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Quarterly Review (ISSN 0270-9287) provides continuing education resources for scholars, Christian educators, and lay and professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. QR intends to be a forum in which theological issues of significance to Christian ministry can be raised and debated.

Editorial Offices: 1001 19th Avenue, South, Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202. Manuscripts should be in English and typed double-spaced, including notes.

QR is published four times a year, in March, June, September, and December, by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry and The United Methodist Publishing House. Second-class postage paid at Nashville, Tennessee.

Subscription rate: $16 for one year; $28 for two years; and $36 for three years. All subscription orders, single-copy orders, and change-of-address information must be sent in writing to the Quarterly Review Business Manager, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202. Orders for single copies must be accompanied with prepayment of $5.00.

Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to The United Methodist Publishing House, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

QR is printed on acid-free paper.

Lections are taken from Common Lectionary: The Lections Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1983).

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Quarterly Review
Spring, 1993

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Interpreting 1 Peter as a Letter [not] Written to Us
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In the well-known account of the resurrection in the Gospel of John, Jesus asks Mary of Magdala, “Who are you looking for?” Mary is looking for the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth and thinks she is conversing with the custodian of the cemetery grounds. Actually, she is being addressed by the risen Lord.

Mary of Magdala may have been the first person to go looking for Jesus of Nazareth and meet up with the Christ, but she was far from the last. Her encounter has a great analogy in the renewed search for the historical Jesus. Scholars who look in the Gospels for Jesus of Nazareth find that the sources themselves are marked indelibly by the church’s awareness that Jesus was the Christ. That makes it hard to get to what one of my colleagues calls “the ring of the verisimilitude of truth”—of historical truth, that is. The resurrection of Jesus was the perfect disguise, for it kept him with us yet shrouded him from our view.

This leaves us with some issues to resolve which are, in the end, quite personal. Some of us will feel a strong affinity with the traditional, ecclesial view of Jesus as Christ (even in protest against it) and some of us are more attuned to a progressive, non-institutional perspective on Jesus of Nazareth. Where are you on that spectrum? It’s worth thinking about—particularly in light of the lead article in this issue. Ted Jennings’s Jesus (like his Wesley) proclaims a message that is deeply human and undomesticated by later dogmas and piety. There is no lack of divinity here, but the voice is rougher and stranger than we might be used to. Just the right voice, these days, to call us to discipleship.

We move from there to three articles on baptism, the core of this issue. In keeping with our theme of authentic voices, I want to call on liturgical scholar Aidan Kavanagh to introduce this topic:
I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order that directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistry and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: "Take off your clothes." There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb—not that of the forum and the drawing room.

Diedra Kriewald, Jim Stein, and Keith Ray give us some fine reflection on the sacrament as it was practiced historically, understood theologically, and how it is enacted today in our churches. Kriewald reaches back to the New Testament and gives us an overview of the practice of baptism and confirmation; that is a good place to start. Stein looks at Wesley and seventeenth-century German pietist Philipp Jakob Spener on baptism in order to focus on the question of baptismal regeneration, a bone of contention among United Methodists even today. And finally Ray applies his understanding of the theology of baptism to contemporary practice to try to overcome the problem of indiscriminate baptism.

This is the second time QR has addressed the topic of baptism in some depth. The first occasion was the advance issue of the journal in fall, 1980, which carried the Lutheran-United Methodist Statement on Baptism, plus responses by Art Landwehr at First United Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois, and David Tiede, at that time associate professor of New Testament at Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminaries in St. Paul, Minnesota. It may not surprise you to hear that the theological issues concerning baptism haven't changed much. The insights expressed by the committee and individual writers are as fresh and significant as they were thirteen years ago.

So happy reading, and may all the blessings of the Easter season fall richly on your households of faith this spring!

The theme of discipleship has been on the minds of United Methodists. The bishops' pastoral letter *Vital Congregations/Faithful Disciples* has raised this issue for many in a new way, even if it does emphasize congregations somewhat more than disciples. Church growth advocates now speak less of reaching the unchurched and more of the importance of "discipling" people. Among the most promising signs of renewal in the denomination is the development of the program of Covenant Discipleship that has been launched and led by David Watson. But if our talk of discipleship is not to degenerate into a simple re-naming of the same old institutional structures and is instead to contribute to the renewal and revitalization of the church, then it is imperative that we measure our talk of discipleship against the sources of our Wesleyan and Christian heritage.

In order for this movement to make good on its promise to bring about or contribute to renewal we must keep before us the most fundamental questions about the meaning of the Christian life and the life of discipleship. In this essay I will provide two basic perspectives on discipleship that I believe may help us get our bearings and see what is really at stake in the commitment to discipleship. The first perspective is based on Wesley's understanding of the Christian life. Then I will look at the meaning...
of discipleship in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels, where the life of discipleship is described. Finally, I will combine these two perspectives and use them to ask questions about our commitment to discipleship.

Conversion and Holiness in Wesley

If we look to Wesley for a clarification of the meaning of discipleship, we will encounter some frustration, for discipleship is not a term that Wesley uses. Indeed, much of the language that we take for granted has no place in his thought. Wesley does not talk about evangelism, mission, discipleship, conversion, religious experience, or even connectionalism.

Nor should we assume that Wesley speaks of the same things we do, just using different names. Consider, for example, the terms which Wesley most often uses to characterize the Christian life: justification, regeneration, the witness of the spirit, sanctification, perfection. These terms are importantly different from our terms, such as conversion and discipleship, which focus on what we do and experience. Wesley’s terms focus far more on what God does in and through us. Our terminology reflects an institutional and anthropological bias. Wesley’s terminology reflects a transformational and theocentric orientation. That may be something worth pondering.

Holiness (Discipleship). In order to clarify Wesley’s view of the Christian life, we should begin where Wesley begins, with the meaning of holiness. From the beginning to the end of his ministry, holiness was the North Star of his reflection and practice. He reports that in 1725 he committed himself to “entire holiness of life.”

(Even when the movement of Methodism had been transformed from a small group of Oxonians to a mass movement among the poor, Wesley could still describe the aim of the movement as the spread of “scriptural holiness.”

What does Wesley mean by this notion? Wesley understood holiness in terms of the love of God and neighbor. He could describe it variously as having the mind of Christ or as the renewal in us of the divine image. But for Wesley, this always meant the life of love for God and humanity. Christianity requires nothing not plainly
related to this comprehensive love. But comprehensive love is required.

Wesley gave the love of God and neighbor a definite and concrete content, which encompasses six dimensions.

1) The immediate awareness of God's love for us produces "peace, love and joy." Wesley's difficulty was that he himself never felt either the constant joy or the love of God which he believed to be necessary. Eventually Wesley came to speak of this dimension of holiness as belonging not to the beginning but to the end of the process of sanctification.

2) While Wesley never clearly articulated the idea of religious experience as relationship with God, he did develop a sophisticated view of what he called "holiness of conversation." Thus, the absence of pride and self-will, the willingness to think humbly of ourselves, the willingness to forgive others, the commitment to their physical and spiritual welfare, etc., characterize this dimension of holiness.

3) Beyond "holiness of conversation" Wesley thinks of "holiness of conversation." This quaint category deals with all our relations to other persons. But Wesley was indeed primarily concerned with the way in which relationships were governed by our way of speaking about and to the other. Here Wesley develops a view of the absolute seriousness of detrimental ways of speaking, such as backbiting and gossip. These were the offenses most often cited by Wesley for excommunication from the societies.

The notion of holy conversation also includes a positive commitment to the other's well-being. Thus, Wesley attached great importance to being always ready to speak of faith and to reprove the shortcomings of our friends. For Wesley the emphasis was on "plain-speaking," and he faulted the Moravians above all else for their deviousness. The aim in holy conversation is a speaking of the truth in love, a regard for the well-being of our neighbor which compels us to speak the truth.

4) The regard for the neighbor must, in Wesley's view, be expressed as particular concern for the indigent. From early Oxford days Wesley regarded visiting the poor and attempting to relieve their necessities as essential to the life of holiness. He could no more
imagine a week without visiting the poor than he could a week without Holy Communion.

When Methodism became a movement, Wesley constantly stressed the essential character of demonstrating divine love dwelling in our hearts. For Wesley, love was far more than an attitude; it was a pattern of action. Wesley's commitment was not only to a constant presence with the poor and personal charity but also to organizing clinics and cooperatives and credit unions for the poor. His vigorous protests against specific forms of injustice toward the poor led to conflict with the medical and legal establishments and the standard business practices of his day. He made concrete recommendations with respect to governmental economic policy and protested against the systems of slavery and colonialism.

Wesley made concern for the poor the litmus test of his "religious" work as well: preaching to the poor instead of the rich, devoting all money publicly raised to the welfare of the poor (instead of the costs of his movement), and directing that Methodist preaching houses be built as plainly as possible in order to prevent making rich men essential to the Methodists. In all of these ways, Wesley saw the "preferential option for the poor" as essential to holiness.

5) Wesley's view of economic life was itself to be ruled by holiness. For Wesley this meant "stewardship." But this had nothing whatever to do with raising money for the church. It had to do with a simplicity of life which made it possible to give to the poor and in that way, and that way alone, to give to God. The virtues of diligence and frugality have no other aim for Wesley than to make it possible to give more to the poor and so lay up treasure in heaven.

This was no incidental theme for Wesley. In the last quarter century of his work he urgently summoned the Methodists away from their increasing prosperity and back to an evangelical stewardship for the poor. Wesley sensed that their prosperity was allowing Methodists to forget the poor and to decline into worldliness and pride.

6) Holiness means to be conformed to God, to the divine nature. But it also has the negative sense of being separated from the world and its values. One of Wesley's constant themes is that of avoiding "worldly prudence." Holiness means a turning from this
dependence upon the good opinion of the world and a reliance entirely upon the gracious love of God.11

In summary then, holiness for Wesley is simply the love of God and neighbor. It is this love which modifies our tempers and is expressed in “holiness of conversation” and, by extension, all the ways we are in relationship. It imitates the divine love which, though it was rich for our sakes, became poor and shows itself in the concern for the poorest, meaning a specific solidarity with and involvement on behalf of the poor. This love draws away from the structures of a world dominated by pride, envy, avarice, and violence in order to give expression to a full love of the neighbor, which is itself the love of God, since it is obedience to God and imitation of God.

Now the features I have sketched remain essentially constant throughout the ministry of Wesley. However, Wesley did change his view of how we acquire this essential holiness. This brings us to the question of conversion and the means of grace.

Conversion and the Means of Holiness. In the early days (1725-36), Wesley’s project of actualizing holiness had a certain “elitist” character that may be attributed to the influence of the English mystical tradition. Thus, Wesley explained his own refusal to take up parish ministry by claiming that for those who had to deal with ordinary Christians, holiness was impossible.12 In this period Wesley is more concerned with his own holiness than with the salvation of others.

A further stage in Wesley’s conception of holiness comes through his conversations with the Moravians. They persuaded Wesley that the holiness he sought must have the foundation of faith. But if the Moravians forced Wesley to think in terms of conversion, Wesley still considered this change to be the infusion of holiness. This is what Wesley was expecting at Aldersgate. And this is what did not materialize for him.

Despite the fact that Wesley’s own alleged conversion experience was something of a fiasco, his dialogue with the Moravians suggested to him that the holiness project was not limited to the elite but extended to those who had lived in the most callous sin. Thus, it was possible to offer salvation to the criminal about to be hanged: the inward change wrought by conversion would be sufficient to
transform all of life, and all that lacked was time to practice the love now poured out.

Wesley's optimism about the immediate effects of assurance or faith or the witness of the spirit or regeneration or justification (at first these were all confused in Wesley's mind) was assaulted not only by his own experience but by the testimony of experienced Christians (including some of the Moravians) and by the analysis of the lives of new Methodists. It became clear that most did not find entire holiness at the point of initial transformation.

Over the course of several decades Wesley developed a new view of the means by which we become holy. Wesley returned to his idea of the disciplined life, which had earlier characterized the Methodists. But this disciplined life was now more clearly grounded on the grace of God. Since grace was the foundation, holiness was a possibility for all. The dominant metaphor for the process of becoming holy was growth toward maturity. This growth always has its basis in divine grace, but it requires our cooperation as well. That is Wesley's Arminianism.

Wesley's mature view of what we might call conversion was that it was a means to this end. God gave us this infusion of grace so that we might become truly holy, so that we might manifest in all aspects of our lives the love of God and neighbor. Unlike the "gospel preachers" of his day, Wesley never viewed conversion as an end. Faith in Christ was merely the means to that end (and moreover not an indispensable means). Even the doctrine of assurance came to be regarded as a dispensable means to that end.

This helps explain why Wesley constantly discounted the enthusiasm of early converts. Time and again in his Journal he notes that many claimed to have been justified or regenerated, then remarks, "But how many of these flowers will fade?" He was interested in "converts" only insofar as they really began and continued on the road to the holiness. Wesley always subjected claims of religious experience and of conversion to one rigorous test: does it produce holiness? Does it lead to a life which embodies love for all humanity and especially for the least of these? Does it bring an end to enmity and division? Does it bring peace and humility? Does it produce sacrificial solidarity with the poor? Only if it does can it really be termed a conversion.
It must also be said that what we call church membership was also for Wesley a means and not an end. Simply becoming a Methodist, accepting the disciplines of that community, could in no way substitute for holiness. The essential thing was that all be called to holiness and that the people called Methodists offer concrete help along the way. Wesley formed the societies in order "to conserve the fruits of the revival." Attendance upon public and private prayer, the private and public service of the word and constant communion were for Wesley not signs of holiness but means thereto. In these regular avenues the Spirit operates upon us, filling us with the love that enables us to grow in grace and in holiness.

Put in familiar terms then, for Wesley the goal was discipleship (holiness). This discipleship was to be understood in terms of the love of God and neighbor transforming every sphere of life. What we call conversion is a means to this end. It is the commitment to discipleship made possible by the awareness of the divine love permeating to the roots of our being. But where such love does not become effectual, the "conversion" is utterly wasted, and the person becomes more the child of hell than ever before. Growth in holiness, however, occurs by participating in the means of grace. The Methodist societies intend to make these means of grace more generally available, especially to the poor and the disaffected.

Methodism has always been tempted to confuse the means with the ends. For some the temptation is to substitute the ecclesiastical means (institutional commitment) for holiness. For Evangelicals the temptation has been to substitute conversion for holiness. For others, a rigorous focus upon moralism divorced from love has deflected attention from the true aim of holiness; the love of God and neighbor. Wesley's contribution, so often obscured in the past but still critical for the life of Christendom, is to clarify the way to actualize scriptural holiness in the world.

Discipleship in the New Testament

Wesley insisted that his own theological conclusions be tested in reference to the Scripture. I want to explore the meaning of discipleship in the New Testament in order to see what areas of congruence we may find between Wesley's views concerning holiness and the Gospels' views concerning discipleship.
Contemporary North American Christians often define discipleship in institutional terms. Our calls to discipleship are calls to commitment to the church in its local and denominational forms. Discipleship entails a minimum of attendance at worship and some contribution of our money to the program of the church. But we are not at all content with that minimum even though it is the proximate goal of church growth strategies. What we want is an increased level of commitment, which usually means an increase in discrete institutional commitments. Thus, we want people not only to attend worship but also to attend Sunday school. And we want them to take responsibility for the program of the church: serving on committees, teaching in Sunday school, and so on. We also aim at getting people to practice good stewardship, which usually means tithing—giving a tenth of their income to the work of the church.

I think we are vaguely aware that even this is not an adequate definition of discipleship. If we get beyond such an institutional view of discipleship, it is most likely to be in terms of the cultivation of "spiritual life" (whether this be reading The Upper Room or participating in a prayer group, for example).

What is discipleship really? When we begin to reflect on this, we will see that the things we often think of when we speak of discipleship really have nothing whatever to do with it. In order to make this clear I want to indicate briefly some of the characteristics of discipleship as we encounter it in the narrative texts of the New Testament. Discipleship is a primary category only in the four Gospels and Acts. It is not a category favored by Paul or by the other writers of the "epistles" nor does it play a role in the Apocalypse of John. With this in mind, let us see what we can learn about disciples from those New Testament texts which mention them.

Background. In the world of the first century, there were a number of movements which operated on the discipleship model. The rabbis of Judaism had circles of disciples, as did the various schools of philosophy, especially the Cynics and the Stoics.

What these groups have in common is the formation of a reflective life-style. They are not concerned with the acquisition of a body of propositional truth. They are not there to learn math or physics or theology; their aim is to apprentice themselves to one who knows and can teach them how to live. The disciples of the rabbis learned, for example, how to make the demands of the Mosaic law
real for their lives. The disciples of the Cynics learned how to practice asceticism, how to leave off attachment to the world in order to concentrate on being holy. The disciples of the Epicureans learned how to avoid excess in life in order to avoid needless suffering.

In all of these what was at stake was the learning of a way of life which would govern relationships not only to other persons but to getting and spending, to possessions, to the laws of religion and state, to friendship and table fellowship; to all that made up the shape and content of life.

A disciple is an apprentice, an understudy to one who shows by precept and example the art of a life which corresponds to the truth. A disciple is an understudy in the art of life.

The Call. It is remarkable that in three of the four Gospels the first thing Jesus does in his public mission is to call disciples. In Mark and Matthew this is the call of Andrew and Peter, James and John. In the Gospel of John, Andrew and an unnamed friend "volunteer" after hearing the Baptist say that Jesus is the one who is to come.

There are a variety of ways to become a disciple. Some are called. Some volunteer. But Jesus did not ask everyone he helped to become a disciple. Often Jesus sent people back into their former lives, which by no means implies that they did not respond appropriately to Jesus. Being a disciple was not a prerequisite for Jesus' concern.

We should also note that the group of disciples is not the same as the group of the twelve. The Gospels make it clear that the disciples comprised a much larger number than the twelve. In fact, this group plays a very small role in the texts which deal with Jesus' disciples. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the twelve should be identified as the core group. In Mark and Matthew the core group is made up of three or four. In John it includes disciples who were not part of the twelve (such as Lazarus or Nathaniel). It is important to see this because our confusion of "disciples" with the twelve prevents us from seeing what is going on in the texts.

But the most important feature of these stories concerning Jesus and the disciples is this: Jesus has no ministry or mission which excludes the disciples. From the very beginning Jesus does all that he does with disciples, with understudies.
We must now see what it is that characterizes the role of the disciples.

**Accompaniment.** The first feature of the disciples’ role is that they are to accompany Jesus. That is, they really do follow him in his itinerant mission.

They accompany him on his whirlwind tour of the villages of the Galilee (Mark 1:38-9).

They accompany him on his occasional wilderness retreats (Mark 1:37; 6:31).

They accompany him in his partying with disreputable companions (Mark 2:15).

They do not learn about Jesus at second hand. They share his life. This, of course, was basic to discipleship in the Greco-Roman world. If the teacher was the domestic type, you moved in with him, ate with him, worked with him. You would learn how to be a carpenter by living with a carpenter. If the teacher was a wandering or vagabond type, you travelled with him, camped with him, and so on. For the Cynics and for the disciples of Jesus, there was something important about not being tied to a single place, something important about being on the move. Their disciples learned to be on the move as well.

As we shall see, this business of accompanying Jesus, while deceptively simple, turns out to be basic to all that follows.

**Participants.** The disciples do not simply observe Jesus in action; they are to perform the action as well. I have noted that Jesus has no mission without disciples, but it is also true that whatever Jesus does the disciples are to do also.

Jesus proclaims the coming of God’s reign. The disciples are to do the same (Mark 3:14).

Jesus heals the sick and casts out demons. The disciples are to do the same (Mark 3:15; 6:7ff.).

When the multitudes are hungry, it is the disciples who are to do the actual feeding (Mark 6:37; 8:6).

In every way the disciples are Jesus’ understudies in mission. They are to become full partners in mission so that they can carry on that mission in his absence. In Mark and Matthew some of them are even sent out to try it on their own (Mark 6:7-13). In Luke there is a
second sending, this time of seventy of the disciples for the same purpose (Luke 10:1-20).

The disciples are to imitate Jesus. And this above all means to act in such a way as to give hope to the poor that God's rule is really at hand, that the powers of disease and distortion are really being overthrown.

**Instruction.** In order to engage in the practice of this mission the disciples must also learn from Jesus a certain amount of theory about life and mission. They must come to understand the strategy of mission and ministry as well as the form of life which corresponds to that task. In the Gospel of Mark this can be seen in Jesus' discourse concerning the proclamation of the gospel and the way to understand the (immediate) failure and (eventual) success of this mission (compare Mark 4:1-38). He is also found in Jesus' "in house" instruction (Mark 7:17ff.; compare Mark 13).

In the Gospel of Matthew this instruction is even more detailed, beginning with the "Sermon on the Mount" and continuing through the discourses of the Gospel. Here the focus is widened to include not just specific mission strategies but an entire way of life commensurate with participation in Jesus' mission of announcing and enacting the kingdom of God.

