Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore
Theological Agenda of
Georgia Harkness

John M. Buchanan
Basic Issues in
Theological Education

Douglas W. Ruffle
Building Blocks for a
Multicultural Congregation
Editorial Board

Lloyd R. Bailey  
Duke Divinity School

Wilfred Bailey  
Casa View United Methodist Church  
Dallas, Texas

Pamela D. Couture  
Candler School of Theology  
Emory University

Fred B. Craddock  
Candler School of Theology  
Emory University

Brita Gill-Austern  
Andover Newton Theological School

Janice Riggle Huie  
Manchester United Methodist Church  
Manchester, Texas

Roger W. Ireson, Chair  
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry  
The United Methodist Church

Robin W. Lovin  
The Theological School  
Drew University

Robert C. Neville  
Boston University School of Theology

Thomas W. Ogletree  
The Divinity School  
Yale University

Russell E. Richey  
Duke Divinity School

Judith E. Smith  
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry  
The United Methodist Church

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki  
Claremont School of Theology

John L. Topolewski  
District Superintendent  
Wyoming Conference

Donald H. Treese  
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry  
The United Methodist Church

F. Thomas Trotter  
Alaska Pacific University

William H. Willimon  
Duke Divinity School

Sharon J. Hels, Editor  
Neil M. Alexander, Editorial Director  
J. Richard Peck, Production Editor  
Sheila W. McGee, Composition Editor
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).

Scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are from the New Revised Standard Version Common Bible, copyrighted © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S., and are used by permission.

Quarterly Review:
Fall, 1993

Copyright © 1993 by The United Methodist Publishing House and The United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry

ii
## Contents

### Introduction
Sharon J. Hels .......................................................... 1

### Articles

**To Search and to Witness: Theological Agenda of Georgia Harkness**
Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore ........................................... 3

**"The Rest Is Commentary": A Reading of the Ten Commandments**
Jeffries M. Hamilton ....................................................... 25

**Paying Attention**
Charles M. Wood ........................................................... 39

**Basic Issues in Theological Education**
John M. Buchanan .......................................................... 45

**Teaching the Bible: Between Seminary and Congregation**
Frederick H. Borsch ....................................................... 57

**Building Blocks for a Multicultural Congregation**
Douglas W. Ruffle .......................................................... 73

### QR Lectionary Study

**Creating Heroes**
Jon L. Berquist ........................................................... 83

### Reviews

Reviewed by Paul D. Duerksen ........................................... 107

Reviewed by Douglas E. Wingeier ....................................... 109
Introduction

Recollecting the past few years of Quarterly Review, I can't think of a single issue that opened with a focus on an individual theologian. Some would argue that the age of the theologian-as-hero is past, anyway. But Mary Elizabeth Moore's theological portrait of Georgia Harkness (1891-1974) is a good reason to turn the spotlight on individuals again.

Harkness was the first woman to teach theology in a mainline Protestant seminary in the United States. She and her writings are still fairly obscure—but then, she did not seek originality. Nor did she anticipate the religious needs and quandaries of Christians in the last decade before the twenty-first century. She was not a charismatic person, particularly, and I suspect she wore wire-rimmed spectacles and sensible shoes her whole life.

But as a theologian of the Church Georgia Harkness was the genuine article. She knew that theology could not confine itself to the university. She recognized that theologians had pastoral and spiritual responsibilities; that her call to theology involved not just her thought, but her whole life. She wrote for her own time with such authenticity that we cannot fail to see what we are missing by not having her with us today. For further reading on this remarkable woman, I strongly recommend Rosemary Skinner Keller's recent biography, Georgia Harkness: For Such a Time as This (Abingdon, 1992).

The example set by Georgia Harkness is a call to thoughtful, deliberate Christianity. It is exactly the kind of witness to bear in mind when we examine questions of clergy effectiveness, the core of this issue of QR. Expertly introduced by Charles Wood at Perkins School of Theology in his article "Paying Attention," these three writers—a United Methodist, a Presbyterian, and an Episcopalian—
have tackled the debate over the nature and purpose of theological education. They can be read as continuations of Marjorie Suchocki's excellent essay in the summer issue. Each in its own way asks us to account for our leadership in congregations, whether we are clergy, diaconal or lay. Bishop Blorsch writes about how seminaries train pastors to interpret the biblical text and its consequences in the parish. John Buchanan tells about "teaching congregations" and the grace that occurs when clergy and people learn from each other.

Our emphasis on theology and the individual are complemented by two pieces on Exodus, Moses, and biblical law. Since Moses was the prophet par excellence in the Hebrew Bible, the most natural tie-in may seem to be the prophetic role of the clergy. But our biblical interpreters, Jeffries Hamilton and Jon Berquist, have something else in mind. They remind us of the role of the community in the exercise of ministry, for the very shape and purpose of Israel's communal life arises from God. Individuals are blessed with theological talent and discernment; they exercise their gifts in Israel's communal life or not at all. Finally, Doug Ruffle tells a story of a vibrant congregation whose story is one of love, acceptance, and celebration of difference in cultures yet unity in Christ. It is a marvelous and inspiring tale.

I would like to think that the articles in this issue form a great chorus of thoughtful and engaging voices, all singing from the same page. This fall, as we focus our energies on the new school year and the approaching season of Advent, let us strive to increase our awareness of our own theological presence in the community of faith. We are interpreters of the gospel, whose depth and meaning are never exhausted.

As always, best wishes to you in your ministry!

Sharon Hels
Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore

To Search and to Witness: Theological Agenda of Georgia Harkness

In 1991 United Methodists celebrated what would have been Georgia Harkness's 100th birthday. Harkness was the first woman to publish actively as a systematic theologian in the Methodist movement. Although a large cultural gap exists between her active work of the early and mid-twentieth century and our postmodern 1990s, her contribution is more challenging than appears on the surface. Largely because of her integrative approach to theology and her life as a witness and activist, she avoided pitfalls that now impede contemporary Wesleyan scholarship.

Georgia Harkness's legacy to theology is found not so much in particular theological constructs as in her method of integration, which prefigured modern feminism in that it emerged from searching her own experience and yearning to communicate meaningfully with others. Her theology emerged in the dynamic interplay between searching and witnessing: she reflected systematically on the existence of God, the dark night of the soul, and peace and war; and she insisted at the same time that theologians be witnesses, freely expressing their faith. She wove systematic analysis and personal

Mary Elizabeth Moore is Professor of Theology and Christian Education at the School of Theology at Claremont, CA.
conviction into the fabric of her theology, transcending simplistic di-
visions among systematics, ethics, and spiritual theology.

Georgia Harkness’s life broke stereotypes. She was a woman bold and direct, and according to one pastor who knew her well, “She came across as being quite gruff and foreboding.” Another pastor said, “I found her strong, and I played no games with her; I could talk with her about anything and be perfectly honest.” Harkness herself sought to be thoroughly honest in addressing her mid-twentieth-century world.

Georgia Harkness in Her World

Georgia Harkness was aware of scattered twentieth century people living in distress of one kind or another. In 1937 she described “the dissolution of ideals,” and in 1945 she reflected on “the dark night of the soul.” She knew that people often became disconnected from God and their religious ideals. She was also aware of a world at war and the sins of society. Her readers were touched by suffering, and she knew that.

Within that context, Harkness repeatedly proclaimed the reality of God, the assurances of God’s salvation, and the ethical claims of God on human lives. Her The Dark Night of the Soul begins with these very themes, as do many of her works:

Our Christian faith affirms that as workers together with God we can transform some evil situations. Those we cannot transform we must seek to transcend by God’s strength. The last word in the problem of evil . . . is not to be found in a theoretical explanation but in the promise repeatedly validated in Christian experience: “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

These are the words of a woman who was ordained a local elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church when that was unusual (1938), but who was later refused full connection in the annual conference. She struggled with physical illness and depression in her mid-forties and chose to write Dark Night as “an alternative to having a nervous
breakdown." She said of the book, "[I]n those dark years God taught me much that I should not otherwise have learned. I do not wish to repeat them, but neither do I wholly regret them."

Harkness was also aware of social pain, and increasingly so over the passing years. When she prepared the second edition of *Conflicts in Religious Thought*, after World War II, she criticized the descriptions of the world she had written in 1929: "'Human slavery, even within a century, has been well-nigh banished from the earth. Within a decade we have moved an amazing distance toward a warless world.' How were we ever naive enough to think that!"

Georgia Harkness's story is certainly not that of a successful foremother who opened doors so that women might become leaders in the church. Nor was she a forerunner of the feminist movement, for she was less a critic of patriarchy and more a builder of faith. Her work, however, was not a defense of the existing system. Harkness was realistic about problems in the church and world, and her work was born of struggle and hope for change.

**Georgia Harkness as Liberal Theologian**

So what is the theological legacy of Georgia Harkness? Clearly she saw herself as a follower of God through Jesus Christ. She was a woman of the church, a theologian in the Boston Personalist tradition, an ecumenist, a prolific writer, a teacher, and a person who was active in peacemaking during a time in U.S. and world history when war-making was popular—when patriotism was seen as upholding U.S. values throughout the world. In all of this, the persistent theological agenda was liberalism—a liberalism that does not fit easily into late twentieth-century stereotypes.

Georgia Harkness was a liberal theologian before the "L" word was widely condemned. But liberal theology was under attack even in her day, especially during the height of her theological writing in the 1940s and 50s. As a defender of liberalism, Harkness was often subjected to attack herself, especially from defenders of neo-orthodoxy.

Even in this climate, Georgia Harkness wrote of neo-orthodoxy as an appreciative critic. In 1957 she described the basic similarity between neo-orthodoxy and liberalism in assuming that no fundamental
conflict exists between religion and science. She pointed out, however, that neo-orthodox theologians were making a valid critique of the liberal overconfidence in science, emphasizing instead the sinfulness of human beings. She acknowledged the contribution of the new orthodoxy, writing:

*The human predicament of sin and weakness, even in the best and most Christian of persons, needs to be recognized to humble us before God and to dispel the fallacy of [human] self-sufficiency. Not pride in scientific achievement or confidence in human good will, but repentance before God is the appropriate attitude of the Christian.*

Although Harkness thought that neo-orthodox theologians sometimes underestimated human dignity and the capacity of people to work with God in remaking society, she wanted to preserve the insights of both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. She advised the wise Christian to pursue truth:

*Both through the revelation of God in the Bible and through all that God has written in *this mysterious universe*—through the glory of God revealed supremely in the face of Jesus Christ and through sympathetic understanding of both the worth and the weakness of God’s human children.*

Georgia Harkness was unusually able to see and convey the value in different theological perspectives. Perhaps because of this, she was herself a clear defender of liberalism. Near the time of her retirement, she wrote, "As one whose theological memory spans the past fifty years, I have to say that I have seen very little of the ‘straw man’ liberalism that is now so easily knocked down, rolled over, and sat upon." She argued that the "great liberals" were never guilty of the excesses of optimism for which they had been blamed. She put the debate within an historical context:

*What has happened—as Henry Sloane Coffin once reminded me when I ventured to speak in praise of liberal-*
ism against a hostile climate in the Union Seminary chapel—is that those who have never had to battle for the liberal spirit of free inquiry, but have simply inherited it from the efforts of an earlier day, have no realization of its cost. It is not essential that all theology bear the label of liberalism, but it is essential that theology, whatever its brand name, preserve the spirit of inquiry.

Within this social context, Georgia Harkness bemoaned the fact that liberalism had not yet had its full effect on hosts of people in her time. She saw the possibility that liberalism could provide an alternative to fundamentalism, which many people rejected but found no substitute. She said, "These terms like liberalism have had enough disparagement heaped upon them to cause them to go out of fashion. Yet great numbers of persons are completely at a loss to know what to put in place of the older and inherited simplicities. . . ."

Georgia Harkness was herself moved by the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ and in the world, but her defense of liberalism was not for the sake of a particular set of doctrines or theological system; it was for the sake of openness. As one friend of her retirement years said of her:

You could talk with her about anything. She had her own opinions, of course; she was not vacuous, but she was always open to examine her opinions. She could do a paradigm shift in order to entertain new ideas, which many theological faculty members can't even do.

Two challenges to contemporary theology arise from the liberal legacy of Harkness. First is the challenge to hold together openness and commitment. To be open is not to be vague and uncommitted. To be open is to share your deepest commitments and to live by them, all the while examining them and revising them as new insights come. The second challenge is to appreciate persons with perspectives different from yours. This challenge seems obvious, but it was a passion for Harkness in a day when enormous chasms existed between people with different experiences and opposing perspectives. These chasms appear again on the landscape of our 1993 world, where pluralism is added to liberalism as a dirty word.
Georgia Harkness as Passionate Witness

In addition to Georgia Harkness’s openness, she sought in all of her work to participate in and reflect upon the movement of God’s Spirit. She was trained, first, as a religious educator, and she was a teacher of renown. She spent much of her time writing theological expositions and devotional materials to engage people in questions and experiences of faith, in thinking about God, and the relation of God with the world. Some dominant patterns appear in the witness of Georgia Harkness.

First, Georgia Harkness was a witness for proclaiming one’s faith. She believed that “the gospel and the communication of the gospel are two different matters. Its communication is the most important task, under God, that any person can undertake.” She was distressed that the gospel is usually so poorly communicated that “the greater part of society...fail to get any real awareness of the gospel’s meaning or its power.”

Further, Harkness believed that a Christian theologian is obligated to affirm her or his faith. She said, in fact, that “a theologian ought to be an evangelist for his (sic) faith.” For her, this was not a mode of evangelism based in orthodoxy, unchanging truths, or coercive communication. For her, the mandate was to share one’s commitments humbly and persuasively.

Harkness was wary of detachment. She said that “a completely detached, take-it-or-leave-it attitude parading as objectivity is foreign to both the nature and the function of theology.” She was confident that people could and would still disagree, and she was sure that “neither the historical nor the rational foundations of faith need to be surrendered for faith to be existential.”

This leads to the second point. Georgia Harkness witnessed for full lay participation in the work of theology. She believed that “there is a latent theologizing tendency in every concerned Christian, and there is often an unconscious theological witness in the lives of the humblest Christians.” She herself sought to nurture that by writing and teaching for both laity and clergy. One of her profound gifts was the ability to translate complex theological concepts into clear, understandable language. She did not assume an aristocracy of theological schools over churches, clergy over laity,
or teachers over students. She saw theology as the work of the whole people.

Underlying all of these commitments, Georgia Harkness was a witness for God's salvation. She wrote about God's salvation and the love of God for the whole world continually. Formally, she said that "'to be saved' means to be rescued, delivered, made safe from something we ought to be rid of." Salvation is from that persistent evil called sin, but it is also "from frustration, inadequacy, destructive inner conflict, despair." Harkness quickly added, however, that salvation is not just an escape from the negatives: "it is positive, joyous spiritual health." She saw God's salvation revealed in Jesus Christ:

Hope of the world, thou Christ of great compassion,  
Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.  
Save us, thy people, from consuming passion,  
Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.  
Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,  
Bringing to hungry souls the bread of life,  
Still let thy spirit unto us be given,  
To heal earth's wounds and end all bitter strife.

So far I have focused on the proclaiming aspects of her witness, but Georgia Harkness was also a witness for questioning and exploring. In fact, she saw the spirit of inquiry as essential to faith. She often wrote in the form of questions, such as, How can we be saved? How do we find God? or How does one commit oneself to Christ? When she identified basic tenets of the Christian faith, she affirmed God the Creator, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that all of these affirmations can be turned into questions, "and they constitute the basic questions that torment [people's] minds in a wistful world." Georgia Harkness believed that questioning would lead to answers, but also to more searching. And although professional theologians have responsibility to be "custodians of the answers," she insisted that "theology is every Christian's business, and we who are theologians by profession had better not suppose that we alone have the answers!"

Georgia Harkness herself was always exploring. One former pastor said that "Georgia didn't have a single cause; she was open to..."
wherever the Spirit moved." He said that "the penalty she paid for being so open was that she didn't have the crusading axe of someone like Reinhold Niebuhr." She stood with strength, but not with fierceness. Her friend added, "In a sense, Georgia was not bringing anything new into the church, but she just wanted to get the church to think."30

As evidence of her concern, she dedicated her *Understanding the Christian Faith* to "The Reverend Emmett Wells Gould, lifelong pastor, teacher, and friend, who in retirement continues to think and to blaze new trails."31 Certainly, Georgia Harkness valued thinking and encouraged it at every opportunity. Perhaps that is a worthy crusade in itself, especially in a world where faith and reason are set in opposition to one another and anti-intellectualism reigns. Harkness's concern for thinking reflected an even deeper concern for the wholeness of theology. She was a witness for a coherent and full faith. For this reason, she addressed many different concerns of Christian belief and action in the world, including both personal existential issues and major social problems of her day. She also gave much attention to the way we do theology and to the many sources of God's revelation. And she emphasized the importance of interpreting biblical passages in light of the whole—their historical and literary contexts and their relation to the whole witness of the Bible.32 She was concerned always to seek order and clarity, even amid ever-emerging questions. Her concern for a coherent and full faith led her interest in good communication:

> The message which the churches attempt to communicate falls on deaf ears, not because the ears are really deaf, but because the Word of God is spoken in so strange a language or in such trivialities that it fails to be the Word of God to those who otherwise might hear it. If it is not understood it is no word at all.33

One final note on the witness of Georgia Harkness is her emphasis on the demands of the gospel. Georgia Harkness was a witness for following God's will. She believed that the Christian faith carries moral demands, and that our responsibility as Christians is to discern what God is asking of us and, then, to do it. Her writing almost al-
ways included a statement on action—what we need to do, concerns we need to address, how we can relate with God.

Harkness believed that our action is made possible by the working of God's Spirit. She saw the relationship with God as transformative, and she closed one essay with a typically enthusiastic statement of that relationship: "Exciting? Directing? Transforming? There is nothing more so, if we will give ourselves in full devotion to the God we find in nature and in persons, but most of all in Jesus."34

Harkness trusted that human actions make a difference in God's world. She insisted on holding faith and works together, but she persistently affirmed that Christian hope is in God. One frequently recurring image in her writing is Jesus's prayer on the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). These words had flashed in her mind when she faced death after a bad fall as a young adult, and she drew on these words to conclude her formal prayer for a time of illness: "In thy good keeping, all is well. Into thy hands we commend our bodies and our spirits. Do with us as thou wilt."35

According to Harkness, a huge weight of responsibility rests on the shoulders of every Christian to be a witness for the gospel—to communicate the gospel and to be part of a transformed people in the world. From her point of view, this is a responsibility "that is too hard for us, but not for God."36

Georgia Harkness as Active Leader

Georgia Harkness was an active leader. She attended church, served on church commissions and boards, served as delegate to jurisdictional and general conferences and as a delegate to the World Council of Churches. This woman was an activist, long schooled in the patience and persistence of church politics.

After General Conference in 1972, she preached in her own church. The story in various versions is legendary. She expressed regret that a statement had been added to the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church saying that homosexuality was "incompatible with Christian teaching."37 The statement was made in the context of a very positive affirmation of human sexuality, added to the Social Principles by the same General Conference.38 Harkness
stood in the pulpit of her church and reminded the congregation that twenty years earlier the General Conference had ruled that a woman should not be allowed to preach—not be allowed into full connection. She told the congregation that she stood in the pulpit on that morning to prove that the church had been wrong, and it had finally changed its mind. Twenty years from that moment would be 1992, and she predicted that the church would again realize it had been wrong; she predicted that the Social Principles would again be changed. Her prediction regarding homosexuality did not come true, but the church has certainly engaged and debated the issue in the twenty intervening years.

Georgia Harkness was also an active writer, publishing thirty-six books and seven booklets; her pen was rarely still. She awoke every morning with the dawn and wrote five pages, her goal for each day. She continued this discipline until the time of her death in 1974. Prior to 1937 her books were more broadly philosophical and ethical. Increasingly after that time, she addressed particular existential issues of faith, including questions of human anxiety, doctrine, life after death, immigration, women in the church, and war and peace. Her interests were very broad, and her writing was simple and clear. Many of her books found eager readers among pastors and lay leaders of the church as sources for study.

Her conversations with her father during his final illness in 1937 effected a turning point in her writing agenda. In his last hour of life, he asked her how many books she had written, to which she replied seven. (She was 46 years old at the time.) Her father’s response to her was: "I think they must be good books. Wise men say they are. But I wish you would write more about Jesus Christ." She did.

In addition to being an activist and a writer, Georgia Harkness was a teacher through and through. She taught religious education and philosophy at Elmira College for fifteen years (1922-1937), religion at Mt. Holyoke College for two years (1937-1939), applied theology at Garrett Biblical Institute for eleven years (beginning in 1940), and theology at Pacific School of Religion until retirement. Her teaching was as broad as her writing, including religious education, philosophy, systematic theology, and applied theology.

