Why is it that school teachers get
blamed for everything that goes wrong in the world?" Or we
blame lawyers, or physicians. If you have a dart to throw, then
the professions are the bull's-eye. Having said that, I still don't
think that therefore the clergy is totally OK. I don't think that
if you repair the covenant then everything else will work out
all right. The problems we see, plus half a dozen others, are
separate and unique issues that must be resolved on their own.
The covenant sets the stage for working on these problems, but
in itself it is not a spiritual antibody.

Cain: I don't want to look for one reason to account for
society's hostility toward the professions. But at least one of the
many reasons in the current sociological environment is our
emphasis on egalitarianism. People tend to resent anyone who
has something which is not available to everybody. There's a
desire to make everyone the same while simultaneously
demanding specific services which can only be done by the
professional. But institutions themselves are in a decline, and
there are specific sociological reasons for this. Part of it may be
leadership. But we need to be aware of the world as we try to
analyze where we are as a church, or as clergy.

Cho: Obviously the church in this country has experienced
decline, as Dr. Cain has said. I just returned from Korea and a
mission tour with 27 new New York conference leaders. I took
them to see the growing churches there, some with 40,000 or
45,000 members, gigantic churches, education buildings going
up, social programs being developed. It was interesting to see
their reaction: they were numb. They are so used to decline,
smallness, falling numbers, they don't know what to do with
that kind of growth. There was a little sadness, envy, even some
cynicism.

Russell: Where I have seen change among churches who
were experiencing decline, it has been a result of people's
changed attitude about themselves.

Walter: And where did they get that?

Russell: From the clergy. Ministers came in there and said
to them "You are part of something larger than your own
decaying body. There are people out there who need minister­
ing to, and you are part of that ministry." Some places fail, but
you must at least address the question.

Del Pino: I think the covenant means that our church can
move more intentionally, more deliberately than any other
Protestant body, to go about the task of being a prophetic
church, and there is not going to be astounding success in those
circumstances. When I look at mainline liberal Protestantism,
I see that The United Methodist Church has done some herald­
ing. We continue to have a deployed ministry, and the majority
of people continue to go where they are sent. Those people can
be removed if they become obstacles to the mission of the
church. To me, church growth, reversing the membership
decline, is not the basis for evaluating the health of of the
church. My understanding of the biblical prophets is that their
word is never welcome.

Hels: Living in the covenant brings with it constant evalua­
tion, both of new candidates and each other. What does it mean
in either case to be a good member of the clergy? What is the
theological significance of personal characteristics or virtues of
members of the clergy?

Harnish: Can we change your question again? Instead of
being either good or bad, I would rather talk about being a
responsible member of the covenant. The question would then be, what are my responsibilities as a member of the covenant?

Griffith: I would describe the covenant as an organic system, or community that we are parts of. In it we must be self-differentiated, ourselves, neither passive nor aggressive, but at the same time responsible for how we affect other people. That’s where we see those characteristics or virtues you were asking about. And that is intensely theological, because the system is rooted in God’s call [to ordained ministry].

Link: And if we call the system a body, then it’s the Body of Christ. That clearly defines these characteristics and qualities as theological.

Cain: I think we need to look at how the Discipline defines covenant, otherwise we are evading the main question. The Discipline is very clear when it says that only those shall be elected to full membership who are of unquestioned moral character and genuine piety, who are sound in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and faithful in the discharge of their duties. That seems to be comprehensive and not open to individual decision-making. It calls for individual accountability, but the criteria are not ours to tinker with.

Garcia: Does that mean that when we look for new clergy members, or evaluate each other, that we look for whoever meets minimum standards? That it’s OK if you have not been caught or accused of anything, regardless of your performance as a pastor with responsibilities to your church? My concern is that too often we look for reasons to keep people in ministry, and use covenant to protect each other as much as possible.

Del Pino: I believe that is the exception rather than the rule. The problems with ineffectiveness have to do with the task of superintending. But I want to return to the theological underpinnings of all this. Covenant is theological in that it is rooted in something that is very deep in the hearts and souls of everyone who is audacious enough to dare to speak for God. The key word, as Don said yesterday, is special—there is a special covenant. We clergy lack clarity about what it means to be special. Instead everything has to be egalitarian. But there are gradations even among those who claim there is no such thing
in the church. There are professional lay people in this church who see themselves either as deficient clergy or super laity, one or the other. But we must look into the special quality of our covenant, because it comes from our mandate from God, based on the priestly role emerging from the Old Testament, the New Testament communities of faith, and what the tradition has done with that.

Russell: I would like to pick up on Don’s response to the original question, which emphasized the system in relation to individual parts of it. I would simply like to share what I look for in a clergy person in conference, in the qualifying process, and further as continuing to be a responsible minister. I see individuals as having systems as well as belonging to them. I look for a person with an open system as opposed to a closed system. That is, someone who doesn’t have all the answers, who is willing to listen, who is not completely mature yet, because God wills change and growth for him or her. This type of person can be in a system of accountability. People with closed systems become almost a God to themselves, because they will not acknowledge that something beyond them owns them, first God, and then the covenant community.

Hels: Jerome, does that correspond to your idea that we need clarity on the special nature of the covenant?

Del Pino: Not exactly. I want to use theological language, not language from systems development. I'm not really clear what Tim is saying.

Russell: To use theological language, I would say that Abraham was open to God when he said, get up and go to a new land. Moses resisted God at first and took some convincing, but finally the Hebrew people went into the wilderness. When Jesus approached the fishermen and said follow me, they dropped what they were doing and followed. An open person, someone with an open system, is one who responds to a call, or something beyond themselves. That's theological language as far as I'm concerned, not systems development or analysis. But it is still responsive to our United Methodist structure of accountability. You are not a clergy person out here on your
own. You are connected in a covenant body of Christ that works in concert.

**Cain:** But isn’t there more to the covenant and being an ordained minister than just being open? It would appear to me that this is expected of every Christian. But I thought that the ordained clergy had a specific task, so there is performance connected to it. You are called upon now to act, to serve, to be responsible.

**Russell:** Yes, of course it is more than just openness. But that is the starting place for me. I see too many ministers coming into the covenant body who are not open to other members of the covenant. They are closed to persons from this area, or whoever has this theological view, or persons who are this color, or have that accent, and so forth. That is the reality in the United Methodist Church. So my first check in qualifying a person in ministry is how ready they are for diversity, to grow and make adjustments in their lives.

**Del Pino:** Sharon, I think your question had to do with gatekeeping, and consequently with the ability to say no more clearly so that we are not just accepting warm bodies. What are the nonnegotiables in the special covenant? I think it is almost embarrassing to have a long footnote in the *Discipline* regarding what it means to be special, because the real standards are axiomatic. There must be a prior commitment to these standards so that men and women are willing to say, I will vote this person down because he or she is not worthy of exceptional trust, even if it means I won’t get elected to General Conference. I am acutely aware that ordained ministers are not being sent to local churches to work out their own personal problems, they are being sent in the name of Jesus Christ on behalf of the mission of the United Methodist Church. People who make decisions of this kind must understand what is special about this covenant; it is not something that can be reduced to a general euphoria that we are all in ministry.

**Link:** Jerome, I like what you’re saying and I agree with it. But there is a problem. Once we have determined that this person does not have the normal equipment for being an effective pastor, but he or she testifies to a call from God, we stand
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back. As gatekeepers, we let them in. All right, so he really does not get along well with people. If his call and his zeal is intact, what can we do to nurture, support, train, educate, and guide him into being really effective? In the case of those who go awry morally after they are within our ranks, here is where the suspicion is that clergy will protect each other, as Dan was saying. But the truth is I don’t see that taking place. Once it becomes public, at least public to the district superintendent, then the Discipline has routes and channels that we follow. But problems with the discharge of duties we cover up out of some kind of patience or piety. Then our so-called grace and compassion just trip us up, and keep us from being better pastors.

Del Pino: But I think we need to see clearly that there must be a convergence between what someone asserts as his or her call and the ability of the community to discern the presence of gifts and graces. When they assert their call, the community must discern in them something fundamental, something non-negotiable. What happens after they are admitted becomes a test of the integrity of the covenant. Namely, are we really capable of letting our judgment stand? Forgiveness is not the task of a board of ordained ministry; that is for God to give. It is the task of the board, however, to make good on the promise that if you betray the trust of your office, the consequences will be severe. I’m not saying that heavy penalties should be meted out in every case. But my goodness gracious, when it can be shown that a minister’s impropriety within a congregation has led to several divorces, the question of forgiveness is moot. Will the gospel be advanced when such an individual is allowed to continue? That is the bottom line on the covenant. Ordination is a sacred trust, not a right, or enfranchisement. We must use the authority that has been invested in us as a result of this trust, and not shy away from it. But it is not just a matter of authority or authoritarianism, but of integrity in being committed to a cause that is greater than ourselves. There is a hierarchy in principle here, and we must have clarity about it, from the Council of Bishops all the way to the local church.

Harnish: I agree with Jerome. Coming back to the original question, what does it mean to be a responsible member of the
covenant, I want to raise the issue of our hesitance to really use the Discipline and take it at face value. The two sets of questions, the first about call and the second about examination for membership, give us the grounds for addressing whether a person should be ordained. A person can say that he or she has been called by God, but the questions are supposed to test that, to determine whether the call is genuine or not. It is wonderful to be able to claim that you have had a call, but in the United Methodist Church, that is not enough. The Discipline tells us what the clergy covenant is meant to be; these things are given, and we must use the authority.

McArthur: I would like to stay on the subject of characteristics. Once a person is in the covenant, and the goal is to maintain it, I will look for two things. If I don't find them, nothing else matters. The first is a kind of basic integrity about one’s own person, that is, honesty with oneself, with God, and with persons in relationship. Theologically this has its roots in faith in God. If I have no integrity in this place, my service to God, then what is there to build on; how can I understand or relate to other clergy in covenant? The second issue for the covenant is the tension between obedience and initiative. I react strongly to complaints about inadequate leadership in the church. There is probably some truth to the complaint. So what? Part of the covenant demands that I exercise initiative based on my call and responsibilities, so that where there is need, I will attend to it, where there is a word to be proclaimed, I will do it. And where I see someone in authority doing something wrong, I need to have the guts to say so. But in this I am also being obedient, because I am not a rule unto myself, or God’s gift to a particular congregation. I am part of a tradition; to lead people through their journey in faith, I will pick up where someone else left off, and then hand responsibility over to someone else. These are existential issues; we live in this tension whether we can describe it clearly or not.

Griffith: Tom, I agree with you. There’s a prior commitment here that we take for granted that I think needs to be verbalized. There needs to be an explicit faith in Christ for service in
the Christian community. That faith is personal, real, and beyond all doubt. I think that has to be the starting point.

_McArthur_: But for me the starting point is integrity, and that has implications. I think it is legitimate for someone to say, yes, I am an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and I also know that at this point in my life I have no faith. Something has happened and I realize that I must step aside. It may be that I will want to come back. This sort of think has to be permissible. For me, integrity precedes everything.

_Cho_: I think what you are saying is true. But you have raised the issue of belief versus unbelief, and this can be confusing. For example, when I take pastors to appointment interviews, they will sometimes be asked, Do you believe in the Virgin Birth? Do you believe the creation story literally? These are real questions in some congregations.

_Griffith_: I would hope that the pastor who goes to that congregation would have enough integrity to say either yes, I believe in the Virgin Birth, or no, I do not, it is not part of my faith structure. Or even to ask, why is this doctrine important to you? The congregation, or staff parish committee, has a right to ask these questions, but not a right to have the answer they want. The real problem is the pastor who is afraid to deal with these issues if he or she were asked.

_Russell_: The common thread in assessing candidates or evaluating other members of annual conference is to listen to how that person works out other covenantal relationships. The residency program has its covenants, the mentor system, the local church, the board of ordained ministry, and so forth. These are initiated by the individual, not given, as in the case with the annual conference. And these covenants should be reviewed and explored, including both vision and practical expectations.

_Del Pino_: Tim, what you're saying reminds me that we have the most layered, and in some senses convoluted gatekeeping system possible. We have so many covenants that it's hard to keep up with all of them. And that was my original point, that we have democratized so much that we have lost clarity about
the authenticity of call and the church's expectations of everyone in ordained ministry.

Russell: I certainly agree with you about the complexity of process; for me it would be better to spend less time developing a document or an evaluation instrument and more time trying to discover what kind of person we want to be dealing with in the process—both for qualifying and continuing in the covenant.

McArthur: When we deal with people who are just coming in, I think there is some confusion about the difference between doing and being. This reminds me of William James's struggle with the illusion of technique. We give the appearance of looking for the person's ability to do this or that task; but we do not disclose that we are really looking for who they are. We've probably all had the experience of dealing with someone who did all the requirements and wants to be ordained...but we were really looking for a quality of being. No amount of doing will substitute for that.

Link: Jerome's comments have made me think about the element of sacrifice in ministry. Many people who are coming into ministry now are doing it because there is employment security, and will do better in the church than in another place. Of course they have peers who expect to go straight from college to $40,000 a year jobs. Other people come to seminary from local churches and they only want to serve that kind of church. Do these people really have a vision of the church's mission that they can sacrifice themselves for?

Griffith: I also hear people who say that they are drawn to the ministry but that seminary education is too expensive, and after college they cannot afford to take on even more debt.

Taylor: It seems to me that we are doing ourselves the very thing that Don was talking about, clergy-bashing. I do not think that we should think of people who enter seminary now as being somehow inferior to us. As I listened to this discussion, I was trying to think, where's the gate? The gate is the process. At one point someone enters, but for the rest of the time the covenant means that we work with them, help them to grow and mature and become what we think they can be. Why don't
we explore our ability to say yes without getting hung up on our need to say no once in a while?

Cain: I think you have raised a very significant point. There is a certain judgmental attitude toward those who are just coming in, and I would like to speak in their defense. I think we have remarkable group of people trying to come into the ministry. There is dysfunction only later, when for example, as Young Cho mentioned, the pastor-parish relations committee sees fit to examine a person theologically. When the bishop and cabinet decide that this person is the one for this appointment, then their soundness on Christian doctrine is assumed and not open to question at that point. So if a person going to a local church has to go through a basic Sunday School examination of their faith, then there is no confidence in the elders, the board of ordained ministry, and the annual conference with respect to this person and their ability to be a servant of Christ.

Treese: Let me assure you, Dick, that your comment will be taken to suggest that the laity of the local church are not equipped to quiz people about their theology. That's elitism!

Cain: No it is not. I am saying that certain people are responsible for certain functions in the church. The board of ordained ministry and the elders are to determine who is trained and able to serve. If the person couldn't function theologically, he or she wouldn't be there in the first place. Sure, they can ask any questions they like, but to ask the person about the Virgin Birth, well, it's like asking a kindergarten question for a Ph.D. oral exam. That person should be answering questions like, how can you be our shepherd in this particular area, or that--something substantial.

Harnish: Local churches do have a sense of their own theology, things that are important to them; they want to know how this person will deal with these sorts of things.

Walter: A more practical example is rebaptism. If the previous minister at my local church re baptized, when I believe that God's grace was sufficient in the first baptism, so that it should not be done again, then that creates a problem in the covenant. Consistency in fundamental doctrine is part of being a good member of an annual conference and the covenant. On
the other hand, I know of a seminary that passes out a sheet of guidelines to graduates outlining what they should say and how they should act and dress and so forth, in order to come before the board of ordained ministry. If you do all these things, you’ll get through. That’s simple conformism.

Griffith: It seems to me that we are assuming that these are all individual decisions, when in fact the system itself is dysfunctional, and cause all kinds of problems for individuals. The system, the connection, produces its own results. But there are two sides to this question, a functional side and a relational side. Anyone who has sat on a board of ordained ministry knows you’ve got to deal with a lot of paperwork and procedure in order to keep props under the covenant relationship. It reminds me of what I ask people when I marry them: why do we bother with wedding ceremonies and licenses and rings, when it’s the relationship that makes a person married? These things undergird the relationship, which can sometimes be quite fragile. Our covenant of ministry is the same thing. It’s the relational side that is important, but all the systems, questions, and disciplines undergird and support it so that it can live.

Hels: I would like to return to the Discipline and see if we can draw some conclusions about what the church expects from its ordained ministers, and how we support one another in meeting those expectations.

McArthur: What do you mean by the church? If you addressed this question to a local church, or to ordained ministers, or to church historians, you would get three different answers.

Hels: I mean that collective entity that we have referred to as the system, the connection, the Body of Christ, regardless of our level of participation in it.

McArthur: As a member of the clergy, I tend to have different expectations of a colleague in the ministry than the local congregation will have. I am very much concerned with what lies beyond a pastor’s ability to get along with people. It’s nice that this person is friendly and enthusiastic. But what is their enthusiasm about? I want to know about their diligence in sermon preparation, their theological reflection, how they un-
derstand the entire life of this congregation, and not just during the time that they happen to be serving there. There are other issues like that.

Hels: And does this relate to your reading of the Discipline?

McArthur: I have been struck by paragraph 112, which is called the Journey of a Connectional People. This paragraph invites me to struggle with what it means to be people on a journey, and what it means to lead people on a journey.

Walter: But paragraph 112 is about the general church, and the ministry of all Christians.

McArthur: I think that leadership of a people on a journey is at the root of the covenant. To do that you must be committed to word, sacrament, and order. And order is perhaps the most powerful of these, though it is often misunderstood. Biblically, God first created order from chaos, separating the day from the night, water from dry land, and then life was possible. I think members of the clergy have a similar function in that they provide the leadership and resources out of which congregational life becomes possible.

Del Pino: Our Protestant tradition of ordaining to order as well as to word and sacrament comes out of the Counter Reformation. Then it is picked up by the Reform tradition, which we inherit by virtue of our Anglican roots. Tom's choice of creation texts to justify ordination to order picks up on the theology of some of those original thinkers.

Treese: To me, the issue is how we read paragraph 422, the actual statement about the ministerial covenant. We have been circling this constantly but we never really get into the so-called attributes which the Discipline says are the marks of a good member of the annual conference. Now do we address this paragraph and its implication for our practice, or do we just mention that it is there as a reference document?