In John this teaching takes an esoteric turn. Although it seems to veer away from the situation of mission, the Gospel finally makes it clear that mission and ministry is to be understood as an expression of sacrificial love (John 13—17).

Disciples, then, are those who learn from Jesus what they need to know if they are to participate in his mission. The teaching is always related strictly to the needs of those who have decided to accompany him and participate with him in this mission. Theory follows practice.

**Equals in Service.** One of the most striking characteristics of discipleship is that the disciples constitute an egalitarian community. This is already clear in Jesus' saying that his only family is constituted by those who are committed to the will of God, that is, those who join him in his mission, especially to the outcast (Mark 3:31-5). One feature of this saying (as well as that concerning the eschatological family in Mark 10:30) is the absence of fathers. There are no "authority figures." This is underlined by Matthew in the
saying "call no one your father in earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven" (Matt. 23:9).

What this means for the community of disciples is made clear in the saying that the first will be last and the last first (Mark 9:35). This saying is then explicated at greater length in the conversation with James and John, who sought to have the places of honor alongside Jesus in his reign (Mark 10:35-45). Here they are told that greatness lies not in glory but in the most menial service to the other. This too is taken to be an imitation of the teacher who, together with the disciples, comes not to be served but to serve.

This vision of an egalitarian community is given graphic expression in the Gospel of John when Jesus assumes the role of the menial slave, stripping in order to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). This is a model for the disciples as well, for they are to wash each others' feet. This story is not merely the origins of a Maundy Thursday ritual but the establishment of a pattern in which disciples are encouraged to adopt the attitude of menial servants toward one another.

The community of the disciples then abolishes all forms of hierarchy which imitate the "management style" of the world in order to vividly enact an egalitarian community of mutual service.

Scandal. We know that Jesus' recognition that God was coming to rule the earth led to trouble with the religious authorities. It produced scandal. This is also true for the disciples.

In the Gospel of Mark the group of disciples are recognized by the following characteristics:

They do not fast, unlike the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18ff.).

They do not observe the sabbath (Mark 2:23ff.).

They do not wash (a religious, not a sanitation requirement, Mark 7:1).

That is, the disciples are distinguished not because of their piety but by their lack of it. They scandalize the pious and respectable because they are not themselves pious or respectable. They are not "religious." It is important to notice this because, like the Pharisees, we suppose that being a disciple has something to do with being religious. It does not. It means following one who was himself a scandal to the religious establishment.
Being Disreputable. The scandal does not stop there. So far as we can tell, the disciples were also marked by leaving work and family behind. They voluntarily chose to become homeless vagabonds upon the earth with no visible means of support. They were vagrants.

Now this is also very hard to swallow since we so easily suppose that discipleship is consistent with being a pillar of society, an upholder of work ethic and family values. But this is not what the Gospels tell us. Peter and Andrew, James and John left their gainful employment to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16-20). This is also true of Levi, the tax collector (Mark 2:13). It is sometimes pointed out that there were exceptions to this. There were, but not among disciples. Without exception they left family and work.

Note what Peter says in defense of the disciples: "We have all left family..." (Mark 10:28).

Nor should we ignore the fact that in the Gospel of Mark there is one and only one person who comes to Jesus asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This person is told to sell all his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus (Mark 10:17ff). He is simply to do as the other disciples have done. What makes him an exception is that he can't bring himself to do it, because he has many possessions.

When Jesus does send out some of the disciples to perform his mission on their own, he specifically instructs them to take not a dime or even a change of underwear with them (Mark 6:8). It is in getting rid of all possessions, of all earthly security, that the disciples become capable of participating in Jesus' mission.

To be a disciple is to renounce possessions in order to rely wholly upon God and in this way enact the near approach of God.

Death. The fate of Jesus is to be rejected by the pious, condemned by the powerful, and executed. The same fate awaits the disciples. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Jesus calls a man he bids him come and die" (and we should note that this applies to women as well). The disciple is not above the teacher. To be a disciple means to follow Jesus on the road which leads ineluctably to the cross. "If you would be my disciple then deny your own life, take up the cross and follow me" (Mark 8:35). That is the meaning of discipleship.

There is no following of Jesus which does not provoke the outrage of the pious and the powerful. There is no following of Jesus which does not lead to the outrage of family and friends (Mark
There is no following of Jesus that does not lead to persecution and finally to death (Mark 13:9,13). This is not death as a natural if lamentable end but instead death as the execution of a criminal. That is what discipleship means in the New Testament. To be a disciple is to be a witness. And the word for witness is martyr.

This should not be too surprising. The disciple is to accompany Jesus, the one who will be crucified.

Alas, we seek a different form of discipleship, one that has no part in following Jesus. One that lives not in the streets and deserts but in the temple. One that does not leave work and family but is the bastion of the work ethic and the model of family values. One that does not scandalize the pious but is the very epitome of piety. One that does not outrage the wealthy and powerful but courts their patronage.

But if this is the discipleship we seek, why do we confuse things so utterly as to call this the discipleship of Jesus? For we really want disciples, not of Jesus but of the priests and Pharisees.

Betrayal. This quick sketch of discipleship in the New Testament may give us pause. It is clear that Jesus’ call to discipleship has nothing to do with the call to make people functionaries of a religious institution. They are instructed not to attend church or synagogue but to attend the hungry and naked.

They are called not to tithe to the temple but to renounce all possessions in solidarity with the poor.

They are summoned not to be religious but to be agents of freedom.

They become not exponents of the old family but members of a new adopted family of shared mission.

We may say that the difference is one of culture and of epoch. We do not live in first-century Palestine. But the difference is so radical that it appears to be more a matter of commitment than of culture. Our view of discipleship is too like what the New Testament describes as the old eon, the world that is passing away. And it is the New Testament discipleship that is really “modern” in the sense of belonging to the new eon.

If this difference between our discipleship and theirs leads us to defend our own, then it will be catastrophic. For the only liberating response to this difference is one of confession and repentance.
It is in this connection that it is important to recall another characteristic of disciples as we encounter them in the New Testament. They all, without exception, abandoned Jesus. All without exception denied and betrayed him whom they had sworn to follow. All.

Here if nowhere else we may truly recognize ourselves in the picture of the disciples. All have abandoned. But this abandonment, denial, betrayal does not and cannot have the last word. At the end the lad in the tomb relays to the women a message from the one who was abandoned: “Go and tell Peter and the other disciples...” (Mark 16:7).

They have abandoned him. But they are still called disciples. Their betrayal is not the last word. And neither is ours. We may be terrible dunces about discipleship. So were they. We may be terrible cowards about what it costs. So were they. But they were still called to go back and start over. And so are we. They had a chance to try again and get it right. And so do we. The Easter message scared them half to death. It scares me too.

This call is addressed to us who have sought security in the world and have fled the cost of discipleship. We cannot forever hide out in our studies and sanctuaries, in our robes and rules, in our excuses and rationalizations. For that voice still calls, summons, invites, seduces, and lures. And we will never be at peace, never know joy, until we turn with undivided heart to the one who loves us even in our disobedience and summons us to follow him into mission in our own Galilee.

Conclusion

What can we learn from this consideration of the double perspective of Wesley and the New Testament on the theme of discipleship in the contemporary world?

It is clear that we have two contrasting views. But they are also complementary. In spite of the confusion that results from using the term discipleship to refer to Wesley’s view of holiness, this does at least have the advantage of suggesting that we need to consider them together.

Let me quickly sketch a few common themes.

THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP
Both New Testament discipleship and Wesleyan holiness point to a radical or fundamental break with the social, political, economic and religious world of the status quo. To follow Jesus as his understudy is to forsake family and work and all that assures our place in the world in order to herald the coming of the new and wonderful reign of divine justice and generosity. To undertake the way of holiness is to break with the habits of comfortable religion, to forsake worldly prudence and calculation.

Both New Testament discipleship and Wesleyan holiness entail a turn toward the despised, the forsaken, the marginalized, the poor, the least of these.

Both New Testament discipleship and Wesleyan holiness renounce the "cheap grace" that only gives a religious sugar-coating to our worldliness and instead embrace the grace that will cost us our life and give us deliverance not only from the guilt but also from the power of sin.

Both New Testament discipleship and Wesleyan holiness mean the adoption of a style of life that imitates the one who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor. This means that we renounce our own wealth in order to enter into sacrificial generosity and solidarity with the poor.

Now if we are prepared to take seriously the radical claims of holiness and discipleship, then the renewed interest in discipleship can become a vehicle for the transformation of the world, most especially the church, and an instrument for the spread of scriptural holiness across the planet. If we are not serious, then our talk of discipleship will only be another cosmetic for a dead sect having the form of religion but not the power.

It is my earnest prayer that the Church will be born again by a fresh outpouring of Pentecostal spirit, that we will be a visible and dramatic sign of the transformation of heaven and earth, and that each of us will be empowered to join with Jesus in the Galilee outside our doors to experience not only the cost but also the inexpressible joy of being companions of Jesus, the firstborn of the new creation.
Notes

1. An early version of this paper was presented to the bishops who were drafting the document *Vital Congregations/Faithful Disciples*. Quotations from that early version were included in the bishop's published document. A subsequent version was presented to a regional meeting of the Covenant Discipleship program in Los Angeles.


3. *Minutes of Several Conversations* (also known as the Large Minutes), VIII: 299.

4. See also Wesley's reflections on the Beatitudes in his sermons on the Sermon on the Mount.

5. e.g., "The Curse of Evil Sayings" and the tenth discourse on the Sermon on the Mount.

6. "The Duty of Reproving our Neighbor."


8. This is developed at greater length in my book, Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics (Abingdon, 1990).


11. See the sermons "On Friendship with the World" and "In What Sense Are We to Leave the World?"


14. "...of all preaching, what is usually called Gospel preaching is the most useless, if not the most mischievous: a dull, yea, or lively harangue on the sufferings of Christ, or salvation by faith, without strongly inculcating holiness. I see more and more, that this naturally tends to drive holiness out of the world. (Letter to Charles, Nov. 4, 1772; XII: 140).

15. Wesley writes: "I would just add that I regard even faith itself, not as an end but as a means only. The end of the commandment is love, of every command, of the whole Christian dispensation. Let this love be attained, by whatever means, and I am content; I desire no more." (Letter to John Smith, June 25, 1746, XII: 78-9).


THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP
17. "The Duty of Constant Communion" and "On Attending the Church Service" are two of Wesley's later sermons on the subject. He regularly defends Methodist discipline as offering a few prudential helps to the realization of holiness.

Confirmation: 
Its History and Meaning

S
ome time during the year 26 of the Common Era, Jesus from 
Galilee was baptized in the Jordan River near Bethany (Mark 1:9- 
11; John 1:28). Nineteen hundred and sixty-three years of baptism 
polemic notwithstanding, the church still knows few concrete details
of this formative event, including the actions of the rite or the liturgi-
cal words exchanged between John and Jesus.¹

All primary sources agree that the Baptist believed: “One more
powerful than I” (Mark 1:7-8) would follow his own use of the
water-sign with a baptism of the Holy Spirit and “with fire” (Matt.
3:11; Luke 3:16). Indeed, Jesus’ own baptism by John contained
both water-washing and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16; Luke
3:21-22; John 1:32-33). Following the baptism, when Jesus was
praying, he experienced that presence of the Holy Spirit lighting on
him like a dove accompanied by a heavenly voice who declared,
(Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) “You are my son, the
Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The same Spirit who was
present in his baptism then sent him into the wilderness for an
extended time of prayer and fasting.

The New Testament church noted the parallel between John’s
prophetic announcement and Jesus’ own baptism (Matt. 3:2).
Carefully trying to emulate the experience of their risen Savior, the

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earliest Christian congregations began to interpret their own salvation in light of the two foci of Jesus' own baptism, that is, through both water and the Spirit. So the author of Titus wrote late in the first century:

God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This saying is sure. (Titus 3:5-8)

Messianic Anointing

The linkage between ritual washing and anointing was well known by both Jesus and his Jewish followers. As recorded in Exod. 29:4, 7, Moses brought Aaron and sons to the door of the tent meeting to be consecrated/ordained to the priesthood. Moses washed them with water and then poured oil on their heads to anoint them. 2 Samuel made the connection between anointing and the gift of the Spirit when he consecrated Saul as the first king of Israel (I Sam. 10:1, 6). When David was crowned king, "Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (I Sam. 16:13). In the history of the covenanting ritual for consecrating both priests and kings in ancient Israel, the laying on of hands preceded the coming of the Holy Spirit. The anointing by the Holy Spirit was the mark, or seal, of Yahweh's approval.

The words Jesus heard as he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit on his shoulders alluded Ps. 2:7 with the striking words, "You are my son...." Jesus therefore interpreted this post-baptism experience as he did his own ministry and mission, in light of the covenantal relationship between God and the king of Israel. The content of the heavenly blessing also reflects the Suffering Servant passage found in Isa. 42:1:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights
I have put my Spirit upon him
he will bring forth justice to the nations.\(^3\)

The church understandably interpreted Jesus’ experience of the blessing following his baptism as the direct anointing by the Holy Spirit so that oil was not necessary. This Spirit-filled event made Jesus, in their eyes, the Christos. “Christ” is the title given to Jesus by the church, which means “God’s Anointed” (John 1:41). Jesus’ own experience with water-washing and spirit-anointing became the basis for the primitive church’s understanding of regeneration and initiation into the body of Christ.

The Emerging Pattern

The sub-apostolic church understood the two threshold moments in the baptism of Jesus (water-washing and spirit-anointing) as intrinsically connected to one another. The church adapted these two moments as paradigmatic for including converts as members of the Way (Acts 19:1-7). Luke records the following emerging pattern:

I. Kerygmatic Announcement by the Apostles
   A. Instruction of Seekers: Telling the story of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:14-36)
   B. Response of the Seeker: “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)
   C. Call to Repentance: Instructions to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38).

II. Water Baptism (Acts 8:12-17; 19:1-7)


IV. Instruction in “the Way” (as in Acts 2:40-47).

There are passages in Acts (see Acts 10:47) which alter this pattern. Considerable debate about this has recently ensued among scholars, but most hold that any altered pattern is an exception and is for the sake of a particular missional purpose (i.e., Cornelius was a Gentile convert).\(^4\) We will not focus on the order of this pattern here, only the unity of it.

The primitive church extended the Messianic anointing of Jesus at
his baptism to the experience of Christians. Some members of the primitive church appear to hold a connection between Spirit-anointing and ecstatic utterances. Some Scripture passages make it clear that the gift of the Spirit following baptism is linked to the historical tradition in Judaism of anointing with aromatic oil. The reception of the “mark” or “seal” of the Holy Spirit following baptism became an important motif for the congregations influenced by Paul. The apostle writes in Eph. 1:13: “When you...had believed, you marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.” Thus Fuller thinks:

The connection of the sealing with baptism is therefore unmistakable. In baptism, as by an instrument, the faithful receive the mark of God, the stamp of his eschatological worship.

As the Pentecostal experience came under increasing scrutiny and finally under ecclesiastical control, the imposition of hands with prayers for the coming of the Spirit and the use of anointing oil gained liturgical favor. Toward the end of the century, the writer of I John indirectly indicates the prominence of chrism:

As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (I John 2:27)

Biblical evidence indicates that the New Testament Church probably knew nothing of two separate rites. While there was no universal sequential uniformity, a unified initiation rite included some reflection of the two-fold threshold of Jesus’ baptism: 1) water baptism, probably by immersion as indicated by the paschal language of Paul; and 2) any or all of anointing, sealing, and laying-on-of-hands with prayers for the gift and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote instructing the faithful at Corinth to remember the benefits of this unified rite: “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11).

The integration and then the disintegration of these two in focus in Christian sacramental liturgy is a fascinating story. The historical picture is essential for the United Methodist Church to understand...
the complex interrelationship between the belief and action that informs the rite of Confirmation today.

**Chrsimation**

Validated by Jesus' experience at the Jordan River, a regularized form of Christian initiation developed along these lines:

- Evangelistic witness;
- Instruction of converts;
- Water Baptism;
- Chrismation (anointing with oil);
- Laying on hands with prayers for the gift of the Holy Spirit; and
- First Eucharist (the Thanksgiving meal of Holy Communion).

The apostolic church called the act of water-washing “baptism” and the act of spirit-anointing “chrismation.” The word “chrismation” comes from the Greek word *chrism* and reminded new believers of the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The *chrism*, or anointing, of Jesus made him the *Christos*, the Christ, the Anointed One.

Documents from the second century show that the early church united the practice of baptism, chrismation, and first communion as a single rite of initiation in the Body of Christ, both for adults and for infants. Evidence for the unity of the rite is well documented. Tertullian, for example, around 200 c.e., attested to the three parts of one Christian initiation. *In de Baptismo (VI and VIII)*, he wrote:

> Not that we obtain the Holy Spirit in the water, but being cleansed in the water, under the Angel, we are prepared for the Holy Spirit (VI). After this, having come out from the bath, we are anointed thoroughly with a blessed unction, according to the ancient rule, by which we were wont to be anointed for the priesthood with oil out of a horn. Wherefore Aaron was anointed by Moses; whence Christ is named from Chrism, which is “anointing,” which, being made spiritual, furnished a name for the Lord, because he was anointed with the Spirit of God the Father; as it is said in the act....Next to this, the hand is laid upon us, calling upon and inviting the Holy Spirit, through the blessing.... Then that most
Holy Spirit comes down willingly from the Father upon the bodies that have been cleansed and blessed, and resteth upon the waters of Baptism, as though remembering His ancient abiding place, who in the form of a dove descended upon the Lord. By the same ordering of spiritual effect, doth the Dove of the Holy Spirit fly down upon our earth, that is, our flesh, when it cometh forth from the laver after its former sins, bringing to us the peace of God, sent forth from the heavens, wherein is the Church, the prefigured ark.12

At about the same time, Hippolytus wrote that it was the practice in Rome to baptize by triple immersion. Immediately following was anointing by the presbyter with the oil of Thanksgiving. After the newly baptized dried and put on clothes, the bishop invoked a prayer to make them worthy of the “laver of regeneration” and “filled with the Holy Spirit.” After this prayer, the bishop poured consecrated oil on the newly confirmed and, laying on hands, said, “I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Ghost.”13

One final quotation points to a unitary baptism rite that extended from the second to the fifth century. This ritual included chrismation following a Spirit-filled water-washing and concluded with first communion for the newly baptized. The “sealing” in chrismation took the form of laying-on-hands with pneumatic prayer, with or without unction. Cyril of Jerusalem (348 c.e.) taught in his catechetical instruction:

And He (Christ) having bathed in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit descended personally upon Him, Like resting in Like. And you also when you came out of the pool of the sacred water, you received the anointing, the sacrament (mark) of that with which Christ was anointed, I mean to say, the Holy Spirit...Christ was not anointed by an oil or by a physical perfume given by the hand of men. But the Father, Who established Him in advance as Savior of the whole universe, anointed Him with the Holy Spirit, as Peter says: Jesus of Nazareth Whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:38)14
Adult Baptism and Chrismation
as Normative in the Ancient Church

Christian literature from the first five centuries of the church’s life recorded that baptism/chrismation/communion was normative for adults.

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote: “The fullness of the sign of baptism is to be found in the baptism of believing adults.”15 Allen F. Bray III states, “The historical reality is that adults were the ones who were exposed, instructed and received as fully-participating members.”16 Balthasar Fischer, Chairman of the Vatican Council Subcommittee on the Baptism of Adults and Children, in answer to the question “Is adult initiation normative?” replies, “Not in the sense that would prejudice infant baptism...but the original pattern of baptism in the early church was only to be seen in adult baptism.”17 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, in its consensus document “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry,” summarizes this growing perspective of scholars with this carefully worded consensus paragraph:

While the possibility that infant baptism was also practiced in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents.18

Christians believed that water baptism was the sacramental sign of regeneration. Chrismation naturally followed as a sealing by the Holy Spirit of the promises of baptism (by dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ) and the granting of power to live out the life of faith in the world. Baptism was the act by which the believer was accepted into the visible church, and chrismation functioned as a sign of the baptism covenant, an authenticating seal of God’s gracious action for salvation in Jesus Christ.

From the second to the fifth centuries, chrismation was a universal practice of the Christian Church, being celebrated immediately on coming up out of the water. It was understood to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit as a logical consequence of baptism and its necessary completion.19
The Sacramental Nature of the Baptism Rite
Shifts from Adults to Children

While the baptism/chrismation of children was not normative in the first four hundred years of Christianity, the practice was performed from the second century on. Robert Grant believes that the baptism/chrismation of children probably arose "because of the Christian emphasis on family solidarity." And Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that it may have been because "the second coming of Christ was at hand and such children would be lost if unbaptized." In any case, ancient Christian writers can be marshalled "for" (Origen, Cyprian) or "against" (Justin Martyr, Tertullian) the practice of baptizing/confirming children along with adults.