Harkness’s physical mobility also influenced the scope of her teaching. She taught on both coasts and the mid-section of this coun-
try, as well as in Japan and the Philippines. All the while she was travelling to international conferences in different parts of the world. Georgia Harkness was highly mobile, continually expanding her horizons and passing on her new insights and passions to students and readers.

Another look at the sweep of Georgia Harkness’s teaching makes clear that she had a particular way of teaching. Near the time of her retirement from theological education, she described what she called “The Task of Theology.” In that address, she said that “any authentic and valid theology needs to be conceived under four categories: as systematized inheritance, as comprehensive inquiry, as witness, and as coordination.” This is how she approached her teaching, and according to the testimony of former students, she had a reputation as an excellent teacher, though some found her overly methodical. Her teaching was also embellished with humor, often at her own expense. She told stories of her encounters with Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, widely regarded theological giants of her day. These encounters were not always complimentary to her, but she would conclude, “The real giants of theology are people who can communicate theology in clear terms.”

This was her passion—to communicate theology in clear terms. She did not care to oversimplify theology or to avoid the more technical discussion of fine points, but she did care to keep the whole in view and to communicate in language that most people could understand. In her most comprehensive, mature writing she made this point very explicitly. She said in the introduction to Understanding the Christian Faith that other fields of inquiry had available popular expositions, stories of the discipline, or outlines so that a broad audience could learn profound insights in simple terms about science, philosophy, history, politics, and so forth. She expressed regret that “[t]here is no corresponding presentation of theology.”

Simplicity, then, has a place in theology, and Georgia Harkness stepped into that place. In the introduction to Understanding the Christian Faith, she explained that she had tried to keep the book brief by passing quickly over great issues: “It has seemed more useful to say something about nearly all of the great Christian doctrines, and thus to enable the reader to see them together, than to linger at length over any.” She proceeded to encourage the readers to do...
further study, providing a bibliography for that purpose. Even as she wrote, Georgia Harkness was a teacher.

Georgia Harkness was also active as a sponsor of persons on their journeys of faith. One former student said that “her greatest joy was following through with her students after graduation.” He went on to say that she had “a deep sense of pride when she visited churches where we ministered and we introduced her; it was a deep sense of pride that she had a share in training these ministers.” She also had “great joy that many of her books were being used in churches in study classes.” He added a speculation, “Maybe she was a frustrated pastor, so she lived out a pastoral role in her teaching.”

As a sponsor, Harkness taught her students to understand ministry in a holistic way. She would say, “Being a brilliant preacher or teacher by themselves do not count for much without warmth toward human persons.” She gave advice to her women students at the close of seminary, “Take care always to be your own person.” She corresponded with former students and pastors and friends. She gave advice about career directions, and she actively worked to help persons find jobs or suitable contexts for their vocations.

Harkness was also a great one for reflecting on ideas, and people sought her out to discuss their ideas and to have her review their writing. She carefully pondered these works, and she responded both to the ideas and to the clarity of expression (commas, periods, and other editorial matters). As one person said, she read and responded to every line. This quality of sponsorship impressed the people who knew her.

In addition to being an activist, writer, teacher, and sponsor, Georgia Harkness was also a giver. She was generous in giving both time and money, as witnessed by former students, and she gave and loaned money to persons in need throughout her life.

Theological Legacy of Georgia Harkness

To summarize the theological legacy of Georgia Harkness, she can be seen first as an integrative thinker—one who brought different theological perspectives into discourse, crossed disciplines, integrated the concerns of the church and the world, and addressed leaders in academia and faith communities. One of her recurring
approaches to theological integration is the way she frequently pre-
sented different perspectives on a subject and reflected on the
strengths and limits of each view. She did not do this as a way of pre-
senting false perspectives (“straw persons”) as background to her
own. In fact, she did present her own perspective, but she addressed
the strengths and limits of it as well.

The focal point of Harkness’s work was always God. Even in the
struggle with the dark night of the soul, the final word was to trust
God: “And whether we find [God] near or far or feel ourselves cut
off from [God’s] presence, this is still our Father’s world! Though
we cannot find God, [God] finds us. When we are assured that God
cesses not to love us, we can watch through the night and wait for
the dawn to see [God’s] face.”

Georgia Harkness distinguished between knowing about God and
knowing God. To know God is to relate with God and to obey the
moral demands of that relationship. So the last word from Georgia
Harkness is the challenge she gives readers of Understanding the
Christian Faith:

This book is not for the curiously critical. It is for the
open-minded seeker who, not expecting all mysteries to be
revealed, is willing to live by the light he (sic) has while
he (sic) seeks for more. The Christian faith is both a way
of belief and a way of life.

Harkness hoped that her legacy would be to support her students
and readers in their search to know God and to respond.

Critical Assessment

In a sense this is the easiest and the most difficult part of the essay to
write. It is easy because I did have many reactions as I read the
works of Georgia Harkness—reactions that are seeds of critique. It
is a difficult task, however, because of the need to cross the cultural
gap into another part of the century and to see Harkness’s work in
its historical and theological context.

The difficulty of the task is particularly great because of the con-
ventionality of her work, which can easily cover the uniqueness of
her contribution. One aspect of her conventionality is that Harkness focused on debates within Christian theology, so that she did not engage the most ardent critics outside of Christianity. She did deal with movements that contest with full Christianity, such as secularism, but she did not engage scholarly critiques of Christianity that were emerging in theology and philosophy. Further, she did not engage extensively with other religious traditions, so she did not deal with some of the issues that are raised in interreligious discourse. Her language remained within the conventions of the Christian community, and her Christocentrism allowed her to remain clearly within the mainstream of Christian tradition.

Although Harkness seems quite conventional, she was approaching theology in a way that was against the stream in her day. She lived in a time when debates were raging within Christian theology, and she walked into the middle of those debates. She sought mutual understanding and critique during a time when opposition parties were more focused on articulating their particular positions as sharply and decisively as possible.

Three qualities of Georgia Harkness seem particularly significant for a critical assessment of her theological method. She was a searching, integrative thinker; a witness to her faith; and an active leader for social change. These qualities are provocative for contemporary theologians, particularly those within Wesleyan theological traditions and feminist theology.

To Inheritors of Wesleyan Theological Traditions

For theologians within the Wesleyan traditions, Georgia Harkness offers critique and challenge to the contemporary work. As a searching, integrative thinker, Harkness carried on the Wesleyan tradition of seeking to understand and respect diverse points of view. She attempted to hold these views together when possible, and she sought to reform one point of view through the influence of others, or to find a middle ground where diverse views could be integrated. Harkness was integrative in a way that very little Wesleyan scholarship is today. Even with the recent attention to interdisciplinary theological research and the insights from practical theology regarding integration, the separation of disciplines is profound in Wesleyan scholar-
ship. Also, contemporary Wesleyan scholarship is often divided by perspective as well, with scholars drawing from the traditions in ways that support their own points of view. For Georgia Harkness, searching for truth and seeking to integrate across differences were at the heart of the theological agenda.

As a witness to her faith, Georgia Harkness carried on the tradition of proclaiming faith and resourcing people on their faith journeys. She saw social relevance in questions of theological belief and ethical practice, and she wrote frequently on matters of Christian doctrine and ethics. Her concern was to build faith rather than to convert people to a particular perspective. She was not an apologist for a particular point of view, but neither was she apologetic about holding a view and expressing it as fully as possible. The challenge for Wesleyan theological inheritors is to be clear about their own theological commitments. For those who teach theology, whether in a seminary or in a congregation, the challenge is to proclaim faith, even while actively questioning and revising it.

Unlike Georgia Harkness, however, the theologians of the 1990s cannot assume that they are dialoguing with three or four different perspectives. The dialogue is much more complex, and some of the voices have been ignored or silenced. If theologians today are to witness, they will need to add social humility to personal humility, recognizing that witnesses from different social locations will be quite different and can be understood only if theologians seek the more oppressed voices, listen to the silences, and form their own commitments in relation to these.

As an active leader for social change, Harkness carried on the tradition of responding to particular issues in the church and world. Not only did she address these issues in her teaching and books, but she was also an activist; she was especially active for the ordination of women in the Methodist Church and against the escalation of war. More than most who engage in theology within Wesleyan tradition today, Georgia Harkness embodied commitment to social change and active leadership for change, thus giving opportunity for theological reflection on action—praxis theological knowing.
To Inheritors of Feminist and Womanist Theology

This essay began with the assertion that the work of Georgia Harkness prefigured modern feminist theology and emerged largely from searching her own experience and yearning to communicate meaningfully with others. Although Harkness's theological content is greatly dissimilar from that of feminist and womanist theologians writing today, her method is strikingly similar. This will be the focus here.

As a searching, integrative thinker, Harkness refused to participate in the compartmentalization of ideas, disciplines, or points of view. This effort toward integration is one which is shared by late twentieth-century feminist theologians, although their social, economic, and psychological analyses are much more fully developed. The social science analysis of recent feminist theologians has opened the possibility of a more radical critique of patriarchy than Georgia Harkness ever imagined. On the other hand, Harkness held up the possibility of integrating across different points of view and seeking to see the values and limits of each. Such efforts could stretch the ideological boundaries within current feminist theory into a much broader dialogue with diverse points of view. However, such an expansion of dialogue and understanding would require a far stronger hermeneutic of suspicion than Harkness herself developed.

As a witness to her faith, Georgia Harkness has some limitations, but she has also made a profound contribution. As I read Georgia Harkness today, I sometimes long for her to speak more boldly and critically on behalf of women, but that was not how she understood her mission. She saw herself as a builder, beginning with the foundations and building up from there. Hear her own words:

*It is natural to want to plunge into the middle of things, as I have found through a good many years of teaching religion to students, who are apt to be impatient of groundwork and wish to have all the answers at once. But in theology, as in most things, the answers depend much on the approach one takes. One must know what one is setting as the basis of authority if one is to follow any clear lead toward the truth.*

18 QUARTERLY REVIEW / FALL 1993
What a challenge to those today who want to change the world—to re-form ourselves, re-form theology, and participate in liberation. Georgia Harkness always began with foundations, thinking that one’s basic point of view determines the way one relates the many complex aspects of life. Perhaps real liberation only comes about when we attend to foundations, including the flaws that are to be found within them.

The limitations of Harkness’s work have mostly to do with a lack of suspicion of misogynist tendencies in theology. She was not without feminist sensitivities, but they did not temper her theological work in an explicit way except in a few selected instances when she addressed the issues of women directly. Despite any limits of Georgia Harkness’s witnessing, she challenges contemporary women to move beyond critique to construction—a challenge already articulated among many feminist and womanist theologians themselves.

As an active leader for social change, Georgia Harkness grounded her work in the church community and was influenced by the issues of the church. By standing on the grounds of a particular community, she could have enduring influence across time, particularly in relation to peacemaking and the full participation of women in the church and society. For contemporary feminist theologians to become involved in active leadership and to stay in close dialogue with those women whose primary vocation is activism can only enrich the significance and influence of feminist theology.

Harkness, in her role as active leader, could also be conscious of the subtle forces that mediate against social justice and peace. Her stands on social issues were sometimes straightforward, and sometimes subtle. For example, Harkness refused to participate in elitism of professionals over nonprofessionals or clergy over laity, though both were dominant and rarely questioned forms of elitism within theology. Harkness could yet make a contribution to contemporary feminist theology because these forms of elitism still exist, albeit in modified form. Her contribution would have to be widened, however, because women in theology struggle now with elitism of social class, race, and nationality, all of which become intertwined with gender issues. Georgia Harkness’s subtle attempt to undercut elitism by communicating with a broad audience is a tactic that is underused in contemporary feminist theory. Books on feminist theology are more often written to one or two audiences, and quite often, the writ-
nings respected by one audience are spurned by others. The challenge of Georgia Harkness is to broaden the audience and, thus, broaden the conversation.

In conclusion, Georgia Harkness’s seemingly conventional theological agenda is not so conventional after all. Her unique combination of searching and witnessing led her into a theological method that still today has potential for stirring people to think and to participate in transforming the church and world.

Notes

1. C. Douglas Hayward, “Georgia Harkness—A Pulpit Biography,” Walnut Creek United Methodist Church, April 9, 1978, 1.
4. Harkness wrote frequently on the issue of peace and war, and she discusses the sins of society in some detail in The Dark Night of the Soul, 115-133.
9. Ibid., 48-49.
10. Ibid., 49.
11. Georgia Harkness, “The Task of Theology,” unpublished address, n.d. This address was presented near the time of her retirement from Pacific School of Religion, and internal evidence indicates that it may have been presented on the actual occasion of her retirement around 1958.
12. Ibid., 5-6.
13. Ibid., 6.
15. This theme pervades her work, but nowhere is the focus on God more clear than in: Georgia Harkness, The Providence of God (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960). The book was reprinted as Does God Care? (Waco: Word, 1960).
publication date of the Word edition is likely an error; research continues to resolve ambiguous clues.

17. Ibid.
18. Harkness, "The Task of Theology," 9. Harkness, with her spirit of openness, would almost certainly use inclusive language if she were writing today, but that was not the consciousness of her time.
19. Ibid., 9-10.
20. Ibid., 10.
21. Ibid.
27. The first question appears in many of her writings, and the others are actually titles of unpublished, undated essays: "How Do We Find God?" and "How Does One Commit Oneself to Christ?" Her style of question-posing is a common thread woven into all of her writing, and many of her published writings are titled as questions: "Are Pacifists Romantics?" *Christian Century*, 55 (June 1, 1938), 693-694; "What Can Christians Do?" *Christian Century*, 57 (May 29, 1940), 699-701; "What, Then, Should Churches Do?" *Christian Century*, 57 (August 14, 1940), 996-998, *Does God Care?*
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 27-33. She develops her ideas in more detail and includes an emphasis on reading the entire Bible "by the spirit, the words, the life of Jesus." (32) This is now a dubious claim in light of the 34 years of biblical scholarship since she published this book, as well as the growing theological sensitivity to relationships between Jews and Christians and between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.
37. Harkness did not write a book or article on homosexuality, but she did discuss the issue at length in a letter to Paul Hulslander, May 18, 1974. She put forth a view that parallels the oral tradition of the story told here. She wrote that "homosexuals have been far more sinned against than sinning in the way both society and the churches have treated them as moral lepers and outcasts." Her own position was complex, but she clearly did not identify homosexuality as a sin, and her primary response regarding what the church should do was that "homosexuals should be treated charitably and not excluded from the churches' fellowship."

38. "Social Principles," The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), 86. The entire statement on human sexuality approved by the General Conference of 1972 was grounded in the idea that sexuality is a gift of God and that we are called to stewardship of that gift. The admonitions against sexual expression outside of marriage or destructive sexual expression within or outside of marriage were placed in this context of stewardship. The statement represented a major shift from the statement on "Sex in Christian Life" in the 1968 Discipline ["Social Principles," The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1968 (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1968), 58.]

Within the 1972 statement on human sexuality, the following statement was included on homosexuality: "Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured, though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." (86)

39. Some exemplars of her work reflect that these existential concerns were present quite early in her writing, but they were sharpened in time: The Church and the Immigrant (New York: George H. Doran, 1921); Conflicts in Religious Thought, esp. 183-217 (on suffering), 279-315 (on immortality); Christian Ethics (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), esp. 122-216 (on marriage and family, economic life, race, Christian conscience, and war and peace); Women in Church and Society: A Historical and Theological Inquiry (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

Georgia Harkness was aware of changes in herself. She noted in 1949 that her shift from teaching philosophy in an undergraduate college to teaching theology in a theological seminary had shifted and deepened her interests, but she could affirm in 1949 most of what she wrote in 1929. She did feel compelled to say more regarding "the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (Harkness, Conflicts in Religious Thought, xviii.)

41. Georgia Harkness, "The Task of Theology."
42. Harry Pak, Interview conducted in Claremont, CA, April 1990.
44. Ibid., 14.

45. Harry Pak.


47. Pierce Johnson added that he gave his book to three readers. All were helpful, but Georgia was the "real critic." He said that he could depend on her taking him seriously.


50. *Understanding the Christian Faith*, 14. The substitution of the last two pronouns is for the sake of inclusive language.


53. Harkness understood Christian apologetics as concerned with the foundations of Christian knowledge and aimed "at exposition and communication." (Harkness, *Foundations of Christian Knowledge*, 11; cf: 9-17.) In that sense, she herself was an apologist, but she wanted people to think for themselves and to respond to God.


55. Ibid.

56. Some of this critique is found in Harkness, *Women in Church and Society*. TO SEARCH AND TO WITNESS 23
“The Rest Is Commentary”:
A Reading of the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, is a text whose meaning seems to be self-evident, and perhaps this is why one hears it preached upon so seldom. Yet if one stays with this text for a while, a surprising thing happens: the familiarity of the Ten Commandments wears off, and what once seemed self-evident turns out to have required the greatest skill and understanding.

Our reading of the Decalogue will give special attention to two commandments, the first (“You shall have no other gods before me”) and the fourth (“Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy”). There are reasons for this special attention which come from the Ten Commandments themselves, as will become apparent. But tradition provides external reasons as well.

In the Christian tradition, Jesus’ answer to the question concerning the greatest, or first, commandment (Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-28) highlights the first and fourth commandments. Jesus recites the second half of the Shema, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” (Deut. 6:5), which is a positive formulation of the first commandment. Then Jesus cites Lev. 19:18: “You
shall love your neighbor as yourself." Scholars have argued that in the Ten Commandments this love of neighbor finds its greatest expression in the fourth commandment.¹

A similar story is found in the Jewish tradition. The great first-century rabbi, Hillel, was challenged to teach the Torah while standing on one foot. He said "What is hateful to yourself, don't do to someone else. That's the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary." Hillel's aphorism bears similarities to the "golden rule" (cf. Matt. 7:12), which is identified as the substance of "the law and the prophets." It also shares the spirit of Lev. 19:18 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself"). The primacy of the Shema, and therefore of the first commandment, can be taken as a given for the Jewish tradition.

Both traditions which stand upon the ethical base of the Ten Commandments consider these two commandments bedrock.

Reading the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments cannot be studied in the abstract as ten universal commands spoken out of eternity for all times and places. Like all Old Testament law, the Ten Commandments should be understood in light of the narrative and traditions of which they are a part.

The Decalogue belongs at the very heart of Israel's story. The narrative which surrounds the giving of the law consists of, first, the complex story of the struggle between God and Pharaoh which leads to the Exodus; second, the trip to Sinai and the giving of the Law there; third, rebellion and the years in the wilderness; fourth, the retelling of the law on the plains of Moab at the edge of the promised land; and fifth, the taking of the promised land. This brief outline leaves out many important episodes, but these five blocks form the basic structure of the narrative.

Two observations emerge from this outline. The first is that when liberation comes to the people of Yahweh, salvation in the form of life in the promised land does not immediately follow. Rather, after liberation there is wandering in the wilderness. One can readily see that in this situation there is a need for instruction, lest the formlessness of the wilderness become the norm for life in the community.
In the context of the wilderness, law gives much-needed order to the community.

Second, one notices that, in terms of the structure of the narrative, the two tellings of the law on Mount Sinai and the plains of Moab stand as twin pillars supporting the architecture of events from liberation to salvation. The giving of the law is the first event after liberation and the last event before salvation. The law gives order on either side of the wilderness years. The law both frames the center of the narrative (the wilderness wanderings) and brackets the events at either end (exodus from Egypt and entry into the promised land). Therefore, none of these events, liberation, purification, and salvation, has an existence apart from the law. Each stands in relationship with the law.

It is significant, then, that the Decalogue, found in Exod. 20:1-17 and Deut. 5:6-21, is the only component of the extensive legal material in the Old Testament that is repeated essentially verbatim. In both cases, it is the first of the laws given, and it is the only law spoken directly to the people rather than mediated through Moses. The Ten Commandments are law, "instruction," par excellence.

The First Commandment: Loyalty

The importance of the first commandment in both versions of the Decalogue is signaled by its length and by its position at the head of the collection. The two commandments which follow the first are to a large degree outworkings of this first one.

In the last few decades, biblical scholars have called attention to the similarities between Israel's relationship with God as expressed in the laws of the Old Testament and certain kinds of political treaties in the ancient Near East. These treaties share a common form or set of parts, the most important of which for our reading of the Decalogue is what has been labeled the "chief stipulations" of the treaty. These stipulations typically involve oaths of mutual allegiance, defense, and, above all, loyalty, owed by the inferior party in the treaty to the superior party.

The Ten Commandments as a whole holds the place of the chief stipulation in Israel's treaty-relationship with God. The first commandment is therefore the chief of the chief stipulations. Seen in this
political light, the first commandment signifies the demand not only for purity in worship but absolute loyalty in a broader sense. This absolute loyalty plays itself out in three directions.

