Breaking the Power of Cancelled Sin: Possibilities and Limits in a Wesleyan Social Theology
Theodore R. Weber

Diocesan Ministry: Vision and Reality
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Clergy Authority: To What Shall We Compare It?
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Readings from 1 John: Living in the Living Seasons
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Plus Special Feature:
Globalization in Theological Education
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Introduction

The failed efforts to avert war through negotiation called up a memory of Neibuhr's observations on the Versailles Conference in 1919 (in *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*), which included a comment on how to deal with one's enemies:

What a picture that is of Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau settling the fate of the world in Paris! Wilson is evidently losing his battle. He would have done better to stay at home and throw bolts from Olympus. If you have honest and important differences of opinion with others, it is better to write letters than to put your feet under the same table with them. Compromises are always more inevitable in personal contact than in long distance negotiation.

We pray for peace on earth, but will it ever be achieved? If we wish to defend our positions we cannot avoid contact altogether. But we must choose our opportunities wisely, and before doing so, we should consider our own position.

Theodore Weber takes up the dreams of Christians for a transformed society and anchors them securely in the Wesleyan vision of the justified and sanctified individual. His essay looks at the quest for power and the struggle for rights; the limits of privilege and the necessity of conflict.

These are strange times for people in mainline denominations, says Charles Foster. Few of us would dispute him on that. In this age of exclusivity and rampant self-interest we must fight for a theological vision of servanthood, and for the institutional survival of diaconal ministry. Foster's article is intended to stir emotions. His global, inclusive view of ministry is set as a challenge before us. Two respondents, Linda Vogel and Jose Palos, have offered their views—and QR welcomes further responses from our readers.

Gary Peluso's essay on authority roles for clergy grows out of his research for the Northern Illinois Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. His work for QR builds on some of these themes and suggests that we look at the theological implications of these social systems of family, business and government. His insights would be a good way to begin a small
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group discussion on this topic.

In this issue, we begin a special series on the relationship of the United Methodist Church to globalization, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue. These articles focus on theological education—specifically, what is taking place in our thirteen United Methodist seminaries (Claremont, Wesley, Duke, Candler, Iliff, St. Paul, Boston, Perkins, Drew, United, Garrett-Evangelical, Mehetseco, Gammon). The three papers in this first installment are introduced by Dr. Robert Reber, professor of Christian Education at Auburn Theological Seminary. Russell Richey, author of the first essay in this series, has sent this vivid testimony to the power of these issues in congregations today:

The problems of ecumenism and unity in their several dimensions are by no means simply national or denominational affairs. They concern the local church and do so dramatically.

My own experience confirms this. In our Sunday school class during Christmas, a couple confessed how difficult the season has become now that their daughter has married a Muslim. Customs, seasonal observances and family beliefs are up for grabs and must be negotiated item-by-item, bringing pain rather than joy to family gatherings. They ask for the prayers and support of the class. The work area chairperson of church and society worries whether all the church’s efforts in urban ministries should go through an interdenominational agency. “Should we not do some things unilaterally?” is the sincere question. Church school classes order a wide variety of materials, including some from the Bristol Bible Curriculum, despite the oversight of the work area on education. In local congregation as well as connection, ecumenical problems are vital, day-to-day, and urgent.

Paul Aspaan closes this issue with a lectionary study on 1 John. In this little book we find a treasure of spirituality for those in ministry. It is the perfect conclusion to a discussion of conflict and dialogue: the unity of koinonia, experienced as participation in the Reality of the gospel. In the course of writing this study, Aspaan found a story in the New York Times about the Saving Stations program begun in Washington as part of the church’s effort to conduct a “war on drugs.” It became the centerpiece of his article—exhibit A in the case for renewed social commitment based on the deepest understanding of our faith. May your Easter be filled with new beginnings.
Breaking the Power of Cancelled Sin: Possibilities and Limits in a Wesleyan Social Theology

Theodore R. Weber

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He breaks the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

To develop a Wesleyan social theology we must do what Wesley himself never did: we must extend the *ordo salutis*—the order of salvation—from the realm of individual salvation to that of societal transformation. That would allow us to speak of justification and sanctification with reference to groups and institutions, and to deal with the problem of sin in relation to social pathology and social transformation without relying on—and being misinformed by—liberal or Marxist understandings of human nature and history. To adapt the language of Charles Wesley's great hymn, we would determine what it means to "break the power of cancelled sin" in the hope for a transformed society.

Theodore R. Weber is Professor of Social Ethics in the Candler School of Theology of Emory University, and a former president of the Society of Christian Ethics in the United States and Canada.
Among the questions asked of candidates for full connection in Methodist conferences, two are notorious: "Are you going on to perfection?" and "Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?" The right answer ("Yes!") to these questions implies belief in the eventual termination of sin in the sanctified Christian, rather than its persistence as contradiction to the life of faith and love. Persons brought up in a doctrinaire, scholastic Wesleyan or holiness tradition answer these questions freely and affirmatively, while persons exposed to Reformation or neo-Reformation theology hesitate mentally if not vocally. It is more than merely paradoxical to answer the questions affirmatively, and at the same time make the Lutheran mental reservation that we are *tutus et peccator simul* (righteous person and sinner simultaneously)!

If candidates stumble over the question of individual sanctification in this life the reservation must be even greater concerning our hopes and expectations of societal transformation. The more or less orthodox theologies, and almost all Christian theologies prior to the Enlightenment, entertained no prospect for a redeemed society. The earthly city and the heavenly city were qualitatively different. Human political efforts could not transform one into the other. Social institutions therefore held the world together, maintaining order, defending the innocent, punishing the wicked, until God—in God’s own time and by means of God’s choosing—would put an end to earthly institutions and bring in the new order of divine graciousness.

But the Enlightenment and the ideas it spawned sought to end such pessimism in both individual and societal dimensions. It saw a future of unlimited transformation—hitherto unimaginined prospects of perpetual peace and undiluted justice. The liberal theological tradition, deriving from the Enlightenment, dismissed the notion of original sin, which explained and justified the restraining character of social institutions. With this dismissal it opened the way to the infinitely progressive reformation of both persons and structures. The Marxist tradi-
tion in social analysis rejected the notion of sin as well, locating the problematic character of human existence not in individual persons, but in social structures. With these two intellectual changes in place, it was possible to believe that social evil was on the road to historical elimination through gradual evolutionary or disjunctive revolutionary social change.

Let us return to our two pointed questions. If one can accept Enlightenment critiques of and alternatives to the more orthodox forms of Christian theology—the innate and essentially unspoiled goodness of human nature, the progressive advancement of history, the redeeming effects of scientific discovery, technological invention, and profound social transformation—one can remove the reservation and even wonder why it was there in the first place. Moreover, one can hold up the same hopes for a redeemed society that one has for redeemed individuals. Under those conditions, there is no fundamental obstacle to perfecting institutions according to the law and love of God, and Christians should strive earnestly so to do!

There always has been wide diversity among Methodist theologians and communions on these issues. Nevertheless, it is clear that many persons in this broad, professedly Wesleyan, tradition, have been influenced strongly if not persuaded fully by these modern attitudes, particularly because downplaying the problem of sin allowed a greater openness to social transformation. One can see evidence of the Enlightenment liberal tradition in the social pronouncements of The United Methodist Church and some of its predecessor denominations, with their reliance on optimistic assumptions concerning human nature and history, and their anticipations of general and complete disarmament and world peace through world law and world government. One can see evidence of the Marxist tradition (to be sure qualified to various degrees by Christian commitments) in some of the representations of liberation theology, with their expectations of justice and peace through revolutionary struggle.

These theological positions and church pronouncements may be admirable and commendable in important respects, but do they give expression to a Wesleyan social theology? Not if
they reject the notion of original sin out of hand, with no serious effort to account for the human and social reality to which it points. The alternative is to reformulate the meaning of original sin and move from a chronological and biological understanding to a mythological and existential one. Doubtless that move would bring objections from Wesley himself and from present-day Wesleyan scholastics. But even if the reformulation is not, strictly speaking, Wesley’s view of original sin, the "bent to sinning" and its persistent and pervasive effects in human relationships is minimally necessary to a contemporary Wesleyan social theology.

Nor can the theological positions and church pronouncements be considered Wesleyan if they deny that the primary locus of sin is the individual will in rebellion against God, and instead locate sin in the contradictions and systemic violence of social structures. There is no suggestion in Wesley that the sins which come to social expression are anything other than the projections of individual sins. We may deal with this problem in at least three ways. First, we may charge Wesley with not having a sophisticated understanding of corporate evil, its origins, manifestations, and dynamics—which is true, although he knew more than he often is allowed. Second, we may find his understanding incomplete, contending—rightly—that we can neither comprehend nor address effectively the disorders of the human condition without profound structural analysis. Third, we may re-equip Wesley with a relational understanding of selfhood that overcomes the sharp distinctions between individuality and sociality. All of these approaches might qualify as necessary extensions of Wesley’s thought for the sake of developing a contemporary Wesleyan social theology. But none would be Wesleyan if it simply exchanged a sociological explanation of human disorder and injustice for Wesley’s own conviction that the problems of society are rooted in the individual will in rebellion against God. And none would be adequate unless it could account for the persistence of disorder in social structures that appeared to be sound ideologically.

We can extend and reformulate Wesley’s thought in developing a Wesleyan social theology, but we cannot abandon Wesley’s
convictions concerning the persistence of sin by reason of "original sin." We must also recognize that new social constructions will be just as susceptible to the "bent to sinning" as were the old. Therefore we can rule out the possibility that society, its institutions and structures, will or might "go on to perfection" on the terms offered by the Enlightenment.

But can a social theology be Wesleyan if it holds out no hope for breaking the power of cancelled sin in groups and institutions as well as in the lives of new-born individuals? That is the question we must address in the remainder of this paper.

Justification:
Cancelling the Merit of Social Identity

Justification, according to John Wesley, is the cancelling of the debt of sin, both original sin and actual sins of commission or omission. It is divine forgiveness of guilt, the wiping clean of the slate. It allows one--by grace--to turn towards God in a new birth and begin the process (sanctification) of ending the presence and power of sin in one's life through the growing presence and predominance of the love of Christ.

This notion is difficult enough already, with its argument for our culpability for original sin, and its atonement language (cancelling debt) suggesting accountancy, law and contract. It becomes even more problematical when we attempt to move it from individual to group experience. Even if the notion of "amassing a debt of sin" is an appropriate characterization of the distressed individual before God, can it be extended to groups, and if so, on what terms? To make this move requires, at minimum, the concepts of collective personality and collective guilt. One cannot find these concepts in Wesley with sufficient solidarity to authenticate the transfer as "Wesleyan" on that basis.

It is true that Wesley had a strong sense of the organic character of particular communities. England for him was not a contractual gathering of individuals. It was a unity of crown, church and people. Persons had rights and obligations by reason of their belonging to this people. There were "rights of
Englishmen" and socially hereditary rights that were not abstract human rights. But every such reference was to the historical and social reality of membership, to a relationship which protected and enriched individual reality and did not deny it. There is nothing in Wesley of the notion that the individual is a societal epiphenomenon, a cog in the machine, a drop in the ocean of liquid society. Nor, conversely, is there anything to suggest belief in the concept of society as a person, with unified organs of reason and will, i.e., the presuppositions of personal responsibility.

Neither does one find in Wesley a concept of collective guilt of the kind necessary to make the transfer. He knows that the people collectively are guilty, and he tells them so, but they are guilty of a collection of various types of sins; they are not guilty of acting wrongly with one mind and will as a solidary people. He preaches about "National Sins and Miseries," but the sins are not those of the nation acting as such. They are sins of the rulers, sins of the gluttonous, sins of the extremists for liberty. And when he attempts to explain why the little ones suffer, he concludes that they are innocent victims of the sins of others. He does not argue that they accumulate guilt by reason of their membership in the corporation.

If we were to discover that Wesley held such solidary notions, we should have to depart from him at those points. The notion of group personality led historically (although not in every instance) to the fascist state and the total subordination of the individual. The concept of collective guilt, however useful in raising a sense of responsibility, led also to the persecution of Jews across the centuries as "Christ-killers," to blaming young Germans for Hitler's atrocities, to loading onto the consciences of Italian and Polish immigrants to the United States the white guilt for four centuries of black slavery and segregation, to stereotyping all Arabs and Iranians as potential terrorists, to the targeting of innocent tourists as agents of the "Great Satan."

In short, the road to a societal concept of "cancelling the debt of sin" has a dead end. We cannot develop an understanding of justification for a Wesleyan social theology by going that route.
Is there another possibility, one perhaps that is not literally "Wesleyan," but tenable nonetheless in the framework and spirit of a Wesleyan theology? Let us begin with redemption rather than with sin, and ask whether there are biblical representations of divine redemption that portray the work primarily in corporate terms. Clearly that is the case with the New Testament passages which refer to breaking down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (principally Greek), thereby making peace through the creation of one new person in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:11-22). The enmity in this relationship obviously is corporate. It is not a matter of transient squabbles between individual Jews and Greeks, but of enduring opposition, resentment, even hatred between peoples. "Jew" and "Greek" are corporate designations. To be born into one of these peoples is to take on the mantle of animosity toward the other.

But why is there enmity, and why does it endure? Presumably because each people sees its corporate identity as final and exclusive, assigns merit to membership, and uses that self-awarded merit as justification for feelings of superiority and for promoting its needs and interests to the detriment of the other. A portion of humanity confers on itself the meanings and prerogatives of the whole. Its members routinely are socialized into those values and learn to make the same distinctions. They face the members of other groups with an exclusive sense of worth and with symbols and power that confirm the distinctions and justifies the advantages. The group identities build dividing walls. They generate corporate animosity.

Quite obviously, the work of redemption must address the corporate distinctions in order to get at the sins and sinfulness of individuals. To be a member of the group is to be justified in relation to other groups and their members for that reason alone. The false grounding of merit is at the heart of corporate disorder, whether within groups or between them. Therefore the "cancelling" (if the term rightly can be used) which takes place in justification is the cancelling first of all of corporate merit, and only derivatively of corporate sin. In fact, the merit is the sin. In its pretensions it is idolatry; in its relationships it is injustice. The redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ denies
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the merit of corporate identity as justification. Conversely, it confers justification on the group members by reason of their election to common humanity sola. They must share this common humanity with all others in the grace of acceptance. It is the wholeness which no group or organization of groups creates, but is given only through the renewing and reconciling work of God in Christ.

In principle, the point is not new. The Reformers were aware that it was necessary to attack the problem of merit in order to open the way to the gracious overcoming of sin. The differences in this case are primarily two. First, the focus is on the corporate rather than the individual consciousness. Second, the hindrance to divine grace is not the striving of individuals to be meritorious before God, but the pride and power of corporate identity that have little to do with individual striving.

Interlude: Some Qualifications

Having redefined justification in corporate terms as the cancelling of corporate merit and the conferring of a fully human status before God, we must note some qualifications of the concept before proceeding to investigate the meaning of breaking the power of cancelled merit.

1. Justification does not necessarily require or entail the discarding of corporate differences. It is not offensive to God that there are Jews and Greeks, males and females, or different races. However, it is offensive that there are masters and slaves, or master races and slave races. All corporate distinctions must be judged according to their pretensions to self-justifying merit, but only those which inherently contradict the common humanity disclosed and established in Jesus Christ must be discarded.

2. Consequently, there can be no principled objection to the struggle of particular groups to secure their rights and interests as groups, and to use power in the struggle. It remains possible to speak of justification—or the lack of it—in ethical terms: that is, to validate an action that usually is wrong but in a particular case may be right if good reasons can be given to establish its
rightness. Groups may offer good reasons for the causes they pursue—even on their own behalf—and for the means with which they pursue them. Justification in theological terms, the gift of membership in the fullness of humanity, affirms this process. But it requires that the reasons be certified as "good" by those who are not members of the group as well as by those who are, and that the rights and interests of opponents be respected as well. If the struggling group acts as its own judge, and always finds itself to be right, it implies that it has renounced justification, theologically understood, and returned to a status of self-justifying merit.

3. Justification denies the validity of concepts of corporate sin and guilt that are used as instruments of social domination. Historically, peoples suffering under dreadful tyranny have been told by Christian theologians that harsh rulers were given to them as punishment for their sins. Therefore they should not rebel against these tyrants. Rather, they should pray for forgiveness for their own sins, which are the principal grounds for their suffering. The existence and persistence of slavery also have been explained as punishment for sin (although not necessarily for the sins of particular slaves). Justification has the dual effect of cancelling the merit of those who use such arguments to serve their own purposes and the sense of guilt of those who are wrongly bound. In the light of divine justification, no peoples or groups need accept dehumanizing conditions as their rightful punishment, nor has anyone the right to impose or maintain such conditions for those (or indeed any) reasons.

4. Justification is the act of God in Christ at the heart of the kosmos. It is a cosmic event. It is not simply a moment in the redemptive history of particular individuals, preparatory to new birth and sanctification. It is the presupposition of all action, now and in the future. What it means is that all social action takes place in a context in which no contesting group has unspoiled and unlimited claims to merit, and none stands outside of the common humanity created by God in Jesus Christ. No tribalism, no polarizing class struggle, no manichaeian division of the world into forces of good and evil.
carries morally legitimating authority superior to the reconciling work, accomplished yet in process, that destroys the dividing walls and creates one person in Christ. All particularities, all corporate identities, however noble or however oppressed, lose their self-authenticating justifications. "There is none that is righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10). Yet in that status which none of them has generated through action, history, or biology, all are righteous.

It follows that the justifying work of God cannot be equated with any political movement or event. A revolution in a given society denies merit to the overlords and their supporting structures of ideology and power, but it does not create or confer its own justification. The bearers of the revolution are themselves particular forces in the totality of humanity. To equate revolution and revolutionaries with divine justification is to restore the merit of particularity and to stand apart from the already completed reconciling work. The tendency of some recent social theologies—"messianic," "political," "liberation"—to make this equation constitutes an inauthentic and heretical thrust in what otherwise might be an authentic and theologically supportable witness to the presence of God in the struggle for a just society.

Sanctification: Breaking the Power of Cancelled Merit

With these qualifications noted concerning the revised meaning of justification in a Wesleyan social theology, what can we say about sanctification? On the one hand, the process of sanctification involves breaking the power of sin, or in this case, the power of merit (of which sin is the result). This is the "critical" principle of sanctification. On the other hand, it involves "going on to perfection," or the maturing realization of the love of Christ in the believer (or the "constructive" principle of sanctification). What do these dimensions of the process mean in terms of a social theology?

"Breaking the power" must occur on at least four interrelated levels: The first level is that of the corporate identity itself, as primary definer of selfhood, relationship, loyalty and value.
Corporate identity need not be destroyed, as we have noted, as long as it is maintained in the context of a common humanity under God. The second is the ideological structure that undergirds the corporate identity with appropriate myths and symbols, with songs, flags, scriptures, uniforms and heroes. The third is the power structure that the group uses to defend itself and advance its interests. The fourth is the system by which benefits, charges, and obligations are allotted and distributed.

Theologically, the breaking of power begins in the moment of faithful awareness, when the claims of corporate identity are seen in juxtaposition with the claims of Jesus Christ. In Wesleyan terms, it is the operative moment of prevenient grace, the irresistible awakening to a condition of spiritual blindness and bondage to sin, and to the offering of new life as a gift of God. At that point the corporate identity loses its power to define ultimately and to command authoritatively. The use of power descends into the realm of mere enforcement. Unqualified loyalty is recognized as idolatry, and the distributions of benefits, charges and obligations as injustice. The wholeness of the group is exposed as mere parochialism at best, tribalism at worst, and its holiness as self-congratulation.