Most important, the political fortunes of Christianity changed dramatically with the battle at Mulvian Bridge. Following his military victory, Constantine legalized the Christian religion and regarded the Christian God as his protector. In 324 C.E. Christianity went from a minority sect to an imperial state church. The impact that the legalization of Christianity made on the life of the church cannot be overemphasized. The practice of baptizing whole tribes under the banner of the emperor changed the requirements for church membership from a long, protracted period of study and reflection (in many cases three years before baptism) to instantaneous admission by baptism/chrismation.

Indeed the very success of the church in recruiting members by the later Roman Empire eventually led to the separation of the rite of baptism from the post-baptismal ceremonials surrounding chrismation. By the early fourth century, for example, Christian evangelism had been so successful that many congregations dotted the area around large episcopal centers. So large were the dioceses that it became impossible for the bishop to preside at every baptism.

The bishops of the East and West arrived at different solutions for this problem. The Eastern bishops blessed the anointing oil for chrismation and then authorized the priests to conduct the triple baptism rite in its entirety (baptism, chrismation with the holy oil, and first communion). Bishops in the West, on the other hand, chose personally to continue the anointing. As a result, bishops authorized the priests in their dioceses to baptize in their own parishes, and then at a later time, the bishops themselves anointed and imposed hands.
with prayers for the Holy Spirit. Edmund Chavaz comments about this shift, "Church unity was thus clearly signified, but the unity of the rite had been split....A new name was given to the separated rite: it was henceforward called "confirmation." 22

The length of time between episcopal visits increased. The time separating baptism from confirmation slowly expanded into years. Clearly, two separate sacraments were now emerging in the early church, and the administration of chrismation was left to "the pastoral concern of the bishop, the size of the diocese and the clemency of the weather." David Holeton says that it was not uncommon for bishops, as they rode through their dioceses on horseback, to confirm those children who lined the roadside. One medieval source comments that Bishop Hugh of Lincoln "always dismounted before confirming, unlike many of his fellow bishops." 23

The unity of the total baptism rite was therefore sundered, with the new name of "confirmation" being used for but one part of the baptism rite. 24 In addition, confirmation was now replacing chrismation in Western liturgies and was officially adopted in the fifth century. 25

It is important to note, at this point, a linguistic shift as well. Liturgical language was changing from Greek to Latin. The root of the Greek word chrismation came from the Greek word meaning "to anoint." The term confirmation, however, comes from the Latin word confirmare, which means "to make firm," or "to strengthen." In either case, it was the intention that the new Latin term would be the same as its Greek counterpart—to signify the forgiving of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether the Latin word has continued to bear the understanding of the original Greek terms seems questionable in contemporary understandings.

In addition, with the success of its evangelistic mission, the church spent more time on internal matters, including writing creeds and clarifying doctrine. An increasing preoccupation with the concept of "original sin" led many to question the certainty of salvation for infants. Gregory of Nazianzus reflected the prevailing view at the end of the fourth century. If infants run the risk of eternal death, Gregory thought, then they should be baptized because, "It is better to be consecrated without knowing it than to depart unsealed and uninitiated." 26 Within one hundred years it became the custom to baptize infants as soon as possible after birth.
to save them from "the wrath to come." Times were very difficult and infants often died. The fear of damnation answered by doctrinal theories of atonement justified the universal baptism of infants. The Reformers would later complain that the work of Christ took on an almost magical quality in medieval Christianity as parents hastened to insure the salvation of their children. The modern church must be sensitive to the parental and pastoral concerns that called forth instant infant baptism.

By the end of the sixth century, baptism and confirmation had become two separate sacraments. The church also made a complete shift from the traditional unified rite for adult believers to the baptism and separate confirmation of infants. To be sure, the ritual was somewhat slower to change. The ceremony that had once been designed for adult converts took on an air of unreality when said for infants. However,

even when adult baptism ceased to be the rule, and infant baptism became standard, the water-bath was followed by eucharist, with the infant receiving a drop of the consecrated wine. This is still part of the eastern Church's rituals, and it lasted in the West until the cup was taken from the laity in the early Middle Ages. When the consecrated bread became the only form for eucharistic reception open to the laity, the eucharistic aspect of the baptismal liturgy in the West was dropped.28

Loss of Sacred Memory

As the time between the sacraments of baptism and confirmation lengthened, many Christians forgot the traditional purpose of chrismation/confirmation. Eusebius Gallicanus, writing in the fifth century, exclaimed:

What good can it do to me, after the mystery of baptism, to have the ministration of confirmation? So far as I can see, we have not obtained everything from the font, if after the font we still need something new.29

Both Martin Luther and John Wesley inherited this fifth-century confusion. Luther and other mainline continental reformers attacked the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation and regarded the rite
as *adiaphora*, that is, a ceremony (not a sacrament) that is permitted but not essential to church life.\(^3\) So much change had taken place over the centuries that the sacred memory of the rite's original meaning was lost to the Reformers. Technically John Wesley was correct, for example, when he wrote: "...Christ did not institute Confirmation; therefore it is not sacrament at all."\(^3\) Centuries of a separated sacrament had altered the purpose of Confirmation to such an extent that the two threshold experiences of Jesus (water-washing and Spirit-anointing) at the Jordan had become irrelevant to its meaning.

### Reformation Reformulations

For over nine hundred years, infant baptism with delayed confirmation was the unquestioned norm for Western Rite churches. In this "Christian" civilization, where every person was baptized as an infant, however, the church was compelled to develop a new rationale for confirmation. The metaphor of following a dying and rising Savior into the paschal mystery of water immersion was clearly suitable for decision-making adults but not for infants. A slightly different heritage of biblical imagery needed to be appropriated, and a change of theological images grounded the separated confirmation rite for both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

A richly developed covenantal theology gradually undergirded the concept of confirmation. Children, the church explained, are heirs to the covenant of grace and are entitled to baptism as surely as adults. The Pauline concept of "adoption" into the Body of Christ seemed especially appropriate for infants. The atoning work of Christ had always undergirded Christian rites of initiation. The continuing cosmology of a realistic hell compelled the church Protestant and Catholic to declare with Job, "No one is free from uncleanness" (Job 14:4). Even the continental Reformers, when confronted by a rigorous Anabaptist critique, felt persecution was preferable to adult confession and water-immersion. The Protestant town council of Zurich, for instance, "ordered Anabaptists drowned, in cruel parody of their belief."\(^3\)

The sixteenth-century Anabaptists abandoned both infant baptism and delayed confirmation. These radical reformers returned to the model of Christian initiation of adults and recognized but one
baptism—for mature youth and adult believers only. They claimed to have recovered the New Testament model of Jesus' baptism by adult immersion with prayers for the Spirit. The conception of the role of the Holy Spirit, however, developed along very different lines than in the early church. Anabaptists relied on the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their baptism services took on a "revivalistic character which marks the separation of the "gathered church" of the faithful from the "world" of Papists and Protestants." Those who practiced "believer's baptism" also had lost touch with the connection between confirmation and anointing. They, of course, would have had little use for the earlier rite anyway, in light of their belief in a direct spirit-filled liturgy.

Confirmation as Christian Education

The separation of the rites of initiation had led to a general decline in the education of Christians in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Infants did not need to undergo a long period of study as did the adult and youthful converts of the earlier church. The medieval church assumed that Christian education was the domestic responsibility of parents, and godparents. Only a few inaccessible manuals instructed priests, parents and godparents how to teach children the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Our Father before participating in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The woeful ignorance of the Christian population which confronted the Reformers is well documented. Among the continental Reformers, Martin Bucer of Strassburg tried hardest to relate Christian knowledge to confirmation. He reclaimed confirmation as a rite rather than as a sacrament but included the imposition of hands. While Luther did not intend his new catechism to be yoked with confirmation, the next generation of Lutherans "regarded true confirmation to be catechizing." The Church of England preserved the focus of the Holy Spirit in its confirmation rites and continued to uphold the tradition of the bishop to confirm. First communion followed confirmation, which normally took place between 14 and 16 years. The Anglican church is still debating whether water baptism is full sacramental initiation: is delayed confirmation merely a pastorally valuable rite, or is reception of the Holy Spirit in both baptism and confirmation
needed to “complete the fullness” of the sacrament? (The latter position is known affectionately by Anglicans as the “two-dose position.”) In any case, catechetical instruction became an integral part of confirmation as early as 1662 and the requirement for first communion.

The acceptance of the rite (or sacrament) of confirmation as graduation from religious instruction spread even to the sacramental denominations. Roman Catholic theologians complain, along with Protestants, that confirmation has become “a sacrament of education.” And for good reason! If confirmation is understood as the end of an extensive period of religious instruction, the implication is that both baptism and Christian education are only for children. Educators remind us, however, that it is precisely in late adolescence that mature Christian faith begins. A similar difficulty arises if the eucharist is withheld until confirmation occurs. [If baptism is understood as entrance into the Body of Christ, then on what grounds can holy communion be withheld from its members?] The baptized are real Christians, not “preparatory” ones. The current trend to admit pre-adolescents to the eucharist is a radical change for both the Anglican communion and the other denominations that emerged from the continental Reformation.

In addition, most mainline Protestant clergy have lost the memory of the traditional meaning of the word confirmation. The Latin word confirmare upheld the apostolic tradition that the Holy Spirit “makes firm” (con-firm), strengthens, and fortifies the justified believer. Many Protestants, including United Methodists, have simply adopted the English sense of the infinitive to confirm and, as a result, believe that confirmation is about taking or “confirming” the promises made for the infant at baptism. This locates the “confirmation” in the faith of the believer rather than in the mark and seal of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation, because of the loss of historical memory and perhaps linguistic ignorance, has become a human activity rather than a divine anointing.

The concept of confirmation as “graduation from education” is often coupled with the modern notion of “passage,” or a rite of maturity. The use of rite of passage has been particularly well developed for African-American congregations. There is no doubt that some denominations have utilized the educational preparation for confirmation in a very effective way. However, while the
purpose of a rite of maturity is to take on the baptismal vows for oneself, many young adolescents are confirmed as a social rite of passage without exhibiting any religious conviction. In addition, when churches refuse to provide young people with full rights and responsibilities in the local church, they are already acknowledging that "maturity" is something far more than meeting the "age of confirmation." When confirmation takes on the character of a rite of passage, the implications may suggest more than most would be willing to consciously state: that infant baptism is thus relegated to either a "dedication" of a baby waiting for Christian maturity or a modern-day exorcism of sin.

Many scholars believe that "Confirmation as it has been traditionally practiced by the Western churches has inherent and insoluble problems." 40

Conservative evangelicals attack the modern theology of confirmation from an Anabaptist perspective. Progressive Christian educators challenge the developmental soundness of an arbitrary youthful age for a mature profession of faith. 41 Treating confirmation in any of the ways described can only result in a heightened sacramental view of confirmation at the expense of the sacrament of baptism.

As Western culture has become increasingly secular, the church baptizes fewer infants from Christian families. Membership trends indicate that the evangelization and baptism of unchurched youth and adults will continue to gain center stage. Denominations whose memberships are growing have a fully developed rite of adult initiation. 42 In the future, Protestants may be faced with a membership situation closer to that of the early church than to the "Christian" civilization, in which baptism is a kind of civic or state expectation.

Even those marginal adults who were baptized as infants may yearn for a special rite in which they can make a mature profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The educational rite under which many congregations presently confirm their young does not seem adequate for this need. A liturgy of reaffirmation of baptismal vows has come into recent use in order to meet the need for the professions of faith of formally baptized youth and adults.
Conclusions and Questions

This paper has documented four distinct conceptions of the relationship between baptism and confirmation:

1) Adult and youth initiation into the visible church through the sign-actions of one rite which included water-washing and Spirit-anointing, understood as the laying on of hands and chrismation;

2) Universal infant baptism with a prolonged period before a Spirit-centered confirmation of the baptized, leading to first communion in late childhood or early adolescence;

3) Infant baptism with personal confession in early adolescence which is held "to confirm" the vows taken for the confirmand at baptism by adult Christians;

4) An anticipated youth/adult conversion experience followed by a confession of faith leading to baptism (with or without a rite of confirmation).

Each of these four differing modes of baptism/confirmation developed as a response to the specific historical situation of the church at that time. Each model is very different both in theological substance and liturgical style. Even though one has to blink hard to believe they are the same Christian rite, modern Christians must be careful in engaging in judgmental polemics about the belief system of their spiritual ancestors. There may be elements of value in each of the historical stances. Denominations must also face squarely the question of the authority of their own heritage. How much weight should twentieth-century United Methodists, for example, place on John Wesley's understanding of the sacraments? Given the extensive developments in theological studies over the past two centuries, it would be unfortunate if contemporary ecumenical understanding, to which United Methodists have contributed considerably, were given a secondary place to the writings of a man who was, after all, of his own times.

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches unequivocally supports the sacramental tenet of the early
church, namely, that baptism-chrismation/confirmation is God's work of salvation and not human invention. The unity of the rite is understood to be inseparably linked with both the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and with the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Christians obviously differ in their understanding of which sign-actions are associated with and designate the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt, however, that one commonly held belief is that Christian baptism is in both water and the Holy Spirit. Whatever relationship is finally established between the various acts of Christian initiation, a fundamental consensus does affirm that the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the baptism/confirmation/communion liturgy. The time has come to put aside the post-reformation/modern use of the word confirmation. At whatever stage in one's life the prayer is made, whether infant, youth, or adult, all confirmands must learn to understand that it is not they who somehow "confirm" their faith; rather, the prayer is that the Holy Spirit will seal and make firm in order to empower believers in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. A variety of postures, for example, might be anticipated by the ambiguous phrase, Jesus came "up out of the water," at the conclusion of the rite (Mark 1:9; Matt. 3:16).
2. Also see Lev. 8:6ff. Psalm 133 uses a poetic illusion to the precious anointing oil running down Aaron's beard and down upon the collar of his robe.
3. Matthew employs the same Suffering Servant imagery in Matt. 12:18-21, where he quotes Isaiah 42 to explain Jesus' power to heal.
7. See especially Rom. 6:3-14; I Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:12. Paul left a rich legacy of baptismal images.
8. For a brief history of the instruction of converts see Michel Dujaryer, A History

9. The research of scholars Michel Dujarier, Aidan Kavanagh, G. W. H. Lampe, O. C. Edwards Jr., Kenan B. Osborne, and Geoffrey Wainwright have made a strong case for a one-time unitary rite of baptism.


22. Foyers mixtes No. 50, Lyons, 1981.


27. Consult J. D. C. Fisher, Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West, A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation (London: SPCK, 1963) for what is considered the definitive study of the relationship between baptism and confirmation in the Middle Ages.


30. See Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1964), 21f.

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36. Reginald H. Fuller, "Confirmation in the Episcopal Church and in the Church of England," Confirmation Re-Examined, 11.

37. Fuller, "Confirmation in the Episcopal Church," 12.


41. For an excellent discussion of modern educational trends consult Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, The Sacrament of Religious Education and Liturgy.

42. This is true for wide ranges of the theological spectrum. Conservative charismatic congregations maintain spirit-filled adult initiation rites; the Roman Catholics, who also continue to grow, have spent much energy on developing the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults).

43. For an excellent survey of the heritage of Methodist and United Methodists by Ole R. Borgen. See Ole E. Borgen, "Baptism, Confirmation, and Church Membership in the Methodist Church," Parts I and II. Also see Henry H. Knight, "The Significance of Baptism for the Christian Life: Wesley's Pattern of Christian Initiation," Worship, 63, No. 1 (March 1989). In addition, consult the fine works on baptism by United Methodist liturgical scholars Laurence Hall Stockey, Baptism, Christ's Act in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), and James F. White, Sacraments as God's Self-Giving (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

44. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches), 17. The new United Methodist liturgy includes these words in the laying on of hands at infant baptism and (with slightly altered verb form) at confirmation: "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."
Baptismal Regeneration:
Is It an Option
for United Methodists?

Professor Lawrence Stookey of Wesley Theological Seminary, writing in Doxology, the journal of the Order of St. Luke, has stated that

*United Methodists face a crucial challenge of understanding and interpretation with respect to the new baptismal rites of our denomination. This was evident in the fact that the most substantive (indeed, almost the only) changes made at the 1988 General Conference to the report of the Hymnal Revision Committee, were in this area.*

From several "grassroots" sources, actually from several generations of our seminary alumni, I have heard criticism of our new baptismal liturgies. The general tenor of complaint is that the new liturgies tend to take us to a more Roman Catholic or Lutheran understanding of baptism than we had hitherto observed.

As I turned to the baptismal liturgies in the new hymnal, I found words leaning in the direction of baptismal regeneration that might give offense:

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In Baptismal Covenant I, in the “Introduction to the Service,” it is claimed that

. . . through the Sacrament of Baptism we are initiated into Christ's holy church. We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

In the “Flood Prayer” spoken over the water, we pray,

Pour out your Holy Spirit, to bless this gift of water and those who receive it, to wash away their sin and clothe them in righteousness throughout their lives, that, dying and being raised with Christ, they may share in his final victory.

Immediately after the baptism, the baptizand is addressed by the pastor with the following blessing:

The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

The element of renewal is found in the welcome:

Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit in God's new creation and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood.

In Baptismal Covenant III, the prayer for those about to be baptized as believers, includes this petition:

That they, coming to thy holy baptism, may receive remission of their sins and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our new liturgies suggest very clearly that in the sacramental act a person's sins are washed away and he or she is given new birth (regenerated) and incorporated into God's new creation, as well as into the Christian church.

The Theological Background of the New Liturgies

Not unexpectedly, the new baptismal liturgies reflect the theology of a number of our leading United Methodist sacramental theologians. At least three of these influential persons deserve mention here.

Lawrence Stookey's book Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church, by its very title indicates that the focus in baptism has been shifted from our human response back to its rightful place—the divine initiative.
Stookey repeatedly claims that Christ is active in the water. There is an objective quality to baptism. Baptism is a sign that God grants us, but "it is a sign that brings to pass, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the very identity it proclaims." Stookey connects forgiveness of sins with baptism. He has no difficulty stating that

\[
\text{All of us come to baptism as sinners equally guilty before God,}
\]

\[
\text{and all of us come away from baptism as those who have been}
\]

\[
\text{made God's adopted sons and daughters through grace.}^2
\]

Stookey provides the necessary demurrers. He does not make individual salvation dependent upon baptism; he sees baptism not as a magical act but as a beginning point of birth, from which people are expected to grow. He laments the devaluation of the sacraments and recounts American Methodism's gradual liberalization in its baptismal liturgies in the early twentieth century, as far as the doctrine of sin is concerned. This book, so rich in biblical and historical support for the church's theology and practice of baptism, concludes with the author's growing awareness of the meaning for his own Christian life that his baptism in infancy has had.

James F. White, in his book *Sacraments as God's Self-Giving*, contends that a revolution in our thinking about the sacraments and our use of them has come about by our reinterpretation of the word *signify*.³ Sacraments, according to White, are sign-acts through which God actually gives himself to us. They are actions through which God relates to us in the here and now, establishing a personal relationship with us just as God once acted in the basic sacrament, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to make God known. Since God is the chief actor in the sacraments, the power of the sacrament rests upon God alone.

Does White speak in terms of baptismal regeneration? He does see New Birth as a fifth biblical image of baptism, another of which is forgiveness of sins. White approvingly states that in the New Testament church

\[
\text{baptism is a means through which the uncleanliness of sins}
\]

\[
\text{is washed away and we are united to Christ with a clear con­}
\]

\[
\text{science.}^4
\]

As to the New Birth, White contends that physical birth is a gift, not something we do for ourselves. He uses the John 3:5 text in which our Lord tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom
of God without being born of water and the Spirit, and the Titus 3:5 reference that Christ saved us,

*not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.*

White does not use the term *baptismal regeneration,* but he talks of how "baptism marks the beginning for us of a new creation" and of how we are born into the church and its royal priesthood. He does speak of God giving us birth in baptism. White’s assertion is interesting:

*Baptism, then, is God’s free gift, not contingent upon us or our worthiness. By baptism, God makes us Christians; because of our baptism we try each day to become disciples.*

A third well-known United Methodist interpreter of liturgy and sacraments in our time is William H. Willimon. *Remember Who You Are: Baptism a Model for Christian Life* contains a chapter entitled "How to Be Born Again," in which Willimon criticizes Billy Graham’s book by that title because in it Graham gave a simple method for making the New Birth happen—recognizing what God did, repenting of our sins, receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and confessing Christ publicly—without recognizing that new birth is God’s gift and not something we can do for ourselves, and without mentioning baptism. 6 Says Willimon (who also draws upon John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 at this point, among other scriptural texts), "In the New Testament, any talk about rebirth, regeneration or being born again is invariably baptismal talk. 7"

Willimon spends a helpful paragraph or two discussing the relationship between the outward rite of baptism and the inward experience of renewal. He does not completely identify them but says that they are related. He would not say that rebirth is impossible if we are not baptized. Actually, Willimon avoids a magical understanding of baptism by stating that regeneration is a part of baptism but that it may not occur chronologically when baptism does. This is because baptism is not a momentary rite but "a lifetime process of God’s work in us. So is our rebirth in baptism." 8 Willimon has quotes from the Protestant reformers to support this affirmation that he makes. He sees a lifetime of repentance and conversion necessary to follow baptism. To him
Baptismal regeneration of infants only makes sense if baptism is seen not as completed in a moment, but as completed throughout life.\(^9\)

I have quoted extensively from Stookey, White, and Willimon not only because I consider them to be important weather vanes with regard to United Methodist sacramental theology but also because I highly value the more objective and foundational meaning they attribute to the sacraments. I see them as voices calling United Methodism out of its sometime blatant humanism, experiential subjectivism, and flat works-righteousness into a deeper and more biblical understanding of the Christian gospel. I do not agree with them at every point.\(^{10}\) Nonetheless, I greet affirmatively the sacramental interpretations these authors have provided us.