First, loyalty becomes a major theme in the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. In the Exodus story, the people of Israel traded one master (Pharaoh) for another (Yahweh). The old master they know is powerful and able to compel loyalty. His way is imperial, and his desire is that things remain the same and under his control. The new master, they have begun to see, is also powerful. But this master's way is inviting, and his desire is for justice and compassion, both of which require the freedom to experience a new social reality. This trading of masters is particularly evident in the episode which immediately follows the giving of the law in Exodus, the covenant-making ceremony between the elders of the people and Yahweh in Exodus 24. Here loyalty is pledged explicitly and formally.

The second direction the commandment for absolute loyalty takes us is toward seeing the creation of a new people, a new community, even a new family. If the exodus from the realm of the old master and the instruction which follows at Mt. Sinai has resulted in the acceptance of a new master who demands loyalty, then it has also created a new sense of loyalty among the people who now have this relationship with Yahweh in common. They are the "people of Yahweh" in two senses. They are the people of Yahweh in the sense that they have one who claims rightful ownership of them. They are also the people of Yahweh in the sense that having this new owner has created a new relationship among them all. A community has been created and made concrete which was only implied before. And in this context, the effect of the first commandment of absolute loyalty toward the one God, Yahweh, is to set them apart, to make them distinct, and hence to make their relationship to one another primary and all others secondary.

The third direction the commandment for absolute loyalty takes us is toward reflecting upon the character of God and the qualities which God has exhibited and promises to continue to exhibit. One notices that the first commandment is bounded on either side by descriptions of what God has done (Exod. 20:2: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery") or what kind of God this Yahweh is (Exod. 20:5-6: "for
I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments (Proverbs 8:34). In both cases, something is being said about the character of the God who demands absolute loyalty. This is a God who can act with integrity, who can will and accomplish that will. This God is one in a very profound sense, a God who has the same character in all the times and places in which God is met. This is a God who manifests in deed and word those very qualities which are demanded of the community in its relationship with Yahweh: fidelity, integrity, reliability, loyalty.

When we reflect on the implications of this reading for the Christian life today, it is not enough to say that there are gods—money, fame, etc.—in the present who tempt us to place our loyalty in them. This is certainly true, but to state this conclusion prematurely deprives us of additional insights both into the commandments and into our own situation. The process of getting there is at least as important as the moral point itself. The analogies we make in that process will take us into ever deeper levels of meaning in the text. What is the first commandment with its call for absolute loyalty really about?

The first commandment shows the contrast between God and Pharaoh, between the community of the people of Yahweh and the land of Egypt. This contrast is made explicitly in v. 2, which insists that the setting for this commandment be recognized as liberation from Egypt. The contrast is also made implicitly in the placement of the Decalogue immediately after this act of liberation. The Egyptian sojourn, with its oppressive turn and its liberating conclusion, is, of course, a theme which turns up time and again in the Old Testament. Two such instances only will be cited here. One is Deuteronomy 17:16, a verse within Deuteronomy's law of the king. Here the king is admonished not to "multiply horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses," which is to say that the king's ability to gain for himself a standing army and military power is limited, and limited specifically by the prohibition against getting such power through Egypt.

It is this very temptation to turn to Egypt for military help, to put one's trust in the power of the Empire for one's salvation, which is at issue in Isaiah 30 and 31. During the time of King Hezekiah, a
time in which the Kingdom of Assyria was quickly spreading westward toward Judah, it was tempting to turn to Egypt, the other great power in the region, to counter the threat. The prophet Isaiah sees that this temptation is not a matter of political astuteness but constitutes a rejection of Yahweh. The punishment will therefore fit the crime.

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.
But you refused and said,
'No! We will flee upon horses'—
therefore you shall flee!
and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds'—
therefore your pursuers shall be swift! (Isa. 30:15-16)

Trust in one earthly power will result in being handed over by God to a greater power.

The Egyptians are human, and not God:
their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the Lord stretches out his hand,
the helper will stumble,
and the one helped will fall,
and they will all perish together. (Isa. 31:3)

This is the awful dynamic of power when we see the world the way the first commandment would have us see it. Trust in God and worship of God alone is a difficult but necessary counterbalance to the temptations of power and might. The alternative, giving up trust in God for trust in power, leads only to pride, arrogance, destruction, depravity, all stemming from the notion that one can act without God's knowing, seeing, or caring. As one theologian puts it, "inherent in power is the tendency to breed conceit." Or as Jesus describes it, the powerful neither fear God nor respect people (Luke 18:2).

There are, of course, many powers in our own time, many analogies to the temptation which Egypt posed to Israel and Judah. Like
Egypt, each of these powers comes equipped with the ability to rule and order our lives as only God is meant to.

Many of these powers have long been named: nation-states, corporations, economic, political, or personal ideologies. Many have only begun to be named, though they have been long recognized as capable of claiming our loyalty and diverting our will: alcohol, narcotics, sex, even the consumptive pursuit of physical or emotional well-being. All tempt us to pledge our loyalty to them and there to find security.

It is the need for security where we strike bottom. What tempted Judah to return to Egypt with Assyria at its door? What tempts us now to hand over our wills and our lives to one of these lesser powers? It is the fact that our hearts are gripped by an all-pervasive anxiety in which the present seems dangerous and the future unknowable. Led by a desperate need to find security from this threat, our gaze turns from God to more immediate succor.

Faced with this dynamic, the first commandment tells us that once we have left Pharaoh's house, there is no turning back. We have traded one master for another, a master who calls us to order our world according to a new set of relationships and who leads us toward the promised land and promises to meet us there when we arrive.

There is good news here. To say that we are to worship God alone, to cast aside all idols which may tempt us from that worship (that is, the second commandment), to safeguard the integrity of actions done or words spoken in the name of God (the third commandment), all of this is at base to say that we live in a world ordered by another, a world in which we are not alone with our worries. Comfort and security come from knowing that our lives are in the hands of the one who led us from Egypt and who leads us still.

The Fourth Commandment: the Holy Rhythm of Israel

Several clues point us toward the conclusion that the fourth (Sabbath) commandment is given special prominence in Deuteronomy.

First, these verses (Deut. 5:12-15) show the greatest discrepancy between the version of the Decalogue found in Exodus and that found in Deuteronomy. The fourth commandment in Deuteronomy
is formulated in a typically Deuteronomic way. "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day"—these are words which echo time and again within Deuteronomy. Echoes can be heard in Deut. 4:34; 6:21-25; 15:15; 16:12; and 26:5-10, to name just a few.  

Second, the addition of these Deuteronomic phrases makes the fourth commandment longer in Deuteronomy than it is in Exodus. Deuteronomy has also strung together commandments six through ten by means of conjunctions. The NRSV reflects this alteration by the addition of the word neither before each of these commandments. Taken together, these two minor changes create a structure of alternate long and short blocks:

**Block 1: The Worship of Yahweh—5:6-10 (long)**

**Block 2: The Name of Yahweh—5:11 (short)**

**Block 3: The Sabbath—5:12-15 (long)**

**Block 4: The Elders—5:16 (short)**

**Block 5: The Ethical Prohibitions—5:17-21 (long)**

The fourth commandment thus stands as the long block at the center of this structure.

Third, the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy provides subtle links at two points to either end of the Decalogue. Deuteronomy's version of this commandment has that distinctive motive clause already mentioned ("Remember that you were a slave in Egypt. . .") which hearkens back to the historical prologue at the head of the whole Decalogue (5:6: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"). In addition, Deuteronomy's version of this commandment has in its list of people and animals to be given rest on the Sabbath (5:14) two additional items, the ox and the donkey, which are not present at the same point in Exodus but which reappear in the final commandment.
These small but important changes make the fourth or Sabbath commandment the center which draws the Decalogue together. Some have gone so far as to call the Decalogue as it is found in Deuteronomy the “Sabbath Decalogue.”

What is the importance of the Sabbath? The Decalogue says that the Sabbath is for those who have no means of getting leisure for themselves, that is, not only “you” but also “your son, your daughter, your male slave, your female slave, your ox, your donkey, your livestock, and the resident alien in your towns.” The commandment presents itself as the way in which God decrees that free time will be given to those who have no freedom. This gift of leisure or free time works itself out in two ways which can be illustrated by noting the different motivations attached to each of the two versions of the commandment.

First, as Exodus 20:11 reminds us, the series of seven days which make up the week from Sabbath to Sabbath is a reflection of creation (Genesis 1). This means that God’s gift of free time should be seen as a time of re-creation and not of rest only. Time has become a cycle that begins and ends with rest and release. Time is not simply one thing after another, rather, it returns again and again to rest, relief, and re-creation.

Second, as Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us, this commandment is supposed to remind us that God promises relief from bondage—from Egypt or from whatever else may enslave us. Deuteronomy’s emphasis on the relationship between the Sabbath and the promises and mighty acts of God means that the observance of the Sabbath is to be physical, concrete evidence of God’s claim on us. Since with the first commandment we have traded one master for another, there are consequences for how we act, for how we order life together. Because we were slaves in Egypt and God gave us relief from our bonds, we are to give relief to those over whom we have power.

Taken together, these two points mean that the Sabbath is a time to center upon our relationship with God. Because that relationship is ongoing in time and space, some means needs be found by which it can be recreated (the Exodus emphasis) and reformulated (the Deuteronomy emphasis). The Sabbath functions as a safeguard for the chief stipulation of absolute loyalty. It also makes the primary rela-
tionship in our lives concrete and periodic. To give rest to those within our society who cannot get rest for themselves, then, is to honor by imitation the memory of the rest which God took at creation and which God gave to us in bringing us up from Egypt.

All of this becomes even more apparent when we look at certain laws within the Deuteronomic law code (Deuteronomy 12-26). Many scholars contend that these laws in Deuteronomy are arranged according to the order of the Ten Commandments. If this is true, it would be instructive to examine the laws that correspond to the Sabbath commandment. These laws (Deut. 14:28-16:17) have to do with the tithe of the third year which is to be given to those who have no portion (14:28-29); the seven-year release of loans and slaves (15:1-11 and 12-18, respectively); and the festivals of Passover (16:1-8), Weeks (9-12), and Booths (13-15). The importance of the three festivals is underlined in 16:16-17.

One notices immediately that all of these laws share with the Sabbath commandment the quality of a cycle. All have to do with things which are to recur regularly, periodically. Together with the Sabbath, these laws lay out the "holy rhythm" of Israel which makes their relationship with God concrete and manifest. Those who repeatedly obey these laws repeatedly acknowledge the first commandment mandate of absolute loyalty.

Second, one notices that release and relief are a feature of all of these laws. The tithe is for the relief of those dependent upon society as a whole for their welfare. Loans and slaves are to be released every seven years. The festivals are a time to gain release from labor, to gather and to celebrate and to share the rich bounty of the promised land.

Third, and related to this, great care is taken in all these laws, as in the Sabbath commandment, to include those in danger of exclusion. The similarity between those for whom the Sabbath is given (5:14) and those who are to rejoice in each of the last two festivals (16:11 and 14) is striking: "you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you." In these laws and in the Sabbath commandment, we are given a beatific portrait of God's community in which everyone is cared for, where economic or physical enslavement can only be temporary, and where the whole community gathers to rejoice and to re-
ceive the blessing of God. In this way the requirements, the intention, and the remembrance of the Sabbath commandment are given specificity.

The honoring of elders (the fifth commandment) and the ethical prohibitions (commandments six through ten) can be seen as also giving specificity to the way in which life within this community is conducted, that is, with respect for the rights of others to live a good life, free from the threats of shameful treatment and the other misfortunes named by the final commandments of the Decalogue. Once the portrait of the whole community cared for and gathered to rejoice is presented, however, these later commands fall easily into place.

As with the first commandment of absolute loyalty, there is good news here, and for many of the same reasons. We see this good news especially when we notice the urgency and fear with which most people in our society go about obtaining the necessities of daily existence for themselves and their families. Even when those necessities are attained, however, we are barraged with messages from all quarters that enough is not enough. There is a frantic quality to life in a consumer, wage-earning society, and a corresponding anxious quality when one’s means of livelihood is given by another rather than created or gathered for oneself. These insecurities are encouraged and preyed upon by those who demand more work. Little wonder, then, that the Sabbath stands in danger of being squeezed out entirely. And little wonder that civility (that quality being demanded by the final six commandments) is seldom seen in our political as well as in our economic lives.

As with the first commandment, the deep need being addressed in the fourth is how to get security. The specific dimension of this issue now being addressed is the temptation to gain a sense of self-worth, security, or status through work. This is an addiction which the guardians of the Work Ethic hold in highest regard. As a firm counter to “workaholism,” the fourth commandment reminds us that life is given by God. Life was given at creation and remembered at the Sabbath, both for those of us who have and for those of us who have not. Freedom from bondage and life in the promised land was given at the Exodus and made concrete at the Sabbath, both for those of us who have and for those of us who have not.

This is the same concern which Jesus addressed in Matt. 6:25-34 and summarized in the final verse of that passage: “So do not worry

A READING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. To­
day's trouble is enough for today." Seeing the Sabbath in this light
not only makes us acutely aware of what is at stake in its observance
but offers us the further insight that we are to live as if every tomor­
row is to be a Sabbath to God.

"The Rest Is Commentary"

This brief reading of the Ten Commandments has shown us that, far
from being a self-evident passage which requires no study, the Deca­
logue greatly rewards study and reflection. The Ten Command­
ments, which can be summarized, as tradition has done, in the first
and fourth commandments, shows us that our relationship with God
and with one another has a reality and an urgency that we cannot
avoid. God demands absolute loyalty. That loyalty must be made
concrete and regular in our society through specific social functions
in which all are cared for and all are given reason to rejoice in the
bounty of God.

The rest is commentary.

Notes


2. The most frequently cited work in this regard in English is D. J.
summary of the discussion (and a dissenting view) can be found in E.
Nicholson, God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament

3. On this contrast, see W. Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination

4. On the theme of the family of Yahweh in the Old Testament, see N.
Lohfink, "The People of God," Great Themes from the Old Testament
(Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 117-133.

5. It is quite legitimate to speak of vv. 5-6 as being on the far boundary
of the first commandment, since many traditions (Jewish, Catholic, and Lutheran)
take the whole of vv. 3-6 as a single commandment rather than dividing them.
While acknowledging the legitimacy of dividing the Decalogue this way and
using this division in my own interpretation, I have elsewhere retained the
enumeration more familiar to one from a Protestant Christian background.


8. There have been many analyses of what is characteristic of the language of Deuteronomy. A particularly thorough study is that of M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), especially his appendices.


11. Deut. 15:19-23 stands before the laws concerning the festivals as an enumeration of what can be considered a proper sacrificial animal to be used at the festivals.

LILLY FOUNDATION STUDY:

Paying Attention

"What is theological about what you do?" Two-and-a-half years ago, a group of Protestant church leaders from various traditions and backgrounds began an extended consultation on theological education by sharing their reflections on that question. The consultation, a series of meetings which concluded in October, 1992, was an effort to bring church leaders into the discussion of basic issues in theological education which has been underway for a decade now and which up to this point had mainly involved faculty and administrators in theological schools. Like many of the projects in this ongoing study, this consultation was supported by the Lilly Endowment.

These church leaders did not join the discussion as representatives of their denominations or in any other official capacity but simply as practitioners whose range of abilities and experience in church leadership seemed likely to yield some worthwhile contributions. As someone who has written on theological education, I was invited to their first gathering, mainly to listen and learn. I was then invited back to their final session and given the task of preparing a synopsis.

Charles Wood is Lehman Professor of Christian Doctrine at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.
of what transpired. That synopsis, revised and refined somewhat in light of the participants' comments on it, is the substance of this article.

In dealing with that initial question—"What is theological about what you do?"—these practitioners in ministry did not, on the whole, do what many would have expected them to do. They did not identify "theology" with the work of the systematic theologians they had read in seminary or since and then talk about how those writings had or had not been helpful to them in the practice of ministry. They did not speak of theology as "theory," which had somehow to be related to something called "practice." They did not talk about the difficulty of "integrating" the various disciplines of theological study with each other or with the realm of churchly activity. They did not appear to think in terms of a dichotomy between the "academic" and the "practical."

Instead, their responses to the question indicated that they took "theology" to stand for a way of thinking in which they themselves were constantly engaged. To call it a way of thinking, however, may not quite do justice to the scope and depth of the activity as they described it. It might be more accurate to say that, for these practitioners in ministry, theology is above all a way of paying attention: a way of paying attention to God, and to everything else.

Paying attention in this way is evidently a key element in these leaders' own faith and Christian life, inseparable from both prayer and action. It is more or less deliberate and reflective, depending on the circumstances. It is rooted in an aptitude formed and sustained through learning. As evidenced in how they talked about it, that aptitude involves a capacity to "read situations," as well as a capacity to read Christian scripture and tradition, theologically. Those readings appear to inform one another to such an extent that they are often difficult to distinguish in practice.

Having established a good bit of common ground as well as significant differences of background and approach in the first session, each of the participants accepted the task of writing a substantial paper, informed to whatever extent they found useful by the recent literature on theological education or by whatever else they chose, on some aspect of the general topic. These papers were discussed in subsequent sessions and reworked in between.
At the final meeting, the group directed its attention to three specific questions: What sorts of ministerial leadership and church life are needed in order to enable congregations and their leaders to be faithful to the demands of the gospel in the contemporary situation? What kinds of theological education are required for this leadership and church life? What relationships are needed between schools and churches in order to enable the development of faithful leadership?

Discussion of the first question reflected a broadly shared conviction that requisite for ministerial leadership is *theological* leadership, in two senses of that phrase: first, a leadership that is grounded in theological aptitude, that is, in a well-developed, well-honed capacity and inclination to pay attention to God and to the things of God; and second, a leadership intent upon sharing that theological aptitude with the community and cultivating it in the community. Theological leadership in both these senses is, the discussants observed, less a matter of technique than of character. It requires a blend of steadiness and flexibility. It also requires a sober realism concerning the extent of the world’s (and the church’s, and the self’s) corruption and concerning the fact that the exercise of leadership will bring with it an abundant measure of suffering, some of it merited, much of it undeserved.

Other requisites for ministerial leadership were seen to be rooted in this theological aptitude. The members of the consultation were clear that pastors and other leaders need various specific abilities—for example, the ability to plan an effective meeting, or to keep track of finances—which have nothing especially theological about them at first glance. But they resisted the notion that these specific abilities were in fact non-theological. They saw a problem in the widespread tendency to treat administration (to pick one example from the discussion) as a matter of technique rather than as a theological practice. Many rejected the entire concept of "management" as inappropriate in a discussion of pastoral responsibility and were highly critical of attempts to import secular, technocratically inspired resources into the church’s thinking in this area. Others favored the adaptation and theological transformation of such resources. In this connection, some spoke of the *stewardship of institutions* as a significant responsibility of church leaders, a responsibility whose effective exercise demands an understanding of what is articulated in Christian doctrines of creation, sin, redemption, and so forth.
cal institutions, they thought, are neither to be disparaged nor to be worshiped; they are to be de-idolized and affirmed in their proper place. Their maintenance and management are part of the vocation of leadership. While the participants agreed that church leaders have much to learn from competent nontheological studies of administration and leadership, at least some also suspected that theology might have some distinctive and useful things to contribute to the understanding of those fields.

As to the sorts of church life needed for faithfulness to the gospel, the discussion again focused on essentials. Churches must be marked by hospitality: welcoming all, and especially the stranger, in God's name. This kind of hospitality is very demanding of those who share in extending it. It requires not only time, effort, and material resources but also and foremost an ongoing personal and communal transformation, a constant overcoming of the inhospitableness that lingers in the self and in the community and that is always eager to reassert itself. An important source of strength and encouragement in the task, so far as the participants in this consultation were concerned, is the "communion of saints," extended both historically and geographically: actual people and actual congregations that have borne witness in their own lives to the generosity of God. Still more important is a vital awareness of that same generosity in the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

When asked what kinds of theological education are required for these sorts of leadership and church life, the participants' answers revealed general agreement on a few central principles. First, the kinds of theological education we need are those that keep at the forefront the overall aim of equipping persons with theological aptitude in its various dimensions and specifications. The members of the consultation did not find much promise in the conventional tendency to regard the interpretation of texts and traditions as belonging to the "theoretical" side of the curriculum and to regard the work of attending to human situations (personal, cultural, etc.) as belonging to the "practical" side. Interpreting texts and interpreting, let us say, instances of social conflict both require specific abilities acquired in part through practice. Theological students practice reading texts and are guided in that practice. Similarly, they need (and sometimes get) practice under supervision in reading situations of various sorts. They need to be enabled to see the similarities and the connections
between the two: for example, to read texts in their sociocultural contexts and to read situations in light of the texts which bear the community's wisdom. A theological education that concentrates on situational analysis and critique is no more adequate than one that deals exclusively with the practices of reading texts. What is needed is theological education that aims explicitly at developing in students the sort of holistic aptitude for paying attention that is basic to genuine church leadership.

