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and American Political Values

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Introduction

Someone once said that the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there. Our past as Americans is indeed foreign to us; these days, it seems as if we can barely make out a passing resemblance between ourselves and the key figures of our national story.

But it is one thing to see their official portraits and another to hear them speak. A few years ago, in Ken Burns's PBS series, "The Civil War," actors read the words of soldiers, generals, and citizens from both South and North, including Frederick Douglass, Mary Chestnut, Robert E. Lee, and most majestically of all, Abraham Lincoln. For a moment, these people seemed alive, possessing the same needs and capacities that we bring to our world today. They were confused, oppressed, or ennobled by the war going on around them, just as we are by the social crises of our own day. If history is going to help us find meaning in our world—if we are even going to have a national history—it must first of all disclose to us this sense of the humanity of our national ancestors.

In the headline article this quarter, Frederick Blumer reaches back to the American past to discover how the ideas of religious liberty and justice have influenced higher education, and in particular United Methodist higher education.

I wonder if it would help us to imagine Thomas Jefferson in his study, and to read his words aloud: "Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict... errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them." This is carefully worded conviction, not merely political oratory, from a man who reflected faithfully on the nature of freedom in human society. Blumer's article gives us a sense of who we are as a nation and a denomination in higher education based on the humanity of our
leaders, and the application of their hearts and minds to questions of the common good.

Pastors and theologians eventually find out what poets already know about words: their power to evoke sensation is matched by their power to communicate values, either positive or negative. The Hebrew prophets were masters of this language game, especially in the tactic of using color to measure worth: “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18 NRSV). Because it is so effective, this equation of color and worth must be questioned when it is applied to human beings. Ronald Allen invites us to see the consequences of our implicit value systems in these language systems—not merely to lose ourselves in semantic correctness.

Our series on pluralism and teaching authority in the church continues with a slate of three articles by prominent United Methodist Christian educators. Charles Foster, at Emory University, reviews the dilemma facing pastors and educators when they realize that “our way of doing things” is simply not comprehended by a growing number of Christians from different cultural backgrounds. Building on the insights of the historian of education, Lawrence Cremin, historian Bernard Bailyn and anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Foster argues that non-English cultural traditions should be welcomed within the church, not overlooked or condemned as unorthodox. His model for this is hospitality to the stranger—sound biblical advice for, as we know, “some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Taylor and June McConnell bring their long experience with multi-cultural ministry into focus in their article. Their work with the three major cultural groups in North Central New Mexico, the Pueblo Indians, the Hispanics, and the Anglos is key here: they are the teachers, the mentors, and guides to different expressions of the gospel. For Joseph Crockett, the experience of African-Americans must be the starting point for Christian education in an African-American context; the end point is transformation of self and society. Both articles bring us into the center of minority communities, encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding, and personal growth between different camps.

Fall is here; may our notebooks be fresh, our pencil points sharp, and our minds attuned to all the lessons before us!
It is not often that one can say two distinctive things with a single word. The German word *Geschichte*, translated both as *history* and as *story*, provides that opportunity. The *Geschichte* of American United Methodist education would be at once its completed history and its institutional life story, still in the making. American United Methodist education is best understood by *Geschichte*, a historical narrative distinguished not only by Wesleyan traditions but also by distinctly American perceptions of freedom and justice.

Narratives, like oral traditions, are often discounted by those who define history as a simple reconstruction of past circumstances. They know that with time accounts of the past are embellished as they are retold. If one assumes that history consists exclusively of the empirical circumstances comprising events, then any embellishment of the account would obviously distort its meaning. But if one assumes that history derives also from the organizing ideas and operating assumptions uniting events into a life story (*Geschichte*), then the historian must identify the cardinal features (whether facts, ideas, or presuppositions) that form and inform the story. Historians of this variety appreciate oral traditions, even legends and myths. They understand why the meaning of some historical developments may have been better captured in epic poetry than in chronicle or

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photographic prose. The embellishments of successive generations may recall the stake of the participants and the issues addressed in their story. They may even become legitimate parts of the true story. History teaches because we see the significance of earlier events as they are fitted into the fuller story. Geschichte, history, is fact and story. Efforts to recapture the bare facts, if not futile, are certainly no more important than efforts to understand the ideas and organizing assumptions synthesizing those facts into a continuous narrative.

Thinking about American United Methodist education as such a story encourages us to look for cardinal features making this chunk of history indelible while also expecting new elements to become indispensable to the story.

**Freedom of Religion**

Two distinctive ideas that emerged in colonial America have become distinguishing features of American education shaping the character of contemporary academic institutions as well as the self-understanding of those who lead them. Like historical chromosomes, these distinctly American ideas have also ordered and unified the life stories of American United Methodist institutions.

One of these ideas is Thomas Jefferson's understanding of religious liberty. By founding the University of Virginia, Jefferson provided a model that unites education and religious liberty. By founding the University of Virginia, Jefferson provided a model that unites education and religious liberty. He believed fervently in the fecundity of freedom; it is pregnant. Freedom not only reproduces itself but gives birth to discovery. The task of academic institutions, therefore, is not to certify the claims of religious traditions but to facilitate intellectual growth. But the result is not necessarily a secular educational institution. According to Jefferson's model, by protecting religious liberty during their search for truth, even religious institutions can be legitimate partners in the academic enterprise. To preserve religious liberty, however, the academy must maintain a clear distinction between education and sectarian partisanship. Education is an expression of religious liberty. In itself, however, education is the birth of freedom. Authentic education is emancipation from ignorance, superstition, and error through voluntary risk, the risk of taking the unprecedented seriously enough to allow discovery. It is a freedom event over against sectarian partisanship, which is a crusade for orthodoxy.

This radical understanding of education as an expression of religious liberty is rooted in the American Revolution. United
Methodists are indebted to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison for their understanding of it. Ask any group of American United Methodist Sunday school children why the colonies fought the revolution and two answers are likely to surface simultaneously. Remembering the story of the Boston tea party, some may say the revolution was fought to escape oppressive taxation. Others, preferring to get to the heart of the story, will report that the revolution was a fight for freedom. If you then ask what freedom means, someone will surely tell a story about how pilgrims came to the new world to escape religious persecution. The American model for freedom is commonly expressed in the terms Jefferson and Madison used to explain the nature of religious liberty. These champions of the first amendment eventually provided the norms not only for religious liberty but for understanding academic freedom and freedom in general.

On the eve of the revolution, Jefferson and Madison interpreted religious liberty more radically than their contemporaries who considered their phrasing of the first amendment almost too mysterious to be readily accepted. Colonial Americans assumed that religion was required for social stability and that an established church was needed to preserve any nation. Thus, John Adams argued for established religion in Massachusetts. Most colonial Americans, therefore, believed that religious dissent undermined the social order. To be sure, because they had learned from harsh experience the dangers of religious tyranny, “states moved quickly to curtail English ecclesiastical power... All disclaimed... religious persecution; all affirmed the benefits of toleration. Apart from this unanimity, however, one found in the revolutionary era and well after much uncertainty about the limits or implications of full religious liberty.”1 Prior to the American Revolution, religious freedom was pursued but it had not yet been universally guaranteed. Its eventual role in the life story of American educational institutions was yet to be determined.

With hindsight we can discern that a civil religion with a utilitarian flavor, nourished by the English Enlightenment and balanced by a growing aversion to the violence of the French Revolution, was in the making. What United Methodists need to understand, I believe, is that the decline of established religion in colonial America is essential to the story of American Methodist education. The decline of established religion and the separation of church and state, manifested eventually in the secularization of American education, are not developments important only in the story of American public institutions; the decline of established
religion was also decisive in the development of United Methodist educational institutions—and will continue to influence the story of their development in the twenty-first century.

The appeal of established religion declined slowly. Jefferson stands almost midway between Jamestown and Watergate: that is, almost as much colonial history occurred prior to the framing of the First Amendment to the Constitution as national history has occurred since. Similarly, the gestation period of religious freedom in the American colonies was long and its birth protracted. The story of American United Methodist education, which appears in volume two of the American saga, is a kind of advent narrative in which religious freedom finally becomes institutionalized. One of the remarkable features of the story of Methodism is that it was introduced to America and prospered during a time of reaction against established religion. I am convinced that its remarkable growth under these conditions was not accidental.

Had the appetite for an established church not been so strong among many influential colonials, sensitivity to the dangers of religious tyranny might never have become so acute among those framing the Bill of Rights. The American colonies may not have been oppressive theocracies, but neither did they champion religious liberty as we experience it today. The Puritans were not noted for religious toleration and they rarely displayed the kind of impartiality we commonly associate with the Enlightenment. Religious liberty in America did not land on Plymouth Rock with the Mayflower! Edwin Gaustad even suggests that if Roger Williams had not been forcibly ejected from Massachusetts in 1637, it is unlikely that he would have become such a determined voice for religious liberty—or that in 1663 he would have sought a charter for Rhode Island offering “the most explicit guarantee of religious liberty that the New World had yet seen.”

Perhaps the best example of religious liberty in the colonies was Pennsylvania. But as Gaustad says, even William Penn can be fully understood only in the light of the persecution of Quakers in England and Ireland during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. United Methodists should remember that cries for religious liberty had been heard for over a century before Jefferson and Madison formulated the First Amendment.

Rhode Island and Pennsylvania were exceptions rather than the rule. It was not the colonial churches who gave birth to religious liberty in the new nation; genuine religious liberty wandered as an orphan in colonial America until eventually it was guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. It acquired a permanent home only after it was
embraced and adopted by specific American institutions. Religious liberty is never secure until it is institutionalized. The genius of the First Amendment and of American Methodism is that neither attempted to secure their futures through established religion. Rather, the nation was to be secured by guaranteeing religious liberty as immunity from religious obligation. American Methodism secured its own future by establishing colleges that chose to embody religious liberty as a distinguishing character trait.

I do not mean to suggest that religious liberty was merely an afterthought of the American Revolution. But neither was the American Revolution a religious revolt. (The burrs under King George’s saddle blanket were of a different sort.) I am simply observing that Jefferson’s formula for religious freedom evolved gradually in a revolutionary climate as a reaction to the inherited disposition colonials had for established religion, that the first amendment was a refinement of Penn’s understanding of religious liberty, and that having matured, this distinctly American understanding of religious freedom infected Methodism almost immediately upon its arrival in America. Henceforth it has become one of the distinctive features of American Methodist education.

Jefferson’s and Madison’s common goal had been to guarantee freedom of religious expression by the authority of government. Religious liberty had to be an integral feature of the new government. The question was how religious liberty could possibly be institutionalized, embodied in the structure of governance, without simultaneously giving one religion advantage over another and thereby undermining the religious liberty of dissenters. To solve this dilemma they chose these words: “All persons shall have full and free liberty of religious opinion; nor shall any be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious institution.” Freedom for religion must henceforth be guaranteed by freedom from religion!

What is truly distinctive about the First Amendment guarantee of religious liberty is not that it protects religious expression but that it does so by providing immunity to any religious obligation whatever. Jefferson’s genius was in capturing with precision an insight that William Penn, Roger Williams, and James Madison shared: the protection of dissenting opinion is never guaranteed until obligations to express any religious opinion whatsoever are successfully removed. They were of one mind in recognizing the importance of the distinction between protection through establishment and protection through immunity. A guarantee of free religious expression by the authority of government cannot be achieved by affording religious expressions official status, that is, by establishing this or that

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religious opinion officially by the power of government. The granting of official sanction to one expression of religious opinion, they saw clearly, is simultaneously a threat to the religious liberty of all who espouse a dissenting religious opinion. The only way to preserve the religious liberty of everyone is to grant immunity to those who would never espouse religious opinions at all!

It is easy to understand why some with slower wit, irked by Jefferson's refusal to profess religion in public, accused him of being opposed to all religion. But rather than reflecting an aversion to religion, Jefferson's refusal to discuss his religious opinions publicly reflects an acute sensitivity to the vulnerability of religious liberty. It is inevitable that an established religion will crush dissent. A zealous pursuit of orthodoxy inevitably threatens religious freedom because it wishes to be done with the religious quest for truth. It sees no need to amend established confessions; it abhors revelation as a continuing story, and consequently has no appetite for surprising, alien recipes. Establish religion and be done with it! Heuristic education, you see, is not really needed. But American Methodists quickly learned better.

To many, then and now, Jefferson's radical solution seems to threaten institutionalized religion rather than guarantee religious liberty. Religious freedom of individuals is fine, they insist, but it is much more important to preserve the future of those religious institutions upon which individuals depend for sustenance. And if institutionalized religion is to be guaranteed a future, then the power of government must be deployed on its behalf. How is free religious expression in this institutional form to be protected against political tyranny if it is not established in perpetuity? Can religious freedom exist apart from the power of governmental authority upholding religious institutions? Do not free religious institutions require protection equal to that enjoyed by individuals or endowments? Or shall the church be compelled forever to compete for its future and to depend upon each generation to rediscover and perpetuate the faith? And apart from the continuity of belief from generation to generation, how does religion survive? Does not religious liberty defined as immunity from religious obligation doom institutional religion to destruction?

This formulation of the dilemma is only slightly different from arguments for established religion or appeals for sanctions protecting religious orthodoxy. It echoes the demands of those who consider the story already told. American United Methodist educational institutions, however, have pursued the religious story, contributed to the story, welcomed dissent because it opens the soul to continuing revelation and spurs the mind to discovery. Reason rather than
power is the proper champion of religion. Religious faith does not silence doubt by establishing orthodoxy; faith moves beyond doubt by an exercise of freedom in the competition of contending opinions. Where there are no adversaries, there is neither faith nor doubt.  

American Justice

Sam Irwin, who became an American folk hero while serving in the Senate, once observed that “liberty cannot exist except under a government of laws,” echoing the words of Daniel Webster: “Whatever government is not a government of laws is a despotism, let it be called what it may.” Because law constitutes a major portion of the language of social obligation, law is clearly one of the pre-requisites of justice in a complex society and international economy. We depend upon law to secure and preserve justice. It is simply indispensable, as Irwin and Webster claimed.

But what is the law, essentially? And how do different understandings of law per se affect our understanding of justice? Professor Wolfgang Maresch, former Rector of the University of Graz, Austria, and Professor of Forensic Medicine, first opened my eyes to the importance of this basic question. In a casual yet serious luncheon conversation shared with John P. Humes, who was then serving as Ambassador from the United States to Austria, and Arthur Price, his cultural attache, we explored the general question of how to control crime while preserving liberty. As we wrestled with these potentially contradictory objectives, it became clear that nothing less than our assumptions about the nature of law itself were at stake.

Public outrage in response to crime is often expressed as a demand to enforce the law. Many who voice such demands to enforce the law assume that an ideal definition of justice undergirds the law and that this ideal is logically prior to human experience, including the commission of crimes. It is assumed that this ideal embodied in law should guide human behavior in just the way that a Platonic idea might. If behavior corresponds to this idealized norm, it is considered just; deviations from it are condemned. It is the responsibility of government to secure conformity to the norm. The ideal of justice brings with it an ideal law (as distinguished from specific laws, which admittedly may be carved). Because law per se is a given, existential questions about the definitions of law and its opposite, crime, are never seriously explored or entertained. The only possible reaction to crime, therefore, is outrage.
Professor Maresch attributed this understanding of the nature of law to the Justinian Code (528 A.D.), suggesting that most European nations have developed their own legal traditions based on an interpretation of Roman law and its idealized assumptions about the nature of justice. English common law, for example, he insisted, can be contrasted with the Napoleonic Code, simply on the basis of its assumption about the nature of justice. The Magna Carta (1215 A.D.) assumed that justice, rather than being an idealized pre-existent norm, is something that must incessantly be worked out by human beings. It does not exist prior to their deliberations about it. Instead, it flows like a mighty stream from human minds engaged in debate about their mutual and corporate responsibilities, their commitments and aspirations. Justice is the product of doubt (Ver-zwei-flung, the division of the mind) repeatedly overcome in courts that rely upon an adversary system, case by case, to formulate definitions of justice. The jury system is no afterthought. The jury system and the adversary system underlying it are essential because justice is not conformity; justice is plural! Justice as the application of precedent must also be the occasion of liberty and application of freedom to the specific circumstances constituting the cases in question.

This luncheon conversation made even the Vienna torte seem bland (please excuse the pun). It helped me see that predetermined definitions of justice are both needed and dangerous. They are needed because no multiplicity of rulings or pronouncements can be fashioned into a coherent system of law until precedent is taken seriously. Prior order in some sense is required if any action is to have assignable meaning, dependable or anticipated consequences, and thus utility. Predetermined definitions of justice become dangerous when we assume that precedents suffice. Professor Maresch’s point was not to discount the role of precedent; it was to reveal the role and importance of freedom (novelty) in our definitions of justice. Those who strive to be responsible in a changing world, those who are faced with unprecedented circumstances or new issues, cannot assume that precedent will be adequate to the occasion. Those who recognize not only the obligations undergirding the status quo but who also acknowledge their responsibility for the law itself (that it always be good law, now as well as then), will consent to a public debate about the demands of justice and will celebrate the combined wisdom of courts, of juries, of contending lawyers and of doubtful minds. The problem is not merely that justice is often hidden; the more difficult problem is that justice is often not yet fully defined.
Martin Buber once told a Hasidic tale to illustrate that one of the recurring ironies of life is that we understand important truths only after they are revealed in a foreign tongue by a stranger. What I heard in my English speaking mind was surely not exactly what Professor Maresch said in German. During the years that have intervened, I have surely caricatured his insights or attributed to him inventions of my own imagination. But what a wonderful example such accretions are of the crucial point made during that conversation! Perhaps something new ought to occur! If the point of that conversation was that such deliberations must continue if they are to preserve the authenticity of their subject matter (justice), then perhaps the conversation we had over lunch in Graz can itself be a model to illustrate how justice must be understood—through deliberation—and why justice is never fully understood if we ponder it abstractly or apply it to ourselves in static isolation. Justice is shared. Its definitions must expand with community experience. Because the conversation I had with Professor Maresch, Ambassador Hume, and Arthur Price surprised us all, the conversation is itself a paradigm of the process through which justice occurs and is eventually understood.

That our deliberations about justice should have yielded agreement is remarkable. Thinking the thoughts of others and learning from them is not simple. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that successful deliberations also produce unprecedented surprises. They reveal the character and nature of justice itself, not only by revealing what justice has required (precedent) but by surprising us with what else it herewith does and henceforth shall involve. But most remarkable of all, the discovery that justice reflects the insights of divergent minds and can be discovered amid the deliberation of adversaries is the most enlightening insight of all. American jurisprudence is distinctive by virtue of its refusal to establish justice as an esoteric and idealized norm. American jurisprudence is distinctive by virtue of its deliberate and conscious insistence that justice, rather than merely requiring the enforcement of the law, demands the application of law as a mechanism for defining justice as we attempt to shoulder responsibility in community. This distinction between law as the embodiment of an idealized norm and law as a mechanism for shoudering responsibility influenced American United Methodist education as much as any feature of our theological tradition. American United Methodist education is distinguished in large part by its dependence upon what Professor Maresch identified as the distinctive feature of American
jurisprudence, namely its understanding of justice as the occasion of liberty. This assumption about the nature of justice implies that education must reconcile knowledge (precedent) with discovery (the unprecedented). It must resist established orthodoxy if it is to guarantee its own future and avoid self-destruction.

Simply put, we insure the integrity of education in exactly the same way that we perpetuate justice—not merely by enforcing educational standards but by evoking the perpetual commitment of contending minds to use what is known as a mechanism for shouldering responsibility for discovery of what is yet unknown. We do not often learn from like-minded tutors. Only those who surprise us, challenge our opinions and insist that we shoulder the burden of proof for our convictions offer us an opportunity for education.

**Summary and Implications for Education**

The story of American United Methodist education as I interpret it is a drama in which leading roles are assigned to two distinctly American values: religious liberty as Jefferson understood it and social justice as our adversarial court system defines it. Religious liberty and social justice are keystones of education and prerequisites of academic integrity. The challenges of these political values energize the academic enterprise, contribute to the character of scholars and institutions, and protect their integrity. Education, in the final analysis, is a quest for freedom and justice.

The major premise undergirding my interpretation of this story as a story about freedom is that liberty, a prerequisite both for faith and education, cannot be preserved through the establishment of orthodoxy. Freedom, whether religious or academic, requires immunity from obligations to espouse specified opinions, that is, to equate the claims of orthodoxy with truth and justice. Otherwise, one could never legitimately entertain dissenting opinions, learn something new, or even deepen one’s understanding of something old.

The minor premise of my interpretation of this story as a story about justice is that justice is properly determined case by case by antagonists deliberating in an adversary system. Justice understood in this distinctly American way does not merely tolerate differences of opinion about social responsibility: it capitalizes on the contributions of dissenting opinion. Justice does not bring order out of conflict by extracting conformity to some pre-existent ideal. Neither does justice homogenize; it synthesizes. Justice is a dialectical process that incorporates embellishments of the human
story by expanding the horizons of responsibility. Justice is an occasion of freedom within an orderly yet changing world.

The general conclusion to be drawn from these premises is that authentic education is heuristic. It is endless discovery—both for individuals who open themselves to the unknown and for universities who institutionalize discovery by facilitating free inquiry. Learning presupposes respect for the unknown and issues from the expectation that what has not yet happened and is not yet understood may enhance what is already believed. Ideology and orthodoxy encourage intellectual suicide. Rather than preserving its authenticity by certifying orthodoxy or exposing the truth, education earns its keep by perpetually shouldering the burden of proof for its expanding claims and conclusions.

The dilemma Jefferson faced in his effort to preserve religious liberty and the dilemma that American jurisprudence faces in its effort to achieve justice is the same dilemma education faces in its efforts to remain heuristic and thereby to offer deference to whatever the future reveals. Religious liberty, social justice, and education, all three, are placed in jeopardy by the demands of misguided champions who insist upon establishment to insure the future. Each of the three must preserve something precious—liberty, equity, or knowledge—but without threatening the future by idolizing the past. All must protect what has already been achieved but not at the expense of forsaking what is yet to be revealed. All three must allow novelty, whether in the guise of creativity, unprecedented responsibility, or discovery, its rightful role in the ongoing story. Novelty alone distinguishes the future from the past and keeps the story alive. Just as Jefferson understood that we cannot preserve religious liberty through established religion, and just as American jurists understand that justice cannot be well served by precedent alone, education must understand that authentic academic enterprise must shoulder the burden of proof for its claims. Integrity in education cannot be preserved by attempting to be done with discovery or by establishing academic orthodoxy once for all.

To insist that everyone incessantly bear the burden of proof for one’s religious, legal, moral, and scientific opinions—even those commonly accepted—is insulting to those who see themselves as partisans of truth. It seems to them a dishonorable burden, one that questions the reality of truth and one that challenges rather than preserves the achievements of history. It is ironical that religious liberty should be served by granting immunity to religious belief, that justice can be served by adversaries whose deliberations go beyond...
precedent, or that education should preserve its integrity by accepting the burden of proof even for its most revered axioms, but that is what the American political experience has taught us. The United Methodist university must welcome the challenge of dissenting opinion, resist its appetite for established truth, and refuse to become a partisan of ideology. To remain free, to nourish social justice, and to advance knowledge, we must consent to be advocates rather than authorities, we must offer rather than impose our insights. We must voluntarily bear the burden of proof for our claims and conclusions.

There is a remarkable affinity between these distinctly American political ideals and certain theological convictions underlying the Wesleyan free-church tradition. United Methodists, true to their Wesleyan heritage as they strive toward perfection, do not promote established religion. One virtue of United Methodists is that they simply do not know how to bring theology to closure. From the beginning they were skeptical of formal theological confessions and sought to provide a future for the church by organizing free colleges and universities rather than by defending orthodoxy. United Methodist education, like American education generally, has become distinctly heuristic. It maintains a healthy uncertainty and respects inquiry as necessary in any continuing story. It believes with enthusiasm; it advocates with conviction; but it does not evade responsibility by shifting the burden of proof to dissenters. United Methodists are an eschatological people of the Holy Spirit. They expect to be surprised by God speaking through the voices of strangers in alien tongues as the story of heaven and earth unfolds. Consequently, they view education as the heuristic exercise of freedom striving to become responsible.

Obedience to truth does not require acceptance of orthodoxy. Obedience requires deference to the given, deference to the eschatological voice of the future even when discerned in an echo from the past. Such obedience harkens to the Beyond, to a word that frees the earth and all humanity from the bondage of what is. Obedience to the truth, whether expressed in religious faith or heuristic education, is an exercise in freedom, a daring response to the risks and challenges of an unknown future, a voluntary and perpetual shouldering of the burden of proof in the face of discovery. The simple truth is that we seldom learn anything significant except from strangers speaking in a foreign tongue. Who else could get the attention of academics with tenure?!
Notes


2. Ibid. When describing Massachusetts and Connecticut as colonies that advocated an established church, Gaustad reports that “Although the term theocracy cannot properly be applied to these two colonies, the term establishment surely can. The alliance between civil and ecclesiastical forces was intimate, meaningful and enduring... In the eighteenth century, dissent made some inroads, but toleration... came slowly, reluctantly, and quite unevenly,” p. 20-21.

3. Ibid., p. 23 and 24. Williams guaranteed that in Rhode Island no one would be molested or punished for “any difference of opinion in matters of religion” and that every person would “freely and fully have and enjoy... their own judgments and consciences.” Cf. Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island* (New York, 1975), p. 70.

4. Compare the language of William Penn in *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience* (1670) and in his first set of laws for Pennsylvania published in 1682 with the language Jefferson chose to support the first amendment. Penn wrote “all persons living in this province who confess and acknowledge the mighty and eternal God to be the creator, upholder, and ruler of the world, and that hold themselves obliged in conscience to live peaceably and justly in civil society, shall in no ways be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion or practice in matters of faith and worship, nor shall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever.” See Jean R. Soderlund, ed., *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania 1680-1684* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 172; cf. Gaustad, p. 27.

5. “American Methodism was born in 1784, one year after the end of the Revolution and a mere five years before George Washington accepted the nomination for the presidency. ... By 1800 Methodists, only sixteen years old as an American church, numbered at least sixty-five thousand; in a single decade that number more than doubled, then doubled once again by 1850; by 1850 the new nation found itself with over half a million Methodists and with far more Methodist churches than those of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans combined. Methodists not only increased numerically, they exploded spatially.” See Gaustad, Ibid., p. 125.

6. Ibid., p. 38.

7. Ibid.

8. With the simple phrase “whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free,” Thomas Jefferson exposed the keystone for religious liberty and religious education alike. He was convinced that “truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict... errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.” Section II of the statute Jefferson proposed to the Virginia legislature January 16, 1786, expresses the distilled essence of his understanding of religious liberty: “Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious
worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities."

Ibid., pps. 41 and 151.

9. See Wendy O'Flaherty, "The Aims of Education Address," The University of Chicago Record, Volume XX, Number 1 (April 10, 1986). O'Flaherty recounts this Hasidic tale as it was retold by Heinrich Zimmer. "...a Rabbi who lived in a ghetto in Cracow...dreamt that he should go to Prague, where he would discover a hidden treasure buried beneath the principal bridge leading to the castle of the Bohemian kings. He went to Prague and waited by the bridge for many days, until one night he was questioned by the Christian captain of the guard on the bridge, and the Rabbi told the captain about the dream that had sent him there. The captain laughed and said that it was foolish to trust a dream, since he himself had been commanded in a dream to go to Cracow and to search for a great treasure buried in a dirty corner behind the stove of a Jewish Rabbi named Isaac son of Jekel—clearly a ludicrous proposal, since half the men in the ghetto were called Isaac and the other half Jekel. The Rabbi, who was Isaac son of Jekel, said nothing, but hurried home and found in his house, behind the stove, the treasure. As Zimmer comments on this myth, 'Now the real treasure...is never far away; it is not to be sought in any distant region; it lies buried in the innermost recess of our home, that is to say, our own being...But there is the odd and persistent fact...that the only one who reveals to us the meaning of our cryptic inner message must be a stranger, of another creed and a foreign race.'"
Ronald J. Allen

The Language of Color in the Service of Justice

In the summer of 1990, I visited the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Zambia (a nation in south central Africa) and attended a class session. The subject was illegal economic practices; a team of students gave a report on the black market in the developing nations of Africa, stressing the exploitation and injustice inherent in it. The instructor and the sixty students seated in a semicircle were black.

At the conclusion of the report, a participant from the Republic of South Africa complimented the team on the essence of the report and then continued, "But why do you call it a black market? After all the years of exploitation and injustice practiced by white people in my country, we should call it a white market." The class broke out in thunderous laughter.

After the laughter subsided, a participant from Ghana commented, "We're laughing, but there is an important side to this. Why should we do to white people what they have done to us? We need to find better ways to use the words white and black."

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The Problem of Racist English and a Solution

The class had put its finger on an important matter that has been taken seriously (at least among Caucasians) only in the last few years. The language of color affects our self-images and social behaviors. Furthermore, when we speak of light and dark, we often use expressions which signal, subtly but significantly, the ways in which we value and treat others. We transfer the values that we associate with lighter and darker colors to persons of lighter and darker skin hues.

A growing number of Christians thus lament that much ordinary English usage is itself color-biased. We often think of light colors in positive ways and of dark colors in negative ways. For instance, white often evoke a sense of purity and goodness whereas black evokes a sense of unclean and evil. Caucasians, in particular, frequently relate these associations to the superiority of lighter-colored peoples over darker-colored peoples. English in itself thus reinforces racism and contributes to self-hatred among peoples of color.

Of course, today few Christians of any color would admit to being racially prejudiced. The official pronouncements of the long-established churches in the United States and Canada stand against prejudice, discrimination, racism, and oppression. But sociologists tell us that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of racially antagonistic incidents is rising rapidly each year in our society. Even in the church, we find evidence that color barriers still exist. For instance, few largely Euro-American congregations call African-American pastors and few largely African-American congregations call Euro-American pastors. Color-biased language continues to help enforce a color-biased social world.

The color prejudice of our language can be criticized in the light of the gospel. The gospel is the news that God loves each and all with gracious, impartial love and that God wills justice for each and all. English usage which contributes to racism (no matter how unintentionally on the part of the user) must be corrected. The continued use of the stereotyped patterns of the language of light and darkness will only prolong discrimination.

One of the most common of the current remedies for language prejudice is to excise images of light and dark and to replace them with other language which speaks of good and evil but without color stigma. For instance, instead of describing something as black, it is described as stained.
I agree that much of our common English speech is color prejudiced and that it contributes to racism. Indeed, this is true of some of our most beloved images of God. However, I believe there is a better way to make our use of the language of color more loving and just than to wash the color out of our vocabulary. We can recover the full use of the colors of light and dark. We can particularly retrieve neglected but positive uses of the language of darkness as well as neglected but negative use of the language of light. In this way, our language can be truly inclusive. I first review these uses and refer to representative examples. I then offer seven principles which can help us put the whole language of color into the service of justice.

Resources for an Inclusive Approach to the Language of Color

Everyday language does contain associations of light colors as positive and dark colors as negative. For instance, we think of white and light in connection with cleanliness, goodness, hope, purity, virtue. When someone makes an important discovery, we sometimes say, “The light came on.” Dawn is a time of relief and rebirth. A savior figure is a white knight. And we do think of black and dark in connection with unclean, evil, sadness. A person who is thinking wrongly is “in the dark.” We have many negative expressions which make use of dark colors: a black day, black magic, black list, black Monday, blackmail, blackball, dark ages, night of despair. We are prone to fear and worry in the night. Shakespeare spoke of depression as “that black dog.” A black hole in space is a place where (according to popular mythology) matter disappears. These associations are not limited to Euro-America; Mindolo participants told us that some African languages manifest similar phenomena, such as proverbs about black (bad) sheep.

But in everyday language, white can have negative connotations and black can have positive ones. For instance, a white flag is a sign of surrender. We speak of white elephants and white trash. A person who is white as a sheet (or white as a corpse) is fearful or sick. Poets speak of the whiteness of death. We whitewash a person who has committed a wrong. (It would be a white lie to deny this.) The movie The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman tells the story of an ex-slave (Miss Jane) in which she uses the phrase “white devil” to curse an albino horse which kills her husband.
The African-American community speaks of black as beautiful, a usage which is increasingly common among Euro-Americans. A black belt is the highest achievement in karate. A corporation which is financially successful is in the black. Night can be a time of positive mystery; we stare into the deep bucket of space and feel a sense of awe and wonder. Night is a time of romance, of sexual union and ecstasy. Is there a more secure feeling than cuddling under warm covers on a chilly night? Indeed, the night is as much a time of positive mystery as it is of fear of the unknown. We labor and grow weary in the day but rest at night. We think of dark soil as rich and fertile. Rain falls from dark skies. Coal is a source of energy. The novel Black Beauty provides a positive image of blackness for many.

Images of God

The Bible repeatedly speaks of God as light, as dwelling in light or as bringing light (e.g. 2 Sam. 22:29; Pss. 4:6; 18:29; 27:1; 36:9; 89:15; 104:2; Isa. 60:19; Micah 7:8; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 22:5). Light is a central figure for depicting God from the time of the early church to the present. Many hymns use the symbolism of light to describe God and the effect of God's presence, as in "Sun of my soul, thou Savior near: it is not night if thou be near." Many visual representations depict God as caucasian, often as aged, bearded, and white-haired.

Though the references are not as numerous, we also find that God is positively associated with darkness. God dwells in thick darkness (e.g. Exod. 20:20-21) or in a cloud (e.g. Exod. 13:21; 24:16-27). The psalms speak of God's absolute autonomy by describing God as surrounded by clouds and darkness (e.g. Ps. 97:2). Hosea speaks of God's love as like a cloud (6:4). Darkness is a place of divine treasures (Isa. 45:3). God is as present in the dark as in the light (Ps. 139:12). Claus Westermann thus notes that Hebrew peoples "are aware of the differences between a darkness which protects existence and a darkness which threatens it, between darkness which is a part of the natural order and the darkness of chaos." Dionysius the Mystical Aeropagite refers to God as the Divine Darkness. And peoples in other cultures frequently represent deity in dark tones. Some congregations dim their sanctuary lights during prayer because the darkness evokes a sense of God's closeness.
Images of Christ

Christ, too, is often connected with light, as when the Johannine Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; cf. 1:4; 1:9; 9:5; 12:46). The Nicene Creed expresses the epitome of this connection when it confesses that Christ is "light of light." The Christian year draws heavily upon motifs of light and darkness, especially Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter. Missionaries in earlier generations carried the light of the gospel to gentiles and to regions imagined in darkness. Visual representations of Christ in Euro-American churches frequently show Christ as a Euro-American. But the influence of this image permeates far beyond Euro-America: an African-American pastor occasionally reports that his or her congregation is reluctant to give up its painting of a Euro-American Jesus in favor of an African-American or Semitic Jesus.

Outside Euro-America, Christ is often represented positively as black (and as other races). In Africa, Christ is not only visually portrayed as an African but is spoken of as Chief and Ancestor (significant designations of leadership in traditional African societies). Furthermore, Mary and Jesus appear in mosaics and stained glass in several European cathedrals as the Black Madonna and the Black Christ.

Images of Purity and Sinfulness

Salvation and divine favor are sometimes denoted by light (e.g. Ps. 51:3; Isa. 60:1; Luke 1:79; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:14). White is the color of heaven and the angels. To be moral is to walk in the light (e.g. Prov. 4:18-19; Eph. 5:8-9). However, our tradition does associate judgment and condemnation with light. The white skin of leprosy is divine punishment in Numbers 12 and it signifies impurity (e.g. Lev. 13:8; 14:2; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chron. 26:4). In the Book of Revelation, Caesar dresses in a white robe, thereby attempting to deceive the people into thinking that his false, idolatrous, oppressive rule is God’s rule (6:2).

Contrariwise, judgment and condemnation are sometimes denoted by darkness (e.g. Deut. 28:9; Amos 5:18; Matt. 25:30; 2 Peter 2:4). In the Johannine literature, the cosmos itself is a place of darkness (characterized by lying, slavery, violence, sickness, death) and in need of the light of revelation. We sing of “The Prince of Darkness, grim” whose dominion is darkness. Some picture hell as a bleak, black place illumined only by torturous fire while others “picture” hell as a black
void. Sinners and those engaged in immorality are said sometimes to walk in darkness (e.g. Ps. 82:5; John 3:19; Rom. 13:12; 1 John 1:5). The Book of Job brings this way of thinking to a poetic height.

There are those who rebel against the light,
who are not acquainted with its ways,
and do not stay in its paths.

The murderer rises at dusk
_to kill the poor and needy,
and in the night is like a thief.

The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,
saying, "No eye will see me";
and he disguises his face.

In the dark they dig through houses;
_by day they shut themselves up;
they do not know the light.

For deep darkness is morning to all of them;
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness. (24:13-17, NRSV)

However, darkness is also a positive arena. God speaks to people in the night through dreams (e.g. Gen. 20:3, 31:24; Num. 12:6; 22:20; 2 Kings 7:4). God acts redemptively in the dark; the Exodus takes place at night (Exod. 11:9-13). The apocalyptic consummation of history is sometimes envisioned as taking place in the night (e.g. Matt. 25:1-13).

Thus, the English tongue, and particularly Christian vocabulary, gives us a full range of positive and negative associations with light and dark colors. If we excise all words and phrases which suggest the superiority of light over darkness, we deprive the Christian house of powerful metaphoric figures. If we excise images of the superiority of light over darkness but leave other patterns in use (e.g. black as positive, white as negative) then we open the way for thinking of darkly colored peoples as superior to lightly colored peoples. This would only reverse our current pattern of color bias.

**Developing a More Just Language of Color**

I suggest that we draw upon the full resources of the symbolism of light and darkness in our language to speak of the full range of the
Christian life, and indeed, of all life. Toward this end, I propose seven practical strategies to develop ways of speaking, writing, and singing which use the language of color in the service of justice.

First, church leaders of all races can bring these matters to congregational attention. Leaders can talk candidly in preaching, teaching and other settings about problems inherent in much of our language of color and about its complicity in racism. Leaders can also talk about the possibilities for justice afforded by our language. Many Christians may be surprised to discover these connections. Perhaps some will be dubious and will resist such insight. However, this only points to the need for sensitive, imaginative, persistent pastoral leadership. The appearance of the language of color in a preaching text, for instance, might be an ideal time to devote a sermon to the relationship between the gospel and the language of color and its personal and social effects.

Second, in all original expression, we can move away from exclusive use of color imagery which contributes to traditional negative associations with people of dark skin hues and we can move towards a more balanced use of the language of darkness to speak of both positive and negative aspects of God and life. In preaching, teaching, music, writing, and conversation, we need not continually use figures of speech such as black market to the exclusion of other color associations. Sometimes church leaders can come up with wording which not only removes the onus of negative color associations but which may help the listener get a more accurate picture. The phrase “illegal market” both does away with the color reference and gives the hearer a clear explanation of the business transaction: it is illegal. We can then reserve negative associations with dark colors for select occasions and we can enlarge positive uses of darkness. For example, one might begin a prayer, “O God, you are like a summer night, filled with more promise than we can see, enfolding us in warmth....”

Third, in original expression we can move away from exclusive uses of color which help exalt people with light skin tones and we can move toward more balanced uses of lightness to speak of both positive and negative aspects of life and God. Again, church leaders can generate wording which is vivid, expressive, and evocative but which does not repeatedly reinforce the unfortunate side effects of devaluing people of dark color and of exalting people of light color.

In fact, we are living in a time when the church is widely interested in religious language, especially language for God. Books, articles, poems, hymns, and sermons are daily increasing our reservoir of images with which to speak of God and the Christian life.
experience of life. So, instead of speaking of God as the one in whom there is no darkness at all, we might borrow an image from contemporary hymn writer Thomas Troeger and former homiletics professor Halford Luccock and speak of God as a spendthrift lover.

Fourth, we can balance positive and negative uses of the language of color in the life of the church. For instance, as aesthetically and theologically possible, a service or worship which includes negative references to darkness (e.g. "the black night of sin") could also include negative references to lightness. A service of worship in which the sermon exalts God as light might contain a prayer which speaks to God as dark.

At times, church leaders plan to use material which relies on one aspect of the language of color but cannot find balanced imagery. On such occasions, the leader might choose not to use that piece of material and to find another which is free of color associations. For example, if balancing imagery cannot be woven into the service, worship planners might forgo "Christ whose glory fills the skies, Christ the true, the only light; Sun of righteousness arise; triumph o'er the shades of night." Instead, "Blessing and Honor and Glory and Power" might help the congregation focus on Christ without color language.

We cannot do this mechanically, of course. And balancing imagery may not be necessary on every single occasion when color talk comes into the church's life. But careful monitoring will increase the likelihood that, over time, the community will develop a more just language of color.

Fifth, we can often revise material which is color exclusive. I am thinking particularly of hymns, creeds, liturgical elements, and resources for preaching and teaching and of occasions when balance (principle three) is not possible. For example, sensitive souls might revise a collect so that its prayerful intent is honored and its revised form echoes the language of the original but without color-negative undertones. Of course, such efforts must respect the aesthetic, theological, and historical integrity of the piece, as well as comply with copyright regulations.

This approach represents a challenge to leaders in certain phases of the Christian life. Music and liturgies for Advent and Christmas, for instance, are permeated by the imagery of light illuminating darkness. By thinking ahead, disciplined planners can make judicious selection of material. They can be thoughtful in revision of existing texts and can take advantage of the contemporary explosion in hymns and liturgical resources to achieve color balance.
In some settings, it is impossible to substitute, retouch, or balance inherited material. Church law occasionally demands the use of material which contains unfortunate associations. In such cases, church leaders could use the material but accompany it with a brief commentary similar to the type proposed below for use in connection with difficult passages from the Bible.

Sixth, in settings where balance is not possible, we can paraphrase problematic color language of biblical origin if it is clear that the Bible is not being quoted. Paraphrase attempts to capture the essence of the meaning of a passage but in a way that can be more easily understood than in the original by a contemporary person. Scripture often furnishes language for liturgy, hymns, creeds, and other speech in the church. These uses usually do not seek to quote the Bible verbatim but seek, more generally, to evoke the memory of the Bible and to encourage listeners to associate in a positive way with the biblical tradition. In such instances, paraphrase is acceptable.

The paraphraser can frequently sidestep prejudicial color language. For example, the English translation of Amos 5:8 reads that the day of the Lord “is darkness, not light.” A paraphrase might say that the day of the Lord is punishing judgment and not salvation. Ministers can paraphrase in similar ways in public discourse as long as they are clearly talking about a biblical text and not citing the text as such.