We should not accord only Stookey, White, Willimon and others like them sole credit for the current directional change United Methodism seems to be experiencing regarding the sacraments. The ecumenical milieu in which our denomination has long been a vital part has involved us in a move toward a more churchly direction with the emphasis on God’s grace communicated sacramentally as well as orally. It is difficult, for example, to measure the influence of the World Council of Church’s Faith and Order document, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM), on the United Methodist Church. For those pastors and laity who take it seriously, this 1982 statement affirms, among other biblical images for baptism, “a washing away of sins (1 Cor. 6:11), a new birth (John 3:5),” and “the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Pet. 3:20-21)” — all equated with baptism. Much is claimed for the sacrament just at this point.

Thus those baptized are pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.\(^{11}\)

United Methodism’s official response to BEM, in the form of a report made by a theological task force appointed by our bishops and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, expressed reservations regarding baptismal regeneration in terms that see baptism only for the forgiveness of sins.\(^{12}\) When the Council of Bishops affirmed BEM on behalf of the church in 1986, they did not appear to criticize rebirth in baptism. Instead,
they urged a stronger claim for a personal experience of New Birth by the indwelling Spirit, leading to the fruits of the Spirit.  

Several years earlier, in 1979, the Lutheran-United Methodist Statement on Baptism was issued. Interestingly, Lawrence Stookey and James White as well as Hoyt Hickman, then assistant general secretary for the Section on Worship of the General Board of Discipleship, were part of the ten-person United Methodist team. Several interesting affirmations appear in the statement. For example,

We affirm with scripture that God gives us the Holy Spirit in baptism:
— to unite us with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12);
— to effect new birth, new creation, newness of life (John 3:5; Titus 3:5);
— to offer, give, and assure us of the forgiveness of sins in both cleansing and life-giving aspects (Acts 2:38);
— to enable our continual repentance and daily reception of forgiveness, and our growing in grace;
— to create unity and equality in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28);
— to make us participants in the new age initiated by the saving act of God in Jesus Christ (John 3:5);
— to place us into the Body of Christ, where the benefits of the Holy Spirit are shared within a visible community of faith (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13).

After three years of study, the signers of this statement expressed their hope that United Methodists and Lutherans, who recognize one another’s baptism, would continue this dialogue at the local level. Once again United Methodists seem to have little difficulty affirming that the Holy Spirit in baptism gives us New Birth and the forgiveness of sins.

**Opposition to the Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration**

Stookey and White are correct when they talk about a “crucial challenge of understanding and interpretation” and “a revolution in
our thinking," respectively, with regard to the sacraments. In many ways they and our new baptismal liturgies are taking our church in a direction it has not formerly gone.

Consider an all-too-superficial glance at the baptismal stance taken theologically by the predecessor denominations in America that form the United Methodist Church today.

In the Articles of Religion, which, in 1784, John Wesley sent over for use by his American followers, baptism was described in Article XVII:

> Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth.

Article XVII makes a somewhat lesser claim than Article XXVII of the Anglican thirty-nine Articles, from which it is adapted. Wesley's article uses the Anglican "sign of regeneration or the New Birth," but it does not suggest in any bold form that it conveys the New Birth. It seems to be a sign of God's renewing grace that may operate outside of the sacrament itself.

Although the former Methodist Church held firmly to the practice of infant baptism, it did not clearly delineate a doctrine of baptism. Where it did do much thinking about baptism, it was, as Hoyt Hickman suggests, done for the purpose of justifying the practice of infant baptism. Over a quarter century ago, Colin Williams stated that Wesley had a creative tension between the objective and the subjective, between the givenness of Christ's holiness in the Word and Sacraments and the responsive holiness of life effected in the lives of Christian believers, but that he did not spell this tension out with any force. Thus, Methodism has experienced a great deal of confusion on the subject. Williams concluded:

> Apparently, understanding only the second emphasis in Wesley, American Methodism has since reduced the service of baptism to the point where it is little more than a dedication, and in British Methodism, while far more of the structure of the service has been kept, all references to regeneration were excluded in 1882.
After analyzing how American Methodism interpreted the sacrament of baptism between 1766 and 1844, Paul Sanders conceded:

... the church failed to arrive at any view of baptism clear and profound enough to withstand the corrosive effect of that emasculation of evangelicalism which would be the end product of a hundred years of revivalism.¹⁸

Sanders's sharp criticism could rather readily be interpreted to mean that American Methodism before the middle of the nineteenth century—and certainly beyond that—preferred to see regeneration taking place in a more subjective and self-conscious conversion experience. This emphasis on regeneration in conversion was held by more than the more conservative Evangelical and revivalist wing of twentieth-century American Methodism alone. In L. Harold DeWolf's book, *A Theology of the Living Church*, which manifests a moderate to liberal theological position, a ten-page chapter on the New Birth (analyzed psychologically, ethically, and theologically—in that order) contains no significant mention of baptism. DeWolf did include a paragraph on New Birth in the chapter on baptism, but it is nothing like the specific claim our baptismal liturgy makes today.¹⁹

Thus, it is not surprising that in the Methodist *Book of Worship for Church and Home*, authorized by the Uniting General Conference of 1939, the baptismal liturgies provided for infants, youth, and adults emphasized the recipients' being under the grace of God and included several prayers that they might increase therein. However, these liturgies made only slight reference to forgiveness of sins in the sacrament and no reference at all to New Birth.²⁰

The United Brethren in Christ, who at the outset drew upon both the German Reformed background (where infant baptism was the norm) and Amish and Mennonite elements (which strictly held to believer's baptism) affirmed the use of the "outward means of grace," baptism and the Lord's Supper, in their earliest confession of faith, adopted in 1815. But they stipulated that "the mode and manner, however, shall be left to the judgment of everyone."²¹

At the United Brethren General Conference of 1853, infant baptism became a hot issue. Since some preachers had criticized infant baptism and others took delight in rebaptizing persons
baptized in infancy, the General Conference "forbade disrespect toward infant baptism and those that saw fit to make use of the same, but did not go further." 22 In their new confession of faith, which was adopted in 1889 and carried into the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946, the United Brethren affirmed baptism and the Lord’s Supper but insisted that the mode of baptism and manner of observing the Lord’s Supper were to be left to the judgment of each individual, while the baptism of children was to be "left to the judgment of believing parents." 23 No theological interpretation of the sacraments was offered. Private judgment was extolled.

The Evangelical Church, patterned more closely after the Methodist Church both in doctrine and polity, adopted Articles of Faith in 1809 that were but a shorter version of Wesley's Article's of Religion. Their rewrite of Wesley's article of baptism went as follows:

Baptism is not merely a token of the Christian profession, whereby Christians are distinguished from others, and whereby they obligate themselves to observe every Christian duty; but it is also a sign of internal ablution, or the new birth.

The Evangelicals could not bring themselves to use the word regeneration, it appears. Maybe for this reason, S. J. Gamertsfelder, president and professor of systematic theology at Evangelical Theological Seminary, made it clear that the Evangelical Association agreed with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which saw baptism "as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of . . . ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of . . . self-committal unto God. . . ." 25 Gamertsfelder likewise attacked "the error that water baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, as some hold." 25 He continued:

Another error closely allied to the preceding is the view that baptism necessarily works transformation in the subject baptized. This view is commonly called baptismal regeneration. . . We admit that regeneration and water baptism may take place simultaneously, but we also hold that they are not necessarily connected. There may be regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit on the sole condition of faith without water baptism.

Thus, in the 1955 Book of Ritual of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, one should not be surprised to find baptism
referred to as "a symbol of an inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship."  

Defense of the Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration

Now with this apparent recent departure from our American Methodist, United Brethren, and Evangelical sacramental heritage can we justifiably and with integrity use the language of baptismal regeneration now solidly inserted into our baptismal liturgies? I am sensitive to the issues raised by Ted A. Campbell’s article "Baptism and New Birth: Evangelical Theology and the United Methodist Baptismal Covenant I," which appeared in the Fall 1990 issue of the Quarterly Review. I do not completely espouse his concern, however, that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration need necessarily diminish the stress we should again give to the New Birth. In support of my contention, I would like to call up the teachings of John Wesley and Philipp Jakob Spener.

It must be admitted at the outset that baptism was never in the forefront of the doctrinal disputes in which Wesley engaged and that his references to baptism were really made in relation to weightier issues such as New Birth, justification, and sanctification rather than in their own right. Perhaps the way to summarize Wesley’s views on baptism is to agree with Paul Sanders that the founder of Methodism’s mature theology was both catholic and evangelical and that, by inference, his utterances on baptism reflected the two polarities of this tension.

From his evangelical side we hear those well-known statements of Wesley like his commentary on John 3:5, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit...” “Except he experience that great inward change wrought by the Spirit, and be baptized (whatever baptism can be had) as the outward sign and means of it.” It was clear that Wesley considered the direct work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart to be far more important than baptism which, in this instance, was the outward sign and means of the inner working. Baptism appears optional; the work of the Holy Spirit is not.

The striking distinction between baptism and the new birth comes from Wesley’s sermon “The New Birth,” where the new birth is defined as “that great change which God works in the soul when He
brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. . . . In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into "the mind which was in Christ."

Wesley averred that baptism is a sacrament ordained by Christ wherein the washing with water was to be a sign and seal of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Wesley minced no words in this matter: "Here it is manifest, baptism, the sign, is spoken of as distinct from regeneration, the thing signified."

But Wesley changed the Anglican article on baptism when he refashioned it for the American Methodists in 1784. Something can be made of the fact that it was the mature Wesley who took this position. The Anglican Article XXV began, "Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will toward us." Wesley omitted the words "sure witnesses and effectual" to call the sacraments "certain signs of grace." Wesley's Article XVII "On Baptism" deleted these words from the Church of England Article XXVII:

they that rightly receive baptism are grafted into the church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

Henry Wheeler, who extensively analyzed the twenty-five articles of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the turn of the century, did not refer to this omission precisely but dwelt upon the alteration in the article on the sacraments. Wheeler said of baptismal regeneration: "Upon this subject Wesley's views during his long life changed in a great degree. Whatever his belief was in his early years, in his later life he did not teach this doctrine."

There also remains Wesley's telling comment, "You think the mode of baptism is 'necessary to salvation'; I deny that even baptism itself is so; if it were, every Quaker must be damned, which I can in no wise believe."

Nevertheless, there remains the catholic side of Wesley. In Samuel Wesley's "A Treatise on Baptism," which his son John published in abridged form in 1756, one notes that the first benefit
of baptism is "the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ's death." Applying Romans 5 to the human situation, Wesley believed that everyone, including infants, is involved in original sin. He continued:

And by virtue of this free gift, the merits of Christ's life and death, are applied to us in baptism. 'He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word' (Eph. 5:25-26), namely, in baptism, the ordinary instrument of our justification.\(^\text{33}\)

Twice more in this treatise, Wesley utilized the word ordinary in reference to baptism—once making the powerful claim:

It is true, the Second Adam has found a remedy for the disease which came upon all by the offense of the first. But the benefit of this is to be received through the means, which he hath appointed; through baptism in particular, which is the ordinary means he hath appointed for that purpose; and to which God hath tied us, though he may not have tied himself.\(^\text{34}\)

Another benefit of baptism Wesley saw—in addition to our entering into covenant with God, our being admitted into the church and being made members of Christ, and our being made heirs of the kingdom of heaven—was our being changed from children of wrath by nature into children of God. Said Wesley:

By water then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called by the Apostle 'the washing of regeneration.' Our church therefore ascribes no greater virtue to baptism than Christ himself has done. Nor does she ascribe it to the outward washing, but to the inward grace, which, added thereto, makes it a sacrament. Here a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness.\(^\text{35}\)

It should also be noted that in the sermon "The New Birth," where Wesley says that the New Birth is not the same as baptism and does not always accompany baptism (a person may possibly be born of water and yet not be born of the Spirit), he makes this important distinction: "I do not now speak with regard to infants: it is certain our church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again. . . ."\(^\text{36}\)

Wesley identified
with the baptismal regeneration concept personally. His *Journal* entry of May 19, 1738, acknowledged, "I believe, 'til I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism." 37

Now, can the evangelical and catholic dimensions of John Wesley's thought regarding baptism and the New Birth be balanced? Maybe not. I believe that some of the confusion in our United Methodist Church over the doctrine of baptism is that Wesley himself did not square all his utterances in this regard because he was "theologizing on the run" in eighteenth-century England. What is patent about his situation is that he looked out on a nation of baptized people whose lives, either by dissolute living or by open disbelief, were separated from the gospel and church of Jesus Christ as he understood them. He believed that baptismal grace ought to yield living faith and its fruits of love. Wesley felt that the solution was to bring these people, by the grace of God, to a conscious awareness of God's forgiving and renewing grace in their lives. We should not forget, however, that he was fully aware of the efficacy of sacramental grace in bringing people to God.

This is the way a number of Wesley scholars read him today. John Parris conceded that "Wesley was seeking a *via media*, in which the extremes both of an *ex opere operato* concept of the sacrament and that view which held that a sacrament was only a 'bare sign' were avoided." 38 Albert Outler stated that one must compare Wesley's "mild allowance" of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in the "Treatise on Baptism" with the sermon "The New Birth," which stresses a conscious adult experience of regeneration. Outler concluded that Wesley held to both ideas. 39

Bishop Ole Borgen contends that "there is no doubt that Wesley holds a doctrine of baptismal regeneration or new birth, of which baptism is a sign and a means." 40 Borgen is in agreement with Outler, seeing sanctification as "the gradual process of growth in grace" to be a complement to regeneration received in baptism. Colin Williams conceded that Wesley stressed the need for people to come to a conscious acceptance of the work of regeneration which God begins in infant baptism. That was reason enough to reduce but not to eliminate Wesley's reference to baptismal regeneration. 41 I am satisfied that there is a doctrine of baptismal regeneration in John Wesley, whose theology is foundational for United Methodists.
Although there is only scant likelihood that he might have directly influenced the predecessor bodies that form our United Methodist Church, Philipp Jakob Spener, the leading seventeenth-century German Lutheran Pietist, affirmed a position somewhat similar to Wesley’s. Spener (1635-1705) stressed the *Wiedergeburt* (the New Birth), which was a gift of God and was necessary for salvation. For Spener the three basic elements comprising the New Birth were: faith is created by the Word of God in the heart; forgiveness, justification, and adoption are given to the believer; and an entirely other and new nature is created in the believer.

Spener taught that the new birth was given in infant baptism. But it was almost always lost afterward and needed to be regained if salvation were to occur. For Spener, God’s power permeates baptism. Infant baptism was the practice in Lutheran Germany. Spener felt that infants at baptism are regenerated or born again because they lacked the ability to resist God’s grace. Unfortunately, most people later lose their baptismal regeneration in living according to the old nature, seeking in this life honors, riches, or pleasure and refusing to be obedient to God in all areas of life. In order to be saved, they need to experience the new birth once again through the Word in true repentance. Following this second rebirth, the believer must cooperate with the Spirit of God in being daily renewed, so that the spiritual life begun at New Birth might be continued for the rest of this life. Renewal is the Holy Spirit working through the Word and sacraments to impart us power to remain steadfast in the new nature.

Spener’s classic example of this New Birth was King David of Israel. David was reborn at circumcision. Why else would he taunt Goliath by calling him “uncircumcised”? Then, in the Bathsheba affair, in which David committed adultery and murder and persisted for a long time in his sins, he lost the New Birth and fell from grace. When David was made aware of his sin, he repented. His Psalm 51 prayer, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,” reflected rebirth by the Word of God, which came through the prophet Nathan. Renewal followed David’s rebirth.

Spener compared the New Birth to physical conception—something done out of pure grace and instantly. Renewal is like the gestation period. It is slow and gradual, and it
requires our lifelong cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Physical death for the believer is \textit{the} New Birth, ushering us finally cleansed of sin from the Kingdom of Grace in this life into the Kingdom of Glory in eternity. The diagram below demonstrates Spener's understanding of how we are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5) and how in terms of Titus 3:5 he affirmed the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Philipp Jakob Spener's Understanding of the New Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom of Grace</th>
<th>Kingdom of Glory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>Physical death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(New Birth through the Water)</td>
<td>the New Birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It needs to be added that Spener hardly ever called for a datable conversion experience and claimed no such event for himself. He challenged his congregations not to undergo a dramatic conversion experience but to be sure that they possessed "living faith," that they were in a state or condition of New Birth.

Points of Agreement between Spener and Wesley

In terms of baptismal regeneration, Spener and Wesley agreed on several points. First, they both affirmed that regeneration occurs in infant baptism. Secondly, they believed that regeneration may happen when adults are baptized as believers if they truly repent and believe.\(^44\) Thirdly, they warned against reliance upon baptism alone for one's salvation. Spener wrote, "Nor is it enough to be baptized,
but the inner man, where we have put Christ on in baptism, must also keep Christ on and bear witness to him in our outward life.\textsuperscript{45} Wesley's warning was unmistakable:

\begin{quote}
Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that you were then made children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore, ye must be born again.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Note not only Wesley's admission that his listeners were born again in baptism but also his clarity that the issue was where they were now. He implies that they were not in a state of rebirth.

Fourth, baptismal regeneration is not lost by the slightest sin or even unintentional disobedience against God. Spener maintained that the Holy Spirit would not dwell in persons who sin maliciously, yield themselves to sin, and do this unremittingly over a long period. Wesley stated that the principle of grace infused at infant baptism "will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness."\textsuperscript{47}

Fifth, both Spener and Wesley preached the Good News that regeneration, possessed in infant baptism but subsequently lost, can be recovered through regeneration brought about by the Word of God. One of Spener's sixty-six sermons on the New Birth is entitled "Repetition of the New Birth." It is based on Gal. 4:19, where Paul tells his disciples in Asia Minor that he is in travail "until Christ be formed again in you." Stressing the word \textit{again} Spener promises the recovery of a new birth once lost.\textsuperscript{48} At the end of his sermon "The New Birth," Wesley warns his auditors, whom he accused of having denied their baptism through sin, and tells them they need to be born again, whether they are baptized or unbaptized. Then, as if to lead them to the new birth, he pleads, "Let me be born 'not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever' and then let me daily 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!'\textsuperscript{49}

Lastly, Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, implied in the biblical quotation listed immediately above, seems analogous to Spener's accent on daily renewal of reborn believers. Emmanuel Hirsch believed that renewal and sanctification were equivalents in Spener's thought.\textsuperscript{50} Parris read Wesley's commentary on Col. 2:12 to mean
that for the latter “regeneration is only completed in sanctification, which also coincides with conversion.” 51 Borgen minimizes Wesley’s use of the word “conversion,” but sees Wesley in agreement with John Calvin, who claimed that infants are renewed by the Spirit of God. 52 Whether they called it renewal or sanctification, both these Christian leaders envisioned a new birth first granted in water baptism and given subsequently through the Word of God to lead to a life of faith active in love under the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance.

Conclusion

The United Methodist Church can affirm the doctrine of baptismal regeneration as it reflects upon and teaches the theological significance of baptism in its new baptismal liturgies. It can do this in one of two ways: First, as Lawrence Stookey suggests, it can let those who wish to have a theology of baptismal regeneration read this into the new liturgies which, like every good liturgical statement, are ambiguous and speak to the diversity of our denomination. 53 There is a certain wisdom to this in its appeal to the catholicity of our church.