Second, we need kinds of theological education that place themselves in a community of faith. While most of the discussants wanted to see the theological school itself as in some sense a community of faith, the difficulty of specifying the sense in which that is so was acknowledged. For some, the theological school is aptly described as a congregation or liturgical community; its own ecclesial identity is an important aspect of its life and work. This view has some implications for the question of who should belong to the school, as well as for the sorts of scholarship consistent with its life. Others would insist that the school is not itself a congregation and does not have the mission of a congregation. On this view, the school may in some cases at least include among its members earnest seekers and skeptics as well as believers (whatever that latter term may mean). It may include members of quite disparate religious communities. The faith that makes it a community of faith may in some ways be quite distinct from the faith that makes a congregation a community of faith.

However this feature of the school's identity is sorted out, the discussants were reasonably clear that the theological school should be seen as a particular enterprise of the community or communities of faith, entrusted with a distinctive mission on their behalf and sustained by a living relationship to them. They were also clear that theological education itself requires some involvement on the part of the learners in communities of faith beyond the school as sites for learning, and thus requires some sort of partnership between school and church.

This led to the third topic question: What relationships are needed between schools and churches to fulfill this aim? There was less consensus in an answer to this question than in most points in the discussion, perhaps because the participants were recalling a diversity of forms of such relationship, both good and bad, from their own experience. In any event, it was generally agreed that not all theological
education for church leadership happens best in schools of theology. It is increasingly a common practice to blame the seminary for the failings of church leadership, if not of the church in general, and then to demand that the seminary do more, which means including more required courses in areas of perceived weakness as well as doing a better job overall. However, the educational process goes on before, alongside, and after the seminary experience.

Some discussants suggested that it is very important for both the church and the school to ask themselves what aspects of education for church leadership are best accomplished in the context of the theological school and what aspects are best addressed in other settings. Some, convinced that the school is not an effective context for learning practical reasoning, called for more movement away from the school toward the congregation and community as the site for education in the practices of church leadership. Others thought that to assign "book learning" to the school and "experiential learning" to the congregation or community in this way would strengthen prevalent obstacles to effective ministerial education and would hinder constructive relationships between church and school. They did not want to lose sight of points previously made concerning the overall aim of theological education and the necessary coinherence of its dimensions. They preferred to ask: How might the church and the school better cooperate in the realization of this common educational aim? Answering this question might, of course, involve drawing some distinctions between the tasks proper to each; but these distinctions should not, they felt, be drawn in advance of the discussion between church and school over these matters, and they might turn out to be quite different from what either party by itself might anticipate. For example, just as the church may need to find new ways of, in effect, "being a school" for its leaders, so the school may need to find new ways of "being ecclesial," that is, of nurturing Christian existence, helping people (students, staff, and faculty) learn to live together and care for one another, and making more explicit connections between the life of learning and the life of religious faith.

Some such hope for a discussion productive of new insights animated this consultation itself, and the hope was not disappointed.
Since this odyssey began in the summer of 1990, I have been thinking about and then struggling with and finally agonizing over a series of questions which I assumed were resolved. In fact, until this exercise, they were not questions I had ever asked. They are basic questions, going to the heart of my life and how I have invested it for the past three decades.

I. What skills does one need in order to be an effective clergyperson? What does one need to know?

II. How does one learn the skills and procure the knowledge? Where is it learned and procured? Who teaches?

One would think that the answers to those questions are fairly simple. And if not simple, at least obvious, particularly for one who has been doing the job without interruption for thirty years. The truth is that the more I thought the less certain I was that I knew, or could articulate what I knew, about my own profession and my practice of it.

This paper will attempt to explore these basic questions on the basis of my own life experience. While it is risky to describe a world...
on the basis of what one can see from one's own front porch, I have concluded that this is the best way I can serve the Basic Issues in Theological Education project.

First, a clarification. Christians are ministers. We are called, one and all, to the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. Historically, we have made a lot of trouble for ourselves when we have forgotten that the call to ministry is the call to discipleship, that it comes to all, that we are all members of the priesthood, and that professional leadership in the church is not the product of a "higher" or a "better" calling.

And yet there are leaders and some lead more effectively than others, and it is important not to lose sight of that reality in the interests of ecclesiastical/political correctness. I am happy to leave the question of whether God chooses particular men and women to specific types of ministry to the theologians, or to those who are our ecclesiastical gatekeepers, deciding who gets ordained and who does not. The fact remains: there are clergy who are effective leaders and clergy who are not.

How does it happen?

Formation

My first response to the question is new for me. Incredibly to me now, I had never encountered the idea of formation before the reading associated with the Basic Issues in Theological Education project. I'm embarrassed! Where was I? How could I have missed it? In a sense I have spent most of my energy for 24 months in the Basic Issues in Theological Education project thinking about formation and exploring where and how it happened.

I encountered two assumptions about formation, or spiritual formation, neither of which seemed, at first, to be true for me. The first assumption is that formation happens in a congregation. Beginning with baptism, proceeding through experiences of Christian Education and confirmation, individual faith is nurtured, and spiritual formation happens within that extraordinary complex of relationships which constitute the life of a particular congregation.

My initial conclusion was that it didn't happen for me that way. We were steady but indifferent Presbyterians. Compared to the inten-
sity and zeal of Baptist neighbors who attended church twice (on Sun­
day and Wednesday evening) for a staggering number of revivals,
traveling evangelists and Bible studies, our Presbyterian attachment
seemed negligible. Those people next door were “formed”!

And then, this past summer, I was invited to return to my home
church to speak in worship on the occasion of the congregation’s
one-hundredth anniversary. It was a provocative experience for me.
Of course I was “formed” there. In a covenant community, a com­
munity of faith, a congregation, a formation happens, as James
Fowler puts it, “a formation of affections . . . a person’s deep and
guiding emotions, the wellspring of a motivation in a person—in ac­
cordance with the community’s identification of its central passion.

So, yes, I was formed in a community whose central passion was
differently expressed from my neighbors’ zealotry, formed spiritu­
ally, that is, with a particular posture toward the life of faith in the
world. In that congregation I learned by watching that faithfulness
was not contradictory to involvement in the world, that there was
something a little worldly about this way of being religious, that be­
ing a Christian was not a matter of merely retreating from the world
to the cloister of like-minded friends but of figuring out how to live
in the world with integrity and courage and faithfulness.

I should have known it all along. The Reformed tradition says for­
mation will happen this way. One begins to learn about leadership
and discipleship in a congregation.

Parker Palmer provides an eloquent illustration:

I recall attending a Sunday School session in a small
Black church in the rural South. Only four or five people
were present, but the meeting functioned strictly accord­
ing to Roberts Rules of Order. The class president pre­
sided, a secretary took notes, and a parliamentarian was
available to resolve questions of proper process. The
whole scene struck me as overdone. With so few people in­
volved, would it not make sense to proceed in a more cas­
ual manner? When I raised the questions with the pastor
he informed me with some vigor that in such classes disen­
franchised people had a rare, even singular opportunity to
learn how to function in a political setting—how to get
one’s concerns on the agenda, how to argue one’s case.
... He argued, and rightly so, that I had witnessed the formation of citizens who were learning skills and gaining the confidence necessary to function effectively.  

And so it happens in different ways: formation designed by congregations in response to the realities of the culture, the particular world in which they live.

The second assumption is that spiritual formation also occurs in the places of formal theological education which may or may not be related closely and intentionally to congregations.

The Dean of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary argues that important spiritual formation happens in the midst of the process of theological education, whether it is intended or not. Early Presbyterians understood it and wanted it that way. When the Presbyterian General Assembly authorized the founding of seminaries in 1810, the resolution contained the following statement:

Filling the church with a learned and able ministry without a corresponding portion of real piety would be a curse to the world, and an offense to God and the people, so that General Assembly think it their duty to state that, in establishing a seminary for training up ministers... it will be their endeavor to make it... a nursery of vital piety, as well as of sound theological learning, and to train up persons who will be lovers as well as defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus.  

Steve C. Hancock's research at four Presbyterian seminaries revealed that:

Most graduates remember seminary years as a time of significant spiritual growth, but most wish their seminary had been more intentional about helping them grow spiritually.

Most of the efforts seminaries have made to help students in the area of spiritual development have been outside the formal, required curriculum.

48 QUARTERLY REVIEW / FALL 1993
Spiritual growth and development of seminary students seems to come as an indirect result or "by-product" of other activities . . . field education, service, social justice, new relationships with professors and other students. John Updike pokes fun at what he thinks happens at a university divinity school:

Believing souls are trucked in like muddy, fragrant cabbages from the rural hinterland and in three years of fine distinctions and exegetical quibbling we have chopped them into coleslaw saleable at any suburban supermarket. We take in saints and send out ministers, workers in the vineyard of inevitable anxiety and discontent.

It is not, of course, that simple. It is not "believing souls" who come to seminary so much as "seeking souls." But Updike does have the process right. Formation happens alongside of learning. Students learn new information and become new people.

Spiritual formation does happen in the community of faith, i.e., a congregation. More, and significant, spiritual formation happens in the process of theological education, intended or not. In fact, it would seem that structures of theological education, for example, a course in spiritual formation, are not as conducive to spiritual development as actual activity involving other people.

Therefore, it would seem that preparation for ministry should include life within a community of faith, not as an elective activity, but as the foundation, or the context, of the entire enterprise.

Management

It has been argued persuasively that the management model of clergy professionalism is essentially a sellout to the world, a symptom of the church's lack of direction and sense of identity and mission, a modern variation on the theme of "whoring after Babylon."

Perhaps, I'll risk arguing that whatever name we use to describe it and however we adorn it, management is a skill an effective clergyperson must have and which preparation for ministry must in
some way cultivate. My argument is essentially theological, incarnationally theological. "The Word become flesh and lived among us."
"We are the Body of Christ." We believe, as a matter of creed, in
the "holy catholic church." The Church is in the world. It may wish
it were not in the world. It may act as if it were in some other
world. It may exhaust its energy critiquing and hating the world. But
insofar as it is the Body of Christ, the Church is as radically in the
world as he was.

And those who would lead the Church, that is, enable it to iden-
tify its mission, articulate its mission, assist it to accomplish its mis-
sion, must know something about leading, enabling, and assisting
groups, communities, and organizations to do what they want to do.

Thus, management is part gift, part teachable and learnable skill.
How does one learn it? By reading about it, listening to good manag-
ers talk about it, watching effective managers manage. And by doing
it.

Fred Borsch has suggested that an effective clergyperson must
know how to lead, should show some evidence of having led some
organization, a club, a team, a class. I think he is right and I think,
furthermore, that the teaching and learning of management, includ-
ing leadership, is absolutely essential to effective professional minis-
try.

Theological education might begin simply by not denigrating a
management model of ministry so that graduate clergy all their lives
believe that time engaged in administration is time away from real
ministry, drudgery, a necessary evil. And then theological education,
insofar as it is preparation for ministry, might ask the people in-
volved in graduate management education about the management of
a congregation. Finally, preparation for ministry might include the
disciplined necessity of practicing management and cultivating lead-
ership skills by managing and leading.

The Church is, among other things, an organization which lives in
the world, has goals for itself and is willing to work for their realiza-
tion. Clergypersons are, whether they wish to be or not, church man-
agers.

Therefore, preparation for ministry should include learning man-
agement theory and experiencing management practice.
Knowledge

The third dimension of preparation for effective ministry has to do with specialized and general knowledge. The curricular content of theological education traditionally has focused on theology, history, and Bible. To close the gap between the academy and parish various bridges have been built: internship (borrowing from the traditional medical education model)—academic discipline followed by a period of resident apprenticeship; field work—practical experience concurrent with classroom study; and, of course, a wide range of academic courses described as "Practical Theology."

There may be major problems of relevance when the curriculum of theological education is confined to the centuries-old formula of theology, history, and Bible. But the problems are even more critical when "Practical Theology" becomes a "how-to" conglomerate of wise tidbits from the life and experience of a tired practitioner.

Edward Farley observes:

*The very structure of theological studies alienates the whole enterprise from praxis. Hence proposals on behalf of praxis made to that structure are quickly and easily absorbed and trivialized. Practical theology never has existed and does not now exist. The closest it ever came was a gleam in Schleiermacher's eye.*

And Don S. Browning puts the matter in a helpful new context:

*The process of practical thinking, whether it be religious or secular, is indeed complex. To think and act practically in fresh and innovative ways may be the most complex thing humans ever attempt. I wish it were otherwise. Life, especially modern life, would be so much simpler.*

Browning proposes an intriguing alternative to the classical format of theological education: all theology is practical; practical theology is not a "subspecialty" but "theology as such." Professor Browning would upset the apple cart of theological education, arguing that "practical thinking is the center of human thinking and theological and technical thinking are abstractions from practical thinking."
lieve Browning is onto something important. "We never move from
theory to practice, even when it seems that we do. Theory is always
embedded in practice."8

If he is even close to the truth there are enormous implications for
how theological education and preparation for ministry actually hap-
pen. To assume that successful scholarship in theology, history, and
Bible is equivalent to preparation for ministry is naive. To assume
that the addition of a course in Practical Theology or a fieldwork re-
quirement would resolve the matter is no less naive.

Somehow theological education and preparation for ministry must
occur in a place and time and context in which individuals are living
the questions, dealing with the people, managing the institution.

First, knowledge of theology, history, and Bible are requisite but
alone do not prepare for ministry. Second, praxis is always, by the
very nature of theological education, subject to trivialization. And
third, all theology is practical theology because that is the way hu-
man beings think.

Therefore, the Church is the primary place where preparation for
ministry happens, or perhaps more consistently, the Church is the lo-
cus where theological education can become preparation for ministry.

A Personal Journey of Preparation for Ministry

How and where did I learn? Who taught me? I wandered into the
B.D. program at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago
for two reasons:
— it was not a denominational seminary.
— a college advisor had suggested it as a place I might spend a
year or two pursuing the kinds of theological questions I was asking
at the time without anybody pressing me about professional ministry.

I found, to my satisfaction, that both reasons were actualized in
experience. And, ironically, it was the divinity school's neglect of
practical theology which contributed in a major way to my learning
how to be a minister.

By blessed accident, at the end of my first year at divinity school,
I ran out of patience with the endless pursuit of abstractions in the
lecture hall. And I simultaneously ran out of money. The latter was
no small crisis. I was married and the father of a newborn daughter.
A resolution to our fiscal crises appeared in the form of Union Church, a small congregation in a blue-collar community in the Calumet region of Northern Indiana, which had been subsisting for years by way of, or in spite of, the efforts of a string of student pastors from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and the Chicago Theological Seminary. It was a fateful decision, and no one thought it was a good one. The school worried about the daily twenty-five-mile commute. My parents were hoping I would come to my senses and go to law school. To them, Dyer, Indiana, sounded tragic. Sue and I saw it as a way to pay next month’s bills, a real house with a real backyard and $50 per week!

I had only the vaguest notion of how to do what the trusting souls of Dyer, Indiana, had agreed to pay me $50 a week and the use of a real house with a real backyard to do.

Whatever I know about being a minister, I started to learn it there. They didn’t teach me, but they were the patient and graceful context in which I could and did learn. In fact, I now know that a creative dynamic was set off by my being there which suddenly and dramatically transformed the academic rigor of the University of Chicago into preparation for ministry. Browning is right! Abstract thinking follows practical thinking.

I continue to try to exegete that experience.

How did I learn to preach?

I never sat for a course on preaching. There were none available. I listened to preachers; I had been listening all my life, but I listened with concentrated, white-knuckle intensity after I began preaching weekly myself. I listened to preachers in chapel—Joseph Sittler and James Nicols and Marcus Barth—and I read everything I could find, books of sermons and homiletics texts. I apprenticed myself to preachers without their ever knowing it. I learned to preach by the necessity of preaching and I am now convinced that it was critical that the necessity occurred while I was still in the environment of theological education.

When Granger Westberg lectured about “grief work,” I listened differently, I know, because I was still reeling emotionally from sitting at Johnny Johnson’s bedside, holding his hand as he died. He was not an abstraction or even a patient at the University clinic upon whom Westberg’s students called on in order to “write it up” for class. His widow and teenaged sons lived a block away from our

BASIC ISSUES IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION 53
house. They were in the pew the next Sunday after he died and they were going to hear what I said. The church was the context for theological education to become preparation for ministry.

A '60s social activist, committed to civil rights and the immersion of the Church in political issues, I plunged into local politics with Kennedyesque determination and vigor, taking public stands on a variety of issues. Whether the town should drill a new well or pipe in water from Lake Michigan was by far the "hottest" local issue. I was for lake water and in the process offended and infuriated my members, who wondered what lake water had to do with the gospel. I also wrote a letter to the editor of the town paper that was unkind and hurtful to a local politician. It was happening while I was reading, listening, and arguing in courses in social ethics. Someone suggested that the twenty-five-mile daily commute was the key to my learning, that I was living in two places thoroughly and simultaneously. And I am prepared now to suggest that it may be a helpful paradigm for the future.

And so, to a Proposal

I'm grateful for university divinity schools, for the academic study of religion, and for the rigorous, critical approach to theological inquiry as an expression of the human pursuit of truth.

But when theological education needs to become preparation for ministry, its locus should change, and the teaching responsibility should intentionally broaden.

I propose that preparation for ministry happen situationally, in places where praxis is daily necessity.

I propose residential experience as absolutely necessary, not in a graduate dormitory or a university neighborhood, but in a parish, a neighborhood where church people and non-church people live, move, and have being.

I propose teaching parishes, large urban congregations, clusters of inner-city ministries, and rural churches, to which students in preparation for ministry would be assigned and in which they would live and minister.
I propose intentional monitoring, apprenticing of students in preparation for ministry with experienced practitioners in a context of reflection and critique.

I propose to acknowledge where and how spiritual formation happens in the community of faith and to encourage those who think about and plan for the theological education of the future to force the issue of praxis by simply moving the location, or dividing the location between classroom and parish. I propose we celebrate that theological common ground upon which we all stand—namely that "the Word became flesh and lived among us," not in classroom or cloister alone, but among us, in the world, in communities of faith, congregations, parishes, the Church.

Notes

4. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
Throughout my time as a teacher of the New Testament and associated studies in theological schools and university, and now from another perspective in my office as a denominational leader, I have heard complaints about the gap between what is taught about the Bible in the seminary and its application or usefulness in congregations and other communities of faith.

It begins with a lament from a number of first-year seminary students. They often find historical-critical studies a poignant challenge to the understandings of Jesus and early Christianity that had been shaped in their congregations. Indeed, I was among those teachers concerned about students who in their first class on the Gospels did not weep at least once. The mold of naive conceptions had to be broken, I and others argued, in order that new and larger understanding of the faith could grow. The students had to be made to see the absolute historicity of Jesus and of the Gospels in order that they could begin to comprehend the full meaning of incarnation. The process

Frederick Borsch is Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Los Angeles, CA. A version of this article was presented as the 1992 Colwell Lecture at the School of Theology at Claremont.
was sometimes described as disintegration and reintegration. I likened it to how Paul Ricoeur understood the effect of a number of Jesus' stories and sayings: reorientation by disorientation. In order to see in new ways, the old ways of seeing and thinking had to be radically challenged—disturbed.

I took seriously my responsibility to help with the task of reorientation and reintegration. In advanced classes and seminars, I sometimes taught jointly with professors of systematic and pastoral theology, and with ethicists and professors of preaching. Two of the books I wrote during the 1980s were attempts on my part to show how historical-critical New Testament studies and contemporary experience and issues could be interrelated and seen as interdependent. The bulk of my effort as a seminary teacher was, however, directed to imparting historical-critical methods and information with help from literary criticism. I felt strongly that this was the only chance the next generation of theologically trained leaders for faith communities would have to master this perspective and these tools in order to share the New Testament in depth with others.

Resistance to Learning Critical Method

It took me some years to realize how difficult the task was. There were, of course, stories of gains and successes, but many returning students told me of their failures fully to use what they had been taught. Sometimes they lamented that people did not seem interested in historical criticism in any real depth—especially if it challenged cherished understandings. They spoke of an anti-intellectualism among at least a number of their people and even a growing suspicion of what was being taught in seminaries. On occasion they complained directly about what they saw as the failure of their teachers to help them make useful in their ministries the information and historical perspective they had gained. The process of reintegration was evidently not working well.

Professors of the Bible complained, too, and I was ready to join them. There were many obstacles, from the fact that we were supposed to do all this in four or five courses on the Bible in seminary; to the unreadiness of clergy to be continual learners; to television,
busy lives, and congregations' resistance to what they saw as challenges to their faith.

Viewing the problem from another perspective, some voices have suggested that there is almost a conspiracy afoot to keep critical information from the faithful lest they be overly challenged and scandalized. Speaking for himself and other members of the "Jesus Seminar," Robert Funk has registered forms of this suspicion.

Yet, although there may well be a reluctance among the clergy to share this information forcefully, it is hard to believe that this reluctance is operative in many of our seminaries. In over thirty years of learning, teaching, and association with theological schools, I can witness to the fact that the teaching of the historical-critical perspective has dominated the course offerings. The results of the Jesus Seminar might even be said to have a certain naive confidence about them compared to one of the first books on the New Testament I was given to read. In concluding his 1934 Bampton Lectures, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, R. H. Lightfoot wrote: "It seems, then, that the form of the earthly no less than the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of his ways."

Even when it is agreed that historical critical studies can give us more access to knowledge of the past than Lightfoot suggests, there is yet a lack of agreement as to how useful that information may be. Dennis Nineham in The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Study of the Bible in an Age of Rapid Cultural Change is among those who have raised tough questions about the commonalities which would allow understanding to pass between ancient cultures and our own. He emphasizes the pronounced changes which have taken place in recent centuries. L. William Countryman has offered an example of this "distance," important for church discussions, when he illustrates how different the attitudes of biblical generations are from our own with respect to sexual mores and ethics, particularly with respect to impurity and the status of women. Countryman does then go on to hold, however, that armed with this awareness there is much of contemporary value that can be learned from New Testament studies.

In his book The Two Horizons, Anthony C. Thiselton is finally optimistic about the possibility of learning from other cultures—specifically that of the New Testament. People of different times do live
in different world perspectives, but there are commonalities in the human condition and ways of bridging the horizons.

Resistance in the Parish

Yet even if the seminary professor were to be optimistic about this bridging, he or she may still be far less sanguine about the ultimate effects of all the instruction in the theological academy upon most of the congregations. Edward Farley speaks pointedly of the problem with regard to theological knowledge in general and to contemporary biblical literacy in particular:

Why is it that the vast majority of Christian believers remain largely unexposed to Christian learning—to historical-critical studies of the Bible, to the content and structure of the great doctrines, to two thousand years of classical works on the Christian life, to the basic disciplines of theology, biblical languages, and Christian ethics? Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, physicians, homemakers, scientists, salespeople, managers of all sorts, people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain at a literalist, elementary-school level in their religious understanding? How is it that high-school-age church members move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA, and calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of scripture?

Along with Farley a number of other teachers have observed how many seminary graduates, evidently feeling unprepared to use their learning in their ministries, tend to lapse into biblicist or quasi-biblicist approaches. Or they largely ignore the Bible and instead concentrate on administrative, therapeutic, or other forms of pastoral ministry, oftentimes uninformed by Scripture.

All church leaders bear a responsibility for seeking to change these dynamics. We need to analyze the systemic problems which cause many clergy to feel that they are expected mainly to be pastors.
and administrators at the expense of time and energy for various forms of teaching. With so many other demands on parishioners' time there is a need to be inventive with the use of short courses, weekends and week-long "camps." Many congregations would benefit from more frequent and thoughtful sermons about Scripture, its content, authority, and uses. New disciples can be more carefully prepared for Christian living. More lay teachers need to be trained, and various media forms more artfully used.

In my ministry I am called to spend time with the clergy and other leaders, reflecting together on Scripture and its place in our lives. Together we read and discuss, recognizing the Bible as the record of people struggling with God, a book not full of absolutes and certainties, but full of God's presence. It is a fundamental tenet of orthodox Christian teaching that, as Jesus was incarnate in history, so was and is the Bible. As was true in its formation, it remains the community's book requiring interpretation and application if it is to be guidance and revelation for contemporary people.

New Methods and Approaches

In the balance of this paper I wish to discuss some understandings and approaches which I believe have been of help in theological schools for the work of bringing the Bible into a more central and critically useful role in the life of contemporary Christian communities. While there is, in my view, no one method or approach that will overcome all the distance and difference between the seminary and other communities of faith, a strategy which both teaches and practices a series of ways of using and interpreting Scripture can go far toward developing the commonalities of interest and concern. None of these approaches is new to theological education, but it is a thesis of this essay that a more thoughtful and concerned use of these approaches in seminary can make a significant difference to the ability of graduates confidently to help give the Bible an authentic and vital place in their ministries. Some of this reflection may also be of assistance in viewing the larger issues regarding what is taught in seminary and how a greater focus and integrity can be brought to the theological curriculum.
Holism. The fundamental perspective from which I would approach
the teaching of the Bible in seminary views all true learning as best
understood holistically. Farley uses the Greek word paideia to refer
to older conceptions of education as well as to contemporary insights
which recognize that imparting, educating, and developing under­
standing along with knowledge involves not only the whole person
but also persons in communities of experience. A comprehensive
view of education includes a tradition of understanding as well as
contemporary information and knowledge. It gives important roles to
imagination, the creative intellect, and the interaction between theo­
retical understanding and the “making and doing” aspects of life.
Emotions and the body as well as the mind are part of learning and
education.

Under critique here are more limited views of education, which
need not be caricatured, but which, by stressing factual, demonstra­
ble, and “objective” information, slight the larger context of life
and learning. The awareness of the hermeneutical circle and the
“participatory universe” of learning in which the “hard” sciences
and all observation and study take place should continuously help
educators recognize that what is seen and understood always in­
volves much more than the measurable and quantifiable. Indeed, we
should today have a much keener insight into the awareness that
what is perceived is in many ways a product of what is looked for.
This, again, is not just a result of individual paradigms for viewing
and learning, but arises from communities themselves, whose lan­
guage, customs, mores, and beliefs shape individual ways of perceiv­
ing.

In two of the areas of scholarship integrally related to biblical
studies—history and literature—these awarenesses have, of course,
reached an acute, one might even say painful, heightening from
which they may recently have begun a movement of common-sense
reconsideration. But the vigor and excitement of the deconstruction­
ist urge remain as salutary reminders of the severe limits of human
certainty and how unfathomable are the depths of necessary prejudice
in the interrelated roles of teacher and student, writer and audi­
ence.

Indeed, the varied faith interests and commitments of believers
forced the field of biblical hermeneutics into becoming an early
leader of the apprehension of the hermeneutical circle and its implica­
tions. The early promise of critical scholarship to provide a certain basis of historical information regarding the Bible—either to reinforce or to critique faith—was undercut almost before it had begun to bear fruit.

A contemporary comprehensive approach to biblical studies would, however, in no way discount the importance of historical and literary critical approaches. While efforts to understand earlier world views and "what was meant" by the biblical writers must always remain problematic, probabilities and weight-of-evidence judgments continue to be vital to any teaching and learning that has integrity. Our scientific awareness that the fundamental systems of the universe are ones of probabilities rather than immutable laws should encourage rather than discourage a search for what is more likely, even if certainty is most often beyond human grasp. It has aptly been suggested that an analogy with the standards of the civil rather than the criminal law can be helpful. On this basis biblical scholars, working in their large field-encompassing-field of studies, and taking as fully into account as possible their own prejudices and limitations, will seek, not to prove beyond doubt, but to provide the most likely interpretations of biblical events and writings.

Social Setting. Essential to these efforts to understand the past is the keen awareness of the social circumstances in which the biblical materials were formed—all the conditions and influences on interpretive processes of those who, interacting with their life events and earlier traditions, gave the Bible its form. Although there was more sociology of religion in earlier biblical studies than contemporary practitioners sometimes credit, this approach has been much more fully and self-consciously developed in the last two decades of scholarship. Where applied to the teaching of the Bible in seminary, the benefits are considerable and should be reinforced.

One the one hand, sociologically informed interpretations of biblical writings help to remind students of the differences and distance between ourselves and the biblical materials, that we live in a different horizon (or, in some cases, different horizons) from the several horizons of the peoples of the biblical eras. In any number of ways (from understandings of the cosmos, natural forces, and anatomy, to sexuality, lifespan, views of social relations, and of the individual and the community) we are dealing with world and life perspectives.
that are often strikingly diverse. These differences should regularly make the interpreter take a step backward before trying to identify with earlier lives and circumstances. The differences will mean that any informed strategies for bringing our contemporary horizon and those of the past into touch will always involve some form of second naïveté.

On the other hand, it is through better appreciation of the density and "thickness" of daily life conditions of past ages that we today may also come to sense commensurabilities, common denominators, and forms of kinship. An understanding of the circumstances which conditioned the hopes and fears, the dreams and provications, the heartbreaks and valor of biblical people can bring us nearer to them. The awareness, for example, that they too lived with conflict and controversy, with ambiguities, tensions, and doubts, and, especially in later times, with considerable diversity around them and in their ranks, offers points of contact for contemporary Christians concerned with holistic education and paideia.

Dialogue with the Text. These understandings also invite a next step on the part of those living in theological schools who are searching for insight and revelation through the Bible. This step, in interaction with historical-critical and sociological methodologies and learning and drawing upon literary criticism and narrative theology, involves bringing our contemporary experience and concerns into dialogue with the biblical materials. There are varied approaches to what is often called "Bible study," but they all include two basic understandings. The first (given its more academic dress in reader-response criticism) is that a text does not exist (other than marks on a page) without its being read and without interpretation and interaction with it. While some of this interaction may be regarded as more congruent and relevant to the text being studied, all response will have a certain legitimacy in having been prompted by a reading or hearing of the text. It thus becomes a part of its history of interpretation.

There is also, however, a legitimate concern that Bible study in some congregational and related settings can drift away from dialogue with the text, the text becoming little more than the starting point for personal reflections. There are various ways of fostering a more critical dialogue, including periodic rereadings of the text. The
use of different translations can sometimes elicit pointed questions. Annotated Bibles and sections of commentaries can bring helpful insights and further questions. One who has theological training can help foster this dialogue either directly or by training others. Indeed, it is a thesis of this paper that one will be much better equipped to do this if he or she has participated in Bible study in theological school.

Thus, the second basic understanding is that every Christian community has the opportunity to be a "scriptural community," and this can include the theological seminary. All who are members of the community would then be regularly involved in Bible study, reading and reflecting on the Scriptures together, asking what suggestions and meanings they find for their individual and corporate lives, and sharing these with one another. As a scriptural community the seminary would steep itself in biblical narrative, recognizing that the story form as well as content helps to provide that shaping of perspective which offers guidance for the formation of character for service, direction for hope, and interpretation of suffering.

Students and faculty would then participate in a community of interpretation in which various voices can be heard and all experience and insight have value. Diversity becomes of particular significance in such a community and will be missed when it is not present.

Recently I was part of a group reflecting on Mark 2:23-28, the story of the disciples plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath day. We were discussing the role of law and how the Sabbath observance has always been controversial in Judaism and Christianity. One of our members told us she had not eaten that day and that the story had another emphasis for her.

The "hermeneutics of suspicion" thus comes into play. All of us who have studied and taught in theological schools are aware of how privileged life in them often is. We know how seminarians, when reflecting on the story of the Good Samaritan, are inclined to identify with the Samaritan—the one in charge with the means to help. Those living in disadvantaged situations tend, however, to see themselves as the beaten and oppressed individual (who is, in fact, the central figure of this story). I am reminded of a time years ago when, just after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., I took a New Testament class from Evanston down to the near north side of Chicago to a church around which fires were still smouldering from riots the night before. Our texts came alive in special ways that day.
In biblical study sessions people of different backgrounds, classes, and ethnic groups can speak from their perspectives and concerns. The voices of women may bring sharp critique out of their experience of the Bible's shortcomings and its cultural conditioning. By the offering of such criticism, together with longing and willingness to share experiences, doubts, and fears, a context for biblical interpretation is fashioned which has strong parallels with those of other scriptural communities outside the seminary. It is unlikely that in such settings the Bible will seem dull or be only a document from the past. When people are asking how a biblical passage affects their lives, real contact with real world issues is likely. New insights and revelation are always a possibility, with historical, critical, and related understandings regularly providing background, correctives, and enrichment. The student gains not only information but also experience in use of the Bible which can be carried over into other communities. Indeed one can ask whether, if this does not happen in seminary, it is likely to take place with integrity for seminary graduates in congregational settings.

Such biblical study in seminary is demanding of faculty members. It is demanding, of course, in terms of time, but even more so in terms of commitment to community, that is, to becoming members of a community of learners as well as teachers. Yet, many faculty have been trained to do their work in highly individualistic ways, and the critique of non-communal approaches to the Bible in congregations must take into account how the Bible is taught to its teachers-to-be. The critique that the theological curriculum is fragmented and that seminary teaching and learning are lacking in integration may stem as much from this individualistic tendency as from more theoretical issues. The experience of being part of a scriptural community can help faculty members to become more of a team and will inevitably cause them to ask about the relevance and place of scripture in their own course work. They will find themselves called upon to demonstrate a certain "bilinguality," translating between the biblical world and their own, each "language" providing some critique and challenges for other areas of study.

Authenticity will require that faculty be understanding, insightful, and properly critical of both the contemporary world and the biblical teachings and perspectives. The theological school will then need to be an intellectual center for contemporary life as well as a scriptural...
community, in part because that is what a genuine scriptural community in an academic setting requires for interpretation.

**Biblical Theology.** This bilinguality and interaction will lead to a completing step which must be integrated with the others. Questions regarding the inspiration and authority of the Bible will naturally arise and necessitate a biblical theology which can respond to and sustain the experiences of contemporary use and study of the Bible along with historical-critical study and related learning.

No doubt some will ask why such reflection on and use of the Bible should have so central a role in the life of a theological community. Why should biblical study as a community activity be given any preference in these ways over, let us say, systematic theology, practical theology, ethics, or integrated reflection on field work?

My response would be that the Bible provides the stories which have always given identity to the Christian community: stories of the gardens of Eden, Gethsemane, and paradise; stories of creation and slavery; of exodus, exile, and return; of Moses and David, Ruth and Esther, Job, Jonah, and Jeremiah; of a child's humble birth; of healing and exorcism; Bartimaeus and Mary Magdalene; seeds and sowing and reaping; dinner parties, prodigal son, and Good Samaritan; meals shared, temptations, misunderstandings, betrayal, crucifixion and new hope and challenge on the roads to Emmaus and Damascus. These stories and related materials are the base data and the primary theological core of Christian community. In the same way that not knowing the stories of a family means that one is not a full member of the family, so not to know these stories undercuts full membership in the community of Christians. It is the one "language" shared by Christians of different races, cultures, and economic backgrounds. Throughout the Church's history the scriptures have called for the formation and reformation of faithful communities before God. It is both appropriate and necessary that dialogue with them—bringing to bear pastoral experience, ethical concerns, and critical theological reflection—be at the center of the life of every Christian community. Placing study of the community's central documents at the heart of the life of a theological school could not only then help bring the Bible into a more central and communal role in congregations but could also help discover greater unity and focus in the whole of the theological curriculum.
The Story of Legion: A Case Study

In order to provide some illustrations of the impact and value of these suggestions about teaching the Bible in seminary, I want finally to look at stories of demon possession and exorcism and ask how they can have a place in the scriptural community of a theological school as well as in other communities of faith. I choose these stories because they bring acutely to the fore some of the issues discussed above. While the stories in some Christian communities are used uncritically in an age of television and computers, in many other church communities they are often ignored.

The story of Legion (Mark 5:1-20; Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39), for instance, which is the longest single narrative in the Synoptic Gospels, is virtually omitted from the Sunday lectionaries of the so-called mainline churches. This attitude was encouraged by earlier biblical scholarship, which sought to relegate this folktale about the Gerasene demoniac, along with related stories, to a stage of later development in the New Testament. But many scholars now believe that the historical Jesus was known as an exorcist and that his casting out of unclean spirits was central to his ministry and message.

Yet the tales are still often found to be an embarrassment to contemporary Christians. They are viewed as relics of superstition and of understandings which have little to say to the contemporary world or church. What is the scriptural community of the theological community to make of them?

There is, of course, a good deal of historical understanding and literary insight that we can bring to a story like that about Legion. One can notice, for instance, a number of characteristics of folktale: the huge number of pigs, the trickster aspect of the story in which the demons and Jesus seek to outsmart each other, and the final outwitting of the demons. The total reversal of behavior, the terrified anger of the herdsman and townspeople, and Jesus’ imperious manner with the demons would have occasioned satisfaction among early hearers of the story and a sense of relief, and even comic release, as order is restored and right prevails.

We may notice, too, the basic form of a healing story in which we have first a description of the illness, stressing its seriousness. Tension is then introduced as hearers are told of resistance or some further reason why the healing may be particularly difficult to per-
form. The method of the healing is then related and evidence is
given that the healing has been performed. Finally, witnesses to the
healing—some of whom may first have been disbelievers or mock-
ers—make their testimony. They are awed and dismayed.

We can also appreciate the figurative character of the story. Early
hearers would note the self-destructive power of evil. It causes the
victim to wound himself. A figure whom others cannot bind is self-
bound by forces within. This man who had been out among the dead
and cut off from community is in the story's conclusion enabled to
return to home and friends. The one who could only shriek and cry
out is now not only calm and able to speak intelligibly, but he can
also tell others what Jesus has done for him. Indeed, the story antici-
pates the conversion of Gentiles and gentile lands from demon pos-
session to discipleship. This individual becomes a prototype for the
converted Gentile. On a larger stage the banishing of the evil forces
into the sea figuratively returns them to the chaos from which they
have come. There is a struggle—ultimately cosmic in scope—be-
tween the forces of disorder and evil and those of right order and
good. People of Jesus' time would have recognized the allusion to
the Creator God overcoming the chaos monster. In this battle Jesus
participates and in this power of God he shares.

Having gained these and other insights, we may still, however,
feel at some distance from the story—perhaps particularly separated
from our own experience by the elements of the demonic and tele-
transportation. Those of us who reverence all life and who are also
conservationists will be disturbed by the treatment of the pigs, to say
nothing of the waste of all that ham and bacon. This "distance" can,
of course, be helpful in our interpretation of the story and for our
awareness that people of other eras experienced life differently from
ways in which we "see" and comprehend.

Yet it also takes only a modicum of second naiveté and a few
probing questions to allow for a more personal participation in the
narrative. Perhaps the story can be read dramatically or acted out in
some way. In times when I have done this with others there are often
individuals who have stories of their own to tell about recognizing
forces within them—part of them, yet seemingly inimical—which
make them want to punish themselves, which inhibit communication
and community. Sometimes those forces may seem to swarm and

TEACHING THE BIBLE
overwhelm and make one fear that there is no power that can bring calm and order.

The group may go on to reflect about the nature and source of these powers and how people and communities may be helped to deal with them. They may continue on to recognize ways in which the forces can seem to gang up, as it were, and gain power in the larger society in terms of fear of others, anxiety’s greed, racism, sexism, militarism, destruction of the environment, and gross economic injustice. Was the beating of Rodney King not in some ways like Legion’s story? What “possessed” these policemen? What is possessing other parts of our society? Where, if anywhere, is the power and courage to fight back?

How does the experience of this story relate to the baptismal promises to “renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God,” to “renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God,” to “turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior,” and “to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ”? Indeed, the Baptismal Covenant may seem to be drawn from the story of this man healed from demon possession.

Does the power to overcome the forces of evil become known and manifest in promising to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself,” and in striving “for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being”?

The group may want again to distance itself historically, perhaps by reading the series of books by Walter Wink entitled Naming the Powers, Unmasking the Powers, and Engaging the Powers. Wink’s exegesis and analysis will soon return modern interpreters to the most profound of contemporary questions about our politics and ways of relating to each other and the world. Perhaps the group will also want to be thinking about ways that it can as a Christian community begin to do battle with the powers of disorder and evil.

That can be not only challenging but also threatening in the setting of the academy. But it is also then that students and faculty are in other ways most like other faith communities. Perhaps it is most then that the school becomes a theological community and the distance between seminary and congregation is narrowed in the teaching and use of the Bible.
Notes

8. See my brief discussion of the importance of faculty teamwork in "Faculty as Mentors and Models," *Theological Education* XXVIII/1 (Autumn, 1991): 71-75.
9. On the importance of theological schools being such intellectual centers, see James M. Gustafson, "The Vocation of the Theological Educator," *Theological Education* XXIII (Supplement 1987): 53-68.
Building Blocks for a Multicultural Congregation

A friend of mine once worked for an organization that oriented South African Blacks who had come to the United States for study. With each new group, the standard introduction included the statement that "the last bastions of segregation in the U.S. are visible in funeral parlors and the church."

I cannot speak for funeral parlors. But what a sad commentary on the church of Jesus Christ! In John 17:20-21, Jesus prays to God for the community of believers: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." In too many churches across this land, the church is not one. Racial and ethnic segregation remains. In too many communities the church reflects the divisions existing in society. Yet there are churches where the barriers of racial enmity and mistrust have come tumbling down. There are churches that transcend the difference of color, national origin, even language.

Over the past five years I have had the honor and privilege to serve as pastor of a church that includes people from five continents—thirty nations in all. I have experienced the excitement and joy of worshipping with people from many different cultures. Drawing upon my experience at Teaneck United Methodist Church and

Douglas Ruffle is Pastor of Teaneck United Methodist Church. A Ph.D. candidate in Theology and Religious Studies at Drew University, he is a member of the Northern New Jersey Annual Conference.
talks with others participating in multicultural churches, I have at­
ttempted to identify some building blocks of a multicultural congrega­
tion.

**What is Multiculturalism?**

Fifteen years ago a congregation with mixed races and nationalities
was "a church in transition." The assumption was that because of
demographic changes in the community, the church would undergo
changes as well, from say, an all-white to an all-black church. While
this change was taking place, it was considered a church in transi­
tion. Today a multicultural church means something quite different.
In November, 1992, The New Jersey Council of Churches spon­
sored the first in a series of gatherings of "multicultural churches"
in an attempt to understand better their characteristics. Of the seven
churches represented, all showed a desire to be diverse congrega­
tions. Moreover, each church was consciously striving to maintain
that diversity.¹

What we have in the United States today is the convergence of
many cultures living in proximity with each other. Some churches
are celebrating that fact as they intentionally seek to represent the
population of their communities. When we talk of "multiculturalism"
we refer to venues where differing cultures interact and interrelate.
"Multiculturalism" contrasts the idea of cultural assimilation. As­
similation assumes the predominance of one culture over others. It is
the basis of the "melting pot" theory where U.S. culture boils out
the distinctive features of foreign cultures. A culture is a shared way
of life for a people. Birth, language, shared ideas, and habits give
culture distinctiveness. Multiculturalism is the mutual respect
for the gifts of differing cultures as these cultures interact.

Multiculturalism carries with it an assumption that no one culture
stands over another. Cultural and ethnic diversity brings a variety of
gifts in the interaction of peoples in society. As Douglas E. Wingeier
writes, "Increased cultural and ethnic diversity demand that we ac­
tend to and respect the gifts of the various groups now represented in
our society, church, and institutions. It also requires us to develop in­
ter-cultural sensitivity and skill."²

¹

²
A popular analogy seeks to counter the old notion of the melting pot. In a multicultural world, we are in a stew pot together. The carrots, potatoes, vegetables, and meat do not lose their distinctive characteristics in the stew. They give flavor to the total brew.

There is a danger, of course, whenever we celebrate a new "'ism" such as multiculturalism. Lest we over-empower the phenomenon, the church must continually keep before it the central focus of what God is doing in our midst. We must be wary of being "politically correct" at the expense of the gospel. The churches gathered under the auspices of the New Jersey Council of Churches identified spiritual richness, not "multiculturalism," as the primary indicator of congregational health. Because they were alive spiritually, these churches attracted persons of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

My faith journey has informed my understanding of multiculturalism and what it means to build a church of many cultures seeking unity in Christ. From 1978 to 1986 I had the opportunity to live in a foreign country. My experience as an immigrant helped me understand many people who have joined our church.

A Personal Journey

Through my sojourn in Argentina, I gained important insight into what it means to immigrate to a new country. The new experience, the intensity of learning to speak another language fluently, new sights, sounds, and tastes enthralled me. Eventually, though, I experienced culture shock. I experienced the anxious yearning to return to familiarity. Afterwards, I began to appreciate my new adopted country and its culture, language, customs, and quirks.

I realize now that my experience in Argentina is similar to many of my parishioners in New Jersey who have come from India, Ghana, Nigeria, Colombia, and other parts of the world. Whatever the reason for immigrating, be it economic, political, or because one's family was here, most people go through a stage where they yearn for "home." There is conflict between embracing the new (country) and letting go of the old.

Feelings of nostalgia for my home country attuned me to such feelings in others. I also learned to be critical of my home culture when
I was away from it. The distance helped me discern better what was American about my faith and what was Christian. When we enter honest and open dialogue with persons from other cultures, we can begin to be critical of those cultures. The notion of "multiculturalism" in the church should not equate with cultural acceptance at any cost. Openness and hospitality to various cultures do not mean that we refrain from questioning practices that conflict with our idea of Christianity. There are many aspects of U.S. culture that I know are incompatible with the Christian faith. For instance, I think we must be critical of our heavy emphasis on individualism and our proclivity for violence. And, there might be cultural traditions from other parts of the world that need to be questioned. The point is, such honest discussion can only occur when we have built a basis of trust with one another.

I arrived at Teaneck United Methodist one year after returning from Argentina. It was a church known for its diversity. Through the years it had kept up with changes in the community. As Teaneck became more diverse, so did the United Methodist Church. An historically White-Anglo congregation, Teaneck United Methodist actively sought integration in the 1950s.

Churches tend to mark their progress by buildings erected or membership increases. The 1950s, however, proved to be a decisive time in terms of an intangible "building of the kingdom" at Teaneck UMC. In October of 1955, Wilma and Lamar Jones moved into a predominantly white neighborhood in the northeast quadrant of town. It was a time of transition. Many African-Americans were moving into previously white areas within the northeast section.

Wilma had grown up in the Methodist Church. Lamar had been an Episcopalian. Upon moving to Teaneck, they wanted a church nearby, instead of commuting to New York City as so many others had been doing. A member of the Teaneck Methodist Church, Dorothy Ling, learned of the Jones' arrival and their link with Methodism. She urged the Rev. Dr. Joseph Blessing, pastor since 1953, to call on them. Over the first year of the Jones' residence in Teaneck, Dr. Blessing called on them four times before they ever attended a service. He persistently wooed the Joneses and simultaneously prepared the church for their arrival.

Bill Moore, who joined the church in 1939, recalls that integrating the church proceeded well. One member recalls a few white
families leaving, but none who had been in the leadership of the church. At first the Joneses came only to worship on Sunday. Before long, however, the Couples Club asked them to join. Wilma joined the Women’s Society of Christian Service and Lamar took a position on the Missions Committee. Eventually both Wilma and Lamar began teaching in the Sunday school. 3

The Joneses were the only African-American family in the church for over seven years. It wasn’t until Teaneck itself became more integrated that other African-Americans became members. The seeds of a fully integrated church had been sown. The Jones family paved the way for others. The sixties and seventies would be decades when other ethnic minority families would join the church.

Increasing numbers of African-Americans joined the Teaneck United Methodist Church in the sixties and seventies. In the seventies a new wave of families originally from India came to live in Teaneck via New York City. Five of these families joined Teaneck United Methodist Church.

The seeds of integration that had been sown in the fifties and sixties and had taken root in the seventies began to grow in the eighties and nineties. Membership figures remained constant during the sixties but declined during the seventies. At the end of 1985, there was an increase in net membership and average Sunday attendance for the first time since membership began to decline. The eighties saw integration in the church expand to include Caribbeans, Africans, Filipinos, East Asians, and Latin Americans. By the end of 1990, 25 nationalities were represented among the 266 members of Teaneck United Methodist Church (52.6 percent white, 25.5 percent African-American, 18.7 percent Asian, 2.6 percent Hispanic). Average Sunday attendance, which began to increase during the pastorate of the Rev. John Painter, continued its rise. Over the past two years five more nationalities united, so that today Teaneck United Methodist includes persons born in thirty different countries.

We are also experiencing unprecedented growth as a congregation. I say unprecedented particularly in light of what so-called church growth experts say about the “homogeneous unit principle,” which insists that church growth can happen only when parishioners are alike racially, culturally, or economically. Since 1987, Teaneck UMC has gone from an average Sunday worship attendance of 101 to 158 today. Membership has increased from 232 to 291.

BUILDING BLOCKS
My involvement at Teaneck United Methodist Church over the past six years has introduced me to a variety of cultures. One way that we have attempted to celebrate our diversity has been through special evenings of ethnic culture and cuisine. Last year we began the series with an evening of U.S. culture entitled "Pizzazz." For the price of admission, one received a piece of pizza, a soda, a salad, and a jazz concert. Our second event was "Caribbean Night" in which our members born in the Caribbean prepared food and arranged for entertainment. Posters decorated the walls. Recorded music played on a stereo system. After the dinner, participants danced to the rhythms of reggae. Last April we held "India Night" along a similar format, though instead of participatory dancing, Indian entertainers performed the singing and traditional dance.

As part of our World Communion celebration four years ago, we encouraged folk to come to church dressed in the traditional garb of their place of birth. Since then, many of the women from India and Africa who attend our church dress in native garb every Sunday. In November of 1992, our African members presented "Africa Night." These events have afforded an opportunity for everyone to taste the cuisine and to hear the music of the different cultures. Future events include "Southern Comfort," presented by those from our church who come from southern states; "East Asian Night," to be presented by our Philippine, Korean, and Japanese members; "Western Night" that will feature square dancing; and "Latino Night," to be presented by our Spanish-speaking members and friends.

How do we cultivate the sensitivity and skill to minister in a multicultural context? What training should a pastor or lay leader have to help foster a ministry that invites persons of differing backgrounds into the congregation? When I was appointed to Teaneck United Methodist Church, I had no idea what to expect. The bishop appointed me there because of my overseas experience in mission. There is no question that my experience in Argentina helped me understand immigrant peoples. Yet I think it would have been helpful to receive an orientation to ministry in the multicultural church. I have identified a few "building blocks" toward that end.
Building Blocks for a Multicultural Church

1. Understand clearly your primary task. All churches, whether homogeneous or multicultural, should work at clarifying their primary task. We at Teaneck United Methodist have been working and praying to discern what primary task God holds for us. It is a project in progress as we seek to improve on our mission and ministry. So far we have articulated that our primary task is to create, empower, and energize disciples of Jesus Christ—people who tirelessly minister to every soul they encounter and continually seek to deepen their own relationships with God. This primary task includes five components. To fulfill our primary task, TUMC and its members will:

   a. Foster Spiritual Development. Help each individual, guest, and child deepen his or her relationship with God through well-informed Christian ministry.
   b. Nurture. Assure that every part of the church family is nourished and empowered physically, emotionally, and spiritually, so that we are fully equipped to do God's will.
   c. Reach. Work tirelessly in carrying out God's will in our own families, places of work, communities, nations, and world.
   d. Include. Assure that every member of our unusually diverse congregation feels a deep sense of belonging at TUMC.
   e. Tell. Share widely our experience in building a Christian community that transcends ethnic divisions.

   These five strategies are components to the primary task. Without any one of these, our task at Teaneck United Methodist is incomplete. The language you use will surely be different. The process of identifying a primary task, however, is vital to the health of your church. The components of that task should reflect intentionality in reaching across cultural lines.

2. Seek racial harmony. To be a truly inclusive church, it is important to examine and recognize racism in our midst. We need to identify the demons and then work on strategies to cast them out. Bert Affleck, writing in the Journal of the Academy for Evangelism, says that "racial harmony means that each of us will be aware that none
of us is free of racist tendencies, whether overt or covert. 5 Affleck goes on to say that racial harmony means that we begin to see each other as children of God regardless of color or national background. Racial harmony finds its basis in the belief that all persons are created in God’s image. We must be intolerant of racial prejudice and protest any form that we see or hear.

3. Understand the changes happening in your environment. The demographics of our world are rapidly changing. A major factor in New Jersey's growth is the increasing presence of immigrant people along the eastern part of Northern New Jersey. The Center for the Study of Pluralism at Ramapo College in a newsletter entitled New People-New Cultures in Bergen County, N.J. says that “the current increasing presence of immigrant people in Bergen County is a suburban phenomenon.” It is not restricted to Bergen County. Similar trends are occurring in Hudson, Passaic, Essex, and Union counties in New Jersey and Rockland County in New York. The trend is due in large part to changes in the immigration practices after 1965 legislation. While immigration has opened to almost all countries, preference is given to persons with skills and education. In a county like Bergen, white communities have experienced a population decrease because of a low birth rate and retired persons moving out of the area. Filling the void have been immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Another factor in this phenomenon is the increase of jobs in the corporate, professional, and service levels in suburbia.

There is every indication that this trend will continue in other counties in the northern half of the state. We miss opportunities when we are not aware of changes. I have discovered that many West Africans and Caribbeans grew up Methodist in their native lands. We need to keep abreast of demographic changes.

4. Cultivate an attitude of humility concerning other cultures: celebrate the stew; avoid the melting pot. This building block underscores the notion that we are in the stew pot together. There is no room for cultural superiority in a church that is trying to build a multicultural congregation. Exciting things happen when we are open to the way people have done things in other lands.

A church needs to employ cultural sensitivity and skill in such a way that makes it open. In building a multicultural congregation, each culture must have a say in its style and direction. If the church is historically white, European-American, must another culture as-
similateto its style (the melting pot), or can a new identity emerge from the mix of peoples (stew pot)? Examine how certain traditional practices are received by new cultures. Can stewardship be handled differently? Are there ideas regarding the church’s involvement in mission, stewardship, evangelism that come from another country that can be tried? Each new culture added to the congregational stew can add flavor to the total brew.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that “the first service that one owes another in a community is listening.” The church that seeks to bring unity amid diversity requires careful listening across cultural and language barriers. For a pastor serving a multicultural congregation, customs surrounding death and burial or weddings tend to be particularly culture bound. It is wise to talk about expectations and customs before a funeral or a wedding service.

5. Sow seeds for tomorrow’s church today. Are there ethnic or racial groups represented in your geographical area that are not present in your church? How can you approach these groups winsomely? What must you learn about the different cultures? Can you strategize to reach out intentionally to a specific ethnic or racial group? Teaneck United Methodist sowed seeds for its present multicultural mix in the 1950s. Yet there are newer ethnic and racial groups living in our area that are not now represented in our church. How can we sow seeds for the day when folk of Korean heritage no longer speak Korean and no longer have such a strong need to congregate exclusively with other Koreans? How can we better serve the needs of the fast growing Spanish-speaking population in our area?

In a world so torn and divided across racial and ethnic lines, I believe the church can provide the space where peoples of differing cultures can come to know one another, appreciate one another’s gifts and establish enduring friendships. In spite of the sin of racism and our human imperfections, we can experience racial harmony in the church. We can discover the unity that comes with faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel challenges us to “make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). The multicultural church understands clearly its primary task; it squarely addresses the sins of racism and prejudice as it seeks racial harmony; it understands the demographic changes happening in its environment; it cultivates an attitude of humility about other cultures, celebrating the stew and avoiding the melting pot; and it sows the seeds for tomorrow’s church today.

BUILDING BLOCKS
Notes


Creating Heroes

In the lectionary cycle during the fall of 1993 a series of stories about Moses and the founding of Israel appears. These texts from the Exodus and beyond tell of Moses as a great hero of the faith, steering the people by divine command through their struggles and, eventually, into the promised land. Such stories make up the framework of Israelite history that many of us carry in our minds, firmly implanted through Sunday school lessons and movies by Cecil B. DeMille. Moses is the heroic character whom God raises up to deliver the chosen people from Israel. Moses is the one who makes things happen for the rag-tag bunch of Israelites who leave Egyptian slavery to form their own nation.

Moses is certainly one of the Old Testament’s most colorful characters. We hear more about him than about almost any other biblical figure. We know the details of his birth and death and even the names of his wife and father-in-law. All of this information about Moses serves a purpose beyond mere description. The development of Moses’ character allows the reader access into a time of Israel’s history, a time when its identity was forming. As a result, those who read about Moses must keep an open eye for the themes about Israel’s development as well.
These five lectionary passages progress well, beginning with the Ten Commandments. This provides a summary of the law that sets forth the identity of the Israelites vis-à-vis the identity of other surrounding nations. Then, the focus shifts to Moses' special knowledge about God, a knowledge that others in Israel (even Aaron) did not possess. At Moses' death, Joshua inherits this special relationship with God and becomes the next leader for Israel.

In all of these stories, the importance of a hero becomes paramount. God works through heroes of the faith to provide leadership for the Israelites, to enable them to progress to the promised land. But the passages are also about a vision of life and of relationship with God, and this vision receives the first attention.

A Vision of Relationship: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

This part of the lectionary cycle begins with one of the Old Testament's best-known passages. These verses from Exodus 20 contain the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, in the form most familiar to today's Christians. The story of the first proclamation of this law is part of the cycle of narratives and law centering around Mount Sinai, as are the next two sections of the lectionary readings from the Book of Exodus. The Sinai narratives provide a rich tradition of God's presence. Mount Sinai looms over the wilderness passage between Egypt and the Promised Land. In the midst of that journey through barrenness, God meets the people and talks with them. In this revelation of God, the people's future becomes clear. The Israelites—a large company of slaves and poor people, under the leadership of a former government official—have left Egypt, and they go immediately to Sinai. They know their goal, for God and Moses have told them that God is giving them the land where the Canaanites have dwelled. But there is still much that the Israelites do not know. They do not know how to get to that land, and they do not know what to do once they get there. They do not know if Moses is really trustworthy, and they have never met this God who called them out of Egypt. In the midst of all this uncertainty, God appears and makes plain statements to them.
In Exodus 19, the Israelites arrive at Sinai, and God and Moses meet halfway up the mountain (Exod. 19:3). God's first statement to Moses explains what the Israelites need to know:

*Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.*

(Exod. 19:3-6)

Sinai is God's place. God brought the Israelites out of Egypt so that they would come to God at Sinai and meet with God, to learn about the kind of relationship that they should have. When Moses first spoke to Pharaoh, he explained that God wanted the Israelites to observe a religious festival with God in the wilderness (Exod. 5:1). This is exactly what happens. The first goal of the exit from Egypt is to meet with God, here at Mount Sinai. Once the people arrive there, God begins to speak, and God's first large statement is the Decalogue.

The Ten Commandments do not begin with a commandment, but instead with a statement about relationship: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod. 20:2). This establishes the basic connection between God and the Israelites. At one level, the relationship is founded on God's action. God has brought the people out of their slavery to Egypt. By freeing them, God stakes a claim upon the Israelites. This asserts God's right to command the Israelites, a right grounded in God's saving activity toward them. Herein lies the root of the Old Testament's notion of law. The law is a response to God and to God's salvation. Law is not the prerequisite to grace or salvation; instead, law is the natural outcome of God's salvific choice of the people.

That choice makes Yahweh the God of the Israelites. The text does not stop with naming Yahweh; it asserts that Yahweh is "your God." This moves the text from a focus on God's nature and God's past activity to the present relationship of God and people. Yahweh...
is the God who belongs to the people, and these Israelite folk belong to God. Together, Yahweh and the Israelites form their relationship as God and people, journeying together through the wilderness from Sinai on to the land that they both will inhabit. The identification forms a partnership that is unique and powerful.

The partnership provides the basis for the law. The law therefore depicts the desired results of the partnership with God. Through following these laws, the Israelites will achieve both a religious purity and a social harmony, fulfilling the possibilities inherent in this relationship between a people and their God. The law offers a vision of the richness of life with God that should result from Israel’s liberation from Egyptian slavery.

The first set of the laws illustrates the religious purity that will be part of Israel as it reaches its ideal potential. The relationship between people and God will be exclusive, the people will respect Yahweh’s name, and all Israel will devote a day to the memory and worship of Yahweh. In these ways, Israel keeps its faith in Yahweh pure, and the practice of the Sabbath gives an opportunity for the community to express its faithfulness in concrete ways. Grounded in these religious visions, the text continues to establish social foundations for Israel. The relationship between God and people serves as the basis for social ethics within the community. Israelites honor the elder generation and refrain from murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and coveting.

Together, these Ten Commandments show how life should be. They describe the existence that God desires for the Israelites within this new land. In this way, law becomes formative for a new community. It provides a ground for being, and it constitutes an identity for these people who are fleeing Egypt and its slavery. While the law provides identity for the people in the present, it provides a vision of the future, specifically a future in the land that God gives to the people. God and people will inhabit this land together, living out their relationship in all of its wonderful potentiality.

When explained in these terms, the relationship between God and people sounds like a human relationship of love and commitment. Each partner takes on certain roles with regard to the other, and each promises the care and protection of the other. Such human relationships, embodied within behavior of faithfulness such as that mentioned within the Decalogue, build identity in the present and offer
glimpses of a future together. But the relationship between God and people that we find embedded within the Ten Commandments is of a different sort, and we must be careful not to let our metaphors get in the way. A mutual relationship of love and respect speaks of many of the aspects of the relationship between God and the people, but there are fundamental differences as well.

The relationship between Yahweh and Israel is not a partnership of equals, according to Exodus 20. Instead, Yahweh is a powerful God who states the terms of the relationship with Israel. These terms, as listed in the Ten Commandments, specifically instruct Israel to avoid other relationships of this sort with other gods. Adherence to Yahweh alone is the basis for this relationship’s continuance to fruition. But the reverse is never stated. God never asserts any exclusive loyalty to Israel. In some senses (though this analogy creates another imperfect metaphor), it is more like a parent’s love—the love and the commitment is not lessened by the number of children, and a parent’s act of affection toward one child does not negate the parent’s relationship with other children.