Russell: I think you can move in three different directions from this paragraph. You can ask what it means theologically, or how it is lived out in the covenant community, or how we organize ourselves to accomplish it. I think it is important to be explicit about those attributes and what they mean to us.
I would propose that these virtues are ingrained in us and that we have been talking out of that context all along. The covenant is something we believe in, and it is most clearly present when talk about how we do it, or in our disappointment when it does not surface.

Treese: It may be something we are used to hearing, because it is in the book. But what is the actual reality—do we offer ourselves without reserve? Do we live in mutual trust and concern with our fellow ministers? Are we really seeking with our colleagues the sanctification of the fellowship?

Harnish: I have to disagree with you, Jody. This description of the covenant isn’t ingrained in us. The only time I’ve seen anybody in the annual conference take the Discipline seriously was when the board of ordained ministry ran into a problem. In the Executive Session we joke about the Discipline! Nobody in the church talks about what it means to seek the sanctification of the fellowship, or how to live in mutual trust and concern.

Taylor: It is impossible to take the covenant language about offering yourself without reserve literally. The reality is that we are in more than one covenant. My marriage covenant was not simply made with my husband, but it was also made with God. That’s why we need the consultation process.

Harnish: Our polity, our appointment system, was designed for a different day and time. It worked very well on the frontier. As long as Francis Asbury could keep his preachers single, they would keep traveling and not want to settle down in one place. The two primary issues affecting appointment-making in the Detroit Annual Conference today are spouse employment and school systems. I will go anywhere in this annual conference after my kids are out of school, but before that time I will not sacrifice their education or safety for the sake an appointment.

Griffith: I think that’s a healthy tension. When I talk about [clergy] having authentic self-identity, that means we recognize who we are. And I have to say, quite honestly, that my covenant with my wife takes precedence over my covenant with the ministry, because I think that biblically and theologically the marriage covenant comes before any other covenant. But that doesn’t mean I can’t be faithful to both. In the consultation
process I wrestle with issues, talk to the bishop, and come to an agreement about with him about the need for my appointment at a particular place. But the bishop makes the appointment, and I live with the consequences.

Treese: It's interesting to hear this. One of the objections to the consultation process was that it would hamper itineracy. But statistics show that there is a great deal of itineracy at work in the denomination. In 1976 the average length of a pastorate in this country was 3.9 years. When you look only at ordained elders the number is always higher. Our most recent study was completed in 1986, and average pastorate is 4 years. So even with consultation there is a lot of itineration going on, and people are still being accommodated in the system. I think that is a tribute to the flexibility of the system.

Cain: When we say "without reserve" we do not mean it in an absolute sense, without any questions asked, with blind obedience. It means that we take into consideration all of these covenants but that we do not ignore the church's request. The church has a need to which we accede by making adjustments in the other covenants that we have.

Del Pino: Commitment to itineracy also involves fairness in pay to ministers. The church in its wisdom has chosen not to restore a basic salary plan that was in the 1972 Discipline. If we ask how ordained ministry is related to the church's mission, then an important part of that would be the ability for pastors to move based on the need of the local church, particularly in places we ordinarily would not want to go. The economics of mutual support can be worked out, but there is resistance to it, even among the clergy. There is a capitalism at work in this that is not healthy for the covenant.

Harnish: I don't think that salary is the major issue in the appointment making process anymore because I think we are gradually moving closer to a common salary. The difference between the bottom salary and the top is getting smaller: in our conference we keep raising the minimum salary but the top is pretty well fixed. But the problem I have with guaranteed salary is that it contributes to the impression many people already have that the covenant exists to protect mediocrity.
**Walter:** The issue is how to match skills and abilities with the needs of the church. Organizationally, we developed an evaluation system, which some annual conferences have used well and others don't use at all. Now we're trying to look at the exiting process in a humane and creative way. In this we are going back to the covenant to make sure it is real and a source for helping people.

**Garcia:** I don't know what you mean by "humane" exiting. We are supposed to exercise our responsibility; we know it's going to hurt everyone involved, but we must do it anyway and not protect them because they are in the covenant with us.

**Walter:** The system tries to reclaim a person to effective ministry. In a very small number of cases, we will make an extra effort to get counselling for individuals and not cut them off from their income. But after six months to a year, we'll meet again and make a decision.

**Russell:** I would like to return to Don's point about paragraph 422 in the Discipline. I think we must guard against taking that paragraph out of the context of the whole Discipline, using it as a proof text. We have discussed the covenant in many fragmented ways but we have yet to get a total picture of it. That may be the agenda that we take with us from this conversation, since I think we can't really cover it all today.

**McArthur:** The specific language about the covenant, offering oneself without reserve, is pretty clear. But we kill it by a thousand qualifications. Marriage, children, personal independence, all these are exclusions to the original assertion. My question is, if we make no changes in the language about the covenant in the Discipline, and we carry on with business as usual, where will we be in 10 years?

**Cain:** That was very well said. But the point here is that after all the important aspects of one's life have been considered, the church can still make a claim on us and that becomes the priority, for which we make the necessary sacrifices. One person at this table mentioned that she and her husband waited for 17 years to have an appointment together. Now they did what the appointing authority said, and went without reserve, but that didn't mean that they couldn't even raise the issue of
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their marriage. And I would guess that there are persons in the Detroit Annual Conference who have moved into school districts they didn't like, and sent their kids elsewhere to school, or whatever it took. I think the words are very real and should not be replaced.

*Treese:* Dick, if I've heard you clearly you are emphasizing the offer of your self. The self is offered for two purposes. First you offer yourself without reserve to be appointed. That's one thing. But at the same time you offer to serve, after consultation, where the appointed authorities determine. You go without reserve if need be, but only after consultation, which addresses your own circumstances.

*McArthur:* But then it's an offer to go with reserve, not without.

*Russell:* No, the reserves have been addressed in consultation, and I can now go without reserve. If you don't address the reserves in consultation, then they do remain.

*Cho:* It seems to me that when you talk about covenant fellowship, you are talking about sharing the burdens and joys of the fellowship. But in reality there is a lot of inequity among us. There are some people who keep having the joys, and some who keep on having the burdens, despite all kinds of legitimate reasons and excuses. The consultation process will not keep some people from being sent out into the boondocks.

*Russell:* But we can go there without reserve. There was a time when I was asked to go to an inner city parish. The school was in decay; the neighborhood was in decay. Our children were just entering school, so I had reserves about it. My wife and I talked about it, we talked about ministry, and our children and their exposure to a new culture, and so on. After we addressed these issues, we could go without reserve. Another pastor came into that situation and the first thing he did was to get the church to sell their property in the city and buy some out in the suburbs. That person didn't want to be a minister there, he wanted to be a minister somewhere else.

*McArthur:* I have no problem with that. All these examples are of people who have been asked to go someplace, struggled mightily with it, and then went. My problem is that I know
there are as many people who have real reserve, a thousand reasons why they shouldn't go. Is the covenant written in a way that we can't possibly keep it? If so, it would be better if we just rewrote it.

_Griffith_: Tom, for me the covenant includes trust in the system. If I cannot trust the bishop and the cabinet, and the consultation process to help me deal with my reserves, if I have them, then I really need to get out, or take a leave of absence. If the trust is there, I can say what my needs and wishes really are.

_McArthur_: My concern is what happens to an organization that continues to give lip service to words but doesn't really live by them.

_Griffith_: That leads me back to the question of what the sanctification of the fellowship really means. Doesn't it mean that we start holding the community accountable, and not just say the words?

_Link_: I think that there are real inequities, though. Some folks do have more opportunity to say no; because they are less flexible, it's harder for them to move, or not to have reserves about moving. And we have given them the right to be less involved in the structure than others. And some people make great personal sacrifices to go where the bishop has seen fit for them to be, and really bloom in those new circumstances.

_Harnish_: I'd like to take the other side on this question. I think the _Discipline_, like the goal of Christian perfection, should be held up as an ideal for us. We acknowledge that we have not perfected the fellowship, sanctified it. We acknowledge that we have not fully lived up to the meaning of the covenant. But I want to keep that language there ahead of us, rather than make it come back to where we are now. I've got trust in the system like Don has, but there are a great many of our brothers and sisters out there who feel burned, and have good reasons not to trust their bishop. But the goal, the ideal, still stands.

_Griffith_: But if we really trust each other within the covenant we can say, 'I don't think you were being fair to me.' Or, 'I am deeply sorry, but my faithfulness to the covenant means that
I've got to take a leave of absence. I get frustrated with passive aggressive ministers who complain but won't take responsibility for their lot.

Harnish: I was thinking in particular of a situation where a pastor had moved twice at the initiation of the cabinet, and after four years at this third appointment, they asked him to move again. There were good personal and missional reasons for him to stay rather than move clear across the annual conference. And what was the bishop's response at this point? He questioned the person's commitment to the system.

Griffith: And I think that person was being manipulated, and he had the responsibility to say so.

Link: I am surprised with my reaction to this conversation. I have always said that the Discipline was written for young white men, and that if we don't change it, the church is not going to keep pace with the modern world. Yet I find myself reluctant to change a word of this paragraph. What I have heard again and again is the real depth of our call. Seen in that perspective, the covenant must be reinterpreted for these new times. It happened when Asbury let his pastors get off horseback and into stationary congregations. We will have to do it again, and very well, because of all the new kinds of people coming into the ordained ministry. If we relinquish the ideal, as expressed in paragraph 422, now, then we will really modify ourselves into mediocrity.

Cain: Which is to say that the covenant does work. But there is much to be done to move toward perfection. We should use the word sanctification, recognizing that this too is a goal. To use the old adage, if you are not going toward perfection, what are you going toward? The covenant has served us well, and it is flexible enough to allow for differing interpretations. Our denomination, by and large, has indeed proved the value of the covenant as a part of its total understanding of ministry.
In March, 1987, Jim Bakker admitted to a previous sexual Liaison with a young woman named Jessica Hahn, a long-time church worker and secretary. Although seven years had elapsed since the liaison, Bakker’s career as a televangelist for the powerful PTL came crashing to a close. The lesson was clear: wrongful sex can kill a minister’s career.

There were complications in the Bakker case—charges of blackmail and of “coverup” money, of other affairs, of homosexual liaisons, of financial mismanagement. The tangled web which began to unravel around Bakker caused one observer to declare flatly: “this was not a story about sex.”

Yet in the public view, this was indeed a story about sex. Tales of enormous funds missing from the PTL officers and of “shocking” opulence in the life of Jim Bakker paled beside the pictures of Jim and Tammy Bakker standing side by side while he announced his sexual misdeed and resigned his ministry. One leading journal reported that Bakker was “defrocked over a
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tryst with a church secretary. Whatever the complexities of the total story, the public mind was captured by the fact that a minister was having wrongful sex.

Was Bakker's liaison shocking only because he was married? Is it only the fact of adultery that makes for public scandal and private shame? If he had been single would there have been no outcry? What makes sex "wrongful" for a minister? Little attention has been given to this issue by Christian ethicists.

One happy exception to this rule is Marie Fortune. In Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin, Fortune laid groundwork for considering the ethics of sexuality for those in positions of power. There she argued for a "consensual" sexual ethic. This ethic is based upon mutual respect, trust, equal power, and free and knowing consent of both sides. Only when these characteristics are present can consent to engage in sexual relations be considered valid.

Any relationship, then, in which there is lack of mutuality or an imbalance of power automatically undermines the validity of consent. For instance, suggests Fortune, "when the roles in the relationship create an imbalance of power between the two persons," the requirements for consensual sexuality are not present. Parent-child, teacher-student, counselor-counselee, and pastor-parishioner relations are all characterized by imbalances of power that undermine the validity of consent.

In her recent volume, Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship, Fortune tackles more directly and fully the question of pastor-parishioner and pastor-coworker sexual contact. Moreover, she deals with the case of a pastor who was single, so that it is clear from the outset that adultery is not the issue. In this case, if there is something wrong about pastor-parishioner sexuality, it will not lie in violation of the pastor's marriage covenant; rather, it will be rooted in the dynamics between the pastor and the parishioner.

Is Nothing Sacred? describes the events at "First Church of Newburg" where six women eventually brought written allegations of sexual misconduct on the part of the pastor. These allegations covered 14 instances of sexual contact, including at least four occasions of use of physical force, three of verbal
threats, and seven other instances of coercion, intimidation, or misuse of pastoral authority (p. 72). If these allegations are true, it is clear that the pastor of "First Church of Newburg" was using his position of ministerial authority to seduce, coerce, and abuse numerous women.

But perhaps some will argue that this case is too extreme to count. There were too many women involved. The pastor of First Church of Newburg did not simply "have an affair." He developed one sexual liaison after another, and often more than one at a time. He used threats and physical force. He took advantage of vulnerable women. Is his conduct wrong only because it sits on the far end of a spectrum?

While this case may be extreme in terms of the abusive and assaultive behavior of the pastor, claims Fortune, in terms of the methods he employed, the number of people he harmed, or the resistance of the church to facing the truth the case is not unlike some 70 others on which she has consulted. The difficulty in both this case and in that of Bakker is to specify what makes sexual contact between pastor and parishioner wrong without falling into the trap of thinking that it is either the number of women involved or the fact of an existing marriage that constitutes the core of the ethical dilemma.

What, then, makes the pastor-parishioner sexuality wrong? Our study of "intimacy in the parish" suggests that there are significant differences in the way male and female pastors experience their sexuality and its impact on their ministry. In this essay, we will deal only with male pastors and female parishioners.

Fortune attempts to locate the "wrongness" of the pastor's behavior squarely in the professional role. She argues that there are four primary dimensions of ethical violation in pastoral misconduct.

The first is exploitation of vulnerability. For example, most of the women with whom the pastor of First Church became involved were especially vulnerable: several had just lost a loved one, or were at a particularly stressful or difficult time in their lives. The pastor used their grief and vulnerability to gain access to them sexually.
The second is misuse of authority. The pastor of First Church promised jobs or promotions to some of the women if they acceded to his sexual interest and threatened others with loss of love or physical harm if they did not accede to his sexual wishes. Both the promise of reward and the threat of harm constitute violations of the authority of the pastoral role.

The third is creation of dual relationships. The pastor of First Church created dual relationships with the women, being their "pastor" in public and "lover" in private. He never acknowledged the shift from one role to the other or its implications for the women—e.g., that they effectively lost their pastor, and had no one to whom they could go for spiritual counsel. Indeed, those who had sought him out for counseling for a specific problem often found that the original problem was never resolved (p. 110). Thus, he failed to function as a pastor for them.

Finally, central to the ethical violation is absence of authentic consent. Even with the more mature women, Fortune argues that their consent to engage in sexual relations with the pastor was not valid: "because he was her pastor and she a parishioner seeking counsel, they were not peers and the 'consent' was not authentic" (p. 38).

These four reasons cluster to make Fortune's central argument that this pastor's relations with the women in his church "paint a stark picture of a minister betraying his pastoral, professional relationships" (p. xiii). While it is not wrong for a pastor to need intimacy, or to seek intimate relationships, says Fortune, this pastor's violation "was that he initiated sexual activity within a pastoral relationship and that he used coercion and deception" (p. 46).

With Fortune's assessment that this pastor's behavior was wrong and unethical, we agree. With her delineation of the four dimensions of ethical violation of the pastoral role, we agree. With the underlying judgment that the "wrongness" of pastor-parishioner sexual relations must be located in the pastoral role, we agree. Thus, in our judgment, Fortune has done all of us an enormous favor and has advanced significantly an argument about the ethical dimensions of pastor-parishioner sexuality.
And yet, we are troubled. What if the pastor of First Church of Newburg had not chosen women who were particularly vulnerable? What if he had not initiated sexual contact primarily with women who were dealing with death, divorce, mastectomy, or other life crises? What if he had chosen to become involved with mature, competent, strong women in the church? And what if he had not used his authority to threaten or make promises to the women? What if he had simply presented himself as a man who happened to be a pastor, but who was seeking genuine intimacy with a woman?

Under these circumstances, the first two conditions above would seem to drop away. The women would not be particularly vulnerable, and the pastor would not be misusing authority through threats or promises. Then we are left with two concerns: the problem of dual roles, and the problem of consent. Is there any way for a pastor to be both pastor and lover? Does the fact that the pastor is in a pastoral role automatically make consent impossible? Or is consent problematic primarily because of the presumed vulnerability of the parishioner and the misuse of pastoral authority?

The particular case utilized by Fortune is an egregious one. The women are particularly vulnerable, the pastor's tactics are frightening, he is clearly using the women for his own sexual gratification while intending no return of love for any of them. In these circumstances it seems clear that the women cannot give a genuine consent and that therefore pastor-parishioner sexuality is wrong.

But this is a case of an "offender." Fortune describes offenders as being manipulative, coercive, controlling, predatory, and sometimes violent. They are "sociopathic," having very little conscience, lying and denying their behavior when confronted (p. 47).

Are all pastors who have sexual relations with parishioners to be classified as "offenders"? Fortune herself suggests that there is another possibility. In addition to the "offender," she identifies another type of pastor who has affairs with parishioners: the "wanderer" (p. 156). Unlike the offender, the wanderer is not a predatory animal, waiting to pounce on any
vulnerable victim. The wanderer is a minister who typically is not functioning well personally or professionally and is experiencing conflict, inadequacy, and anxiety. The wanderer "falls" into relationship because he has difficulty maintaining boundaries and feels overwhelmed by stress. He is tempted because his flagging self-esteem is bolstered by the adoration received from the parishioner.  

The "wanderer," then, does not necessarily pick on vulnerable parishioners, and does not coerce or threaten or misuse authority in the ways that the pastor of First Church of Newburg did. Using Fortune's schema, then, if sexual contact between the wanderer and the parishioner is wrong, it must be wrong either because of the dual relationship established, or because of lack of consent, or both.

Yet even here, there is something else that affects our judgment about the wanderer. According to Fortune's description, the wanderer "takes little care of himself" and "attempts to meet private needs in public arenas" (p. 156).

Although the wanderer may not be a sociopath or an abuser, we still get a picture of a person who at root is not healthy and who seeks to meet needs inappropriately by turning to people found in the public arena (parishioners) rather than by developing an appropriate private arena.