I prefer a second approach. I think I have demonstrated that there is in our European Pietist and Methodist heritage a greater sacramental sense with which we ought to get in touch. Spener and Wesley expected the fruits of living faith to be manifested in the lives of their colleagues and followers, but not at the expense of an emphasis on baptismal grace. They were not Baptists. They saw the primacy of God’s working through the Holy Spirit in the Word and sacraments to call people to salvation in Jesus Christ. They looked for the human response, but they also extolled the initiation of divine grace. We truly need to emulate them. I believe that we can affirm the baptismal regeneration themes in our vastly improved new baptismal rites. We need only believe the Good News that in our helplessness God through water and the Word takes the initiative to kindle faith in us; to grant us forgiveness, justification, and adoption; to create an entirely other and new nature in us; and after the New Birth through the Word and the Lord’s Supper, to renew us daily until perfected at death we depart the Kingdom of Grace for the Kingdom of Glory.
Notes


4. Ibid., 41.

5. Ibid., 43.


7. Ibid., 85.

8. Ibid., 87.

9. Ibid., 90.

10. For example, I think Stookey, in discussing baptism and salvation, leans too heavily on baptism's corporate nature, stressing its value for the church and probably minimizing its significance for the individual Christian (cf. 71-74). White's inclusion of ordination and Christian weddings and funerals in his chapter on "The Reform of Sacramental Practice" seems to suggest that the aforementioned are sacraments (cf. 131-134). Most United Methodists would not accept this. I liked Willimon's point that "we get born, reborn, in baptism" (cf. 85) but wonder if his making baptism and rebirth a lifetime process does not minimize the sacrament itself as the foundation and anchor of our faith. I prefer Luther's comment, "When faith comes, baptism is complete" (cf. Luther's Works [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958] 40:246).


23. The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (Dayton, Ohio and Harrisburg, Pa.: The Otterbein Press and the Evangelical Press), 43.
24. Ibid., 49.
25. S. J. Gamartsfelder, Systematic Theology (Cleveland, Ohio: Printed for the author by C. Hauser, 1913), 539.
26. Ibid., 538-539.
34. Ibid., 193.
35. Ibid., 192.
36. Sugden, II, 238.
38. Parris, 60-61.
41. Williams, 121.
42. For a more complete treatment in English of Spener’s view of the New Birth, see my Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch (Chicago: The Covenant Press, 1986), 188-204.
43. Der Hochwichtige Articul von der Wiedergeburt (Frankford am Main: Johann David Zunzer, 1696), II:156.
44. Borgen, 159f.; Stein, 319, f. 132.
46. Sugden, I: 296
51. Parris, 47.
52. Borgen, 166-7.
A New Proposal for Wesleyan Christian Initiation

The people called United Methodist are being asked to consider seriously the significance and meaning of the sacrament of Baptism in the next quadrennium. First the Baptism Study Committee and now the General Conference have requested this denomination-wide study so that the whole church might be involved in a process that hopefully will culminate in proposed legislation to the 1996 General Conference. Such legislation will help us outline the theological understanding of baptism and Christian Initiation in the United Methodist Church (UMC). The task, of course, will not be easy. This season of study will remind us painfully of the stark differences within our church with respect to the sacrament of Baptism. I hope to share with the reader an understanding of Christian Initiation which I believe can be rooted in the Wesleyan tradition of which I am a part. At the same time I hope to give us a creative structure to help us deal with a widespread problem in our current initiatory practice, namely, that of indiscriminate baptism. Thus, I offer this reflection on baptism as a response to my own prayerful searching in hopes that it will contribute to our church’s dialogue and study on Christian Initiation.

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I am not a liturgical scholar or professional theologian. I am a pastor. I am asked to baptize persons and to interpret the meaning of this sacrament for those whom I pastor. I find much confusion in the local churches and among the clergy as to what United Methodists believe about our rites of initiation. Even now, as I write this paper, I see on my desk a newsletter from my church of origin that has a section announcing "DEDICATION OF BABIES,"

followed by a list of names and dates of those "dedicated." I am left to wonder if these were really baptisms cloaked in indigenous language? Or has the pastor found an alternate service that will allow parents to preserve the option of adult baptism for their children while they make a public pledge to guide and nurture these little ones in the faith?

There is confusion and ambivalence about baptism among the laity and clergy alike. And, unfortunately, this ambivalence has often led us to practice indiscriminate baptism.

The Problems of Indiscriminate Baptism

A proud grandmother came up to me and said, "Pastor, I want you to baptize my new grandson." And I immediately responded, "Sure, I would be honored." After all, I had not been a pastor long. I had had few opportunities to invoke the Spirit's presence over the waters of baptism. Besides, the grandmother was truly a faithful member of our congregation. How could I not baptize her grandson? And so he was baptized into the community of faith. Yet, in the back of my mind I wondered if he would really be nurtured in the faith, especially if his grandmother, the only active Christian in the family, was ever prevented from teaching this child about the life of faith into which he was baptized. Yes, I knew the congregation, along with the parents, had also pledged their support and nurture. But neither the church nor the parents had any specific ideas about how this was to be done.

I'm sure I'm not the only pastor who has struggled with these issues. The questions arise, too, when we teach our confirmation classes, confirm our youth, and then wonder how long they'll "stick." Have they really been adequately prepared to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in our church and world? Yes, they can recite the creeds and they know the bishop's name, but do they
pray? Do they know what it is to be fed by Christ at the Eucharist? Do they know what it means to live and struggle and feed on the sacred texts of scripture in their day-to-day journey?

These questions, and others like them, have led me on an unexpected journey of prayerful searching with respect to my own understanding of Christian initiation. I certainly have not completed this journey. Thus, this paper is not meant to be a "Treatise on Christian Initiation" come to save the UMC from all its ills. Rather, it is a proposal of Christian initiation that I think addresses the problem of indiscriminate baptism (especially infant baptism) in a way that can be supported by our common Wesleyan heritage.

When I say the following understanding of baptism is faithful to the Wesleyan tradition, I do not mean to say it is pure Wesley. Father Wesley would not have agreed with my proposal, for he was rooted in another context. The liturgical renewal movement, as well as the discoveries in liturgical and sacramental scholarship in recent years, have given us resources that were, unfortunately, not available to Wesley. Thus, I will not attempt to describe Wesley's views on baptism per se, although some of his arguments will be employed. Rather, I will largely appeal to Wesley's use of the small groups in the early Methodist movement, which assisted persons in their faith pilgrimages as a means of defining and implementing initiatory practices in the UMC.

Changing to an Adult Norm for Baptism

Baptism is, according to Wesley, "the initiatory sacrament, which enters us into covenant with God." In baptism we are made children of God and members of Christ's Church. Through baptism we are "regenerated or born again [and] herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness." Thus, baptism can clearly be described as a gift of God to the one baptized. She/he is regenerated and given the necessary grace to continue the journey toward holiness.

When is baptism appropriate? Methodism has always maintained a belief in infant baptism. Wesley himself took great pains to defend this practice in his "Treatise on Baptism": "On the whole, therefore, it is not only lawful and innocent, but meet, right, and our
bounden duty...to consecrate our children to God by baptism, as the Jewish Church were commanded to do by circumcision.” Yet, should Methodism continue to make infant baptism the norm in its initiatory practice? Or should there be an adjustment which makes adult baptism the norm while still allowing for the baptism of infants in certain situations? I would argue for the latter. Clearly there is no scriptural warrant for or against infant baptism. The tradition has, however, legitimized the baptism of infants since an early date, for even the apostolic tradition of Hippolytus (ca. 215) allows for the practice. Thus, I am not proposing the abolition of infant baptism. Rather, I am suggesting that the days of infant baptism as the norm should be numbered. While it is clear that baptism is a gift of God not earned by any person no matter what their age, it is also true that “the use of baptism in theological apologetics as a sign of God’s complete gratuity in the giving of [Godself] cannot serve as basis for a policy of indiscriminate baptism.”

Such baptismal practices in the UMC have led to a significant number of persons who are baptized as infants and confirmed after a brief doctrinal catechesis. Many of these confirmands are in the life of the faith community only briefly before falling away from participation. Clearly, infant baptism as the norm has not been most successful in making and keeping disciples (a good Wesleyan test, I believe). Thus, I propose making adult baptism the norm in the UMC. As the liturgical scholar Aidan Kavanagh has written:

"Tradition’s witness to the baptism of adults as the norm throws infant baptism into perspective as a benign abnormality so long as it is practiced with prudence as unavoidable pastoral necessity—in situations such as the frail health of the infant, or in response to the earnest desire of Christian parents whose faith is rigorous and whose way of life gives clear promise that their child will develop in the faith of the Church... The data of neither scripture or tradition can be made to support infant baptism as the pastoral norm.

It is clear that adult baptism was not the norm in Wesley’s understanding of Christian initiation. Given the recent developments in liturgical and historical scholarship, however, I believe that having adult baptism as the norm is, indeed, Wesleyan. To demonstrate how this is so, it will be helpful to examine how the
larger initiation process of those baptized as adults would fit with Wesley's structure of the small groups utilized in the early Methodist movement.

An emphasis on adult baptism as the norm in the UMC would require a major overhaul of current initiatory practices. A structure would need to be developed to deal with persons seeking baptism and incorporation into the life of the church. Furthermore, with this shift in baptismal praxis, responsibility for persons not yet baptized but within the faith community (such as infants and children) must be seen in a new light.

The Catechumenate and Wesleyan Classes

The early church model of the catechumenate is, I think, a helpful model for our own time. The catechumenate involved "the enrollment of a convert in the formation program meant to prepare one for the baptismal rites... normally celebrated at the vigil of Easter and at Pentecost." Acceptance into the catechumenate brings responsibility to the one enrolled (according to the apostolic tradition), for catechumens "will be expected to begin living in a manner befitting a Christian manner that will be gradually molded by the teaching, moral support, prayer, example, and ritual patterns of the Christian community itself. The catechumen becomes, thus, "an incipient Christian.""

The similarity between the catechumenate and the small groups of the early Methodist movement is clear. Early in the movement, Wesley began organizing the Methodists into societies that soon became too large and had to be further divided into classes. A Methodist society, according to Wesley, is "a company of [persons] having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other work out their salvation." In both Wesley's groups and the early church catechumenate persons were involved in a process of growth in the Christian life through their involvement in these group processes.

But this does not imply merely sitting in a classroom in order to learn specific doctrinal formulations. Prayer, worship, scripture, and spiritual formation appear to be the shaping forces in the lives of the early Methodists and the catechumens. As Kavanagh says, "One is
formed in the gospel not only by learning but by worship as well, the two being articulated in a balanced continuum." Thus, the development of a catechumenate within the UMC (which may be modeled after the small groups of Wesley and the early church catechumenate) must not only function to teach intellectual knowledge of Christianity but to help the individual incorporate the life of faith in his/her daily walk. To accomplish this requires more than a six-week program taught by the pastor. The process should involve a significant amount of time (in the early church it was three years, which some may find excessive), and clergy and laity alike should take responsibility for instructing the catechumens. After all, "Conversion, which is what catechesis is about most profoundly, is not so easily regimented. For some, several years may be needed for faith to mature in them to a point at which ecclesial election for baptism would become possible."  

The development of the catechumenate within the church raises a concern, however. What do you do with the unbaptized? The Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) creatively deals with this dilemma by designating a "Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate." The document states that

*[Although the rite of initiation begins with admission to the catechumenate, the preceding period or precatechumenate is of great importance... It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom [God] has sent for the salvation of all. Thus those who are not yet Christians, their hearts opened by the Holy Spirit, may believe and be freely converted to the Lord and commit themselves sincerely to [the Lord].]*

Thus, the community of the faithful has a tremendous responsibility for those not yet baptized or in catechetical groups. It is because of the church’s evangelization, along with God’s intervention, that, in the RCIA’s words, these persons “come (to) feel the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God’s love.” Thus, the presence of precatechumens within a congregation is a ministry in itself, for these persons remind the community of the baptized of their responsibility toward those not yet committed to Christ.
Evangelization, then, becomes crucial in the life of the community that emphasizes adult baptism as the norm.

But what happens to a person once she/he has been a precatechumen, a catechumen, baptized, and given first communion? The Roman Catholic RCIA describes the immediate post-baptismal period as "the time...during which the newly initiated experiences being fully a part of the Christian community by means of pertinent catechesis and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday eucharistic celebration." Methodism has a tremendous resource to offer in the post-baptismal period through the small group structure developed by John Wesley. As Knight points out, "Wesley also insisted Methodists remain in classes after their new birth. The accountability to a common discipline was essential throughout the Christian life." Thus, catechesis does not culminate in the moment of baptism. Rather, the life of holiness expressed during catechesis is just beginning for the newly initiated.

Wesley's development of classes, bands, and select societies should, then, inform what we as Methodists do after our initiation. Such a method for continued discipleship was very important for Wesley. In fact, his concern for remaining faithful after baptism has led to controversy among Wesleyan scholars concerning his understanding of baptism. In his sermon "The New Birth," Wesley claims that "the new birth is not the same thing with baptism, so it does not always accompany baptism... A [person] may possibly be 'born of water,' and yet not be 'born of the Spirit'." Wesley then goes on to say, "A child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that [he/she] afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ." And yet elsewhere Wesley claims that "by water then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again..." And so comes the problem. How can Wesley claim that we are regenerated in baptism (in a context where infant baptism was the norm) while saying that baptism is not the new birth? Ole Borgen attempts to address the problem in this way: "[T]he grace of Baptism, as all grace, may be lost... It is possible to deny one's baptism: [so Wesley says:] ‘Whenever, therefore, you give place to him (the devil) again, whenever you do any of the works of the devil, then you deny your baptism'." Wesley believed that the life of holiness was an active...
life, for one could always lose grace by rejecting the graces/gifts of God.

This, then, is an argument for continued small group processes in the UMC after baptism. One has not arrived when one is baptized. Rather, one has begun a journey that leads to the use of God-given graces in their fullness. Small groups help persons learn from God and from each other how to live the life of holiness, the life of our baptism, because these groups allow us to see that "no [person] sins because [he/she] has not grace, but because [he/she] does not use the grace [he/she] hath."17 The community of the baptized is not a group of "catechetical graduates" who no longer need to learn the disciplines of the life of holiness. Rather, this community can, with God's help, increase in the life of holiness through continued participation in small groups modeled after those formed by Wesley.

The New Liturgies of Baptism in the United Methodist Church

A final consideration to be raised has to do with the actual celebration of the baptism itself in the UMC. Kavanagh helpfully points out that Christian initiation in the early Graeco-Latin context, including the sources of Justin, Hippolytus, and Tertullian, involves the following: "1) stress on instruction preparatory for baptism; 2) an anointing with exorcized oil after Satan has been renounced; 3) the water bath by triple immersion in the Name of the Trinity; 4) an anointing with chrism (Tertullian) or oil of thanksgiving (Hippolytus); 5) a hand laying by the bishop with prayer invoking the Holy Spirit... 6) the eucharist."18

The new liturgies found in the 1989 United Methodist Hymnal help to connect the church back to its roots when they include a question asking the candidates to renounce evil, a prayer of invoking the Holy Spirit on the candidate, and a suggestion to celebrate the eucharist after the rites of initiation. Other denominational literature allows for the anointing of the candidates with oil. These changes are significant for several reasons, but it is especially important to note the movement toward a recovery of the early practice of maintaining a sense of unity among the initiatory rites. The postponement of confirmation eventually led to it becoming "contingent upon human knowledge—the learning of a
catechism." This culminated in the United Methodist creation of "preparatory members," those who are baptized but have not yet been confirmed, and so are not yet "full members."

The separation of confirmation from the water bath cannot be justified historically or scripturally. So Kavanagh says, "Whenever it is deemed advisable to initiate a Christian, regardless of age, that Christian should be initiated fully and completely by water baptism, the 'sealing' of confirmation, and first eucharistic communion." James White agrees: "Baptism, laying on of hands, and first communion ought to come together. Anything that implies half-way membership or preparatory membership is a contradiction in terms." Thus, the water bath, the anointing or laying on of hands, and eucharist should all be celebrated as one is initiated into the community of the baptized.

Objections and Responses

One objection that might be raised against the description of Christian initiation outlined above is that a movement toward adult baptism as the norm pushes us to emphasize the human response in baptism rather than the grace-filled nature of the sacrament. Putting persons through an extensive catechumenate (not for weeks, but months and years), insisting that infants who are baptized are, as far as we can tell, raised in an environment where the life of holiness is a priority—these seem to emphasize the human activity rather than the divine initiative in the process of Christian initiation.

While I admit that I have largely focused on human activity in the process of Christian initiation, I have not intended to do so at the cost of forgetting the divine grace given to those baptized. To do so would not be Wesleyan, for Wesley insisted that some measure of grace was offered to all persons in prevenient grace. What's more, Wesley's view of the Christian life as a process moving toward holiness and perfection is not possible without God's grace. Thus, initiation into such a life can never be possible without grace. This is why I cannot say we should prohibit infant baptism. Nor would I dare say that the child I baptized in my first appointment is not truly a recipient of God's baptismal grace simply because his parents choose not to mold him in the life of the faith community. To do so would be to attempt to place limits on God's ability to offer grace.
However, I have focused on human activity in Christian initiation because I believe that a great deal of indiscriminate baptism (largely infant baptism) has taken place in our church. Remembering Wesley's claim that we can reject God's graciousness after baptism (and even after perfection) leads me to believe that it is very Wesleyan to take seriously the response of humanity to the various graces given to us throughout our lives of holiness, including the grace-filled act of baptism.

A second objection that might be raised is one of a practical nature. How can such a shift in baptismal praxis become a reality in an established United Methodist Church? Has not infant baptism become so deeply routinized that it is practically irreversible? And if it is, why don't we simply address the problem from another angle while continuing to allow for infant baptism as the norm? I do admit that it will be difficult to move the church into an initiatory practice with adult baptism as the norm. I believe, however, that it will be even more difficult to transform the infant-norm praxis already in place. The church, however, can utilize the tremendous resource we have in one another, for it is in small gatherings of Christians that John Wesley saw and experienced power. Also, it was in such gatherings that those not yet born again could become justified and then push on to sanctification and even Christian perfection. It is time, I believe, to realize that the culture is not a place of Christian catechesis. This is our task, the task of the community of faith.

This leads me to a difficult conclusion. Adult baptism, in my opinion, should become the norm as we attempt to renew our Christian initiation polity and praxis in the UMC. As I have attempted to show, such a shift, along with the presence of the catechumenate, would serve to remind the community of the baptized of the seriousness of Christian initiation. Furthermore, the presence of the precatechumens would also remind the gathered community of its responsibility for evangelization and formation of those not yet committed.

Such a shift in baptismal praxis would, I hope, prevent baptism from becoming a five-minute episode crammed into a worship service on any particular Sunday, depending upon the local church calendar. While I have not addressed the issue, the early church practice of baptizing at the Easter vigil and/or Pentecost can have a profound impact on the meaning of the act of Christian initiation.
Furthermore, such celebrations, along with Wesley Covenant Services, Baptism of the Lord services, and celebrations of the Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant might also remind those already baptized of the continuing nature of the covenant made in our baptisms.

Much more could be said concerning the reform of initiatory polity and praxis in the UMC, but my purpose here is to put this brief proposal before the church rather than to attempt to offer a fully developed plan of Christian initiation. There is still much left to do and consider before such a shift can occur. I must admit that the position I have taken in this project was not my position prior to my own study and reflection in the past few months. But United Methodists all across the denomination are wrestling with this issue in a special way these days. I join the struggle and look forward to this time of study and prayerful reflection during the quadrennium. Reforming the initiatory polity and praxis in our church can be a step toward revitalization in the UMC. May the winds of the Spirit blow in our church as we take the time to remember and affirm our baptisms in all their fullness.

Selected Bibliography


**Notes**


6. Ibid.,

7. Ibid.,


12. Ibid., 16.


The story is the stuff of preaching. If it does its work, it arises out of the minister's own experience and grabs hold of the person in the pew. It is a moment of relief from anything abstract or too much moralizing. The story drawn from the preacher's own life can help people remember something about the sermon. It says, "Hey, I'm not just the face behind the pulpit. I sweat, too. I know what life is like where you live. And God knows how you hurt!"

A good story does not a good sermon make. At least not necessarily. But sometimes, we might just as well tell the story and let the sermon take care of itself.

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Winter is wet in Chile. This year, the rains came after drought threatened the land for too long. And this year the church at Perales didn't get a pastor. I was appointed a kind of "circuit rider" to attend the church once a month. Instead of a horse, I used a 1969 Land Rover. When it rains, the coast road from Concepción to Perales is closed. But the road that runs from Coelemu along the Itata River is usually open, as long as the river doesn't rise too high.

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It was raining pretty hard one Saturday afternoon when I picked up the eight lay persons who would support Angela, the young woman in charge of the Perales congregation. Angela was doing her "practical year" of rural service there, after which she would know if she wanted to continue training for the ministry. We were delayed by a bus that had slipped sideways in the road, but we arrived at Lonpulla, one of the three congregations in the Perales area, just in time for "Sunday" school. As the rain and wind battered loose tiles on the roof, we sang and told Bible stories with a group of fifteen children.