Throughout the Bible, God’s commitment to the chosen people does not interfere with God’s love for the whole world. This repeated theme never fails to disturb us. We want God’s undivided attention. We want God to love us in ways that negate God’s love for others, so that we can rest assured that in any potential conflict God will intervene on our behalf. With these attitudes rooted deeply within our theology, assertions of God’s love for others shocks us. “Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the LORD. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?” (Amos 9:7). Of course, God has rescued and liberated Israel, but that does not mean that God takes only Israel’s side. There are times when God saves other nations and liberates them. God is involved in other ongoing relationships of care and commitment. The law does not bind God to us in restrictive ways.

The New Testament also reflects this theme of God’s freedom. Jesus compares his followers to a flock of sheep, and then asserts, almost in passing, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold” (John 10:16). This is much more than a sanctification of denominationalism. The Gospel of John insists that by loving the world, God’s commitments transcend human obligations to religious purity. Of
course, God’s involvement with the world is not at all detrimental to the chosen. God’s love for all does not deplete God’s love for us. Thus, we are right to emphasize God’s love for us as the type of relationship embodied within the law, which envisions life with God and with each other.

As clear as God’s love for us may be, a problem occurs when we use the Ten Commandments—or any biblical law—to limit God. The Decalogue envisions life with God, and the vision is a beautiful one. We rightly want to experience the law’s future of peace and harmony among people, and we long to live with God in the land that God gives us. But this vision easily turns to dreams of domesticity. On the mountaintop of Sinai, Israel pledged itself to follow Yahweh as nomads, as travelers without promise in a risky world. Before long, the wilderness of Sinai became the lofty reveries of Jerusalem, where David built a palace and Solomon built a temple, where Yahweh would dwell forever, ensconced in smoke and deep darkness (1 Kings 8). The faith of Sinai was dynamic, ever changing and shifting, but Israelite religion soon developed into a temple, with God safely static inside temple walls.

Law offers a vision of life and of social order. God offers such a life to humanity, desiring that they live with peace and with care for each other. But when human beings turn this visionary law into statements of limits, the law becomes a separation, dividing people from God and prescribing the precise modes by which each party can relate to the other. This restriction limits God and insists that God deals with humans only in certain predefined ways. The limitations we place upon God can be subtle, such as the affirmation that God loves only those who follow the law, or that God’s promises are such that our compliance with the law mandates God’s grace and favor upon us. In either case, such interpretations of the law are merely human attempts at control, whether control over our neighbors by threatening them with damnation if they refuse to follow our interpretations or control over God by insisting that God has an obligation to fulfill certain promises to us.

Once we transform the law into such controlling restrictions of God, the law quickly becomes a symbol of human fear. Such interpretations of the law try to assuage our fears of an uncontrollable universe, but they quickly point to our own failures at controlling even ourselves. If the law is not a vision of the way life can and should
be, and if it is a systematization of rules and regulations that control whether or not we receive God's love and blessings, then the law brings fear. This conception of law emphasizes that God's love is contingent upon our behavior, and that we must earn God's love and blessings through our own good behavior. This sort of relationship between people and God breeds fear, for it recognizes the human failures at control. In this way, law wrongly becomes the opposite of love, instead of functioning as a depiction of God's desire for us.

The lectionary's selection of verses containing the Ten Commandments does not stop with the commands themselves. Instead, the passage continues to include the people's reaction to the law:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

(Exod. 20:18-20)

The Hebrew Bible's tradition of the Ten Commandments moves from the vision of a bright potential future to the fear of God's unpredictable presence. Though the law presents a beautiful picture of the way that life can be with God, the people respond with fear because God is powerful and autonomous. The law does not limit God, and the people respond to God's freedom in this relationship with fear.

The Ten Commandments assert the primacy of humanity's relationship with God and affirm that social relations should be based upon that connection with God. The retelling of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 understands this theme clearly, and there is a powerful summary after the giving of the law:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deut. 6:4-5).

The proper context for the Ten Commandments is the love of God, and this love brings amazing closeness to God. But the Exodus
version of the Decalogue presents the other side of the matter: the law can bring fear, and fear introduces a separation between God and people. When the Israelites hear the law and see God’s powerful presence in their midst, they respond with fear, and they ask Moses to mediate between them and God. Moses will pass the word of God from the mountain top to the people below; they themselves will not face God directly. For these Israelites, the law brings fear, and fear brings separation, and separation necessitates a mediator, Moses.

By including Exod. 20:18-20, the lectionary shifts the emphasis of this passage. Instead of lifting up the law’s vision of life together, it concentrates on Moses’ role as the mediator between a powerful God and a people full of fear. This underscores Moses’ own character: he is the fearless one who stands before God. This is the theme that the lectionary chooses to pursue instead of focusing on the law’s vision for human harmony. With this in mind, the lectionary continues to present us with texts that emphasize Moses’ leadership of the fearful, failing Israelites. The lectionary does not return to the law but instead moves to a story of human leadership.

Meanwhile, Elsewhere: Exodus 32:1-14

In this passage, the scene shifts. After Moses receives the Ten Commandments, he remains on top of Mount Sinai, and God provides him with many more explicit instructions about how to organize the Israelites and their priesthood. At the end of these laws, God gives Moses two tablets inscribed with the covenant (Exod. 31:18). With that act, the narrative’s attention moves down the mountain, away from God and Moses and toward the people waiting at the bottom.

In Exodus 20, the narrator told us that these Israelites had asked to be separate from God, so that they would not risk exposure to the deity’s grandeur. The people’s desire not to see God points out the ironic nature of Exodus 32. In this passage, the people are uncertain what has happened to Moses (Exod. 32:1). They themselves were afraid to approach God, and they seem to assume that God may have killed off Moses—or that this God was just some invention of the crazed, dangerous Moses. Whatever their thoughts, the Israelites approach Moses’ brother, Aaron, with a simple, concrete request: Make gods for us.
The Israelites want something that they can see and touch. Their fear of Yahweh resulted in their unwillingness to approach God, and now they desire a god that they do not feel they have to fear. Once more, they want a god that can be controlled. Aaron obliges; taking the golden jewelry stolen from the Egyptians on the night before they left slavery, the priest fashions an idol, a golden calf.

Instantly, we criticize these faithless Israelites. They are so close to God’s awesome power, standing at the foot of the very mountain where God had waited for them in the midst of the wilderness. They had seen the flashes of lightning that demarcated God’s presence, and they had heard the thunderous voice of Yahweh, feeling it shake within their very bones. Why were they faithless? Why did they become idolaters in the foothills of Sinai itself?

Perhaps we should pause in our criticism. What exactly did Aaron and these Israelites think they were doing? The Israelites ask Aaron to make gods for them (Exod. 32:1). The Hebrew word here (and also in v. 4) translated “gods” is elohim. There are two translations possible for elohim, and one of them most certainly is gods or deities, a plural term referring to the many things that humans can and do worship. But elohim more commonly means God—the one God worshipped by the Israelites. Aaron’s act is clearly idolatry, the creation of an image to be worshipped, but perhaps Aaron was not making gods, but God. The Israelites wanted their only remaining priest to make God for them. Aaron complies and then tells the people, “Such is your God, O Israel, who brought you from Egypt.”

Aaron then proclaims a festival for Yahweh. It seems that Aaron did not understand himself to be creating a different god for Israel, but instead a more concrete and acceptable way to worship their God, Yahweh.

Years later, when King Solomon died and the nation of Israel split into two parts, the northern kingdom (which retained the name Israel) formed its own shrines and temples apart from Jerusalem. Two of these shrines were in the cities of Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:25-33; cp. Jud. 18:27-31). In each of these places, Jeroboam, the first king of the separate nation of Israel, erected a golden calf as an object for the people’s worship. As Jeroboam placed these images in the shrines, he explained his actions by quoting Aaron: “Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). Though the southern kingdom of Judah, centered...
around the Jerusalem temple, was highly critical of Jeroboam's religion, it seems that Jeroboam—like Aaron before him—was suggesting not the worship of another god, but merely a different form of worshipping Yahweh.

The Israelites in both times knew that the golden calf was not a god, but they understood it as a *symbol* for God that would aid in their worship. Every religion uses symbols, even religions as against images as some forms of Judaism and Christianity. In the Jerusalem temple, the Jews placed the ark of the covenant at the center of their shrine, in the middle of the Holy of Holies. They knew that the ark was not God, and they would not even have suggested that the ark *contained* God. They did believe that God sat on the ark, between the golden cherubim on top (Exodus 25-40 *passim*; see especially Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2; and Num. 7:89). The ark was not an image of God; it was a symbol for God, to be used in worship so that people could focus their attention on God's presence. Was the golden calf any different? Did it also serve not as an idol of another god but instead as a symbol for Yahweh? Perhaps the Israelites, both in Aaron's and in Jeroboam's time, understood the golden calf as the place where Yahweh sat, and so as an aid in the worship of the one God.²

Lest our criticism of idolatrous Israelites grow into hypocrisy, we need also to examine ourselves. In what ways do we wish to control God? Do we desire a visible, predictable deity, worshipped in stable ways in beautiful places? So often we do. Our worship often involves great expense and lavish decoration, costing millions more than a mere golden calf. Beyond that, we also desire a controllable God who follows the rules. Our theologies serve as our idols; our understandings of God provide us with the acceptable means of defining, limiting, and controlling God. We insist on the sure knowledge of God's character and the predictable nature of God's blessings upon certain people who live by certain rules, and in so doing we keep God more securely in a box than any temple or idol could do.³

What, then, is idolatry? It is much more than the construction of statues—that is only a physical manifestation of a more wide-ranging reality. Idolatry is the human reaction of control, based upon the fear of the unknown. The Israelites became afraid when Moses went up the mountain for so long, because *they did not know* what had happened to him (Exod. 32:1). Their lack of knowledge bred fear,
and they allowed their fear to grow into a desire for control of that unknowable situation. Thus, the Israelites asked Aaron to make God for them because they did not know. Perhaps idolatry, then, is the opposite of faith, if we understand faith as the acceptance of the unknowable. Such seems to be the definition of Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith accepts the unknown, and understands it as an expression of God; idolatry fears the unknown and attempts to control it, even through religion. In the case of the Israelites, they chose the religion of Yahweh for their attempt at controlling the unknown. But Yahweh refuses to be involved in that activity of restricting the future. God's interest is the embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, including the Israelites' uncertain future in the frightening land of Canaan.

The desire for security seems understandable to us, and our generation can certainly identify with the use of religion as a protection against life's uncertainties. God, however, calls this quest for security and control by its proper name: idolatry. And idolatry is death. Even in the face of the people's blatant idolatry, this text is not without compassion. God sentences the Israelites to death for their lack of faith, but Moses disagrees. In fact, Moses argues strenuously with God.

The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' " And the LORD
changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people. (Exod. 32:9-14).

God sees the people's attempt to control. As they order Aaron to construct an idol so that they can reassure themselves in the face of the unknown future, God watches from the top of the mountain and informs Moses about the people's unfaithful actions. Yahweh's reaction is swift: God will kill the Israelites and then start over with Moses. Moses has a chance to take Abraham's place as father of the nation, as well as his own place as prophet and lawgiver. But Moses rejects this offer, and instead argues with God, just as Abraham did before (Genesis 18). Moses insists that it would be a bad idea for God to kill off the Israelites. No one at all would gain from such an action, and it would permanently sully God's own reputation. In this way, Moses rejects the offers of privilege and instead argues for the salvation of his people, the Israelites. Just as Moses argued with Pharaoh for the people's freedom from Egyptian slavery, Moses convinced God to avoid divine slaughter. Moses once more functions as the protector and the savior of his people.

Thus, several distinct themes are woven together through the telling of this text. Firstly, the text shows Moses as the recipient of the law, which comes directly from God. Secondly, the people's lack of knowledge brings about fear, which results in their attempts to control God. These failed attempts to control God are nothing short of idolatry, and God thus condemns them. Thirdly, Moses appears as the people's protector. He stands up to God and argues with his Creator; through this struggle with God, Moses brings about a possible future for the Israelites.

Another theme links this passage with the lectionary's other selections. The prior passage listed the Ten Commandments and then depicted Moses' role as the mediator between the fearful people and God. Here again the people fear, and only through the actions of Moses, their intermediary, do the Israelites receive salvation, allowing them to continue their existence. Thus, these passages work together to emphasize Moses' role as the conduit for God's relationship with the people. Again, the lectionary functions to uphold and glorify the role of the clergy.

Of course, this passage also decries the evil idolatry of Aaron. This shows the alternative to a good and faithful clergy. Religious
leaders can lead the people to God, but they can also lead the people astray. This vast power of the priesthood—or today's clergy—requires that God's representatives uphold the strictest standards, for much is riding upon their leadership. Together, these passages focus on the power of leaders and the need for people to follow. The two leaders are shown to be opposites. Moses is all good, and Aaron is all bad. Each person chooses the leader who is absolutely right or the leader who is completely wrong. But religion, and even faith, is hardly that simple. The lectionary oversimplifies the portrayals of these two leaders by choosing partial stories. In the lectionary, we never hear of Aaron's true significance as one of the founders of the Israelite religion of Yahweh, and we never hear of Moses' faults and sins.

Of course, the lectionary selection serves the interests of some pastors who wish congregations to think that one religious leader is completely right and that others are absolutely wrong. This depiction, as inaccurate as it is, bolsters the power of the leader who claims to know God's will. This claim, when coupled with the absolutizing influence of the lectionary's reading of the Exodus narratives, proves dangerous. At the very least, congregations lose the sense of Moses as a real, human character, whose flaws were as integral a part of his personality and call to ministry as his gifts and graces. These texts, especially in the lectionary's combination of them, asserts the power and primacy of perfect individuals who mediate God's presence to the people. The tradition of the priesthood of all believers moves in a very different direction, but these texts threaten to reinstate the power systems and hierarchies, uniting believers under the dominance of competing charismatic leaders. Persons of faith must remember that Moses is human and fallible, and that no human authority is perfect.

Seeing God: Exodus 33:12-23

If Moses serves as mediator for the Israelite people, that role depends upon God. God chooses Moses as mediator, as the divine conduit between the deity and humanity. Regardless of the ways that Moses—and later texts and lectionaries—justify their own positions of power, God is the one who chooses. In this next passage, Moses
recognizes God’s role once more and pleads with God to continue to choose him.

Moses begs God to allow the divine presence to remain with Moses and the Israelites. This leader understands that his own authority comes not from within him but from God’s presence with the whole people. He knows that God’s presence is necessary for the people to remain distinct among the nations. Israel’s difference, and its unique identity, depends upon God’s presence.

Implicitly, this critiques the role of God as Savior. At this point in the story, God had already saved the people of Israel by bringing them out of Egyptian slavery. But that is not enough. It is not enough that God rescued and redeemed the people. God’s presence to save is not all that God must do. Moses argues with God, begging for God’s continued presence. This presence may not save the people in magnificent fashion, but it continues the people within their new way of life, and God keeps nourishing them and transforming them into a people distinct from the rest of the world. Salvation—even the miraculous rescue of the Exodus—is never enough. God’s continuing presence in the midst of the people must occur, and that requires the people to make choices about how they organize themselves as well. They must continue to reside in God’s presence. The Israelites must center their lives, both as individuals and as a community, around the permanent presence of the living God.

Modern Christians can be quick to see implications of the Spirit’s continuing presence in concerns such as these. Truly, Moses as an individual desires a personal experience of God in a permanent fashion, and this comes close to many notions of the Spirit’s involvement with life. But note carefully that Moses insists that God be with all the people, for they are God’s nation (Exod. 33:13). There is a vital communal dimension to God’s presence. In other words, it is not enough for God to be present with a single individual, even an individual as important a leader as Moses. Instead, God must be with the whole people, living in the midst of all of them. God is not the God of merely a person, but the God of the community, and God’s concerns are for the people to remain together as a group, faithful as a whole to the purposes for which God brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Besides this presence, Moses asks for one more thing. He asks to see God. Moses, the prophet who sees God face to face, begs God
for a vision, a chance to view the Creator with his own eyes (Exod. 33:18). God responds instantly, promising Moses a chance to see God’s goodness. But there is a catch. God devises a plan by which Moses will hide in a rocky place on the side of mountain. God will cover Moses’ eyes until God is already past Moses, and then Moses will have a chance to see God’s hindquarters. Moses will only see the rear of God’s glory, not all of it.

The text here limits the extent of Moses’ privilege, even as it asserts that special opportunity. Moses sees God in a special way, but even Moses does not see all of God. Moses hears God’s name, but it is the same name that all of Israel now knows. This passage provides a helpful parallel for today’s clergy. Though there is a special level of knowledge attained by the opportunity for seminary study and other substantial reflection upon God and church, the pastor has no access to God that is of a radically different nature than that available to all people. All of Israel had seen God leading them and had heard God’s voice in the thunder at Mount Sinai. In the same way, all parishioners today join in the discourse of faith, bringing with them their own relationship with God and God’s own revelation to them. The pastor’s academic training may be more extensive, but the pastor possesses no special revelation of God. God’s desire is to be known by all, but no one knows God fully—not even the pastor, not even Moses. Everyone sees only a part of God.

Because we all see only part of God, we can never think that God is predictable. In modern science, we can fully know something according to its physical properties, and thus we can offer predictions based upon that full knowledge. For example, we know how the earth moves around its axis and how the globe moves around the sun. We know that system completely. Because of our knowledge, we can predict the future of that system. That is, we can know when the sun will rise and set tomorrow—or a year from now. Full knowledge leads to predictability, but since we can never fully know God, God will never be predictable.

Instead, the Old Testament emphasizes God’s autonomy. In this passage, Yahweh asserts, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exod. 33:19). God chooses the objects of God’s grace and mercy. God makes choices about whom God will honor and aid. It is God’s right to make such choices, and the human need for predictability cannot
take away from God that right. No matter how close God comes to
humans, God is still in control.

Many of our modern appropriations of biblical law overlook the
Old Testament's insistence upon God's autonomy. Instead, we assert
God's predictability on the basis of the law and its promises. Since
God has offered us blessings if we obey the law (so we argue), when
we obey the law, God will bless us. God's promises limit God so
that our obedience forces God to bless us. Likewise, our faith forces
God to save us. There are guarantees for humans in this sort of
thought; God is bound to save. But the God of the Old Testament is
much less predictable than that. God's character can never be fully
known and God's salvation can never be fully predicted. Instead,
God retains the right to make choices, and God never has to defend
those decisions to us humans. God will save whom God chooses to
save and show grace and compassion upon those whom God chooses.

The law, then, is not a limitation upon God. Though the law ex­
plains God's desires and intentions, it is not a promise that restricts
God's options. God can even change the mind, as we hear about
later in the Bible (for example, consider Jonah 3:9-10). God's power
to save is far greater than human ability to predict. Still, we humans
tend to search for sure things, for a safe bet, and for a security
within the religion. Such striving for security, though, is the idolatry
which Yahweh condemns earlier.

Exodus presents us with an unpredictable God, whose desire to
save results in all sorts of risks, such as the movement out of Egypt
itself and the revelation to the people. God's desire to save, how­
ever, goes far beyond the Israelites. A prophet later comments that
God's care for the other nations of the earth is just the same as that
for Israel (Amos 9:7). God is involved in liberation movements
other than the rescue of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Each
people of the world forms part of God's family.

This passage—and these themes of God's unpredictable revela­
tion—continues into Exodus 34, where Yahweh actually does reveal
God's self to Moses. Again in this case, the lectionary's choice of
texts betrays its own concerns. In Exodus 34 there is a beautiful con­
fusion of God's nature:
The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The LORD." The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. (Exod. 34:5-8)

This affirmation of the central reality of God's grace is left out of the lectionary, in favor of the focus on Exodus 33 on Moses as the one who receives the vision. This matches the lectionary's emphasis on religious leadership, even to the point of de-emphasizing God's own role. Moses takes the lectionary's spotlight away from God, and human leadership becomes the key issue.

Long Live the Leader: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

One of the problems with a reliance on human leadership is that it is always transitory. Every human leader, like every human, ages and dies. The lectionary here skips over the struggles of the Israelite people in the wilderness to focus on the inevitable result of Moses' elevation as leader. Moses dies, leaving the people temporarily without a leader. Moses was not perfect. Despite all of his exaltation as a privileged leader within Israel, he too sinned. The lectionary ignores that story, however. Moses had sinned when the Israelites passed through a place called Meribah, which means "testing." When the Israelites were wandering through the desert in that area, they once more grew short of water (Numbers 20). Moses then struck a rock...
with a rod twice and told the Israelites to drink the water that came forth from it. He claimed the credit for himself and rejected the trust in God that brought the water from the rock at an earlier time. For this sin, Yahweh condemns Moses to a life without the entry into the land. That is, Moses receives the same punishment as the whole nation received earlier. God bans Moses from the promised land. After the great work of leadership, Moses will not see the results of his activity.

Despite this punishment, God sees fit to honor Moses with a view of the land that he will never enter. Even though Moses cannot receive the advantages of this new land that flows with milk and honey for its inhabitants, even though he cannot receive the heightened reputation of the one who led the people through the military conquest of the promised land, God still considered Moses worthy of some extra recognition, and so God shows the promised land of Canaan to Moses.

The text reflects God’s recognition of Moses by stressing the qualities of this great leader. Following a typical pattern in the Hebrew Bible, the text praises Moses through emphasizing his advanced age. Moses lived to be 120 years old. Not only did he live a long life, but he retained his health throughout the time: “his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated” (Deut. 34:7). His health and strength were clear indications of God’s favor for him, since many Israelites believed that only the blessed would achieve length of days (cf. Job 42:12-17). However, Moses also receives more direct praise:

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

(Deut. 34:10-12)

Moses had a special relationship with God that was unmatched throughout Israelite history. This text completes the process of creating Moses as a hero. He was unique in Israel’s history; never again did anyone know God in this way. Furthermore, Moses performed
unmatched miracles, visible for all of Israel. The lectionary again chooses a text that displays Moses as hero. In this passage, the emphasis is not upon the miracle of the Exodus as performed by God, or its salvific nature for the Israelites. This text explicitly claims that Moses performed the miracles surrounding the events of the Exodus from Egypt. God’s role is non-existent.

Throughout these texts, the lectionary has depicted Moses as hero, emphasizing the value of human leadership. The lectionary chooses limits to the unit of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) that emphasize Moses’ role as mediator. Then the lectionary presents a story of Aaron’s sin with the matter of the golden calf (Exodus 32), indicating the importance of correct leadership. Moses then receives a special vision of God (Exodus 33; compare the story of God’s appearance and nature in Exodus 34), and the lectionary’s next installment is the praise of Moses at his death (Deuteronomy 34). Never do we see Moses’ faults. Instead, the lectionary continually shows the strengths of Moses’ leadership and the importance to the people of following an effective leader. The praise of Moses at death provides the logical conclusion for this cycle of stories, skipping over other events of Moses’ life and instead moving immediately to the final positive evaluation of his entire life. Never do we hear critique of Moses or the struggles of the Israelites’ experience in the wilderness. The lectionary only provides the confident assurance that following proper leadership is the straightforward path to the promised land.

Deuteronomy 34 makes one additional point. The transitory nature of human leadership requires a replacement for Moses. Moses is freshly buried when the text announces his heir as leader for Israel: Joshua, son of Nun. Joshua had appeared at several points throughout the Pentateuch, but here at the end his true role as Moses’ successor becomes crystal clear. He will lead the Israelites through their next phase. As the next leader, he takes the role and function of Moses, and he receives praise as well.

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

(Deut. 34:9)
The line of succession is apparent. Moses was the anointed leader, worthy of popular obedience because he was the one chosen by God. Joshua becomes the next leader through the laying on of hands and through the filling with the spirit; thus, the Israelites owe to Joshua the same sort of obedience that they owed to God and to Moses. The lectionary moves immediately into Joshua’s story, continuing the theme of human leadership.

**Becoming like Moses: Joshua 3:1-17**

After Moses’ death, Joshua takes over the reins of leadership for Israel, a nation still languishing in the wilderness on the verge of entering the promised land. Under Joshua’s leadership, the military campaign against the cities of Canaan takes place. Whereas Moses was a religious and political leader with responsibilities for setting up and administering the priestly and legal systems of the new society, Joshua’s roles were much more emphatically limited to the military functions. Despite the differences in function, the text clearly depicts Joshua as a leader in the tradition of Moses. In fact, the text goes out of its way to emphasize the similarities between Joshua and his predecessor.

*The LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” Joshua then said to the Israelites, “Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God.” Joshua said, “By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the ark of the covenant of the LORD of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from*
above shall be cut off: they shall stand in a single heap."  
(Josh. 3:7-13)

In this passage, two elements of Joshua's depiction are most striking. Firstly, Joshua should receive the same respect and obedience accorded to Moses. The comparative issue receives explicit and immediate attention. Secondly, Joshua undertakes as his first duty of leadership for the people an act that echoes Moses' activity. Joshua leads the people across a river that dries up in order to allow them to cross. Thus, Joshua performs for the Israelites the same miracle that Moses did at the parting of the Red Sea. Just as Moses dries up a body of water in order to lead the people out of Egypt, Joshua dries up the River Jordan so that the Israelites can cross into the promised land. In doing, God's miraculous intervention proves that Joshua is a leader in the same sense that Moses was, possessing the same kinds of powers and abilities.

In this way, the lectionary selections continue their emphasis on Moses' leadership of the people. The lectionary asserts that divinely inspired human leadership does not end with Moses but continues on to other generations. Even though there will never be another leader of Moses' stature, God will provide leaders for Israel who will partake (at least partially) of Moses' charismatic abilities to draw the people together as well as God's miraculous intervention on the leader's behalf. Such leaders take Moses' place and deserve the people's obedience, just as Moses himself commanded the Israelites' respect in years before. Through the juxtaposition of these texts, the lectionary emphasizes the continuity of divinely chosen leadership into the time of the occupation of Canaan and, one supposes, beyond, even to the present day.

The Heroes of the Faith

The lectionary's readings of these texts from the Pentateuch and Israel's history focus on human leadership. But more than leadership is at stake. We see Moses and Joshua not just as leaders for their community's day. They appear as heroes of the faith. They are great characters looming over the past into the future, affecting the way that we live our lives of faith in the present. Moses and Joshua pro-
vide powerful examples of the way that leaders and followers should act. These texts, as selected by the lectionary, produce a notion of them as heroes who are worthy of our emulation and our obedience. This creation of heroes through the lectionary selections has profound effects for today's religion. The emphasis on heroes and leaders can bias today's believers into relinquishing their own roles as interpreters and followers of God, stressing instead the obedience due to the religious leader. Dependence upon heroes creates normative views of faith, since all that one must do is follow the leader instead of working out one's own faith in fear and trembling, making an honest and conscientious effort to discern the best faith and understanding for oneself. Thus, the creation of heroes can lead to hero worship, as part of the search for security in religious beliefs that resulted in the idolatry of the golden calf. In many cases in today's congregations, parishioners give up their own responsibility for their faith and perceive the clergy as embodiments of the true faith, which require obedience. If our admiration of them turns to idolatrous worship, then heroes of faith become dangerous creations.

At the same time, the lectionary presents the surety of the continuation of God's activity at the human level. God's presence is constant with the chosen leaders and, through them, with the entire community of God's people. Beyond the presence and the availability of leadership, there is also the Ten Commandments, which provide a vision of the way that life can be. With God's presence, such life is possible, and God will provide leaders to empower the people to attain that kind of life. In this respect, there is great hope within these passages, and yet the danger of falling into hero worship—or dependence upon clergy—is always close at hand. Our searching for security, whether through idolatry or religious heroes of the faith, takes us further away from that vision of life, and makes us wander in the wilderness for a generation, until we begin to learn that God's vision of human life offers little possibility for security and every opportunity for relationship with each other and with the living, present, unpredictable God.
Notes

1. The plural verb would more typically indicate the plural subject gods, but there is some inconsistency of usage within Hebrew. More to the point, there seems to be an editorial desire to depict Aaron as the fashioner of multiple idols and “gods,” even when the text is clear that he made only one calf.

2. This may also explain the images of Yahweh as the “Bull of Jacob” (Gen. 49:24; Psalm 132:2-4). For a complete discussion of this issue, see Mark S. Smith, The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 51.

3. For a discussion of the Old Testament’s insistence that God is free to leave any humanly constructed box, see Jon L. Berquist, Ezekiel: Surprises by the River (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1993).

4. Abraham argues with some effectiveness to bring salvation to Sodom and Gomorrah, but then fails to save those cities. Then, in Genesis 22, Abraham never questions the command to sacrifice Isaac; instead of lifting up his voice, he lifts his knife-bearing hand to kill his son. For a discussion of this text, see Jon L. Berquist, Reclaiming Her Story: The Witness of Women in the Old Testament (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1992).

5. Interestingly, however, Aaron does not receive any special punishment for his activity in this chapter.

Bibliography


This new reference work on thirty-three major world religions (including those considered “extinct” and the existing majority) may be the most helpful of its kind ever to be produced. Mircea Eliade, longtime professor of the history of religions at the University of Chicago (d. 1986) needs no introduction to those interested in this subject matter. His three-volume *History of Religious Ideas* has become a classic survey of the major features of all world religions, past and present. The present volume represents in some respects a systematic abridgement of the latter while also drawing upon the scholarly articles from *Encyclopedia of Religion* (which Eliade edited). However, the reader should know that it is the second author, Couliano, who is primarily responsible for the selection of this work’s contents, their manner of presentation, and the literary style which in some cases is less readable than that smooth narrative style we have come to enjoy in *A History of Religious Ideas*.

The *Eliade Guide* is “user friendly,” depending on the reader’s purposes with the volume. Its first and longest section (pp. 11-225, “African Religions” to “Zoroastrianism”) forms the “Macro-Dictionary” and claims to contain the “complete surveys of thirty-three religions.” The subject matter of each of these is itself subdivided into numbered paragraphs and sub-paragraphs reminiscent of Eliade’s format in *History*. The second portion of the book (259-301, the so-called “Micro-Dictionary”) is actually an annotated index keyed to the paragraph numbers found in part one. Thus, those who use the *Guide* primarily as a reference work may move rapidly to the paragraphs which treat the topic of choice.

The disadvantage to this is that those who desire to take up the volume and read several chapters at a time will find this format somewhat disjointed and awkward; since the religious systems are listed in alphabetical order, there is no grouping according to region, sources, world view, culture, or historic period. Nor is there within each chapter any attempt to classify the individual elements of a religious system in a uniform way from one chapter to the next. Thus in one chapter, Couliano may begin with “classifications” (as with African Religions”), while “Roman Religion” begins with a brief overview of Roman “history.” This format will not assist one in seeing the shared or common features from one religious system to the next, though other aspects of the *Guide* may help in this.

As for the choice of thirty-three religious systems, this comes obviously by combining into a single chapter some religions less well-known in the Western world, though much practiced elsewhere! For instance (and unfairly) the historic “African Religions” are treated in one ten-page chapter, although the internal paragraphs attempt to survey the major religious systems within each region of this great continent. Likewise, one is disappointed to find such little space allotted to the “Australian Religions,” which still contain a sizeable following.
Eliade and his students approach the study of religion from a European phenomenological perspective (see his *Myth and Reality* and *The Sacred and the Profane*). For them the subjective and changing world meets the real human world at various intersections. These in turn become, for those open to a reality beyond themselves, holy places and times. These encounters often cause persons to feel transformed or renewed. They mark the occasion when another reality impinges upon humankind. Naturally, it is these points of contact which come to form the basis for seasonal celebrations and periodic worship of that which is considered other than and beyond routinely observable reality. This, according to Eliade, was the major reason why religions, as independent, historic human phenomena, could be compared favorably.

Couliano advances upon this when he prefers to think in terms of "religious systems" as the best way to describe the individual religions and to relate them one to another (book's introduction). By "system" Couliano means the cognitive "map" or structure which a regional/cultural group develops as its own particular answer to the common fund of ultimate questions (meaning of life, self-preservation, death, creation, and future state). Since all humans have perennially faced these same great issues, it stands to reason that there are only a finite number of ultimate human questions with a corresponding number of possible answers. This, then, becomes the basis for "mapping" and meaningfully comparing all religions.

One must then carefully examine the inner structure of each religious system, a total structure which may not be readily apparent when one gazes only superficially at the present "surface" institutions and customs of that religion. But when one looks deeper, the similarity of many world religions becomes much more obvious. Even religions as complex as Judaism and as "different" from one another as Christianity (chapter 7) is to Shintoism (chapter 27) may be seen to have in common major structural features when analyzed in this way, claims Couliano. The outward variety of differences which religions appear to possess is due to each people group's distinct set of environmental variables plus the responses of the religious movements to other historical forces and events. The few cross references within part I as well as the annotated index (part two) offer the reader some links for comparing the religious systems in this way.

What will be distressing to the Christian thinker is that Couliano insists that this is the only proper way for explaining any and all religious systems. The Christian must respond by raising the question which Eliade's original position easily accommodates: Can religion be defined only as the system of human mental solutions to the ultimate questions with which all humans are inevitably confronted? Cannot religion be defined also as the attempt by humans to make formal sense out of genuine historic encounters with an Intelligent Being which is above and beyond them, more complex than them, and able to reveal its Divine Self to them at various times and places in history? Couliano is uninterested in this questions, but his disinterest does not limit his ability to offer informed, highly descriptive surveys of each religious system. In other words, one finds that a great deal may be learned about beliefs, practices, and relationships with other religions even though the author's philosophical approach denies any form of genuine, historical revelation.
This helpful volume will assist Christian leaders today with understanding and appreciating the other great world religions. It will enable church members to learn why the other religions have remained powerful, viable choices for so many members of the Two-Thirds World.

Paul D. Duerksen
First United Methodist Church
Kermit, Texas


Eduardo Hoornaert, a native of Belgium, lived and worked for nine years with the poor of Recife, Brazil, and since then has taught church history at the Fortaleza Institute of Theology and Pastoral Studies in Brazil. In this stimulating and groundbreaking work, he combines his grassroots experience with base Christian communities and his academic studies in theology and ancient history into a thoughtful and well-documented study of the striking parallels between the living, practicing communities of the poor and marginalized in the early church and similar grassroots communities in Latin America today.

Hoornaert’s thesis is that the Christian memory has been massaged by Eusebius and his successors, who sought to link the church with imperial powers and developed a hierarchical structure similar to that of the Roman Empire. These early church fathers suppressed both the basic community pattern of the early church and its memory in the written history which was preserved and given prominence. His method, unlike that of the patristic writers, is to draw on the “little literature”—the epistles, Gospels, apocalypses, first catechisms, and texts and liturgies of the early Christian communities which were composed of the poor and marginalized and were radically democratic.

His conclusion, not surprisingly, is that the early church was a network of small communities, not a hierarchical institution, and that the Christian mission was primarily the work not of the great apostle and early bishops but of a broad, anonymous people’s movement manifested in Palestinian, Antiochian, Asian, East Syrian, Syrian, African, and Ethiopian cycles in the first and second centuries.

Among his key arguments are the following:

1. Christianity, like Judaism, is a “memory religion.” Church historians, who in Marrou’s words are missionaries “dispatched to the past to strike a hyphen between past and present,” are needed to join forces with the base communities to “struggle for an authentic Christian memory” by recovering Christian origins among the *am ha-arets,* the “people of the earth,” with whom Jesus worked and out of whom were formed the earliest Christian communities.
2. The dominant Christian geography of history, as represented in maps, places the North on top and the West at the center. Christian origins, however, are traced to the Near East and Africa, and much vital Christian activity today is south of the equator. A fascinating map of the Christian world, ascribed to a "Beatus" of Spain in 776 A.D., shows no city as central, not even Jerusalem or Rome, and no region towering over the others. It graphically demonstrates the collegiality and communication among Christian peoples by means of the world's waterways.

Unfortunately, this map is described here, but, along with all the other diagrams and drawings found in the Spanish edition, is omitted from the English translation. Other illustrations lost to the English reader are a globe turned on its side which places Africa at its center, an early Ethiopian painting showing the compatibility between Christianity and African culture, a picture of primitive Christian leaders with their heads together in a circle, and examples of elitist Byzantine art. All illustrate the ideological struggle between the powers and the marginalized for control of the Christian memory.

3. The early Christian communities, patterned in their structure after the Jewish synagogues, were made up of people—slaves, Jews, fugitives, annual workers, artisans, women—who were deliberately marginalized by Roman policies. A "theology of the marginalized," developed by Paul, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, was opposed, undermined, and itself marginalized by allies and advocates of the empire like Clement, Origen, and Augustine. The practices of both the Marcionites and the Montanists were more democratic and egalitarian than those of their victorious opponents, and the reasons for their being marginalized as heretics were as much political as doctrinal.

4. Documents of the primitive church demonstrate that "to be a Christian, in those times, did not mean primarily embracing a new doctrine, . . . [but] living a new life." This emphasized the "little virtues" of peace, humility, and gentleness, expressions of God's love in the social dealings of everyday life. The practice of these virtues was seen as transforming leaven working within the larger society toward building a new one. These communities were constituted by the rite of baptism, which was both a sign of rebirth into this new life and the boundary separating Christian and non-Christian.

5. Much service and leadership in these early communities were carried out by women, but "the Fathers of the ancient church themselves simply failed to preserve memorials of women." As for men, both the deacons, presbyters, and bishops (charisms of organization) on the one hand, and the apostles, prophets, and teachers (charisms of word) on the other, were chosen for service in the community on the basis of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit, with the former clearly designated to serve and support the latter. The power and authority of the officials over the proclaimers and over the church as a whole came much later, with the institutionalization of the church in line with the secular Greco-Roman hierarchical pattern. Organization in the early communities was minimal, varied, and provisional, out of concern not "to tamper the free movement of the Holy Spirit."
6. The "Christian novelty" or leaven, which challenged the prevailing cultural norms through a family and community lifestyle of radical integrity and democracy, included the practice of healing miracles as signs of the loving, saving power of God toward those living in precarious poverty. Unlike the works of contemporary magicians, these were acts of charity and compassion, not of sensationalism or domination.

Another characteristic of the primitive base communities, the practice of holding goods in common, had Judaic roots in the economic legislation of the Old Testament. Based in the teaching of Jesus and the writings of Paul, James, Justin, Irenaeus, the Didache, Marcion, and Polycarp, it was seen as the natural expression of a common faith in the same Lord in everyday community life. Later, as the church became institutionalized, holding goods in common was replaced by the practice of almsgiving; the gap between rich and poor was justified theologically; charity was elevated as a virtue over community; and practice of the community of goods was lost to the Christian memory.

Thirdly, "the Christian memory is the depository of an important inversion in the relationship between men and women" in which the prevailing norms of male primacy and domination were subverted and replaced by "women as the heralds of the novelty of Christ." Early Christian documents, both canonical and apocryphal/marginalized (such as the gospels of Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene), highlight the centrality of women in the early church. Early teaching about Christian marriage and family life emphasized mutual respect, equality, dignity, purity, love, and care for one another. Only later, with the gradual replacement of the family model by the monastic model, did the emphasis on celibacy, veneration of Mary, and exaltation of Christ as lordly husband over the dutiful church come to predominate.

In the fourth place, the martyrdom of early Christians, like the crucifixion of Jesus, was "a persecution against justice, and not simply one against the institution." Christians were countercultural and were persecuted or their affirmation of the values of life over death (on such issues as abortion, infanticide, the cruelty of the circus games, and the treatment of slaves and other "inferior" beings) and their refusal of military service and emperor worship. The respect accorded the martyrs was enhanced by a firm belief in the bodily resurrection but did not obscure a willingness to forgive the lapsi who lacked the courage to give their lives for their faith.

Finally, the dialogue of early Christianity with paganism, rather than condemning it, gave it a new interpretation. Paganism "raises the great problems of humanity—health, life, justice, land, peace, happiness." Not only in the first centuries, but whenever in history Christians have sought to show pagans by their lifestyles the life-giving values of Jesus, Christianity has flourished. This requires openness to dialogue with the surrounding culture and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. "Christianity has been transformed into a Christendom allied with colonial powers" whenever it has supported its imposition of dogmas, values, and control on a vanquished people—especially in the Spanish and now North American domination of Latin America. But where the Christian mission has been open to dialogue...
with paganism in colonial lands, "the themes of justice, fellowship, charity, and respect for the life of the small and humiliated [have] emerged."

These traits of primitive Christianity all have direct parallels in the experience of twentieth-century Ecclesial Base Communities in Latin America. Having read this book in the midst of an intensive study of these communities in a three-month sojourn in Central America, it is obvious to me how Hoornaert's ministry with the marginalized of Brazil has influenced his reading of early church history. But his perspective provides a valuable and necessary corrective to the dominant and long-standing interpretations of those who live in the North, who belong to the hierarchy, who benefit from the domination, and who read scripture and history from the center rather than the margins.

This book, thoroughly researched and well-documented, contains a helpful glossary of unfamiliar terms and is made accessible through an unusually complete and well-outlined table of contents. It is extremely valuable to North Americans seeking to understand the biblical, historical, and theological roots of the base community movement and to get perspective on our own church structures, practices, and traditions from the standpoint of the marginalized.

Douglas E. Wingeier
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Evanston, Illinois