Christians always live at this fundamental point of the breaking of the power of merit and sin. That does not mean they necessarily have missions of iconoclasm or political struggle, although such may be entailed in radical discipleship. It does mean, however, that they live with the knowledge of justification, of the cancelling of claims to merit of their empirical communities, of the human status before God that overrides all particularities and makes all of humanity one people before God. It means that they know this work is for the whole creation, not only for themselves as believers, that it is completed yet not complete, that it is the presupposition and condition of all political action as well as individual action. Knowing these things, and holding to them in life as in faith, they enter inevitably into conflict with the power of particularities in their idolatrous claims and unjust constructions. They themselves become focal points of the breaking of the
power of merit and sin and the opening of societies to the transforming power of grace and truth.

In the past year the people and Government of the United States of America have been involved in controversy over whether to adopt a new amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting and punishing the desecration of the national flag. Such an amendment would override constitutional protection for flag desecration activities under the First Amendment as exercises of free speech. But the proposed amendment—as well as the rhetoric used to promote it—confers a sacral character on a merely human symbol and assigns it a value higher than the freedoms which it symbolizes. Implicitly if not explicitly, it regards the United States as the supreme source of merit, which it confers on its own people among the other peoples of the world. In religious terms that is idolatry, and idolatry is the first of the offenses which the Ten Commandments prohibit. It is important that the citizens of the United States honor and respect their flag; it is crucial that they not make it the object of idolatrous devotion. United Methodist Bishop Leontine Kelly stated the issues correctly in her sermon (June 5, 1990) to the Louisiana Annual Conference when she said, "I salute the flag, I do not worship it!" Refusal to worship the national symbols and the nation itself, however worthy they may be, is an act of breaking the power of their overreaching merit, and returning them to their proper order of temporality.

This negative work of "breaking the power," and therefore living by faith in relationships defined by the new humanity in Christ and not by empirical communities of membership, may simply be a function of Christian identity. Or it may be a definite strategy worked out for Christian vocation in society. But in either case, the results of this social critique are not secure. Those who challenge established power particular corporate identities usually attempt to erect new organizations of social power and to shape new identities that tend—perhaps contrary to intention—to inflict suffering by reason of their own pretensions to merit. "Christian" motives offer no protection from this danger. Because righteousness is not an achievement or possession, we can take no pride in it ourselves. Rather,
it is a gracious gift and we depend on God for it in every moment, not the least because we are so easily tempted to assert the righteousness of our particular perspectives and prejudices as the righteousness of God.

The critical principle of sanctification—breaking the power of cancelled merit—never censers from operation, and most especially not in the lives of those who recognize the persisting power of the old even in the onward course of the new.

Sanctification: The Constructive Principle

Nor does the constructive principle of sanctification ever cease from operation. The new humanity emerges with the shattering of self-awarded merit and the breaking down of dividing walls. It is a process of growth and maturation, not an instantaneous achievement. In this process the moral center is the new, inclusive corporate identity, not the old, exclusive one. In the sense of Eph. 2:11-22, for example, Jew and Gentile become new persons in the oneness of Jesus Christ. Exactly how the process works politically and socially cannot be described except in relation to concrete situations. But in general it involves at least the following elements: expanding the membership of the community to include those previously excluded; acknowledging new lines of community relationship and pursuing the courses of common interest; bringing the members to full and collegial participation in the power, benefits and responsibilities of the community; requiring the power of the community to work for its weakest members; healing old wounds; enhancing and insuring the freedom to be vulnerable and other freedoms also, within a context of supporting order.

That is the agenda, in abstract terms, of the constructive principle of sanctification. It becomes possible, with grace and striving, once the merit of corporate identity has been cancelled. But are the possibilities open or limited? In fact they are both, because various sorts of limiting factors are built into the process, yet any particular set of historical limits may be set
aside or transcended. What we must confess, however, is that there is no entire sanctification for societies and groups in historical existence, whatever may be the prospect for individuals. The historical process does not take away the "bent to sinning." It is present in all societies, in whatever stage and degree of transformation, because it is present in the individuals who make up the society, and because not all individuals would be "entirely sanctified," even if some were. The "bent to sinning" is an empirical reality, not a throwback to pre-liberal and pre-Marxist theologies. Nor is it present simply in individual forms. Corporate identities persist even after their merit has been cancelled, and their (rightful) stewardship of group interests carries the tendency towards group egoism. The "bent to sinning" can (and must) be restrained and redirected by balances of power, controlled by the organic and rational processes of constitutionalism, and made subject to individual rights as to majorities. Still, its presence and thrust must always be presupposed.

For that reason, the process of social transformation must be seen in eschatological terms as a perduring contest between the old and the new. It is not simply, as Wesley thought, the expelling or terminating of the old by the new. The work of reconstructing from the new moral center is never only a matter of opening, expanding, including, liberating—although it is all of those things. It is a matter also of reformulating the requirements of social order in institutional terms. Political categories such as law, representation, and authority are indispensable to this work of ordering. Political theologies and liberation theologies that ignore these necessities imperil their causes.

Is there no real liberation, then, no hope for deliverance from the injustices, oppressions, and disorders of this life and time? Is it meaningless—at least in societal terms—to sing, "He sets the prisoner free"? Certainly it is possible to put an end to particular forms of bondage; to liberate individuals, groups, even whole peoples from the domination of unjust and oppressive rule, whether it be that of their own princes, or foreigners, or international systems. One can make a Wesleyan case for the
process of liberation on the basis of Wesley's response to slavery, however it may be qualified by his attitudes toward the American War for Independence. But one cannot make a Wesleyan case for equating liberation ('setting free') with salvation.

Nor is it a Wesleyan position to advocate the exercise of freedom in society apart from the ordering of power with its inevitable accompaniment of force. Theologically and morally, the Wesleys never intended "set free" to mean that a person was released to a formless field of untrammelled liberty. Rather, the liberated person was turned from one set of relationships to another. The relationships of freedom involved the life of love and obedience to the law, and the course of sanctification was understood as developing perfection in love and in the fulfillment of the law. The "setting free" aspect of salvation was accompanied by these relationships and would be completed through them.

In political and social terms, John Wesley insisted over and over that the liberty required for political practice could be possessed and exercised only in the context of a stable political order. "Sanctification" in our times would then become the process of strengthening the institutions of society in their ability to secure liberty. There would be no "setting free" from the use of force as the ultimate sanction of institutional power, but there could and should be growth in both the responsibility of governors and the consent to wise and just governing that would make reliance on force much less necessary or useful, and the securing of liberty much more likely.

Conclusion

Formulating a contemporary Wesleyan social theology involves applying the elements of the order of salvation to social experience and reality. We have proposed that this can be done by understanding justification in social terms to be the cancelling of the self-endowed merit with which groups tend to set themselves apart from and above other groups. Sanctification then becomes a process of breaking the power of this cancelled
merit (read sin)—the critical aspect—and opening the groups to the possibilities of genuinely human fellowship transcending and overcoming the previous animosities—the constructive aspect. These new relationships can grow in the social strength, which supports freedom and justice in increasing measure. In so doing they will extend and enhance consent as a primal element in social power. However, this growth cannot eliminate the role of force in social power, nor can it protect against group egoism and tribalism. Those ultimate prospects are beyond this life and time.

Those who hope for a more conclusive resolution of the problems of humankind in human history—for "entire sanctification" in social terms—will find this social rendering of the ordo salutis an inadequate basis for that hope, and so it is. If we seek support for the more conclusive resolution from Wesley himself, or from the combined elements of the so-called "quadrilateral" (Scripture, tradition, reason, experience), we shall not find it. On the other hand, we should recognize that the motive power in Wesleyan social action is not the hope that we can make an end of all these massive problems. It is, first, the conviction that God has acted in Christ for the salvation—the whole making of the world, and that God has called us to act out of the rich experience of the love of Christ, which impels us to seek the good of the neighbor even when there is little or no prospect of good results.

A Wesleyan social theology must work with these resources and within these limits. The limits are not as confining as they may seem. They express the faith that the horizons of our fields of action are wider than time, that God has more to offer than the temporal horizons can contain, and that these convictions both empower us for the task and protect us from despair and foolish judgments. Any lesser faith has much more to explain.

Notes

1. Millenarian sects and movements of the Middle Ages and the Reformation Era often projected and at times attempted to produce a new society on earth, but those new societies were understood to be radically discontinuous with the old society, not transformations of it. Not infrequently their redemptive
methods included the slaughter of priests, Jews, landlords, magistrates, prin­
cess—anyone believed to be responsible for the corruption and perpetuation of
the existing order. Moreover, their new societies were believed to be anticipa­
tions of the coming Kingdom of God, not its full realization on earth. See
The Calvinist project of converting society into a Holy Commonwealth under
the Kingship of Christ presupposed both original sin and the distinction
between elect and non-elect, and therefore was not fully transformationist.
2. For evidences of this theological orientation, see "The Social Principles
of the United Methodist Church," "The Bishops' Call for Peace and the
Self-Development of Nations" (1972), the Episcopal Address to the 1984
General Conference of the United Methodist Church, and In Defense of
Creation; the Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986).
3. In the sermon on "Original Sin" (Sermon XLIV), Wesley declares that
belief in original sin differentiates Christianity from Heathenism, and that all
who deny original sin "are but Heathens still." The Works of John Wesley, 3rd
cd., vol. VI (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 63. See also "The
Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience,
Works, IX, 191-494.
4. "Chronological" and "biological" mean that Adam and Eve as progenitors
of the human race committed the first sin, and that the results of that sinning
were communicated genetically to later generations. Wesley accepted the
chronological interpretation, but understood the communication of original
sin to be federative rather than biological. See Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and
the story of Adam and Eve is a literary device for presenting a profound truth,
but not a literal account of the matter. "Existential" in this case means that the
story is a representation of human existence as such, and not only of the first
parents. For the most influential treatment of original sin as mythical and
existential, see Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I (New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), esp. Chapters VII-IX.
5. Among the most important theologically oriented treatments of the self
as social and relational are H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New
York: Harper & Row, 1963); and Luigi Sturzo, The Inner
6. "National Sins and Miseries" (Sermon CXXX), Works, VII, 400-408.
7. I have discussed the uses and limitations of the concept of collective guilt
in "Guilt: Yours, Ours and theirs," Worldview, 18 (February 1875), 12-22.
8. The Rev. Morris Cerullo, according to The Atlanta Constitution of July 2,
1980, will use the "Heritage USA" theme park of former televangelist Jim
Bakker to "train and equip an army to take over the world." I am not convinced
that I would want to live in a world governed by Mr. Cerullo and his army of
Christians.
9. In "Thoughts on Slavery" (Works, XI, 59-70) Wesley argued that slaves
had a natural right to freedom, but he did not propose parliamentary abolition
of the institution. Later, however, he supported William Wilberforce in his
abolitionist efforts. For his views on the colonial war for independence, see "A
BREAKING THE POWER OF CANCELLED SIN


THESE ARE STRANGE TIMES for what the sociologists of religion have called the mainline of North American Christianity. We experience that strangeness in small ways—the biblical literalist in a Sunday school class who claims to believe in reincarnation; the clerk in a Christian bookstore who is not certain whether the Bible has yet been translated into Greek; the frustration of pastors and diaconal ministers with twenty-five and more years of experience who no longer enjoy what they are doing; the discovery that people in Bible belt churches often do not "know" their Bibles any more than people from churches in the west and northeast.

The strangeness of these times has been described in several recent studies of Christianity in North American society. One author concludes that we are living "between the times," having emerged from a past when mainline Protestants dominated the political as well as religious landscape of North American life, and looking now to an era of waning influence. Another author describes our recent past as conflict over our very identity and mission as a church. That struggle has led our own Bishop Wilke to ask if United Methodists are yet alive?1

Other studies explore what Martin Marty has called the malaise that saps the vitality of mainline denominations.2 All point to the obvious decline in church membership. But there

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is more: the lack of internal resiliency in the church due to the
graying of its membership; squabbles over theology, liturgy and
mission; and the lack of will or commitment to develop creative
strategies to respond to radically changing national
demographics and economics.

I have painted this gloomy picture in broad strokes
deliberately. The changing status and role of the church in
North American life has been the background of the movement
to establish a permanent diaconate. What does it mean for us
to have established a permanent diaconate at the point of our
institutional decline? Is it an attempt to salvage an experience
we are losing? Or is it a signpost to a creative and faithful
future?

Issue I: Institutional Dilemmas

The formation of the diaconate permanent deacon in the
United Methodist Church occurs at a time in North American
history when its institutions—government, education, in­
dustry, labor, medical, and church—are increasingly unable to
meet the expectations people have for them. The word often
used by commentators and social scientists to describe this
situation is "dysfunctional." The pattern is complex but it
includes problems such as expanding bureaucracies and
diminishing productivity, increasing expenses and decreasing
returns, governance by rules and regulation rather than prin­
ciples and overarching policies, heightened demands on
workers (both paid and volunteer) and decreasing loyalty, in­
tensified planning and less organizational clarity. As an institu­
tion, the church is obviously prey to institutional dysfunction.
Our concern here is whether the diaconate serves as a symptom
or a solution to that problem in the church. Let me be specific.

In his introduction to Called to Serve, Tom Trotter has made
a helpful distinction. Building on an insight from the work of
Margaret Miles, Trotter identifies "ordered ministries" with the
task of institutionalizing the ministries of the church. Or­
dered ministries identify corporate directions, establish
precision in procedures, and conformity in perspective. They
emphasize the need for authority and control for the sake of the survival and continuity of the community. During times of trouble, this sense of order is essential. My former colleague, Everett Tilson of the faculty at The Methodist Theological School in Ohio, has compared this to the biblical assessments of Israel’s kings. Those who maintained order to sustain the faithful obedience of Israel to God during times of national crisis received the accolades of prophets and deuteronomistic historians. Those who could not received negative judgments.

In contrast representative ministries embody the gospel to make it visible. The emphasis is upon relationship rather than structure. They witness to the gospel. They reveal the power of the gracious activity of God. This approach underscores the distinctive thrust of the diaconate—to be engaged in ministries of service or to embody servanthood.

In the best of times ordered and representative ministries function interdependently. In times of trouble they are usually thrown into disequilibrium. This is not a new insight. We read about it in the challenges of the prophets to the priestly accommodations to the kings of Israel and Judah when confronted by invading forces. We recall the most dramatic account of this tension during Holy Week in the stand off between Jesus and the high priests. It certainly existed in the challenges to churchly traditions by such representative figures as St. Francis, Martin Luther, John Wesley and more recently by Martin Luther King, Rosemary Ruether, and Bishop Desmond Tutu.

The danger in ordered ministry is always the tendency to identify more with the continuity and stability of the institutional status quo than with the call of God toward new edges of ministry. In our own denomination we see it when the consultative process for making appointments is reduced to an announcement of the reasons for a given pastoral decision. We see it in the contrast between the increased requirements for aspiring clergy and diaconal ministers and the lack of attention to the nurture of the laity (a practice that has contributed, I believe, to a rising clericalism in the church despite our policy statements regarding the general ministry of all Christians).

We see it in the subtle pressure on cabinet members to appoint
clergy to larger and more prestigious congregations based on tenure and institutional loyalty rather than competency, gifts and graces, and signs of effective ministry. We see it in the growing disparity in salaries and benefits between staff members of affluent churches and those in churches with affluent and poor members. We also see it in those congregations who seek to avoid conference supervision by replacing ordained staff members with lay or consecrated persons they have chosen and can supervise. We see it in the alienation of some local congregations from the program ministry agencies of the annual conference and general church. Although there is a counter-move toward institutional chaos, much institutional energy today is expended in efforts to reinforce and undergird the power and authority of those who already possess it.

For those working toward a clearer understanding of the meaning and role of diaconal ministers there is profound danger. It would be easy for us to play power politics in an effort to thwart unwarranted uses of ecclesial power by others. At the same time it would also be easy for us to ignore the power of politics in negotiating the issues and concerns of a servanthood ministry. The concerns for institutional order could easily control the church’s agenda in the discussions over the character and responsibilities of diaconal ministry. But in our efforts to resist this we may set diaconal ministry inappropriately over against the need for order and continuity in the life of the church.

A key expression of United Methodist connectionalism today is the organic interdependence of local church, district and annual conferences and the national divisions of ordained and diaconal ministry brought about by their shared supervision of representative ministry—both ordained and consecrated. Preparing persons for representative ministry is more time consuming and costly (both in terms of money and hours), the procedures more complex and demanding, the rites of passage more numerous, and the rules more clearly defined than at any point of our denominational history. These processes have cut through the often chaotic program ministries of our institutional life.
That is—until the church attempts to reach out to new communities. I have recently been a part of an attempt to bring into the United Methodist fold several independent Hispanic congregations that requested membership. This is not a simple task in itself, but this time the problems were unrelated to theology or faith. The primary stumbling block was the annual conference's concern to maintain the established order of the church in designating, nurturing, sanctioning, and celebrating the leadership of congregations. Given this, conference leaders ran into two problems. Only one of the Hispanic pastors had a college education. And because leadership in Hispanic cultures depends more upon the collaborative will of the people than upon legislative process, leaders are not designated—especially by outside bodies. The negotiations were frustrated by a series of miscommunications because conference officials did not talk to the persons who actually made the decisions for those congregations. They talked to the representative they had designated. I recite this experience not to criticize these conference officials. Their intentions have been more than honorable and their efforts often heroic. The point is that annual conference bureaucratic structures across the country have had similar difficulties when responding to new opportunities for ministry presented to them. In this instance conference officials—who wanted to welcome these new congregations into the UM family—were hampered by cultural and social differences in the rules guiding candidacy for ministry, education for ministry, appointment to ministry, and supervision of ministers prior to ordination or consecration.

Diaconal ministers bear the brunt of cultural and economic differences, for the structures of diaconal ministry are not in tune with new communities. The majority of diaconal ministers are either directors of Christian education or directors of church music, roles that have been shaped by the practices of predominantly European American church patterns and cultural life. But the role of the director of Christian education has not adapted well to non-European American congregations (and neither has the role of the director of church music). The result is an overwhelming lack of interest among racial/ethnic...
congregations in these ministry roles. The seriousness of this issue may be put into perspective by the fact that by the mid twenty-first century more than fifty percent of the population of the nation will trace their ancestry to Asia, Africa, Latin America or to cultures on this continent prior to the European invasion and settlements. Even today more than fifty percent of California school children are non-white. The future of our institutions is with those who can develop truly multicultural institutions and leadership patterns.

Despite this cultural bias, diaconal ministry distinctively embodies the character of representative ministry. It declares itself a servanthood ministry. Yet the quest for order, which is so crucial to the institutional maintenance of the diaconate, may subvert its distinctive contribution to the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. The potential for destructive conflict lurks at every corner and every crossroad. It is found in diaconal ministers whose quest for justice in their places of employment barely disguises their desire for status and position. It is found in the need to establish academic standards and procedures for diaconal ministry—a concern for order—while at the same time advocating an educational process that creates a self-consciousness of servanthood. The academic community is not necessarily a protagonist at this point. Seminaries for example, offer courses and experiences that contribute to servanthood understandings of ministry, but they also screen students to ensure that they meet academic and church requirements for graduation, ordination, and consecration. This enhances the hierarchical character of the academy and the competitive environment of the classroom.

There is also danger in the mentoring process. In the days of the circuit rider, an apprentice preacher or candidate for ministry rode with the pastor who assisted him in expanding and extending his ministry. Today, however, the task of mentoring is something the mentor adds on to her or his responsibilities. It reflects the relationship between the psychologist and client or that of tutor and student much more than the relationship of Jesus and disciple. Ideally, in a mentoring process the disciple learns by entering into and living out of the ministry of
the mentor. If we are not careful this can easily be diminished to a set of hoops to jump through rather than a consistent way of using life-experience as a basis for engaging in ministry.