The children sang about the man who built his house on the sand. It's a story they know very well. Four years ago the wind, rain, and tide washed away the simple dwellings of a dozen families who lived at the river's mouth, fishing and gathering seaweed for survival. The Methodist Church provided land a little farther from the beach and helped them rebuild their houses there. Most of the people in the village are now Methodist, and they hope to have their own church building soon. In the meantime, they hold Sunday school and a Wednesday night service in the village and walk the two miles to church in Perales on Saturday and Sunday evenings.

When the class was over, Angela led our evangelism team to Vegas de Itata at the mouth of the river. We witnessed in the home of a widow with two teen-aged children who lived in a house with no water or electricity. Pieces of meat cured over the smoking fire of the charcoal hearth. Standing together, we sang: "Buscad primero el Reino de Dios..." in any language, the song means hope in the midst of misery and despair (Matt. 6:33).

By then the rain was letting up, so we went to preach in the streets, in front of the single bar in the village. Brother Jonathan gave a short, rousing sermon, while Angela and Jorge played their guitars and Sister Nuria handed out tracts. Then we went to the village closest to the river's mouth to visit a woman with twelve children who had been abandoned by her husband. As the rain and wind whipped the air, I tried to talk with her oldest son, about twenty years old, who was obviously retarded. The rest of the team prayed and sang with the woman and her younger children.

When we checked in at the Methodist agricultural center, a barefooted young girl offered to sell us the crayfish she gathered from the swollen river. We bought all she had. Later we would boil
them for our supper, but for now we left them rattling alive in the sink as we hurried off to Saturday night church.

The service was lively, and as usual, included lots of singing accompanied by guitars, accordion, and tambourines. While Brother Jonathan, the carpenter, was preaching, we heard the rain battering the roof. After the service, I shuttled people back to Lomuila and Vegas, because by then the road was completely flooded.

There must have been twenty people in the Land Rover. As we pushed through the water that had spread over the road from the flooded fields, I realized the water was as high as the floorboard, and I began to get a little worried. But eventually, we made it. I let my passengers out, and they marched off singing into the night—children, youth, parents, and grandparents facing that beating rain, returning to makeshift houses that would never keep out that wind and weather. As I watched them make their way home, I heard a voice in my head affirming: "These are my people, Starr..." I was privileged to be allowed to share that vitality of faith in the wet, windy darkness. It was a moment of grace.

It rained hard all night. Driving down the flooded road with Angela and the evangelism team the next morning, we all knew that few would make it to church or Sunday school in Perales. Still, the next morning a few children did appear, and while the team improvised a lesson, I made pastoral calls with Angela, to try to cope with the alcoholism, adultery, and violence in the home that are the usual by-products of living in miserable conditions.

Later we held an impromptu service with the gathered family of Sara, who was dying of stomach cancer. After several songs, I read Psalm 23 and Angela prayed that God would receive Sara. At least twenty people were standing either in her bedroom or outside looking in the window. Sara's yard was full of people. How different from dying in a sterile hospital! Next we trudged through the mud to bless the "new" home of a Sunday school teacher. Then we sang and prayed by the bedside of a woman who had burned herself badly at her charcoal fireplace. (She announced later that the infection was healed at our visit.)

During lunch, I began to wonder whether it was wise to try to drive back to Concepción, knowing that by now the road might be truly impassable. I was thinking about sending the "team" back on the bus when word came that the bus had not gotten through. About
the same time a young man came to say that his wife, Norma, had begun labor pains and could I please get her to the hospital?

So we set off in the Land Rover with the eight members of the evangelism team, Norma (great with child), her husband (greatly anxious), and myself. How was Norma feeling? Not well...we took hot water in a coffee thermos in case the baby should be born on the road (although I had no idea what to do with the hot water).

It was a slow trip. The road was covered with water. As it ran by the river’s edge, we could see that the river had risen ten or twelve feet overnight. The river and the road were nearly one and the same. Where water did not yet cover the road there was deep, thick mud. We held our breath and wondered whether this 21-year-old vehicle would pull through as time after time we crawled into and then out of a deep muddy patch. In places we churned through water higher than the floorboards and hoped we would miss potholes in the road surface.

I could easily imagine my vehicle being carried off by the raging rivers, but we had to keep going. Norma said that her first baby had to be delivered by Caesarean section, and she expected this one to be born the same way. I did not relish the thought of attempting such an operation in a stuck truck with the river rising around us.

The windshield wiper blades broke, but one of the women came up with some thread to tie them back on. The brothers and sisters chided me gently for my doubts. We kept on singing and grinding through the mud, not knowing if the road was still there or if the loaded Land Rover or its eleven passengers would stand the strain. There were no other vehicles on the road.

But just as I knew we had come too far to turn back an amazing thing happened. Around a bend in the muddy road ahead, in the waning light of dusk, there appeared a mirror image of ourselves. Yes, another Land Rover, painted sky-blue, and even older than ours. As we passed each other, the blue Land Rover honked its horn. We knew there was still a road ahead of us. And we knew that it was passable, if only by a rugged vehicle like ours.

Norma’s baby was born that night. The preparations for the operation began moments after her arrival at the hospital. Although her child was born with jaundice, Norma, the baby, the father, lay evangelists, missionary, and Land Rover are all doing fine. But Perales, Lopullá and Vegas were cut off from the world for a
week. The river wiped out the road only hours after we made our escape.

If I ever see that other driver again, I'll tell him how hope and grace rode in his blue Land Rover that wet Sunday afternoon. And maybe he'll answer that we were his hope, too, as we honked and slid past each other in the mud and rain before the flood. For the folks in Perales, Vegas, and Lonpulla, the task of the church may be only to confirm that there is still a road up ahead. To know that the road is open, and that on it we are not alone—just that—may make it worth keeping on.

For many years now I've been going where the gospel has led. Mission contexts and mission places. The inner city of the U.S. Forgotten villages in Europe. The jungles of Ecuador. The new teeming colonias of the world's most populous city. The war-torn areas of Northern Ireland. Mental hospitals and orphanages. Universities and seminaries. Rich churches and the poorest. Central America, Andean Indian villages and fishing shacks in Chile.

Through all of these contexts, I've learned that my task as a minister has more to do with being attentive to other people's stories and agendas than relating my own. It's what the Latin Americans call "acompañamiento pastoral." Just being there is most of it. But being able to actively mediate some sign of hope, some human affection, some ministry of the Word—that is really the job description. And through this attentive presence, I've come to notice that only occasionally am I the one with the most to give. I'm usually on the receiving end, one way or another the beneficiary of grace bestowed through the faith and works—the stories—of humble people.

When a moment looms chock-full of mystery and meaning, a moment such as that weekend in Perales when the stakes were high and the drama went on and on, I can only make sense of it by trivializing somewhat the intensity of shared feeling that I experienced. There's a danger in too much explanation. Once we think we can make it "make sense," we are already on artificial turf, while the real stuff grinds through the mud and the flood . . . and the blood.

Such narrative of ministry, or mission, points to another agenda and a reality beyond itself. As a record of grace or tribulation, tragedy or achievement, a parable doesn't need to be explained or
theologically unpacked. A pastoral narrative has its own integrity because it is more than the sum of its parts. A good mystery always is.
Jon L. Berquist

The Minister's Bookshelf: Preaching the Hebrew Bible


In recent years, many books on preaching have appeared, including technical treatises, anthologies of sermons, exhortatory essays, books on different styles in preaching, tomes on preaching in individual traditions and on specific topics, and discussions of the use of the Bible in preaching. Many of these books are tremendously helpful, but in the midst of the veritable flood of new volumes, one should certainly ask if enough is being said to warrant all these new words.

Two contributions to the recent dialogue on preaching were published in late 1989 by well-known writers on the Hebrew Bible and preaching: Elizabeth Achtemeier and Walter Brueggemann. These two books deserve consideration by those who wish to integrate Hebrew Bible texts and ideas more thoroughly into their preaching. Though their general topic is the same, these books approach the issues from very different perspectives.

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Elizabeth Achtemeier’s book, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, provides an excellent short course on the integration of the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis and the contributions of Hebrew Bible texts to biblical preaching. After two opening chapters to motivate preaching the Hebrew Bible, Achtemeier offers an introduction to historical criticism. She presents the dangers and the benefits of this approach to biblical study. Historical criticism runs the risk of reducing the Bible to “a historical document from the past, to be studied by scientific, rational methods.” Such an approach results in a Bible “emptied of its power to create” (29). Despite that risk, Achtemeier asserts that the church needed and still needs historical criticism to remove the Bible from the restrictions of dogmatism and to present the Bible in its correct historical, cultural context. As a corrective, Achtemeier emphasizes the story of the Bible as one story, with one chief actor—God. Her summary of this singular story is helpful in understanding her approach to the Hebrew Bible as the long, unbroken history of God’s promises to the people who so frequently reject their creator and redeemer, continuing through the story of Jesus. Not only is this the Bible’s story, but as Christians we “inherit that story by being baptized into the body of Christ, the church, as adopted children of God” (37).

For Achtemeier, then, the challenge is how to preach the Hebrew Bible so that it most effectively encourages the appropriation of this ancient story as part of the modern church’s story. To this end, she offers in her third chapter, “Basics of Sermon Preparation,” a discussion of how to use critical methods of exegesis in the construction of sermons. She stresses form criticism as a means of understanding the expectations aroused by certain genres, balanced by rhetorical analysis to show the uniqueness and the interrelationships of the text to be preached. She continues with an examination of the text’s themes as shared with the rest of the canon and with the life of the congregation. Achtemeier insists on the pairing of Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts, since the Christian church has inherited the Hebrew Bible only through the New Testament.

The main portion of Achtemeier’s book details the specific manner of preaching from five types of Hebrew Bible literature:
narratives, law, prophets, psalms, and wisdom literature. In each
section, Achtemeier discusses the genre of the texts and provides
many good, brief insights into specific issues of content. She is
careful not to lump these genres together; for instance, she discusses
Genesis 1-11 separately from chapters 12-50, which she understands
to be of a very different character. Within each section, Achtemeier
outlines each genre, comments on the content of the literature,
provides some theological judgments about the central character of
the texts in that category, and offers segments from her own
sermons that illustrate her points about the possibilities for
theological interpretation and relevant biblical preaching.

In general, Achtemeier’s book is sensitive to the lectionary but is
not limited to it, providing good insights for those from several
traditions of preaching. There are too few notes, and most of them
to her own books, but this book makes a helpful addition by itself. It
is perhaps most helpful in providing a sense of the different
contributions, as part of the same story, made by the various types
of Hebrew Bible literature, as well as in presenting the methods of
biblical scholarship in interpreting these types of texts as a service to
faith. As a methodological handbook for the exegesis of Hebrew
Bible texts leading to their preaching, I know of none parallel.

Walter Brueggemann’s Finally Comes the Poet

Walter Brueggemann’s Finally Comes the Poet is quite a different
book. Achtemeier explains how to use critical methods to produce
interpretations of Hebrew Bible texts for preaching; Brueggemann
offers a framework in which Hebrew Bible texts can be interpreted.
Whereas Achtemeier focuses on biblical exegetical methods prior to
preaching, Brueggemann produces theological justification for a new
kind of proclamation.

The title of Brueggemann’s book comes from the Walt Whitman
poem, Leaves of Grass. In the poem, after the technocrats of the
world have tried to define reality, “finally comes the poet” to sing
new songs. Brueggemann both demonstrates and encourages the use
of poetic language in the church to bring forth a new consciousness
of the reality of God in the world. By poetry, Brueggemann means
not rhyme and meter but the power of speech to evoke images and
even to evoke new reality and new life. Such poets are often called
prophets by the traditions of ancient Israel. "The poet/prophet is a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes new possibility in the listening assembly. Preaching continues that dangerous, indispensable habit of speech." (4). As such, he considers, "preaching as a poetic construal of an alternative world. The purpose of such preaching is to cherish the truth, to open the truth from its pervasive reductionism in our society, to break the fearful rationality that keeps the news from being new." (6).

The theme of reductionism runs throughout Brueggemann's book. He fears and reacts against the reductionism of our time, which can make even the gospel seem old and which can shackle the message and practice of liberation. The thought of the church, according to Brueggemann, too often resides in overly simplified categories that cannot contain the power of the gospel. We must allow the gospel to break through the reductions of society and even of the church, or the gospel will fail.

Brueggemann's four chapters develop themes that militate against reductionism. The first chapter, "Numbness and Ache: The Strangeness of Healing," focuses on sin, guilt, and their healing. Firstly, sin must be portrayed in all its ignored destructiveness. Secondly, an alternative must be constructed in such a way that the listeners feel the possibility of healing and wholeness. Lastly, God's will to move the listener from sin and its consequences to healing must be voiced. This articulation must overcome the numbness of the community, whose members are often mired in guilt and alienation that prevent honest confrontation with sin. Ideologies of retribution or cheap grace can prevent such honest confrontation (14-15). The solution is strong proclamation of guilt, to which God responds with anger and pain, followed by the assertion that we can begin the return to God by reparation. Then God can remove the ache, through sacrament (18-33). Through this movement Brueggemann offers a very insightful exegesis of Lev. 6:1-7.

The second chapter deals with "Alienation and Rage: The Odd Invitation to Doxological Communion." In response to God's overwhelming sovereignty and grace, our communication with God is often reduced, leaving only humanity or God. If there is only humanity, then there is alienation; if God is the only free actor, then humanity responds in rage. On the other hand, when the both human and God are speaking and being heard, then true communion is
possible. This expresses itself in singing, as best evidenced in the hymns of Psalms and Revelation.

But when one listens to the voice of God, what is that voice telling us to do? Such is the topic of the third chapter, "Restlessness and Greed: Obedience and Missional Imagination." The typical understandings of God's commanding the people can fall into non-negotiability of obedience to inflexible (and perhaps irrelevant) rules or into therapeutic inanities that leave us feeling good but not doing good. Furthering the problem is the fact that North American Christians, who possess a disproportionate amount of the world's goods, engage in an acquisitiveness that leaves us restless and greedy (82). God thus calls us to proclaim God's own intervention in the world (through the Exodus, the cross, and many other events) that is slowly changing the world to end the disproportion. Thus, preaching should aim toward "human participation in God's transformative work" (88). Towards these ends, Brueggemann offers extended exegetical insights into the Ten Commandments and their use in the later biblical traditions (90-110).

The final chapter, "Resistance and Relinquishment: A Permit for Freedom," focuses on human personhood. Brueggemann develops two models of transformed humanness out of the Book of Daniel (113-41). The first model, resistance, is depicted by Daniel 1. Daniel resisted conformity as a means for success because of his special identity as one of God's chosen ones. Against imperial control, there can be "self-assertion, self-respect, and freedom" (119). Daniel 4, the story of a confrontation between Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar, illustrates the second model, relinquishment. Nebuchadnezzar relinquishes his imperial authority and instead through praise acknowledges the dominion of God. Between the problematic poles of docility and autonomy, Brueggemann encourages these models of resisting authority or relinquishing authority as ways to participate in the new, alternative reality of God. Through Daniel's poetic action or Nebuchadnezzar's poetry of praise, "finally comes the poet" to bring new possibilities into reality.

Brueggemann's book is full of exegetical insights on many significant texts. Though the main discussions are based on Hebrew Bible texts, New Testament texts appear frequently to show the continuing expression of the more ancient ideas. The book is good
reading; it seems as if one is hearing a good sermon rather than reading a book about homiletics. It also offers extensive notes which are helpful to those who would like to pursue Brueggemann's thoughts. The fact that these notes are from recent and varied sources makes them even more beneficial. They in themselves are a rich resource. A scripture index also increases the book's practicality.

**Hebrew Bible and New Testament**

Both Achtemeier and Brueggemann take explicitly Christian approaches to the Hebrew Bible, and both understand their goals to be the Christian preaching of these texts. There are, however, several important differences in their understanding of the relationship between Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

Achtemeier argues extensively that Hebrew Bible texts can be preached only if paired with a New Testament text (Achtemeier, 56-59). Her reasoning is clear:

apart from the New Testament, the Old Testament does not belong to the Christian church and is not its book. The Old Testament is the word of God to Israel, and unless we Christians have some connection with Israel, the Old Testament is not spoken to us. But of course we do have such a connection. . . The only one who has made us one with Israel, however, is Jesus Christ, and so to hear the message of the Old Testament rightly, as members of God's covenant people, we must hear the Old Testament in Christ. The pairing of Old and New Testament texts acknowledge that fact. (Achtemeier, 56-57)

Achtemeier understands Christ as the one who makes the Hebrew Bible part of our religious heritage. In this statement, it is necessary to hear what Achtemeier does not say. She is not arguing for the New Testament to be the lens through which we interpret the Hebrew Bible. Instead, she argues for placing every biblical text in canonical context. Both Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts must at times be corrected by texts from the other testament. Likewise, Achtemeier does not argue for any particular primacy for the New Testament. It is neither a replacement of the earlier revelation nor a completion of inadequate religious ideas. However,
it is an indispensable part of the Christian faith and thus of Christian preaching.

Nevertheless, Achtemeier insists on the pairing of texts and is very careful about how it should be done. The meaning of the Hebrew Bible text should not be removed through this association of texts. As techniques for the pairing, she suggests a scheme of promise and fulfillment, analogy, common motifs and/or words, common thought, and contrast. Achtemeier's methodological commitment to the pairing of Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts has an obvious result in her book. In every chapter about Hebrew Bible forms, the discussion moves toward a conclusion with a New Testament text and discussion. Two chapters end with the affirmation that Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts agree on the point being considered.

Brueggemann does not explicitly address the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. All of his extended examples are drawn from the Hebrew Bible, and his references to Hebrew Bible texts outnumber references to New Testament texts by about three to one. However, the New Testament is far from neglected; references to it appear in almost every discussion throughout the book. Brueggemann’s consciousness and theology are thoroughly Christian and are quite informed by New Testament ideas. Nevertheless, the logic of Brueggemann’s integration of Hebrew Bible and New Testament is quite different from Achtemeier’s. Whereas Achtemeier's New Testament references are the point to which the Hebrew Bible texts move, Brueggemann uses New Testament texts as further examples of the theological points under discussion. Brueggemann’s theological points all stem from reflection upon Hebrew Bible texts.

Brueggemann’s textual connections are chiefly historical. He often traces the development of a certain Hebrew Bible thought through texts from the later periods of Israel and from the early Christian community. In these discussions, Brueggemann offers excellent exegetical and theological insights that are true both to biblical scholarship and to the needs of the church. This point is perhaps best illustrated by Brueggemann’s discussion of the Ten Commandments, detailed below, and can also be seen in the many passages where he lists Jesus (or another New Testament figure) as an example of the point under discussion. For instance,
Brueggemann's discussion of royal vs. alternative bread (Brueggemann, 121-23) begins with the Dan. 1 text as the main focus but also cites Isa. 55:1-3 and Mark 8:14-21 as extended examples.

Perhaps the key difference between Achtemeier’s and Brueggemann’s views of the Hebrew Bible’s connection to the New Testament centers on the question of necessity. Must the New Testament be used to make a point from the Hebrew Bible, or is that simply one option in the effective, Christian presentation of the ancient Word? Achtemeier answers that the New Testament must be used in every circumstance to make the Hebrew Bible acceptable in Christian circles. Brueggemann uses the Hebrew Bible to make its own points and supports these in several places with New Testament references. It is clear that for Brueggemann the Hebrew Bible can stand on its own; New Testament interpretation can help to develop the ideas, but it is only one method of doing so. There are great advantages to Brueggemann’s historical approach. When it works best, it widens a chain of thought. Different parts of the canon are related, but they are not equated and thus reduced. The rich variances and the chronological development allow the preacher to find a new, fuller range of ideas in the text.

The Sabbath Commandment

The best comparison between Achtemeier and Brueggemann can be made in their treatments of the Ten Commandments. Achtemeier focuses on these commandments in her chapter on “Preaching from the Law” (Achtemeier, 93-108). Achtemeier defines law, or torah, as “God’s teaching about how to live” (Achtemeier, 94). The commandments are given in divine love in order to lead to life; our obedience is a loving response to God’s prior love (Achtemeier, 98-99). Because Jesus has delivered us from the law, “the specific laws simply do not apply,” but “the intention of Israel’s laws remains very pertinent to our lives as Christians” (Achtemeier, 105). There is one notable exception: those laws from the Hebrew Bible that are repeated or affirmed in the New Testament are binding upon Christians today.

Achtemeier gives the most specific attention to the fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath. She cautions against turning
this into a legalistic injunction. Like other passages throughout scripture, this is mercy, a gracious gift from God. Here, the gift is rest. The reality of commandments as "gracious guidance for us in the way of abundant life" is paramount in both parts of the canon. Such gracious guidance should be the base for our ethical life today (Achtemeier, 107).