But are these the only possibilities? We think not. We see yet another category of pastor, whom we call the "normal neurotic." The normal neurotic is not a sociopath, or even a wanderer. This pastor does not go from parishioner to parishioner, or from church to church looking for victims or trying to meet private needs inappropriately in the public arena. This pastor is "normal" to the extent that any of us is. He is "neurotic" in the sense that, unlike the sociopathic offender who experiences no pangs of conscience, his conscience functions well. This is the pastor who develops an attraction to a parishioner, has concerns about whether that is appropriate, feels guilt for stepping over pastoral boundaries, tries to remain within the pastoral role, but sometimes does not.

The "normal neurotic" is a pastor who is at root healthy, is functioning well in his ministry, and is sexually attracted to a
parishioner. He knows enough to think that such attraction is problematic, but he also acknowledges realistically what is happening to him. This is a pastor who is seeking genuine intimacy, not just gratification of needs, and who often marries the parishioner with whom he has become romantically and sexually involved.

Our survey of one denominational region suggests that there are far more "normal neurotics" than there are "wanderers" or "offenders." Over a 20 year period, of 21 male pastors who became sexually involved with one or more female parishioners, we could classify three as "offenders" and four as "wanderers" in Fortune's terms; the remaining 14 are "normal neurotics." Ten of the fourteen normal neurotics married a parishioner with whom they had become sexually involved. Thus, two-thirds of the pastors would not fit either the offender or the wanderer model, and nearly half ultimately married a woman with whom they were sexually involved in their pastorates.

Is it possible to delineate what it is that makes sexual relations between pastor and parishioner wrong and yet leave room for those genuine instances in which pastors fall in love with parishioners and intend and even achieve honorable relationships? While we share wholeheartedly Fortune's concern to protect the victims of offenders, we believe that an ethical framework is needed that will apply to the "normal neurotic." The woman who gets involved with a "normal neurotic" pastor is not a victim of manipulation, deceit, coercion, and duplicity. She is usually a normal neurotic herself—a healthy, functioning adult who genuinely seeks an intimate relationship and in this case seeks it with a man who happens to be a minister.

We need, then, a framework that takes seriously the power of the pastor and yet does not automatically assume that sexual relations between pastor and parishioner will fit either the "offender" or the "wanderer" models. Is there any way that sexual relations between a normal neurotic pastor and a normal neurotic parishioner can exhibit genuine consent and avoid the problem of dual relationships?
Let us begin with the problem of consent. There are reasons to be cautious about the possibility of valid consent between pastor and parishioner. These reasons are rooted in the power of the minister and in the dynamics of sexuality in our culture. As much as we might like to think that a normal neurotic parishioner who is a competent adult is "equal" to the pastor and can give valid consent, there are still reasons to hesitate.

First, the pastor does have power that the parishioner does not have. This power is of three kinds. First, he has professional power—the authority that goes with the role. Within the church, the pastor is understood as the authority on matters of faith and spirituality. This does not mean that his authority cannot be challenged, but it does mean that his word is generally taken as authoritative. This is true for all professional people.

Second, the pastor is not simply a professional, but is a minister. He has "numinosity," the power of being a link with the divine or mysterious. The pastor represents ministry, the church, and even God. As Fortune puts it, many church people "see the church as different from other institutions. They believe it is a refuge from a sordid world." The pastor, then, is seen as "different" and has the power of linking people with their expectations of the divine.

This is true even where parishioners do not seek explicit spiritual counsel from the pastor. We would do well not to underestimate the power of liturgy, ritual, and worship in parishioners' lives. It is in these symbolic acts that the pastor most clearly mediates the divine. Preaching and sacramental ministry have a powerful effect on the laity. Thus, even the parishioner who is a strong and competent adult is not immune to the spiritual, "numinous" power of the pastor as it is communicated in the daily and weekly rituals of church life.

Finally, many pastors have yet another kind of power: the power of personal charisma. Studies have shown that lay people in the church value the personal characteristics of the pastor above his or her professional training. A warm and welcoming personality and a certain amount of charisma are highly valued. Indeed, the work of Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger suggests that 50 percent of pastors fit the "NF" type
on the Myers-Briggs personality inventory, a type characterized by charisma and charm. Thus, in addition to the authority of the role and the power of being the "numinous" presence, most pastors also have personal power, charisma.

The combination of these three types of power means that pastors will generally have more power than parishioners. They have the authority of the role, they have the "numinosity" that comes from dealing with spiritual matters, and they often have personal charisma as well. This combination gives reason for pause when we consider what it would take for a parishioner to be able to stand as an "equal" and consent to sexual contact with a pastor.

Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact of sexism in our society. In this essay, we are dealing exclusively with male pastors and female parishioners. In a sexist society, men have power generally. Thus, the male pastor has not only the forms of power that go with role, with spirituality, and with personality, but also has the forms of power that go with being male in a sexist culture.

Indeed, male power is sexually attractive in this culture: "power contributes to a man's sex appeal." Thus, the very fact that the pastor has several forms of power will tend to make him sexually attractive to women. Moreover, these dynamics are complicated because while power is sexually attractive, the use of force is not. Thus, the existence of power, coupled with trustworthiness and gentleness, is perhaps the most attractive to women in a sexist culture. In discussing the events at First Church of Newburg, Fortune declares, "one can be readily seduced and manipulated by a person who is perceived as trustworthy and powerful" (p. 38). She notes that at least one of the women who became involved with the pastor was seduced because she thought he was "a caring, gentle, attentive man"—everything her husband was not. In sexist culture, where women are often the victims of male power, the man who has power but nonetheless appears gentle can be very attractive to women.

Because of these dynamics of power and sexual attraction in sexist culture, even the most mature and competent of women
will not readily stand as the pastor's "equal" who can give an authentic consent to sexual involvement. There is some reason, then, to conclude that sexual contact between pastor and parishioner is simply unethical and unprofessional.  

And yet: the dynamics of sexism operate in general in our culture. There may be reason to question whether sexual contact between men and women can ever be truly consensual, or whether all heterosexual contact is not distorted by sexist culture. We suspect that some distortion enters most sexual relations, and that many women do not give truly adequate consent for their sexual relations. Until such time as sexism can be eradicated from our midst, perhaps all heterosexual relations should be considered suspect.

But then it is also clear that we accept as minimally valid the consents given under some circumstances of unequal power. The question is where to draw the line. How much unequal power is too much? When does the power of man invalidate the consent of the woman? Is there anything that can be done to equalize the power so that consent may be more valid?

Minimally, the pastor should avoid dual relationships. Dual relationships can be avoided by ensuring that the parishioner has another pastor, so that one is not trying to be both pastor and lover at the same time. For instance, Fortune argues that when therapy is terminated between counselor and client, a relationship between equals may be possible. Where the person with power gives up that power, a new, equal relationship may emerge.

We agree. However, we also note some ambiguities here. First, the development of romantic interest generally takes time and contact. It is often the case that people become attracted to each other precisely because and as they work together over a period of time. At what time should the pastor say, "I'm attracted to you, and would like to be your lover. I can therefore no longer be your pastor"?

Second, we note that the sexual arena is complicated because people generally do not address each other with this kind of clarity. Sexual interest develops by hint and innuendo more than by direct and explicit statement. Sexual interest is com-
communicated by eye contact, by gesture, by dress, by laughter and intonation. Thus, the very clarity we seek here about roles is contrary to the ambiguities normally attendant upon sexual interest.

We think it likely, therefore, that under normal circumstances, some period of time will elapse during which the pastor is both pastor and potential lover. While the two roles are not yet both explicit, both are implicitly happening at the same time. Is this wrong?

We would distinguish one circumstance in which even the potential coexistence of the two roles is clearly wrong: the circumstance where the parishioner has sought explicit spiritual or personal counsel from the pastor. In this case, the parishioner places herself in a position of special vulnerability and trust in her relationship with the pastor. It is absolutely unethical for him to violate that special vulnerability by creating dual relationships.

But we are trying to ask here about cases where there is no special vulnerability, but where the parishioner faces the pastor as a strong, competent woman facing a man who happens to be a minister. So let us suppose that the woman does not seek counsel. She is simply a parishioner, who sits in the pew on Sunday, works with various church boards, and is a normal neurotic church member. Under these circumstances, where there is no particular vulnerability, can a "dual" relationship begin to grow without raising ethical eyebrows?

Perhaps our ethical eyebrows should always be raised. In the same way that the power of men generally in our culture should give us pause when we consider the validity of consent to sexual relations, any power gap should give us pause. There is reason to exercise caution. There is reason to seek structural protections. One structural protection is securing another pastor for the parishioner, so that the parishioner is not left without spiritual counsel. Another is ensuring that the pastor has colleagues, including female colleagues, with whom he discusses what is happening so that others help him monitor the performance of his professional duties.
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Such structural protections will not always guarantee that the pastor-parishioner sexual interest falls within ethical boundaries. Perhaps there will always be ambiguity, and caution should always be urged. But even as there is reason to guard against the offending and wandering pastor, so we believe there is also reason to accept the existence of the "normal neurotic" pastor and to acknowledge that such a pastor can be an honorable person seeking an honorable relationship.

Notes
1. PTL is said to stand for "Praise the Lord" or for "People that Love."
6. Fortune, Sexual Violence, p. 82.
7. Ibid.
9. Fortune, Sacred, p. xvii. At the time of writing the book she identified some 60 cases; however, at a conference in New York in March, 1989, she specified the number 70.
10. Under a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the Professional Ethics Group of the Center for Ethics and Social Policy at the Graduate Theological Union has conducted a four-year study of friendship, fishbowl living, and sexuality in the parish.
12. For example, in Sexual Violence (p. 83), Fortune argues that the less powerful person must be protected from "exploitation and abuse" by the more powerful. These terms suggest that it is not the existence of a power gap per se
but the misuse of power that is problematic. So long as power is not misused, then, there might be room for an ethical sexual relationship between people with unequal power.

13. In their study of Personality Type and Religious Leadership, Oswald and Kroeger note that 50 percent of clergy, as compared to only 12 percent of the general population, fall into the "NF" type on the Myers-Briggs personality inventory. This type is characterized by needing affirmation and tending to foster dependency, wanting everyone to like them, and being seductive. Oswald and Kroeger declare flatly, "NFs are the most seductive of all four temperaments" and they argue that "we would do well to warn these groups that they are particularly vulnerable" (pp. 131-132). We suspect that most "wanderers" come from this "NF" type.

14. In a letter to the editor of The Christian Century, December 14, 1988, p. 1163, James L. Lowery of Enablement, Inc., distinguishes the pastor from other professionals, arguing that the pastor is not only a professional (licensed), but a "cleric" (ordained). It is this "setting apart" through ordination that brings the "numinous" quality associated with ministry.

15. Fortune, Sacred, p. 2. As a representative of God, the minister symbolizes safety: "each of these women trust [the pastor of First Church of Newburg] not to harm them and to provide for their pastoral needs because he was a minister. They assumed...that this mean they were safe with him" (p.46).

16. For an excellent distinction of types of charisma, see the Appendix to Fortune, Is Nothing Sacred?

17. See Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, Personality Type and Religious Leadership.


19. Valverde, Sex, p. 41f.

20. C.f. Fortune, Sacred, p. 64. At some points, Fortune appears to argue that such sexual contact is always unethical. However, it must be remembered that this is in the context of a discussion of an abusive situation; therefore, it is possible that she intends to leave room for acceptable sexual contact in non-abusive situations.


22. In the movie "Tootsie," there is a wonderful scene where the young actress admits that just once she would like someone to approach her directly and bluntly, rather than "playing games." But when the young man subsequently tries it, she rebuffs him.

23. In The Problem Clergymen Don't Talk About, Rassieur shows how this model might be utilized; however, he does not include women pastors. We argue for the inclusion of women pastors because we believe that, generally speaking, today women are more sensitive to power issues.
Many Christians, ministers and laypeople alike, are growing tired of hearing theology dissolved into psychology. There is a growing unease about the secular disciplines setting our Christian agenda for understanding the spiritual life. But traditional theology, especially when it is dry doctrine abstracted from the vitality of lived life, is also acknowledged as inadequate. The need to find some middle ground between these two extremes has gone unmet largely because most contemporary systematic theologians seem to be wary of too much "heart" talk lest they be thought to have lost their intellectual rigor and integrity.

Lately, many have looked to the emerging discipline of practical theology to bring together sound doctrine with a sophisticated appreciation for spiritual/emotional realities. In a recent book, James Fowler makes a plea for a more affection-centered practical theology, but contemporary theorists have not yet heeded this plea. Nor have practical theologians discovered the richness of the Wesleyan heritage. T.S. Eliot once said that

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Quoted as it is in terms of the "religious affections," John Wesley’s theology provides a decisive challenge to the present received wisdom, which either elevates doctrine over life or subordinates theology to therapy. If we follow Wesley’s views, then emotion cannot be left exclusively to the psychologist and the pastoral counselor. The theologian must see that the nature of emotion has definite implications for the Christian life and that the Christian story has important implications for the affectional life. Wesley saw that the normative question of theology ("What is Christianity?") must be brought together with, and sharpened by, the counselor’s quest for self-knowledge ("How does that make you feel?") if all of the truths of the gospel are to be embodied.

Let us see how Wesley envisioned this synthesis by first looking at the apparent split between "inner" and "outer" religion.

The "Inner" and The "Outer"
In Wesley’s Heart Religion

Leading the life of "outward" religion—the objectively observable features of the Christian life—is not enough to be truly Christian, according to Wesley. He stresses this point throughout his writings. In his note on 1 Timothy 2:2 he writes "Godliness—Inward religion; the true worship of God." To James Erskine (Lord Grange) Wesley wrote in 1745 "I am more assured that love is of God than that any opinion whatsoever is" (Letters, Baker ed., II, 128). In a long letter to Conyers Middleton in 1749, he stated that Christianity "is holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life" (Letters, Telford, ed., II 333). Writing to the Westminster Journal Wesley stated boldly "The whole ingredients of our religion
are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance" (Letters, Telford, ed., IV, 131).

Such passages make it sound as if Christianity might be purely an "inner" phenomenon. But Wesley often says that both the "inner" world and the "outer" world are crucial for the Christian life, as in his note on Luke 15:31 where he speaks about making progress in "inward as well as outward holiness." The kind of "outward holiness" that Wesley preached and practiced is well-known and included frequent communion, visiting the sick, giving to the poor, and working against slavery. What is less often understood, though, is that the "inner" religion of the heart—the religion of the "Christian affections"—is itself both an "outer" as well as "inner" phenomenon. This is true in two senses for Wesley.

First of all, the truly religious affections arise from the person's being directed, focused, or fixed on some object. Second, "having an affection" means being disposed to behave in certain ways. Let us now consider these two "outer" elements of the affections, beginning with the fact that they take objects or, in other words, that they are "transitive."

The Transitivity of Emotion

Wesley's writings overflow with references to the fact that emotions take objects and that, specifically, the Christian emotions take God, and what God has done for us, as their objects. Commenting on Rom. 1:7 he says, "Our trust and prayer fix on God, as He is the Father of Christ; and on Christ, as He presents us to the Father." Later in Romans we see "If we believe on Him who raised up Jesus—God the Father is therefore the proper object of justifying faith" (Rom. 4:24). In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" he says that "Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper object" of our faith. (Sermon #1, 120. Abington Works numbering).

Let us be clear here that when Wesley speaks of God as the object of our faith he is not thinking of God as a spatio-temporal object (idolatry). To speak about the object of our emotion is simply to acknowledge the structure or "grammar" of emotion,
i.e., that emotions are generated by targeting certain aspects of reality with our attention.

The many occasions where God can be an object in this sense are too numerous to fully catalog here, but attending to God by hearing the Word of the gospel would certainly be one classic example. Other examples might be seeing an act of self-sacrificial love, being forgiven by someone, or taking communion. In fact, we might say that a central function of all of the means of grace for Wesley is the task of correctly targeting our affections on God.

The transitivity (or, in the language of phenomenology, the "intentionality") of emotion, of course, does not apply only to religious affections, but also to natural affections:

They that are after the flesh...mind the things of the flesh—Have their thoughts and affections fixed on such things as gratify corrupt nature: namely on things visible and temporal: on things of the earth, on pleasure (of sense or imagination), praise, or riches. But they who are after the Spirit—Who are under His guidance. Mind the things of the Spirit—Think of, relish, love things invisible, eternal; the things which the Spirit hath revealed, which He works in us, moves us to, and promises to give us. (Romans 8:5)

Whatever is the object of our attention will determine the form of our heart, the posture of our soul, the nature of our affections. Wesley's views on this point are reinforced by the words of Matthew 6:21-23: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The eye is the lamp of the body: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."

Works and the Heart

Religious affections, then, result from the soul turning to God. If God is not their object, they are not Christian affections. But this is not the only "outer" or "external" or outward-turning aspect of Christian emotion. The second aspect may be termed the dispositional nature of the affections.
ORTHOKARDIA

John Wesley was active in the world. He was not given to long solitary retreats or extended periods of withdrawn meditation. His sermons show us that his very emphasis on the religious affections as the "marks of the new birth" is precisely what led him into the world of action and society, not something that tempted him away from it. The conceptual linkage between a right heart and right works, in fact, moves in both directions: right works require a right heart and a right heart requires right works.

Throughout his sermons, Wesley demonstrates that "right works require a right heart." Even in the first sermon of the corpus, "Salvation by Faith," we read that "Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree" (#1, 118). Discourse six on the Sermon on the Mount (#26) takes pains to show "how all our actions, likewise, even those that are indifferent in their own nature, may be made holy and good and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention. Whatever is done without this, [Jesus] largely declares, is of no value before God" (#26, 573). Again in "On Perfection" we see that "holiness of life" arises from "holiness of heart" (#76, 75). This is stated most starkly, perhaps in "The Way to the Kingdom":

"Yea, two persons may do the same outward work—suppose, feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked—and in the meantime one of these may be truly religious and the other have no religion at all; for the one may act from the love of God, and the other from the love of praise. So manifest is it that although true religion naturally leads to every good word and work, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still, even in the 'hidden man of the heart.'" (#7, 219-220)

Similarly, the reverse of this truth, namely that "a right heart requires right works," is equally plain in his sermons. The most extended attention to this topic is sermon 24, the fourth discourse on the Sermon on the Mount. Here he begins by saying "The beauty of holiness, of that inward man of the heart which is renewed after the image of God, cannot but strike every eye which God hath opened, every enlightened understanding" (#24, 531). Shortly after this he states:
If religion therefore were carried no farther than this they could have no doubt concerning it—they should have no objection against pursuing it with the whole ardor of their souls. But why, say they, is it clogged with other things? What need of loading it with doing and suffering? These are what damps the vigor of the soul and sinks it down to earth again. Is it not enough to 'follow after charity'? To soar upon the wings of love? Will it not suffice to worship God, who is a Spirit, with the spirit of our minds, without encumbering ourselves with outward things, or even thinking of them at all? (#24, 532)

The answer to this is, of course, that "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it; secondly, that to conceal this religion is impossible, as well as utterly contrary to the design of its author" (#24, 533). Explaining this he says "Ye may not flee from men, and while ye are among them it is impossible to hide your lowliness and meekness and those dispositions whereby ye aspire to be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect. Love cannot be hid any more than light; and least of all when it shines forth in action" (#24, 539). While it is true that the "root of religion lies in the heart," it is also true that such a root "cannot but put forth branches" (#24, 541).

We also find this emphasis on works in Wesley's N.T. Notes. Commenting on James 2:14, Wesley writes that "James refutes not the doctrine of St. Paul, but the error of those who abused it." He later clarifies this by saying, "Works do not give life to faith, but faith begets work, and then is perfected by them" (James 2:22). The same theme is seen in Matt. 7:16:

"By their fruits ye shall know them"—A short, plain, easy rule, whereby to know true from false prophets; and one that may be applied by people of the meanest capacity, who are not accustomed to deep reasoning. True prophets convert sinners to God, or at least confirm and strengthen those that are converted. False prophets do not.

In commenting on Matt. 6:1, Wesley says that this chapter is about "the purity of intention without which none of our outward actions are holy." Where James 1:27 reads, "Pure religion

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and undefiled before God even the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world," Wesley comments, "But this cannot be done till we have given our hearts to God, and love our neighbors as ourselves." In Wesley's emphasis on this point, we can hear echoes of Rom. 14:23 "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Thus the telos (end), like the genesis, of the affections lies outside of the self.

The religious affections are not a purely "inner" phenomena. Or, we might say, if they are only inner, they are not really Christian. To love God and one's neighbor, to take joy in the happiness of others, to fear the wrath of God, all imply dispositions to behave in certain ways. We seek to serve our neighbor because of who God is and what God has done for us. Our disposition to behave charitably toward our neighbor is based on our appropriation of the Christian story, not (for example) because of some inherent attractiveness of the neighbor. Just as the nature of the object determines whether the affection is truly religious, so the nature of the resulting action is an indicator of the nature of the affection.

To make sure, however, that this "faith working by love" does not degenerate into a works righteousness, Wesley said the following to "John Smith" in 1745:

"I would rather say faith is 'productive of all Christian holiness' than 'of all Christian practice'; because men are so exceeding apt to rest in 'practice', so called, I mean in outside religion; whereas true religion is eminently seated in the heart, renewed in the image of him that created us." [emphasis his]

Feeling an Emotion and Having an Emotion

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to accepting Wesley's emphasis on the religious affections is the general tendency to identify affections or emotions with feelings or sensations. It is important to note that while Wesley emphasized the heart and its affections, he also held that being conscious of certain sensations is only an episodic feature of the Christian life. For
example, consider Wesley's comment on Matt. 4:1 (where, immediately after being baptized by John Jesus is tempted by the devil): "After this glorious evidence of His Father's love, He was completely armed for the combat. Thus, after the clearest light and the strongest consolation, let us expect the sharpest temptations." There is no indication in this quotation that a continuity of feeling—an unbroken flow of pleasant awareness—is the mark of the Christian life. The warning in the last line of the quotation in fact indicates that we are not to depend on feeling since it is bound to fluctuate.

An even stronger statement on this matter comes in Wesley's comment on 1 Thess. 2:17. The Scripture verse reads: "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time, in presence, not in heart, labored with great desire the more abundantly to see your face." This seemingly unimportant passage occasioned the following remarks from Wesley:

In this verse we have a remarkable instance, not so much of the transient affections of holy grief, desire, or joy, as of that abiding tenderness, that loving temper, which is so apparent in all St. Paul's writings towards those he styled his children in the faith. This is the more carefully to be observed, because the passions occasionally exercising themselves, and flowing like a torrent, in the apostle, are observable to every reader; whereas it requires a nicer attention to discern those calm, standing tempers, that fixed posture of his soul, from whence the others only flow out, and which more particularly distinguish his character.

Here Wesley straightforwardly states it is the "calm, standing tempers, that fixed posture of the soul" that is indicative of character. These standing "tempers" (an eighteenth-century equivalent of "affections"), and not the transient affections or "passions," are what indicate the "posture of the soul." If one is to be a Christian, then one will have the kind of temper or character or affectional make-up from which the particular Christian affections will occasionally "flow out," but this is quite different from saying that a Christian is to be forever filled with certain intense sensations. To have a particular emotion in
one's behavioral repertoire does not mean constantly feeling that emotion.

Sermon number 37 ("The Nature of Enthusiasm") speaks clearly to the true place of feelings or sensations in the Christian life, especially in one passage where Wesley is speaking about knowing the will of God. How are we to know this?

Not by waiting for supernatural dreams; not by expecting God to reveal it in visions; not by looking for any particular impressions (emphasis his) or sudden impulses on his mind; no; but by consulting the oracles of God. 'To the law and to the testimony!' This is the general method of knowing what is 'the holy and acceptable will of God.' (54)

It is also clear from Wesley's letters and journals that this religion of the heart was not a religion of mere feeling. In his Journal Wesley criticizes a Mr. Simpson because "he is led into a thousand mistakes by one wrong principle (the same which many either ignorantly or wickedly ascribe to the body of the people called Methodists), the making inward impressions his rule of action, and not the written word." Again, in a letter to Thomas Olivers, Wesley states that "Barely to feel no sin, or to feel constant peace, joy, and love, will not prove the point." 8

Let us consider a common sense illustration of what Wesley is saying here about the relation between "standing tempers" and occasional "passions," or, as I think we can legitimately translate, the relationship between having an emotion and feeling an emotion. When we say about a woman "she loves her husband," our statement is not proved invalid by the absence of feelings of love in the woman at any one particular time. When she is sleeping, for instance, or when she is in rapt concentration over a task at work, she is not filled with sensations of love for her husband, but we can nonetheless speak of her as a woman who loves her husband, if we have enough other behavioral evidence (e.g., she is disposed to act in his best interests; she devotes time to him; she shares her possessions with him, etc.). To have an emotion, one need not always be feeling that emotion.

We can see now that Wesley's famous emphasis on works as found in his observation that "there can be no holiness but
social holiness" (found in his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems*) is entirely consistent with his emphasis on the religious affections. Moreover, Wesley's discussions of the affections, which carefully balance feeling, object and disposition, shed light on a paradox of which most of us are aware. The paradox I refer to is the fact that for many of us, our most deeply held convictions are guarded by an outward calm, an apparent serenity, rather than strong displays of feeling. These convictions seem somehow too important to display in an exuberant way. The dispositional nature of our religious beliefs is so clear that to try to express them completely through bursts of feeling is clearly futile. Feeling just cannot be substituted for action. Wesley realized that what makes religious language so hard to speak is that it is an idiom which demands much of the speaker. The "meaning" of our religious discourse is not found in a feeling, but in the actions which make up our lives.\(^\text{10}\)

**Assurance And Perfection**

The doctrines perhaps most affected by Wesley's understanding of the religious affections are assurance and perfection, as well as the associated understanding of sin. Let us consider assurance first by looking particularly at three sermons: "The Witness of the Spirit I," "The Witness of the Spirit II" and "The Witness of Our Own Spirit." The first two of these sermons (both on Rom. 8:16) were written over twenty years apart, yet both have the same goal in mind, namely, to show the enthusiasts how they "have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for this 'witness of the Spirit' of God, and thence idly presumed they were the children of God while they were doing the works of the devil!" (#10, 269).

The most important point Wesley makes in these sermons is that there is a direct witness of the Spirit, but it never appears *without* its fruits, which are, of course, the religious affections of peace, joy, love, etc. (see Gal. 5:22-23, which Wesley quotes or alludes to on pages 279, 283, 286, 297). One determines if one has this assuring witness, therefore, by simply determining if one loves God:
He that now loves God—that delights and rejoices in him with an humble joy, an holy delight, and an obedient love—is a child of God;

But I thus love, delight, and rejoice in God;

Therefore I am a child of God; then a Christian can in no wise doubt of his being a child of God (#10, 276).

In the later sermon he makes the same point: "When our spirit is conscious of this—of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness—it easily infers from these premises that we are the children of God" (#11, 289).

In summarizing this theme, Wesley draws two inferences. The first is "let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it" (#11, 297). The second is "Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness" (298). As he had said earlier, . . . to secure us from all delusion, God gives us two witnesses that we are his children. And this they testify conjointly. Therefore, 'what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder'. (296)

The witness of our own spirit, then, is not an experience available to anyone—it is not some universal inherent capacity—but only to Christians who have been formed in the Christian "rule" of the gospel, found in Scripture (#12, 302-303). If we are so formed, "If therefore this eye of thy soul be single, all thy actions and conversations shall be 'full of light', of the light of heaven, of love and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (306-307). This testimony or assurance, then, is not some necessary religious a priori to be mystically intuited; it is the contingent result of our taking as the object of our affections God and what God has done for us.

We are then simple of heart when the eye of our mind is singly fixed on God; when in all things we aim at God alone, as our God, our portion, our strength, our happiness, our exceeding great reward, our all in time and eternity. This is simplicity: when a steady view, a single intention of promoting his glory, of doing and suffering his blessed will runs
through our whole soul, fills all our heart, and is the constant spring of all our thoughts, desires, and purposes. (#12, 307)

The doctrine of Christian perfection was one that "God peculiarly entrusted to the Methodists" according to Wesley's Journal entry of February 6, 1789. Let us understand Wesley's understanding of perfection. The best summary of it is found in his sermon 76, "On Perfection":

This is the sum of perfection: It is all comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;' Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. 'On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets:' these contain the whole of Christian perfection. (p. 74)

Later in this same sermon he says that the whole reality of perfection is like the mind of Christ, which includes "the whole disposition of his mind, all his affections, all his tempers, both toward God and man. Now, it is certain that as there was no evil affection in him, so no good affection was wanting" (#76, 74).

What would such perfect love look like?

As we have seen above, Wesley was very well aware that Christians sin, and that indeed they do not have a life of constant sweet feelings. Sermon 13 "On Sin in Believers," in fact, was concerned solely with "inward sin: any sinful temper, passion, or affection. . .any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ" (#13, 320). It is this kind of sin which can remain even though Christ reigns (#13, 323). Or, as he says later in this sermon, Christians have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24) yet this flesh remains "and often struggles to break free from the cross" (#13, 329).11

What Wesley's theology presents is an affectional telos for the Christian life—perfect love—which is in no way contradicted or vitiated by a felt awareness of sin, even in the justified believer. "A man may be in God's favor though he feel sin; but not if he yields to it" [emphasis his] (#13, 332). We still need the "Repentance of Believers" (sermon 14) because while we are born again at the moment of justification, we are not entirely
changed, nor wholly transformed, "Far from it" (#14, 351). Acknowledging the reality of sin, however, should not keep us from having an "uneasiness for the want of [entire sanctification]," we need to "hunger and thirst after it" (#14, 351).

Having perfect love as our goal does not mean that we must always have some constancy of inner feeling, which all would acknowledge to be impossible. Wesley never maintains that total control over the inner realm is somehow the norm for Christianity. In fact, inner feelings are not the issue at stake here. As we noted above, feelings can come and go, but it is the more enduring aspects of the affectional make-up which speak to the question of whether or not someone is a Christian:

A man may have pride in him, may think of himself in some particulars above what he ought to think (and so be proud in that particular) and yet not be a proud man in his general character. . . .Resentment of an affront is sin. It is anomia, disconformity to the law of love. This has existed in me a thousand times. Yet it did not, and does not, reign. . . .Here, therefore, as in ten thousand instances, there is sin without either guilt or power. (#14, 330-331)

**ORTHOKARDIA**

Wesley affirmed the orthodoxy of the creeds, just as he affirmed the orthopraxis of the works of piety and the works of mercy. But by emphasizing the love, joy and peace of holiness as the goals of life, he was in effect saying that there is an orthokardia (right heart) of Christianity which cannot be conveyed by stressing either beliefs or actions, or by focusing on self-contained inner states or "feelings." Nor did he opt for a simple-minded "authenticity" or "sincerity." Until God-centered, neighbor-disposing affections begin to grow, the assent of belief will be the "faith of a devil" ("a train of ideas in the head") and the works will be a deadening and empty moralism.

Even the role of the church is ultimately defined in relation to the affections for Wesley. Wesley asks 'John Smith' "What is the end of all ecclesiastical order?" Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in his fear and

Wesley's Orthokardia in the Post-Modern World

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love? Order, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends: and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth.\textsuperscript{16}

The central place that the religious affections hold in Wesley's theology, and the particular grammar which he attributes to them, are displayed throughout Wesley's other writings.\textsuperscript{16} However, his views are often mischaracterized today in our theological climate which is fearful of too much "heart" talk. One type of such criticism comes from liberation theology. Many liberation thinkers (when they refer to Wesley at all) emphasize his social concerns and want to keep him from appearing too "emotional." But we have seen that the affections are crucial for Wesley and to deny this violates the very fabric of his thought. Wesley's theology translated out of the language of the affections ceases to be his theology.\textsuperscript{17}

The Argentinian Methodist Jose Miguez Bonino in his influential \textit{Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) states the general approach of liberation theology: "Orthopraxis, rather than orthodoxy, becomes the criterion for theology" (p. 21). Similar sentiments are expressed by black theologians as well as feminist thinkers. Such approaches, in their rejection of the sufficiency of either abstract doctrine or mystical experiences for defining the true nature of Christianity, will find a sympathetic ear among the followers of Wesley. For instance, Wesley once declared in sermon number 130 "On Living Without God" that

\begin{quote}
I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas. I believe he respects the goodness of the heart, rather than the clearness of the head; and that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are confused. 'Without holiness,' I own, 'no man shall see the lord;' but I dare not add, 'or clear ideas'. (175)
\end{quote}

However, those liberationists who emphasize praxis as opposed to the "interior" life are in need of correction not only by the Wesleyan witness, but also by the more recent interpreters
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of Marx. People like Herbert Marcuse, writing on aesthetics, have shown that treating subjectivity as a "bourgeois" notion, as the classical Marxists do, is historically questionable and even damaging to the goal of social reform (see The Aesthetic Dimension [Boston: Beacon, 1978], pp. 1-21). Marcuse recognizes that there is a mutually generative relationship between the "inner" and the "outer" and to have one we must have the other. Such insights from this member of the "Critical school" expose the shallowness of much current criticism of "heart religion."

There is a debate about how "systematic" Wesley's theology is, but regardless of the outcome of that debate, it is clear that systematic theology is not the only kind of important theology. We need not feel ashamed about taking someone like Wesley as our theological conversation partner simply because he did not write a summa. What is more important than theology's being "systematic" is that it be done (as Albert Outler has often pointed out) coram Deo (in the presence of God) and this is precisely what Wesley did (in the presence of God). Theology done in this manner is truly practical theology, and that is the legacy of Wesley's heart religion for us.

Notes


2. See Edward Farley's Theologia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) for a discussion of theological education in the modern era which documents the need for a more unified emphasis on sapiential knowledge instead of training the minister to be the master of a set of specialized sciences or, even worse, a "professional." Neither Farley's book nor Fortress Press's latest entry into this field (Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology, 1987), however, contain a single reference to the thought of John Wesley. Even when Methodist-related thinkers explore the issue of practical theology with a major contemporary theologian, as in Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), Wesley's thought never makes an appearance.

3. In quotes taken from the Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament (N.T. Notes thereafter) all material in italics is Scripture text, that which comes after the double-dash (--) is Wesley's comment.

4. That emotions take objects is something that has been well-documented by many contemporary philosophers of mind. See Solomon, Robert and Cal-
houn, Cheshire, eds., What is an Emotion? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) for several relevant articles and a bibliography on emotion.

5. Also on this theme, see sermons nos. 27 (699); 30 (651); and 33 (698).

6. One of the clearest examples of a failure to act which damages the affections is in not giving all one can. In sermon 87 "The Danger of Riches" he sets forth his famous dictum "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can" and he also states there that riches allow us to gratify foolish desires which lead to "unholy desires, and every unholy passion and temper. We easily pass from these to pride, anger, bitterness, envy, malice, revengefulness; to an headstrong, unadvisable spirit—indeed, to every temper that is earthly, sensual, or devilish." (#87, 236) This same theme is seen in 106 "On Riches" as well as 122 "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity." In this last, he shows his increasing unhappiness over how his Methodists are handling their growing prosperity:

...you may find many that observe the First rule, namely, 'Gain all you can.' You may find a few that observe the Second, 'Save all you can.' But how many have you found that observe the Third rule, 'Give all you can?' Have you reason to believe that five hundred of these are to be found among fifty thousand Methodists? And yet nothing can be more plain, than that all who observe the two first rules without the third, will be twofold more the children of hell than ever were before. (#122, 91)

For more of Wesley's attacks on antinomianism see sermons 34-36 "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," and "The Law Established Through Faith" Discourses I and II, as well as number 18 "The Means of Grace." Note sermon 92 "On Zeal" to see that Wesley places "zeal for works of mercy" only below "zeal for holy tempers" and above "zeal for works of piety" (e.g. receiving communion.)

11. "Sinless perfection" was not Wesley's term of choice, though some of his writing had been interpreted in that direction. See Outlcr's note on Sermon 40 "Christian Perfection" where he points out how Wesley sometimes spoke unguardedly about "perfection" (107).
12. For other discussions of how negative affections can exist in the justified, though not yet sanctified, believer, see sermons 41 "Wandering Thoughts," 46 "The Wilderness State," 47 "Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations." See also Outler's notes in Volume 1 about how Wesley repudiated "sinless perfection," pages 323, 333, 346.
13. Independent of my own work, Theodore Runyon coined the term "orthopathy" to refer to this third element not addressed by "orthodoxy" and
"orthopraxis." See his "A New Look at 'Experience'" in Drew Gateway, Fall 1987, 44-50. However, in this work, as in a plenary address given to the theological consultation celebrating the Bicentennial of American Methodism, Runyon tends to blur some important distinctions in Wesley's heart religion. In this latter address, after stating that 'experience' for Wesley is not an entirely 'subjective' thing, Runyon unfortunately identifies feeling with emotion:

When Wesley insists that this change in the heart is the sine qua non of genuine religion, he is not concerned about an emotion, he is not insisting that persons should feel a certain way. ("What is Methodism's Theological Contribution Today?" in Wesleyan Theology Today (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1986), p. 12)

14. This latter point is reinforced when we see what Wesley said elsewhere about 'sincerity.' In his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," question 12 asks: "Does Christian perfection imply any more than sincerity?" To which Wesley answers:

Not if you mean by that word, love filling the heart, expelling pride, anger, desire, self-will; rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. But I doubt, few use sincerity in this sense. Therefore, I think the old word ['perfection'] is best.


17. Theodore Jennings in his recent article in Quarterly Review titled "Wesley Against Aldersgate" (volume 8, no. 3) sought to make clear the true role that John Wesley's experience at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738 played in both the Methodist movement and also in Wesley's own life. However, in the process of clarifying Wesley's experience, Jennings ends up distorting several crucial aspects of Wesley's theology.

Jennings polemical target is the 'conversionism' or 'Aldersgatism' which offers a form of "pious individualism" that "thinks of interior consciousness instead of doing the will 'of the Father.'" Jennings makes reference to the ebb and flow of Wesley's own feelings (as found in his Journal) to base his conclusion that

Neither before nor after (Aldersgate) did Wesley find it possible to 'love' the God he so vigorously served. Yet serve he did, whether as servant or as son; and in the end that was all that mattered to him. (19)

This makes it appear that Wesley renounced the "religion of the heart" in favor of a kind of stoic social service, which simply is wrong. Wesley's vision of Christianity held together both individual conversion to the life of the Spirit and "social Christianity," and his theology - focusing on the "religion of the heart" - gave strength and vigor to this integrated view. The distinction between feeling an emotion and having an emotion makes it clear how Wesley could downplay "feelings" (as Jennings points out) and yet never renounced his "religion of the heart" (as Jennings implies that he does). This confusion

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between feelings and emotions was not cleared-up in either Kenneth Collins' response to Jennings' article nor in Jennings' subsequent reply (Quarterly Review, volume 8, number 4 [Winter 1988]) 90-105.

18. See Randy L. Maddox's "Responsible Grace in Wesley's Theology" in Quarterly Review volume 6, number 1 (Spring 1986) and Mark Horst's "Wholeness and Method in Wesley's Theology," in Quarterly Review volume 7, number 2 (Summer 1987), 11-23.

19. See, for example, Quarterly Review, volume 8, number 2, Summer, 1988, 8.
Antithesis in the Historical Framework

Confrontations between state and church have a long history. In Christian civilization they resulted from the dualism of secular and religious authorities or, as the traditional terminology put it, dualism of temporal and spiritual power. The bone of contention was not the articles of their creed, which in fact they held in common, but the extent of their respective jurisdictions. If there was a struggle it was, so to speak, a struggle for bodies not for souls.

The struggle for souls was a matter for inter-religious rivalries. Temporal power, however, was more often than not instrumental in the outcome of that struggle. Winning over the state was crucial for the victory of Christianity over paganism. Victorious military campaigns of Arabs, Turks and other peoples were the main preconditions for the expansion of Islam; this, to a large extent, occurred at the expense of Christianity. And in southern and eastern Asia where the co-existence of various religions was achieved on a more equal footing, the
support of the state was essential for the strength and even survival of individual religious orientations. In these areas the state occasionally used its power to suppress unwanted religious institutions and practices. Yet in all these struggles the state acted on behalf of a world-view, values, and rites that characterized a particular religion. Even Confucianism with its predominantly political features accepted, or lived in symbiosis with, underlying ancient Chinese religious tradition.

On the other hand, the modern lay state observes benevolent neutrality towards all religions which share the practice of mutual tolerance.

With the coming of Marxism-Leninism and with the establishment of a communist state, a new situation emerged. Marxism-Leninism claims to be a scientific world-view that is incompatible with any other world-view in general and with any religious view in particular. Therefore it has waged a war against all religions. So at least was the position when the communists took over all power in a country. Only recently some ruling Communist Parties have begun to be more conciliatory towards religion and its public expression. Some ruling Communist Parties however, such as in my native Czechoslovakia, stick to the original policy of gradually ousting all religious beliefs and practices from the societies dominated by them.

When the communists took exclusive power in the east and central European countries they anticipated that the prevailing trend towards secularization would play into their hands. They believed that all they needed to do was to accelerate its course and turn it to their own benefit. In some countries such as Czechoslovakia they were also able to exploit the co-existence and rivalry of various religious traditions.

In Czechoslovakia rivalry of this type played an important role in the national consciousness. Memory of the enforced re-catholicization after the Thirty Years War was still alive. The close link between the Catholic Church and foreign domination (the Habsburg dynasty) was an additional liability for the Catholic cause. After World War I when the Czechs regained their own state there was a considerable drift from the Catholic
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Church. Some turned to the Protestant denominations but others remained without any religious affiliation. Many of those who remained registered as Catholics held views totally incompatible with Catholicism. This was a particularly favorable situation for the promotion of atheistic views.

The communists, however, overplayed their hand and turned the tide in the opposite direction. To understand the reasons for their failure a few words have to be said about their tactics and about the main results of their overall policy.

Although the communist final aim was the abolition of all religious beliefs and practices, their policy towards individual churches was for tactical reasons differentiated. The main target of suppression became the Catholic Church. In spite of many defections and many lukewarm members, the Roman Catholic Church still represented the most numerous community of practicing Christians, especially in the eastern part of the state, in Moravia and above all in Slovakia. The fact that the supreme head of the Catholic Church was seated abroad was particularly irritating for the communists. In their propaganda they described the Vatican as an agent of American imperialism. The much smaller Protestant denominations, especially those who operated only within Czechoslovakia, such as the newly created Czechoslovak Hussite Church or the traditional Church of the Czech Brethren, were considered less dangerous. But the communists attempted to misuse the tradition of the Czech Reformation of their materialistic interpretations of history; Hussitism was praised as a social revolutionary movement which assumed a religious garb only because it took place in the Middle Ages.

For the struggle against all religious denominations the communist government inherited from the previous democratic regime a mighty weapon. The salaries of all clergymen and employees of recognized churches were paid by the state. In the democratic republic (1918-38) and later until 1948 there had been no strings attached to that practice. The communists, however, did not fail to exploit this arrangement to curb the activities of the churches. A special government office with branches in all regions was established to supervise all the
churches and religious organizations. Every clergyman had to receive special approval for his ministry. His function was limited to performing religious services in the ecclesiastical confines of his own parish.

The general tendency was to reduce the activities of the churches to their ritual aspects; only people of the older generations were supposed to participate in these rites; younger people were to be severed from any contact with religious life. People in important or influential jobs such as government officials, teachers, professionals, managerial staff, armed forces, police etc. were required to keep aloof from any contact with religious institutions. They risked the loss of their jobs if seen attending religious services.

Formally, religious education was not banned from schools but its attendance was made difficult. There were so many restrictive conditions that hardly anybody dared to risk taking part in it. First the parents had to apply in writing to the schoolmaster for permission. The schoolmaster, whose career record depended, among other things, on his success in eliminating religious education, was induced to persuade the parents to withdraw their application. The persuasion was presented as good advice for the child's future. In the event that all this discouragement proved to be ineffective, and the parents continued to insist on religious education, the teaching of the catechism was scheduled for the most inconvenient time of the day—often when other children were offered sporting and entertainment facilities. To sum up, religious education was made so unattractive and so risky that it virtually disappeared from the schools. On the other hand, anti-religious atheistic propaganda was a compulsory part of the school curriculum. The only channels for the transmission of religious beliefs and values remained in the family and clandestine gatherings organized by individual priests at their personal risk. Limited scope for religious education remained in the Sunday schools of the Protestant churches.

Higher theological education was reorganized and put under strict control. The Catholics were allowed only two faculties with a limited number of students. One theological faculty was
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...for the Czech regions (transferred from Prague to a smaller town in Bohemia), the other for Slovakia. The common Protestant faculty in Prague was divided into two—one for the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and the other for the Czech Brethren. (Divide and rule was the stratagem.)

With respect to the Catholic clergy, attempts were made to win their collaboration under the pretext of the common struggle for peace. All priests were invited to join a loyalist association, the Peace Committee of the Catholic Clergy. As most priests refrained from joining this association, punitive measures were undertaken. During 1949-51 religious orders were dissolved and priests who had not taken the oath of allegiance to the state were dismissed. Many also were imprisoned. Bishops were especially affected by this, and most of these offices were left vacant as a result.

At the time of the so-called Prague Spring (1968) the situation eased considerably. The Peace Committee of the Catholic Clergy disintegrated. All religious denominations began to breathe more freely. Yet after the suppression of the reform-communist rule in Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact, the repressive measures were renewed. The association of the loyal priests was reconstituted under the name of the Papal encyclical of 1963 'Pacem in Terris'. Recently there have been attempts to negotiate with the Vatican for the appointment of bishops to the vacancies. Yet at the time of writing (September 1989) seven of thirteen bishoprics are still vacant.

On the whole it can be said that the communist anti-religious policy made some initial progress that later proved to be rather fleeting. The failure to achieve more permanent results was due to several circumstances. The suppression of intellectual and artistic freedom at large and above all the failure to build up a more just and thriving society damaged the credibility of the communist cause. The great constructive economic effort was not accompanied by any commensurate improvement in living standards or, most important, in the quality of life.

The manual workers were the first to show their disappointment. When the monetary reform of June 1953 confiscated a substantial part of their savings, the workers demonstrated in...
several industrial cities. Their public protest constitutes a watershed in the drive for ideological conversions. The communist intellectuals took a few more years to show their dissatisfaction with the operation of the system. The fact that the new constitution of 1960 proclaimed Czechoslovakia to be a Socialist Republic had no positive effect. On the contrary the subsequent years showed an interruption of economic growth. Economic reform became the clamour of the day. With it unorthodox ideas began to crop up in the planning, and later also in the party, apparatus. Gradually a palace revolution was in the making. In 1968 the reform-communists took over the helm in Prague. There was a general feeling that Marxism-Leninism was proving to be the antithesis of scientific thought.

The Soviet armed intervention against the 'Prague Spring' completed the process of alienation of the Czechs and Slovaks from Soviet Russia. Whilst between 1945 and 1948 the advance of the pro-Soviet communists was predominantly brought about by the Czechs and Slovaks themselves, in 1968 their comeback was to be reimposed upon Czechoslovakia by force from abroad. Those who were supposed to have requested Soviet "help" have not dared, up to the time of writing, to declare their names in public.

The dashing of hopes and a sense of powerlessness together produced a widespread malaise amongst the Czechs and to some extent also amongst the Slovaks. Most turned their backs on any kind of politics whatsoever. Some focused all their effort on improving their personal lot, on relentless acquisition of means to, and symbols of, a comfortable life. This was a means of escape which the authorities found quite acceptable. For the communist regime gave up its indoctrinating zeal; it no longer insists on manifestations of loyalty, but contents itself with political disinvolvement on the part of the citizen, whose acquisitive drive it is ready to accept as legitimate behavior.

Those who do not want to play this game try to build a framework of their own independent culture. In contrast to the official culture, it is pluralistic both in form and in ideological orientation. Every kind of art and every shade of opinion has found a place within it. Not only criticism of current events and
practices but also a critical reappraisal of the past plays an important role in its themes.

At the time of writing, the extent of the alternative culture in Czechoslovakia is impressive. It is kept alive by the enormous effort and enthusiasm of those who spend their time and energy in writing, retyping and distributing what has become generally known as 'samizdat' literature. It comprises not only novels, poetry, drama, etc., but also historical, sociological, philosophical and religious essays. Several literary and scholarly periodicals provide the forum for discussion. Although the circulation of 'samizdat' literature at home is limited, about a dozen Czech and Slovak publishing houses abroad give it the widest possible publicity.

At the beginning of 1989 eighteen independent movements in Czechoslovakia were reported in the West. The best known has been the oldest of them, Charter 77. It was founded as a loose pressure group in January 1977 and the membership in 1989 is about 11500 signatories. Charter 77 functions as a spontaneous voice of conscience. Its main aim is to remind the Czechoslovak authorities of the necessity of observing the laws and international agreements to which Czechoslovakia is a signatory, particularly those concerning human rights. This applies especially to the so-called Helsinki Agreement of 1975. A special branch of Charter 77, largely independent, however, of the main organization, is the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted, founded in 1978.

Of the more recent groupings the most remarkable is the Movement for Civil Liberties, founded in October 1988 as a loose association of independent political groups and clubs. Its Manifesto stands for political pluralism, a new democratic constitution, overhaul of the legal system, protection of the environment, freedom of intellectual activity and belief, independent trade unions, an end to the militarization of society and for national sovereignty within an integrated democratic Europe.

One particular feature of this alternative culture is the revival of religious consciousness. This is most clearly manifested in the increasing number of churchgoers and in
mass participation in religious pilgrimages, but this trend can also be seen in the pattern of the themes of 'samizdat' literature. Most striking is the fact that now it is Roman Catholicism that has become most attractive. Just as Hitler's propaganda backfired when it picked upon bolshevism as the main enemy, so the communist campaign against Catholicism has likewise backfired.

The number of people who have ceased to be afraid of harassment and persecution is steadily increasing. This development is particularly impressive with respect to the religious revival. Petitions demanding the granting of human and civil rights have attracted up to 20 thousand signatures; but when the Catholics in Czechoslovakia drafted a petition demanding the re-establishment of the freedom of belief and worship and the freedom of cultural and charitable activities of the Church in 1987, it was signed by 500,000 people. Pilgrimages to traditional places of Catholic worship attracted between 100 and 200 thousand people.

According to the official Institute of Scientific Atheism the number of convinced atheists can be estimated at 14 percent amongst the Czechs and 9 percent amongst the Slovaks. Although this does not mean that all the others are convinced Christians, it may be assumed that most of them share at least some Christian views and beliefs, even if they are not practicing Christians.

Although from time to time polemical voices are to be heard, both Protestant and Catholic Czechs advocate tolerance and mutual understanding. In his ecumenical message for Easter 1988 the Primate of Bohemia, Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, announced a Ten-Year Program of Spiritual Renewal. In it he made the following statement:

When looking to the past we all have reason to call for mercy and forgiveness. The Catholic Church does not disguise its share of guilt for the regrettable chapters of our history (put forward, for instance by Cardinal Beran at the Second Vatican Council, regarding the burning at the stake of John Hus and the violence accompanying the recatholicization of Bohemia after 1620). We hope that our ten-year program will
help us to avoid protracting the discords of the past into the new millennium.

In June, 1988 thirteen prominent Czech Protestants wrote an open letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In it they stressed their solidarity with Catholic demands for the restitution of their educational and publishing facilities and for the reopening of monasteries; they also acknowledged that the Catholics had been exposed to harsher repression than they themselves had suffered. Last but not least the Protestant speakers expressed their shame for the fact that they had not stood up earlier for their Catholic fellow Christians.

Thus a start has been made with the healing of a wound which had remained open for more than three hundred years. Tolerance ceases to be a matter of indifference, of declining religious beliefs; on the contrary it reappears as the result of a deeper, more understanding and empathic religious sense, the fruit of adversity and suffering. The terrain conditioned by communist pressure and by the suffering of the believers has become fertile ground for a genuine Christian ecumenism. On the spiritual plane, Marxism-Leninism suffered a crushing defeat. On top of that, it lost its credentials as a scientific school of thought. By maintaining their dogma in the teeth of all empirical evidence Marxists were proffering a religion devoid of any elevating spiritual content.

Does this mean that Christianity will recover the spiritual ground lost by Marxism-Leninism? Could it be the need to demonstrate opposition to the communist regime that prompts the conspicuous upsurge of the Christian cause? Czechoslovakia cannot remain so insulated from outside influences. Sooner or later she will join the general stream of European development. Will she then take part in the general continuous trend towards secularization? Or, perhaps, will the competition with religions other than Christianity replace the challenge of Marxism-Leninism? As everybody knows, even Europe, a continent rich in spiritual tradition, has to cope with influences and challenges coming from other parts of the world. In many respects indeed, our planet has become a ‘global village’ in
which people of various religious and non-religious world-views and sets of values rub shoulders with each other. Will their peaceful coexistence continue to be based on indifference or will it come to be founded rather on mutual understanding and harmony?

To answer this question my life experience may also be of some relevance. I shall turn to it in the second part of this paper.

The Path Toward Synthesis in Variety

The struggle for souls between the Marxist-Leninist state on the one hand and the churches and religious organizations on the other has had a particular side effect. It produced a challenge that extended the scope of discussion beyond the original framework of contention. It aroused interest in a wider variety of world-views in general and religious tenets in particular. It also stimulated a quest for mutual understanding and possibly also for a common ground.

I had a unique opportunity to take part in wide-ranging discussion on this theme. Later I was able to initiate their further development. The initial venue was the Czechoslovak Gulag: two labour camps in Bohemia; one serving an antiquated coal mine where it was thought some uranium was to be found, the other serving a glass factory where the glass to make chandeliers for export was ground and polished. The participants were from all walks of life. The composition of the inmates was always the same: one third clergymen, one third lay political prisoners and one third ordinary criminal convicts. A small distinct group was made up of Jehovah’s witnesses. Altogether there were about 450 inmates in each camp.

The clergymen were almost exclusively Catholics. The lay political prisoners were mainly professionals, intellectuals, small businessmen and farmers. Those taking part in the discussion were mainly priests and intellectuals but the other people took a lively interest. By their straightforward questions and common sense logic the latter forced their more educated fellow inmates to use plain, unequivocal language. Obviously, the discussions could not embrace the whole camp. But the overcrowded cells housing 15-20 people provided an ample
opportunity for widely shared discussion. In the case of the second camp, which was an old monastery, several inmates squeezed into rooms formerly shared by two monks only. The most interesting discussions, however, occurred during the walking time in the courtyards. In the monastery their length was dependent on the working performance of individual prisoners. Here only two or three participants could walk together; their meetings on these occasions were as a rule prearranged; popular contributors were booked well in advance. In this way religious services also took place on foot. The local miners, not inmates of the prison, were helpful in providing contacts with the outside world; as a result Holy Communion could be administered and the Jehovah's witnesses could read and offer for reading their cherished parts of the Bible. In the coal mine, where inmates worked in three shifts, there was more scope for discussion out of doors. In both instances there was a considerable amount of coming and going between the cells (inmates being moved around for various reasons) which widened the possibility of contacts.

Significantly, amongst the attitudes adopted in the labour camp discussions, Marxism-Leninism did not find resolute defendants. The few communists, sentenced in the fabricated trials of the early 1950s, did not dare to raise their voices on behalf of the lost cause. But atheism found its representatives amongst what in the West are called the humanists. Religions other than Christianity were often brought into the discussions.

I had ample opportunity to return to these discussions and considerations many times later, first in Czechoslovakia when I was released from the labour camp (1960) and then, more extensively, when I became a staff member of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster, England. I have to point out that the lively interest of my students in these issues reminded me often of the discussions with my colleagues in the labour camps. I likewise found echoes of those discussions at various universities in the United States and Canada, where I often gave lectures and seminars.
During most of these discussions there were two distinct areas of contention. In the first, the rationalistic position of the unbeliever was held up against religion in general and Christianity in particular. In the other, Christianity was confronted with other religions, especially Buddhism, Hinduism, and sometimes Islam.

Not only their creed and ethical stance, but also the historical record of these religions was examined. In general, the discussants often mentioned the corrupting effect of power. Islam was in particular at a disadvantage because of its Holy War principle, its acceptance of polygamy, harems, etc. The fact that the Christians, too, waged wars for the expansion or preservation of their domains (the epoch of the Crusades was the main target of criticism) did not put Christians in any better light. The Inquisition, introduced and widely practiced by the Roman Catholic Church, was a sore point during the examinations of the historical record.

On the other hand, the active, charitable spirit of Christianity, realized from the beginning in the form of good works, was widely acknowledged. In contrast to Buddhism, this was once visualized by a student in Lancaster in the following way: Buddha is sitting under a tree meditating. Christ passes by and says "Don't just sit there; do something."

It may be worthwhile to recollect some conclusions of the often heated discussions. I shall focus my memory on the conclusions concerning the position and record of Christianity.

Amongst all the world’s major religions Christianity has a unique position. First, its origin and its Holy Writ relate in a massive way to an earlier religion, Judaism, that has further survived as a separate religion. Second, in contrast to other religions the Christian Holy Writ, the New Testament, contains in the Gospels the most clear-cut account of the life and teachings of its founder. Third, Christianity contains a moral code that, with its principle of self-denying love, imposes the most demanding requirements on its adherents. Fourth, its founder is believed to be the only Son of the universal God. Fifth, his message is supposed to be (nowadays at least by the traditionalists and fundamentalists) the only safe way to salva-
tion. Sixth, while it claims to be monotheistic in the sense of the Old Testament it believes in the Holy Trinity that divides the unity of God into three functional entities: Creator, Redeemer and Inspirer. Seventh, its historical record is beset with the most varied performance with respect to good and evil. Nowhere else were charitable institutions developed to such a wide-ranging extent. On the other hand, nowhere else was uniformity of belief and ritual enforced in such a consistent and harsh manner. This criticism applies to various Churches which succeeded in dominating the state, but the Roman Catholic Church is renowned for having the most lasting and extensive record in this respect.

Only in the course of the last two centuries has Christianity acquired a more balance image, one more worthy of its founder. While the charitable activities continued unabated (with the development of technology they could even expand and improve), tolerance towards other believers became the norm.

An important step in this direction was made by the Anglo-Saxon branch of Protestantism which accepted the principle of plurality of Christian denominations. Further, as a result of the Enlightenment, the churches were deprived of their temporal authority. Thus, paradoxically, the time-honoured demand of the Lollard and Hussite Reformations has been achieved by a non-religious state.

Separated from the church, the lay state declared its neutrality in matters concerning religious faiths and rites. On the other hand, it allowed itself to be inspired by the Christian principle of charity. Under the combined pressure of various religions (in particular Methodist), democratic, and socialist (labour) movements, the lay state developed into a welfare state. Thus, the Christian injunction to love one's neighbour was extended from individuals to lay institutions. This development however did not make the Christian charity administered through the churches superfluous, rather, its scope was further extended.

In the climate of increasing tolerance not only the various Christian denominations but also other religious views and communities could flourish side by side. Having lost their
political power, Christian churches could return to their function of spiritual and moral guidance. The loss of power was rewarded by enhanced moral prestige. Anticlerical movements lost their raison d'etre.

But the decline in belief in the dogmatic aspects of religion continued to diminish the relative number of practicing Christians. Here it has to be pointed out that in Europe, in contrast to America, there is not that continuous counterstream of fundamentalism which maintains the precarious balance between modernity and the beliefs of the past. Religiously minded people who are for one reason or another dissatisfied with the mainstream Churches turn either to a more accentuated ecumenism which tends to obliterate the boundaries between individual Churches, or look for inspiration and/or consolation in quite alien religions such as Buddhism, or in particular practices connected with the exuberant spirit of Hinduism.

In the atmosphere propitious to these views there is a similar spiritual background to that which characterized the Gnostics at the dawn of the Christian era. It seems that there are perennial problems which periodically recede and then again reappear in a new form. But at the present time it is mainly rationalism bolstered up by the immense development of scientific thought which hammers at the doors of religious beliefs and practices.

Here we have to make a clear-cut distinction. No genuine scientist can claim the ultimate validity of his or her theories. The more one knows the more one realizes the limits of our scientific understanding of the universe. But at the same time the scientist also realizes the unfathomable depths of the human psyche which cannot live by rationality alone. Religious needs are a deep-seated quality of the human mind; their varying intensity and depth are matters which it is often difficult to explain in rational terms.

From what has been said it follows that science and religion have to live side by side. Science cannot provide a substitute for religious benefits. Scientific thought, however, is in a position to circumscribe religious beliefs in such a way that they may become acceptable to rational, critical minds. This was one of
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The main fields in which scientific, rational thought comes into conflict with religious beliefs in general and with Christianity in particular, and where a solution is needed, were summarized as follows:

First: belief in various supernatural, miraculous events and mythical stories which are often claimed by individual Churches to be of exclusive validity.

Second: contrasting views with respect to basic theological principles of individual religions. At issue in particular is the contrast between, on the one hand, the concept of a personal, unique and universal God, Creator of humankind and of the universe and, on the other hand, the impersonal, abstract principle which permeates the whole universe and all human psyches, which however does not exclude beliefs in personal gods or other supernatural beings as its emanations and personifications. The contrast between the immortal soul and the reincarnation is in a way a corollary of the issue.

Third: with respect to the idea of a personal God there is a logical incompatibility between the existence of evil and the claim that God is at the same time omnipotent, benevolent and just. To relegate this issue to the realm of theological enigmas was not considered satisfactory.

With respect to these three points, the same questions were repeatedly raised in the Czechoslovak labour camps as later in academic discussions in the free world.

Particularly intriguing was the historical fact that the concept of a unique, personal and transcendental God-Creator prevailed in the Western part of the ancient world, having emerged in the Middle East and being held by the three religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), sharing the Abrahamic tradition, whereas the Eastern part of the ancient world (especially India and China) was the birthplace of the abstract and immanent religious principles. Could a universal God have intended such ambiguity?

In the aforementioned discussions the quest for the common denominator was based on the following assumptions: individual religions are alternative ways of seeking a meaning for human life. They offer alternative interpretations and elabora-
individual religions are alternative ways of seeking a meaning for human life. They offer alternative interpretations and elaborations of what in essence can be conceived of as the one fundamental universal theology. The respective elaborations which take shape, in particular dogmas, philosophies, mythologies and rituals, constitute the spiritual bases of the individual human cultures or civilizations into which mankind has been divided from time immemorial.

A substantial part of this many-faceted elaboration is the moral code. In contrast to the diversity of theologies (philosophies), mythologies and rituals, individual moral codes tend to have many principles in common. This is especially the case with the commandments or ethical postulates concerning inter-human behaviour. On the other hand, requirements concerning human behaviour with respect to God, the gods or other theological principles are much more variegated. But even behind all these variations, a common background can be detected and some common principles suggested.

These principles were already perceived in the Czechoslovak Gulag. Later I could hardly add anything substantial. In my opinion, there resides a particular virtue in their brevity. The four simple principles read as follows:

1) God, whether imagined as transcendental and personal or immanent and abstract, is a source of creative and moral force in the universe.

2) Of all creatures on the planet Earth, only humans are endowed with the ability to draw from this source.

3) It is the duty of human beings to draw from this source as much as possible.

4) Human beings carry full responsibility for the whole planet and also for the universe as far as they can reach it.

Conclusions

The main conclusions in this paper can be summarized in three points:

1) In the struggle for souls the communist state with its Marxist-Leninist philosophy was utterly defeated. Having brought all its vision of the future down to earth, to the tem-
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poral, material dimension of human life, it had to accept empirical testing as the criterion for its success or failure. In spite of all attempts to substitute abstract and deductive reasoning for empirical assessment, the communist regime could not persuade anybody that its record lived up to its promises. Only those who enjoyed the privileges of its existence behaved as if they believed in the Marxist-Leninist theory.

On the other hand, religion, i.e. in the Czechoslovak circumstances primarily Roman Catholicism, experienced an extraordinary, spontaneous revival. Although the increased interest in, and sympathy for, religion in general and Catholicism in particular may be largely due to political expediency, the readiness to bear the unpleasant consequences of a manifest declaration of faith speaks more for genuine conversions.

2) The wound in the Czech national consciousness caused by the rivalry of two religious traditions, a rivalry that in the past erupted in conflict, sanguinary wars and, eventually, repressions was largely healed. The responsible representatives on both sides of that historical divide have made the necessary steps toward reconciliation.

3) Under the pressure of enforced uniformity and censorship, free discussion flourished in situations which officially were supposed to foster re-education for the communist worldview. No such re-education, however, occurred. On the contrary, the attempt to enforce uniformity brought closer together those who, in one way or another, rejected the communist regime and the Marxist-Leninist world-view. Being confronted with one and the same foe, which aimed at their total annihilation, people of various world-views and religious affiliations began to look for common ground. One result was the simple, four point creed (perhaps an unwitting echo of the Four Articles of Prague which in 1420 declared the Hussite reformation) reproduced in this article.
Mission in the 1990s
Reflections on the Easter Lections from Acts

Robert C. Tannehill

Having a flame on our logo cannot substitute for the drive of the Pentecostal Spirit, nor can talk about mission substitute for dedicated participation in it. Reflection on our scriptural roots, however, can help to clarify our failure and our possibility. The United Methodist Church knows that it is called to mission but is confused about the nature of its mission in the present time. It knows that its mission should embrace the world but actually spends most of its time and resources on a limited constituency. Our mission has become stuck. Reflection on the experience of the early mission as depicted in Acts can help us get unstuck.

The church is subject to the same forces as other human groups. It must maintain itself as a cohesive group that has a distinct identity and purpose. It must clarify its own nature and membership, thereby establishing a boundary between those who belong and those who do not. Because this is done primarily by the insiders, there is a strong temptation to define the...

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group's purpose in light of the desires and needs of its present membership. Yielding to this temptation, the church turns inward and mission to the world becomes a minor activity of a group that basically exists for the benefit of its present membership. Much of The United Methodist Church shows the effects of this inward turn.

The Acts of the Apostles can be strong medicine for our sickness. Acts is not really the story of the early church, for it tells us very little about the church's internal life. It is the story of the early mission, focusing on a few central figures, especially Peter and Paul. In telling this story, the narrator highlights the typical experiences of a church in mission. This story can help us to recognize what it would mean to recover our roots as a missionary movement dedicated not simply to the welfare of its present membership but to the transformation of individual and social life in the world at large.

We will focus on the lections from Acts for the first six Sundays of the Easter season, namely Acts 10:34-43; 2:14a, 22-32, 36-41, 42-47; 7:55-60; and 17:22-31. It may seem strange to emphasize mission in the Easter season. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to leave that for Pentecost? In the perspective of Acts, however, the forty days of the risen Lord's appearances to the apostles are a period of preparation for mission (cf. 1:3-8). The Easter season can have the same significance for us. The rule of the risen Messiah is spread through the mission, and the risen Messiah pours out the Spirit in order to make the mission possible (1:8; 2:33).


It is important to understand the lectionary texts in the context of the unfolding narrative as a whole. Nevertheless, it is useful to depart from the order of Acts and begin where the Easter lectionary does, with Acts 10:34-43, for two reasons: (1) We read here about a missionary who has been called to univer-
The early mission became stuck as our mission has. (2) Peter's speech to Cornelius provides a retrospective overview of God's work through Jesus. This overview can remind us of the place of the resurrection within a larger story.

At the end of Luke the risen Jesus told the apostles and those with them that they, as his witnesses, must proclaim "in his name repentance for release of sins to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47-48), and again in Acts 1:8 Jesus spoke of being witnesses "to the end of the earth." Yet Peter and his colleagues have made no attempt to address Gentiles. Was this simply because the apostles were proceeding methodically, step by step (first Jerusalem and Judea, then Samaria, and only later the larger world)? This explanation ignores the fact that there were Gentiles living in the Jewish homeland who have not been approached. The introduction of the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10 alerts us to this fact. Peter has been called to an inclusive mission, but he has been speaking only to Jews. The United Methodist Church also pays verbal homage to an inclusive mission, but the church in the United States, at least, largely focuses its attention on its present supporters and certain traditional, limited areas of mission. Both we and Peter recognize a universal mission, but it does not guide our practice.

Peter's problem is that Gentiles are unclean (cf. Acts 10:13-15:28). How can a mission with Gentiles proceed when the missioners must practice a holy life and protect themselves from defilement by Gentile uncleanness? Peter must be pushed step by step to the recognition that God has declared the Gentiles clean and has opened the way to mission among them. For us, too, the marks of a holy life, which are meant to affirm our dedication to God, can sometimes function as barriers to mission in the world, for they sharply define the boundary between us and the outsiders who live differently. Those who place their own holiness first and fear the world's defilement are limited in mission. In contrast, forced encounter with persons who, we reluctantly discover, do not fit our stereotypes of the non-Christian world can change our
REFLECTIONS ON THE EASTER LECTIONS

thinking about opportunities for mission. Peter’s encounter with Cornelius had this effect.

Peter’s speech begins in 10:34-35 with a declaration of what he has learned through the events that brought him to Cornelius’ house. That God “does not play favorites” (RSV: “shows no partiality”) is a widely accepted theological affirmation, but now Peter recognizes this “in truth,” that is, he recognizes that God really behaves this way and wants the missionaries to behave this way as the mission proceeds. Peter also now recognizes something about the world: there are non-Jews, like Cornelius, who fear God and do what is right. The circle of those who love God and neighbor is not coextensive with the Jewish people (nor, we might add, with the church). Part of the experience of mission is discovering that some outsiders already share what we think our religion gives us.

The discovery about God and about outsiders voiced in vv. 34-35 is followed in v. 36 by Peter’s discovery about Jesus. In contrast to the RSV, I would translate v. 36 as follows: “Concerning the word that God sent to the sons of Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Messiah: he [Jesus Messiah] is Lord of all!” It is important to recognize that the narrator, through Peter, is reflecting on the birth announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:10-11,14. These sons of Israel received good news and a message of peace about their Messiah Lord. Peter is saying that this announcement to Israel concerning its Lord Messiah must now be understood to apply to everyone. Jesus is truly the Jewish Messiah, fulfilling God’s promises to the Jewish people, but his rule as Messiah and Lord is going to reach out and embrace all, uniting the historic people of God with other peoples.

Peter’s speech continues to summarize the story of Jesus as previously presented in Luke, moving from the announcement to the shepherds in v. 36 to the baptism and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in v. 37, Jesus’ announcement in the Nazareth synagogue and healing mission in v. 38, his crucifixion in v. 39, his resurrection and appearances in vv. 40-41, and the risen Lord’s interpretation of the prophets and commission of the
apostles as his preachers in vv. 42-43. Peter's speech follows the chronological order of the Lukan story of Jesus and emphasizes key scenes. It also retains the Jewish setting of Jesus' ministry, although Peter is now addressing Gentiles. At the same time, it sets this story of the Jewish Messiah within a universal context, for it opens with the affirmation that God does not select one group as God's favorites and has made Jesus Lord of all and ends with the affirmation that "everyone who believes in him" receives his saving benefits. Peter's speech represents a careful balance between particularity and universality. The narrator, speaking through Peter, prevents us from ignoring the fact that Jesus was a Jew and was sent to the Jewish people as their Messiah, but this Jewish Messiah has become Lord of all and the one through whom God now demonstrates that God does not play favorites. In Jesus God's saving purpose is effectively at work to include all kinds of persons.

The new universal message does not eliminate the particularity of the story of Jesus the Jew, sent to the Jewish people. It is the role of the witnesses to preserve that story and insist on its relevance. There is considerable stress on Peter and his colleagues as witnesses to Jesus in this speech. They are witnesses both to his ministry (v. 39) and to his resurrection (vv. 40-41). Although Peter will play an important role in later events, this is his last missionary speech in Acts. This speech is an appropriate place to emphasize the importance of preserving and respecting the earliest impressions of God's power in Jesus shared by his first followers, who became his witnesses.

The church continues to live from this tradition. Yet it also continues to make new discoveries of ways in which God's purpose takes surprising turns, forcing the church to rethink the relation between the traditional message and the church's setting in the world. Peter's conversion—for it is not only Cornelius but also Peter who is converted in Acts 10—results from his recognition that God has declared the Gentiles clean, removing the barrier to mission, and from his new insight into the connection between Jesus' life and work as a Jew and God's universal saving purpose. Acts 10 should prepare us for experiences similar to Peter's. Encountering non-Christians who
refers God and do what is right, we may discover that our familiar story—the story of Israel-Jesus-church—must be placed in a new and larger context that includes these strangers. Then we can share with the strangers our communal story and experience. In the process both we and they must change. Peter witnesses to Cornelius concerning Jesus, but through his encounter with this Gentile both his theological understanding and his behavior change. We cannot predict at the beginning the outcome of our encounter with the world.

We now turn back to the first of Peter's mission speeches, the speech at Pentecost in Acts 2:14-40. Although this is the scene on which our festival of Pentecost is based, Peter's speech has appropriately been chosen as a lection for the Easter season. Acts 2 not only presents the first coming of the Spirit upon Jesus' followers and the beginning of the mission in Jerusalem but also presents the first public proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. After the lengthy quotation from Joel, which relates both to the outpouring of the Spirit and the future mission, Peter begins to speak of Jesus in v. 22. He speaks of Jesus' mighty acts, his crucifixion, and especially of his resurrection and its significance. He presents a tightly constructed argument leading to the conclusion in v. 36 that "God made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Only by considering the narrative context can we understand what is happening through this speech. It is not a speech that would be appropriate for every audience. It is directed to the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are judged to be accomplices with their leaders in the death of Jesus. Peter speaks to his audience in strong tones of accusation. He charges them bluntly with killing Jesus in vv. 23 and 36. Their rejection of Jesus contrasts sharply with God's affirmation of him, for God "raised" him (v. 24) and "made him Lord and Messiah" (v. 36). The contrast underscores a central aspect of the Lukan understanding of God. God is most clearly revealed as God in those events that ironically twist human resistance to the service of God's saving purpose. God is not only ruler but overruler. God rules by overruling, allowing rebellious humans to have their
God's saving purpose. God is not only ruler but overruler. God rules by overruling, allowing rebellious humans to have their way but robbing them of the results, for things turn out quite differently than expected. This God of surprises is especially revealed in the resurrection of Jesus, who is not only raised but installed as ruling Messiah and Lord as a result of crucifixion.

The resurrection of Jesus is also a central event in an ongoing mission. Jesus announced the mission entrusted to him by God in the Nazareth synagogue, disclosing at the beginning of his public ministry that God had anointed him to preach good news to the poor and to proclaim release to captives (Luke 4:18). This same mission continues through Jesus' witnesses, who are sent to proclaim "release of sins" in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47). However, the situation has changed, for Jesus is now the enthroned Messiah who authorizes the mission in his name, a mission that is no longer limited to those times and places in which the historical Jesus was present. The new situation is described by speaking of the enthroned Messiah pouring out or giving the saving benefits that were available in more limited ways during his earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit, the divine power behind the mission, rested on Jesus during his ministry (Luke 3:21-22; 4:14, 18), but now the exalted Messiah pours out this power upon his faithful followers (Acts 2:33). Jesus freely exercised the authority to release sins during his ministry (Luke 5:20-24); now he has been exalted to God's right hand "to give repentance to Israel and release of sins" (Acts 5:31). The Spirit, repentance, and release of sins are given to new groups as the mission spreads. The resurrection of Jesus means the overruling of human designs and the installation of Jesus as ruling Messiah, with the benefits of his ministry available in a new, unlimited way through the mission in his name. Therefore, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are saving events. God saves by establishing through Jesus the messianic reign, which is the promised time of salvation. This remains, of course, a contested reality within the present world, as later opposition to the mission in Acts will emphasize.

Jesus' saving benefits are available even to those who rejected and killed him. Peter in his speech is not accusing Jews
in general but the residents of Jerusalem in Jesus' time, who are judged to bear corporate responsibility for Jesus' death but are also offered forgiveness. In terms of dramatic theory the Pentecost scene is a recognition scene, a scene in which persons who have acted blindly, causing a disaster, suddenly recognize what they have done. Recognition of what has happened is the point of Peter's speech. Peter begins, "Let this be known to you" (2:14), and ends by saying, "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly" (2:36). They must know that they have crucified the one who is now ruling Messiah and Lord. The speech is intended to produce the effect depicted in v. 37: the hearers are "cut to the heart." Then Peter calls them to repentance. The public proclamation of the risen Messiah must also be a call for repentance from those who denied him.

We tend to think of Lent as the time of repentance and Easter as a time of celebration. In the Lukan story, however, the resurrection of Jesus sharply and clearly reveals the need for repentance, to which God's people were previously blind. The resurrection does not resolve the problem in the plot but heightens it, for it reveals that many of the historical people of God are blind opponents of God's saving plan.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that this applies only to some ancient Jews and not to the church today. Consider our social position as part of an establishment church and, in most cases, part of middle-class society. Our position gives us something to protect, which causes us to resist repentance and view new developments with suspicion. Beginning in Acts 4, the temple leaders show the typical establishment response: opposition to unauthorized upstarts who challenge establishment authority. This opposition is also resistance to repentance.

There are reform movements already underway within The United Methodist Church. The early followers of Jesus were such a reform movement, and the temple leadership in Jerusalem was the establishment church, protecting its own interests. Social dynamics suggest that most establishment groups will act in the same way, an insight that should lead us to self-examination.
We should also admit our difficulty in dealing with a God of surprises. As soon as we are pushed into admitting that some troublemaker—such as Martin Luther King, Jr.—was a prophet of God, some new challenge to our comfortable assumptions arises. Many of the people of Jerusalem and especially the temple leadership had similar difficulty with Jesus and his witnesses. It is still difficult for us because we must trust in God's power before we recognize it in action. It is one thing to celebrate God's surprising triumph after it has been revealed and another thing to trust in it when all we can see is our defeat. Our very commitment to the work of the church leads us to equate the church's triumphs with God's triumphs. It is very difficult for us to recognize that God can win through our defeat. That, however, is what happened through the defeat of Jesus in Jerusalem. Jesus' defeat (the rejection of his mission) and the following resurrection remain the paradigm for God's continuing action in the world. At Easter we acclaim the God of surprises who (1) calls us to repentance for our past insensitivity to God's work in the world and (2) calls us to faith in God's persistent saving purpose when all we can see is our own defeat. This repentance and this faith are necessary for the renewal of mission in The United Methodist Church.

Acts 2:42-47, the lection for the fourth Sunday of Easter, shows the pattern of communal life that results from repentance and enables mission. The most striking sign of the devotion of these early believers is that each now regards his or her property as the common property of all and is willing to sell it and share the proceeds with those in need (2:44-45). This description of communal sharing in the early church returns in 4:32-37. It is not to be dismissed as a curiosity or a failed experiment that we are not intended to repeat. It can call the American church to repentance by revealing our bondage to American culture, with its drive toward acquisition and pattern of high consumption. When we compare our own pattern of life, our unfaithfulness to the gospel is revealed, for our real values appear nowhere more clearly than in our use of money and property.
The favor that the early believers enjoyed with the people and the rapid increase in their numbers (cf. 2:41, 47) might seem to indicate a problem-free environment for the early mission. In Acts 2-7, however, the story will move rapidly from harmony through developing conflict to a major crisis. The next Easter lection catches that crisis at its dramatic high point, after Stephen's speech and at the moment of his vision, events that directly lead to his stoning and a great persecution of the church (7:55-8:1). Through a series of arrests and threats, the temple leadership has tried to stop the apostles from preaching and the Christian movement from spreading. Finally, Stephen is accused of speaking against the temple and the law (6:13-14). Stephen's long speech anticipates what is about to happen by recalling the tragic turn in Israel's history when the people previously rejected God's messengers and the fulfillment of God's promise. Using the strong language of prophetic indictments in Scripture, he accuses the Sanhedrin of resisting the Holy Spirit working through the prophets, as their ancestors had done. This accusation provokes an angry reaction. At that moment Stephen sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he testifies to what he sees. This increases the fury of the audience, who cast Stephen out of the city and stone him. Stephen's two prayers at his death parallel the two prayers of Jesus on the cross in Luke. Stephen trustfully commits his spirit to the Lord Jesus as Jesus committed his spirit to God (Luke 23:46), and Stephen prays for the forgiveness of his enemies as Jesus prayed for his crucifiers (Luke 23:34). The passion story repeats itself in the experience of Jesus' witnesses. Although they do not seek the condemnation of their opponents, they appear to be such a threat to the establishment that they deserve death. Those who call for repentance are sometimes treated as very dangerous people, as we discovered again when Archbishop Romero of El Salvador was assassinated.

Stephen's vision of Jesus at the right hand of God is a revelation of the hidden power that overrules human violence. In his Pentecost speech Peter testified that Jesus had been exalted at the right hand of God as heavenly Lord (2:33-35). As
course of events in spite of human violence. God the overruler, working through the exalted Messiah, robs human violence of its victory as the scattered church carries the witness to Jesus into new areas as a result of the persecution (cf. 8:1, 4; 11:19-20). Here we see the continuing power of the resurrected Lord. Stephen’s vision is a witness to this power, for he sees the risen Jesus where the condemned Jesus said he would be, "at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). The opponents' violence is not defeated by Christian violence but by this hidden power that works through the death of the witnesses.

Recent events in Central America and South Africa show that it can be as dangerous for modern witnesses as it was for Stephen. Our more secure lives may show that we are part of the establishment church rather than the movement of repentance and renewal initiated by the risen Messiah.

The lection for the sixth Sunday of Easter takes us to a different stage of the mission. In Acts 17:22-31 Paul is speaking before the Areopagus, the council in Athens in charge of religious affairs, among other responsibilities. Many of the Gentiles previously approached by Paul had been prepared for his message through participation in the worship and study of the synagogue. That is not the case in Athens. Paul has been preaching "Jesus and the resurrection" in Athens (17:18), but the results have been disappointing. Some of his hearers think that Jesus and the resurrection are two "foreign divinities." Even later the resurrection will cause some to scoff (17:32). Paul is addressing a difficult audience, not inclined or prepared to accept a message about a risen Jewish Messiah. Therefore, he must lay a foundation for his message before it can be understood. The Areopagus speech attempts to lay this initial foundation, which explains the fact that Jesus is not even named in the speech. He is mentioned without name in the last verse, with a brief reference to his resurrection.

Acts does not present the Areopagus speech as a mistake, an attempt at apologetics that proved fruitless and was later abandoned. This speech fits central theological affirmations in Luke-Acts. Early in Luke we are told through an inspired prophet and through quotation of Scripture that God intends
salvation for "all flesh" (Luke 2:30-32; 3:6). This understanding of God's purpose requires the mission to present the message of salvation in a way that all—even those not sharing Israel's history—can hear. Rather than speaking of the promises to Israel and their fulfillment through Jesus Messiah, Paul speaks of the relation of God the Creator to all humans as God's creatures. This relation transcends every ethnic and religious difference. Therefore, Paul can speak of "all," "every nation," and "each one," as he repeatedly does in this speech.

Mission in the 1990s requires careful reflection on the relation of God to the world as a whole. We can no longer live and work in cultural isolation. The church itself is no longer predominantly European and American, and our shrinking globe requires us to pay attention to people of other faiths and the secular world. Religiously inspired conflict—as in the Near East and Northern Ireland—is one of the most dangerous and destructive aspects of the modern world. Both human survival and the nature of the Christian mission require theological reflection in a global context. We must learn to express our witness in ways that restrain conflict, while affirming the right of all to share in God's promise.

Paul begins his speech by referring to the Athenians' altar to an unknown God. This altar is an ambiguous symbol: it testifies both to its builders' awareness of God and to God as unknown. Paul continues by presenting God in terms that might appeal to cultured Athenians. God is the universal Creator, and all humans have a common origin. At the same time Paul criticizes the Athenian civic religion for which the Areopagus council is responsible. The one who is Creator and Lord of heaven and earth cannot be thought to inhabit temples made with hands nor to have needs supplied by humans through temple sacrifices (17:24-25). Later Paul will criticize the attempt to fashion an image of the divine in gold, silver, or stone (17:29). Paul insists that God the Creator cannot be limited to and dependent upon human creations.

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stone (17:29). Paul insists that God the Creator cannot be limited to and dependent upon human creations.

In this scene Paul takes seriously the presence of God outside the Jewish and Christian communities, recognizing that even pagan religions (and, we might add, secular world views) have areas of overlap with Christian affirmations, providing a basis for dialogue. As Paul's speech shows, this must be a critical dialogue. Paul is critical of some aspects of Athenian religion. We must be critical of some aspects of non-Christian life and thought (and also of some Christian theologies that do not permit real dialogue with the larger world). This dialogue, however, must not only be critical but also genuine. Therefore, we Christians should expect to learn as well as to teach. We should expect to discover something new about the universal God who was present among the world's peoples long before the Christian mission began.

A Christian mission that does not critically engage the presuppositions and dominant concerns of a culture will create a Christian ghetto that rejects God's world as demonic or reduces the Lordship of Christ to a private religious sphere and permits other forces to rule unchallenged in the rest of life. The necessity of critical engagement with the world entails rephrasing the gospel for each cultural group. Otherwise the gospel's cultural implications will not be understood. Paul's address to sophisticated Athenians who think in universal terms provides a model for this process.

Paul's negative statements about Athenian religion are balanced by statements that give hope. God created all peoples to seek after God. This may seem a blind groping in the dark (Paul speaks of feeling after God), but Paul encourages this search. God is "not far from each one of us," he says, for God is the source and immediate context of human life. Whereas Paul in other speeches quotes Jewish Scripture, here he quotes a pagan poet, who in a hymn to Zeus said, "For we are indeed offspring of this one [God]." The Greek word translated "offspring" can also be translated "family" and has previously been applied to the Jewish people as the "family of Abraham" (13:26). In the Areopagus speech Paul's witness moves beyond previous
affirmations of God's history with a particular family to affirm that all humanity is a single family of God. Furthermore, Paul recognizes that this has already been affirmed by a pagan poet. The following call to repentance is a call to respond in a new way to the presence and promise of this one God of all humanity, who wishes to include all peoples in salvation.

Jesus the risen Lord and the mission in his name are meant to be the agents of God's inclusive saving purpose, in the Lukan perspective. When Christians turn faith in Jesus into christocentric exclusivism (only those who confess Jesus to be the Christ will be saved), we are left with a theology that consigns most of the world to damnation. This is an ironic inversion of the New Testament witness to the purpose of God in Jesus Christ and therefore must be critically examined.

The affirmations that God is not far from each one of us and that all humanity is a single family of God function as promises to the world in the Areopagus speech. Then Paul calls for repentance, for the world has not clearly recognized this one God of all nor the unity of humanity that results. Competing groups have attempted to limit God to their own localities and form God in their own image. The call to repentance should be understood as an opportunity. The gospel of Jesus Christ brings a new opportunity to the world to recognize its unity in the universal God. If this opportunity is an integral part of the gospel, the Christian mission in the 1990s must present Jesus Christ to the world as the one who unites the world as the family of God, rather than as one of the competing Lords who divide religious people against each other.

If the mission of The United Methodist Church has become stuck and we have turned inward upon ourselves, the Easter season can be a time of repentance and renewal. Repentance and renewal are appropriate and necessary responses to the resurrected and exalted Lord, who pours out the Spirit to guide the church on a mission to all nations. Through the Easter lections from Acts, we can hear anew God's call to accept our role in God's mission of salvation for the world.
Of the writing of books on Jesus' parables there is no end; and, unfortunately, recent offerings have tended to be redundant, either rehashing Jeremias's groundbreaking but dated analyses, or reiterating insights of the existentialist and formal treatments in vogue from the sixties to the early eighties. A welcome relief from this trend, *The Gospel in Parable* begins to chart previously ignored territory, the relationship between the parables and their contexts in the Synoptic Gospels.

Almost all modern research—both historical and literary—has focused on the parables in isolation from their literary settings. Historical criticism fostered a view of the Gospels as quarries of historical information, rough amalgams of tradition and redaction. By fragmenting the Gospels into pre-existing components, and then analyzing these parts separately in terms of their original (pre-Synoptic) settings, historians were able to learn much about the historical Jesus and the phases of early Christian development. Much effort was thus expended in disentangling the parables from their present settings and reconstructing either the original conditions under which Jesus delivered them, or the various early church situations which gave rise to idiosyncratic modulations in them. More recently, literary critics have also been wont to excise these short stories from their present contexts. Largely neglecting the broader narrative settings of the parables, most interpreters have preferred to view Jesus' metaphorical stories as autonomous, self-sufficient literary objects.

Professor Donahue is rightly convinced, however, that much theological, historical and literary value lies in the complex linkages and fertile interaction between the parables and their present literary contexts. Indeed, his study makes it clear that our appreciation of both the Gospels and the parables is lessened when we ignore this important relationship.

The book begins with a marvelously concise and enlightening chapter relating the author's method and purposes and summarizing the best of recent parable research. Donahue's evalua-
tions of the contributions of Amos Wilder, Paul Ricoeur, Robert Funk and John D. Crossan are remarkably lucid given the complexity of the issues discussed. Like these scholars, Donahue stresses the significance of the metaphorical and narrative character of parables; however, he wisely avoids the inflated language (e.g., "world shattering") of some who ascribe to metaphor powers previously reserved for the divine. The central chapters consist of careful exegetical treatments of selected parables in Mark, Matthew and Luke, and the final chapter draws together broader theological implications for our understanding of the gospel in these three unique versions.

As anyone who has tried to teach the parables will recognize quickly, the strengths of The Gospel in Parable are many. Its lucid prose, careful exegeses, and summaries of scholarship make it an invaluable resource for seminary classes and sermon preparation. Indeed, the book is based on well over a decade of Professor Donahue's extremely popular divinity courses (one of which this reviewer attended), and the author's concern for the modern preaching of the parables is evident on every page. This is one of those rare theological books which, despite its full engagement in scholarly debate, targets and reaches pastors and seminary students as well as biblical specialists. For example, Donahue repeatedly grapples with the difficult issue of how one transposes the power of Jesus' imagery, long dead in western tradition, into equally effective language in modern times. But Donahue's most valuable contribution is his pioneering venture into the area of the intimate relationship between parable and Gospel. In my opinion the study of the parables in context will be the next great phase of parable research, and, as the charting of this new territory continues, Donahue's work will stand as a landmark.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether many other scholars embarking on this endeavor will wish to emulate Donahue's rather anachronistic methodology. The basic problem is that the author does not go far enough in the direction he has chosen; indeed, he seems unaware of just how deep, intimate and intricate the relationships between the parables and their present contexts really are. And this deficiency is largely at-
tributable to the redaction-critical perspective which dominates the entire study. Donahue expends far too much energy distinguishing between layers of tradition and speaking of the evangelists' theological agendas while devoting too little effort to thorough literary explorations of narrative contexts. What is needed is a truly literary approach which sees the Gospels as unified and integrated wholes and takes seriously such matters as the relation of the characters in the larger narratives to the characters in the embedded narratives that we call parables.

Despite methodological shortcomings, this book will long be valued for its role in opening a new phase of parables research, as well as for its attention to the task of preaching the parables today.

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AIDS is as welcome in our twentieth century as leprosy was in the first century—and about as well understood. As the Black Death swept through Europe in the Middle Ages, casting fear upon every soul, so now does the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome sweep devastatingly through the United States, Western Europe, and Africa. No community can hide complacently from this modern plague.

In response to this crisis, William Amos, Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Plantation, Florida, has written When AIDS Comes to Church. It tells of Amos' incidental introduction to AIDS and the disease's powers of disruption. Focusing on Christian pastoral response to persons suffering from AIDS Amos says, "I am convinced that no other issue has the same potential as this disease to change the face of pastoral ministry. There will be families in the church who, because of their connection with the disease, will be viewed as untouchable" (p. 11).
For Amos AIDS will be a testing ground: will Christian compassion win the day? Or will the alternative to compassion--judgment, fear, and anger--be victorious? Amos expresses his central concern: "The church has always had a very open view toward struggling to bring the gospel to bear on all sorts of situations and needs. However, being open and being involved are two very different things" (p. 14).

Amos' concern is three-fold. First, he contends, there must be education within the Christian ministry--both clergy and lay--about the nature of AIDS. As Amos began work with AIDS patients, he realized people had false perceptions of AIDS. The church's role to patients and congregants is disseminating accurate information. This will partially allay the public's "homophobia" regarding AIDS and its victims. Amos supplies a six- and a-half-page appendix of governmental phone numbers and addresses making information available including several 800 numbers.

My basic piece of education material is the Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Published in October 1986, it is available on request from the U.S. Public Health Service in Washington, D.C. It is dependable from a medical point of view and is, in my opinion, the single best piece of material available on the subject of the disease itself. (pg. 34)

This educational material, however, will become obsolete as researchers learn more about AIDS. AIDS discussions also necessarily involve issues of AIDS Related Complex (ARC), the fact that Amos does not mention ARC shows how quickly the technical aspects of AIDS data become out of date. The question also must be raised as to the soundness of Amos' methodology based primarily on but one United States federal governmental report--a government not particularly disposed to assisting gays, drug users, and prostitutes.

The second concern for Amos, beyond separating medical facts from fictitious stories about AIDS, is how to begin ministry. How are persons with AIDS drawn into caring relationships within the faith community? Amos' approach is in two steps. First, for most churches, ministry to AIDS patients will neces-
sarily be in one-to-one relationships. "While nearly all churches will be touched in one way or another by AIDS in the future, it will be the unusual church that has large numbers of patients for which a major program can be developed. Ministry to AIDS patients and their families cannot be handled through church programming, like food or clothing distribution or a specific age-group ministry" (p. 33).

Thus, for mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, ministry to AIDS patients and their families will be targeted at small numbers spread over a large number of congregations. For people suffering from AIDS, the alternative to the traditional congregation may be a "gay church" which, by its very nature, will be equipped to offer a comprehensive program for people with these special needs. As Amos so aptly reminds us, "Whatever one's personal view and opinion of the 'gay church' might be, the sad fact is evident that often they minister because others cannot or will not" (pg. 30). Ironically, it is this "gay church" which will be ministering to many who are not necessarily homosexuals. These churches will serve ever increasing numbers of non-homosexual AIDS patients, patients who contracted the disease through intravenous drug use, prostitution, and birth. In other words: AIDS is not exclusively a gay syndrome. Because of the emerging nature of AIDS among the poor, for the sake of the gospel, the church becomes involved and hears the scriptural mandate to "minister unto the least of these."

Realizing this ministry and its one-to-one nature yields Amos' second step: the preparation of the pastor. The pastor must be equipped to lead a small local church group to be a patient's primary caregivers. Amos maintains pastoral preparation has emotional and theological dimensions. Again it must be stressed, though Amos mentions it only superficially, that the emotional preparation must assume an outlook of ministry to the terminally ill. Whether with AIDS or cancer, the persons in need are going to die—sooner rather than later. Counseling must guard against the ever popular blame-the-victim mentality which can creep into the attitudes—however unintentionally—of those giving care.
The third concern is the follow up to the first, general education, and second, beginning to envision a church program unique in scope and method. The last three chapters of When AIDS Comes to Church lay groundwork for a practical ministry to AIDS folk, the modern American equivalent to India's Untouchable caste.

Using the rubrics of 1) inclusiveness, 2) consistency, 3) judgment, and 4) touch, Amos speaks in biblical images about meeting the needs of society's cast-offs. He reminds us that, "as AIDS spreads into the heterosexual community, more and more persons will be labeled with the scarlet letter of somehow improper sexual activity" (p. 12). The fact is, though, already many persons with AIDS are infected by sharing dirty needles, the practice of the birth mother, and by pre-test date blood transfusions. Amos also gives the impression that with education, Christians will overlook the sexual aspect of contracting the AIDS syndrome. Amos's case is somewhat misleading. Current AIDS research reflects prime growth is not among the sexually active. It is among the other high risk groups, the drug culture for instance, that the syndrome is making inroads. The church's future role regarding AIDS will not be to minister to homosexuals alone.

The church's traditional sexual mores makes the Christian response to AIDS difficult. One might even say before the church is able to come to terms with AIDS it needs to come to terms with human sexuality. But the fact remains: AIDS is not simply a virus which is exclusively transmitted by sexual means. Amos' strategy of one-to-one caregivers, is a legitimate response by local congregations to AIDS. His hope is that as more and more care is given by individuals the sexual prejudices against AIDS will be mollified.

This is a book which merits reading. Because of the nature of the book, Amos sacrifices measured theological reflection for emotional immediacy. Possibly the greatest weakness is Amos' reliance on data which was out of date even as his book was published. The reasons for reading remain. Amos is neither inclined nor feels he has the luxury to wait for further developed research and pastoral methodologies. His perception
is that this ministry is needed and it is needed now. Therefore, Amos gets this issue before the church in a helpful way. His personal experience with many AIDS patients will reveal much to others who increasingly seek guidance in this emerging prophetic ministry.

It is precisely because of the prompt nature of this work, however, that questions arise. One issue is confidentiality. Amos repeatedly speaks of confidentiality in the pastoring of AIDS patients. Initially this pastoral concern seemed to be raised because of the disease's unusual nature. But Amos' main point in speaking of pastoral confidence was more for the purpose of protecting a person's civil rights. Pastoral silence kept AIDS victims from being fired and/or becoming medically uninsured. Here is a quagmire in the theological ethics of truth-telling.

What may have been confidential because of the private nature of counseling, however, assume serious practical consequences. These ethical questions concern the civil rights of those with AIDS. This provides the church an opportunity to initiate an advocacy ministry in legislative lobbying. The church's prophetic ministry, that is, standing up for the civil rights of AIDS victims may appear to uncritical observers as the church condoning homosexuality. This is not necessarily the case. Helping protect citizens who by law are so entitled is the aim, whether they are healthy or not.

Another set of issues focuses on financing soaring health care costs. Indeed, this is not an issue which is limited to those with AIDS. It is an issue all Americans will be forced to address soon and in substantial ways. With AIDS patients, however, health care costs are especially devastating, because of possible loss of insurance coverage, compounded by the victim's loss of employment. Many AIDS patients need long-term nursing care, often for months at a time. Traditional resources for treating AIDS are often soon exhausted. Sometimes this happens early in the syndrome. In turn, this financial burden is eventually assumed by either the patient's family or a governmental agency. Whether one is affected by AIDS directly or not, all persons will be affected indirectly.
BOOK REVIEWS

Long-term care is another area the church can explore if it is really serious about those on the edges of society. Hospices offer economical alternatives to expensive hospital care. These places are easily transformed into homely surroundings, in contrast to institutional hospital decor, and they also afford a conducive atmosphere for visitation.

AIDS is a public health problem that is not going to go away. William Amos has rightly suggested that few if any churches will have the luxury of ignoring ministry to AIDS victims and still be considered ministering to the twentieth century. When AIDS Comes to the Church is one perspective on a theological and pastoral care issue affecting the whole church.

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Each of these volumes intends to address the debate current in theological education today as to how divinity schools and schools of theology can strengthen the connection between their curricula and the churches. Throughout this decade there has been increasing awareness that many seminaries have moved in the direction of the study of religion as an academic discipline, with the result that there is concern about the direct relationship between the academic work of students and the immediate realities of the churches they are preparing to serve.

The two volumes under consideration contribute significantly to this discussion. While they are both directed primarily to the schools of theology as they review their curricula and programs, it might well be argued that churches themselves
could be the greatest beneficiaries of the opinions and perspectives contained in each. Both of these books, each in its own way, could be the subject of an adult study group or, especially in the case of Beyond Clericalism, might be an important subject for discussion for any church preparing to search for a new pastor. Ideally, and this is the basic theme underscoring both of these works, churches and schools devoted to the training of clergy should be in conversation about the ideas presented and share concerns and responses together.

Christian Identity and Theological Education has been available for several years, and has been reviewed by many different groups and bodies. It is an attempt to lay the groundwork for a new conception of theological education (although as the authors profess, not one that is radical) and the kind(s) of curricula that might develop from this conception. Thus it begins and ends with a consideration of the task of the theological school itself. The middle chapters are devoted more specifically to the church, its history, context and forms of identification. Those chapters alone would be important reading for congregations interested in rethinking their identity and mission in a world moving rapidly into the twenty-first century. The authors take seriously the many concerns that have been identified as crucial to the thinking of today's educators and today's church members, including forms of liberation theology, concerns for ecology, feminism, the Christian church in the global context and many others. It suggests ways for the church to understand itself, and ways for the school to be in tune with the importance of educating "practical theologians."

The second volume, Beyond Clericalism, is the result of a fairly recent colloquium of theological educators who were attempting to respond to the thesis of the late James Hopewell that seminaries should focus their training specifically on a congregational paradigm. In this model the emphasis would be not on the development of an individual pastor, but on a particular congregation with its own life, problems and realities. Hopewell felt that if this model were pursued not only would theological education be more relevant, but there would be an
invaluable opportunity for churches and divinity schools to work together in planning courses of study to prepare pastors for the real circumstances to which they are called to minister.

The responses of a variety of noted theological educators make up the contributions to this volume. While Hopewell's ideas are the basis for the discussion most of the contributors use this proposal as the platform by which to develop their own ideas. Many problems are raised with his model, in the context of which other alternatives are put forward and some extremely interesting possibilities raised for the relationship of the seminary to the local congregation. David Kelsey, John Cobb, Letty Russell, and Marjorie Suchocki are contributors to the first section of the book which discusses the possibilities of a congregational paradigm for theological education. In the second section Jane Dempsey Douglass, Carl Holladay, E. Brooks Holifield, Don Browning, Stanley Hauerwas and Beverly Harrison discuss the relationship of their own academic disciplines to the lives of individual congregations, providing other means by which to bridge the gap between academia and the life of the worshipping community.

Both of these books are to be highly recommended. Because of the exposure that has been given in the past few years to issues of theological education there is a ring of familiarity to most of the concerns that are raised. Nonetheless they remain of crucial importance to schools considering the nature of the kinds of education they provide. And without question each of these works could provide valuable insights for congregations planning seriously for their own future and concerned with the role of the church in the contemporary world.

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The publication of Dr. May's book Addiction and Grace is timely. The enormous individual and social problems resulting
from addiction in contemporary society make it of general interest. Dr. May is a psychiatrist and spiritual director who has had extensive experience dealing with persons with chemical addictions. But this is not a how-to book on the treatment of addictions. It probes the physical, spiritual, and social antecedents and concomitants to addiction, developing a "philosophy" for understanding and treatment. Having been a practicing psychiatrist and a university professor, May has the medical and intellectual background to tackle this difficult subject. In addition, he has long been engaged in a spiritual search of his own that makes his writing authentic and personal. He has consulted the literature of spiritual practice in several cultures. His interest in human freedom and volition, and in the conditions that limit or expand human freedom may be seen in one of his recent books, Will and Spirit.

The "sides" of Dr. May's professional life are clearly represented in Addiction and Grace. Equally balanced between the man of science (perhaps more accurately, of medicine) and the seeker after God, he leans in the direction of the latter. This can be seen in the two major propositions of the book: 1) human beings are all addicted; 2) the only cure for addiction is grace. His own experience with these two "facts" is rather beautifully stated in the preface to the book:

Many of the old understandings to which I had been addicted were stripped away, leaving a desertlike spaciousness where my customary props and securities no longer existed. Grace was able to flow into this emptiness, and something new was able to grow. Fresh understandings took root, and the insights that emerged were clearer, simpler and more beautiful. I became acutely aware of living what I was writing about. I live a life infused by the bondage of addiction and the hope of grace; I think we all live such lives.

That statement contains the beginning and ending of the book. The rest, it seems to me, is simply explication; and there is quite a good deal of that.

As might be expected from Dr. May's own history, the explication is framed in two languages: the language of psychiatry and the language of theology. To be more specific: the language
of modern behavioristic psychiatry and the language of evangelical theology. The former is specific, "scientific" and data-related, the second more propositional and metaphorical. One of the difficulties in reading the book is the transition between the levels of these languages. The psychiatric language is representative of contemporary post-Freudian thinking, leaning heavily upon behavioristic concepts. It is used to explain the physical and psychological aspects of addiction with considerable skill and detail, properly remembering that the book was written for a rather broad readership.

The theological language seems more problematical. It is pervaded with an experiential tone that seems somewhat less objectified than the psychiatric discussion. Numerous Scripture references are used to introduce or illustrate points being made in an all but proof-texting manner. In some cases, Dr. May has made revisions in the common usages of these Scripture texts to provide meanings that he believes to be more enhanced or accurate. These freedoms of interpretation made me somewhat nervous.

There are two different levels of discourse here—different in terms of specificity and different in terms of the consensus they might generate within the professional communities to which they related (i.e. psychiatry and theology). I am not sure that this oil and water phenomenon ever blended together in the making of the book.

Laying aside these considerations of style and linguistics, perhaps a more important question is this: is Dr. May's argument a valid; did he tell the truth? In the main I think so. I believe that his description of the manner in which addictions occur is accurate. His assertions that addictions can be intense whether they are "psychological" or "physical," that all human beings are potentially addictive, that people play endless mind games to keep from giving up the objects of their attachments, are also true. He accurately points out that the most successful programs for the treatment of addicted persons have a spiritual component. And he states clearly that the only way to overcome an addiction is to quit, no matter what that might mean in terms of discomfort and struggle.
It is the more sweeping psychological and theological generalizations that may leave the readership puzzled. For example in making his argument that all of us are addicted he says:

I am not being flippant when I say that all of us suffer from addiction. Nor am I reducing the meaning of addiction. I mean in all truth that the psychological, neurological, and spiritual dynamics of full-fledged addiction are actively at work within every human being.

This may be like saying the potential for addiction is addiction. I feel sure that he has found disagreement among scientific and professional persons who spend their lives working with addicted people and studying addiction. Most of them, I suspect, would differentiate between the intensity of obsessional and compulsive behaviors, calling some addictions and other not. Some might reserve the word addictions for attachment to substances that once taken, create their own continuing demand.

However, Dr. May's argument that psychological attachments can create their own intense, continuing and repetitive demand is well taken. His writing may reflect a new and broader usage of the word addiction that is moving into the professional literature.

I found his use of the word grace both appealing and distressing. If by 'grace' he means God's unmerited and unconstrained favor, God's loving mercy displayed to human beings for the salvation of their souls, and I think he does, this is not only appealing, but entirely congruent with the heart of Christian theology. I believe that many, if not most practitioners of psychological or medical healing believe that their work is done within the framework of God's grace; that practitioners and their clients must depend upon God as the Ultimate Healer. But these beliefs are hard to operationalize in therapeutic practice. At times it appears that Dr. May is attempting to do so. It seems to me that both his life and the argument in the book have been headed toward a confluence of the skills of medical-psychological and spiritual practices. The story of his own spiritual growth and the deeper satisfaction it has brought.
to life are incontrovertible phenomenological reports. But the book does not seem to weave the major truths of the two major areas of consideration together into a unified fabric.

The book seems to say that both the motor that drives the desire for health and wholeness, in this case recovery, and the environment within which such recovery can occur are spiritual in nature. Dr. May frames the spiritual motivation as follows: "...all human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure." This desire is obfuscated by repression and addiction. "Attachment" nails our desire to specific objects, creatively addiction, instead of allowing the energy to flow toward God and wholeness. Dr. May attempts to show how activity can become detached from these addictive, idolatrous objects and redirected toward the relationship with God.

Addiction and Grace is a strong, thoughtful, sometimes impassioned book that should be, and will be widely read and appreciated. It will open the reader's eyes to unrecognized addictions and emphasize their demonic persistence. It will remind the reader of her or his ultimate dependency on God for freedom from those attachments that interfere with the most central human relationship: openness to the healing love of God. It may reform the thinking of persons who work with those suffering from addictions, helping them to realize that addictions cannot be broken by professional skill and behavioral changes alone; that addiction is a spiritual problem the recovery from which begins with grace.

John L. Maes, Ph.D.
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