To summarize: The first issue I raise has to do with the effect that the institutionalization of the diaconate has on its meaning and mission. Will its concern for embodying Christ's mission of servanthood be compromised by the corresponding efforts of the church to impose order on the chaos of contemporary life? Will it be a source for salvific transformation? The answer I think, is still not clear, but there is currently, great pressure to restrict the role and function of the diaconate so that it serves the church as an institution.

Issue II. The Local Church

For our denomination the meaning of the practice of ministry shifted direction when the 1968 and 1972 General Conferences established a Council on Ministries. Another significant change took place in 1976, when General Conference approved the diaconate as a permanent order of representative ministry. Whether or not they were intended to be interrelated, those two decisions function interdependently at some crucial points.

The story is too long to rehearse here, but essentially the 1968 and 1972 decisions shifted the impetus for congregational mission from the national church and annual conference to the congregation. Without major responsibilities for local church life and mission, the numbers and responsibilities of national and conference staffs were reduced in number, and their attention was redirected to establishing and supporting program ministries for the national church and for the annual conference respectively. These programs became optional sources of enrichment for local church members and ministries.

In the meantime congregations faced a major crisis. The network of leader development for congregations had been curtailed or abolished in most annual conferences. Pastors who had never been trained to help congregations plan their own ministries or train congregational officers now shouldered
these responsibilities. As congregations exercised their newly mandated opportunities, they began to identify missional priorities that were unknown to conference or national agencies. So local church Christian educators, many of whom had some background in planning and development, were quickly "promoted" to be program directors in larger churches and given oversight of the Council on Ministries. Four major consequences of this situation affects contemporary discussions on the shape and purpose of diaconal ministry.

1. Congregations with abundant financial resources have increasingly hired staff to compensate for the loss of general church programs, staff assistance, and leadership training. Many of these churches feel connected to the United Methodist Church primarily through the appointment of their pastors and diaconal ministers. These churches have also hired diaconal ministers to give leadership in program ministries. The Division of Diaconal Ministry is exploring additional requests from local churches for an increasing variety of certification programs to grant recognition to many new leadership roles. Youth ministry is the latest to be added to the list. But the growth of the diaconate has also increased the instances of unethical and unjust use of many of these staff persons, who must tolerate inequitable salaries and benefits, a lack of procedures for the redress of grievances, and a lack of attention to appropriate training and support.

2. Smaller churches with limited personnel and financial resources have been left in the lurch. They must depend upon pastors who for the most part have not been trained to provide the leadership required by the Council on Ministries program structure. Smaller churches also depend upon a decreasing pool of volunteers who have not been trained to develop the vision or skill to facilitate congregational mission. I believe we must be cautious in celebrating the creativity the Council on Ministries approach has evoked in many of our congregations. There is an increasing number of dysfunctional congregations victimized by the loss of programs and training designed by the general church for local churches.
3. In most annual conferences, racial/ethnic congregations have been left destitute because the old networks that nurtured their common life have essentially disappeared. Most resources and programs have been prepared for a predominantly European American constituency (if United Methodist) or they have different, if not lower academic and leadership standards (when purchased from the local Christian book store).

What is the effect on our view of diaconal ministry? Most diaconal ministers give order and direction to the overflow of material blessings to be found in our more affluent congregations. Most do not see themselves as servants—except perhaps at the point of salary. Although there are outstanding diaconal ministers serving in situations of severe human need, and some have a clear sense of the function of servanthood in affluent contexts, we have generally not found a way to mobilize the diaconate in ways that truly embody its mandate to servanthood.

4. A fourth consequence of the decision to move to local initiative for congregational mission may be found in the pattern of leadership that now dominates the church's approach to congregational planning. Perhaps we should not be surprised that pastors or diaconal ministers have increasingly found themselves to be the managers of congregational programs and events. The Council on Ministries was designed to be an agent of congregational mission. That has happened in some places in rich and exciting ways. It has happened occasionally in most other places. But mission has not become the dominant metaphor guiding congregational planning. The word "program" has. We unfortunately reinforced that emphasis by initially calling the director of planning at the local church and conference level "the program director." Although the title has been changed in some places, the metaphor stays with us, just as a Sunday school session is still called a "lesson" more than fifty years after the church attempted to drop its usage.

Note the difference. Mission involves sending people out on some special errand or service. A program is a list of items to be performed. It has to do with entertainment. A program can also be seen as a plan to be completed. My hunch is that this
latter view is what church leaders had in mind when they began to use the title "program director." But let us be clear about the implications here: if mission is treated as entertainment in the planning process, then it becomes something to be consumed rather than to be enacted. And that is exactly what happens when various mission projects, as well as Christian education, liturgical events, evangelism or stewardship become "programs." Mission becomes optional, simply a matter of personal choice.

Even if we decide that a program is simply a plan to be completed, we have a conflict with Christian mission. The leadership of a program is managerial rather than missional. With the radical shift in who volunteers for responsibilities in church life and how they engage those responsibilities, a fascinating change is taking place. Clergy and diaconal ministers function increasingly as "congregational go'fers." They make sure that the details for a program are in place. They expend much time and energy on the endless demands of small details. They burn out quickly. Some leave their calling. Others direct their attention away from local church ministries and immerse themselves in conference activities, D.Min. studies, or personal hobbies and give only maintenance leadership to the congregation. Ministry such as preaching, teaching, witnessing, and engaging in acts of service, those tasks that actually develop discipleship, are diminished in congregational life.

At no point have I heard the church relegate the servant hood of the diakonia to bureaucratic pencil-pushing. And yet I have talked to many clergy and diaconal ministers whose work consists of distributing resources, shuffling priorities, juggling schedules, placating and directing people, attending meetings, and responding to unexpected requests and problems. Significant ministry occurs as an episodic event rather than as an integral part of a continuing, developing, and integrating journey of faith for either individuals and congregations. In times of institutional crisis, both programs and managers are expendable. What would happen to diaconal ministers—and therefore, diaconal ministry—if depression decimated church budgets and curtailed the need for program managers?
The Discipline makes it quite clear that the function of the diaconate is *diakonia* or service, to "make more effective the self understanding of the whole People of God as servants in Christ's name." It involves participating in the leadership of worship, working in a "serving profession in the Church," and serving the needs those who are poor, sick, or oppressed. In the United Methodist Church, diaconal leadership symbolizes and embodies the unity of the congregation's worship with its life in the world.10

My concern is that this ministry is in real danger of being domesticated. That danger is expressed in several forms. Perhaps the most serious is that diaconal ministers do not think theologically about their ministries. There are many options here; *Called To Serve* points to the contemporary discussions on partnership as a creative new way to understand servanthood ministries.11 But I have encountered too few diaconal ministers who are aware that such a discussion includes their own observations. Who is giving direction to the ongoing grass roots exploration of *diakonia*—to partnership both in the local church and among those who have been set aside as diaconal ministers?

A number of years ago, Everett Tilson observed that the recovery of the notion of servanthood in ministry often culminated in some reform effort. The work of St. Francis and John Wesley comes to mind. The political agenda of reform is not the foremost concern of such movements: it only occurs as a consequence of the servanthood activities of persons and communities.

Diaconal leaders do understand that the potential for reform in the church and society is rooted in the ministry of servanthood. But the question is one of focus. As a Christian educator I am aware of the educational crisis now facing the church. The church's education, for example, is not developing the kind of biblical and theological literacy and competency central to vital and sustaining acts of worship and mission. It is not nurturing
within congregations a sufficiently deep memory of its heritage, saints, symbols, or rituals. It has essentially abdicated responsibility for helping to shape the values and perspectives of the larger community—what I and others call the church's mission to educate the public. It is not intentionally training leaders among its youth and young adults for the future of the church's mission. Ironically, to the extent that diaconal church educators are consumed by the managerial tasks of planning educational activities, recruiting and training teachers and leading youth retreats without reflecting on these larger issues, their efforts may only prolong the crisis.

The diaconate is called to be concerned with the relevance of the church's ministry to the world. But when diaconal ministers direct their attention to congregational life rather than to the way congregational life embodies the servanthood of Jesus Christ in the world, then the diaconate can only further contribute to the domestication of the church's mission. It is far too easy to reinforce the privatization of the church described by Robert Bellah and his colleagues in *Habits of the Heart.*12 If the diaconate is to be faithful to its calling, it must be engaged in careful, sustained, and systematic theological reflection on the nature of the church and its mission. As the embodiment of servanthood in the church, diaconal ministers add a redemptive and constructive voice to those discussions. This theological effort should be supported in this effort by "diaconal" role models through identifying, honoring, celebrating and emulating the history of the church. It is hard to be something when no saints are known to set examples for one's aspiring.

This leads me to a final theological concern. It is very important for those concerned with diaconal ministries to think theologically about how to use and engage power. We are all familiar with hierarchical patterns in the exercise of power. They are second nature for us. But the power of servanthood often confuses us, especially in bureaucratic church meetings. The point is made *Call to Serve* in a discussion of the diaconate in the Middle Ages: "the usefulness and vitality of the diaconal ministry were so closely tied to the idea of service, that the function was lost as the spirit of service was lost."13 Is there
power in the diaconal spirit of service? Or does the spirit of service mean that "questions of pensions, power, and authority" must necessarily be kept subordinate?

One clue to diaconal theologizing about power may be found in the work of Victor Turner, the influential Catholic anthropologist. Building on the research of Arnold Van Gennep, Turner explores the function of those who live in what he calls the marginal, inferior, and liminal places in the institutions of society. When one enters into the service of another one takes on inferior or marginal or liminal status. The child, the stranger, the person who is different, the servant all relate to social organizations on the margins, in places of inferiority or as residents of two worlds or communities. They do not possess traditional institutional forms of power. But they do have power. Note the mounting frustration and anger on an airplane when an infant discomfited by air pressure refuses to be comforted and cries loudly. Or observe the intense attention and energy of a congregation during the baptism of an infant. Such is the irritating and energizing power of a Mother Theresa or of an outstanding child musician.

The diaconal minister is not powerless. But what kind of power adheres to the office? What kind of power is embodied in service? How does that power function creatively in hierarchical institutions—especially in times of stress? How does that power engage the unfaithful use of executive power when it occurs in the congregation, the denomination, or the larger community? What is the relation of that power to the gospel itself? to the potential for transformation? to the possibility of liberation? to the significance of Christ like presence?

**A Post Script**

In *The Creation of Settings, The Future of Society*, Seymour Sarasen describes how the vision that nurtures a sense of possibility and energy in new organizations or movements is usually compromised when people institutionalize values. Finances, leadership, and organizational relationships begin to dominate the time and energy of group members. We see this
process at work in regard to the diaconate in the United Methodist Church, which has increasingly concerned itself with the development of standards for ministry, the equitable distribution of Ministerial Education Funds between ordained and diaconal ministries, the clarification of the theological and political relationships among the diaconal minister, the ordained deacon and elder, and the general ministry of all Christians, and the improvement of the economic support system for diaconal ministers. In the negotiations, the danger of domesticating the vision of a representative ministry is everpresent.

Only if church discussions on the diaconate retain their theological focus can this danger be avoided, or at least minimized. That same tradition provides the data to assess to what extent new decisions are faithful to historic church commitments to ministries of love, justice and service.

The responsibility for keeping the vision that first led to the establishment of a diaconal ministry belongs to the whole church, from congregation to theological school. The diaconal minister however, carries a special responsibility in keeping a vision of love, justice, and service ministries before the church. In the diaconal embodiment of servanthood in the routines of daily work, the church may discern the relevance of diakonia to mission. In their efforts to help the church understand the theological traditions that inform and shape their ministries, diaconal ministers encourage the church to be faithful to its responsibilities to all of God’s creation. In their attempts to respond to new circumstances and situations of human need, they keep the vision of diakonia before the church.

To preserve the vitality and relevance of diaconal ministry, in other words, we must pay constant attention to the possibilities in its original vision. The reality of diaconal ministry may witness to the power of love, justice, and service, even as it contributes to the renewal of that vision.

NOTES


7. The European American cultural influence may be seen in the basically individualistic character of the mentoring process and the view of servanthood as a form of personal leadership, the voluntary character of ministry, the tendency to view learning in linear patterns and education in schooling structures.


11. Keller, et.al., p. 49.


I STILL REMEMBER the excitement I felt in 1977 when I first learned about the United Methodist Church's decision to consecrate persons to specialized ministries of love, justice, and service. As I examined what it meant to become a diaconal minister, I became convinced that this was an invitation from my church to enter into a relationship of mutual responsibility and accountability as it claimed and affirmed the ministry God was calling me to do. The form diaconal ministry is to take in our church has been growing and changing ever since, as the church struggles with the larger question of the nature and role of the ministry of all Christians and of representative ministry.

Charles Foster's paper helps us focus on several important questions as we in the United Methodist Church (as a part of the larger ecumenical church, which is also struggling with issues around a permanent diaconate) continue to wrestle with the mission of the church and the form of its ministry. I will limit my response to three questions which Foster's paper raised for me:

I. Is the diaconate 'a symptom or a solution' to the church's struggle to be faithful to God's call in this troubled age?

II. What are the dangers inherent in the struggle to define and empower diaconal ministry?

III. What are the opportunities that the diaconate offers to the church as it seeks to focus on its mission as we move into the twenty-first century?

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Foster rightly points out that there is always the danger in any ordering of ministry of erring on the side of "continuity and stability" rather than moving out in faith toward prophetic, servant ministry. This needs to be guarded against in all forms of ministry—baptized, consecrated, and ordained! As the church seeks to define the nature and responsibilities of those in representative ministry, I believe we might be guided by Jesus, as portrayed by Luke. Jesus engages in an inclusive ministry that is for Gentiles and Jews, poor and rich, children, women and men.

It is a ministry that seeks justice and brings hope to all persons in all arenas of life. It is a ministry of loving, praying, healing, feeding, evangelizing, teaching, preaching, serving. It is a ministry of hospitality and judgment. It is a ministry that accepts persons as they are and offers them hard choices regarding who they will become. Interestingly, it is a ministry that cannot escape questions of who, among those who minister with Jesus, are the greatest!

It seems to me a false dichotomy to ask whether anything is a "symptom or solution." In this case, I believe diaconal ministry has the potential for building bridges—empowering laity to be the church in the world, as they serve with those called to word, sacrament, and order; and being the church's representative ministers among the poor and disenfranchised in specialized ministries (currently diaconal ministers serve outside local congregations in hearing-impaired ministries, counseling, peace and justice ministries, teaching, and in church and community work, for example).

Diaconal ministry can embody servant ministry in specialized arenas by educating and empowering laity for ministry in the world and by using their specialized expertise and theological education in the name and on behalf of all Christians where the church sends them to serve. Diaconal ministry will not solve the institutional churches' problems; but it (and all forms of ministry—lay as well as representative) can provide opportunities for the church to acknowledge and affirm persons who
believe God calls them to offer their ministry to God through the church of Jesus Christ.

There are certainly dangers at every turn as the church struggles with ways to faithfully order ministry! Luke tells us that "an argument arose among them [the disciples] as to which one of them was the greatest." (Lk. 9:46 RSV).

Foster rightly points out that "much institutional energy today is expended in efforts to reinforce and undergird the power and authority of those who already possess it." In that regard, all kinds of charges have been laid at the feet of diaconal ministry—e.g., "it will be the undoing of itineracy!"; "it will just add one more layer to an unjust hierarchical system"; or "diaconal ministers just want a bigger piece of the clergy-pie!"

As we seek to discern the role and function of diaconal ministry (and all forms of ministry), it behooves us to guard against either scapegoating or idealizing any one form of ministry. All baptized Christians and those in every form of representative ministry (church and community workers, deaconesses, deacons, diaconal ministers, elders, home missionaries...[the list is alphabetical!]) must seek, together, to find ways of being faithful to God's call to each one of us and to our church. There is plenty of ministry to go around and we must begin to seek ways to empower and aid one another. It is deplorable whenever persons in ministry join those early disciples in seeking to position themselves on Jesus' right and left—hoping to gain life. We, like those with whom Jesus walked and talked, will discover that such actions lead not to life, but to death.

It is also true that our church's approach to ministry is "deeply rooted in the relative homogeneity of Northern Europe" and that we need to move beyond the confines such roots provide. I suggest that diaconal ministry can provide a way of broadening our paths for ministry. As we order ministry and find ways to name and affirm the ministries of those working in the world as well as within the denominational institutions, it is vitally important that we be open to persons who seek to
engage in "tent-making" ministries, precisely because many persons are called by God to serve in communities, agencies, or congregations of the poor and disenfranchised which cannot afford to hire full time (or even half time) ministers.

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My vision for diaconal ministry within the United Methodist Church is a ministry of persons called by God and affirmed by the church—persons whose roots are deep and who know the story of God’s chosen people, claiming it as their own; persons who know and want to share God’s love and saving grace; persons who seek to be and to act in truth, with justice; persons who are gifted and are open to the gifts of others; persons who understand ministry as mutual, embodied, empowered by the Spirit...

I pray that, as we seek to discern the forms ministry may take as we move into the twenty-first century, we will focus on ways we can best live with and learn from all God’s children on this fragile planet of ours; that we well strive for ways to negate competition and embody compassion.

I pray that all baptized Christians in our church, and all churches, will work to build up the church so that as the Body of Christ we might "bring good news to the poor,...proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor" (Lk. 4:18-19)

Jose L. Palos

IN "DIACONAL MINISTRY: VISION AND REALITY," Charles R. Foster raises several issues confronting diaconal ministry in the United Methodist Church that merit attention and discussion. First of all, Dr. Foster suggests that the quest for a permanent diaconate in the face of the denomination’s decline may represent a symptom of the church’s concern for institutional order and control. Is such a quest part of the problem or part of the solution?

Foster adds that the ordered ministry always has the danger of identifying with institutional continuity and stability than
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with God's call to new edges of ministry. This seems to be the crux of the whole matter. Institutional concerns have dominated our denomination's ordered and representative ministries. There are several examples of this, including "a rising clericalism," the growing disparity of salaries and benefits among staff members of affluent churches and staff of other churches, and the inability to deal with the pluralistic nature of our changing communities.

But Foster has overlooked one important factor: the primary attention the church has given to educational standards for representative ministries. Foster has seen that our inflexibility as an institution in responding to racial ethnic ministries has to do with educational standards. In today's world, education is essential for effective representative ministry. But our denomination has made educational standards the primary (and almost exclusive) standard for representative ministries. If we ask what sort of education we need to respond to the missional challenges which the church is facing today, we seem to be suggesting a lowering of educational standards. A number of years ago the United Methodist Church made seminary education the basic standard for becoming an elder. There are routes to becoming an elder that require less education, but to be a full member of the Annual Conference it has remained the standard. Should diaconal ministers have the same or equivalent educational standards as ordained ministers? Diaconal ministers should seek an education that responds to missional concerns, rather than pressing to be equal to ordained ministers. This is a primary example of our denominational tendency to be preoccupied with institutional concerns rather than with missional concerns.

The church's preoccupation with educational standards has encouraged professionalism in the representative ministries. Being a professional can be a good thing, generally speaking. But in the church, professionalism can lead to elitism because it allows the ordained minister to be separate from the people of God and focus only on a job description. The author points to this professionalism when he sees that "the task of mentoring" is seen as something that is added to the pastor's respon-
sibilities. How are seminaries and diaconal and ordained min-
istry boards dealing with this? How will the church break down
the walls between representative ministers and the people of
God?

Foster identifies the shift in the practice of ministry took
place when the denomination established "a new order for
doing ministry through a Council of Ministries," so that
programs, and not missions are focus of congregational plan-
ning. When mission is defined as program, it is no wonder that
ordained and diaconal ministers describe their ministry in
managerial terms.

Churches that are able to look beyond their own membership
to the larger community become known as "missional congrega-
tions." These congregations care for the needs of persons within
their communities and are responsive to the diversity of race,
ethnic background, class, and language in their neighborhoods.
We need missional representative ministers for these con-
gregations. I would like to rephrase Foster's question: Will the
role of the diaconate be to serve the church as an institution or
to serve the church in its mission to the world?
Clergy Authority: To What Shall We Compare It?

Gary E. Peluso

When a middle-aged clergyman was asked, "If you were to view your congregation as a family, what family member's role do you play?" he confidently responded, "The father. I oversee, nurture, plan, and provide for spiritual and material needs."

An older clergyman is frustrated by the expectations his congregation has of him as a leader. They want him to function as a chief executive officer (CEO). He says he simply wants to preach, visit, and pastor.

A clergywoman remarks with some anger in her voice that, when it comes to paying apportionments, her district superintendent considers parish clergy to be fundraisers for the connection. "Doesn't the cabinet understand," she frets, "that parish clergy must woo and massage a constituency just like the politicians? We can't make demands or force people to support the church!"

Each of these vignettes, adapted from interviews done as part of a research project on clergy systems, illustrates the problem of competing understandings of clergy authority, of what and who clergy are "authorized" to be and do. How do we define clergy authority? To what shall we compare it? Family systems theorists suggest that the clergyperson ought to function as if the congregation is a family and she or he ought to assume a

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particular kind of parental role. Church growth consultants are fond of comparing the church to a business corporation and the role of the clergyperson to that of the CEO. Few people openly draw parallels between what a politician does and what a clergyperson does but, as will be shown below, parallels exist.

I have two purposes in this essay. First, I want to compare and contrast the nature and function of clergy authority in the church with that of parents in the family, executives in the corporation, and politicians in public service. What really do we mean by these comparisons? Secondly, I want to expose the norms and philosophical underpinnings of these models for ministry using three criteria. Each mode of authority should involve norms and philosophies which are consistent with Scripture and tradition, are psychologically healthy, and are workable in the church's present context.

I have referred above, and will do so again below, to systems: clergy, family, corporate, political. For our purposes, a system is defined as a set of relationships (material, emotional, spiritual) that connects persons into a total environment. Changing the environment can affect all the relationships, while altering certain key relationships can affect all the participants in the system.

**Parental Authority in the Family System**

At its most basic level, parental authority is the result of the need an infant has to depend on someone else for physical and emotional survival. If human infants are to survive and flourish, they need the aid of someone who can feed them, protect them, hold them, and teach them to communicate. Society authorizes the parent to fulfill these needs. Clearly, such dependence diminishes (or ought to) as the infant grows into a child, an adolescent, and an adult. Our culture generally judges a person to be mature when he or she does not rely on a parent to meet basic emotional and physical needs. This is what psychologists call differentiation. If, as an adult, one still depends on parents for physical needs, or if one's parents still control one's emo-
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tional well being then that person has unresolved childhood tensions that need attention.

The nature of parental authority changes, then, as one grows up. When children reach maturity and no longer depend on their parents physically or emotionally, parental authority consists in the practical wisdom they can impart as persons further along on life's journey than their children are.

According to this understanding of parental authority, parents' authority functions as a means to raise their children to maturity, i.e., to be socially functional citizens who take responsibility for their own lives, who are differentiated from their parents, and who are able to engage in healthy relationships with others.

Biblical writers refer to the church as a household (oikos) and as sisters and brothers in Christ. Paul called himself a "spiritual father" in churches he planted. The Johannine epistles use the family terms "father" and "little children." Catholic and Orthodox priests, as well as Episcopal clergy are often referred to as "Father." Early nineteenth century American Methodist clergy applied the same appellation to each other.

But did calling clergy "Father" develop because the nature of clergy authority is analogous to parental authority? If so, is the analogy between parental authority over dependent children or mature adult children? If the former, then are we implying that lay people need the clergy in order to survive spiritually? This certainly does not cohere with United Methodist tradition, in which the means of grace are not bound strictly to clergy-controlled sacraments. The former model also suggests ties between the hierarchical conception of the family and that of the church, with clergy playing the father or mother role and everyone else functioning as obedient children. However, no psychotherapist would consider parents to be healthy who did not help their children become mature adults. Although some persons like someone else to take responsibility for them all of their lives, clergy do not have to indulge them. Treating parishioners as perpetual little children may be scriptural in a limited sense, but it is not healthy.
Is a more helpful parallel to be drawn between the nature of clergy authority and that of parents with mature adult children? I think there is. Both construe the parent/pastor as the bearer of practical wisdom. The recent upsurge in Protestants seeking a spiritual director is evidence that people are looking for practical wisdom from one who knows some of the journey's terrain. Adult children or parishioners respect the parent/pastor not because they depend on the authority figure for survival, but because they have grown to respect who the parent/pastor is and the power of his or her reflections.

There is also a parallel between healthy parental functioning in a family and healthy clergy functioning in the congregation: both use their authority to aid the system's members on their journeys toward maturity. In the case of a congregation, the goal, as defined by the author of Ephesians, is spiritual maturity, measured against the standard of Christ (3:13).

Although clergy could legitimately claim parental-type authority of the model defined above, the clergy in our research were divided over whether or not they see themselves as functioning in a parental way with their congregation. We asked them: "If you were to view your congregation as a family, what family member's role do you play?" The most significant variable in whether they chose a parent role or a child role was their age. All but one of the respondents over fifty chose a parent role; those under fifty were almost evenly split between parent and child roles. Whether one was married, single, childless, or a parent made no significant difference in the response given. What accounts for the difference between the age groups?

We offer two hypotheses. First, the clergy over fifty are pre-baby boomers; those under fifty are, roughly, of the post-World War II baby boom generation. The latter group was raised in the Vietnam and Watergate days of "question authority"; parental authority may have oppressive connotations because of the baby boomers' social conditioning. Furthermore, the baby boom generation also has experimented with more democratic images of partnership within the family, rather than holding to the hierarchical understandings of the older
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generation; choosing brother and sister roles in the congregational family coheres with this emphasis on partnership.

Second, individual family-of-origin issues also may be at work. Family systems theorists argue that each of us learns ways of responding to authority and to peers in our relationships with, respectively, our parents (or adults fulfilling parental roles) and our siblings. Those clergy who eschew parental roles may themselves desire to be parented by their parishioners, to receive the attention and affirmation they feel deprived of in their family-of-origin. This stance, in turn, would cause great conflict when parishioners come looking to have their own unmet family-of-origin needs satisfied; then hurt child meets hurt child instead of a mature or, in family systems language, differentiated adult (the clergyperson) aiding the hurt child parishioner on her or his journey toward maturity.

Ideally, when clergy are fully differentiated from their own family-of-origin they are able to engage their congregations in a mutual journey toward maturity in Christ. The clergyperson thus moves away from the role of parent-of-hurting-children and moves toward the role of authorized representative bearer of practical spiritual wisdom. He or she is also free to receive such wisdom from others. In other words, as children in a healthy family become more equal with parents as they mature, so it is in the clergy and parishioners in the church.

We should also see that comparing the church to a family has limitations. A local church is composed of many families, often with competing interests. The church cannot compensate parishioners for any love and intimacy they did not receive in their families. The church in the United States also acts like a voluntary organization in which ties do not necessarily bind as tightly as a family’s ties do. Moreover, while a family is bonded by blood and marriage, the church is constituted by a shared experience of God in Jesus Christ. Consequently, clergy as parent must be balanced and corrected by other metaphors.
Authority In The Corporate System

We have seen above some ways in which clergy authority in the church is similar to parental authority in the family. But our understanding of the church is not exhausted by the family analogy. Another popular one today is to compare clergy authority to the corporation's chief executive officer (CEO). As we shall see such a perspective has some value, but is also significantly limited—especially by the differences between employees and volunteers and between the perspective of the local church and that of connectional officials. It also implies an ecclesiology which stands outside the United Methodist connectional tradition.

The CEO's authority is grounded in the mandate given by the directors of the corporation to fulfill the goals of the company. To meet the business' ends, the CEO is expected and empowered primarily to accomplish two tasks. First, she sets the tone and articulates the vision for the company. The corporation's goals must be presented persuasively so that employees feel enthusiastic and confident that the company is doing something important. Secondly, the CEO builds a team of employees who share the vision, who are willing to work toward its fulfillment, and who can communicate excitement about the vision to fellow employees and to customers.

The CEO thus exercises a form of persuasive authority. But she also is empowered with coercive authority. She has the power to hire and fire. She demotes and promotes. Those persons who work under her know very well that, if they do not perform up to the CEO's expectations, they may be looking for another job.

If one views the congregation as a corporation, then clergy authority exhibits definite similarities to the authority of the CEO. As the CEO is empowered by a board of directors, the clergyperson is empowered by the pastor-parish committee or the administrative board to fulfill the goals of the corporation, i.e., the particular local church. The clergyperson is expected to set a persuasive vision before the congregation and to build a team of persons who will work toward that vision. Clergy use
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both formal (preaching, teaching) and informal (lunches) occasions to promote the vision. Their role as chair of the Nominations and Personnel Committee is crucial to building the right lay team. If the church is large enough to have multiple staff persons, the senior pastor is often expected to build and head the employed team as well as the lay team and to coordinate the efforts of the two.

Here emerges, though, a key difference between the authority exercised by a CEO and that performed by clergy. The authority clergy have with volunteers is not the same as a CEO has with employees. The coercive power of the latter is clear and legitimate, although open to abuse. Clergy can exercise a form of coercive power in omitting "troublesome" persons from consideration in the nominations process, but lay people may frequently view such exercise to be less legitimate than a corporation's employees would perceive similar exercise within their company. Moreover, few clergypeople would attempt to hold their limited coercive power over the heads of lay team members, because they are fully aware that these members can always elect to attend another local church—a very different situation than when one's gainful employment is on the line.

Thus far we have been comparing the authority of a CEO and that of parish clergy. This parallel, however, is based on conceiving the situation from the perspective of the local church in relative isolation from any larger connection. In fact, the clergyperson as CEO model has definite affinities with a congregational polity and with the clergyperson functioning as bishop of a single local church. Although this polity can certainly be found in Scripture and tradition, it is contrary to United Methodist tradition. Granted, many local churches would like to view their ministry primarily, if not entirely, from the local viewpoint. In our research, about 25% of clergy judged that their congregation had a positive relationship to the connection, another 25% deemed the relationship to be highly negative, and 50% believed their church was ignorant of or indifferent to the connection. The matter of apportionments does not allow the local church to ignore the connection completely, regardless of what its feelings are. However, a sizeable
minority of parish clergy told us that the best way the bishop and district superintendents could support them would be to leave them alone—further evidence of a practical ecclesiology that is, at base, congregational.

If, however, one defines what the "company" is from the perspective of the connection rather than the local church, then the analogy between the clergyperson and a CEO is delimited by the parallel between the clergyperson and a middle-manager.

One of our opening vignettes was about an angry clergy woman who was angry about apportionments. She had received a letter from her district superintendent informing her of past-due apportionment payments and threatening punitive action if the payments were not forthcoming. Using the business analogy from the perspective of the connection, clergy are employees, middle-managers appointed to promote connectional goals. Here clergy are threatened with coercive action from above, for the cabinet has real coercive power over the clergy. The clergy, on the other hand, have only very limited coercive power over the laity—and, in some congregations, all the persuasive authority in the world would not be enough to convince a congregation to pay its denominational askings in full! Furthermore, denominational expectations for clergy-as-managers, beyond paying apportionments, are often unclear. Fifty percent of the clergy studied either did not know what their district superintendent expected from them or judged that all he or she wanted is that apportionments be paid.

This whole discussion of comparing the church, understood either locally or connectionally, with a corporation leaves me wondering why we use the analogy so often. The parallels seem both limited and, depending on the implied polity, confusing. Perhaps we have turned to the corporation for help because "excellent" American businesses, especially as contrasted with American politics, have a reputation for "getting things done," while ecclesiastical leaders and theorists lament that the church talks a big plan but finds it hard to deliver the goods.

Although calling oneself a CEO may help a clergyperson feel more effective, the confused lines of authority and polities it
occasions may not be worth the psychological boost. Furthermore, while the cabinet may want to treat clergy like middle managers, such conduct undermines the ministry of the laity. And when the clergy have full responsibility for raising funds for the connection, the laity are left to pay and obey—or withhold and rebel.

Authority In The Political System

In surveys asking people who they trust, most Americans rank politicians near the bottom of the list, about the same place as used-car salespeople. This may be one of the reasons why relatively little discussion has centered on the clergy as politician. Another may be that the pastor is seen as a prophetic figure who deals in ideal ends, rather than as a pragmatist who is willing to compromise. Regardless of our hesitations, the parallels between the clergy politicians deserves a look, because there are more strengths in this than we might think especially regarding our issue of authority.⁶

The nature of political authority in a representative democracy comes from below. "We the people ..." begins the Preamble of the American Constitution. We the people elect leaders from our midst who will act responsibly on our behalf and who are accountable to us.

We grant our political leaders authority so that they can fulfill the collective goal: to match the best means with the best ends to accomplish as much good as possible. Both means and ends are important. The politician who cares only about means is a mere bureaucrat; one who ruthlessly pursues an end—even a positive one—by dishonest means usually ends up being prosecuted for it.

Certainly the politician's authority, in so far as he is a lawmaker, is coercive. But, primarily, political authority is persuasive. That is why rhetoric—defined by Aristotle as the art of persuasive speaking—is so important to politics. But Aristotle did not mean that one should try to persuade regardless of the question of truth, as perhaps our contemporary "sound bites" and "ten-second spots" in political campaigns do. Rather, he
meant that rhetoric is the art of finding the persuasive arguments in a case, an art that paid serious attention to questions of ethics and truth. A good politician will use rhetoric so understood to set a vision of the good before the people with which he or she can attract and ultimately convince a constituency to act upon both labor and capital. She or he will also be skilled in marshaling the means necessary to achieve as much of the good as is possible.

Like the politician's authority, the nature of clergy authority is from below. This is so even in a hierarchically arranged church such as United Methodism. Clergy begin the ordination process by obtaining the approval of their local church pastor-parish committee. Throughout the remainder of the process, the candidate must meet the approval of elected committees at district and conference levels. Even though United Methodist clergy pride themselves on the freedom of their pulpits, they know that they are still accountable to the laity, as well as to each other, i.e., at the conference's executive session.

Clergy authority has a similar relation to political authority in that the clergyperson has to relate means and ends. Few would disagree that the clergyperson needs to have a vision to set before the congregation. Granted, several of the lay leaders and district superintendents we surveyed worried that too few clergy had a vision that extended beyond institutional maintenance; but they were unanimous that clergy ought to be able to give a voice to a theological vision of the gospel. The most heavenly vision, however, will be of no earthly good if no one gathers the resources necessary to incarnate it. Therefore, the clergyperson needs to deal with means—at least to the extent of finding the right people who can do some of the detail work necessary to see the vision come alive. Sometimes sufficient means will not be available for the whole vision to be enacted. Other times the people will dedicate themselves only to a part of the vision. Both cases require the pastor as politician, deciding how much good can be accomplished under the present circumstances.

Like the politician, clergy authority is primarily persuasive. As a means of persuasion, rhetoric is a valuable tool for a
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politician; it is indispensable for clergy. Clergy who know how to find the persuasive arguments in biblical, contemporary, and human texts—while attending to issues of ethics and truth—go a long way toward leading a congregation. This bears a strong resemblance to the way in which a good politician leads a constituency.

It may be obvious to the reader that I find the parallel between clergy and politician to be a valuable one, and one that fits better with the way clergy authority actually functions than do analogies with parental or managerial authority. According to our contemporary definitions of psychological health, leaders ought to be differentiated yet connected. Clergy as politician is a healthy way to think about the clergy role. Furthermore, in a democracy-oriented church such as United Methodism is (or at least as the laity is), it is a workable model. But what are its ecclesiological implications? Is the political model of clergy authority faithful to Scripture and tradition?

The church has often been construed as the Body of Christ or the Family of God. Both of these images convey warmth, intimacy, and organic connections. The church as a political system, however, connotes voluntary association, competing interests, and coolly rational calculation. Do these connotations fit the church of Jesus Christ? The answer depends on whether one thinks of ecclesiology from above, with what the ideal church should be, or from below, with how the real church appears to be. If one begins with the ideal church, then the answer is no—the church is a community of disciples, not an association of volunteers. It is a community in which the centripetal pull of loyalty to Jesus Christ is stronger than the centrifugal force of any other interest. Its decision-making process ought to be governed by concern for each human being rather than by detached calculations. But if one begins with the church as it appears, the answer is also yes—the church in the American context is a voluntary association as well as a community of disciples. This is a consequence of America’s denominational arrangement and it is no more a heresy than Europe’s parish system is an orthodoxy. Competing interests have always been a part of the church’s life; the many biblical
calls for peace and unity strongly imply much conflict. The church, especially at the connectional level, exhibits as many characteristics of a society consistent in its Wesleyan origins as it does of a community, and every society needs to make decisions about the good which are not good for every individual involved.

I am not arguing that the clergyperson as politician is biblical in the sense that clergy as parent is. Rather, I argue that the church is inevitably political and that a clergyperson’s authority has meaningful parallels to that of elected politicians. In actual practice the clergyperson has functioned as a politician.

Let us also be clear, however, that I am not saying that clergy should not function primarily as politicians. Avery Dulles’ study of the church and Donald Messer’s essay on contemporary clergy images both correctly assert that multiple images of the church and of ordained ministry are necessary to fully understand each. The images of clergy as parent and clergy as politician deserve to be in that nucleus of metaphors because they have descriptive power, they are faithful to scripture and tradition, they are psychologically healthy, and they are workable in the church’s present context. Clergy as CEO or corporate manager, however, is an image that is not faithful to a connectional ecclesiology and leaves us more confused than ever about the nature of clergy authority. The corporation metaphor, then, is not helpful to us as we try to reclaim an effective authority for clergy today.

Notes

1. This project, sponsored by the Northern Illinois Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, examined the multiple systems in which clergy function the Northern Illinois Annual Conference. The research was conducted over the summer of 1989, and included a total of sixty-five comprehensive interviews. A written summary report (35 pp.) can be obtained from Gary E. Fekus, 814 Buell, Joliet, IL 60435.

2. A small sampling of books and articles on this topic includes: James D. Gisso, Profession: Minister (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968); Putting It Together in the Parish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); John C. Harris, Stress, Power and the Ministry (The Alban Institute, 1977); Stanley Hawcrwas

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3. This last sentence needs unpacking. I cannot at this point define precisely what the nature and function of clergy authority are—that is the issue under inquiry here. But we can carefully examine the ways we commonly speak of clergy authority, especially the analogies that we employ from everyday life. Then we can circumscribe what are legitimate possibilities for the church today with the three criteria of faithfulness to Scripture and tradition, promotion of psychological health, and workability in the church's contemporary context.

4. Edwin H. Friedman's Generation to Generation (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985) forcefully stresses the need for clergy to differentiate from their families-of-origin in order to avoid unhealthy situations in their ministry.


Globalization, Ecumenism, and Interreligious Dialogue in Theological Education

An Introduction

The ecumenical movement has made a considerable impact on theological education in this country. The alternative, an exclusive denominational orientation, has all but disappeared from most American seminaries. Many of these schools offer courses, lectureships, and special events to keep their constituents up to date on the progress of ecumenical dialogue. But their efforts are plagued by another kind of divisiveness: there is no agreement about the nature of the unity that we seek in the church and in the world. Nor do we know what a truly ecumenical curriculum or pedagogy might look like. Seminaries have similar difficulties with globalization and interfaith dialogue. They have encountered the effects of globalization, and in its name they have revamped curricula, set up exchange programs for students and faculty from the so-called Third World, and engaged in dialogue with people of other faiths. But there is no clear consensus on the meaning of globalization—and a good bit of reservation about using the term at all.

The articles in this issue of Quarterly Review began as papers that were delivered at the Consultation on Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Theological Education, held at the Yahara Center, Wisconsin in March, 1989. Consultation organizers Russell Richey and Jean Miller Schmidt surveyed United Methodist seminaries and discovered considerable commitment to ecumenism, globalization, and interreligious dialogue. They also uncovered a number of unanswered questions that lie at the heart of theological education and the life of the church. The report on this survey, written by Russell Richey, provides a fine introduction to the topics under discussion.
GLOBALIZATION IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

We are reminded by Michael Kinnamon, Dean of Lexington Theological Seminary, that the ecumenical vision refers to the unity and renewal of the whole Christian Church, its worldwide mission, and all humankind. All three dimensions are essential to the life of a church that is faithful to the Gospel and the ecumenical vision.

Roy Sano points to the implicit globalization of local congregations in the United Methodist Church. The presumption is that local congregations know little and care less about the concerns of non-Methodists, Christians world-wide, and non-Christians. He argues that not only are congregations ready for ecumenical insight and interreligious dialogue, they need it to cope with their own changing communities.

The next three issues of QR will contain articles that develop the themes of interreligious dialogue, globalization, the COCU consensus, and denominational identity. In many respects these articles present us with issues that we need to think and pray about. Readers will encounter scholars who are deeply committed church members wrestling with ideas and issues that are at the heart of church life and theological education today. They are ecumenists who believe that God surely wills the unity of the Church and of all humankind. They differ on approaches and theological perspectives. They offer no facile answers or simple solutions. Instead they invite us to discern what God is calling us to be as faithful Christians in our time.

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Globalization in Theological Education:

Findings and Observations from the 1987-88 Survey of United Methodist Seminaries

Russell E. Richey

Across North American theological education something of a revolution is taking place. Its watchword is globalization. In its name, faculties revamp curricula to mandate courses on the Third World, other living faiths, contextual theologies; schools seek exchange programs with and exposure experiences in Third World churches for their students; administrators scurry around applying for grants to underwrite both faculty and student travel; faculty members engage in new dialogues or refurbish old ones; faculties pledge themselves to incorporate the perspectives thus gained in the core curriculum; the accrediting agency, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), assesses battle readiness, maps grand strategies, trains leadership, recruits (through start-up funds), and moves toward making globalization a criterion for accreditation; schools revise their catalogs and promotional material to hoist this new banner as their own.

The new watchword does not exactly replace old battle cries — ecumenism, evangelism, world Christianity, missions, world

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religions. Rather, it envelops them. Yet the place of these older notions within the new campaign for globalization remains uncertain. The term 'globalization' invites schools to rethink the purpose of their work, to re-order priorities, to reconceive what students must learn and how they learn it, and so to reshape the leadership of the church. In this essay, we will provide some indication of how United Methodist schools are conceiving globalization—we should say, 'were'—because our findings are already dated by recent curricular efforts at globalization in several of the schools.

Background to the Survey

In late 1987 and early 1988, Jean Miller Schmidt and Russell Richey, faculty members of Iliff and Duke respectively, surveyed the United Methodist seminaries on behalf of the Committee on Ecumenical Perspectives and Interreligious Dialogue in Theological Education of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC), the United Methodist Division of Ordained Ministry (DOM) and the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools (AUMTS).

This survey had been prompted by a report that Richey and Schmidt had made to GCCUIC on ecumenical and global developments in United Methodist seminaries, a report based entirely on their analysis of the schools' catalogs. Their report concluded by asking what role GCCUIC might play in the seminaries' thinking and planning about global and ecumenical factors and how the seminaries might in turn resource GCCUIC.

A mischievous query of this sort often catches the perpetrators rather than the intended victims. Richey and Schmidt found themselves members of a new committee, the Committee on Ecumenical Perspectives and Interreligious Dialogue in Theological Education of GCCUIC. This committee, established at the March 1987 meeting of the commission, was charged to "work with seminaries on the place of ecumenical perspectives and interreligious dialogue in theological education." Chaired by Dr. Ridgway F. Shinn, Jr., a director of GCCUIC, and staffed by Associate General Secretary Jeanne
Audrey Powers, this committee was comprised of directors of GCCUIC and DOM and seminary representatives. It initially included Bishop Melvin C. Talbert, Professor Harriet Miller of United Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert Reber of Auburn Seminary, lay representative Martha Watanabe, the Rev. Thomas Starnes from DOM, as well as Schmidt and Richey. (In the new quadrennium GCCUIC members Talbert, Miller and Watanabe went off and Bishop William Oden, President Norman E. DeWire [METHESCO], The Rev. Patricia Farris and lay representative [and doctoral candidate] Carol Colley were appointed. The other members continued.) The committee took its first duty to be a more thorough survey of the ecumenical and interreligious interests and investments of the United Methodist theological schools.

A questionnaire emerged from several committee sessions, went through numerous 'perfections', and was submitted to executive officers of both DOM and GCCUIC. In its final form, it sought information from the seminaries on the global, interreligious and ecumenical flavor of the entire scope of their operations: the number and frequency of courses on ecumenical and interreligious topics; whether global concerns claimed a central place in the curriculum, particularly in foundational courses; how exchange programs, consortia, visiting lectureships and local dialogues claimed student attention; faculty leadership in ecumenical and interreligious affairs; the ecumenical dimension to worship and daily life; the diversity (denominational, racial, national) of the student body and how that diversity is used; the place of ecumenism in continuing education; initiatives taken in response to the ATS emphasis on globalization; and future plans.

The survey invited attachments, copies of relevant reports and statistical data so that each school could present its ecumenical character to best advantage.6

The Survey

The four-page instrument was sent to the dean or president of each school. Along with it went a covering letter from the General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Robert W. Huston, explaining
that the survey was undertaken on behalf of AUMTS and DOM/BHEM. Follow up letters were sent by Joanne Audrey Powers as needed. All seminaries eventually reported except Gammon. Richey and Schmidt then digested the responses, put the information from the several schools into a common format, returned this overview to the seminaries for comment and correction, and corrected the draft as appropriate. The revised digest was reviewed by the GCCUIC committee, circulated to the seminaries and submitted to GCCUIC and DOM. As the following commentary makes clear, the digest ought to be significant to both GCCUIC and DOM, particularly the former, for the detailed information it offers on the seminaries' ecumenical operations and actors. Because of its detail, the way that current developments have quickly dated it, and its lack of an analytical dimension, the committee found itself pushing beyond the survey to interpret its findings.

Summary Findings And Issues Raised

The survey represents a 1987-88 self-portrait of United Methodist seminary ecumenical and interreligious involvement. So understood, it provides a benchmark, a measure of the ecumenical character of seminary ethos, curriculum and program.

1) Global Commitments. Seminaries are in curricular ferment and change, particularly in relation to the global, ecumenical or interreligious dimension of their life. Much of it seems to be the direct result of the Association of Theological Schools' [ATS] exploration of globalization as a defining aspect of theological education, though in one or two instances longstanding world Christianity or ecumenical commitments seem operative. The institutional support for such global interests is hard to gauge but apparently growing. We infer from the tenor and scope of the reports a clear, though not necessarily formal and official, commitment to globalization.

Most schools require at least one course that has high ecumenical or interreligious content and offer an array of electives with which to pursue those interests. The global, interreligious or ecumenical flavor of the schools as a whole is
impressive. That had been clear from the schools’ catalogs; it was even more obvious, detailed and concrete in their reports.

The survey disclosed within United Methodist seminaries a rich and complex array of involvement in areas described by such terms as ecumenical, global, interreligious, missional, international, Third World. However, while the schools all claimed a global agenda, they differed in its conception and in the place accorded it. The fact of this global concern will not surprise anyone presently working within theological education. We think it worth calling to the attention of the larger constituencies who have a vital concern for theological education and its products. Globalization is very much in vogue.

2) Faculty. Of particular note are the many faculty members whom the schools identify as possessing global interests. Some have long played ecumenical leadership roles. Others represent new talent on which GCCUIC and other agencies of the church may wish to call. Of special note on these ‘ecumenical lists’ are the non-Methodists serving on United Methodist seminary faculties, a talent pool not now well utilized by United Methodism.

Here we would point to a larger issue, one raised for GCCUIC by the disclosure of this global talent, but with ramifications for the entire church. How should the church make use of the intellectual capital represented on seminary faculties? Has it been well used in the recent past? We think not. Seminary faculty participation in boards and agencies seems to have waned in recent decades. The reasons for that are doubtless various. Faculty members themselves are reluctant to take on such roles in part because of the premium put on scholarship and participation in the academy. Other factors might be our recent suspicions of elites, the general scramble for place on national boards, and the mandates to structure with sensitivity to the diversity within the church. All militate against the appointment of seminary faculty to board and agency positions. The result was, that on matters of general importance like ecumenism, the agency (GCCUIC in this instance) lacked substantial contact with United Methodist theological education. Not surprisingly the agency proceeded with its business while the seminaries took their own (ecumenical) tack. The lack of
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contact by seminary faculty with GCCUIC and GCCUIC's minimal use of seminary faculty may explain the intellectual divergence on the nature of globalization.

GCCUIC had already been working on its connection to theological education prior to the establishment of its seminary committee. With that momentum, the committee has already gone a long way towards rectifying this gulf between agency and seminary. GCCUIC in turn has greater interest in the preparation of the next generation of ecumenical leadership. Since seminary faculties are quite limited in what they can effectively support this formula could not, and probably should not, be adopted by other boards and agencies. And yet, United Methodist boards and agencies may well need to find other non-formal ways of drawing upon the church's intellectual leadership.

The findings in the survey, the manner of the responses by the schools, efforts by the DOM, and initiatives taken by AUMTS—all clearly indicate openness and commitment to GCCUIC's specific charge, namely ecumenism and interreligious concerns. Given that, how ought the educational missions of seminary and GCCUIC to intersect? The question turns really on the teaching office in Methodism: who exercises it and how it is exercised. How do various agencies with legitimate teaching roles interrelate, what incentives and deterrents for cooperative endeavor might exist?

3) GCCUIC's Role In Leadership Formation. Up to this point, we have wondered how GCCUIC (and other agencies) might profit from more contact with the seminaries and seminary faculty. The inverse also should be mentioned. Should GCCUIC, perhaps in connection with the DOM, concern itself with the way in which ecumenical perspectives and interreligious concerns affect the curriculum and ethos of United Methodist seminaries? What about other seminaries in which United Methodist seminarians are trained? Larger issues are obviously at stake. In what ways do agencies influence seminaries? In what ways should they? How can schools remain current with the church's agendas, policies and commitments? And since the seminaries intersect with the church through BHEM and DOM, the relation of the various agencies to one
another is also in question. How effectively do United Methodist agencies interact where their programmatic mandates overlap?

For GCCUIC, the pertinent question is "Are seminaries and graduate programs developing a cadre of younger leadership (including seminary faculty) who are committed to and articulate about the ecumenical movement and interreligious dialogue?" Are they educating future clergy to give leadership at the local level (and other levels) in such a way that the life and ministry of all God's people is understood and exercised in an ecumenical and interreligious context? If not, from where will United Methodism draw its ecumenical leadership? We sense that this is a strategic time for GCCUIC to raise the ecumenical banner in theological education. To do so, of course, raises a further question about the colors to be raised.

4) Globalization, Ecumenism, and Interreligious Dialogue. If there is to be a single ecumenical agenda in the church, who sets it, and of what does it consist? The survey indicates what ATS materials also attest, namely that there is a difference in the global, ecumenical or interreligious thrust or style of the several UM schools. Differences have to do with interests of key faculty members, a school's constituency and make-up, the specific contexts in which it works and local agendas, and the international connections the school enjoys. The very terms--global, interreligious, missions, ecumenical--register those divergencies. How do these terms relate? Are they essentially identical? compatible? What theological meaning do they have? Should they have? If the terms have different meanings and are not essentially identical, how does the church's agenda get set?

As these terms become central to the curricula--to the way in which schools' conceptualize purpose and plan program--their meaning, relation, and relative priority become of concern to the whole connection. The question then is determining what role GCCUIC should play in providing precision in the use of these terms, and identifying United Methodist priorities.

It is our conviction that a self-conscious discussion of priorities is in order because these terms do differ, and large issues of direction and policy are at stake. Furthermore, what
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the seminaries do with these terms matters. If a single school shifts its curriculum, there is little cause for notice; but if all the church's seminaries do the same, there is indeed cause for concern. Globalization apparently constitutes such a common move.

These are obvious trade-offs to a general shift to globalization: for one, the emphasis on Christian unity will suffer. It is not our business to argue that Christian unity should be preferred over the other agendas represented in globalization. But what is done in the name of globalization—by training the next generation of the church's leaders—will set agenda for the church. Therefore, we think it important to re-open discussion on the nature and thrust of the church's global agenda. What understanding(s) of the nature and purposes of theological education guide(s) these endeavors at globalization? What theologies of church and ministry inform these conceptions? And how do the various indices of unity and diversity—race, communion, sex, liberal/conservative, nationality, region, age, degree program, etc.—intersect? What are the most powerful divisive forces, the most important punitive ones in today's church and world? On which should the seminaries focus? In such a discussion, we presume that various parts of the church, including GCCUIC, would play an important part.

5) Denominational Formation And Ecumenical Formation.
The survey indicated that the seminaries, some more than others, have labored to build a global aspect into the structure and rhythms of institutional life. In one instance, it will include the expectation that all students have some global experience, preferably abroad. In other situations, interfaith dialogues give shape to both curriculum and the community's common life. Worship frequently carries this commitment; the languages, liturgies, gestures, music, drama, dance, color represented within the community are juxtaposed in creative fashion.

The implicitly global or ecumenical features of seminary life are highlighted—including the fact that faculty (and students) are drawn from various communions; the presence of international students; consortia, clusters, exchange programs, lectureships, visiting scholars; the ecumenical or academic
character of instruction itself. The seminaries are exploring what it means to be global.

At the same time and through the same processes, seminaries take responsibility for ministerial formation. All train non-Methodists as well as Methodists, so that ministerial formation must be done with sensitivity to the diversity within the school. That acknowledged, these schools do have primary accountability to United Methodism and, of course, primary responsibility for the shaping of its ministry. So, then, it is appropriate to ask how global formation and denominational formation cohere.

That question should eventually come to the fore, since throughout the denomination there seem to be increased pressures towards reassertion of United Methodist identity. Motivated by concern over the decline in numbers, the quest for identity often puts a premium on heightened Wesleyan and Methodist awareness. Can we expect tensions between Wesleyan awareness and global awareness?

An obvious place for global and denominational formation to clash is in worship. In some schools, as we have indicated, worship expresses and dramatizes the community's global awareness. Will that be done, can that be done while acquainting United Methodist students with the new hymnbook and its liturgies? (All the schools were given hymnbooks by the United Methodist Publishing House, in part, for these formative purposes.) The new hymnals and the new global imperative raise afresh a question that each of the schools has had to settle: How should the common worship life give expression to both the school's primary denominational orientation and the denominational (ethnic, ideological, national, linguistic) pluralism of its student body? The issue obviously extends beyond worship. What are the ground rules, criteria or norms by which seminaries allot time, space, importance, etc. to denominational formation and global (or ecumenical) formation?

IV. Concluding Observation

While the GCCUIC committee initially undertook the survey to inform its own work, it recognized that the results were
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important to those involved in theological formation and to all concerned about the Oneness of the Church. We concur in that conviction but wish to turn some matters back to GCCUIC and the church generally for consideration. Thus, we invite broader conversation about what globalization means for both seminary and church.

Notes

1. Much of this current interest can be discerned in the official publications of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), particularly its Bulletin and Theological Education. Notable are "Committee on Global Theological Education," Global Challenges and Perspectives in Theological Education. Programs and Reports, 35th Biennial Meeting, June 10-18, 1986 and Bulletin 37, Part 6 (1986) which includes a significant report by the Committee on Global Theological Education. See also the issues of Theological Education entitled "Globalizing Theological Education in North America," XXII (Spring, 1986), and "Theological Education in a Religiously Diverse World," XXIII (Supplement, 1987). For indication of the place of globalization in the overall reflection about theological education, see "Reflections on the Literature on Theological Education Published Between 1955-1985," by James M. Gustafson, Theological Education, XXIV (Supplement II, 1988), 9-86 and Christian Identity and Theological Education by Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr. (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

2. The term 'we' is used throughout to underscore the role that both Jean Miller Schmidt and I played in the process that is described in the following paragraphs, the shared character of the findings, and joint preliminary analysis thereof. I take final responsibility for the transposition of those materials into this draft.

3. The survey and the role of Richey and Schmidt therein grew out of a 1986 workshop at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland devoted to "The Teaching of Ecumenics." The Bossey event had gathered theological faculty from across the world and from the various theological disciplines, among them and under GCCUIC sponsorship, these two American church historians (Schmidt and Richey). They assembled to consider what might be termed the "mainstreaming" of ecumenism, the inclusion of ecumenical perspectives throughout a theological program, teaching "ecumenism" across the curriculum. The findings of this workshop, an effort to reconstruc the several disciplines along ecumenical lines, comprise the October 1987 issue of The Ecumenical Review, "Towards Ecumenical Formation in Theological Schools" and appeared also, in more complete form, as a WCC paperback, The Teaching of Ecumenics edited by Samuel Amirtham and Cryis H.S. Moon. A related consultation sponsored by the WCC, held the year previous, had issued in Ministerial Formation in a Multi-faith Milieu: Implications of Interfaith Dialogue for Theological Education. These volumes deserve attention in their own right and are not herein summarized.

In making an oral report to GCCUIC on the workshop, Schmidt and Richey, of course, highlighted the importance and excitement of this endeavor to
"mainstream" ecumenism, but went on to make a series of observations about the 'ecumenical' state of United Methodist theological education. Relying on the catalogs of the seminaries, they reported on two patterns: (1) the faculty, courses and emphases expressive of long-standing ecumenical/Interreligious commitments; and (2) curricular and extracurricular attention to globalization, apparently inspired by the recent Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and its Task Force on Globalization. Richey and Schmidt asked about the relation between these two patterns and what responsibility GCUIC had to the seminaries (and vice versa) in charting United Methodist policy and program in this general area.

4. Recognizing that this charge affected the domain of DOM, the Commission had sought and received representation from that division, The Rev. Thomas Starnes.

5. This survey was designed to discover the ecumenical intentions of the schools. Richey and Schmidt and indeed the whole committee are painfully aware that a school's intentions and its actual operations—in virtually everything—may differ sharply. Since the purpose of data-gathering at this stage was to learn about goals, we were quite content to accept the schools' global self-understandings.

6. The following analysis draws on the suggestions of all members of the committee, the ably constructed notes of the committee's chair and written proposals by Richey, Schmidt, Powers, Reber, and Shinn.

7. The notable exceptions, but clear exceptions, were in the teams constituted for the several General Conference studies and in the preparation of the new hymnal. For both, expertise as well as the support of the entire United Methodist constituency was sought.

Globalization in Theological Education:

Naming the Issues in Ecumenical Perspectives and Interreligious Dialogue

Michael Kinnamon

There is, I think, a real advantage to having a non-Methodist who teaches at a non-United Methodist seminary help define ecumenical issues for a United Methodist audience. I am free to say "these are the problems as I see them" without embarrassing anyone in particular. And you are free to say 'yes, we have those problems, too" or 'thank God we're better off than the Disciples."

I read the survey prepared by Russell Richey and Jean Miller Schmidt with great interest and appreciation; it caused me to ask how Lexington Theological Seminary would have been able to respond to the questions. We are a school a bit smaller than St. Paul in Kansas City. Our catalog lists thirteen courses that are specifically ecumenical or global in character (though just what that means is a question to which I will return). We sponsor various lectureships and less formal convocations dealing with global and ecumenical themes (the first week in April is designated "Global Awareness Week" with several repre-
sentatives from the Disciples’ Division of Overseas Ministries on campus). Six of our faculty are directly involved in such things as the National Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order, the executive committee of the Consultation on Church Union, the board of the Disciples’ Council on Christian Unity, and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. We encourage cross-cultural study and hope, within two years, to make it required for M.Div. students. Our student body and faculty are not as culturally or racially/ethnically inclusive as we would like; but we have made progress during the past decade, including the regular presence of visiting international professors. And we are part of an interesting consortium of schools—the Theological Education Association of Mid-America (TEAM-A)—that includes Asbury Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and St. Meinrad School of Theology (Roman Catholic). Perhaps seventy-five students from these seminaries take advantage of the opportunity to register for a course at one of the other four institutions during our common three-week January term.

Yet even as I offer this list, I feel the need to add two large qualifications. First, these courses and activities do not yet constitute an integrated focus or identity for our Seminary as a whole. Second, I must admit that many, if not most, of our graduates are not particularly passionate about the unity of the church or the renewal of the global human community—and that, of course, is the bottom line.

Perhaps my introductory concerns will gain clarity if I recount a recent experience of our consortium. I proposed last year to the other TEAM-A deans that we approve a course, to be organized simultaneously on each of the five campuses, that would involve our students in direct dialogue encounters.

Well, the deans agreed, but three of them soon reported that they had no faculty members who were able or willing to tackle such a course. The one exception was Southern Baptist. Undaunted, I proposed to teach a “TEAM-A East” dialogue course for Lexington and Asbury students while Dr. William Leonard taught a “TEAM-A West” for Southern Baptist, Presbyterian,
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and St. Meinrad students. Again the deans agreed, but when
the dust had cleared from registration, we had no one from
Asbury or Louisville Presbyterian, three students from St.
Meinrad, seven students from Lexington, and twenty-five from
Southern Baptist.

"Why," I asked a group of Southern Baptist students, "are you
so enthusiastic about this course?" "Because," they replied,
"these issues and our inability to dialogue are tearing us apart,
especially each year at convention time." For these Southern
Baptists, a willingness to approach theology ecumenically
(though they may not quite know what that means) is a mark
of their identity. Being ecumenical means something, some­
thing rather costly. I also had a revealing conversation with a
TEAM-A student representative from Louisville Presbyterian.
"Why didn't any students from your school sign up for this
course?" I asked. "Perhaps," she answered, "it's because we are
ecumenical about everything so there isn't any need."

I hope this brief vignette has already stimulated reflection
about the problems and possibilities which bring us to this
topic. I want now to become more specific by naming four of the
overarching issues as I see them.

Defining the Terms

The first issue is one of definition. What exactly do we mean
when we speak of an ecumenical perspective in theological
education? I won't rehash the history of the word oikoumene
and its translations, but I do want to note that the term, in
modern usage, has generally referred 1) to the unity and
renewal of the whole Christian community (i.e., to the growing
relationship among the now separated churches and their com­
mon effort to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church),
2) to the world-wide mission of the church (i.e., to the work of
the church throughout the oikoumene), and 3) to the unity of
all humankind (indeed, of all creation), a unity which obviously
relates to and finally includes the church.

It is no secret that in the work of the ecumenical movement,
the search for visible unity of the church has, at times, been
played off against witness or service or social transformation. But I am convinced that this movement, at its best, has articulated a vision of the church and the gospel which powerfully integrates these various definitions and priorities.

We see the foundations of this vision expressed in the 1978 statement, "Christian Unity: Imperatives and New Commitments," by the United Methodist Council of Bishops. "God," the statement begins, "created one world. . .Jesus called into being one church," a church which "was to be the foretaste of the age where the middle wall of partition between nations, races, sexes, and classes—all forms of enmity—had been destroyed." The church, in other words, is not simply the product of a human urge for fellowship; it is, theologically speaking, a gift of God. Our unity as Christians, across all four artificial walls of partition, is not an option on which we get to vote; it is a given which we must seek to obey as part of our participation in God's mission.

I like the way Peter Hodgson of the Vanderbilt Divinity School puts it: "The exigency for unity does not reside in scriptural proofs (though there are plenty of these) or even in appeals to the classic 'mark' of unity, but in the fundamental logic of Christian faith, which is oriented to a single, central figure and event (God's redemptive action in Christ) and which is intrinsically non-provincial in character (legitimizing no divisions or exclusions on the basis of race, sex, creed, nationality, locale, or language)." Our concern that theological education become more ecumenical in perspective is not an accommodation to the new experience of pluralism or to the realities of the global village (though it clearly takes these into account). It is a response to the gospel of God's universal love and to the definition of the church as one, global, inclusive community of faith.

I need to mention one other dimension of this ecumenical vision as I understand it. The United Methodist policy statement "On the Ecumenical Road" surely understates the point when it says

We see in none of the existing churches. . .the perfect exemplar of the fullness of the Christian community we seek. What is needed,
therefore, is for the now-divided churches to abandon their erstwhile claims to self-sufficiency.

They must also rediscover the spiritual treasures which God has granted to their neighbors who see the gospel from other confessional and cultural perspectives. The ecumenical vision, in other words, regards unity as essential to the integrity of the faith. It celebrates our pluralistic context as an enrichment of our attempts to understand and obey the will of God; but it is still God's will we are attempting to understand and obey. As Jane Smith put it, ecumenical Christians hold truth gently. The ecumenical vision, to say it another way, is not philosophically but methodologically pluralistic. An active faith that is truer to the gospel is the goal; expanding the community which seeks, through committed dialogue among differences, to understand the gospel is one crucial means to that end.

I have spent some time on my understanding of the term 'ecumenical' and the vision of the church it implies because it seems to me that this definition is being replaced in many quarters by the notion of ecumenism as interchurch relations. "On the Ecumenical Road" warns of the temptation to settle for cooperation rather than to press for genuine unity through transformation, but I fear the warning has gone unheeded. Our churches and seminaries generally refrain from past polemics and narrowly confessional perspectives, but we often do so, as I see it, in the name of tolerance rather than mutual growth in Christ. The ecumenical status quo is valued for its own sake ("the blessings of diversity and openness") rather than as a constant journey toward deeper, truer koinonia. Our expectations for real unity are so low, and we have become so satisfied with the gains of recent decades, that (unlike my Southern Baptist students) we no longer experience pain of our divisions, the pain of giving such partial witness to the gospel. As a result, there is little passion for ecumenism. When tolerance becomes an end in itself, then cooperation becomes a sufficient goal. But if the very integrity of the faith is at stake, then nothing less than the unity of Christ's Body will suffice.

Actually the situation may be even more dangerous than that. I am now convinced that an ecumenism which is not aimed
at transformation of our common life in Christ fosters a relativism which does violence to the integrity of the faith. Our TEAM-A consortium, for example, is characterized by a kind of tolerant cooperation which reinforces present patterns without dialogically challenging our various pet assumptions. Parker Palmer labels this correctly when he speaks of a weak doctrine of pluralism. "Because this notion concedes diversity without calling us into dialogue," he writes, "it leaves us in isolation and destroys community as effectively as the objectivism it seeks to resist." 

I hope I have named this issue with sufficient clarity for us to address it. George Lindbeck argues in a recently published essay that theology has for the most part become procedurally more ecumenical, but thematically less so. The question I am posing is whether or not that characterizes the current ecumenical posture in our seminaries. It is clear that we value and embrace diversity, including cultural diversity, as never before. But do we know how to bring that diversity into a dialogue that prompts growth in faithfulness? Are we communicating a vision of the wholeness of the gospel and the church to which students can respond with passion and imagination in their ministries? Have we settled for cooperation and openness rather than the unity of the universal church as a sign and instrument of the unity of humankind?

Ecumenical Amnesia

The first issue, then, has to do with what it means in general to be seminaries marked by an ecumenical perspective. The second issue I want to name has to do more specifically with the teaching of ecumenism in the classroom. Part of the issue is identified in the following statement from the Lutheran ecumenist, Daniel Martensen, in his introduction to the report of a Bossey Consultation in The Teaching of Eccumenics. "Visser't Hooft would often say," writes Martensen, "that one of the major failures of the modern ecumenical movement was its inability to perpetuate the ecumenical memory." He was undoubtedly correct. In no segment of the world's Christian
population, including faculty and many professional ecumenical staff people, can one assume knowledge of the modern ecumenical movement. From this fact, we can draw an important conclusion about the teaching of ecumenics, namely: unless ecumenics is taught in a self-conscious fashion, it will not be taught at all. It is not enough, he argues, to promote cross-registration among seminaries or to encourage a kind of general ecumenical ethos. Unless the quest for Christian unity and common witness and service is addressed in a concerted fashion and in self-consciously defined courses of study, the ecumenical memory, to say nothing of the ecumenical vision of the future, will be lost.

It is obvious that our schools are far beyond teaching theology or church history or pastoral care or biblical studies from a narrowly denominational standpoint (whatever that might mean). Since Vatican II, we seldom even speak of Protestant theology and Roman Catholic theology as if these were separate streams. And attempts are also being made to avoid teaching from a narrowly cultural standpoint. I suspect that the reading lists for many of our courses include materials written by persons from other parts of the world. But none of this necessarily means that we are teaching students about the growth of the ecumenical movement, that we are fostering commitment to the oneness of the church, or that we are introducing our students to the nature and results of corporate ecumenical dialogue.

I was recently at a meeting of local church educators from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, many of whom were seminary trained. No one with whom I spoke was aware that the World Council of Christian Education, whose roots are in the Sunday School conventions of the nineteenth century, merged with the World Council of Churches in the early 1970s and that, since that time, one of the WCC's three main program units has been entirely devoted to education and congregational renewal. The otherwise excellent and comprehensive text edited by Seymour and Miller, Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education, contains no reference to the World Council or other ecumenical
bodies. The same can be said, I suspect, of other fields of study as well.

I need quickly to add that being ecumenical should not be reduced to support for a movement, and the movement itself should not be equated with the World Council of Churches. But as Joseph Hough and John Cobb observe, "the WCC thinks globally because its members are from all over the world... [thus] one valuable way of introducing ministerial students to the global context is to make them aware of the work of the WCC in such a way that, as they become church leaders, they will relate the church at all levels to the ongoing world discussions."

Should ecumenics be taught as a distinct area of the curriculum? If not, how do we avoid the tendency to make the ecumenical impulse so diffuse that it is nowhere intentionally fostered? If so, how do we avoid the opposite tendency (seen frequently in the church) to treat ecumenism as a peripheral elective, tangential to the core of the curriculum?

I want to add three quick and somewhat random observations drawn from my own experience. First, I agree with Charles West of Princeton when he writes that ecumenics is an ongoing event—the process itself is the real subject matter; the encounter between living traditions and involved Christians struggling and working with one another. It is important for students to study the history of this process in order that they themselves may become a part of it. But the object of teaching ecumenics is to involve them as participants. The Vatican's Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters" makes much the same point: "the first thing to be attended to in ecumenical education is conversion of the heart"—that humility of spirit that makes a mutually vulnerable pursuit of truth possible. That is obviously the premise behind our course on dialogue which, despite its institutional setbacks, is one of the finest experiences I have had in teaching.

Second, I find that ecumenically-produced materials are best used hot off the press. There are many problems with theology by consensus and committee, including a frequent lack of depth, which means that such materials do not stand up well
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over time. For example, the Sheffield Report from the WCC's On Community of Women and Men in the Church study will not make a good textbook for the 1990s, especially when compared with more systematic treatments of women and the church produced by individual authors. The report is invaluable, however, as a record of global conversations at a particular moment in the church's life and, as such, deserves much more attention than it has received in this country.

Third, I think it is particularly important to acquaint students with ecumenical initiatives currently under consideration in their denominations in order that they can help interpret this work in their congregations. At Lexington, for example, we have devoted two or three public lectures and convocations, over the past two years, to COCU and its plan of covenant communion. The COCU documents are taught in various courses. And in the fall of 1991, we will host a major conference aimed at assessing the response to the COCU proposal in the churches.

Understanding Otherness

The third issue I want to name is raised by the following statement from the president of Union Theological Seminary, Donald Shriver: "Let us grant no M. Div. or doctoral degrees without requiring the candidates to demonstrate knowledge and empathy for a culture, a constituency, a language, a profession, or a point of view decidedly at variance with all that the candidates know most readily. It may be another religion, another country, another ethnic American group, but let us require of ourselves that we will sit in the shoes of this collective, significant other..." I suspect that all of us endorse the importance of such an encounter with otherness. We fail the church if a seminary education does not help students resist the temptations of cultural, theological, political, or geographical provincialism. But the question before us is what best enables such stretching of horizons to occur.

Last fall's issue of Theological Education contains an essay by Robert Schreiter of the Catholic Theological Union in
Chicago, which argues that intercultural contact usually begins by homogenizing the other, colonizing the other, demonizing the other, romanticizing the other, or pluralizing the other. I hope we will enable students to move beyond these postures to authentic dialogue and empathy—in the classroom, through programs of study and work in other cultures, in the way we worship, through the lively presence of human diversity in our seminary communities.

Tension between the Mandates

Finally, there is a tension in the present life of the church between the two parts of the mandate of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, a tension which at least needs to be named. The Commission's mandate is 1) to advocate and work toward the full reception of the gift of Christian unity in every aspect of the church's life and to foster approaches to ministry and mission which more fully reflect the oneness of Christ's church in the human community, and 2) to advocate and work for the establishment and strengthening of relationships with other living faith communities, to foster dialogue with persons of other faiths, cultures, and ideologies, and to work toward the unity of humankind.

I suspect that most of us can and do affirm both Christian unity and interreligious dialogue as priorities for the church; indeed, we likely see them as complimentary aspects of a common vision rooted in our confession of the universal Creator. But there are obviously many members of the United Methodist Church, not to mention the Disciples and other parts of the one church of Jesus Christ, who reject the theological assumptions behind interfaith dialogue. It is possible to argue that strengthening relationships or engaging in dialogue with other faith communities does not presuppose any judgment of their place in God's plan of salvation, but this is hardly a satisfactory response. If dialogue is defined as a mutually vulnerable pursuit of truth (a definition consonant with the WCC's Guidelines on Dialogue), then Christians can presumab-
ly learn something new about the nature and purpose of God from such encounters. The clear implications is that God is at work redemptively in and through these other communities (whose members we regard more as partners in God's work of shalom than as objects of conversion), and that is utterly unacceptable to many in our churches.

My point in raising this is to insist that we hold the tension and to invite us to reflect together on the implications of holding this tension for theological education. There seems to be an increasing tendency for "interfaith dialoguers" and "Jesus only-ists" to dismiss one another as outside the circle of conversation. For example, the well-known historian of religions, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, asserted at a recent meeting sponsored by the WCC that the failure of Christians to affirm the saving action of God not just within other religious traditions but through them is "blasphemy"—a kind of exclusive inclusivism.

I much prefer the position taken by Harvey Cox in a 1988 article in *The Christian Century*. "It is easier for me," writes Cox, "to converse with universally-minded Buddhists or Hindus than with fellow Christians who not only dismiss such people as pagans, but also want to dismiss me for not dismissing them as such." Still, I believe the critically important conversation among people of diverse faiths could founder and fail if we—the dialoguers—lose touch with our fellow believers who cluster on the particularist side. They remind us that without the radical particularity of the original revelation, we would have no faith to share. We remind them that without the universal dream, they falsify the message and diminish the scope of the original vision.

From time to time, we have prospective students at Lexington Theological Seminary who apparently assume that our self-designation as an "ecumenical seminary" means that we subscribe to some new orthodoxy of the left wing, instead of to a methodology that seeks truth in a community of genuine theological diversity. Let me stress that we offer various courses on other faiths, especially Judaism, and are firmly committed as a faculty to the Commission's second mandate.

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(Interreligious dialogue). But our concern for the first mandate (Christian unity) leads us to affirm that even those Christians who oppose Interreligious dialogue—or the whole ecumenical enterprise, for that matter—may do so on the basis of principled convictions which, in my opinion, need to be given voice in our conversations.

If I am not out on a limb already, I will end by inching out on one. I speak as a person who loves the United Methodist Church when I say that the biggest objection I hear from your—our—ecumenical partners is that the Methodists are too self-sufficient. When I was in Indiana, we always got strong verbal commitments to ecumenism from the two conferences of the United Methodist Church, but few United Methodists ever showed up at council of churches workshops because these workshops conflicted with "our" Methodist educational events. That story could probably be retold across the country.

My plea, therefore, is that you do not simply ask, "How can we become more ecumenical through our own devices?" but "How can we work within the wider context of schools, programs, and churches to prepare ministers marked by an ecumenical perspective?" Before asking what programs you can develop, ask what existing ecumenical programs you can plug into and support. Before asking what models you can develop for preparing future ecumenical leaders, explore models being developed by ecumenical partners. That in itself would be a significant witness.

Notes

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8. Quoted in Edwina Hunter, "Re-visioning the Preaching Curriculum" in Theological Education (Autumn 1989); 74.


10. The quotation is from an account of the meeting by S. Mark Heim, Mission and Dialogue: 50 Years After Tambaram' in The Christian Century (April 6, 1988); 342.

WHEN WE SPEAK OF "ecumenical and interreligious agenda of the United Methodist Church," our attention is directed to the future. An agenda suggests topics requiring further exploration and discussion. I would like to look at the past, however, for clues concerning the unfinished agenda we must address as a church.

A convenient point of departure is an indication of the vast involvements of The United Methodist Church in ecumenical and interreligious ventures in recent decades. Within this setting I can only offer a highly abbreviated list of the major types of ecumenical and interreligious efforts. I will use this sampling to explore the ecumenical agenda for The United Methodist Church and its implications for theological education.

Involvements

Our commitments to ecumenism and interreligious efforts are substantial. I turn first to the ecumenical ventures. In the Uniting Conference of the UMC in 1968, the denomination

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adopted a statement, "On the Ecumenical Road." At the same General Conference the denomination also wrote into the Constitution of the Discipline the following mandate:

As part of the Church Universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the Church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity; and therefore it will seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life: through world relationships with other Methodist churches and united churches related to The Methodist Church or The Evangelical United Brethren Church through councils of churches, and through plans of union with churches of Methodist or other denominational traditions.

The passage suggests three basic types of ecumenical relationships and ventures. First, the mandate mentions direct relationships which we have as a denomination with other Methodist Churches or united churches related to our predecessor denominations. We make provisions for direction relationships through affiliations, concordats, and covenants with autonomous Methodist churches. Such ties exist, for example, with the British Methodists.

Dialogues and consultations with other churches, though not explicitly mandated in a constitutional provision, might be mentioned in this connection. We have pursued bilateral dialogues, for example, with Roman Catholics and with Lutheran denominations. We have also joined other denominations in ministries and mission, such as in disaster relief.

If the first type of unity establishes relationships directly with another denomination, the second pursues relations with other denominations through councils of churches. The World Methodist Council can be mentioned in this connection, as can the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

Third, we have pursued plans of union with churches of Methodist or other denominational traditions. We have participated, for example, in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) since its beginning in 1961.
I turn from ecumenical ventures to interreligious efforts. The denomination does not have a constitutional mandate for interreligious pursuits comparable to the statement on "Ecumenical Relations." There are, nevertheless, official denominational statements adopted by the General Conference. In 1972 the church adopted the statement, "Bridge in Hope: Jewish-Christian Dialogue." In 1980, the church issued a statement, "Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationship," affirming the place of witness and dialogue. While a 1988 official statement is not constitutional, it nevertheless appears in the important Disciplinary section on "Our Theological Task." Ecumenism is understood broadly in this setting.

Concurrently, we have entered into serious interfaith encounters and explorations between Christians and adherents of other living faiths of the world. Scripture calls us to be both neighbors and witnesses to all people. Such encounters require us to reflect anew on our faith and seek guidance for our witness among neighbors of other faiths.

In line with these observations, the denomination, acting through the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, has continued interreligious dialogues, for example, with Muslims and adherents of American Indian spirituality. Results of these interactions appear in minutes and reports. As of this moment these dialogues have not produced official stands. United Methodism also participates in numerous interreligious ventures through the World Council of Churches.

While this summary of ecumenical and interreligious efforts is succinct, each example is like a central switchboard at the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Every connection branches off into innumerable relationships and ventures. The citations should explain why a single summary of these activities will never be complete.
Appropriating the Contributions

This survey of efforts in recent decades suggests several avenues for action and reflection. I turn first to the importance of incorporating or "receiving" contributions of ecumenical and interreligious efforts. They must be tied into the life of our local congregations, and the role of theological seminaries is to train persons to do so.

Ecumenism in the Local Church

There are two stereotypes we must overcome if we are to recognize the potential contributions of our ecumenical and interreligious efforts. One has to do with our picture of people in local churches; the other has to do with the nature of ecumenical proposals and their use.

When local congregations object to ecumenical proposals and interreligious dialogues, there is often some media coverage of their protest. This has led to the assumption that local congregations are ill-equipped to receive ecumenical insights. In the meantime, we overlook the increasingly interdenominational composition of church membership and their consciousness of the global interactions in which they live. These realities mean that people in local churches have a greater readiness to accept the contributions of ecumenical ventures and interreligious dialogues.

Consider the increasingly interdenominational composition of our membership. In many local congregations one half to two-thirds of membership comes from other denominations. Even where many members were raised in The United Methodist Church, denominational loyalties have lessened. Special interest groups within the church are often moved more by appeals to Wesleyan heritage than to denominational loyalties. Hence, ecumenical standards are relevant to interactions within our membership and not only to relations between denominations at the highest levels.

Furthermore, our people are becoming more cosmopolitan in experience than ever before. One travel agent, I am told, supports herself on the travel arrangements for six families in Bozeman, Montana, a city with a population of 25,000. Imagine
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the broad-ranging experiences of these families, and the employees on their ranches and farms.

Many of our farmers on the plains listen to the price of their grains on the world market before leaving home for work at 5:30 in the morning. They listen to international news as they plow the fields in the air-conditioned cabs of their combines. These farmers have a picture of the movement of their grains on interstate highways and train tracks across the US. They are familiar with the shipping lanes that connect major ports, sending their products around the globe. Agriculturists in America’s heartland are hardly parochial and uninformed about the global networks in which they live and work.

Because their livelihoods are producing a new global consciousness, such people are ready to take seriously the interfaith dimensions of international and cross-cultural interaction. Economic contacts in the Pacific Basin, for example, are filled with exchanges, tensions, and conflicts informed by the Confucianist and Buddhist roots of Asian and Pacific cultures. Church members experience economic rivalries and cultural clashes that might be eased by awareness of interreligious issues.

Because our people are far more interdenominational, and their experiences touched by interreligious exchanges, than ever before, ecumenical and interfaith documents have a new relevance in the life of congregations. But how can we appropriate the results of these ecumenical and interreligious dialogues? An analogy from stewardship will explain how this might happen. The beginning point in stewardship cultivation is an affirmation of the great things our members are doing with God and God’s people because they are already contributing to the denominational outreach. Even if their gifts are minimal, we still have much to celebrate. The affirmation and celebration precedes any new challenges and additional responsibilities we place before our members.

The same applies to our stands and proposals in ecumenical and interreligious pursuits. They provide resources for understanding the ecumenical experiences and interreligious exchanges that are already happening in and among our people.
Like great works of art, ecumenical convergences and the study of interreligious dialogue help us see a world we had not noticed before. The documents help us describe or name what is already taking place among our people.

Two concrete examples will suffice. We can treat the document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) as a highly abbreviated summary of erudite biblical scholars, church historians, theologians, and liturgical scholars, and assume that it has little relevance for congregational life. In point of fact, however, our congregations have since 1972 used over twenty alternate worship resources that incorporated the emerging convergence outlined in BEM. The final edition of BEM in 1982 therefore describes to a considerable extent what many congregations have already experienced but had not articulated for themselves. That is to say, BEM should not be used as something wholly new to our congregations or unrelated to the experiences of supposedly uninformed laity.

Consider further the process of covenanting that we have developed through the Consultation on Church Union (COCU). Members in local churches are already taking a good number of the steps proposed in *Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting*. For example, laypeople have already experienced considerable unity in faith as they move freely across denominational lines. They recognize one another's baptism and see various denominations as expressions of Christ's true Church. Many of our laity furthermore welcome the ordained ministries of other communions. They experience the presence of Christ and proclaim his parousia in various services of the Lord's Supper. They also engage in significant joint efforts in Christian mission. At all of these points many of our members are already living out elements of the covenant. Despite voices resisting ecumenical proposals, these documents can be read first as descriptions of the best that people already practice and appreciate and second as directional statements of trajectories already astir in their lives today.

Resistance to ecumenical statements can be accounted for in other terms. In their zeal to mobilize support, promoters of
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Ecumenical achievements often suggest their products are avant-garde, perhaps even radical and revolutionary. The inevitable condescension speaks louder than the substance of the achievement. People hear these promoters saying that they are benighted and backward. After decades of this abuse, long-suffering parishioners have begun to protest this decidedly uncumensified ecumenia.

It will therefore be necessary to move beyond stereotypes of local churches and to adopt new approaches if we are to realize the great gains we have made for Christian unity and interfaith relations. We naturally turn to theological seminaries to train those who can infuse the life of our churches with these contributions.

Ecumenism in the Theological Seminary

We have considerable work to do before theological seminaries can train persons to appropriate the benefits of the ecumenical and interreligious gains in recent decades. To begin with, the resources in libraries for interreligious dialogue are growing rapidly. Skills along comparable lines among faculty are increasingly evident. We can celebrate these facts. There is, however, a considerable lag in gathering comparable resources for Christian unity. It is an exceptional library whose documentation of one commission in the World Methodist Council or the World Council of Churches is up to date. Even the dialogues between and among churches on significant issues are generally absent in library holdings and hardly ever introduced as instructive insights for interpreting human experiences.

The oversights are understandable. Ecumenical documents often represent a new and distinct literary genre. To learn how to read some of them is comparable to learning a now-deceased language like Sanskrit for studying Theravada Buddhism. Furthermore it requires breaking through yet another stereotype. Because these brief statements usually compress days and weeks, years and even decades of intense discussion, their slight appearance seems to encourage facile dismissals. Faculty members seldom find occasion to consult such documents or
request libraries to acquire them. The image barrier for their use in theological education is therefore considerable.

But a theological education that neglects resources that interpret the church in its local, regional, and global dimensions is like an trying to study economics without paying attention to such things as labor unions, small business, multi-national corporations, and governmental agencies. Can we imagine a library or faculty of a university economics department that would tolerate such a glaring omission?

Many people do have the opinion that seminaries overlook the very institutions through which religious forces act most immediately and overtly. Granted, religious forces move through politicians and journalists, painters and poets. But churches are the institutions dedicated to the phenomenon of religion, even if they sometimes misguide us, or muffle the power of the Holy. It is not by accident that many church leaders turn to centers for congregational studies alongside some of the finest theological seminaries, or those which operate as freestanding institutions. The Rollins Center in Atlanta or the Alban Institute are cases in point. These centers do focus their studies on the church as an avenue for understanding the dynamics of religion.

If the first item on the agenda for the churches is to take full advantage of the potential contributions offered by our ecumenical and interreligious efforts in recent decades, then it becomes important for theological seminaries to acquire the resources and train persons in the use of these documents. To repeat, the fruits of ecumenical movements and interreligious ventures help us see what we are already experiencing but had not noticed. Like the mystery of faith, we first believe in order to understand. We seek understanding so that we can gain clarity in our lives, and therefore take greater steps in the future.

I therefore turn to second general line of exploration. I move from contributions to corrective; from complimenting what ecumenical and interreligious leaders offer us to complementing their contributions.
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Pursuing New Directions

There are two directions that I would suggest from my sketchy summary of our ecumenical and interreligious involvements. The first is that we continue to broaden the scope of our efforts at several points, and the second is that we narrow our scope in others.

Broadening the Scope

One area in which we might broaden our scope is in interreligious ventures. Efforts in relations with Jewish, Muslim, and Native American neighbors are certainly appropriate. Each require additional work. At the same time, to say the obvious, there are persons best explained by Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism, to mention the more conspicuous Asian traditions where more than a half of humankind lives. In our interactions with persons around the globe, animism is surely of major significance for our neighbors in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the islands of the seas.

In understanding these living traditions, I would hope that the methods for study and interaction could move beyond the heritage drawn from the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. In both eras, the major approach was literary and dealt primarily with ideas. While the verbal products of any civilization are surely among its richest expressions, people express themselves over a far wider range of modes. Thus the humanistic studies of texts need to be supplemented with analytical tools and procedures associated with other disciplines. Cultural anthropology, for example, provides interpretations of the religious dimensions of human societies. This discipline focuses on symbolic interactions or artistic artifacts in music and dance, mime and drama, paintings and architecture, clothing and food. Social psychology treats the publically accessible phenomena as an avenue for understanding the religious foundations of a culture. Historical and sociological studies of political economies and their religious dimensions offer yet another means to broaden the methods for studying religions for use in interfaith exchanges across cultures today. Because these approaches to the study of religion deal with publi-
cally accessible phenomena in culture and social interaction, politics and the economy, they can promote interfaith understanding on a number of experiential levels.

With reference to the political economy, we owe COCU a word of gratitude for their "Commitment to Seek Unity with Wholeness" in their proposal, Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting.26 Ever since the 1975 plenary session, when COCU incorporated an appendix into its emerging theological consensus to include "Alerts on the new church-dividing potentials of some persistent issues," matters of justice (including racism and sexism), as distinct from familiar historic doctrinal points of contention, have been included at the heart of its work.26 COCU thus links concrete issues of social justice with aspirations for religious harmony in Christian communities. Such approaches are certainly valid because our own history reminds us of the role of slavery in church divisions.

Issues related to race continue to haunt us, and that is why I offer suggestions for what I call a narrowing of focus in our agenda as well.

Narrowing the Focus

While many of our most prominent efforts have been interdenominational and interreligious, we now face a need to be intradenominational as well. I have in mind the need for a much sharper focus on the tension between evangelicals and liberals within The United Methodist Church. I agree with Robert Wuthnow, the Princeton University sociologist of religion, who speaks of

the polarization that has come to characterize American religion—the deep cultural divide between conservative or evangelical Christians, on the one side, and religious liberals and secular humanists, on the other side. According to public opinion polls, this cleavage is fraught with considerable misgiving and stereotyping on both sides. It divides the nation into two opposing camps that are approximately equal in numbers, and it cuts directly through most of the nation’s major denominational families and faith traditions.27
The United Methodist Church need to be particularly sensitive to this conflict because we have virtually two parallel denominations within the existing one. Conservative evangelicals have developed their own seminary and publishing house, their own boards of global ministries and church and society, their own network of evangelism and education, and much more. If it had not been for the pension program and the trust clause which prohibits removal of property to another denomination by "local option" we could very well have split the denomination several years ago.

I direct our attention to this reality because of our history. The nineteenth century holiness movement in the Wesleyan household eventually became a divisive force and produced a proliferation of denominations. The emergence of the holiness groups represented what Nathan O. Hatch has called "the democratization of American Christianity" amidst what Alice Felt Tyler called "freedom's ferment." The existing denomination could not incorporate the new burst of energies because of its narrow liturgical practices, theology, and missional outreach. The new movements therefore were forced to leave and organize a new denomination.

In a diversified denomination, the conservative evangelical Wesleyans are now asking us to acknowledge our distinctly white heritage, as much as we have celebrated the contributions of colorful people in recent years. They are asking us to affirm the contributions of males, as we have highlighted contributions of women. It does not surprise us that evangelicals appeal to John Wesley, a white male Anglo-Saxon.

While many factors are operating in the resurgence of conservative, Wesleyan evangelicalism in The United Methodist Church, we cannot overlook the ethnic factor. This sector of the church as lost patience waiting for an affirmative work about white people in this nation and have therefore launched a patriotic campaign. In his analysis of the "New Right" in American politics in the 1980s, Alan Crawford spoke of a "resentment" lying at the heart of the conservative movement. Conservatives have taken it upon themselves to say how good and right the (white, male) United States is because
progressive voices have persistently said for several decades how evil and wrong it has been. They long to hear a witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:16) that they too are "children of God" and not simply a scourge of the earth, a curse to humankind which liberals at home and people of color around the world seem to say that they are.

The intradenominational ecumenical agenda therefore calls for new ways to affirm and celebrate diversity. We must particularly be inclusive of whites as well as people of color; men as much as women; straights as much as persons with alternate life styles; and ordinary people as well as special people with handicapping conditions. Unless we find ways of incorporating more explicitly this heritage in our theology and ethics, alienation will grow among conservative evangelicals and schism becomes a greater probability.

What inclusivity may mean for so-called mainline denominations with a vocal and politically mobilized evangelical movement can only be determined through dialogue and experimentation. An ecumenism that is exclusively denominational and neglects the intradenominational tensions between evangelicals and liberals is outdated to say the very least. Unless we take up the ecumenical task within our own denomination, we poison the balm that can heal both divisions in the Body of Christ, and interfaith rivalries in the body politic.

Notes

1. "On the Ecumenical Road: The United Methodist Church and the Cause of Christian Unity," Service Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, 13th printing, June, 1986. Items distributed by the Service Center 7819 Reading Road, Caller No. 1800, Cincinnati, Ohio 45222-1800


It may be important to recall the status of this constitutional commitment to ecumenical relations. Unlike many other portions of the Discipline, which require a simple majority of General Conference delegates voting, amendments to this portion of The Constitution only occur with "two thirds present and voting and a two-thirds affirmative vote of the aggregate number of members of the several Annual Conferences present and voting." (par. 62)


4. The UMC-Roman Catholic Dialogues have produced three documents. The first round produced an agreement on "Holiness and Spirituality of the
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This note and those that follow in this section will list a lightly selective sample, with primary attention to faith and order interests. This sample will illustrate a point made later in the paper concerning the vast ranging bibliographical resources in ecumenism which theological libraries could consider.


Interactions among the various Methodist denominations who are members of the council produced several statements published in the 1986 Proceedings, including "The North/South Dialogue and Solidarity with the Poor" (pp. 337-340), the "World Methodist Social Affirmation" (pp. 380-381), "Six Major Issues as Methodists Witness to the Gospel," (p. 381).

Documents from dialogues with other world-wide confessional bodies through the World Methodist Council (WMC) also appear in the 1986 Proceedings. They include dialogues with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1985, on the gospel (pp. 339-342), with the Lutheran World Federation, 1979-84, on "The Church: Community of Grace" (pp. 341-360), and with the Roman Catholic Church, fourth series, 1982-85, on the topic, "Toward a Statement on the Church" (pp. 380-372).


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Several documents in relation to the historic statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) (Geneva: WCC, 1982) illustrate the enormous volume of documentation from one WCC unit on a single topic related to our focus on ecumenical relations among Christian churches. See *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, edited by Max Thurian (Geneva: WCC, 1983) for important essays on the document and the follow-up studies; and *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, edited by Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright (Geneva: WCC, 1983) for sample liturgies which demonstrate the amazing convergences. As of the writing of this paper, the denominational responses to BEM appear in six volumes of *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text* (Geneva, WCC), vols. 1 and 2, 1986; vols. 3 and 4, 1987; vols. 5 and 6, 1988. Volume 7 is forthcoming.

See note 14 for a sampling of WCC documents related to interreligious dialogue.

9. A sampling of the statements issued from one unit, The Commission on Faith and Order (COFO) of the NCCC appears in the list of publications in *“Program of Studies, 1988-1991,”* published by COFO/NCCC, 175 Riverside Drive, Room 872, New York, NY 10015-0050.


14. See *Six Hundred Ecumenical Consultations*, pp. 59-66, for a description of the consultations staged by the unit on “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies” and the documents they produced.

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15. Citations above offer illustrations of the enormous network of ties and joint efforts connected to a single ecumenical or interreligious relationship. References have cited documents primarily related to faith and order dialogues in interreligious concerns. The citations illustrate a point concerning library resources that will highlight below.

16. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry called for a "process of reception" (p. x). The concept was chosen carefully. Those who selected the word had in mind something akin to the passage in John 1:12: "all who receive him (Jesus), who believe in his name, (God) gave power to become children of God." See Ulrich Rühm, "Reception--An Imperative and an Opportunity," in Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, pp. 165-168, for the biblical and theological understanding of "reception" drawn from the Greek word, lămbanein, and its cognates. See too, Anton Houtepen, "Reception, Tradition, Communion, ibid., pp. 144-149, for its historical uses.


19. See note 7.

20. See note 8.

21. See notes 4 and 5.

22. Observations concerning Japanese Americans might be cited here. The studies of the cultural anthropologist, Chie Nakano in Japanese Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) and the classic work by Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture (NY: World, 1946) have an enduring value. They study both the social and the cultural manifestations of religion. One of the reasons why D.T. Suzuki has worn so well in uncovering the identity and behavior of Japanese people is that he has combined careful studies of religious texts with an analysis of their social and aesthetic expressions. See, for example, his very familiar volume, Zen and Japanese Culture (Princeton: University Press, 1959).


24. Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, 1958), represents a historic example, as does his study, The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, trans. by

26. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) recognized the "social forces" in church divisions. The COCU documents have focused more sharply on the issue of stratification.
Readings from 1 John: Living in the Living Seasons

Paul F. Aspan

The epistles usually play the role of the poor relation in the lectionary in most any liturgical season--but perhaps no more so than in Eastertide. The grandness of resurrection appearances, of final commissions and consolations, and the overwhelming sense of triumph and relief naturally grab the attention of homilist and congregation alike. The gospel narratives have led us into passiontide, and we instinctively keep our focus there to balance the pain with the joy, the waiting with the fulfillment. Furthermore, we need the reward the Gospel lections offer us for having endured the winter, and of yet again awaiting a late spring--if not in the weather of our region, then perhaps in the climate of our lives.

The epistles this Eastertide speak of beginnings rather than completions. The lections from 1 John come out of a fractious context, where struggle, sin and judgment, and human incompleteness dominate the interests of the biblical author. For these reasons alone, the judicious preacher may wish to steer a wide berth around these lections, preferring to settle into "ordinary time" before returning to the pulpit with such a focus. Yet the author of First John reminds us that the fundamental
Christian mystery is a living Reality, as concrete and vivid as
the dancers in "East Coker," one of T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets":

Round and round the fire/
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,/  
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter/
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,/  
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth/
Mirth of those long since under the earth/
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,/  
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing/
As in their living in the living seasons . . .

Worship in Eastertide proclaims a reality that must be lived.
The author of 1 John understood this so well that to ignore his
message is to ignore the full Reality of Easter. The epistle
sections can help us focus not only on the challenges but the
joys of living in this foremost of the "living seasons."

The Historical Context of First John

First of all, the identity of the author is not important. The
author of 1 John never identifies himself. Most recent com-
mentators believe that the author is part of the larger Johanine
community, but is not identical to the author of the Gospel of
John (hereafter GJ). It is more likely but not certain that the
author of 1 John is the same as that of 2 and 3 John. But First
John gives a distinctive treatment to themes and concerns
which percolate throughout the literature of the "community
of the beloved disciple," and this should be the primary focus
for the homilist. 1 First John 2:18-19 seems to be a clear indicator
that the epistle is meant to address a historic circumstance of
internal division:

18. Children, this is the last hour, and just as you have heard
that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have
come into existence—wherefore we know that it is the last
hour.
19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; For had
they been of us they would have remained with us. Rather, it has been manifested that they all were not of us.

My translation differs from the RSV primarily in v.18 where I have highlighted the author's use of the Greek ginomai. The RSV translates renders this term as have come. I believe that the rhetorical logic here states that those who left became antichrists by the fact of their secession from the community. Thus, we see that 1 John's primary opponents are former members of the same flock.

This group has apparently sundered the community's unity for four reasons: they do not believe that Jesus is of God (4:3); they do not keep the commandments (2:4), nor believe they have sinned and therefore need forgiveness (1:8-9); and they have abused fellow members of the community (2:9-11, 3:10-20, 4:7-21). Of course, we only hear their views represented through the voice of our author—we cannot know how fairly he is representing them. Furthermore, there is one aspect of the letter that indicates that these four failings are symptomatic of the major ill which afflicts the community, the schism itself. This may be seen if we investigate a key term used by the author, koinonia ("fellowship," RSV: 1:3, 6, 7).

An excellent study of this term has been produced by J. Paul Sampley. Sampley has discovered that in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament writings, one meaning of koinonia was an voluntary agreement among two or more partners that was legally binding once entered. Koinonia (which Sampley indicates was understood as "consensual societas" in Roman society), existed only as long as all partners maintained their obligations to it. Yet if some members of the partnership arbitrarily withdrew, they were subject to legal judgment.

Both Paul and 1 John have appropriated this notion of "consensual societas" for the self-understanding of their communities. This use is especially prevalent in Paul in Philippians, Philemon and the Corinthian correspondence. Paul was extremely concerned about the potential loss of koinonia in all three of these instances. Paul's rhetorical logic in these instances consistently indicates those who break koinonia are guilty of eritheia ("partisanship," "selfishness," RSV: Rom. 2:3, 2 Cor.)
Aristotle used this term to describe ancient politicians who abused their sacred public trust for self-aggrandizement. It was also used in other literature of the time to describe those who by profession or disposition placed their needs above the good of the body politic.

Eritheia should be understood as the antonym to koinonia also in that the latter carries a strong connotation of mutual interdependence. Just as the Greek polis was governed by the cooperation of representatives of the citizens, so Christian communities are governed by a spirit of cooperation and harmony, which sets the needs of the whole above advantages for the few, according to Paul and 1 John. The full meaning of the frequent exhortations in 1 John to "love one another" requires nothing less than full commitment of the self to the needs of the congregation as whole. Paul states the very same sentiment this way: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility, count others as better than yourselves. Let each of your look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4, RSV).

Though 1 John never uses the specific term eritheia (elsewhere in the NT only in James 3:14, 16), it is clear that those who have broken koinonia with the author are guilty of the sort of behavior it connotes (at least in our author's eyes). We hear in the opening verses that fellowship with the author and his audience constitutes a necessary pre-condition to salvation. The four ills of the secessionists described above all stem from their fundamental sin of eritheia, or breaking the koinonia. Furthermore, 1 John's pronouncements of judgment upon those who have broken the fellowship are in keeping with the legalistic nature of the model used to describe the churches of Paul and 1 John.

For our author, the creative and constitutive force of the koinonia is agape. 1 John uses this term no less than 27 times, usually in one of three phrases:

1. (If) God has loved us
2. (If) we love God
3. Let us love one another.
The appropriation of *agape*, like that of *koinonia*, represents another instance of Christian theological creativity. As Brown notes, the term was rarely used in classical Greek, and then in a fairly "colorless" way, e.g., "to prefer," "to be content with." This in fact may have recommended the term to the first Christian theologians—they appropriated a sterile term and infused it with new meaning to articulate the new Reality they experienced in their proclamation of Christ’s resurrection. Brown gives a cogent insight to the broad parameters of the meaning of *agape*:

*Agape is not a love originating in the human heart and reaching out to possess noble goods needed for perfection; it is a spontaneous, unmerited, creative love flowing from God to the Christian, and from the Christian to the fellow Christian* (AB, pp. 254-55).

While Brown and other great scholars make invaluable contributions to our understanding by discussing the precise meaning of the term, we are again faced with a metaphor coined by early Christianity—and the meaning of a metaphor depends as much on ambiguity as it does on precise definition. For the Johannine community, *agape* connoted the deep commitment of God to the people, a commitment which was best articulated in the community’s "living out" the legacy of the "beloved disciple" (as Brown has told us). *Agape* meant fellowship with God; yet fellowship with God also implied a contractual-like commitment to one’s community. Fellowship was understood as the result of God’s initiative—a creative act, which impelled similar, creatively loving acts on the part of the faithful toward one another. In our author’s context, the concepts *koinonia* and *agape* are inseparable. A healthy respect for the inter-connectedness and fluidity of the terms utilized by our author will serve to enrich our preaching this season.

**From 1 John’s Context to Ours**

The specific lectionary selections help us bridge the gulf of the centuries which separates 1 John’s shattered *koinonia* from our own. In the six passages which we will discuss below, the author concentrates on the blessings and requirements of
those who will keep the fellowship alive, rather than judging those who did not measure up to his expectations. Let us follow the wisdom of the lectionary and accentuate the roles to be played by those who represent the koinonia incarnate, in all its limitations, rather than wasting energy pronouncing judgment upon the real or imagined faults of those who choose not (or no longer) to join us.

One recent concrete example of this sort of approach may be seen in the Saving Stations program initiated in the northeast by a pastor in Washington D.C. The program, while described as a "holy war on drugs," actually focuses the individual congregation's energy on education, rehabilitation, health programs, safe houses for the abused, food and shelter for addicts and their families, and evangelism. In this model, the church becomes an oasis of resources for living, a voluntary yet morally bound partner with the larger community. This program stresses the mutual interdependence of the individual congregations both with one another and with their broader social context. Below, we shall observe further how well the values of 1 John might be realized in congregational outreach like that of the Saving Stations program.

Second Sunday of Easter: 1 John 1:1-2:2

Mark, Luke, and 1 John all cite the "beginning" (arche) of the Jesus traditions in either their first or second verse. The Gospel of John, of course, apparently has more cosmic beginnings in mind, though the play on John 1:1 by 1 John 1:1 is undoubtedly intentional. In a situation of internal schism, it is not surprising that our author establishes his authority by recalling the primal origins of his tradition.

Brown points out that the language of the first five verses reveals that the author speaks as "part of a chain of tradition bearers" (AB, p. 161). The point is not that the author is a literal eyewitness, but rather that in the second generation of Christianity, the tradition is as vital and redeeming as it was at the beginning. Just as the author of the Gospel of Luke claims to hand on to Theophilus "an orderly account" which was delivered
to him "by those who from the beginning were ministers and eyewitnesses of the word," so does 1 John. Mark, Luke and the Johanine community believe that their communities are to serve as bridges to the present for the ministry of the word.

Although the lectionary rendering of this passage truncates the author's thought at 2:2-3, this passage so limited has a central image: koinonia. The term is used four times in this brief lection; twice in 1:3, and also in 1:6 and 1:7. In its intensive use of the term, 1 John reveals a classic pattern of ancient rhetoric--chiastic structure:

A 1:3a: we proclaim that you may have fellowship with us;
B 1:3b: our fellowship is with God and with his son Jesus Christ;
B 1:6: If we say we have fellowship with [God]
A 1:7: If we walk in the light...we have fellowship with one another

Chiastic structure was used in Hebrew and Greco-Roman rhetoric alike to highlight thematic emphasis. The message in its original context stressed that "fellowship" with God was contingent upon holding "fellowship" with the author. First John's original audience was to manifest koinonia by accepting and submitting to "that which was from the beginning," which is now proclaimed by the author. The rhetoric of this passage literally pivots on the usage of koinonia. Furthermore, the frequent appearance of the term at the beginning of the letter indicates that this concept is foundational to 1 John's understanding of "church" or "congregation." Here is a clear example from ancient rhetoric of how the medium--in this case, the literary structure of the whole--becomes the message.

Brown translates this term as "communion," the RSV as "fellowship." The term "partnership" also would represent a reasonable rendering. How do we decide between these three options? Obviously, it is not on the basis of one being more correct than the others. When we encounter ancient term rich in societal and religious meanings, we must explore the metaphoric dimensions of that term. The congregation should be left not just with the sense that any of these three words would do. They should be led to meditate upon koinonia as a
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fundamental principle for the self-understanding of the first Christian theologians.

As such, one might offer the thought that fellowship actually represents a multi-dimensional Reality for early Christianity. The Christians of the Greco-Roman world reached into their store house of moral and social models and appropriated a term which originally did not have "religious" connotations. Thus, the point can be made that the term koinonia expresses a fundamental metaphor for "Church." Then, the use of the Greek terminology in the homily might serve to highlight the fact that what 1 John and Paul mean by "fellowship" that living out the commitment of God to the Christian community in concrete ways, for example, through endeavors like the Saving Stations program. The full meaning of the metaphor is ultimately discovered only as one incarnates one's commitment to the greater needs of one's "fellowship."

The second half of the passage for this Sunday focuses upon "fellowship" with God and Jesus. As judgmental as our author will be towards the secessionists, this section of the letter (1:6-2:2) contains explicit statements of consolation meant to prepare the audience for the exhortations which comprise the balance of the letter. Membership in the "fellowship" is predicated upon a self-awareness of one's own moral limitations (1:7). It is precisely this limitedness which necessitates the fellowship--both with God and with each other (1:9).

This passage also indicates that while our author hopes that his audience will not sin (2:1), he holds open the possibility of forgiveness for those who fail. Because they have "fellowship" with God, Jesus Christ will continue to intercede for them (2:2). The passage ends on a compassionate note, one which gives a further glimpse of the nature of the fellowship.

In this first week, we encounter a lyrical, carefully structured and theologically rich picture of koinonia. Membership in this means nothing less than beholding the manifestation of "eternal life" (1:2). This represents 1 John's vision of the congregation--it has been and is to be the place where "life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim [it]. . ." (1:2). The hard question for reflection concerns whether or not
the present, living tradition of our congregation exemplifies "life made manifest." If we are resources for our community, well springs for the vital concerns of our neighbors, then we are "living in the living seasons." If not, our fellowship with God yet allows forgiveness and a new beginning. However humble, however failed we may envision the ministry of our congregation, we might well begin this Easter season with a reminder from the Talmud: "If not us--who? If not now--when?"

Third Sunday of Easter: 1 John 3:1-7

This is surely one of the most revered selections in the lectionary. The first verse represents perhaps the single most eloquent expression of the kinship metaphor found in the New Testament: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." The author nicely balances the themes of belonging ("children of God") with rejection ("the world does not know us"). The passage is also nicely balanced between consolation and exhortation. The lectionary again has cut off the author's thought almost in mid-utterance. This represents a challenge to the lector, and a distinct opportunity for the homilist.

The lector must be prepared not to end the reading to abruptly, or verse seven will seem to hang in the air without resolution. For the homilist, the weight of the final verse is equal in gravity to the weight of the opening verse: "... let no one deceive you--he who does right is righteous..." This renews the theme from the previous week that the business of the koinonia is to "do right." The full profile of the "fellowship" includes not only the assurance of the loving adoption of God, the constant forgiveness of God, but the faithful response of the congregation. This becomes even more apparent in the next passage.

Fourth Sunday of Easter: 1 John 3:18-24

The connection between the previous week and the this becomes immediately apparent: "Little children, let us not love in word and speech, but in deed and truth." Brown has observed
that the two nouns, deed and truth, can be of equal value in constituting a single sphere of activity. The idea here is that the author is speaking of deeds that have truth as the principle from which they flow, i.e., truth as God's revelation dwelling within the Christian, which expresses itself in the way which the Christian lives (AB, p. 452).

If we remember that our author was writing to a sundered community, we may also see that the author did not prescribe passive recuperation for the wounds. The author was aware of his congregation's vulnerability—again in 3:19-21, we experience a powerful message of consolation. We should understand the consolation in 1 John as a prescription for renewed health through active involvement. This seems to have been a classic pattern in early Christianity, especially if we recall that the celebration of Pentecost is fast approaching. As we reach the midpoint in the Easter season, the gaze of our preaching may now turn gradually towards our next major liturgical destination.

Fifth Sunday of Easter: 1 John 4:7-12

The Johannine literature is often said to exhibit a "spiral" style of rhetoric: phrases, themes, images used consistently throughout the entire piece, with nuances added in many instances where the repetition takes place. Another way of saying this is that our author will show us as many different sides of one theme as he can conjure throughout the course of his exhortation. At this point in the season, the homilist may want to call explicit attention to this stylistic device in 1 John, so as to continue his or her own development of the themes found there.

In 1 John 4:7-12, the precise focus shifts towards internal relations within the community. The schism obviously forms the backdrop to the exhortation: "Beloved, let us love one another... if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4:7, 11). The genius of 1 John's insight here lies in his understanding of the need for community. That is, the call to love one
John's spiral style is evident in this rendering. Rather than speak of fellowship, he uses the term "born of God." This term has continuity not only elsewhere in the epistle (this is one of 10 instances), but also in the Gospel of John (19 times). "Born of God" and "fellowship with God" are obviously synonymous terms. There is an opportunity here to stress that in attempting to describe the numinous realities of faith, the biblical authors found no one expression or metaphor adequate to describe the both the mystery and the truth of the experience of God in their lives. In this epistle alone, we have see our author tap political, moral and social (kinship) imagery to describe religious reality. In the "spiral style," each image is refracted through the others as a means of pointing to the greater reality being sought.

Sixth Sunday of Easter: 1 John 5:1-6

This passage comprises both an opportunity and a danger for the homilist. As an opportunity, it neatly dovetails themes from the previous three weeks. This offers opportunity for further comment on the tradition's "spiral" style of exposition, and for one's further development of image and themes from prior homilies.

On the other hand, this passage should be approached with extreme caution. Herein lies one of those passages that throughout the history of Christianity has given rise to Christian chauvinism or triumphalism: "Who is it that overcomes the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the son of God" (1 John 5:5). The sermon should not become the equivalent of one of those ridiculous signs everpresent at televised sporting events, for example: "John 3:3." Rather, the idea of overcoming the world by obeying the commandments could serve as a strong challenge to the congregation to embrace the complexity and the richness of the Scriptural call this Eastertide.

In the context of our author, keeping the commandments is equivalent with both the love of God and the love of one
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another. While the idea of koinonia is ever present here, perhaps the homiletic focus should turn to the author's use of another key term in his piece, the verb agapan, "to love." As mentioned above, God is the source of this sort of love so special to the experience of the Christian community. Given that fact, one should hardly feel chauvinistic about a Reality for which one cannot take any credit. The focus for the community is on "keeping the commandments," surely none of which have to do with smug superiority or presumptuous proselytizing.

This passage tells us that keeping the commandments leads to the church "overcoming the world." It is well known that in the Johannine correspondence, beginning with John 1:9, that the "world" (kosmos) bears hostility towards those who are "born of heaven." In the eyes of the Johannine community, the term kosmos carries wholly pejorative connotations. A structuralist analysis would remind us of other diametric oppositions in the literature of this community, which shed light on the fuller meaning of any one term or set of oppositions.

Other key oppositions in this literature are light vs. darkness, flesh vs. spirit, truth vs. lies and most importantly, life vs. death. We need not get into speculation regarding potential Gnostic influence upon this community. It is enough to note that for our author's tradition, "the world" connoted those forces in existence which most threatened life and salvation. "The world," for our author, represented those forces radically divorced from and fortrightly inimical to the message and power of God. We can--and should--identify such forces in our life setting, while realizing that the epistle does not call on us to condemn the created world or earthly existence.

Seventh Sunday of Easter: 1 John 5:9-13

It is fitting that on the last Sunday before Pentecost, the epistle selection emphasizes the ideas of "testimony" and "witness." The narrative of Acts 2 stresses the testimony and witness of the Apostles to the Christian message on what is often called "the birthday of Christianity." In this passage, we have our author's direct definition of the testimony, as well as a
chance to consider this terminology in the broader context of 1 John.

Our author defines the testimony this way: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (5:11). Once again, the focus of our author's testimony is not upon the achievement of himself or his community, but upon the creative and saving initiative of God. Thus, when we hear the condemnation in the second half of the next verse--"He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life"--we remember that the author has in mind those who, in his estimation, have voluntarily aligned themselves with the forces of evil. This verse is far from a statement of self-congratulation. For a text kindred in tone and intent, one should remember the conclusion of the book of Joshua, where the main character puts the choice of life or death before those who have heard his testimony. Like that book, this one challenges its audience to incarnate the saving Reality which has been made manifest to them.

Our season of this epistle concludes with the following assurance: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." The context of our previous lections, and the epistle as a whole, has informed us that the many consolations of this piece do not see complacency as their end. Rather, the gift of eternal life stands as the foremost challenge of this epistle. Do the contours of our lives--individually and collectively--suggest that we believe this testimony?

Final Thoughts

Earlier in this piece, we mentioned that the author of 1 John saw his community as a "bridge to the present" for the tradition which gave birth to their religious self understanding. As we have read through the epistle, we have also seen the community envisioned as a conduit for the agape of God to one another. The proclamation of the this epistle in our churches in this season impels us also to be a bridge to the present for
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the agape of God. As God has done for us, so must we for others manifest the initiatives of creative and saving love.

We have seen one such example of this in the Saving Stations venture on the east coast. This sort of project incarnates the ideal from 1 John 5:5 of "overcoming the world" through belief that Jesus is the Christ. While it has been described as a "holy war on drugs," its profile indicates that it represents a commitment of the Church to the community. The participants in this program seem to understand "love" and "fellowship" as 1 John did. As they rescue lives through their outreach, they overcome what 1 John meant by "the world."

While the so-called drug problem touches every community in this country, our readings from this season do not allow for an easy jingoism to substitute for lived faith. "The drug problem" has become a cliche, a rallying point for reckless politicians who give lip service to the symptoms, but dare not name the true disease. We tend to forget that the use of any drug is an inherently neutral act. It is the profit for the self at the expense of the others that represents the real "drug problem" in this country—and the drug of choice is money. Corporate raiders, junk bond traders and drug dealers—to name just three models of the successful entrepreneur—exhibit more similarities than dissimilarities, from the cars they drive to their lack of concern for the public welfare. Their entrepreneurial orientation could not be more representative of what the Johanine community understood as "the world," the complete antithesis of koinonia.

Our call from First John is to be a saving station for our community, to offer the challenge of community building and the hope of forgiveness, no matter how late the spring of our life may be blooming. If we believe in the eternal life promised us, then we know it is time to be living in the living seasons. Thus, now is the time to preach about the challenge and difficulty of beginnings. In the Reality commenced by the first Easter lies our own end. When we reach it, we will know the meaning of the mystery that forms the conclusion of "East Coker":

111
We must be still and still moving/
Into another intensity/
For a further union, a deeper communion/
Through the dark cold and empty desolation,/ 
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters/
of petrel and porpoise.
In my end is my beginning.

Notes

1. See Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (New York: Paulist, 1979). This book effectively charts the evolution of a single Christian community (though probably not a single author) which produced the Gospel of John as well as the three epistles.

2. The idea of "spiritual lineage" is especially important in this community's tradition. It is seen in the Gospel of John's prologue (1:12-13), where the key motifs of the entire gospel are enunciated; and here it is repeated throughout the Gospel of John 3:1ff; 8:1ff (esp. cf. 8:40); 9:1ff; etc. It is seen in 1 John's prologue, where the author immediately cites the connection of his preaching to "that which was from the beginning" (1:1). Furthermore, the epistle highlights this concept in 5:4, 18. Thus, my translation above tried to retain the sense of having come into existence, rather than mere physical arrival at a destination.


Selected bibliography

The following books should be of some help for further study of the Johannine epistles. The selection is by no means exhaustive. Those interested in the formation of the community of the Gospel of John and its influences should also look to the works of Alan Culpepper, Robert Fortna, Robert Kyser, J. Louis Martin, Fernando Segovia, and D. Moody Smith, to name just six.

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