Brueggemann also focuses on this fourth commandment (Brueggemann, 91-99). Like Achtemeier, Brueggemann deals with the theme of rest, which he contrasts to restlessness in congregations. Brueggemann traces this commandment through the development of the Bible, commenting upon the theological statements about the Sabbath. In Exod. 20:11, God's resting on the seventh day of creation becomes our motivation for resting, but in Deut. 5:15, the motivation is God's salvation in the Exodus. Sabbath keeps together both of these strands of Hebrew Bible thought. In Exod. 16, Amos 8:4-6, and Isa. 56:4-7, Brueggemann finds the Sabbath to be a critique of greed and a call to inclusive rest. Finally, Brueggemann investigates Mark 2:23-27 and Matt. 12:9-14, in which Jesus returns to the original emphasis of Sabbath as rest and protection, expressed as healing and eating.

Brueggemann allows the different emphases to speak their own variations on the theme of Sabbath. Whereas Achtemeier gives directions about how to preach this text and offers one example of a part of a sermon, Brueggemann provides a theological interpretation of several Sabbath texts packed with insights that can then be used in preaching. There are significant strengths to both approaches. Achtemeier's perspective on the commandments as gracious guidance with implications for modern ethics is a good hermeneutical principle with which to interpret other legal texts of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, Achtemeier's discussions of method may well be more able to be generalized to other texts and themes within the Hebrew Bible, but Brueggemann's treatment provides more content for sermons on this one issue.

Limitations of the Books

All interpreters and writers have biases that shape their works. Though these are inevitable, at times these biases can produce
limitations, even in quite valuable books such as these. Achtemeier is stronger on Pentateuch and wilderness themes than on prophecy, and postexilic writings are particularly poorly represented. Wisdom is overly moralized. These imbalances appear to be the logical result of her commitment to the biblical theology movement, which tends to level variation in search of the end of history. Brueggemann represents well the texts that better fit his themes. For instance, he frequently mentions Exodus texts, legal texts, and Psalms; but the historical writings and wisdom are mostly ignored.

Though Achtemeier does a good job of showing the differences in the literary forms, the theological variation between different strands of thought are not as well illustrated. The oneness of the story is emphasized to the detriment, and almost to the exclusion, of the variations of perspective and the multiplicity of Hebrew Bible traditions about the one God. In contrast, Brueggemann shows a categorization of reality that is consonant with Hegel’s dialectical philosophy. In the chapters, Brueggemann presents opposites (“reductions”) and then constructs a middle path. Such patternings have enormous benefits for showing the inherent contradictions within many positions about biblical faith held by people today, and yet it tends toward oversimplification.

An interesting comparison thus emerges. By stating that the texts are all part of the same singular story, Achtemeier oversimplifies and thus denies the diversity present in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, by creating dichotomies that may be too facile, Brueggemann oversimplifies at the level of interpretation. Though these books have limits of perspective, they are succinct and clear statements that can form the beginning for further inquiry. Neither book can function as the last word on preaching the Hebrew Bible, but both are powerful entries into the topics.

There are noteworthy differences in theological perspective between Achtemeier and Brueggemann. Achtemeier is the more conservative of the two, as evidenced by her conscious adherence to masculine references for God and by her understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Brueggemann’s more liberal perspectives will be seen in his references to liberation throughout today’s world and in his close linking of faith with social and economic realities. Though they represent different positions
within contemporary North American Christianity, they are both well within mainstream sensitivities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Both of these books are quite valuable and are to be highly recommended. Achtemeier's *Preaching from the Old Testament* is a good handbook for exegetical methods, presenting straightforward guides for preaching the different genres within the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, her explicitly New Testament orientation will assist readers in making connections between the two parts of the canon. Brueggemann's *Finally Comes the Poet* is a statement of a theological framework for preaching that is based firmly on the Hebrew Bible and is fully in agreement with the author's Christian faith.

Both books may hold some appeal for interested laity. Achtemeier's book provides more than tips for preaching. There is an intelligent and helpful discussion of the need for a larger role for the Hebrew Bible in the life, education, and worship of the church. The organization by genres allows for solid discussion of the types of biblical literature and could help provide some general orientation to the Hebrew Bible. Laity who are interested in current theological appropriations of these ancient biblical traditions can read Brueggemann's contribution almost as a sermon itself. The book serves as a good expression of the range of Brueggemann's thought and summarizes many of the themes found in his other books.

Though there are differences in style, in purpose, and in theological perspective, both books should be helpful to pastors. Also, they complement each other well, and many preachers will benefit from both. For developing a method to analyze Hebrew Bible texts and interpret them in preparation for preaching, Achtemeier's *Preaching from the Old Testament* provides a good handbook and will enable new skills in preaching Hebrew Bible texts. Brueggemann's *Finally Comes the Poet* lends good theological insights into important biblical themes highly relevant to modern life in the church and should start the preacher thinking about many potential sermons. The chief value of each book should be measured by how well they achieve their goal: improving the preaching of the Hebrew Bible in Christian congregations.
As one who is thinking about preaching from 1 Peter, may I ask you, before proceeding, to read carefully two brief documents? The first document is the following letter:

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A Gift for the Future
Capital Fund Campaign

UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

May 11, 1992

Dear Friends,

We are often called to support many worthy projects in this community, but there is none more important than our church, and of course, the church depends on our support. Through our participation in this Capital Fund Campaign, and the future ability of the church to minister to the needs of people.

We hope you will begin now to think of the pledge which you will make. Our campaign goal of $2.9 Million is ambitious but achievable. It is the largest and most comprehensive campaign the church has ever attempted.

We pray for your prayers that God will use the gifts and talents of those who love and serve Him. It is an exciting time in the history of our church, and we invite each of you to be a part of our future.

We look forward to seeing you at the All-Church Dinner on Monday, May 18, 6:30 p.m., in Fellowship Hall. An opportunity to make capital fund pledges will be given at the dinner. Let’s all be prepared to make our commitments.

Sincerely,

R. Denny Alexander
Campaign Chairperson

Enclosures

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M. Eugene Boring is Professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas.
For convenience, we will refer to this as the University Christian Church Capital Campaign Document, UCCCD. The second document I am asking you to read is the First Epistle of Peter. Please read it now, in the New Revised Standard Version, keeping UCCCD in mind.

In some ways, these two documents are very much alike.

Real Letters

Neither letter is an essay, a list of principles, an anthology of resource materials for our spiritual lives, or a collection of laws or wise sayings. As a letter, each document expresses particularity. A letter is written by a particular person or group to a particular person or group, using a particular form. Change any of these particulars, and we no longer have a real letter. We have learned to recognize machine-generated "letters" which, even though they try to appear to be personal, we do not regard as letters at all. (Although everyone who knows me personally addresses me as "Gene," in this age when mailing lists are sold in the marketplace, I routinely receive "personal" mail generated by computers that have run my first name and initial together, "Dear Meugene..."") In trying to address everyone in general, such letters address no one in particular and thus lose the essence of a real letter.

Both UCCCD and 1 Peter address the particularities of a specific historical situation, which they presuppose. They are written not to the general public but to insiders who share the unique events of that history. This particularity is also expressed in the fact that each letter calls its readers to do something concrete for God and the church. It is no accident that our New Testament is composed entirely of Gospels and Letters. Both the Gospel form and the letter form are appropriate to the historical particularity of the Christian gospel. The God represented in the teaching of Jesus is not a universal principle of being that affirms, say, "the essence of birdness" but the heavenly Father without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29). Such a God does not traffic in statistical head counts of human life in general, but numbers the hairs of individual heads (Matt. 10:30). The doctrine of the incarnation affirms not that God became incarnate in humanity in general, but in one particular first-century, Aramaic-speaking Jew who lived and died in a
particular way. The particularity of the letter form corresponds to the scandalous particularity (not to be confused with “individualism”) of the Christian faith.

More than Personal Communication. Both letters are written by church leaders to congregations of Christian people, but both represent more than a personal communication from one individual. The UCCCD letter bears the signature of a single member of the congregation, the campaign chairperson, Denny Alexander. Although this letter was composed primarily by one person, it was the result of the committee process, with the names of the entire committee appearing on the letterhead. This letter represents not just an individual but the church. We are familiar with this accepted form of communication, including documents that are entirely the work of a committee sent “over the signature” of its chair or some other individual. No one called the church office and inquired whether the letter was composed entirely by the person whose signature it bore. The question was whether or not it represented the church.

First Peter was long assumed to have been written by the Apostle Peter, whose name it bears as its first word. But we now know that in the first century it was common to compose letters in the name of well-known leaders in order to perpetuate their message. The vast majority of scholars who have studied 1 Peter critically have concluded that it is such a pseudonymous letter.4

There is an important connection with Simon Peter, however, which may be outlined as follows:5

a. There was a real person named Simeon (“Simon”), a man in the fishing business in Galilee, who had known the human Jesus personally and had been called by Jesus during his lifetime to be an apostle. Jesus renamed him “Cephas,” Aramaic for “rock,” which is “Peter” in Greek. He had his ups and downs as a disciple and finally denied and rejected Jesus at the time of his arrest.

b. The risen Jesus appeared to Peter, reconstituted him as an apostle, and Peter became a leader in one wing of the new Christian community, the somewhat conservative Jewish-Christian wing, which looked back to the earthly Jesus and communicated the faith by handing on his sayings and told stories about him.

c. Peter and his wife, whose name we do not know (1 Cor. 9:5), traveled about as a missionaries. Peter finally made his way to
Rome, taking with him the Petrine brand of Christianity. There he was killed in the Neronian persecution. In the capital city of the empire, he and his disciples had a great influence on Roman Christianity, especially in the conservative Jewish-Christian wing.

d. Another kind of Christianity made its way to Rome, one represented by Paul, who had not known the historical Jesus personally, but who had been called by the risen Christ to be an apostle. This kind of Christianity emphasized the cosmic Christ rather than expressing its faith by telling stories about the earthly Jesus and handing on his sayings. This more liberal understanding of the faith was oriented not to the Jewish past but to the Gentile mission, emphasizing freedom from the law. Paul himself finally managed to get to Rome where he, too, was killed in the Neronian persecutions.

e. During the lifetime of Peter and Paul, they and their followers had sometimes opposed each other (Gal. 2:1-21; but cf. 1 Cor. 3:21-23; 15:1-11). But the Roman church made an important ecumenical move in adopting both Peter and Paul as legitimate apostles, blending the traditions from both apostles into that inclusive ecumenical Christianity sponsored by Rome that became the catholic mainstream.

In the latter part of the first century, the churches in what is now western and north-central Turkey (1 Pet. 1:1: Pontus, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Galatia, and Asia) had to go through some trying times. Past interpreters have often thought the distress of the church reflected in 1 Peter represented an official persecution by the state, with Christians being arrested simply because they were Christians. This did happen later. More recent study indicates that these Christians were not under direct pressure from the government but were experiencing harassment as a suspect minority group out of step with the culture in general. It was not the Roman police but their neighbors who lived by other value systems and religions who were giving them a hard time. Christians were not yet literally being thrown to the lions (cf. 5:8), but they daily faced the cultural pressures to conform that made life difficult. This is not something extraordinary but the normal state of the church in the world when it is being faithful (4:12).

After the devastating war of 66-70 in Palestine, a war that had left Jerusalem in desolation and the mother church scattered, the church
in the capital of the empire felt more pastoral responsibility for their distressed sisters and brothers in the provinces. A leader in the Roman church composed, in behalf of the whole church, a letter of encouragement and instruction. This letter contains both “Pauline” and “Petrine” traditions, some of which had originally been drawn from the stock of common Christian tradition and which were now sent forth as representing the common Christian faith from the church of the capital city. There is a sense in which 1 Peter is more Pauline than Petrine. It adopts the Pauline letter form, including the stylized opening greeting, both of which had become a standard Christian form of communication through the circulation of Paul’s letters in the churches. It also adopts the Pauline form of Christology, seeing the Christ event as part of a cosmic drama rather than communicating its faith in Christ by telling stories about the earthly Jesus. It is striking that in a letter from “Peter” there is not a single direct reference to the sayings of Jesus or individual stories about his life. Even when it would seem most natural to quote a saying of Jesus, the author cites the Old Testament instead. Specific elements of Paul’s letters, especially the letter Paul had sent to Rome, reappear in 1 Peter.

This letter, steeped in Christian traditions that had already appeared in Paul’s letters, is sent forth in Peter’s name. It represents the church’s claim to teach the apostolic faith. As was the case for the original readers of UCCCD, the question for the original readers of 1 Peter was not whether it was actually written by the person whose name it bears but whether it represented the faith of the church.

**Letters to Someone Else.** We don’t live in Fort Worth. Our congregation is not in a $2.5 million capital campaign. Our name does not appear in the address of UCCCD. This letter was not written to us, and we will simply misunderstand it if we read it as though it were. If we want to understand it, we need to know the situation of the author and the Fort Worth congregation to which it is addressed.

Neither do we live in Cappadocia or Bithynia. Our congregation is not in the situation of these congregations in Turkey. Our name does not appear in the address of 1 Peter. Not only was this letter not written to us; nothing in the New Testament was written to us. The first principle of biblical interpretation, a hermeneutical
principle that corresponds to the scandalous particularity of the incarnation, is simply this: Nothing in the Bible was written to us.

Since each document fits into a familiar genre for its own time and place, each was readily understandable by its original readers.

I am a member of the congregation in Fort Worth that received UCCCD. When we received the Capital Campaign letter, none of us said, "What is this strange document? Maybe those who are more interested in this sort of thing could form a study group and talk about its deep inspirational meanings." No. It spoke directly to us, and the question was not what it might mean but whether we would do what it called us to do.

How about 1 Peter? When the people of Cappadocia received it, they did not say, "What is this strange document? Maybe we should form a study group." It spoke directly to them. And this is the key difference between them and us when we read this letter.

**The Difference of Scripture.** There are some important ways in which these two letters are not alike. Although both of these letters were readily understood by their respective original readers, and we are not the original readers of either, only one is readily understandable to us. We can read and understand UCCCD with no difficulty. We cannot do that with 1 Peter. We do have books, study groups, classes, lectures, sermons on 1 Peter, and we need them. We cannot just pick it up and read it and be sure we are understanding it. Even those who claim to be able to do so forget that when we pick it up and read it, a lot has already been done by the church to help us understand it. It has already been translated; every translation is an interpretation. Every interpretation is made within some tradition.

The letters are different in their content. Compare only their respective greetings. One has the familiar "Dear friends," and presents the church as one of the many worthy projects in the community. The other letter addresses those who have been destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit, and it speaks of obedience to Jesus Christ and being sprinkled with his blood. One is about "raising money." The other is about faith more precious than gold, hope for the Christ who shall appear in power and glory, and endurance in the faith while living a holy life.

The primary difference, however, is that one letter is in the Bible and the other is not. I am, of course, not speaking merely about
location but about the way we relate to the two documents. One is canonical Scripture for the Christian community that stretches across the centuries and around the world, and the other is not. It is unlikely that anyone else outside Fort Worth will ever quote from the UCCCD letter to support or illustrate a point or read it for their own spiritual growth or consider it an obstacle to what they really want to do. But uncounted millions, for nineteen centuries, in hundreds of languages, nations, and cultures, have turned to 1 Peter for no other reason than that it is canonical.

What does it mean for a document to be canonical? Early Christianity produced much literature interpreting the meaning of the Christ event. The standard collection of "New Testament apocrypha" lists sixty-three "Gospels," and a corresponding plethora of "Acts," "Epistles," and "Apocalypses." Over a period of some generations, the church read, listened, and sorted out, and finally settled on twenty-seven documents (Gospels and Letters) which in its collective judgment met two criteria: in them it heard the authentic word of God that had been spoken in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and in them they found authentic witness to the meaning of the Christ event. The canonical documents functioned as medium of address and arbiter of meaning.

When the original readers of 1 Peter read it, it was not canonical, not part of their Bible. They read it as more than the message of one individual, Simon Peter. They read it as the message of the Roman church but not yet as Bible.

When we read it as part of our Bible, we read it as more than the advice of one individual. We read it as a letter given to us not by the Roman church alone but by the whole church. To call this or any other document canonical means to say that it is to this collection of texts to which we come back again and again to hear the word of God, that we come here and not elsewhere in order to understand what the Christian faith was for them and what it can be for us.

What does it mean for us in our time and place to approach a text in this book? This is a very basic question, and one of the most pressing questions before the church these days, even if it is often not aware of it. I suggest that all the answers to this question can be divided into two categories: using the Bible as opposed to listening to the Bible.
Using the Bible

In all good faith, we hear comments around the church such as, “I like the way our pastor uses the Bible in her preaching” or “I wish our minister would use the Bible more in his preaching.”

The problematic word here is *use*. This word is found occasionally in the Bible itself but never in connection with the Scripture. The king of Babylon uses divination (Ezek. 21:21). Itinerant Jewish exorcists attempt to use the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:13). Israel is forbidden to use the name of the Lord (Exod. 20:7).

The word *use* indicates that the Bible is a means to some other purpose or goal, derived elsewhere. The Bible can be used decoratively, to provide a religious ornamentation to a program oriented to other agendas. Or the Bible can be used to give us an agenda, which we then develop in our own way. For example, the word *faith* may occur in the text, and a sermon may then be developed on the topic of faith—perhaps a good sermon with helpful things to say things which could be based on any other text that happens to mention *faith*.

Most often, the Bible is used ideologically. After the last General Assembly of our denomination, I returned to my hotel room practically in tears, not only disappointed at decisions that had been made but also unable to ignore the way the Bible had been “used” by all sides of the debate. The notes I made then document that both those who thought of themselves as “conservative” or “evangelical” and those who considered themselves “liberal” used the Bible in approximately the same way. With some exceptions, most used the Bible as a resource book for an ideology derived elsewhere. To be sure, not all ideologies are created equal, but the case for each might be made better and more honestly without “using” the Bible at all. Many perceptive people have “no use” for the Bible when they see how it can be used to support so many programs and purposes. Is there any alternative?

Listening to the Bible

If the verb *use* never occurs in the Bible itself with respect to Scripture, what verbs are found? The concordance provides a quick
The most common verb with reference to the words of the prophets is *Hear*, which includes a readiness to obey. As we prepare to preach from these canonical texts, this is the verb that must guide our study. Our first task is to hear what these texts have to say to us, the preachers. The final goal is to facilitate a hearing of the message of these texts in the worship of the congregation. We ourselves do not like being used and don’t like for our words to be used. But we appreciate being listened to.

The congregation needs and deserves to hear what 1 Peter has to say. I once shared an office with a well-known and beloved teacher of preaching. Our respective cubicles were separated by only a thin partition that did not reach to the ceiling. Each of us could not help but overhear the conversations that transpired in the other compartment (whence the phrase “overhearing the gospel”?). I once heard the following from the other cell. A student had chosen a text from the list in the course syllabus on which a sermon was to be developed and preached to the class. A week later, the student returned wanting to change to a different text. “Why?” asked the homiletics professor. “Because this text doesn’t say what I want to say,” said the student without embarrassment, to which the professor responded, “We get to listen to you all the time. How about letting us hear what the text has to say this time.”

The congregation needs and deserves to hear what 1 Peter has to say. The reason for this is that the text was written to us. The first principle of understanding is, “It was not written to us.” To pretend otherwise is to misunderstand. We are not in the first century; we are not in Cappadocia or Bithynia. But as time went on and this letter was read repeatedly in liturgy of the churches of Cappadocia, did they explain to those who had entered the community after the letter was first received that it was “not written to them” and dismiss them? Of course not, for the later members nevertheless belonged to the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, in living continuity with the church to whom the letter was originally addressed. But after a while the historical and cultural situation had changed, and church leaders had to explain to the “newcomers” what it meant. All those people who came into the community of faith later rightly found themselves addressed by 1 Peter and everything else in the New Testament. If the first principle of
interpretation is, “It was not written to us,” it must be followed inseparably and immediately by the second: “It was written to us.” As we prepare to preach from these texts, we will, fully aware of all the risks involved, make the effort to listen to what they might say to us.

1 Peter 1:3-9

A thoughtful, close reading of this text threatens to overwhelm the would-be preacher with the sheer weight of heavy theological terms. The chimes are rung on a long list of categories fundamental to the Christian faith: rebirth, hope, resurrection, salvation, eschatology, faith, joy. One could even be repulsed by the density of religious jargon (contrast the first paragraph of UCCCD above). Alternatively, the preacher might be tempted to “use” the Bible by adopting some of these key words as an agenda for a sermon or even to formulate a (seven-point!) outline. One could expound a bit on each item, fleshing out the topic with material from various sources. We preachers certainly have no difficulty coming up with interesting and inspirational material on “faith,” “hope,” “joy” and such. Is this listening to the text?