Seventh, when the Bible is read as a scripture lesson, as the basis for a sermon or class discussion or is otherwise quoted, we must honor the wording of the text. In addition, we can offer supplementary remarks which interpret the significance of the language of color in the text. The historical integrity of the text itself is at stake. The Bible is a genuine Other and is entitled to be what it is. We respect the content and imagery of the Bible in the same way that we respect the integrity of other persons. I may not like the way my neighbors look, but I have no right to sneak into their home at night and perform plastic surgery on them while they are sleeping.

To be sure, we should always examine English translations to determine whether the English renders the original language in a fair way. But, with respect to problems associated with the language color, the relief afforded by translation is usually limited.

When the color language of the Bible is problematic for today’s readers, the minister (or other leader) can briefly do four things: (a) The leader can specify the problems which are exacerbated for today’s world by the language of color in the text. (b) The reader can explain that such language is part of the cultural milieu of the Bible. In that milieu, racial prejudice did not fall as much along lines of
color as it did along lines of geography. Racial tension in the Mediterranean world was not a black-white issue as much as it was an east-west issue. Nonetheless, the leader can make a friendly critique of the language of color in the text in the light of the gospel and of today's concerns. The leader can state the fundamental intention of the text in language that is not color-coded. Such comments, in the course of pastoral life, can become important teaching moments.

Conclusion

The use of the language of color in these ways will serve the gospel and the interests of both dark and light people. Misperceptions of both lighter and darker people will move towards correction. In particular, our view of dark-hued persons will be enhanced as we draw upon positive aspects of dark color associations and our view of light-hued persons will be given a sobering touch as we recall associations of light and negativity. This approach will thus encourage persons of all colors to understand themselves and others realistically and honestly.

Language is one of our most precious gifts. In myriad of ways it contributes to how we see ourselves, to how we see others, and to how we act. Present routine English usage often contributes to racism. To continue to use these patterns is to support injustice. Biased associations are so deeply entrenched in the consciousness of many U.S. citizens that these stereotypes can be displayed only by the most potent counterbalancing imagery. But the gospel itself calls for a just world and hence for our best efforts. The language of color can be a powerful servant of justice when it is carefully used. Indeed, it can help create a new social world.

Notes

Teaching Authority in Cultural Perspective

The interest of educators in cultural diversity is not new. Since the time of the early church, missionaries have struggled with problems of translating words and concepts into other languages and cultural contexts in order to communicate the gospel to people with radically different world views. In our more recent past, church educators have explored customs and traditions of peoples around the world. Sunday school papers regularly carried stories about children from “far away lands.” Missionaries on furlough visited churches, bridging the distance between the foreign and the familiar. Children participated in geography contests to locate denominational mission sites almost as often as they played Bible memory games.

Educators have only recently asked how culture influences education, however. The guiding question is: When cultural diversity is taken seriously in the church’s education, what is authoritative? This question is urgent for peoples who perceived that the church’s education helped marginalize and oppress them. It is strongly resisted by educators who fear that their work may be undermined, for it implies that we need a new angle of vision to approach questions of authority when we devise our curriculum, interpret scripture and sacred texts, and order educational systems in the larger community.

Richard Osmer’s study of the teaching office supplies the
framework for our discussion. He applies the Protestant reformers' conciliar approach to questions of authority to three major church education tasks. These include: 1) "the determination of the normative beliefs and practices of the church, 2) the reinterpretation of these beliefs and practices in shifting cultural and historical contexts, and 3) the formation and sustenance of educational institutions, processes, and curricula..." As helpful as Osmer's work is in clarifying the processes of education, he did not explore the role of culture in the determination of what the churches have considered to be authoritative. He conceives culture as a passive phenomenon, acted and shaped by the gospel as it is communicated and interpreted across the generations and between cultures. In particular, Osmer does not address the problem raised by many Christians today regarding the cultural content to be found in what and how the church teaches. It is this challenge to our understanding of what functions authoritatively for us that needs to be clarified.

The Cultural Challenge to Education

Cultural pluralism radically challenges educational policies and doctrines rooted in the cultural traditions of western Europe. The challenge comes not merely from the presence of peoples from many cultures; cultural communities have always lived in, alongside, over, and around other cultures. It occurs today because the "power dynamics" at work among the various groupings of a society have become increasingly fluid. The consequence, as Fumitaka Matsuoka points out, may be seen in the destabilization of older and hierarchical structures of human interaction and the decreasing ability of people to anticipate the nature of their own future.

We experience the fluidity of relationships among diverse cultural groups in concrete ways. It occurs in the conflict between those who demand bilingual education and those who advocate English as the official language of the nation. It has led a growing number of educators to participate in the quest for a multicultural education. It is evident in the refusal of artists, politicians, community leaders, and educators to use dominant cultural canons.

A clear example of this tension may be seen in Paula Gunn Allen's distinction between Western and Indian aesthetic canons regarding what is to be considered beautiful—an issue loaded with political and educational overtones. "Tribal art," she observes, "embodies the principle of kinship, rendering the beautiful in terms of connectedness of elements in harmonious, balanced, respectful..."
proportion of each and to all-in-All." For Allen, the individualism at
the heart of Western art and life is antithetical to the commonality of
consciousness integral to Indian art and life. The Western
assumption that one can understand another culture by studying its
art or religion collapses in this encounter. No universal transcends
the consciousness informing both cultural perspectives. They are
fundamentally and irreconcilably different. If the differences of
consciousness that shape cultural perspectives are ultimately diverse,
then churches in western cultural traditions do not have a secure
basis for isolating authority in education. It means that we must
rethink our very use of the phrase teaching office. The challenge
occurs at many levels.

What is to be considered normative in our education? This
question is larger than the doctrinal statements which often provide
the core of a community's teaching. Instead, it has to do with the way
we view the world. If Edward Eggleston, for example, had been aware
of cultural pluralism at the turn of the century while writing The
Transit of Civilization, his account would have acknowledged that
African, Hispanic, and other cultural traditions have shaped
American U.S. consciousness. As it was, he noted only that the
continuities of English culture and experience were woven into the
fabric of North American life. In similar fashion church educators
would have acknowledged that peoples of diverse cultures respond
very differently to the gospel. The problem is not merely one of
translating and adapting the gospel so that members of another
culture will comprehend it; we must also see that culture informs
their experience of the gospel. When we face up to the cultural
relativity of our normative values and beliefs, we must reassess our
interpretation of educational experiences.

In his epochal work American Education: The National Experience
1793-1876, Lawrence Cremin correctly directs our attention to the
interdependence of agencies at work "in the forming of American
society"—schools, churches, families, newspapers, journals, tracts,
colleges, libraries. Building on Bernard Bailyn's ecological approach
to the study of a community's education, Cremin has described the
contribution of these various agencies over the last forty years to the
"deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or
acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as
any learning that results from the effort." Cremin believes that a
community's total educational efforts provide continuity in the
formation of cultural values and perspectives. Education is not
limited to what happens in the schools, therefore.

TEACHING AUTHORITY
Cremin followed Eggleston’s view that national character developed within the framework of the transit and transformation of English culture. In American education, the domination of English culture did not come easily. The early colonial experience often included conflict over cultural values and approaches to education. “But in the end, English culture triumphed, and with it English law, English language, and English custom.” In a comprehensive and original way, Cremin shows how the nation’s education extended and renewed its dominant English cast. Authority on education was based not only on explicit doctrines, beliefs, and values but also on a specific cultural consciousness about the meanings of human experience. When we approach the question of educational authority sensitive to cultural diversity today, our attention shifts from the stated belief and value systems of an institution or community to the cultural consciousness that informs the webs of meaning integral to human thought and action.

Given this “normative” perspective of dominant cultural consciousness, how do we view other cultures? United States educational history, for example, characterizes the contributions of non-English or non-European cultures to the national life variously as hindrances, embellishments, or enrichments. The education of cultural minorities is described insofar as it negotiates with, accommodates, or resists the prevailing educational policies and procedures of the dominant culture. In a thoughtful chapter on the “outcasts” of nineteenth-century United States society, Cremin concludes that one prevailing assumption guided the educational thinking and experience of the period: “People could be educated to transcend the barriers of ethnicity and religion in order to become full-fledged members of the American (sic) community, but they could not be educated to transcend the barriers of race.”

Cremin missed (as do most of us) the systematic, deliberate, and sustained efforts of minority or marginated cultures to extend, negotiate, and renew their own identities and perspectives within the educational ethos of the dominant culture. We pay little attention to the fact that the African-American church, family, and school extended and renewed African-American culture. We ignore the fact that other minority and marginated cultural communities similarly used education to sustain themselves in the face of educational traditions rooted in the nation’s English cultural traditions.

Our understanding of education is also challenged through the encounter of cultures. This insight may be seen most clearly in the changing goals of the African-American community since the mid-1950s. The initial quest for equal access to the opportunities and
structures of life in the United States by means of the schools has more recently shifted to the affirmation of Black identity and Black culture. It has shifted yet again as African-Americans look for continuity with their African heritage. This movement took shape initially in the quest for integrated schools and institutions—access to normative educational agencies. It then evolved into a quest for ethnic studies and curriculum, which would interpret African-American experience adequately. Most recently it has become a quest for developing African-American identity and destiny through a multiplicity of community agencies. Many in the African-American community are no longer interested in the normative beliefs, hermeneutical principles, or educational institutions and resources of Western cultural traditions. And African-American participation in the institutions and programs of United States Protestant education continues to decline.

As we approach the end of the century, more and more groups are resisting the ancient patterns of cultural domination. This resistance shows that sanctioned forms of educational authority, including those of the church, have not supplanted or suppressed the power of oppressed, dominated, or marginalized cultures. It is the persistence of cultural influence upon a community’s self-image that leads me to a second consideration. Not only is our view of education challenged. Educators must themselves understand the nature and function of culture.

The Challenge to the Way We View Culture

Culture as a concept has tended to elude scholars. Clifford Geertz points out that even a prominent textbook such as Clyde Kluckhohn’s Mirror for Man can define the word culture in eleven different ways. Common to each definition however, is a view of culture as an objective reality—something that can be broken down into component parts, analyzed and compared, adjusted, adapted, or altered in both planned and unplanned ways. Thus culture can be an object of study accomplished by the study of objects. One can compare and contrast the artifacts, customs, and traditions of the Cheyenne, Tongan, or Serbian peoples. This is the premise for academic programs of ethnic studies. But such study is not strictly neutral: Educators assess cultural patterns and values in relation to their own educational experience. In the United States, therefore, educators often affirm Chinese patterns of personal discipline and denigrate the Hopi style of collaborative learning and African aural learning styles, in part,
because the former reinforces dominant culture (American-U.S.) values of individual initiative and competition and the latter does not. It contributes as well to the lack of awareness among educators, who underestimate the influence of their teaching on students who do not share their cultural heritages. We see culture objectively, and miss the origins of these students’ anger, impotence, resistance, and acquiescence. Then we are surprised when an articulate spokesperson speaks of the “brutal holocaust that seeks to wipe us out,” “the dogmatism” of Western classificatory systems, or the “intellectual apartheid” that leads to “aesthetic colonization.”

The objectification of culture pervades the thinking and practices of theologians and educators in American U.S. churches. For many of us, H. Richard Niebuhr clearly defined the relationship between Christian faith and culture. Consequently we begin with the assumption that “culture is the artificial, secondary environment” which people superimpose on the natural. “It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.” Niebuhr observed that given these elements, culture is “always social.” It consists of “human achievement.” Since those achievements all have intended ends or purposes, culture encompasses a world of diverse values which people seek to realize and conserve in temporal and material ways. This view of culture limits our attention to what can be observed and analyzed. It contributes to the assumption that we can distinguish between things spiritual and things cultural. And it convinces us that in the politics of change, cultural transformation can be planned and understood in rational ways.

Clifford Geertz and others have radically challenged this view of culture. They do not see culture as a human product but as the “webs of meaning” through which people order and make sense out of their experience. For Geertz any cultural event, custom, or artifact consists of a “multiplicity of complex structures,” many of which are imposed upon or “knotted into one another. . . .” These structures form “strange, irregular, and inexplicable” chains of meaning rooted deeply in the pasts of a people. This view of culture informs Bernard Bailyn’s view that the historian untangles the knot in our present understandings in order to discern in the past “the path” that leads to contemporary interpretations of an event, idea, or social experience.

Jerome Bruner notes that this new view of human culture has revolutionary implications. It moves us “away from the strict
structuralism that held that culture was a set of interconnected rules from which people derive particular behaviors to fit particular situations, to the idea of culture as implicit and only semiconnected knowledge of the world from which, through negotiation, people arrive at satisfactory ways of acting in given contexts. From this perspective all understandings of culture are interpretations. They function symbolically for a people, evoking, often in the simplest activity or expression, generations of cultural experience from the well of collective memory.

**Authority and Cultural Diversity in Christian Education**

This discussion of education and culture has three implications for our inquiry into the question of authority in the teaching office. The first is simply that most considerations of the teaching office are grounded in and reflect Western cultural assumptions about the meaning of reality. The normative view emphasizes the linear transmission of meaning, the classification and ordering of beliefs, and the hierarchical assessment of truth. Those who wish to interpret teaching in new situations and circumstances are limited to modalities of logic and rhetoric enhanced by post-enlightenment methods of critical reflection. The approach to learning is predominantly visual. These assumptions obviously have power. They have enlivened the church and its thought for many centuries. But educators who held these assumptions have lacked an awareness of other cultures’ approaches to the task of making sense of gospel realities.

A second implication, rooted in Geertz’s discussion of cultural meaning, is that authority is always contextual. In his words, “culture is not a power” which can attribute something to some other thing. “It is a context” —something within which “social events, behaviors, institutions or processes” can be intelligibly described. Letty Russell makes this point in rejecting hierarchical and patriarchal views of authority to embrace another approach to the discussion of authority deeply rooted in Christian and Jewish tradition. She observes that when authority is viewed as partnership or community, “reality is interpreted in the form of a circle of interdependence.” People who wish to order their lives, therefore, do not submit to a set of laws but participate in the “common task of creating an interdependent community of humanity and nature.”
Russell's view suggests that educators concentrate not on the objects of cultural difference but on the contexts in which these objects take form and give meaning. Furthermore, Russell's discussion of authority helps us discern its spatial character. In western cultures, authority has traditionally functioned from the "top" down. She encourages us to think of authority located in the center. In his discussion of leadership, Richard Bondi pushes the spatial imagery of authority a little further. He distinguishes among various sources of authority for leadership. If the authority of leadership dominates, it functions from outside the center of community. That position limits the mobility of people and ideas, emphasizing control and stability, submission and continuity, and universalism and homogeneity in both benevolent and autocratic ways. In contrast, the authority of leaders in the center emphasizes the ability to negotiate, to listen and engage. Authority is essentially dialectic.

Perhaps Berger's term contestation best describes the kind of interaction it promulgates when one begins with the assumption of diversity—even to the point of cultural antithesis—in human community. It involves "open-minded encounter with other religious possibilities on the level of their truth claims." Berger hastens to add that the consideration of alternative world views does not necessarily lead to their acceptance. But it does mean that a community entertains the possibility of being changed. Bondi calls this process transactional. It means that we take seriously the tasks of transmission and interpretation integral to the teaching office but remain open to the power, the beauty, the truth to be found in those cultures we encounter.

Bondi describes another possible location for the authority that undergirds leadership: the edge of community. The implications for teaching from this perspective are several. Teaching from the edge allows us to see other communities and cultures. It makes listening to other stories, and discerning new dimensions of inherited stories, a routine part of living. It confronts the community with the need to reinterpret its traditions and experience in light of unavoidable cross-cultural encounters. When we teach from the edge we are confronted by the limits of human authority. We encounter the audacity of human attempts to control and dominate. We may also discover the meanings that give credence and purpose to our corporate identities. Bondi concludes that these two patterns of authority are not contrary, but complementary. The actions of those on the edge are informed by the canons of those in the center. The canons of those in the center are tested and updated by those on the...
edge. In other words, the authority that informs our lives in community involves both the actions of transmission and interpretation, continuity and transformation. But in a multicultural community these interactions tend to be more random than linear. One does not first transmit normative beliefs and then apply them to the exigencies of daily life—a time-honored approach to two of the tasks integral to Western cultural views of the teaching office. Nor do we have the luxury of immersing our children in some protective enculturating process with the expectation that they will withstand the ever-present threat to continuity. The contexts in which we find ourselves are not homogenous, even in the enclaves of specific families, classrooms, or congregations. The media alone intrudes upon the insularity of our private lives. Our lives are inherently multicultural. We will necessarily encounter meanings deeply rooted in cultures different from and contrary to our own. And we must negotiate our relationship to them. We are challenged to discern what is authoritative for us as we live in the circle of our community’s identity and purpose and at the edge of its encounters with other communities. Max Stackhouse quotes a study by Natawan B. Lewis to make a point relevant to our discussion of the tasks of the teaching office. In a culturally pluralistic setting, our efforts should lead to “intercontextual understandings of both the texts of the Christian faith and the interdependence of the contexts of the church.” Consequently the quest for that which is authoritative centers on the point of intercultural encounter.

A third implication emerges from the liberationists’ attempt to reclaim the silent and hidden voices in the Christian and Jewish traditions. Although their final goal is indeed to replace the prevailing notions of authority that have dominated the Western Christian consciousness for centuries, their primary contribution is to balance historic notions of authority from the center with the more hidden traditions of authority from the edges of our corporate life. They recognize the contextual character of authority in any of its forms. Of its many characteristics, contextual authority is first and foremost located in specific times and places.

This conclusion requires a radical change for any discussion of the teaching office, as Matsuoka has asserted. “In a pluralistic and multicultural world the order of knowing and doing moves from particular to universal” rather than from the reverse direction. Educational approaches seeking to promulgate “homogenous educational ordering”—a traditional concern of the teaching office—are replaced in a multicultural world in which the recognition
of "one's dependence on the web of humankind" becomes the source for an awareness of one's own particularity. This perspective, of course, informs the interpretations of the various liberation theologies. It lies behind the interest of missionary leaders and theologians to discern local sources of authority for ancient Christian teachings. It is reflected in the use of terms like inculturation, indigenization, and contextualization.\textsuperscript{19} Aylward Shorter makes the same point. "Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form. When we speak of Christian faith or Christian life, we are necessarily speaking of a cultural phenomenon. It is a distinctive way of life that can only operate culturally."\textsuperscript{20} But Christianity cannot function as a distinctive way of life if its cultural forms are alien to a people. Christianity then facilitates the imposition of one culture on another. That is the way of domination and not liberation. Church teachings and authoritative structures can weave hostile rather than redemptive meanings into the cultural web. That process, while often ensuring obedience to the teachings of the church, tends to raise up Christians who are incapable of seeing the image of Christ in their neighbor.

**Implications for the Teaching Office**

1. In our quest for the normative we must reconstrue the relationship between the universal and the particular. When we recognize that no attempt to transmit or interpret the gospel can avoid explicit cultural symbols and structures, we will see that any attempt to engage in educational activities from the center must be seen as efforts to extend cultural domination. If we approached the quest for normative beliefs and actions with the expectation that the particular reflects the universal rather than with the assumption that the universal is revealed in the particular, we would acknowledge the finitude of all human perceptions and constructions. We would recognize that every theology and each teaching/learning activity is "a construction of particular persons and faith communities who confess their faith in God in a language, metaphor, and thought pattern appropriate to the context."\textsuperscript{21}

2. At the same time we must not limit our understanding of particularity only to that which is available to our senses. After a thoughtful critique of the limits of the quest for the contextualization of theology, Max Stackhouse suggests that we think in too limited a fashion. We tend to ignore both the historical and interdependent character of our particular cultural experiences. Instead, Stackhouse
suggests that we should see the particularity of our experience as an episode in an age that stretches from Pentecost to the eschaton. Letty Russell calls this kind of consciousness “standpoint dependent.” We encounter and respond to the gospel from within the specificity of “culture, language, class, age, race, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and so on.”

If we are standpoint dependent, our views of authority will change. First we recognize our own angle of vision. We identify contexts which shape our perceptions and agendas and stipulate the boundaries of our discussion. We locate ourselves in the larger context of Christian history and community, and we presume to speak to our brothers and sisters out of the authority of our own experience, which is grounded in the interplay between where we are and the unfolding drama of the Christian story.

3. This leads me to a third implication. The question of authority in teaching should center on the extent to which our efforts lead us to engage in what Stackhouse calls “intercontextual and transcontextual possibilities.” It involves an openness to the stranger as one’s neighbor. The authority in the teaching office may be modeled on the reciprocity of New Testament hospitality. Hospitality is not practiced in abstract. It occurs at the point of the meeting of two or more parties. It is grace-full. It receives the other as if the other were a messenger from God. It is confirmed in experience but grounded in the sharing of the stories that give credence to the meanings shared with each other. It respects our differences but calls us to mutuality. It leads us into the discovery that all of us in our particularities are no more and no less than visitors and guests in the household of God.

Notes


7. Ibid., 245.


11. Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, 10; Bailyn, Education in the Forming, 5.


This article has been prepared in accordance with some cross-cultural characteristics. In the first place, it is written jointly as a dialogue of a man and a woman—and that introduces different cultures, for men and women are raised in different cultures and see things differently.

Secondly, this paper was not prepared in advance and “read” to the consultation of United Methodist Professors of Christian Education. Rather, it was tentatively roughed-in before we came together, but the final form attempts to take into account all that has been said in the other essays in this symposium. While it is not a summarizing statement, each strategy presented here has already been suggested in the articles preceding this one and has been documented by our work.

In this non-dualistic approach to knowledge, we are functioning in accord with principles of many cultures of the world today. In incorporating findings of others, we are using our critical faculties not to find points of disagreement but to find those points with which we are in harmony. With this undertaking, we are using an additive, cumulative form of knowledge acquisition.

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We were asked to write this essay because we have spent the past thirteen years living and working with Pueblo Indians, Spanish-Americans (their term), and Anglo-Americans of Northern New Mexico. Two of these cultures have lived together for nearly 400 years, and the third joined them 150 years ago. But no melting pot has occurred—they are distinct, unique cultures. The members of these three cultures have taught us that pluralism can work and that it offers values to each of the cultures that would be destroyed by assimilation, amalgamation, or isolation.

Pluralism—the term being used in this symposium—has a theological ring to it. To us it means that God created diversity in all forms of creatures. We humans quite "naturally" love and cherish diversity in plants, animals, insects, birds, lakes, oceans, mountains, and plains. When we walk through a natural forest, filled with diverse forms of trees and life, it seems incredibly rich to us. With a distinct sense of loss, we walk on into a tree farm with only one life form permitted.

How strange that we should cherish God-given diversity in nature, then recoil in distaste from the many forms of human life and culture. "God, you made a mistake! They should all be like me." To deny pluralism in human form and culture is to deny the goodness of God's creation.

This essay will contain three parts: the first will enumerate some of the conclusions of thirteen years of life and research in cross-cultural forms of ministry; the second will introduce you to some of the people who have been our teachers; and the third will involve you in the development of strategies of Christian education appropriate in multicultural communities.

Some “Culture Bridging” Conclusions

"Culture Bridging" (the title of our New Mexico research project), has demonstrated a number of positive results, five of which seem germane to this discussion. Let us state them as conclusions, briefly discussing each:

1. Attitudes of respect, humility and love are essential in any form of ministry that reaches across cultural lines. It is surely true that communities can form around the requirement for people to coexist peaceably, with little love lost. But if we are to speak of Christian ministry, love seems essential. This is not "liking," not a feeling tone. If love is an act performed for the benefit of the other, it is essential to ministry.
And respect. People of the dominant culture often fail to notice the extreme disrespect shown for the sensibilities of people of less powerful cultures. A current case in point is the callous insistence by many museums and archaeologists that they as the scientific community have a right to use skeletal remains of Native American burials in any way they choose.

Humility is a part of the determination to learn more of the other culture and its view of life. Without this emptying of ourselves in the effort to understand their often radically different perspectives, our seeming arrogance blocks meaningful communication.

2. Ministry can be designed that is appropriate to the culture being approached and at the same time is true to the essence of the Christian gospel. European dualistic thinking is culture-bound. In her article in this series, Mary Elizabeth Moore quotes Africans who note the missionaries' tendencies to use methods that promoted "a clean break with the past." These efforts to get Africans to look at their own people as "heathens" failed to acknowledge cultural impact, both of the Africans and of the European-American missionaries. Unfortunately, the same mind set is still present in some of our United Methodist work with Native Americans, who are being urged to reject their native culture in becoming Christians.

Another view comes from Japan. Japanese theologian Yosuko Morihara Grosjean in "Understanding Japanese Christianity" states that less than 1 percent of Japanese people are members of Christian churches, but between 20 and 30 percent participate in Christian church activities (which compares rather favorably with American rates of activity). Obviously the Japanese have a different view of ecclesiology, one that does not require them to choose on an either/or basis.

Bishop Charles J. Chaput (who himself is a Prairie Band Potawatomi), in addressing an American Indian audience, said, "Inculturation is a technical word for the process of becoming Indian people who are totally Indian and totally Catholic." The two of us firmly believe that Christ's gospel is resilient enough to allow any people to be "totally Korean and totally Christian, . . . totally Kenyan and totally Christian, . . . totally Navajo and totally Christian, . . . yes, even totally Euro-American and totally Christian!"

3. Cross-cultural friendships play a vital role in building the trusting relations that are required if ministry is to occur. Friendships are based on trust, on long-term risks that survive testing. Real friendships contain conflict but overarch differences. They call for the best that is in us.
We need mentors or guides in other cultures in order to experience, to learn, to survive where multicultural equality is not popular. The necessary forgiveness of ourselves and of each other for mistakes is made possible by mentors who are also friends.

4. Cooperative leadership of lay and clergy greatly enhances the potential for achieving cross-cultural ministries in a community. If the clergyperson is intent only upon institutional stability and growth, she or he will probably resist efforts of congregational members to involve the church in cross-cultural enterprises. And on the other hand, if the clergyperson is alone in the attempt to open the congregation to such work, members will sabotage it actively or passively.

If we think of Christian education with its addressing of sensitive issues from the earliest years onward, laity and clergy are both deeply invested in generating those attitudes about culture and ethnicity that make or break the child's capacity to develop without the crutch of racism or negative attitudes toward differences of custom and appearance.

The literature of Christian education—particularly curriculum material—can make a huge difference. Since most Euro-American Christians have some ambivalence toward the involvement of their church with other ethnic and cultural groups, lesson material that seems to take for granted such involvement is a powerful encouragement for the teacher to move ahead in this regard. But if the materials walk gingerly through this subject, as though tiptoeing through a minefield, the teacher's reluctance is reinforced.

5. Long-term approaches are required if any substantial change is to be made in community attitudes and institutions. This is one reason that the two of us work more with families than with individuals. Racist attitudes, and ethnocentricity as well, come particularly to focus in reference to families. We have all heard many times, "Well, I don't mind their moving into the neighborhood. If it were just my life, it would be okay. But what if my kids..." Only by working directly with family groups can these fears be addressed.

Families are long-term institutions. For the Hispanics and the Pueblos of Northern New Mexico, the priority of the family is a profound fact of life. One Hispanic woman, vital and active not only in her local United Methodist church but an honored member of conference and general boards as well, states forcefully, "I hope I never have to make this choice; but if I ever have to choose between my church and my family, I will choose the family!"

Then there is the Methodist appointive system. Even if a pastor comes to a church that has attitudes conducive to cross-cultural
ministries, even if she or he already possesses skills and a working knowledge of the different cultures in that community, it will still take years to win the trust and acceptance of those cultural groups that have not been included within that church's fellowship. It also usually means that it will take years for the clergyperson to win over members of the congregation to a point of view that makes possible risky new relations with other cultures. The United Methodist Church has concluded that it takes eight years for a bishop to establish needed changes in an area; and in some circumstances, twelve may be required. How strange to assume that a pastor can achieve such changes in about four years!

Our own experience further demonstrates this. In four years' time we were barely moving beyond the most casual relationship with people of other cultures. By the eighth year we were being accepted almost as "family" members by many. By that time many of them were also willing to risk themselves in friendship with others. The most effective United Methodist minister in this area—in his church as well as in his community—is now in his fifteenth year in his parish.

These five conclusions from our Culture Bridging project seem particularly relevant for Christian education as well.

Our Teachers and Mentors

Now let us introduce you to some of our teachers, they who have taught us these truths. To do that, let us focus upon the methods of religious education traditionally employed by the Pueblos and the Hispanos.

On the steps of the Santa Fe cathedral, a wedding party reveals some of the multicultural heritage of the region. The bride's mother is classical Castilian Spanish—tall, slender, light-skinned, perhaps even with blue eyes to match her "blue blood." The profile of the bride is startlingly different, with high prominent nose, a face that could have been taken directly from an Aztec or Toltec sculpture of 500 years ago. Behind her stands a young Pueblo Indian of stocky square frame, his round flat face revealing the Mongolian ancestry from which he is descended.

North central New Mexico claims many cultures, but three predominate in a triangular area ranging from Albuquerque in the south, to Taos in the northeast, to Tierra Amarilla in the northwest. These three are the Pueblo Indians, the Hispanos, and the Anglos.

If we were to use methods of religious education traditionally familiar to the Pueblo people, we would have to make some profound
changes. They are descendants of the Anasazi who built the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde and constructed the huge apartment houses of Chaco Canyon. They have about 2000 years of history, tradition, and cosmology condensed into the sacred songs and dances by which they keep the heritage alive from generation to generation. Anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz estimates that his San Juan Pueblo people memorize between 600 and 650 songs and dances by the time they are grown men and women.  

At the gathering of the animals at San Juan Pueblo each February, men and boys don ceremonial dress and take on the posture and movements of deer. After a night in the nearby hills, at sunrise they are called into the village by the elders. As they come, they pass by the people, who stroke them with murmuring words of gratitude and with sacred corn meal. The daylong deer dances that follow are a prayer of thanksgiving for the animals who give their lives in order that their human brothers and sisters might live.

In the same manner, women, men, boys, and girls join the summer dances. They celebrate the goodness of the fertile earth as mother and the father sky's gifts of sun and rain that bring abundant crops for the village—and for the whole earth and all its creatures.

A prayer that uses the muscles of dance is not that different, after all, from one that uses the muscles of speech. In each, the people's aspirations, fears, hopes, grief, and gratitude are lifted to God. A score or more of such dance days are observed each year. Many are feast days, with days of preparation, baking, and cooking, in order that all who come to the pueblo may receive the gifts of food, friendship, and goodwill. Each dance day is preceded by as much as a week of preparation and rehearsal. How else are the boys and girls to learn the songs and dances?

To our Anglo eyes, these people may seem exotic in their ceremonial garb and activities. But they are real people with ancient, honorable and moral traditions which they combine gracefully with their Roman Catholic practices and identities.

How do we design Christian education for them?

Turn now to our teachers and mentors of Spanish descent. What do their religious practices teach us of Christian education?

Here is the plaza of the town of Trujillo in the part of Spain that is known as Extremadura. When Juan Jimenez was a boy in this village, the Pizarro brothers returned home to build their mansions, immensely wealthy from their conquering exploits in Peru. Trujillo, like most of Extremadura, was poor—hardscrabble stony fields. But if little Juan could just get to the port of Cadiz....
And at about the same time Gregoria Cesar and Francisco de Villalua, growing up in Cadiz, watched ships by the score set sail for the Americas and return, loaded with gold. Eventually these three men—as 37 others whose home towns and villages we visited in Spain—did cross the Atlantic. All in the hope of becoming Hidalgos, gentlemen with land and properties.

In the course of time they joined Don Juan de Onate’s expedition to settle New Mexico—four hundred men, women, and children, together with 7,000 cattle, sheep, and goats. They came to stay, here in the midst of “civilized” natives who grew cotton for their clothing, lived in houses, and even irrigated their fields into fruitfulness.

The Spaniards intended to farm and ranch, as E. Allen Richardson claims. But Onate was not entirely free of gold fever, and it was New Mexico, after all, so he took the men on long, futile gold searches, leaving the women and children to mind the colony.

Here they all were, 1,000 miles from the next nearest Spanish settlement. And they remained isolated for 250 years!

They maintained traditions of deep family loyalty, of honor for the elderly, and of grandparents teaching the children while parents worked the fields. Some of the churches they built in those early days still stand today—not as museums but as living churches still lit with candles and furnished with the figures of the saints which they carved and painted themselves.

From the earliest days, they maintained the pageantry, dances, and morality plays from their homeland. “Los Matachinos” depicts the forces of Christianity driving the “Moors” from Spain. “Moros y Cristianos” is a fully costumed horseback drama in which Christian knights defeat the Moorish cavalry with the miraculous intervention of St. James. The highlight of Christian faith, it seems, is still to be found in the 700-year struggle of Muslims with Christians for the soul of Spain.

Priests were scarce for hundreds of years, so devoted laity banded together as a Brotherhood of Penitents and kept the faith alive, particularly during Holy Week.

And still today, the vows of pilgrimage are a vital part of the faith. A typical Maundy Thursday will see some 7,000 pilgrims walking through the night the twenty-six miles from Santa Fe to the holy shrine of Santuario. But at any time of year, pilgrimages and public processions commemorate the times in history when God’s grace saved God’s people.

So for us, once again the question: How do we design Christian education that is meaningful for those within this tradition?
Appropriate Strategies (Principles)

We are now ready to respond to the theme of this essay: "strategies of Christian education in multicultural situations." We can identify six such strategies.

1. First, the word itself. "Strategy" comes from the Greek word *strategia*, meaning generalship. It is a military word, with such dictionary definitions as "to strike an enemy at the source of his military, economic or political power." And, "to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions." And even, "the science of planning and directing large-scale military operations, especially of maneuvering forces into the most advantageous location prior to actual engagement with the enemy."

The implications are enormous for us. The key element in the military definitions is that of surprise, so secrecy is essential. A derivative word, "stratagem," simply means trickery.

During the nineteenth century, when assimilation into a homogeneous society (the melting pot) was the goal of the churches for ethnic groups, strategy was an accurate term. We know elderly people who were subjected to procedures in which they as children were taken from their homes, shipped to distant boarding schools, and refused permission to speak their native language, all in the name of Christian education. No wonder they still resonate to the cry, "You stole our children!"

If we abandon assimilation as a goal and practice a belief in pluralism, then we must also abandon the word *strategies*. Let us speak instead of "principles."

All the writers in this symposium have in their own way affirmed the need to move from assimilation toward pluralism. And each has alluded to—even stressed—the need for dominant cultures to refrain from dominating through planning for others.

**Principle:** Involve members of each culture at all stages of planning and implementation.

2. In the process of moving into the wonderland of strange and different cultures (in what John S. Dunne refers to as "passing over"), complete the odyssey by restudying your own culture as seen through the eyes of others. Otherwise you may betray the other.

Good-hearted ignorance is still ignorance—including ignorance of our own culture as seen through the eyes of others. This ignorance can hurt and discourage even more than outright hostility does, if the ignorant ones are members of the dominant culture. After all, an enemy cannot betray us; it takes a trusted friend to do that!
On the other hand, educators of people in a non-dominant culture must know their own culture, their own traditions, their own ways of learning. If, failing to know this, they simply mimic the more powerful culture’s ways, they cheat themselves of their most useful procedures.

Principle: Learn all you can about each culture, including your own as viewed by others.

3. We need to identify what it is in the other culture that attracts us, what strikes a responsive chord in us. Is it a more authentic way of expressing what is genuinely us? Or are we filling a void in ourselves with something authentic only to them? We do well to remember that we are all “hyphenated Americans.” Our identification of that cultural ethnicity within ourselves points us toward those expressions of our own authenticity.

Principle: Cultures and religious expressions that flow out of the experiences of people have meaning for them because they do flow out of their experience.

4. The dominant culture often uses its power to manipulate less powerful cultures into a pattern of homogeneity. Allen Richardson says that the melting pot comes from amalgamation (in which everyone changes and becomes someone new.) But the people we relate to fear the melting pot because they see it resulting in assimilation—in which only they change and have to become like us.

In his essay in this symposium, John Cobb notes that assimilation is usually called “integration.” The August/September, 1990, issue of Sojourners is devoted in its entirety to the theme of betrayal and disillusionment felt by African-Americans at the misguided failures of integration.

Don Donato, a Native American, has affirmed Culture Bridging procedures with his comment, “The Indian people didn’t end up fighting each other.” A divide-and-conquer routine is common with homogenizers.

J. R. Newbrough, editor of The Journal of Community Psychology, follows the lead of Frank G. Kirkpatrick’s Community: A Trinity of Models.” Kirkpatrick denies the need to choose between (1) “atomistic/contractarian” communities in which we are isolated monads contracting for each other’s services and in which the only purpose of community is to serve individuals, or (2) “organic” communities in which the individual exists only for the sake of the community, and is valued only for the contribution she or he can make.

Newbrough builds upon Kirkpatrick’s third type, a “mutual/personal” community. Patterned after Buber’s “I-Thou”
theme, it resonates to the statement of Lesslie Newbigin: “Human beings belong to God, and exist for responsible relations with each other under God.”

To quote John Cobb’s article again: “The assimilative force of the dominant culture is so great that few minority cultures are in a position to learn from it without being absorbed by it.” Is it idealistic to assume that a dominant culture will intentionally restrict its power? It is, until love enters the picture, as for example in marriage or family where we ultimately benefit ourselves and others by accepting limits to our powers. Kirkpatrick (and the Community Psychology Association) is sketching out the possibility of a community in which the most powerful culture accepts similar limitations for similar reasons.

**Principle:** Allow each group its space—pluralistically—but restrict the space of the dominant culture, so that each culture can participate equally.

5. Relate culture groups with each other (at least at the beginning) at the points of their perceived strengths and common interests, rather than at the point of conflict and problems. We all know what it means to be part of the “Indian problem,” the “Chicano problem,” the “Black problem,” the “Anglo problem.” But who wants to be just a problem? Our own ideal types allow for far more than that. As one Hispanic man said to us, “Tell us what it is that you find attractive about us.”

Mary Elizabeth Moore’s discussion of “plain truth with plain people” is “a plea for Christian education that struggles with the real issues of real people . . . , a plea for integrative theology in which we draw richly from multiple sources (scripture, tradition, experience and reason) . . . . This is especially important when we face cultural diversity because the various sources will themselves reflect different cultures.” This is one way of relating different cultural groups at the points of their strengths, not their weaknesses.

**Principle:** Enhance the self-esteem of members of each group. (Yes, even the dominant group, for without it, they scapegoat and demean others in order to feel better about themselves.)

6. How do different cultures traditionally transmit the heritage to the next generation? We probably take too much for granted in this matter. Paul Greenbaum directed a comparative study of the classroom linguistic behavior of Choctaw and Anglo fifth- and sixth-graders. He found that the Anglo children understood and cooperated with the teacher’s “switchboard” function of controlling who spoke and in what order during discussion sessions. The Choctaw children, however, interrupted the teacher more often,
spoke out without permission, and gazed at their peers more often than Anglo children. Greenbaum continues: “Within the Choctaw Indian home and community, conversations are not organized such that one person tells others what to do or when to speak... The regulation of speaker change and the designation of attention cues differ from the Anglo system.”

Charles Foster’s reference to Letty Russell brings us another illustration of the dangers of unchecked assumptions concerning cultural transmission. For Russell notes that Western culture’s handling of authority is in a “top down” fashion. And Foster refers to Richard Bondi’s description of leadership that functions from the center out. As we have described elsewhere, this is a major difference between Western and Pueblo cultural views of authority—with Pueblos preferring leadership that functions from the center of the group.

A glance at patterns of communication reveals that many different modes are used as the primary source of transmission of “the Word” from one generation to the next. This is a rough list, not exhaustive and not extensively tested against anthropological expertise; but it is at least suggestive of the range of possibilities:

- the read Word—books of North and West Europe;
- the storied Word—evening firesides of most indigenous cultures;
- the dramatized Word—puppetry of Germany;
- the pictured Word—temple carvings of the East Indies;
- the sung Word—the hymns of Wesley; dance songs of Pueblos;
- the danced Word—sacred dances of Pueblos and of Balinese;
- the gamed Word—rhymed games of Africa;
- the acted-out Word—stressed by all cultures.

**Principle:** Honor each culture’s avenues to meaning by using and encouraging their procedures.

**In Conclusion**

Our research shows that those who have made the commitment to cross-cultural ministry and have walked through some of the difficulties have emerged with an undiminished dedication to the cause.
People of the nondominant cultures have long known that they have more to contribute to society than is allowed.
And people of the dominant culture have found that giving up total control opens up a new and richer life.
So for all of us—it is worth it!

Notes

7. Richardson, Strangers in This Land, 29.
An African-American Method of Religious Education

There are many causes for the present plight of impoverished African-Americans. However, race, economics, and politics are three forces which have robbed and continue to rob the African-American household of self-respect and responsibility, turning our streets into slums and our garden-groves into ghettoes.

The African-American historical experience has been a wonderland adventure. In a decisive way, African-Americans have been acted upon. At the hands of our oppressors, from slavery to segregation, the virus of discrimination and racism weakens our hopes and quenches our zeal. The economic elite subjects African-Americans to the curse of classism, which stratifies persons according to the exchange of goods, services, and skills. Legislatures enact equal opportunity and affirmative action policies which enable privileged African-Americans to advance at the expense of a “permanent underclass.” We are astounded by a puzzling past and often petrified by an uncertain present and future. In gloom-filled moments we wonder “what happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up, like a raisin in the sun?”

On the other hand, African-Americans act. We preserve rich and radiant fragments of our cultural heritage, yet some of us continue to destroy our children’s future. We struggle and rise from ignorance to intelligence, yet we have not learned how to live together as male and female.

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female. We ascend to the mountaintops of industrial responsibility; yet we turn our backs on the ground of our roots. In both promising and peculiar ways, African-Americans act as well as they are acted upon. But regardless of the ultimate causes of our plight as African-Americans, the fact remains that we are linked to a social order that can and must change.  
Religious Education is one crucial element in this process. Religious education, then, will inform individual lives of African-Americans, if teachers and learners engage in the task of shaping the social order, that is, the institutions, agencies, structures, and processes that regulate, mediate, and negotiate resources and relationships in society.  
An African-American method of Christian education rests on at least three assumptions. First, the method emerges out of and therefore is responsive to the African-American experience, particularly in the relationship between the social order and particular human consciousness. It gives priority to the person as an agent with the capacity to respond. Second, it rejects the dualistic polarization of universality and cultural specificity. As finite human beings, we should not presume to speak of unconditional truth. On the other hand, we cannot assume that our truth is unique and applies to no one else. Thus, persons beyond the African-American community (which is itself diverse) may indeed find the method and insights relevant for their discovery and appropriations of faith. But it is the reader, not the author, who determines the extent to which this method is applicable and universal. Third, it is assumed that any multicultural pedagogy is to be constructed with and not for persons who are disenfranchised and oppressed. “The central problem is this: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?”  
The African-American method of religious education views critical thinking as action. This activity assumes that the structures and agencies of the social order which we seek to change share some of the same values held by the oppressed. This is why it is impossible for teachers and learners of religious education to inform the individual lives of African-Americans without addressing the social order. This reality is an expression of the inextricable link between the individual and the social order. The dichotomy between personal development and social transformation is false. Transformation of the self is, in part, change of the social order; and change in the social order, in part, alters the individual’s views, values, actions.
Experience in Context

It is essential to begin with personal and group experience. As Cornel West writes,

_The basic contribution of prophetic Christianity, ... is that every individual regardless of class, country, caste, race, or sex should have the opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities. ...A transcendent God before whom all persons are equal thus endows the well-being and ultimate salvation of each with equal value and significance._

Yet for African-Americans this can be a difficult, even radical task. In order to do it, we must be prepared to critique the position that African-American culture does not have an independent integrity. Scholars have argued for more than three centuries that African-American culture in general, and African-American religion specifically, is a bastardized derivative of Euro-American culture and religion. These writers, whose ranks also include African-American scholars, still argue for an assimilation variant of the “melting pot” theory for U.S. society. Often, they do not perceive distinctions among the various ethnic groups in the U.S.

First of all, their analysis is reductionistic. It seeks to describe the human personality exclusively in predetermined “universal” categories, which turn out to be abstractions of Euro-American cultural values. Secondly, these authors bias the results of their analysis by defining African-Americans in relation to slavery. Because slaves, as property, were not considered to be full human beings, African-Americans as a people continue to be portrayed as non-persons. These scholars argue that “from their deficit experience as a victimized people, [African-Americans] could only make sense of their experiences based on the thought patterns and experiences of others.”

The experience of African-Americans in the United States has been and continues to be shaped by racial and economic ideologies. Race plays a significant and too often destructive role in American U.S. society. Though not the exclusive determining force, the ethnicity and color of African-Americans sets the agenda and presents the concerns to which societal structures and agencies must speak.

Racism, may be viewed as “the cyclical processes of power with prejudice,” or as the systemic creation and regulation of society’s resources on the basis of one ethnic group’s domination. This ethnocentric reality denies the rights and attempts to diminish the
worth of individuals and groups outside its genetic boundaries. Racism is an infectious virus which continues to contaminate U.S. culture and churches. The agenda and tasks of religious communities are a consequence of racism. Racism prevents the church from actualizing its cohesive and unifying functions in society.

Economic forces inform and regulate our life together as well. The African-American community can now be categorized in terms of wealthy, upper-middle class, middle-class, poor, and a "permanent underclass." ("Permanent underclass" appears in quotations because it seems to me that the term is overly determinative, dismissing both the agency of God and human beings responsive to God's initiating acts.) Whereas historically, slavery, segregation, and discrimination were the barriers which African-Americans were forced to overcome, the structural shifts in the U.S. and world economy present new and formidable roadblocks for the impoverished.

...Different systems of production... have imposed different constraints on the way in which racial groups have interacted in the United States, constraints that have structured the relations between racial groups and that have produced dissimilar contexts not only for the manifestation of racial antagonisms but also for racial group access to rewards and privileges.

Today, economics is as significant a force in determining the character of African-American life as race.

Race and economics are both rooted in the social existence to which religious education is related and must relate with greater force and purpose. The systemic and divisive effects of both racism and modern economic philosophies are embedded in the structures and institutions of society.

Historical Location

In Prophesy Deliverance! Cornel West argues that the prophetic Christian tradition contains normative views about "human dignity" and "human depravity." As a consequence, West posits a dialectical relationship between human personality and human history.

This dialectic of imperfect products and transformative practice, of prevailing realities and negation, of human depravity and human dignity, of what is and the not-yet constitutes the Christian dialectic of human nature and human history.

Planning the experiences of persons and groups in the larger historical context allows us to frame and focus the moral and ethical
issue(s) within them. For example, a parent desires to live in the inner city. She values living among racial, economic, and political diversity. But the lack of material and human resources will prevent her children from receiving a quality education. Placing this personal experience in historical context allows observers to gain a moral and ethical view of her dilemma. No longer is the woman’s decision “a private affair.” Rather, the historical analysis holds insights to political and social policy decisions; decisions that limit the mother’s choices and possibilities.

When we observe the African-American experience in historical context we can see that issues of racism (self-worth, image, and dignity) and classism (self-determination in the exchange of products, services, and social relations) are forces that have shaped and continue to shape African-American experience. Yet they did not obliterate or silence African-American self-expression. Lawrence W. Levine argues that “slavery was never so complete a system of psychic assault that it prevented slaves from carving out independent cultural forms.”\textsuperscript{8} Slavery was a common experience for the “first” Africans on the shores of the pre-colonial U.S. But slavery is not the African-American’s primal experience. African-American heritage and culture are distinct in part because the place of origin of African-Americans is Africa. The land of Africa bears a legacy that is as rich and full of strengths and weaknesses as the history of every other civilization. African-American culture is distinct, therefore, because the existential reality of life in Africa has shaped its character and world view.

Both sources influence the unique nature of African-American literature, art, politics, and religion. In their original use, slave songs and narratives had a greater concern for communication than for articulation of correct belief. And the content of their messages was commonly focused on identity and geography.\textsuperscript{9} In his account of becoming a fugitive slave, William Wells Brown wrote about his desire to change both his address and identity. “I was not only hunting for my liberty,” Brown writes, “but also hunting for a name; though I regarded the latter as of little consequence, if I could but gain the former.”\textsuperscript{10}

Dialogue with Tradition

Communication is important. It supports our views of reality and our ability to create and sustain relations with others.\textsuperscript{11} Communication with past experiences and traditions is crucial. For African-American
Christians, dialogue with the traditions includes conversations with their own and Judeo-Christian cultural heritages. In addition, it is necessary for African-Americans to make connections with their religious heritage and tradition, for the religious tradition carries the values and affirmations of African-Americans in general. As Peter Paris has stated it, “In other words, not only has the black Christian tradition been normative for the black churches, it has also been the basic principle of meaning for the entire black community.” Three aspects of the African-American religious heritage and tradition are discussed below.

First, African-American religion addressed the whole of life. There is fusion rather than separation between the concerns of slavery and liberation, the present and end times. African-American religious experience speaks to the whole of human existence. To recall the list of heroines and heroes in the struggle for freedom and equality in the U.S. is to recite the roll of the African-American church. From the crucible of historical racism, African-American religion glimpsed and claimed an egalitarian vision of God’s reign fulfilled.

Second is the inevitable corollary between salvation and sociopolitical emancipation. John H. Satterwhite, writes that “African” and “Christian” in the names of our denominations denote that we are always concerned for the well-being of economically and politically exploited persons, for gaining or regaining a sense of our own worth, and for determining our own future. Our churches work for the change of all processes which prevent our members who are victims of racism from participating fully in civic and governmental structures.

What is true of Black denominations is also true for the African-American individual. Salvation, conversion, and liberation in the African-American religious experience extends to civil rights, social equality, and the ability to fulfill one’s human potential.

Third, African-American religion mediates between the dominant culture and a dominated people of color. It is not enough to examine racism between Euro-Americans and African-Americans as if Euro-Americans are the only actors or agents. Euro-Americans’ power and authority does enable them to enshrine and circumscribe their will and desires in the institutions and agencies that regulate life in the U.S. But the victimized possess power and authority, too. They have the power that accompanies God’s gift of freedom: perspective and choice.

Only as they (the oppressed) discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their
liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor, this contribution is impossible.¹⁴

In both their cultural and religious expressions, African-Americans have refuted, negated, rebuffed and opposed much of what Euro-Americans seek to promote. Unfortunately, large segments of African-Americans continue to be allured by the vision of success embodied in Euro-American life. Yet, the African-American religion mediates between their historic view of God's will and reign and the cultural elements that express, sustain, and would extend Euro-American's dominating position.

African-Americans converse with their cultural heritage and traditions as well as the culture and traditions of Judeo-Christian faith. But the Judeo-Christian tradition to which African-Americans appeal is itself distorted.

Christianity bases itself upon an intensive study of the significance of certain historical occasions scattered irregularly within a period of about twelve hundred years, from the earlier Hebrew prophets and historians to the stabilization of western theology by Augustine... In this appeal to history we must remember the gaps in time between the extent written Gospels and the events which they relate; the discordance in accounts, the translations of tradition from language to language, the suspicious passages; also the seeming indifference to direct historical evidence (emphasis added)...¹⁵

The sacred texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition are multi-layered. Therefore, it becomes necessary for African-Americans to question the accustomed interpretations of the texts in the process of constructing a new interpretation. The Judeo-Christian canon did not address issues of race for political or ideological domination, but the phenomena of racism are by-products of the post-biblical era. It is essential to an African-American method of Christian education to examine, at least, two distinct layers of the Bible. Cain Hope Felder refers to these as “sacralization” and “secularization.” Sacralization is

the transposing of an ideological concept into a tenet of religious faith in order to serve the vested interest of a particular ethnic group. "Secularization" is the diluting of a rich religious concept under the weighty influence of secular pressures (social or political).¹⁶
In light of these matters, four questions are used to evaluate the interpretations rendered:

1) Does the interpretation invite the biblical and African-American experiences to be trusted?

2) Does the interpretation have the power to address the needs, problems, and concerns of African-Americans, both individually and collectively?

3) Does the interpretation make sense of the African-American experience without denying the experience or destroying the humanness of African-Americans?

4) Does the interpretation help African-Americans strengthen cultural identity, enhance their connectedness with the human community, and work toward transforming the social order? [1]

Critiquing the Past

Christian education has had different emphases through the years, and all of them were influenced by culture. Christian education for African-Americans began during the early 1600s. Its intent was to provide instruction in reading and Christian faith to African slaves. They embraced the ideals that were taught and claimed their conversion. They were baptized into Christianity. But when questions were raised about the effect of baptism on the status of the slaves, problems emerged. Colonial Christians and slaveholders then redefined the purpose and role of religious instruction for slaves. This redefinition took a variety of forms. Responses to questions about the aim and role of religious education came from many quarters. In 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts sent Englishman Samuel Thomas to evangelize and educate African slaves in South Carolina. The Society of Friends (commonly known as the Quakers) believed in the Africans' self-worth, taught them, and argued against the institution of slavery. The London Society for the Promotion of Religious Knowledge among the Poor, led by Presbyterian Samuel Davies, offered another proposal. They announced that the aim of religious instruction was to prepare slaves for freedom and a life of moral integrity. While the Moravians carried out religious education in biracial settings, the Methodists and Baptists provided religious education for the African slaves in segregated settings. The content of their religious teachings allowed them to vacillate on the goals of religious education for Africans in a new land.
The Sunday school movement within the United States continued this reexamination of the shift in the purpose of religious education.

From the mid-1820s until the Civil War, it appears that the Sunday School existed with two objectives. William Alcott argued that the "best children of our best and most pious families" attend Sunday school. James Alexander called Sunday schools "the best means yet devised for the rapid and successful instruction and salvation for the multitudes who are perishing for lack of knowledge." This dual purpose continued in the minds of some proponents until the 1860s.

From this moment onward, the Sunday school would wrestle with the tension between its purposes of mission and its obligation to serve the institutional church and culture.

During the early 1900s there were two competing views about the purpose of religious education. One strand followed the lead of philosopher and educator John Dewey. This approach was child-centered; the purpose of religious education was the development of the individual. The opposing strand was led by George Albori Coe and his successor at Union Theological Seminary, Harrison Elliott. Coe maintained that the purpose of religious education was to form small societies that would eventuate into a new democratic order. His phrase for this new order was "the democracy of God." In 1940, Elliott wrote that "the social nature of the self makes evident the importance of a social theory of education." On this basis Elliott agreed with the reconstructionists of his day that social reform was a necessary part of the educational agenda.

The sociocultural and historical milieu of a people shapes their essential character and world view and the values and ethos of this milieu are embedded in the institutions, structures, and agencies of society. We conclude, therefore, that religious educators must address issues of the social order so that African-Americans may be informed and participate in their own transformation.

An Active-Reflective Response

If a function of religious education is to inform individual lives of African-Americans, thus teachers and learners will participate in reconstructing the social order. The question then becomes, how is this best accomplished? To answer this, we must begin with a review of the purpose and religious education itself.
Religious education builds on the nature of its subject matter. The fundamental function of religious education is related to its genetic composition. Religion is composed of society and values and their interrelation. The Latin sense of the word value means "be strong, healthy, effective." Religion is concerned with phenomena that make society strong, healthy, and effective; specifically, the institutions, agencies, structures and processes of the social order that shape peoples' lives. Values, then, are implicitly religious.

The strength, health, and effectiveness of a society rests upon its will and capacity to uphold common values. "...[T]he social cohesion of every society is based on a set of shared values that find significant expression in various communal symbols, ideas, rituals, and pronouncements." Thus, religious education functions primarily to bring harmony amid the disparate values embedded in society.

Religious education works toward this aim through interpretation (meaning-making through examination, critique, and reformulation of existing religious and secular values) and liberation (the naming and acting on values of justice). Critical thinking and doing, the construction of meaning and the living by and acting on this meaning are two dimensions of religious education. Together they impart justice in the social order and empower African-Americans to be strong in religious faith. When action (liberation) is separated from reflection (interpretation), religious educators are unable to actualize the function of religious education.

Ultimately, religious education is about the human fulfillment of God's justice. It is about transmitting those traditions that can be internalized in persons and fixed firmly in structures which allow for diversity within our life together.

How can religious education actualize its fundamental function? First, we must acknowledge the presence of certain obstacles. In his chapter on "The New Reformation," Whitehead highlighted the problem for religious education in his reference to Protestant Christianity.

We are dealing with a topic, complex and many-sided. It comprises the deliverance of the understanding as it harmonizes our deepest institutions. It comprises emotional responses to formulations of thought and to modes of behavior. It comprises the direction of purposes and the modification of behavior. It cuts into every aspect of human existence.

Religious education, in actualizing its fundamental function, will engage in work with principalities and powers, but present and yet to come. First, if religious educators are to actualize this function of...
religious education, they will engage in moral discourse and action within the church and the larger social order. Moral discourse includes the transmission of faith and acquisition of knowledge and skills that allow informed participation to occur. By principle and practice religious education works to establish and maintain the values that mutually benefit God’s created order. (The marginalized must have knowledge as well as practical skills.) Cooperation among Christians is vital to the cause of social reconstruction.

Cooperation must occur, also, between Christian communities and the institutions and agencies in which the social order exists. Freire comments on the necessity of this element:

*The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it.*

The oppressed cannot achieve their liberation and maintain a sense of life together without communication with their oppressors. Impoverished African-Americans cannot realize a restructuring of the social order without the power elite sharing some of those values. If restructuring were to occur without communication, or with a limited sharing of values between the power elite and the marginalized, the result would be either the reversal of roles or sheer anarchy.

Second, cultural institutions and agencies carry human values and shape human existence. These structures, however, are dynamic, not static, responding to human existence and being shaped by it in turn.

*What makes a structure a social structure is neither permanence nor change, taken absolutely, but the dialectical relations between the two. In the last analysis, what endures in the social structure is neither permanence nor change, it is the permanence-change dialectic itself.*

Religious education must participate in this dialectic with the social order to fulfill its fundamental function.

**Conclusion**

Throughout their history African-Americans have maintained the inextricable relationship between the private and public, the personal and social character of existence. The African-American religious experience continues to proclaim this truth as, in the words of Peter Paris, the Black church fulfills its dual responsibility “to build up the AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN METHOD
race and to change the nation." If the fundamental function of religious education is to inform individual lives of African-Americans, then teachers and learners must do so by correcting the injustices and inequities of institutions, agencies, and structures of the social order.

Notes

1. Langston Hughes, "A Dream Deferred."
5. This working definition of racism has been developed by Carolyn Johnson, Ph.D.
7. West, Prophesy Deliverance, 17.


24. Ibid., p. 169.
These papers written by Douglas Wingeier, John B. Cobb, Jr., Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore (Quarterly Review, Summer, 1992), and Charles R. Foster, Joseph V. Crockett and Taylor and June McConnell (Quarterly Review, Fall, 1992), together with the narrated life experiences of more than fifty participants at the consultation sponsored by the United Methodist Association of Professors of Christian Education (UMPACE), helped us to explore what cultural pluralism means for each of us, for our colleges and seminaries, and for the church. After examining the reports of the task groups, I conclude that the following major issues and themes offer guidance for all in the church who seek to recognize and affirm cultural diversity and to minister in a culturally pluralistic world.

Guidelines for Educational Ministry

All persons are called to recognize and celebrate that we live in a global, multicultural world. Dominating cultures who wish to affirm this reality must “even out” (overcome dominance) in order to avoid exploiting those who come from other perspectives and cultures. We do this by cultivating attitudes of empathy, openness, and

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vulnerability. We recognize that all are called to teach and learn in ways that make mutuality become an embodied value.

Multicultural education takes place when individuals and communities name and claim who and whose they are, while seeking to know and understand those who are different. The human need to bond brings us into community, but it can also draw us into conflict with those whose values or self-understanding are different from our own. If we learn to gather together, affirming our differences and the unique gifts which each person and culture brings to the banquet table, wholeness can come. When sharing stories and celebrating gifts takes precedence over debating doctrine and judging lifestyles, bonding can take place between members of different generations and cultures.

As United Methodists, we ground our understanding of multicultural education and experience in our Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace. We proclaim that God loves/creates/abides with the whole creation and therefore is present and active in all cultures. Each person and group knows God through the symbols of their own culture(s). We know God most fully when we can share our stories, values, and rituals with others who, in turn, share theirs with ours.

The biblical understanding of hospitality that receives those seen as “outsiders” as messengers of God is key. Both Christian community and Christian character are shaped by and in turn shape the richness and diversity of culture (Crockett). Individuals who share a safe and hospitable space are able to be their authentic selves as well as to respect others who are different. A hospitable approach to teaching and learning involves mutual accessibility: sharing stories from our experience and inviting others to share stories from their experiences. We must respect differences, recognize our interdependence, and celebrate our mutuality as “visitors and guests in the household of God” (Foster).

The church and those responsible for educational ministry in it need to beware of the issues and approaches to learning that foster assimilation and discourage diversity. The first step is to acknowledge that our educational content and processes are grounded in and reflect Western culture. We can and must develop models for teaching and learning that move beyond solving problems within one dominant context only. We should also examine assumptions and reframe questions so that the educational processes honor diversity, seek to expand horizons, and build bridges. Because contexts are multicultural, our models of teaching and learning need to recognize and honor different leadership styles. These models need, above all,
to empower persons to “wrestle with differences” and to “inspire the love of God and neighbor” (Moore).

The Wesleyan quadrilateral (scripture, tradition, experience, and reason) can assist us in developing bridge-building models that “honor people’s avenues of meaning” (McConnell and McConnell) by fostering an action/reflection method that is integrative and offers “plain truth for plain people” (Moore).

Calls to Action

One of the issues facing the United Methodist Church is the increasing pressure for uniformity. This needs to be addressed at every level of our church from the congregational to the denominational level. Teacher training and curriculum resources must reflect the culturally diverse groups and ideologies that exist within the church. The church is called to resist this widespread pull toward uniformity and to embody and model ways of asking, listening, and witnessing that are dialogical and grounded in the reality and vision of the household of God (Wingeier).

As we grow in awareness of our own cultural background(s) (regionally, ethnically, economically, educationally, religiously), it will become easier for all of us to recognize that even those who seem to be a part of the dominating culture are a part of subcultures. For example, if we listen to and learn with persons who are African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, Pueblo Indian and Euro-American Christians, we can more readily affirm that authentic faith is grounded in particular experience.

Christian religious education that takes cultural pluralism seriously cannot confine its curriculum only to resources for classroom use. Because persons learn in a myriad of ways, the resources may vary greatly according to the specific context. Stories and dances, poems and plays, work projects and immersion experiences, art and everyday tasks, worship and study—all become the means by which God “fashions a people.” Curriculum writers who share their work developed in and for specific contexts will enrich educational ministry across the church.

Colleges and seminaries, for their part, should intentionally recruit students and appoint faculty from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Faculty members should alter their teaching styles to adapt to the ways that persons learn (see McConnell and McConnell on the variety of primary ways “the Word” is transmitted from one generation to the next). This applies to both content and process. The
stories and viewpoints of those in the shadow of the dominating culture need to be highlighted. Those of us who teach must listen to our students, to learn from them and with them. Teachers and students together must reframe questions so that *inculturation*—that process of becoming "totally Indian or African-American or Euro-American" *and* "totally Christian or Jewish or Buddhist"—is encouraged (see the article by the McConnells).

At the same time, we must develop models for lay ministry education which provide in-depth theological and biblical grounding for persons where they live and serve. These models must be culturally and contextually aware and appropriate. Lay persons also need opportunities to enter into dialogue with other lay persons from different contexts, subcultures, and cultures so that they can engage in mutual faith-sharing. Networking at every level is critical if culture-bridging is to occur.

**Calls for Research**

There is a call to develop theological methodologies for religious education that seriously engage issues of cultural pluralism. Our current understandings of cultural pluralism rely heavily on anecdotal data. That is a valid beginning point; it is now time, however, to examine epistemological, ontological, and cultural assumptions in order to frame questions and select methodologies that are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Helping persons see and understand the connectedness of life may lead to an ecological model of religious education (Cobb) which empowers us to examine the diversities among and within groups while focusing on a shared vision of the people of God. This kind of model may well require a new economy, a new psychology and a new pedagogy. It cannot be done in isolation from political, economic and governance systems and issues. It will need to draw on the stories and wisdom of persons with different life experiences and values. We need new research in learning theory and ways to teach inductively as well as deductively.

The impact of cultural pluralism on educational ministry has led us to conclude that much could be gained by *studying the sacramental nature of all of life*. Possible beginning points would be to explore the relationships between *kairos* and *chronos* as well as the nature and function of sacred space. The banquet table may become a useful metaphor as we explore issues of faith and life in a sacramental context. The nature and role of baptism as it relates to...
initiation and belonging also needs to be examined. And if we find a way to move beyond the dualisms which have tended to dominate Western culture, we may discover more holistic ways to understand and live faithfully as members of the household of God.

If a dominant culture can become self-limiting without being condescending, mutuality and dialogue with persons from nondominant cultures are enhanced. *Seeking models of self-limitation that energize and foster mutuality* is a task that religious educators who stand within the dominating culture need to address. Our first step is to learn to recognize the implicit assumptions that foster and support hierarchical ways of thinking and acting. The next step is to find ways to engage in empathic communication and to see through the eyes of others. Taken together, these strategies will enable those of us in higher education to commit ourselves to new ways of understanding the teaching authority of the church.

**Going On...**

It is the hope of all of us in UMAPCE that by sharing our questions and the fruits of our dialogue, the whole church might be empowered to risk listening and caring, sharing stories and breaking bread with those whose stories and celebrations are different from ours. The household of God will become more a reality as we risk culture-bridging rather than wall-building. We invite all in the church to find ways to join us on this journey as we seek to be open to and to learn from those whose cultural and theological contexts are different from our own.

**Note**

E. Clinton Gardner

Theology, Medicine, and Health

The present essay has grown out of more than twenty years' experience in teaching Christian ethics in an interprofessional context at a leading university. Throughout most of that period, my major focus has been medical ethics; it has brought together the disciplines of ethics, medicine, law, and theology. In a very real sense, therefore, this paper is autobiographical. It consists of reflections on recent developments in the field of medical ethics and, more particularly, on the challenge of "doing" theology and ethics in a pluralistic university and community setting.

Modern medicine provides a paradigm of contemporary life. It raises broad philosophical questions, such as the meaning and limits of human existence, the nature of health, the roles of the professions, the nature and function of institutions, and conflicts of loyalty. The actual practice of medicine includes the need to make difficult moral choices. These decisions are often deeply personal and call for individual identity, integrity, and character. But moral choices are not made in isolation; on the contrary, they bring us face to face with the interdependence between individuals and communities. This interdependence, so evident in the practice of medicine as a profession, brings us back to crucial societal issues, including whether to make a basic level of health care available to everyone.

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The Field of Medical Ethics

All of the foregoing issues are brought to focus in the discipline of medical ethics. Most medical schools in the United States added courses in this field in the early 1970s. Medical ethics courses have also become widely available at the undergraduate level and in other professional schools, including seminaries. Medical ethics is essentially interdisciplinary in nature, frequently involving persons from law and business. In this rich context, students can examine the underlying values in medicine, clarify their professional identities and roles, and begin to develop team relationships. These classes foster not only a new style of learning but a new style of professional practice, one that is collegial, interdisciplinary, and interactive.

Medical ethics traces its origin to ancient Greece and the formulation of the Hippocratic Oath (ca. 400 BCE). Although its authorship and precise age are unknown, this oath is the oldest and most familiar of a long line of oaths and codes setting forth principles which govern the practice of medicine as a profession. In its earliest form the Hippocratic Oath included a vow invoking the deities as witnesses that the new initiates to the medical profession would fulfill their oath. Subsequently, the Hippocratic Oath was Christianized. Throughout the period of the early Church and the Middle Ages, Jewish and Christian teachings regarding the value of human life, the meaning of suffering, and the care of the sick, particularly the poor, a work of charity influenced the practice of medicine profoundly.

Since the Enlightenment, however, medicine has become increasingly secularized. Contemporary medical ethics is dominated not by religion or traditional values in medicine but by philosophy and law. The philosophical approach frames moral issues in terms of principles and rules, e.g., patient autonomy as an individual right. The legal approach reduces moral debate to matter of precedent and legal opinion. Issues such as the fetus's right to life, a woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, or a right to refuse to withdraw treatment—all are equated with legal rights.

Interest in medical ethics rose sharply following World War II due to the growth of medical research and technology during and following the war. The Nuremberg Trials focused international attention upon the Nazi experiments on the physically handicapped, the mentally ill, and unwanted social and ethnic minorities, particularly Jews. These experiments, identified as war crimes at the Nuremberg Trials, allowed Americans to raise questions about
ethical misconduct in this country: medical experiments involving prisoners, children, the mentally ill, and the infamous Tuskegee Study of approximately 400 black males with untreated syphilis. The result was a significant change in public policy. In order to protect the rights of experimental subjects in institutions receiving federal funding, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare adopted a set of regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects. These guidelines include the conditions of informed consent, third-party consent, individual rights, confidentiality, and a weighing of foreseeable risks and benefits. Periodically, these regulations have been updated and amended.

Since the late sixties, medical ethics has become preoccupied with the applications of dramatic new technologies: new methods of reproduction, renal dialysis, organ transplants, the prolongation of life, artificial life-support systems, and the artificial heart. As a result, medical ethics entered a new stage called "bioethics." Bioethics represents not only a narrowing but also an impoverishment of traditional medical morality. Its focus has been upon casuistry and procedural (legal) justice rather than upon the goods of medicine as a practice and upon substantive justice understood in terms of the common good.

The late 1960s also witnessed a "renaissance of medical ethics" whose main concern was a re-examination of the Hippocratic tradition. While the latter continues to shape the moral and professional identity of physician, it has been strongly criticized as individualistic, paternalistic, and excessively focused upon curative medicine.

In the words of two distinguished medical educators, "The whole edifice of Hippocratic ethics has been shaken . . . and some parts of it have been dismantled." What is needed, these authors propose, is a "reconstruction" of the tradition based upon a virtue theory of ethics instead of current rights- and duty-based systems. To do this the physician-patient relationship must instead be based upon the principle of beneficence in trust.

Today it is readily acknowledged that in any event, the Hippocratic tradition by itself cannot support an entire vision of medical ethics. That requires a vision of health as the context for the practice of medicine, one that will provide moral direction to the profession itself and enable it to recover a sense of its own distinctive vocation. But physicians may not be able to maintain this vision due to increased specialization in medicine, the impact of technology, and the institutionalization and bureaucratization of health care. Hence the
medical profession has looked to religion and the humanities to ground and nurture the attitudes, virtues, and values which are intrinsic to the practice of medicine.

Examples of such openness and outreach in our own university setting come readily to mind. Dr. Alfred Brann, director of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Grady Hospital, regularly invites my seminary class in medical ethics to visit the nursery. I had been aware how valuable this experience had been to our students across the years. However, I was not quite prepared for Dr. Brann's opening remarks to the class on that occasion: "I welcome you as peers!" He invited their help in the ongoing process of deciding what kind of care is appropriate for severely handicapped newborns and when "enough is enough." These are heavy decisions, and they can be lonely ones both for the physician and for the family. The physician needs the support and participation of pastors, who minister both to families and to staff. Pastors also exercise leadership through the churches in addressing community health issues, for example, making adequate prenatal care available to all women. Lack of such care is the leading cause of premature births.

A vision of health in medical ethics emerges from interdisciplinary work between physicians and theologians. This vision includes (1) a view of the vocation of the healer, (2) the use of moral and theological language and (3) the relation of justice to health care in a pluralistic society.

Professional Identity and Roles

Reflection upon the practice of medicine in the context of vision of health presupposes some underlying agreement about the nature of health. It also assumes a certain differentiation of professional roles. As Tillich has reminded us, health has many dimensions: biological, psychological, social, and spiritual. The particular images which we use to describe health and disease not only shape our understandings of the latter; they also shape the ways in which we envision our professional roles in relation to health. No one image is adequate to capture the full dimensions of the latter. The particular images which we employ reflect different conceptions of human nature and human fulfillment. Taken together, however, they point toward a conception of health as human wholeness. Health includes physical or biological well-being; it also includes psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Health has a relational, dynamic quality. It includes both
the wellbeing and the appropriate functioning of the person as a whole in the context of human finitude, suffering, and death. 7

Health care that proceeds from a unified view includes many different roles and levels of responsibility. At one level it entails personal responsibility for one's own health. At another level it requires the contributions of professionals with particular specialized skills. At yet a third level it involves the social and institutional ordering of the resources of society for the common good. While all of these levels of responsibility are interrelated, in the present context we are concerned first of all with the identity and role of the physician. As a profession, medicine resembles theology and law in the provision which each makes for the specialized education and training of its members, in its emphasis upon service to society, in the development of professional standards of behavior and character, and in the internal monitoring of the practice of its members.

Throughout the history of medicine, many different metaphors have been used to describe the basic relationship of physicians to their patients. In The Physician's Covenant, William F. May has provided a delightful and incisive study of five such images: the physician as healer, as fighter, as technician, as teacher, and as covenantor. 8 While each of these symbols captures an important aspect of the relationship, May argues persuasively that the covenant image is the most adequate in a number of important respects. It is this image which most fully expresses the dynamic, interdependent, and interactive relationship which is established between the patient as a person and the physician as a health-care provider.

Significantly, the Hippocratic Oath does contain a reference to covenant, but it refers exclusively to the obligations which a physician has to his teacher and the guild. In contrast, the physician's responsibilities to his patients are spelled out in a code— or list—of duties, including the absolute forswearing of abortion and euthanasia, the avoidance of promiscuous sexual relations with one's patients, and the safeguarding of confidentiality. This codal form of morality now dominates modern medical ethics, according to May. May argues that modern medical ethics has been reduced almost entirely to a codal form of morality. This can be seen in the succession of codes and statements of principles dating back at least to the 1847 American Medical Association Code and continuing through the Nuremberg Code (1949) and the 1980 AMA Principles of Medical Ethics.

"Code" morality is finally inadequate as a paradigm of the physician-patient relationship because the physician's role becomes...
either paternalistic and contractualist. Contracts constitute a minimalist form of ethics. They require only that the stipulations of the agreement be fulfilled; moreover, contracts are conditional. If one party fails to perform its part of the agreement, the contract itself ceases to be binding. While the newer, contractualist model is ostensibly more egalitarian, therefore, patients nonetheless remain unequal parties because they are not specialists in the field. For this very reason, trust is essential to the professional relationship.

Contract medicine is based upon a highly individualistic concept of human nature both in respect to physicians and in respect to patients. In contrast, the covenant image emphasizes the donative, or gift, basis of medicine. Physicians are not only indebted to their teachers but also to society for the privilege of professional practice, to their patients, and ultimately to God. In the biblical context human covenants are based upon God’s covenantal relationship with humanity, a divine bestowal of special talents and a sense of vocation. Covenantal relationships require an element of gratuitous service— or generosity—which cannot be reduced to contractual stipulations based upon mutual self-interest and fee-for-service calculations.

In the face of unforeseen and unpredictable health hazards, covenant most faithfully embodies the physician’s commitment to the patient. But when the issue is prevention, rehabilitation, and the provision of chronic and terminal care, covenant alone demands that healers become teachers of their patients. Covenant pushes beyond the dyadic physician-patient relationship to the need for covenanted institutions to promote and sustain health in the community at large: The medical profession itself, hospitals, hospices, churches and synagogues. Finally, in religious terms, covenantal faithfulness means recognition of the reality of disease, suffering, and death, but it also means a denial of their ultimacy. Covenant means being with and caring for the dying when all of the resources for bodily health and treatment have been exhausted. This, too, is health care; it is part of the nurturing of human wholeness.

Moral and Theological Language in a Pluralist Society

My observations on moral and theological language in a pluralist society must be brief. Contemporary debates in medical ethics generally reflect the two major moral traditions in Western culture,
viz., an ethic of duty and an ethic of the good. In the former, moral relationships are defined primarily in terms of known rules, duties and obligations. The classical example of this deontological tradition in moral philosophy is Emmanuel Kant. In contemporary Protestant ethics this approach is represented by Paul Ramsey and in Catholicism by numerous textbooks on casuistry. In an ethic of the good, on the other hand, moral relationships are defined in teleological terms, the aspiration after goods and values. In modern medicine—as in modern culture—teleological ethics generally takes the form of utilitarianism in the tradition of Bentham and Mill, e.g. the greatest good for the greatest number. It should be noted, however, that the classical tradition of virtue is a much older form of teleology which is rooted in Aristotle and Aquinas. This position provides the basic structure for James Gustafson's ethic; it is also the tradition upon which Pellegrino and Thomasma draw in their recent book, For the Patient's Good.

Even a cursory survey of the literature of medical ethics demonstrates the pervasiveness of language drawn from moral philosophy. Theological ethics is also dependent upon the categories and methods of moral philosophy when it takes up the task of medical ethics. This is true both within the Christian community and, even more emphatically, in a religiously pluralistic setting. This does not mean that Christian ethics is reducible either to a Kantian ethic of duty or to a teleological ethic of the good. It does mean, rather, that theological ethics must define itself in relation to such concepts because the latter are intrinsic elements in moral experience. They point to broadly human if not universal patterns of moral reasoning, whether they are expressed in theological terms or not.

If Christian ethics is not reducible to philosophical categories, what, then, does theology add to ethical reflection that is not found in moral philosophy alone? At this point H. Richard Niebuhr's concept of "the responsible self" is particularly helpful. Moral action, Niebuhr argued, is responsive in character. The norm of responsibility, thus understood, is "the fitting" or "the appropriate" response to prior action. In addition to being responsive, "responsibility" includes interpretation of what is going on, a willingness to be held accountable for one's own action, and participation in an ongoing moral community. For Niebuhr, the meaning of responsibility is described concretely in the biblical idea of covenant, including not only God's covenant with humanity but also

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human communities bound together by ties of mutual fidelity and

For Niebuhr, of course, Christian ethics is theocentric; responsibility is finally to God and for the neighbor in an inclusive moral community. Since it is based in moral experience, however, the metaphor of responsibility, including ideas of the “fitting” and the “appropriate,” provides a useful hermeneutical tool for examining moral relationships in the practice of medicine. The notion of responsibility does not make the language of duty and the good unnecessary. Rather, it qualifies the latter and places these concepts in a relational, interactive context so that their meaning becomes concrete rather than abstract. The symbols of responsibility and covenant place all human relationships in the context of their ultimate relationship to God, thus pointing to the transformation of medical ethics.

Our choice of moral language helps us to revision the practice of medicine as a profession. I have tried to suggest that a covenantal understanding of medicine and a covenantal ethic go hand in hand. Covenantal ethics is, as May suggests, responsive, relational, and promissory. It focuses on the “fitting” or the “appropriate” rather than the “right” or the “good” act. Insofar as the concepts of the right and the good are retained—as they necessarily are—they become reinterpreted in relational, interactive terms.

Some months ago I was invited to participate in Grand Rounds in the Department of Urology in the Medical School. The case under discussion was that of a patient with end-stage kidney disease who had been placed on dialysis. Over time the dialysis treatment had become increasingly burdensome. Eventually, the patient requested to be taken off dialysis and allowed to die. As a competent adult, he had a legal right to discontinue treatment; nevertheless, the physician felt morally obligated to try to persuade him to remain on dialysis. In the end the physician was unsuccessful, and he eventually supported the patient’s decision. In summarizing the case the physician said that the health care team and the patient had reached “an appropriate” decision. The terms “right” and “good” seem strangely inadequate to capture the moral ambiguity and particularity of that decision, including the patient’s own sense of moral integrity which was at stake in it.

Medical practice is replete with situations in which moral choices and decisions are most adequately interpreted in terms of covenantal faithfulness rather than right and wrong, or even rights and duties. Consider, for example, decisions which must be made daily in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit concerning the kind of treatment or
care which is most appropriate for low birth-weight infants with multiple anomalies. Physicians must look at the infant's medical condition, its prospective quality of life, and the parents' ability to support the child. Under some circumstances, the decision to withhold or withdraw treatment is responsible and fitting or appropriate; it is never good.

Many of us have encountered the same dilemmas involving persons who are terminally ill, particularly those who are suffering from debilitating and slowly degenerative diseases. What kinds of care should be given to them, especially to those who are unable to choose for themselves? Clearly, one must consider the quality of life and the well-being of the patient. Covenant means that these serious decisions will be made in fidelity to the patient as a person. When they are thus made, they appear to be responsible and appropriate, or fitting; but we would be loath to call them good. They remain morally ambiguous and tragic.

The Relations of Justice to Health Policy

Finally, I want to consider briefly some of the implications of a covenantal model of health care for public policy. Both medicine and ministry have a responsibility to provide leadership in the provision of health care. Physicians, in this regard, must educate the public about the conditions which support physical health and those which predispose toward disease. What, for example, is the significance of nutrition, environmental factors, genetics, alcohol, and smoking in the etiology of disease? How is AIDS transmitted, and what methods of its prevention are effective? Ministers, on the other hand, contribute to health care by conducting their ministry with an understanding of the unity of body and spirit; the equal dignity of all persons without regard to social worth; a covenantal understanding of community; and a religious motivation for equal justice. Medicine and ministry therefore join together to develop a just or a fair health care system.

Health care involves three major policy issues: (1) what level of care, if any, should be provided for all?; (2) the allocation of medical resources; and (3) accessibility. All three are issues of distributive justice, and all are questions which must finally be resolved through the political process. Consideration of a guaranteed level of health care leads at once to the question of a right to such care. Is health care a right or a privilege? If there is such a right, to what level of goods and services does it apply? Upon what is such a claim based?
1983 the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research concluded that society has an ethical obligation to ensure that citizens have "equitable access" to "an adequate level of care without excessive burdens." The Commission described this level as "a floor below which no one ought to fall." From a theological perspective the moral right to a basic level of care is grounded in the equality of human worth and in the recognition of health as a primary human need. It is essentially a covenantal nation of justice.

The second policy issue pertains to the allocation of national resources for health. What portion of our Gross National Product should be allocated to health care, and how should such funds be distributed? As a nation we currently spend more than 12.2 percent of the GNP on health care. In 1991 this figure reached an estimated $750 billion. In comparison with other countries, this percentage is not excessively high. As the proportion of the population over 65 increases, as the impact of drug addiction mounts, and as AIDS becomes increasingly epidemic, the need for increased funding in these areas will become more and more urgent. In order to meet these demands new efforts to control costs must be made, and greater priority must be given to prevention. We must use present resources more efficiently. Individuals can and should assume greater responsibility for their own health. Even so, however, scarcity of medical goods and services at both the national and global levels will continue to be a daily fact of life.

Justice demands that a basic level of medical services be provided for all. Scarcity requires that limits be placed upon what governments provide. The availability and effectiveness of various forms of care will determine the basic level, or "floor"; the political process will refine it. In 1972 Congress expanded Medicare to include funding of renal dialysis for patients under 65 years of age. Should similar provision be made for those who need organ transplants and for persons with AIDS? For persons needing long-term care? How much of the general funds should be allocated for prevention as opposed to crisis medicine and research?

The final policy issue is that of accessibility to health care. As a nation, we spend some $400 billion annually for medical care, but all Americans do not share equitably in the benefits of the system. In effect we have a two-class system: one for the affluent and one for the poor. The urban and rural poor, the elderly, and the non-white portions of the population are in worse health and receive far fewer health care benefits than most other Americans. Infant mortality, for example, is 50 percent higher in poverty areas. One of the leading
causes of infant mortality is low birth-weight, which is largely due to inadequate prenatal care. Here as elsewhere the key to equity is prevention. For a lack of $500 million per year for prenatal care, we spend $2 billion for treatment; and, sadly, such treatment does not bring a cure. The concept of a basic level of care implies an emphasis upon prevention rather than treatment.

Another glaring inequity in our health care system is insurance. Health insurance covers medical costs for most of us. Yet there are an estimated 34,000,000 persons in this country, consisting largely of working people, who do not have any form of health insurance. It is indeed ironic that workers who are not themselves covered by such insurance help subsidize those of us who are! Justice requires a fair distribution of health care costs.

Conclusion

I have tried to suggest, in the first place, that theology and medicine are partners in the quest for health. The special vocation of medicine is to nurture physical well-being and healing. Religion brings meaning and wholeness into life; religious faith also facilitates healing. In the face of questions about the meaning of life, suffering, and death, the boundaries between medicine and religion disappear. Secondly, the relationship between physician and patient is most adequately expressed in terms of covenant. Covenant symbolizes the moral bonds of faith and fidelity which are essential to the professional relationship itself, including both medicine and ministry. Thirdly, in a pluralist society the language of moral discourse will—and should—remain primarily secular. The influence of religious faith will be largely indirect through the shaping of attitudes and perspectives and through the nurturing of traits of character which will sustain the practice of medicine as a profession. Finally, religion has a prophetic task in the achievement of a more equitable distribution of health care. This is a requirement not only of charity but also of justice.

I close with the familiar words of Jesus concerning his own ministry: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." And when the people saw the paralytic take up his pallet and walk, "they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" (Matt. 11:2-6; Mk. 2:12).
Notes


8. William F. May, The Physician’s Covenant: Images of the Healer in Medical Ethics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983). Members of The United Methodist Church may be reminded, in this connection, of the Wesleyan Covenant Service in which United Methodists are called upon to renew their covenant with God and take upon themselves “the yoke of obedience.” (The Methodist Church, “An Order of Worship for Such as Would Enter into or Renew Their Covenant with God,” The Book of Worship for Church and Home [Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1965], 382-388.) There the covenant symbolizes God’s faithfulness; in response, the congregation renews its vows of faithfulness and obedience to God. In The Physician’s Covenant, in contrast, May focuses upon the relationship between physicians and their patients. May’s usage of the term is primarily phenomenological rather than theological; in this respect it resembles H. Richard Niebuhr’s treatment of the concept of “responsibility” in The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Both May and Niebuhr are concerned with the interactive, responsive, covenantal character of moral relationships.


Selected Bibliography


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A few years ago, I had an idea that I hoped would beautify the sanctuary of First Church, of which I am the pastor. Wooden aisle candles, I thought, would be perfect as special appointments for the Christmas Eve service and an occasional wedding. There was even a member of the congregation who could make them, someone who could transform an idea into finely designed pieces of craftsmanship. If only he would! I approached Warren Eastman about it when he returned from his annual winter stay in Georgia. But his response was cool and somewhat distant. He'd never seen aisle candles before. Are they hurricane lamps on pedestals? How large are they? How many will you need? What would they be used for? His questions were polite—but I knew that my idea left him uninspired.

Warren and Dorothy Eastman have been members of First Church for many years. They had many friends, all of whom had families. When his sons were growing up, he had been the Boy Scout troop leader. The Eastman boys were always involved with athletics—football in the fall, basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring. Warren has a gruff and unyielding manner, but his friends know he has a sensitive side that he shows only rarely. When Warren resisted my idea, I didn't quarrel with him. But my enthusiasm about the candles flagged somewhat; I knew that without Warren's cooperation the aisle candles would probably never come into existence.

In late June my family and I went on our vacation. Two weeks on an island off the coast of Maine would be a welcome respite from the...
demands of the local church. At the end of the first week, my son called from home. He wanted to let me know that Max Eastman, a handsome young man whose athletic prowess reached almost heroic proportions in both high school and college, had committed suicide. The memorial service would be held the following Monday.

All of a sudden, my vacation seemed terribly ill-timed. I called Warren and Dorothy and offered to come home to be part of their grieving. But they insisted that I stay where I was. I needed my vacation, they said, and there was little I could do for them right now. Warren went on to say that he would be very upset if he knew that I had disrupted my vacation for him. There are a lot of things that a preacher can do wrong without incurring the wrath of members. But ignoring their heartfelt wishes is not one of them. I offered what peace I could communicate over the phone to these sensitive and devastated people, and I assured them that on Monday morning I would pray for them.

Soon after we returned from vacation, I visited Warren and Dorothy. They were still numb with shock. There were no words to express the reality of this loss; deep sighs would have to do. After a particularly long silence, Warren asked me if I were still interested in those aisle candles that I had mentioned in the spring. Yes, I said, the candles would be beautiful. His eyes filled with tears as he quietly said, 'I'd like to try to make them as a memorial for Max.'

Warren hadn't said a word about the project for months, and after this simple statement he didn't say anything else about it for the rest of the summer. He and Dorothy came back to church the first week after the memorial service. We all knew it was a struggle for them just to be there. The church held too many memories of the past: of a boy growing up with friends, of the joys and sorrows shared in a small-town life, of time spent in the company of other families. But they were known here, and Max was known here, as in no other place. They had to be at the church with their friends, people of faith with whom they could live openly with their grief and who would allow them to be weak, needing support.

Others in the church knew all too well what the Eastmans endured. Sara Jane, one of the church organists, had been shocked by her husband's death only a month earlier. She too needed to be at the church with people who had celebrated her marriage to Lee, watched their children grow up, and aged with them. Sara Jane had been sustained by the church in her hours of trial. Now she would be a part of the faithful who sustained the Eastmans during their hour.

A few weeks after Max's funeral, Warren's trust in this congregation was tested. Every year, Warren sang a solo of his
favorite hymn, "My God and I." The church had come to anticipate his solo every year, for, although his voice was untrained and he was rather self-conscious, Warren has a pure tenor voice and an unforced, sensitive way of interpreting lyrics. Now, after his son's death, he was not sure whether he could follow through on his commitment, but finally he resolved to do it. On this Sunday, his accompanist would be Sara Jane.

As I listened to these two people join their broken hearts together, I thought that this is what the church can be—a place where the brokenhearted gather to make an offering of their brokenness. Together they could do what they could not do separately. The piano and voice never sounded better; their offering had the feel of a sacrament.

One mid-October morning Warren knocked at the study door. He had been thinking about that project I had mentioned and wanted to know exactly what I had in mind. Together we went into the sanctuary. He listened as I described the purpose, location, and approximate size of the aisle candles. Never one to assume too much, he said he would see what he could do.

Over the next few weeks he would come to the church to show me his drawings. We would go to the sanctuary, look at the model, and then, after talking about the details of the work, return to the study. In the course of our conversation, Warren would share one of his memories of Max. Every time we met to talk about the aisle candles, there would be another story about his son. And every time, our visits ended with Warren saying he hoped his efforts would be good enough, and blinking back a tear. Clearly the project was taking on larger dimensions than either Warren or I had imagined.

One morning he came to the church with another idea. In addition to the aisle candles, he had been thinking about a pair of candelabra for the chancel. Would it be appropriate for him to make them? Yes, I said, recalling that I had had a similar idea, but thought it was too much to ask. So Warren took on the project, and he and Dorothy made and finished them together.

At last the entire project was finished, and their work would be dedicated on Christmas Eve. Throughout the fall, Warren protested that he didn't want to be in the church when the candles were dedicated. Perhaps one of his sons, who was particularly close to Max, could be there instead. Warren was afraid that a memorial service would be overwhelming, and he just didn't think he could take it. I wasn't going to argue with him about it, but I did press the point a little. Naturally the service would be difficult, I said, but the church members would want them there. They would understand,
and be there to offer support if it was needed. Warren let the matter drop. Then, on one of his final visits to my study, he told me that he and his wife would stay for the Christmas Eve service. They had decided to be there for the dedication and the first use of their memorial gift.

When the day of dedication finally came, a unique anticipation gripped the congregation. Twenty-four aisle candles stood sentinel in memory of Max, giving a sacred light to our worship there. I had worried and labored over my words for that day, aware of my responsibility to interpret for the entire congregation the life, tragic death, and memory of Max Eastman. I count it as a part of the work of the Spirit that the following words came to me.

I began by observing that human life, even with its apparent strength and resiliency, is still awfully fragile. People can rebound from terrible illness or setbacks. But people can also be stretched so far that they can't return. We have gathered as a Christian congregation to give thanks to God for all of life. Moreover, we give thanks for the times of resiliency that we have experienced ourselves. At the same time, we are sobered by our loss of Max, for whom there was no return from suffering and depression. But in our grief we have two options: we can become bitter, forever to shake an angry fist at the universe. Or we can claim our hope as Christians, as the Apostle Paul said. We can allow our anguish to stir depths of care and concern that otherwise were held in check or remained unplumbed. Warren and Dorothy Eastman have chosen to use their grief as a means to work through to hope and blessing. The aisle candles and candelabra were carefully designed, painstakingly crafted, and hand-finished as a gift to First Church in memory of their son Max.

On Christmas Eve, Warren and Dorothy arrived early. Max's father and mother stood next to each other, silently, awaiting the moment when the candles would be lighted for the first time. With a whispered word they began the final expression of their labor of love. Warren touched the flickering taper to each wick, and Dorothy then gently replaced the glass. It occurred to me that I was watching two parents touch their newborn son once more.

People have commented many times about how beautiful the aisle candles and candelabra are. When they ask who made them, and what design they used, I tell them this story. You see, there are two things that people can do with their grief. Warren and Dorothy suffered the loss of their beloved son, and in the midst of their travail and grief they trusted the church to be the Church. They depended
on it to be strong when they were weak, to receive what was broken. It did not fail them, and they turned this gift into something truly beautiful: a sacrament of care and an offering of hope.
The Method of the Parables: More Contemporary than You Would Think

The event described below is based on the recent assassination of a well-known woman who was a community leader in an organized neighborhood of Lima, Peru, but it could have happened in any of our Latin American countries.

Rosa heard someone pounding on the door of her house and recognized the voice of a neighbor shouting, “Put candles in the street!” Rosa opened the door and saw that the night was brightened by the light of many candles. As far as her eye could see, there was a row of burning candles down the middle of the street. There were more candles at the intersections. “Villa El Salvador is full of candles!” said the neighbor.

What happened in the community of Villa on that February night in 1992? The inhabitants had put candles in the street because two days earlier their leader Malena had died. A bomb killed her on the night of the meeting of the organizers of the community kitchens* in that zone of the city. Rosa knew about

*Women in the “popular” or poor communities of Lima have organized programs for sharing and preparing food in order to help people survive during the present economic and political crisis.

The Reverend Rosanna Panizo is President of Comunidad Biblico Teologica in Lima, Peru. Scripture references are taken from the Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday & Company, Inc.
Malena’s death. Her neighbor told her that the candles were put in the street following the wake in the church. Rosa said to herself, “I’m not going to get involved in anything. Besides, I need my candles for other things.” She went back home and shut the door. Suddenly she felt tears filling her eyes. She sat down at the table, buried her face in her hands, and began to cry.

The disciples did not recognize Jesus when they met him on the road to Emmaus. “Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?’” (Luke 24:30-32a). The two returned to Jerusalem and said, “The Lord has indeed risen.”

What happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus can happen to us. As Christians we know that Jesus walks beside us. We hear his word in church. We preach his word. We can even feel a warmth in our hearts. But all that is not enough to open our eyes. Something is still missing. Something as simple and everyday as someone who takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to us.

In Luke 4:18 we are told that Jesus came to give sight to people who are blind. When we read the parables, we realize that Jesus knew very well what his people’s life was like. He watched how they made bread, how the birds lived, how parents taught their sons and daughters, how the judges judged, and how the landowners treated their tenants. For thirty years the Son of God participated in the life of his people. He accumulated a broad, full, and rich experience, all of which he brought to bear on the announcement of God’s reign. Thus the parables were born.

Because the parables belong to the world of symbol, I believe they have a much greater liberating content than at first might seem to be the case. The parables have an impact because they revolutionize from inside out both the individual and society. They collide with our mental symbolic schemes, which are the most difficult things about us to change!

Jesus himself is a parable! Jesus himself constitutes a scandal! That is why they killed him, and that is why God raised him from the dead!

Edward Schillebeeckx offers the following insight into how parables work:

A parable turns around a “scandalizing” center, at any rate a core of paradox and novelty. A parable often stands things on
their head; it is meant to break through our conventional thinking and being. A parable is meant to start the listener thinking by means of a built-in element of the "surprising" and the "alienating" in a common, everyday event. It is not every night that one is hauled out of bed to help a needy stranger in dire straits; and you are not continually losing a sheep or a coin. It never happens at all to a good many of us. And yet in the parable I am confronted with it, here and how. The parable obliges me to go on thinking about it.

The method of the parables is dynamic. It shows us that revealed truth is never captured once and for all. Every day we can discover afresh new perspectives on those facets of life to which Jesus pointed through the parables. In that way we can continually probe more deeply the meaning of the Reign of God for human life. It is also a dynamic method because, at least as I have experienced it in my work on these parables, it never again leaves us in peace. Life, with everything it encompasses, begins to be a call that makes us uncomfortable and that awakens our sleeping consciousness. Just as in the story with which we began, seeing the candles made Rosa break down.

Schillebeeckx continues:

The idea behind it is to make you consider your own life, your own goings-on, your own world, from a different angle for once. Parables open up new and different potentialities for living, often in contrast with our conventional ways of behaving; they offer a chance to experience things in a new way. Parables can have a strong practical and critical effect that may prompt a renewal of life and society. . . .

. . .[However,] parables point not to another, supranatural world but to a new potentiality within this world of ours: to a real possibility of coming to see life and the world, and to experience them, in a way quite different from the one we are accustomed to. . . . In the world of Jesus' parables, living and evaluating are not what they are in the world of the ordinary, daily round. . . . God does not come into [that world of parables] directly; and yet anyone who attends to them knows that through these stories one is confronted with God's saving activity in Jesus; this is how God acts, and it is to be seen in the actions of Jesus himself. If, at any rate, you see with a heart ready to be transformed.

Therefore, especially today, when all of the life we have known has stripped off its old clothing and revealed itself as something totally...
new and different, the parables that require us to take a second look at life will be able to help us discover both old and new things about the Reign of God.

"Have you understood all these?" They said, "Yes." And he said to them, "Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old." (Matt. 13:51-52)

That is the challenge with which I intend to confront you in this article! In any event, more than a solely academic experience, I want to offer a testimony of the faith of someone who believes in the God of Jesus Christ and in the values of God’s Reign, and who, on account of Jesus, has never been able to quench or to hide her hunger and thirst for justice.

A Word of Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

The first episode of Jesus’ public life mentioned by Luke is his teaching in the synagogue of Nazareth (4:16-30). Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, tell of other events taking place prior to that one—stories apparently familiar to Luke (4:23). However, both its placement at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and its general definition of Jesus’ mission, make it clear that this passage is the heart of Luke’s Gospel. Jesus will continue to expound this same type of teaching in other synagogues (4:43-44).

On a Sabbath Jesus proclaims liberty to the captives, gives sight to people who are blind, announces the liberation of the oppressed, and proclaims the year of the Lord. On a Sabbath—the day on which they were to celebrate in a special way their liberation from slavery, which God brought about (Deut. 5:15)—Jesus characterizes his mission, fruit of his anointing with the holy Spirit of the Lord, as a cause of joy for the poor. For to bring joy to the poor who suffer hunger and humiliation is the best way to give glory to God (Luke 6:1-5, 6-11).

Just as for Luke the deaf person is the one who cannot hear, and the lame persons is the one who cannot walk well, and the person with leprosy is the one whose skin is damaged, so also the poor person is the one who is only half alive, the one who is defenseless in the face of arbitrariness, the one who is exploited. The poor person has the same social value as people who are blind or lame or deaf, or who have leprosy (7:22). It is on the basis of this understanding of the centrality of the Lukan proclamation that we will interpret Jesus’
actions and his words or parables.

Exegesis, Interpretation, and Message

The stories from chapters 16 and 18 that are the focus of this study take place on what is known as Jesus’ journey up to Jerusalem. Jesus freely chooses to travel toward that city, which he will enter with a multitude of disciples who have experienced his many deeds recounted in 9:51–19:27.

The true road of Jesus leads to the ascension, ending in his going up to God, the Father (Acts 1:2, 11, 22). But it is a road that centers on Jerusalem, judgment, and death. Only in the hard act of turning himself over completely to the work to which he has committed himself, and in the poverty of finding himself alone and helpless in the face of death, do we find revealed and realized both the true being and the richness of Jesus who ascends to the Father.

On the road to his ascension Jesus offers the richness of his being in God. But, at the same time, by putting himself at risk and even being killed, he teaches us that what is truly new about the Reign of God is that one must overcome the old life if one wants to gain the new one.

Luke 16:1-13 A New Economy, or How to be an Administrator in an Unjust System

The protagonists of this story are:
Verse 1: a rich man (plousios): someone who has sufficient riches or goods to need an administrator for his properties (oikonomos – someone to manage the oikos or household).

This administrator was accused or denounced (dieblethe). Neither in Palestine of Jesus’ day nor in the commercial life of the Hellenistic cities of Luke’s day were bookkeeping or audits much in use. The administrator or legal representative acted on behalf of the client. It was assumed that the interests of the representative were those of the client.

Such representatives were not authorized to carry out any illegal activities. That way, any illegal act was the full and direct responsibility of the steward. The employer would not be punished and would have a clear conscience about any transgression of the Jewish law. In any case, it was assumed that the administrator would act with the authorization of the employer. In the event of a conflict
between them, neither could count on judicial support against
the other.

The administrator would thus enjoy the confidence of the
employer. He would not receive fixed remuneration, but he would be
repaid for his expenses. To be dismissed would be a catastrophe for
him on a number of levels, particularly with respect to his income
and his social status ("Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I
should be too ashamed."—v. 3b)

Verse 5: debtors (chreopheiletai): They are the tenants (who had to
hand over a set portion of the harvest that the land yielded) or the
wholesale merchants who received shipments on consignment.

This group of persons was involved in a social system whose
beginnings can already be seen in the eighth century BCE. The
prophets Isaiah (5:8-10), Micah (2:1-5), and Amos (6:4-7) testify to a
process of concentration of land by expropriation, and to the growing
indebtedness of free peasants through a process of borrowing at
interest.

Within that social system we find day laborers (persons without
land, unemployed, or working odd jobs) and tenants (leasing land
from landowners, with the obligation of paying rent—either a fixed
amount or between twenty-five and fifty percent of the harvest).
These latter were always at risk of moving into the status of slaves
(along with other members of their families) if they failed to meet
their obligations. Furthermore, they had to pay both an income tax
and a personal tax to the Empire, in addition to trying to work their
way out of debt.

The relationship of dependence between landowners and tenants
grew through loans and interest, not as much to augment the
landowners' capital as to provide them with cheap labor—slaves in
the condition of dependents.

Verse 6: one hundred measures of oil, the equivalent of 3,650
liters, representing the product of 146 olive trees, and having a value
of a thousand denarii.

One olive tree produced about 120 kilograms of olives, from which
could be pressed about twenty-five kilograms of oil. To produce a
hundred measures of oil, one would need 146 olive trees, and figuring
twenty-two olive trees for each hectare of land, one would need to
have 6.64 hectares under cultivation.

Verse 7: One hundred loads of wheat, or about 27,500 kilograms,
requiring about 42.5 hectares, and having a value of 2,500 denarii.

Verses 6b, 7b: The administrator would keep the rental
agreements or the I.O.U.'s written by the debtors, without the
signatures of witnesses. Those documents were called holographs.
Changes in the contract would take place in such a way that no one could criticize either the administrator or the debtors.

In both cases, the debts are very large. The discount in the case of the olive trees corresponds to 1,825 liters or five hundred denarii. Large scale trade in olives and olive oil was in the hands of the rich, because newly planted olive trees would not produce for ten years. In the case of the wheat, the discount is of 5,500 kilograms, worth about five hundred denarii.

Verse 8a: The Lord (Jesus) praised the "dishonest steward" (oikonomos tes adikias).

Verses 9, 11: Riches or unjust money (mamonas tes adikias): Here I have opted to personify wealth, in keeping with verse 13, which speaks of "two masters," God and money.

I think that what the evangelist is narrating, rather than a just parable, is the description of one Jewish juridical or administrative case among the many that were already well-known in Jesus’ surroundings.

How should one judge the deal the administrator makes with the debtors?

The interpretations usually emphasize the "embezzlements" carried out by the administrator in the context of a supposed legal system. My proposal begins from the opposite direction: I assume what gives every indication of being the truth, namely that it is the debt system presupposed by the story that is illegal. From that beginning point we can assess more fairly the actions of the administrator.

What is at issue is the return of hidden interest charges in the debt. The administrator has been charging interest on behalf of his employer’s account (the rich man/Mammon), but in a transaction in which the moral responsibility was his own. However, there was a prohibition in force against the taking of interest in loans between Jews (Deut. 15:7-11; 23:20-21; Lev. 25:35-37).

The contract could have been worked out in the following way: The note for the debt would be changed without indicating the date for repayment, which the creditor could set arbitrarily and without establishing the quotas. The interest for oil was 100 percent (since the interest for products subject to spoilage was always higher), and that for wheat was 25 percent. The term for repayment is estimated to be about seven years, so the discount amounts to about three years’ worth of interest in each case.

What did the discount mean for the debtors? A family of five needed an annual harvest of 1,690 kilograms of wheat to have enough to feed the family, set aside seed for the following year’s sowing, feed...
the animals, and pay the taxes and required contributions for things like festivals, a dowry or other gifts, and offerings. The discount described corresponds to the harvest of 2.16 years.

Apparently the rabbis and Pharisees of Jesus' day, who are described as loving money (Luke 16:14), never questioned this state of affairs in which a poor person's livelihood could be more than eaten away by debts and interest payments. In fact, there are many ways to elude the prohibitions against charging interest that were intended to avoid just such a situation. In the Hebrew Bible we find references to ways that was done all the time (Ezek. 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12; Amos 2:8; Ps. 15:5; Job 24:3; Neh. 5:1-13; Hab. 2:6).

In this context I have chosen to translate verse 8 as "the administrator of the injustice," instead of the usual way that treats the genitive construction as the adjective, "the dishonest steward." With the translation I suggest, the emphasis is on the injustice of the system, instead of labeling the one involved in it as a swindler operating personally outside the system. However, as I have already noted, such an assessment of the administrator himself assumes the legality of an unjust order, specifically the system of lending at interest that results in dependents of the large landowners.

Is it being "just" to function within such an order? As we have seen, that system itself violated the Torah. By paying back the unjust and illegal interest that had been charged, the administrator was really being just by reestablishing the law. His "prudence" consists in the reconstruction and preservation of the divine law, the recognition of the prohibition against taking interest that everyone was aware of but that was always circumvented.

If injustice becomes institutionalized, all that is left is to violate the perverted law. What the administrator of our passage does is to restore the law by breaking the law. In such a situation that is the task of the economy. The administrator uses his role, his position, and his information to change an unjust and illegal situation. This is where the eschatological moment of the passage is rooted: the steward recognizes that the system he serves threatens to destroy him too. In that situation he goes back to the Torah, which then leads him to restore freedom and life, both to the debtors and to himself.

There is no need to look for the "prudence" of the administrator on a "higher" or "spiritual" level, but rather on the economic, material, social, and political level. It is on that level that the first commandment hangs in the balance: does one serve God or Mammon in the form of a system that produces injustice and violence?

Jesus takes his stand against the systems of production of the idols, and he restores the first commandment, along with an ethic
and corresponding praxis. The provocative demand of Jesus is that one "make friends with Mammon," which means to serve the true God with and by means of the "Mammon of injustice." How? By interrupting, stopping, sidetracking, or suspending processes that produce idols and sacrifices, in order to reconstruct justice.

We know that the logia of Jesus as they have been transmitted to us have a double historical setting—both the framework of the mission of Jesus, and the parenesis of the early church. It is clear that the parable found in Luke 16:1-9, 13 comes from the first of these contexts, and that verses 10-12 come from the second. The latter verses, then, provide information about the situation of the church that had money to manage, and about the ethical reflection that was developing to address that new reality.

The management or appropriate use of capital by the church was and should be an important part of our ecclesiology. The early church had legitimate needs to protect widows, orphans, foreigners, and prisoners, and therefore needed money. However, we know that Christians are not exempt from falling into the temptation that money brings (remember the story of Ananias and Saphhira). That is the warning carried by verses 10-12. But at the same time, there is an exhortation to caution about the money that the church receives. According to the Didache, they were to reject under any circumstances donations from persons who did not belong to the church, or who behaved badly (for example, those who kept others in prison or who oppressed the poor). Theological work has already begun when the church receives money!

But money alone is not the issue. Rather the problem is serving money. To serve (doulein) means to be a servant or a slave. There is a contrasting parallelism between "serving God" and "serving Money." Money becomes a substitute for God, and as such is an idol. Making a fetish of money makes fetishes also of all human, social, and political relations. The search for the God who liberates cannot take place except in a direct and violent struggle against the idol that is money, and against its idolization of the entire social and political reality.

It is in this same sense that a later letter attributed to Paul develops a critique of monetary wealth (1 Tim. 6:9-10). In the love of money, or of the god that it has become, is the root of all evil: "People who long to be rich... get trapped into all sorts of foolish and harmful ambitions which plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:9). Similarly, money is death. It is the death than shines as if it were life. The service of death is not an infinite number of sins independent of one another, but it consists of an anti-world in which all human impulses are organized under a common denominator.

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What appears is the discipline or punishment (even to the point of death) of money: some of those who pursue money have "given their souls any number of fatal wounds" (1 Tim. 6:10).

The love of money breaks the bodily connection between people in which the love of God is alive. Trust is placed only in money instead of in God, even though one's relationship to God takes place in bodily unity. Therefore, when one trusts in wealth or money, faith is lost, and pride is born: "Instruct those who are rich in this world's goods that they should not be proud and should set their hopes not on money, which is untrustworthy, but on God who gives us richly all that we need for our happiness" (1 Tim. 6:17).


The protagonists of this parable are:
Verse 19: A rich man (plousios) who wore purple and threw banquets every day.
Verse 20: A poor man (ptochos), Lazarus, a beggar who used to lie at the gate of the rich man. Lazarus is the only character in the parables who has a name with a special meaning—"God helps." We are told further (v. 21) that Lazarus was covered with sores and longed to satisfy his hunger with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs used to come and lick Lazarus's sores.
Verse 22: Abraham.
Verse 28: Five brothers.

At least the first part of this story was very well known in the first century. It is based on the Egyptian story about the journey of Si-Osiris and his father Setme Chamois to the realm of the dead. That story would have been carried by Jews from Alexandria to Palestine, and there it was reworked as the story of the poor scribe and the rich publican, Bar Ma'jan. Evidently Jesus used this story, which Luke then picked up both here and in the parable of the great feast (Luke 14:15-24).

It is important to note that on the whole, the emphasis on the parable falls on the different social circumstances of the poor man and the rich man, without getting into moral considerations about them. Movement back and forth between the gate where Lazarus sat and the interior of the house where the rich man partied would have been possible, but it never happened.

The second part of the parable portrays the total inversion of their circumstances after death. But now the abyss between the bosom of Abraham and the torments of Hades cannot be crossed. The earlier
hunger could have been satisfied, but the present thirst will last forever.

Joachim Jeremias makes the following observation:

*Jesus does not want to comment on a social problem, nor does he intend to give teaching about the afterlife, but he relates the parable to warn men who resemble the brothers of the rich men of the impending danger. Hence the poor Lazarus is only a secondary figure, introduced by way of contrast. The parable is about the five brothers, and it should not be styled the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but the parable of the Six Brothers.*

I differ with Jeremias's conclusion that Lazarus is only a secondary character, for, after all, he is given a name in the parable, whereas the rich man is known only by his economic status. I disagree also that Jesus does not take a stand on the problem of the rich and the poor.

It is obvious that the fundamental purpose of the parable was not to comfort the poor, but rather urgently—even to the point of threats—to exhort the rich to be converted to generosity and a loosening of their purse-strings. For Luke the poor are where that conversion takes place, and where the rich discover their own sin.

The final verses of the parable (verses 27-31) reinforce the validity of the teachings of Moses and of the prophets (who are mentioned twice in this section), just as did the earlier verses of the parable (verses 16-18). The intention of the parable appears to be to read in the Hebrew Bible the demands of justice and solidarity that became particularly far removed from a Gentile community that was economically well situated. For Luke the rich Pharisees or scribes are a symbol of the rich or prestigious Christians of his own community who considered themselves superior to the rest (7:36-50; 11:37-44; 14:1-24; 16:14-15).

These same tensions cut across our own communities, and divide Christians of the north from those of the south of our hemisphere!

In Luke we encounter an attenuating of the radical demands of the Jesus movement that reflected the circumstances of the truly poor sectors of the population. Those demands were adapted to fit different circumstances, in which a significant number of people in the community were quite well off. One could say that Luke proposes a spirituality for rich people that is both realistic and demanding. It is a situation requiring a delicate balance, because at the time when Luke was writing it did not seem possible to require that everyone live in total poverty, unless one was prepared to confine Christianity to being a small sect with no possibility of stretching across the
Empire. But at the same time the church had lapsed into a moral climate that legitimized the well-being of the privileged, diluting the capacity of the faith for historical innovation, and making the church the symbolic paraphrase of the established powers.

Luke subverts the notion that the values of wealth and salvation are signs of divine election, as they were considered to be in the Deuteronomic law (Deut. 20:5-8). That is a very clear indication of the double direction of his Gospel: it is addressed to the self-centered rich Christians, but the goal it pursues energetically is their conversion to their poor brothers and sisters (verses 30-31).

Abraham reminds the rich man of the good things he has received during his lifetime. The expression “to have received” or “to receive” contains an interesting image. The term comes from the world of commerce, and it means to have received something (such as an amount of money) and to provide a receipt for it. Right afterward, the texts speaks of the comfort of the poor. “Comfort” is an expression of the historical and eschatological hope of Israel. Instead of using a negative formulation, Luke uses a theological equivalent to the Reign of God, leading to the understanding that the rich man has already received a receipt for the Reign of God in the form of an open invitation, but he has never made use of it. Apparently wealth is the only comfort of the rich. On the soteriological level, the Reign of God is the comfort of the poor. Once again we are confronted with the presence of the Messiah as the content of true comfort (Luke 6:20-26).

Taken together, these notions of the receipt that has been received and the comfort that is offered make clear that what is at stake is the notion of “reward” that Jesus introduces. In no sense is this reward the payment due for good works or the privilege accruing to status or wealth, but rather a freely-given gift. It is a prize reflecting the character of the giver rather than the merit of the recipient. For that reason it becomes the basis for ever greater confidence and trust, unlike formulas that link divine blessing with human criteria of success, and thus serve only to heighten anxiety.8

The triumphalistic schema that identifies wealth with divine blessing found many enemies in the history of Israel. The prophets denounced the falsehood of the rich and the powerful, attacking their exploitation of the poor and such other classically weak subjects as widows, orphans, and foreigners. In the post-exilic period, Wisdom literature also established a link between the poor and pious on one hand, and the rich and impious or foolish on the other.

Jesus accomplished a still superior synthesis, picking up on valuable elements from the prophetic tradition. Poverty was...
unmasked as a scandalous situation, and neither as the fate of the 
pious nor as an ideal virtue. Poverty means pain, hunger, weeping, 
and marginalization. The Reign of God proclaimed and enacted by 
Jesus implies the exercise of the will of God in all arenas, including 
the economic arena. That means the establishment of just economic 
and social relationships. The classical inversions, such as those we 
find in this passage (1:48-54; 6:20b-26), are a step literarily fixed in 
the kerygmatic and didactic memory of the young Christian 
church—precisely a necessary step toward the realization of that 
vision.

If the inversions succeed in frightening the appropriate people, 
they have already accomplished half of their task. If they mobilize, 
convert, and produce obedience to the full call of the gospel of Jesus 
Christ, they will have succeeded completely!

Diagram of the Lukan Inversions

Luke 1:48—The humility of the slave girl/seen by God
50—for those who fear God/God’s mercy
51—the proud/scattered
52—the mighty/removed from their thrones the 
humble/exalted
53—the hungry/filled with good things the rich/sent 
empty away
54—the servant Israel/helped

6:20—the poor/blessed: yours is the Reign of God
24—rich/have no comfort
21—hungry/will be satisfied
25—those who are full/will be hungry
22—persecuted/will have a reward
26—those who are praised/praise shown to be false

16:19—rich man/in Hades (23)
20—poor Lazarus/blessed (22)
25—in life, rich man received good/Lazarus received evil 
in death, Lazarus is comforted/rich man is tormented
Luke 18:1-8 Blessed are the Poor Who Hunger and Thirst for Justice

The protagonists of this parable are:

Verse 2: a judge (krites) who fears neither God nor human beings (see also verse 6).

Verse 4: a judge— who for a time refused to do justice.

Verse 6: an unjust judge who fears neither God nor human beings (see also verse 2).

Verse 3: a widow (chera) who kept coming to the judge demanding that he vindicate her against her enemy.

Jeremias suggests that the widow's case probably has something to do with money, since she presents her petition to a single judge and not to a tribunal. It could involve a debt, a mortgage, or a part of an inheritance that had been withheld. She is poor and has no means to offer a gift to the judge. Since the time of the Hebrew Bible, widows and orphans were the paradigms of helplessness and defenselessness. One might imagine that her adversary would have been an esteemed wealthy man.¹⁰

We have before us a situation very common in our experience as Peruvians: the demand for justice. In this scene Jesus introduces us to a widow (not necessarily an old woman). The other place where widows are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke is in 20:46-47: “Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes and love to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets, who devour the property of widows, and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.” These words of Jesus are set in the very heart of Jerusalem!

It is interesting to note that a connection is established in this context between prayer (v. 1) and injustice, a connection I will explore further below.

To be a woman and a widow in our day is complicated enough. In Palestine in Jesus' day, the situation was even worse. Often charity was the only resort for widows and orphans. If they did have any money, it could be deposited in the Temple for safekeeping. Certain provisions also found their way into testamentary practices, at least in Jerusalem itself:

In Jerusalem a man took care to stipulate in his will that his widow should live in his house for the duration of her widowhood, and be supported by his estate. This became the right of all Israelite widows, and still held good even if no such
provision had been made (m. Ket. iv.12).II

Women enjoyed few civil or legal rights in that period. They could not appear as witnesses in a court nor could they bring charges or suit against another. A woman’s rights were actually held by her father if she was single or by her husband if she was married. A widow found herself with neither rights nor legal protection, prompting prophets in every age to make a special case for the defense and care of widows (Jas 1:27).

We are confronted in this story with a woman whose only means of demanding justice is her own insistence, even stubbornness. This fact reminds us that the women in Peru and Latin America are the ones who maintain this same kind of stubbornness in the demand for the life of their beloved friends and family members who are killed. Here we encounter women who are refugees or displaced from their homes, and women whose family members—fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters—have been detained or have disappeared.

The widow in the story is certain of the justice of her cause, the resolving of which would probably determine her survival (as it would for any poor person). He is surprised to find a woman so possessed by the justice of her cause.

The attitude of the judge is also very interesting. Here also we could translate the Greek as “the judge of injustice”—a judge who is part of an unjust legal system that does not recognize the rights of all persons as having an equal claim, and who therefore does not have the means, legally speaking, to administer justice to a widow who has no rights.

Why does Jesus tell this story? Why does Luke pick up the story and place it precisely in this place in his Gospel?

Jesus proclaims life as the original plan of God. Life itself is one of the most fundamental and primordial mediations in which the reality of the God of life is expressed. Similarly, Jesus announces the possibility of the fullness of life for all (John 10:10) and denounces or confronts the reality of evil and sin that causes death.

According to the biblical understanding in general, the legislation revealed on Sinai established the norms that would guide the historical judgment of God. The violation of those commandments would result in God’s judgment against Israel: “You will not ill-treat widows or orphans; if you ill-treat them in any way and they make any appeal to me for help, I shall certainly hear their appeal, my anger will be roused and I shall put you to the sword; then your own wives will be widows and you own children orphans” (Exod. 22:21-23);
“For [Yhwh] your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, triumphant and terrible, free of favoritism, never to be bribed. [God] it is who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him [or her] food and clothing” (Deut. 10:17-18).

As a just judge, Yhwh will intervene in the judgment in favor of the weak and oppressed, for God never shows partiality and is never impressed by power or wealth. Jesus, who introduced himself in Galilee as the herald of the Reign of this same God, makes pronouncements that continue along the same line as this ancient legislation, pointing toward a new society of justice (Luke 6:20-24).

We find the answer to our question about Luke’s purpose in verses 6-8. The Christian community is wrestling with the question about the meaning of injustice seen in the suffering of the weak, innocent, and chosen people of history (Rev. 6:9-11). They cry out day and night for the judgment of God, for the intervention of God in history.

The question that is posed to us in the last line of the passage is whether our faith is like that of this widow, whether we believe in this God—the God of the widow who does not tire of shouting, praying, demanding justice in this world.

To work and pray for justice is a way of recognizing and speaking of God. Gratitude for God’s love is the frame that surrounds the demand that we practice justice (Matt. 10:8).

Luke 18:9-14 The Parable of Those Who Believe Themselves to be Just

The protagonists of this parable are:
Verse 10: Two men who go up (anebesan) to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a publican.
Verse 11: The Pharisee, standing, “O God, I thank you that I am not like those who are thieves (arpages) unjust (adikoi) adulterers (moichoi)
like this publican (telones)
Verse 12: “I fast twice a week I tithe all my profits”
Verse 13: The publican, remaining at a distance not even daring to look up beating his breast
“O God, have mercy on me a sinner”
Verse 14: The publican returns to his house justified
The Pharisee does not return justified

Our two protagonists presumably live in Jerusalem, for both “go up” to the temple, as one would go up to Jerusalem, at the hour of prayer—that is, at three o’clock in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). It is clear that the attitudes of the two characters, like the contents of their prayers, are totally opposite. The prayer of the Pharisee is an act of thanksgiving, and that of the publican an act of repentance.

The prayer of the Pharisee first lists the sins that he has not committed (unlike other people), then goes on to point to his two meritorious works: a) although the law prescribes only one day of fasting each year (the Day of Atonement), he fasts voluntarily twice a week (probably Mondays and Thursdays) to atone for the sins of the people; and b) even though the producer is obliged to pay the tithe on grain, fresh juice, and oil, he pays a tithe of all of the goods governed by the law, in order to be sure he is not enjoying anything on which he has not paid the tithe.

Jeremias offers the following observations:

The pharisee in Luke 18:9-14... must also be considered as a layman, since nothing is said to the contrary. The Pharisaic communities were mostly composed of petty commoners, men of the people with no scribal education, earnest and self-sacrificing; but all too often they were not free from uncharitableness and pride with regard to the masses, the ‘amme ha-ares who did not observe the demands of religious laws as they did, and in contrast to whom the Pharisees considered themselves to be the true Israel.

...Moreover, we must remember that the Pharisees themselves attached the greatest importance to works of supererogation and good works; what is more, the accomplishment of works of supererogation was an integral part of the very essence of Pharisaism and its idea of meritorious behavior.

According to Josephus, during the reign of Herod there were more than six thousand Pharisees out of a population of twenty-five to thirty thousand in Jerusalem. The combined total of priests and Levites was about eighteen thousand, and there were about four thousand Essenes.

In any event, in the Gospels one is aware of the presence of many of them in Galilee (Matt. 9:11-14; Luke 5:17).

In the New Testament the formula “scribes and Pharisees” is usually used, since these two groups as a whole are perceived as opposed to the recognition of the breaking in of the Reign of God in Jesus of Nazareth. However, there are differences between them of which we should be aware. In Luke 11:37-44 we find Jesus...
reproaching and unmasking the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The objective consequences of that hypocrisy are that their hearts are full of plundering and wickedness, and they neglect justice and the love of God. Thus the solution is not only an inner change, but also an external consequence: “Instead, give alms from what you have and, look, everything will be clean for you” (v. 41).

Concerning the scribes (Luke 11:45-52), the Gospel accuses them of imposing intolerable burdens on people, without lifting a finger to help them. They build tombs to honor the prophets, but it was their ancestors and they themselves who killed and continue to kill the prophets. They have taken away the key of knowledge and prevented others from entering. The scribes cause suffering.

The prayer and attitude of the publican, on the other hand, are of a different nature. His is a prayer of repentance and of recognition before God of his sinful condition. The publicans were the tax collectors who worked for Rome. These people were not looked upon very kindly by the Jews, and furthermore, they were on the “list of despised occupations,” on a par with thieves and usurers. Another character in Luke’s Gospel who is called a chief tax collector is the unpopular Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

The “list of despised occupations” was far-ranging. One group that was particularly ill thought of included a number of occupations thought to be based on fraud, and therefore banned de jure.

Gamblers, usurers, and persons who dealt in produce during a sabbatical year headed the list.

In the same way experience had shown that tax-collectors and publicans, whose post went to the highest bidder, together with their subordinates, almost always abused their position to enrich themselves by dishonesty. “For herdsman, tax-collectors and publicans is repentance hard,” it was once said (b. B.K. 94 Bar.). The reason was that they could never know every person they had injured or cheated, and to whom they must make amends.17

The publican in our story would have been lacking in civil and political rights like any other Jew living in Palestine in that period, and he was one of the most contemptible people of Jewish society. Nevertheless, Jesus chose to call one of these same contemptible people as a disciple (Matt. 9:9)! Once again, it is to such people that the Good News is proclaimed.

It is this contemptible person who goes down to his house justified, and not the “just” Pharisee who “despised everyone else” (v. 9). Once again we encounter the inversion of values of the Reign and
judgment of God. Once again the logic of the Reign of God goes against the logic of the system—in this case, particularly the religious system—that leads some people to think of themselves as better believers than the "sinners" of the world, because they do pious deeds that lead them to boast in themselves.

These are the people who did not grasp and do not grasp the central message of the proclamation of Jesus, that whoever exalts himself or herself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself or herself will be exalted (Luke 14:11; 1:52). They are the ones who did not recognize and do not recognize the truth of which Paul reminded the Corinthians:

*Consider, brothers [and sisters], how you were called; not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families. No, God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; [God] chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by human standards are common and contemptible—indeed those who count for nothing—to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being might feel boastful before God. (1 Cor. 1:26-29)*

At issue is a central point in our faith, which is found throughout the Bible. Human works as such do not justify, do not save, Paul will say, taking as his point of departure the revelation in Jesus Christ. Human works cannot limit or compel God's action. That is the scope of his approach to "justification by faith" (Rom. 3:28). The faith that saves is a grace of the Lord. Entry into the Reign of God is not a right that can be acquired, not even with the practice of justice that is always given freely, with no strings attached. "Go and learn the meaning of the words: 'Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice,' And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). There is an ethic of the Reign of God that is the demand to do justice that is incumbent on every believer. But that ethic does not cancel out the free and gracious initiative of God.

The rejection of the doctrine of retribution and the strong affirmation that the love of God is freely and unconditionally given not only do not exclude or diminish the significance of justice, but instead they affirm it. They establish it in its true place. The poor man or women, the marginalized man or woman, the excluded man or woman is loved not because he or she is necessarily better than other people from a moral or religious point of view. Rather, he or she is loved precisely because he or she is poor, marginalized, excluded, living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to the will of

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God. The ultimate basis of that privilege is not in the poor, marginalized, or excluded person, but in God's very Self, and in God's freely given and universal agape.

Notes
2. Ibid., 157.
5. Jeremias, Parables of Jesus, 186.
6. Ibid., 183.
7. Ibid., 186.
15. Ibid., 252.
16. Ibid., 303.
17. Ibid., 310-311.
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