Responsible preaching from this text might be better served by attending to its form. I have already stressed the hermeneutical importance of the fact that the document as a whole is in letter form. The Hellenistic letter typically began with a stereotyped prescript, “A to B, chairein (greetings)” (cf. James 1:1; Acts 15:23; 23:26), followed first by a stereotyped thanksgiving and/or prayer to the gods for the good health of the addressee and then by the body of the letter. Paul had already expanded and adapted this form as means of apostolic communication (cf. the first two paragraphs of all the Pauline letters except Galatians, which makes a powerful point precisely by omitting the customary and anticipated thanksgiving). First Peter follows the pattern that Paul had made customary in apostolic communication. Just as Paul had transformed the perfunctory “thanksgiving” into a means of Christian praise and instruction, the author of 1 Peter has one long, involved sentence of thanksgiving to God that extends from 1:3 through 1:12. This is broken up by most modern translations in order to make it more manageable for reading, especially in the public reading of Scripture.
in liturgical settings. Yet all of 1:3-12 is one sentence with only one main subject and verb, held together only by a series of conjunctions, prepositional phrases, and relative pronouns. Although there are many twists and turns in the elaboration of subordinate phrases and clauses, the basic structure is very simple, consisting of the subject, verb, and predicate adjective:

\[
\text{God (be) blessed}
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All the rest of this enormous and labyrinthine sentence is an elaboration of the one word God. The sentence is not an explanation of “new birth,” “faith” and such but a doxology, an ascription of praise to the God who is characterized by the long list of attributes. An appropriate sermon might well be in the same form. Here the preacher might need to reflect on the sermon as an act of worship directed to God in behalf of the congregation rather than a message from God to congregation (for which there are, of course, numerous other important texts). One might consider making the whole sermon (and not only this one) an act of prayer, preceded by an appropriate invocation and withholding the “amen” until the end of the sermon, thus bracketing the entire sermon with the form of a prayer.

Along the way, some of the following exegetical points might be made:

In 1:3, God is praised as the sovereign who takes the initiative in calling and creating the church. The begetting/birth metaphor for becoming a Christian is dramatically appropriate here, for no one decides to be born. To be human is to find ourselves experiencing the human adventure. First Peter celebrates life itself as a gift (3:7), a party to which we could never have invited ourselves. The church is the covenant community (the difficult v. 2: “chosen . . . destined . . . sanctified . . . to be sprinkled with his blood” is covenant language; cf. Exod. 24:1-8). But this covenant is not a 50/50 agreement into which we have entered with the Deity (or even 60/40 or 90/10); the covenant relationship is the unilateral act of God given to the covenant people, who then find themselves having responsibilities to God and each other. But the initiative is with God, to whom praise is directed in this thanksgiving.

In 1:6 the NRSV “For this reason” translates the relative pronoun, which can be either masculine or neuter. Most modern
translations understand it as neuter, which allows the sentence to be broken up into more readable units in an English translation. However, the structure of the sentence calls for understanding it as a masculine pronoun ("in whom"), referring back to God, as does all else in this doxological sentence. This reflects the biblical idea of rejoicing in God, as does Mary's song in Luke 1:47-55.

1:3, 4, 7 are explicitly eschatological affirmations but only reflect one outcropping of the eschatological substructure that undergirds the whole letter. There are other explicit statements such as 1:13 and 4:7, but an implicit eschatological perspective pervades the letter throughout. For example, the remainder of this long sentence—not included as part of the lectionary reading, 1:10-12—speaks of both the Hebrew prophets and the heavenly angels as envying the Christian community, since they participate in the eschatological events into which prophets and angels would love to peek. Eschatology is not "taught" or "explained." The living hope is already celebrated in the duress of the church's present, for the revelation of God's glory, not obvious now, will be revealed in the eschatological future. The church already lives in view of this eschatological reality, and without turning away from this world, gives praise to God for the reality of this hope. The living hope is not an explanation that someday there will be a resurrection and things will be different but a celebration that there has already been a resurrection, and things are already different.

1 Peter 1:17-23

For this writer, God is defined, or rather has defined himself, as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). The Bible's patriarchal imagery for God has become problematic for some in the church. This is not the place to discuss a large, important, and complex issue, on which there is already an enormous bibliography. Here I would only note that the issue posed by such texts is whether responsible Christian preaching is to replace biblical imagery or interpret it. Before one decides to replace biblical images for God, at least two questions must be faced: first, has the biblical imagery been understood in its own terms? In the present instance, is the content of the word Father for God filled in from cultural patriarchal structures (ancient or modern), or from the reinterpretation of the
word accomplished by Jesus, who called God "Father" in a radically new way? It should be noted, for instance, that in this text God as "Father" is the one who judges impartially (1:17), i.e., this Father sees human beings without prejudice to their gender, race, and social status. Second, does the Bible continue to function as canon if its imagery is replaced by images derived elsewhere? Since there are other, non-patriarchal images of God in the Bible itself, no claim is being made here for an exclusive use of male imagery for God. But in interpreting 1 Peter, may we simply set aside its imagery without inquiring what "Father" in 1 Peter means and still regard it as canonical?

While in some situations "Father" may have become such a red-flag word that the preacher must help the congregation get past its resistance to the image in order to be addressed by the text of the Bible, this was not the problem in the original setting of 1 Peter. There, Christians who had come to experience themselves as displaced persons within a culture oriented to other religious value systems needed to experience the Christian community as their true spiritual home in this world (cf. the opening words addressing the readers as "exiles of the Dispersion," and 2:11). God-as-Father is inherent in the family language of 1 Peter ("spiritual house," 2:5; "family of believers," 2:17; "your brothers and sisters in all the world," 5:9). The theme of new birth that occurs in 1:3, 1:23, and 2:2 should be interpreted not individualistically but as part and parcel of this family imagery.

In 1:23-25, the theme of rebirth is taken up again, forming an inclusion with 1:3, where it is the result of the generative power of the word of God. This word is identified with the preaching of the gospel (1:25), which is itself an activity of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. The mundane chores of preaching are here placed in the context of Holy Spirit and Word of God: these exalted terms are not left in the transcendent realm but are brought down to earth in the "ordinary" acts of the ministry of the church. This is presented not in the mode of doctrine or explanation but of praise.

1 Peter 2:2-10

In this text the fundamental family imagery for the church discussed above modulates into the imagery of the church as temple,
priesthood, and new people of God. Each image amplifies and strengthens the root metaphor of the community of faith as the true family in which believers find their spiritual home. However, the orientation toward insiders and their needs that may be inherent in family imagery is transcended by pictures of the church as a community of priests and as the people of God that point the church beyond itself to its mission to the world.

In the preceding section of the letter, Christ is the paradigm for understanding God. Faith in Christ is not something added on to faith in God. For Christians, God is the one who is definitively revealed in Christ (1:20-21). To believe in Christ is to believe in this God, not some god we have constructed for ourselves. In this section, Christ is the one who is paradigm for understanding ourselves as Christians in the world. The Christians addressed in 1 Peter are harassed and rejected by the dominant culture. They feel themselves to be outsiders and sometimes experience overt persecution. Though rejected by the world, they are elected and affirmed by God—precisely as in the paradigmatic case of Jesus.

Several writers in early Christianity had discovered Ps. 118:22-23 as a model for understanding the rejection of Jesus, the “stone” rejected by the “builders,” but who was made (by God) the “chief corner stone” (Mark 12:10-11; Matt. 21:42; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:4). Christian experience parallels the experience of Christ. The image is here interpreted not individualistically but in terms of the Christian community: Christ is the cornerstone of the eschatological temple, into which believers are also built, and the whole structure becomes a dwelling place for God, the true spiritual home of believers.

The temple does not exist for itself, however, but for others. This aspect of the believer’s calling, based on the fundamental picture of the life of Jesus as one of self-giving for others, is then extended in the other metaphors. The preacher might concentrate on the priestly metaphor. The priest exists for others. Protestant Christianity has tended to focus on this text to affirm the “priesthood of all believers” in the sense that “we don’t need anybody to be priests for us.” This is an individualistic misinterpretation of the text, which intends precisely to affirm a community of priests. The point is not that “I am my own priest” but “I belong to a community of priests.” In the first place, this means that I belong to a priestly
community that does what priests do: this community prays for me and sacrifices for me. Especially on those days when I can't pray, when I don't know if there is anyone to pray to or anything worth sacrificing for, I can know that I belong to a community that prays for me and sacrifices for me. When I can pray and sacrifice, I do it for other members of the community. This is one of the things it means to say, "I belong to the church." Yet this is still too inward-directed to do justice to the imagery of this text. Like Israel, to whom these texts were originally directed (2:6=Isa. 28:16; 2:7=Ps. 118:22; 2:8=Isa. 8:14-15; 2:9=Exod. 19:6; 2:10=Hos. 2:23), the priestly community lives not for itself but for the world. Though existing as a "sect" amidst a hostile "world," the Christian community of 1 Peter is not hostile toward the world, does not wall itself off from the world in sectarian self-consciousness. It prays and sacrifices for the world, which is God's world. These people who were once "nobody" but are now "somebody" are called not to celebrate their newfound self-esteem, but to live their lives in behalf of the very world that misunderstands and abuses them. This is the Christian path marked out by Jesus, who first followed it.

1 Peter 2:19-25

We must first note the context. The section 2:13-3:7, often called the "household code," is analogous to numerous similar codes in early Christianity. The lectionary text is a selection from this code which commands Christians to "fit in" to the social structures of their time. This means specifically that all Christians are instructed to obey emperors and governors, Christian slaves are instructed to obey their masters even when they are harsh and unjust, wives are instructed to accept the authority of their husbands, and husbands are instructed to treat their wives with consideration, since they are "the weaker sex" (3:7). For many contemporary Christians who wish to take both the Bible and themselves seriously, this is the most difficult text in 1 Peter. What are our hermeneutical options? We may simply reject the Bible as the church's canon, using these anachronistic, unjust, and culturally conditioned texts as sufficient justification.

On the other hand, we may be selective, "using" the Bible as a resource book for an ideology based on other foundations, choosing

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the "good stuff" and ignoring such passages as this. The selection of the text for inclusion in the lectionary reading seems to encourage this, for it begins with 2:19, as though the following instructions were general principles of Christian conduct, when in their context they are specific instructions for slaves. This method of selective reading allows one to find "good texts," such as 2:21, which has been so influential in liberal Christianity, while ignoring their problematic context. This is perhaps the most common method of "handling" the problematic elements in the Bible (eschatology, miracles, ethics that seem sub-Christian). But it has the effect of substituting the ideological principle of selection as the real canon and displaces the Bible as canon just as surely as does the first option, but less honestly.

If we attempt to listen to the text and interpret it as Scripture, what might it say to us? The following reflections do not claim to resolve this difficult issue but may be helpful pointers to the way.

The issue of the Christian’s social relations and social action is argued theologically. In 1 Peter, the way we live our lives in the political, social, and family sphere is not separated into an autonomous secular sphere but is related to the way we understand the Christian faith. Even if we end up with different conclusions for our situation, we can surely go this far with 1 Peter.

This call for Christians to "fit in" is placed in the letter alongside the call for Christians to be holy, which means to be separate, different from society, i.e., not to fit in (1:13-16). Christians are instructed specifically not to be conformed to society (suschematizomai, found only in 1 Pet. 1:14 and Rom. 12:2 in the New Testament). Thus, alongside the call to "fit in" with cultural structures and expectations found in the household codes, the Christian is also called to resist the temptation to assimilate and become just like the world. The Christian life for 1 Peter involves both "fitting in" and "not fitting in." These must be seen together. 1 Peter does not tell Christians in other situations when to fit in and when to resist cultural expectations.

The call to "fit in" can be and has been abused. Whoever decides that responsible discipleship to Jesus Christ in any given situation calls for "fitting in" to given social structures rather than resisting them must do so fully aware of how precisely these texts have been used in Christian history to support tyranny, the divine right of
kings, slavery as a divinely authorized institution and how these texts are being used in the present as instruction to women to keep their subordinate place assigned by God.

If Christians in some situations decide that responsible discipleship means to heed the call of this text to submit to unjust structures, Christians in those situations must remember that they are called by 1 Peter to do this as free people, people who are already liberated (2:16). This is not the whole story, but we may be on to something vital here. Those who are already secure in the freedom of God’s acceptance are liberated from selfish striving after having the “right” self-image. As inwardly free Christians, secure in our self-identity as children of God, we can even be willing to be misunderstood, allowing people to think of us as more servile and uninhibited than we in fact are, if it serves the gospel. As those who have been set free by Christ, we no longer have to orient our lives around our own self-esteem and our own self-image. This, too, is a graven image, an idolatry. Believing not in an idolatrous image but in the one God and knowing we are accepted by God, we can devote our lives to bigger things than our own egos, our own insistence that nobody violates our rights.

It is a very risky thing even to talk in a positive way about giving up rights, especially if it is the comfortable speaking to the oppressed. Such talk can be used as an instrument of oppression, and has been so used. This text, along with others, was used in nineteenth century to perpetuate slavery. Yet 1 Peter takes that risk and claims Jesus lived that risk.

To this we have been called, to the same kind of life as Jesus’ own. (2:21; 3:9). For 1 Peter, the truly radical thing about following Jesus (3:18, etc.) is to know that one has rights and to know that one can not only fight for them but also give them up for the sake of the gospel and other people.

1 Peter’s rationale for Jesus’ ability to live this way: he committed himself to one who judges righteously. For 1 Peter, the whole case for (sometimes) giving up one’s rights as a matter of Christian commitment depends on whether one believes in a transcendent God who is just, impartial, loving, and interested. 1 Pet. 5:7, traditionally translated, “Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you” (NRSV), could also be translated “It matters to him what happens to you.” Jesus believed in such a God and could give
himself for others without placing his own rights as his top priority. It is precisely in this sense that 1 Pet. 2:21 calls us to follow “in his steps.”

The eschatological perspective of 1 Peter to which I have repeatedly called attention was a factor in the author’s instructing Christians to “fit in” to the given social structures of their world and make their Christian witness within them rather than trying to change them. The author of 1 Peter did not count on a continuing world (4:7). Christians of later generations who no longer believe they live in the dawning of the eschatological kingdom of God cannot simply repeat earlier Christian instructions. Yet this does not let us off the hook entirely. There is nothing in 1 Peter to encourage the idea that Jesus renounced his rights for the sake of others because of his apocalyptic perspective (“interim ethic’’). Jesus is pictured as living this risky, misunderstood way of life not because he believed the world was going to end soon anyway but because of his security in God and his concern for other people. And eschatology, however understood, may place our striving toward justice in perspective. Our efforts at social justice, liberation, and equality need not slacken, but need not be frantically self-justifying either, if done in the conviction that, finally, it is not all up to us.

A final consideration: 1 Peter was addressed to Christians who had little power in the social arena. As subjects of the Empire, they could do little or nothing to change governmental structures and were told simply to be obedient and to witness to the Christian faith within the given governmental structures. No instructions are given for Christian emperors and governors; there were none yet. Those who were slaves had no power by which to coerce their masters or change the system of slavery and were told to live their lives as slaves in a way that did not bring discredit on the Christian name. Unlike other household codes, no instructions are given to masters; were there Christians wealthy enough to own slaves in the churches addressed by 1 Peter? However, in the one area of their social context where they did have power, namely, in the family, instructions are given to both wives and husbands. While the patriarchal family of the first-century Hellenistic world is assumed as a given, this is no longer the case for contemporary American readers. 1 Peter’s instructions thus may not simply be repeated in our setting, but the text may still have something to say to both
wives and husbands. To each it might say, "In your family life together, think of the church’s mission, not merely of your own rights and self-esteem. You are (both) ultimately esteemed by God; each of you is already a free person." Though the instruction to husbands seems to us to be condescending to wives, 1 Peter still considers wife and husband to be joint heirs of the gift of life; God’s gift is not hierarchically mediated through the husband (3:7; cf. 1:17). The goal of the relationship between husband and wife is "that nothing hinder your prayers" (3:7). The worship life of the family is primary. Even in the "household code," the praise to God with which the letter began is not forgotten.

1 Peter 3:13-22

This unit continues the theme of the preceding one, following Christ by suffering injustice. As before, the theological grounding for this radical way of life is not that it makes philosophical sense, or builds character, or is a strategy oriented to some other goal. The grounding for this kind of self-giving conduct for the sake of the other is that it corresponds to the ultimate reality (God) revealed in Christ, the righteous one who suffered for the unrighteous.  

The difficult details of the mythological picture of Christ preaching to the spirits in prison who were disobedient in Noah’s time cannot be discussed here. There are two principal interpretations advocated by contemporary scholars. The first is that after the crucifixion Jesus entered the world of the dead and preached to the spirits of disobedient human beings, the generation of Noah representing the worst sinners who brought about the catastrophe of the flood. 1 Peter 4:6 is thus talking about the same event.  

The other possibility is that the text refers to Jesus’ proclamation of his lordship to hostile spirits of the transcendent world related in apocalyptic thought to the story of Gen. 6:1-2 and to the flood in Noah’s time (1 Enoch 6-16). The point, in any case, is not speculative information about where Jesus was and what he did between crucifixion and resurrection or the geography of the ascension. There are two striking features of this picture relevant for proclamation:

All reality is seen in the light of Christ. As in 1:10-12, pre-Christian prophets and saints functioned by the power of the
Spirit of Christ, even if they were unaware of it. As angels long to look into the eschatological mysteries made known to Christians in the Christ-event (1:12), even so the thoroughly pagan, disobedient spirits prior to Abraham, not only non-Christian or non-Jewish, but even non-human, are somehow embraced in the Christ-event. At its worst, this sort of thinking may become a kind of Christian imperialism, claiming that every good thing in every religion—and even the good things that are not specifically religious—are in fact a kind of crypto-Christianity. At its best, such thinking may not represent Christian imperialism at all but the struggle of the best Christian minds to see all reality in the light of God's mercy and justice revealed in Christ. Rather than fitting Christ into the "givens" of our view of reality, the author of 1 Peter attempts to relate all that is, including pre- and para-Christ, to the one God known definitively in Christ.

As elsewhere, Christology is not speculative but related to the experience of the Christian. The point of contact here is baptism, assumed to be the common experience of every Christian. As Noah's family passed through the waters of the threatening flood into the safety of the ark, so Christians pass through baptism into the security of the family of God, the church. Some previous studies of 1 Peter considered the body of the letter to incorporate a baptismal homily. There may well be materials here from the baptismal liturgy of the Roman church, but there is no reason to consider the letter as a whole a baptismal sermon. It is a pastoral letter to the Christians in the five provinces addressed in 1:1. But it is important to see that the author can appeal to the fact that Christians have been baptized as a point of contact between Christology and Christian life. Theological justification for following Jesus on the risky path of discipleship is derived from explaining to them something about the meaning of their baptism. Neither Christology nor sacramental theology is a matter of abstract doctrine; both find their expression in the Christian life, which needs them as its firm basis.

Notes

1. This article are derived from a series of lectures on 1 Peter presented to the Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky. I have...
retained some of the oral style appropriate to a mixed audience of clergy and laypersons, which may not be inappropriate in an article oriented toward preaching from these texts.

2. This is a real letter written as part of the Capital Fund Campaign of University Christian Church, Fort Worth, Texas, cited by permission of the author.

3. Acts is volume two of the Gospel of Luke; Revelation, though containing much apocalyptic content, is not in the form of an apocalypse, but is a letter to seven churches in Asia.

4. Critically, of course, does not mean “negatively” or “without faith.” The opposite of critical is “uncritical,” i.e. “naive.” This is not the place to present detailed evidence for regarding 1 Peter as pseudonymous, which may be found in most recent commentaries and introductions to the New Testament.


6. Cf. Pliny’s letter to Trajan, ca. 115 C.E., which reflects the threat and harassment Christians had to endure but does not reflect a persecution initiated by the state. The persecution was still local, not the “world wide” distress common to the whole church, of which 1 Peter speaks (4:12-14; 5:8-9).


8. The letter composed in Peter’s name was actually written by an elder, 5:1. Rome is indicated by the symbolic name “Babylon” in 5:13, which indicates that the letter is not merely a personal letter from “Peter,” but is from one church to another.

9. In 2:9-12, the modern reader familiar with the Gospels would naturally think of Matt. 5:38-48; but 1 Peter cites Ps. 34:12-16. In 1 Peter 5:13, which indicates that the letter is not merely a personal letter from “Peter,” but is from one church to another.


11. The same style occurs in Colossians and Ephesians, also from the Pauline school and reflecting much liturgical language. Col. 1:3-8 and 9-20 are one sentence each, as is Eph. 1:3-14.

12. The point is only grammatical, of course. All pronouns in Greek must be masculine, feminine, or neuter and in grammatical agreement with their antecedents.


18. “Righteous” and “unrighteous” may sound too biblically quaint in many modern ears, including the preacher’s, until it is remembered that dikaiosune may also be translated as “justice.”


For Further Study


Quarterly Review is a publication of The United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry.