Thomas W. Ogletree
Telling Our Story: Can Marketing Help?

Toinette M. Eugene
Reaching Across Cultures in Ministry

James A. Hamish
Hearing and Preaching Lectionary Texts
Editorial Board

Neil M. Alexander
The United Methodist Publishing House

Lloyd R. Bailey
Duke Divinity School

Wilfred Bailey
Casa View United Methodist Church
Dallas, Texas

Pamela D. Couture
Candler School of Theology
Emory University

Brita Gill-Austern
Andover Newton Theological School

Janice Riggle Huie
District Superintendent
Southwest Texas Conference

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

Jack A. Keller, Jr.
The United Methodist Publishing House

Robin W. Lovin
Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist 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

John E. Harnish
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
The United Methodist Church

E. Thomas Trotter
Alaska Pacific University

Sharon J. Hels, Editor
Sylvia Marlow, Production Manager
Helen Pouliot, Production Coordinator
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 Revised Common Lectionary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

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 US, and are used by permission.

Quarterly Review
Winter, 1995-96

Copyright © 1995 by The United Methodist Publishing House
and The United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry
Contents

Introduction
Sharon J. Hels ......................................................... 335

Articles

Telling Our Story: Can Marketing Help Us?
Thomas W. Ogletree .................................................. 337

Clergy Misconduct and the Gospel
Gregory S. Clapper .................................................... 353

Cultural Ministry: Theory, Practice, Theology
Toinette M. Eugene .................................................... 363

Globalization and Its Ironies
Ruben Habitio and Edward W. Poitras ......................... 375

Globalization in Theological Education: Reflections from an African Perspective
Solomon K. Avotri ....................................................... 389

Melting Pot or Mosaic: What Difference Does Difference Make?
Tyron Inbody .......................................................... 399

Why Owls Matter, Mosquitoes Bite, and Existence Remains a Mystery
Byron C. Bangert ....................................................... 415

QR Lectionary Study

Listening in Time
James A. Harnish ..................................................... 427
Introduction

The holiday season is an excellent time to reflect on the reality of market thinking, that is, our participation in the exchange of goods, services, money, and time that constitutes our economy.

Not that it’s easy to get away for thought and reflection these days. But in the case of this issue, the rewards for such contrariness are great. Market thinking may be a secular phenomenon, but the gospel has never been completely isolated from it. The language of price, exchange, and possession is something we can all relate to, and it’s a natural medium for expressing the things of God. Even to the earliest Christians understood it: “You were bought with a price,” writes Paul in 1 Cor. 7:23, “do not become the slaves of men.” The implicit question of the marketplace, What is it worth to you? goes deep into the heart of our faith: at Christmas we celebrate theologically that our Creator, the author and sustainer of the world, valued us enough to send a mortal being, a son, to win us back. Therefore in this culture and in this time we are no longer merely consumers to be measured by our buying power; our ultimate worth has been decided by God’s desire for us.

The interplay of thought in this issue to do with the dual experiences of familiarity and strangeness, otherwise known as the self and the other. Market thinking, for us North Americans, is the familiar, the comfortable, the self-evident, what we consider simple common sense. In that context, the gospel is the unsettling, the grating, that off-balance feeling that is not quite pain but may be love or learning or the dawning of compassion. The gift in Ogletree’s essay is to show us both sides of the equation in a way that tells us more fully who we really are.

And again, in the essays devoted to the specifics of Christian service in a world full of otherness, we are invited to see ourselves as
figures in the tapestry of the whole. Toinette Eugene shows us that an understanding of cultural dynamics can help us bridge the gap between those of us who grew up in the dominant culture and those of us who did not. Her skill as a social scientist combines beautifully with her passion for Christian ministry in this article.

Habito and Poitras bring a world perspective to ministerial education, based on their vast experience and seasoned theological reflection. After reading their work, no one has any excuse for not being able to define the word globalization. Nor is there any doubt that this change in thinking will have a strong effect on church leadership in years to come. In this context, it is important to understand and respect the strong reservations about multiculturalism lodged by African theologians. Our familiar, comfortable, commonsense notions of the world may be destabilized by clear voices from these other cultures. Dr. Avotri’s voice is one such, and his word of memorial and caution for Africa is a necessary component of our discussion.

When we arrive at Professor Inbody’s essay, we have reached a point for a sustained reflection on the distinctive challenge of otherness. With a marvelous economy of words Inbody expresses the essence of difference and why it is vital for our spiritual health. I also commend Byron Bangert’s essay to you for its ability to move you to reflection about God’s ongoing presence in the physical world. With Jim Hamish’s lectionary study, we can hear the music of particularity in the universal message of salvation. Hamish aptly quotes John Donne: “... and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

I bid you a safe and blessed holiday season.

Sharon Hels
Telling Our Story:
Can Marketing Help Us?

Does marketing offer ways of thinking and perhaps some practical skills that can help the church tell its story? Can it foster fidelity and effectiveness in ministry in an age dominated by new and unfamiliar sensibilities? Will marketing show us how to get our message across? The successful congregations of our day at least appear to be those whose pastors have developed real facility at marketing. Should we follow their lead?

Or is marketing rather a temptation, a Satanic offering of the kingdoms of this world in exchange for submissive service? Should we instead hold to more traditional practices, even though they assure our continuing decline and an increasingly marginal role for the church in modern society? What are we to do? What is our charge? I want to offer six basic propositions to guide our thinking.

None of us can escape market thinking. It dominates our culture, whether we like it or not; and it does so to a degree unprecedented in human history.

What is market thinking? To engage in market thinking is at its core to undertake exchanges of various kinds with fellow human beings only

Thomas W. Ogletree is Dean and Professor of Theological Ethics at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. This address was presented to the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (SACEM), January 7, 1994.
in terms of the benefits we expect to get out of those exchanges. "What’s in it for me?" we ask. If we like "what’s in it," we’re ready to deal; if we don’t, we walk away. When we begin to deal, we may then weigh a lot of things: cost, quality, appearance, convenience, availability, reliability. If we’re satisfied that we can secure the benefits we value on acceptable terms, then we close the deal. Exchange completed. If we are not satisfied, we keep shopping until we find what we want.

In a market economy, enterprises of various kinds flourish when they are able to offer goods and deliver services that people need and want on terms that they find acceptable. "Acceptable" usually means on terms that no one else can quite match. Enterprises that are unable to meet this challenge quickly decline and eventually go out of business. A marketing context is highly competitive. Not everybody makes it. There are winners and losers. To succeed, you have to have an edge. Otherwise, you get nowhere, and you will yourself become one of the losers.

Advocates of market thinking do not worry about the negative side effects of competition, however. They see competition as a positive good. Competition produces discipline. It focuses attention. It stimulates the imagination. It calls forth in us that extra bit of effort we require for success. In competition, we achieve what we might not otherwise be able to do! The contention is that through market-driven competition human energies will be fully mobilized. Aggressive, highly competitive human beings will open up so many new opportunities that even the least successful will benefit in the long run.

Finally, whether we are buyers or sellers, market thinking individualizes us. It disintegrates the social bonds that in more traditional societies formed and defined human life. If we are buying, we assess for ourselves what we need, want, and desire as individuals; we then determine what it takes to get these things. In the whole process we may give only secondary attention to the implications of our choices for others. If we are selling, we assess our capacity to deliver what people need and want for our own personal gain. The market does not dispose us to think of the common good.

Market thinking involves at least three things: 1) an orientation to individual needs and wants, 2) involvement in exchanges that address those needs and wants for personal gain, and 3) competition among enterprises offering particular goods and services.
Market thinking has had a major impact on all of our basic social institutions. While this impact has not been without positive benefits, it has at best been morally ambiguous.

Market thinking enhances individual freedom and initiative. It gives us a level of independence not previously known in human societies. Yet it has also weakened the bonds that make up our basic social institutions.

Consider the family. We speak nostalgically about family ties. Yet today there are few, very few, who would pass up opportunities for personal gain even though seizing such an opportunity has the effect of cutting them off from ongoing relationships with their extended families. We now expect people to go where the opportunities are. We celebrate individuals who are ambitious, who desire to get ahead. We consider this desire to be the right of every individual.

Even intimate relations among lovers and spouses are continually subject to a marketing test: Is the relationship mutually satisfying, fulfilling? Indeed, I may ask, Is the relationship the most fulfilling and satisfying among those that are available to me at a given time? We try out relationships before we consider marriage, and we treat marriage itself as a provisional covenant. In a New Yorker cartoon, a young woman, referring to her new male companion, expresses her happiness to a friend. “Isn’t he nice!” she says. “We have a twenty-four month lease.”

“I did not come into this world to meet your expectations, nor did you come into the world to meet mine,” wrote Fritz Perls, a guru of self-realization psychology. “If we happen to connect,” he continued, “that’s beautiful. If we do not, then no one is to blame.” Market thinking invades love and marriage. The family was once a primal social unit; today it is an association of free and independent individuals for mutual benefit.

Politics and government have undergone similar transformations under the impact of market thinking. Within a liberal democratic society, we once described politics as public discourse about the common good. We viewed political parties as advocates of contrasting philosophies about how best to advance the common good. We do so no longer. Politics and government are now about marketing, though in this case the fundamental medium of exchange is votes, not money. Money comes as the fruit of successful political deals. As an individual, I give my vote to the legislator or executive who will cast
his or her vote for legislation and for administrative policies that favor my particular interests.

Here, too, I ask, "What’s in it for me?" The successful politicians are those who are skilled at offering services and policies that favor a wide array of diverse interests. The challenge, of course, is to package these offerings in a manner that is acceptable to enough voters to ensure re-election. We take it for granted that each person has his or her own stake in the transactions that now make up legislative and administrative processes. Interest-group politics, we call it. Language about the common good disappears, or better, it serves as packaging in the marketing of policy proposals.

The nineteenth century, some analysts argue, was the era of the nation-state. Nationalism was the dominant social and cultural force among human beings, transcending older religious, ethnic, cultural, and class boundaries. In that context, the pressure on the church was to combine the gospel with nationalist sentiments, with patriotism. Our goal, we claimed, was to Christianize first the United States and then the world; in the process, of course, we also americanized Christianity. In the name of Jesus Christ, we created civil religion.

In the late twentieth century, nationalism has been replaced by economism and the nation-state by transnational corporations all seeking market advantages in a world arena. This new economism may mitigate some of the worst excesses of nationalism, particularly racism and cultural chauvinism, as well as the militaristic pursuit of global hegemony through armed conquest. Yet this economism also undermines the sense of social solidarity that once bound human beings together within identifiable national boundaries. As a result, organic conceptions of society have given way to purely contractual conceptions. Societies are mere conglomerates of individuals who enter into various collective arrangements out of perceptions of mutual advantage.

It should not surprise us that market thinking now profoundly affects the churches’ ministries as well. For the most part, we do not go to a church because we are convinced that it teaches the truth or that it practices faithful discipleship. We go to a church because it offers services we value.

The services we seek are by no means trivial. They are vitally important to human well-being. We look to the church, for example, for resources to cope with life’s stresses and to endure its trials. We
expect the church to help us absorb deep disappointments, to survive grievous losses, and finally, to face our own inevitable death. We look to the church for meaning and purpose that will give direction for our daily existence. We want the church to reinforce our deepest convictions and to confirm our primary values. We require like-minded people to help us feel good about our own commitments.

Many of us also turn to the church for assistance in rearing and nurturing children. We feel keenly the weakness and vulnerability of the family. We urgently seek programs that will help our children and youth resist powerful social and cultural pressures that now place them in dire jeopardy.

In a market context, we shop for a church that can respond satisfactorily to these needs, and we affiliate with a church only if we find what we are looking for. Even then, our commitment is likely to be qualified. We participate only so long as and insofar as the church we have chosen fulfills our expectations.

Not only do we pick and choose among churches, usually without regard for denominational affiliation; we also pick and choose among the programs and services provided by the church we do join. We remain ready to change churches if another promises to be more satisfying. If we cannot find a church that satisfies us, we may resort to available social and cultural alternatives—professional counseling, support groups of various kinds, fitness centers, experimental religious societies. In this environment no congregation can flourish unless it can compete successfully for members.

I would even argue that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution institutionalizes a market orientation within religious bodies. Because this amendment both prohibits any establishment of religion and also protects the free exercise of religion, every church, every religious association must win and hold its members, one by one, or it will have no members at all. That task requires some version of marketing.

My basic claim is that we can no longer escape a market orientation, no matter what our attitude toward it may be. It is pervasive in our culture, and it already operates in the churches we serve. Inevitably, it affects our ministries. We have to learn how to take this reality into account and to work with it appropriately if we are to be effective.
The modern roots of marketing are capitalist economics. Given its origins, market thinking is independent of the gospel, even alien to it. It did not emerge from sustained attention to the Christian message. To use marketing in our ministries is to apply contemporary social practices to those ministries.

This point, I suspect, is fairly obvious given my initial characterization of market thinking. When I say that marketing is alien to the gospel, I do not necessarily mean that it is hostile to it. Not all aliens are enemies! They may simply be strange, unfamiliar. What is alien to the Christian gospel is, however, essentially independent of distinctive Christian thinking. To fit Christian faith and practice, it must be reshaped. When Christians attempt to reshape for their own purposes cultural materials that belong to their wider social environment, then their self-understanding as Christians will also undergo change. They will see themselves in terms of their relationship with those cultural materials.

There is nothing new about this interplay of faith and culture. It has been going on since the beginning of the Christian world mission. Nonetheless, it is important to pay attention to these processes of mutual adaptation and change when we assess the role of marketing practices in our ministries.

For the modern West, market thinking first came into its own in the open squares of free European cities, that is, cities that were not under the control of the great landed estates of the feudal order. In these free cities, farmers, hunters, craftsmen, weavers, and bakers brought their wares to market and exchanged them, first by barter, later by using money as a means of exchange. Market exchanges made up the economic activity through which growing numbers of people earned the means of subsistence.

Under the aegis of European imperial powers, first Spain and Portugal, and later, the Netherlands and England, this form of market thinking soon took on world-historical significance. Indeed, the age of European exploration depended upon it.

It was only with the advent of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, however, that the logic of the free market came into its own. Building upon the social philosophy of the European Enlightenment, it began to shape the economic and political organization of both Western Europe and the United States.
Initially, market capitalism required the protection of strong national states, preferably those with liberal democratic political structures. In fact, Karl Marx considered liberal democracy to be an essential superstructure for furthering the interests of an emergent bourgeois capitalist class. The democratic state was designed, on the one hand, to break the power of the older monarchies and the land-based aristocracies that supported them, and, on the other, to control the rising proletariat, the new class of industrial wage laborers. The purpose of strong, highly centralized nation states, Marx contended, was not to institutionalize the freedom and equality of all people—as democratic theorists claimed. It was to maintain a framework of social order suited to capitalist development.

Even so, Marx believed, the highest stage of capitalism would be imperialism, that is, a global marketplace that swallowed up and overwhelmed all national and regional differences. In this respect, Marx anticipated the transcendence of nationalism in a global economism.

Marx’s point was that market capitalism knows no bounds. Its driving dynamic is the creation of wealth. The wealth it creates generates even more wealth, and so on without end. Moreover, market capitalism uses any means at its disposal to produce wealth. Particular products and services are matters of indifference, merely exchangeable means to the production of wealth.

The problem is that capitalist logic entails the unrelenting exploitation of labor power, using up human beings as raw materials in the productive process. Marx saw this exploitation of human labor as the Achilles heel of capitalism. At some point, he predicted, the workers would rise up and say, “No more.” They would seize for themselves ownership and control of the means of production. In so doing, they would transform capitalism and the liberal democratic state into socialism. The free market would then give way to a new kind of social order marked by social solidarity and collective action.

Marx’s projections of social revolution have proven to be naive and utopian. Market capitalism, not socialism, has emerged triumphant in the forward movement of history. Yet Marx did correctly discern the pervasive influence of the market thinking that resides in capitalist production. He also recognized that capitalism itself could not survive unless workers found ways to restrain its excesses.

My point here is that marketing is not a fruit of the Christian gospel but a creation of capitalist economics. If we are to make use of
marketing in the churches’ ministries, we have to recognize that we are attempting to bring into the service of the gospel a modality of thinking that is in the first instance independent of the gospel, alien to it, and perhaps at times hostile to it. We are, in short, daring to learn something from the shrewdness of the children of this age.

Contemporary discussions sometimes highlight electronic communications media as the driving force behind current changes in marketing practices. They stress the development of national and global communications systems, where satellites and fiber optic cables link computer networks, fax machines, telephones, television, and the like. I contend on the contrary that communications technologies are themselves a derivative of economic forces. It was the global impetus of market capitalism that first prompted the development of these technologies. At the same time, the global reach of capitalism could not be fully realized without the widespread implementation of these technologies.

Electronic communications now furnish the primary media through which marketing occurs, significantly displacing face-to-face bargaining and also reducing the importance of print media. To consider the uses of marketing in our ministries, we have to gain some familiarity with and skill in the uses of the electronic media.

*Evangelical Protestantism, the distinctively North American form of Christianity, has from its beginnings displayed a noteworthy affinity with market thinking. The peculiar success of this form of Christianity stems from its congruence with a marketing orientation.*

Max Weber argued that Calvinism fostered an ethic congenial to the rise of capitalism. It was no accident, he asserted, that capitalism first established itself in national settings where Calvinism was preeminent. In a similar fashion, I am suggesting that evangelical Protestantism is congenial to the market orientation, first, of a mercantile society, and later, of mature capitalism. Evangelical Protestantism also has special advantages amid the economism of global capitalism. If we wish to explore ways of utilizing market orientations in the service of the gospel, we would do well to examine the practices of evangelical Christians.

Evangelical Protestantism has roots in Lutheran pietism and in Baptist forms of English Puritanism. It enjoyed dramatic and

To display the connections between evangelical Protestantism and modern market thinking, I want to focus on two figures: John Wesley and George Whitfield.

Unlike his Lutheran, Calvinist, and Puritan predecessors, John Wesley was not a reformer. He accepted as normative classic Christian teaching, especially that of the ecumenical creeds. He relied heavily upon the theological contributions of Luther, Calvin, and their successors to guide his own thinking. He affirmed the apostolic ministry of Anglican priests, and he stressed the centrality of sacramental means of grace. He certainly had no intention of establishing a new church, or even a new denomination. His concern was rather to reawaken the church, to call it to new life in the Spirit, all within established ecclesial settings.

To renew the church Wesley had to bring the gospel to the people. In the midst of early capitalist developments, the English masses were no longer much in evidence in the churches. Wesley also had to devise structures of discipline to nurture new converts in the Christian life. In many respects, these structures of discipline were Wesley's most lasting accomplishment. These structures were not intended as new forms of the church. They served as supplementary arrangements for furthering Christian practice. They proved themselves by their effectiveness in promoting that practice.

In his attempts to carry out his mission of renewal, Wesley found it necessary to recast Christian teaching in a fashion that dramatized its concrete, experiential import for human life. Practical Divinity, he called it. Christologies, doctrines of the Trinity, theories of atonement—however true these and similar formulations of Christian teaching might be, Wesley believed, they are irrelevant to human life unless we can show what difference they make in the ways we actually live and grow as persons of faith. Even Scripture, despite its formal authority as witness to divine revelation, is irrelevant unless we learn to read it not merely as a source of correct teaching but above all as a resource for Christian living.

Wesley repackaged the gospel, we could say, in order to make clear its import in relation to real human needs and desires. In carrying out this task, he made use of thought forms and cultural expressions that were part of his own setting. To the question What's in it for me? he
had an answer: salvation. And salvation embraces human dignity, personal worth, and above all, joy in knowing yourself to be a child beloved of God. Wesley promised his followers hearts filled with love for God and for neighbor. In turn, these followers submitted themselves to the practical disciplines he set forth, confident that through them they too might participate joyfully in the wondrous and unparalleled benefits of the gospel.

Where does George Whitfield come into the picture? For one thing, he spanned the Atlantic, linking the Methodist revival in England to the Great Awakening in the United States. More important for our purposes, he drew upon his training and experience as a professional actor to perfect the process of staging and marketing the evangelical witness.

In a recent biography of Whitfield, entitled *The Divine Dramatist*, my colleague Harry Stout observes that Whitfield self-consciously placed himself in the marketing context of the emergent mercantile society in colonial America. This was the same society, incidentally, that Jonathan Edwards deplored as materialistic, the epitome of human greed.

In this new societal setting, Whitfield carefully planned and vigorously promoted revival meetings where he would preach the evangelical message of salvation. Fully utilizing his craft as an actor, he created a dramatic mass setting for his preaching and then delivered his sermons as a performing art. He transformed the sermon into performance in order to persuade people to accept the promise of new life in Jesus Christ. So skilled an orator was he that even the old skeptic Benjamin Franklin came to hear him preach. Franklin was not interested in evangelical Christianity, but he was fascinated by Whitfield’s ability to put on a “really big show.”

Like Wesley, Whitfield had no intention of founding or building churches. He was quite deliberate about transcending established confessional and denominational boundaries. His goal was a new awakening of faith. The established churches were welcome to follow through if they were disposed to do so. His vocation was to put the gospel before the people with all of the communicative arts that were at his disposal.

Because of his great success, Whitfield became the model for great evangelists from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, including the televangelists. What is noteworthy about George Whitfield, however, is that—like Billy Graham in our own time—he managed to avoid the
self-indulgent excesses that we associate with some televangelists. Temptations surely abounded, but he remained a straight arrow. His reward was satisfaction in a job well done.

Protestant growth in the U.S. has from the founding of the nation been strongly led by evangelicals. Not only was their approach congenial to the growth of capitalism, but it was also ideally suited to the “free exercise” clause of the First Amendment. For evangelicals, the church by its very nature cannot be “established.” The church is precisely the gathering by faith of those who have been “born again” in Jesus Christ. Evangelicals embraced the opening created by the First Amendment to win the nation for Jesus Christ.

Initially the Methodists were uniquely successful in spreading the evangelical message. At the end of the Revolutionary War, Methodists were an inconsequential fragment of the population of the fledgling nation. By the beginning of the Civil War, however, they made up 30 percent of the population. In subsequent decades, the Baptists caught up and even surpassed them, joined more recently by Holiness and Pentecostal churches. These churches share in common an evangelical understanding of Christianity.

Evangelical Protestantism, I am suggesting, is a version of the Christian gospel that is particularly compatible with market thinking: 1) it addresses individuals, not corporate bodies; 2) it packages the gospel in a manner that highlights its life-transforming benefits for those who receive it; 3) it stresses performance skills by preachers for delivering its message; and 4) it creates associational contexts to sustain and nurture its adherents.

As this evangelical impulse detached itself from the constraints of older catholic and reformed traditions of Christian understanding, it generated a new ecclesiology. The church came to be understood as a gathered association of individuals whose lives have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and who by the power of the Spirit are growing toward holiness of life. Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and Pentecostals doubtless embody this understanding in its purest and most consistent form. Yet none of the U.S. churches has been unaffected by this pattern of thinking.

If this account of evangelical Protestantism is more or less accurate, it should not surprise us that rapidly growing congregations, those that fully utilize marketing principles, are marked by an evangelical and charismatic ethos. The emphases on experience and practical benefits likewise permit elements of new age spirituality to make their way.
into more traditional Christian contexts. The older Catholic and reformed standards of doctrine tend to lose their authority, yielding to the eclecticism of contemporary religious life.

Our assessments of the appropriateness of market techniques to the churches' ministries will, I suspect, involve us to some degree in a critical reconsideration of the evangelical heritage, with attention both to its strengths and weaknesses, its relative legitimacy and its limitations.

Despite its alien and ambiguous qualities, marketing can help us think critically about congregational practices in the service of authentic Christian mission.

The important point to note here is that marketing is not simply a search for ways to tell our story more effectively. It is first of all an attempt to discover anew just what our story is, why it matters, and why it deserves a hearing. Stated differently, marketing is not only about persuading, convincing, enlisting, selling. It is also about defining, clarifying, focusing, and then implementing our mission as the people of God.

In secular contexts, marketing studies do not begin with the formation of a plan for promoting and selling a product or service. At a more basic level, they involve reconceiving, redesigning, and in extreme cases even reconstituting various products and services, in order to respond to changing sensibilities within the society. As the felt needs and value preferences of potential customers and clients shift, marketing requires a corresponding shift in products and services themselves. A failure to adjust to changing needs and expectations will result in a loss of market share, perhaps even of commercial viability.

How can marketing help the church? Marketing challenges us to examine critically what we are doing. It presses us to weigh our current practices, to determine whether or not they continue to make sense in light of contemporary human realities. It stimulates us to venture new ways of doing things. It presses us to experiment with new ways of configuring ourselves that may connect more effectively with the felt needs of those who are around us.

Last fall I had a student in my class from one of the new nondenominational megachurches. His church was self-consciously involved in marketing activities. He reported ongoing discussions
among the lay leadership that centered on the questions What do people need? and How can we respond to those needs?

Questions of this kind can be quite salutary! It is often said that experience is the best teacher. Yet what we learn from experience is that most people don't learn much from it. We tend to keep doing the same old things regardless of the results. If things do not go well, we generally make excuses or look for someone to blame. Perhaps we try harder at what we are already doing in the hope that greater effort will turn things around. This response is reinforced by the fact that there are always those among us who have a personal stake in existing practices and who hold to them tenaciously. Only rarely do we reexamine our practices, assess them critically, and venture new and more promising approaches that reflect what we have uncovered in our inquiries.

Pastors in particular easily slip into the pattern of simply reacting to demands that fall upon them. Servant ministry seems to imply that we are to do our best to meet any human needs and expectations that come to our attention. Yet the demands of ministry eventually wear us down. When they overwhelm us, we “burn out.” We do not easily entertain new ways of dealing with these demands that might make them more manageable.

Market thinking does not always or even characteristically lead to happy endings. In the midst of shifting societal forces and relentless social change, not every ministry or every congregation is viable. Some are doomed to perish, like the blacksmith shops that once dotted our countryside. Denominational commitments of various kinds may no longer be sustainable, requiring us to restructure and streamline our activities.

Growing churches, we observe, are characteristically located in highly visible places on major transportation arteries. They are readily accessible to people over a fairly large geographic area. For the most part, they are large churches with large, specialized professional staffs capable of constructing and providing a remarkable variety of spiritual support systems, calibrated to the diverse needs of their constituents. The student I mentioned earlier reported that his church had become a kind of center to address virtually all personal and associational needs of members and constituents: day care, parent support groups, a private elementary school, a fitness center, cultural and recreational activities, not to mention a variety of worship services reflecting diverse liturgical practices. Their goal was nothing less than to offer a total Christian environment for the daily lives of members. Only the workplace and public arena were not addressed by their ministries. It is...
probably not too much to suggest that the shopping mall provides the model for such churches.

A commitment to marketing is not automatically a commitment to favor megachurches. In business activities, the mass market may be the most lucrative, but it is also the most competitive. Sometimes the better strategy is to locate a distinct niche that a given enterprise can fill successfully. Similarly, a particular congregation or denomination may identify a distinctive mission within a complex social fabric, one not likely to evoke a mass response but still one that might prove deeply meaningful for selected individuals and families. In either case, a market orientation forces a church to become clearer about its central mission.

Market thinking can, of course, degenerate into a scramble to offer people whatever they seem to want, for instance, as the mass media now tend to cater uncritically to what appear to be the preferences of a vast majority. That may be a formula for short-term success, for quick profits; yet it may also be a formula for long-term decline, where standards are lost in a swirl of immediacy.

At its best, however, market thinking can stimulate a congregation to fresh thinking about its identity and mission. Who are we as the people of God in Jesus Christ? What are our distinctive traditions? How can we embody them more faithfully, more fully, more effectively? At this point, we are driven to a deeper engagement with our classic traditions, with the elemental sources of our deepest convictions. We have to discover anew what is at stake in those traditions, what they say about human existence.

As we gain clarity about our mission, we are also impelled to search for practical ways to implement that mission in the life of the world. We strive to focus our resources and our energy in a way that will resonate with the needs of those who are within our reach, even if we cannot transform ourselves into a mass church. We can certainly touch more deeply the lives of those who become a part of our common life, worship, and work.

*Market thinking can serve the Christian mission only if we remain critical of its operation, only if we find ways of limiting tendencies within it that ultimately contradict the gospel itself.*

Many things can be said at this point. I want to focus my concluding remarks on one theme: market thinking tends to respond to and foster
individualistic self-indulgence and short-term advantages at the expense of genuine human well-being over the long-term. How can marketing be qualified, even transformed, so that it serves to glorify God and to foster the neighbor love that defines us as the people of God?

As I hear it, the gospel does declare God's compassionate love for all creation. In this respect, God wills my fulfillment and your fulfillment as creatures of God. God also summons us to responsible roles in the realization of the divine purpose. To be given these roles is not a burden but a privilege, a mark of God's generosity. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me," Jesus admonished his followers, "for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls."

There is, however, a paradox: though God is interested in my good, I cannot claim that good for myself so long as I remain preoccupied with my own individual needs and interests. Paradoxically, I can realize my own good only when I have ceased to care about it, when I have rather become absorbed by the grandeur and beauty of the triune God. Simultaneously and in conjunction with my relation to God, I learn to delight in the beauty of my fellow human beings, indeed, of all God's extraordinary creatures. Concern for their well-being begins to surpass my former preoccupations with my own good. And where I see ugliness and brokenness in those around me, I am not repulsed. I feel compassion, like the compassion God has bestowed upon me; for I know that the ugliness I see discloses deep wounds that cry out for healing. My bonds to God in faith and to my neighbor in love displace my anxious concern for my own advantage.

Jesus put it quite succinctly: those who seek to save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for my sake and the gospel's will find them. Jesus' words refer specifically to the cost of discipleship that his followers will have to bear. Yet it also names the profound turnaround we require if we are to share in the promises of the gospel. If I am interested only in getting what I think I need and want, then what I get will neither meet my needs nor satisfy my desires. I can discover what I truly need and want, what authentically promises my fulfillment, only when by the Spirit of God I have begun to find myself in the wider arena defined by the majesty of God and the dignity and beauty of my fellow creatures. "God knows your needs," Jesus reassured his disciples. "Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and you will discover that you also have all that you require."
We do have a story to tell. We have good news to offer the world. Specialists in marketing can help us tell our story more effectively. We have things to learn from those who are shrewd in dealing with this generation! Let us, however, be wise as serpents and yet as innocent as doves. Then we can remain faithful to our calling.
Clergy Misconduct and the Gospel: Theological Foundations for Clergy Character Assessment

Theological criteria are invoked in many ways during the process of evaluating candidates for ministry. When we ask candidates to submit sermons and answer specific theological questions such as, “What is your understanding of the sacraments?” the denominational screening body must put on theological glasses and unashamedly talk about God and our most foundational understandings of what it means to be a Christian. Oddly enough, though, when it comes to the evaluation of a candidate’s character, boards of Ordained Ministry often turn their responsibility over to decidedly secular sources such as psychologists, liability insurance companies and, in extreme cases, the criminal courts of our country. It sometimes seems that the message we are sending is that we as Christians have little that we can add to what the secular institutions of our culture hold up as the proper evaluation of character.

This is seen not only in the evaluation of Deacon and Elder candidates but even more pointedly in cases of clergy misconduct after ordination. It is in such cases where the work of evaluation done

---

Gregory S. Clapper is Associate Professor in the Chapman-Benson Chair of Christian Faith and Philosophy at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama. Prior to this he was Senior Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Waverly, Iowa, and a member of the Iowa Annual Conference’s Board of Ordained Ministry and Joint Review Committee. He is the author of John Wesley on Religious Affections (Scarecrow Press).
by the Bishop, District Superintendent, Board of Ordained Ministry and the Joint Review Committee come under especially sharp scrutiny. Because of this scrutiny, there is a strong temptation to be guided strongly by the safe and culturally accepted evaluations which are done by therapists, insurance companies, and the courts.

But it is precisely in these hard cases of clergy misconduct where our theological self-understanding as a church must be invoked. How the church’s own theological self-understanding should come into play in this process is the focus of this paper. Specifically, I want to deal with the theological question at the heart of many questions involving clergy misconduct. As I see it, the issue can be stated this way: Should we, as a church built on forgiveness, ever recommend extreme sanctions to a minister, such as the termination of Conference membership and the revocation of one’s ordination?

As a member of a Joint Review Committee, I have to say that there are many who assume that the answer to this question is obvious, because I have heard from many people on this issue. The problem is that this assumption is made by people on both sides of the issue. This question, then, needs some theological reflection.

Criteria to Consider When Dealing with Allegations of Clergy Misconduct

As stated in paragraph 454.1c of the 1992 United Methodist Book of Discipline, the Joint Review Committee

shall receive from the chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry all complaints and seek resolution of them... If resolution of the matter is not achieved, the Joint Review Committee shall refer the complaint including the entire file with any recommendations for remedial action to the Board of Ordained Ministry for its consideration.

This process of seeking “resolution” is not guided by any special criteria in the Book of Discipline. Accordingly, let me share some of the criteria which were developed during the course of deliberations of the Joint Review Committee of the Iowa Annual Conference.¹ This is not presumed to be an exhaustive list, but it can be of help in seeing the variety of issues involved in such cases.
Many different issues are raised by an allegation of clergy misconduct. The criteria for the evaluation of clergy conduct can, however, be placed in three broad and overlapping categories: pastoral, professional, theological. I will list here just a few of the specific issues which are relevant for each of these criteria.

Pastoral

—What circumstances will contribute to the process of healing, not only for the victim but also for the minister and his/her family and for the local church and the Annual Conference?
—What action will help to ensure the safety of future parishioners?

Professional

—If the grievance has merit, what should the sanctions be?
—Should the sanctions vary according to the status of the other person involved? For instance, in cases of sexual misconduct, should there be different levels of sanction if the other party is 1) laity, not in the congregation; 2) a member of the congregation; 3) a member of the congregation receiving counseling from the minister; 4) a fellow clergyperson?
—In relation to the above concern, has the issue of power abuse been adequately dealt with?
—How is the sacred trust of ordination—the trust of both the laity and also fellow clergy—to be protected and defended?
—How are we to interpret the Disciplinary mandates, especially those found in paragraphs 2623 (fair process) and 454 (procedural steps for church discipline)?
—What has been the cost of dealing with a particular episode, not just in financial terms but also in terms of energy, time and innocence?

Theological

—How are we to understand Jesus’ mandate not to judge, especially in light of the character assessments which must take place if the Board of Ordained Ministry is to function as directed in the Book of Discipline?
—How are forgiveness, repentance, restitution and restoration related?
—Is confession itself a reason not to suffer the consequences of one’s actions?
—What is the meaning of accountability in this setting?
—As Christians, are we doomed to make no progress in the battle with temptation and sin, or are we to take seriously our United
Methodist ordination vows to “expect to be made perfect in love in this life” and to “earnestly strive after it?”

In what follows, I want to focus on the specifically theological questions at stake in the process of clergy character assessment. The pastoral and professional questions are equally important, but answering the theological questions will help to inform the answers we will wish to give to the other questions.

Theology and Clergy Discipline

Stanley Hauerwas in his recent book After Christendom? has stated the tension that most contemporary U.S. Christians will feel when called into a question of church discipline. Hauerwas writes:

The church seems caught in an irresolvable tension today. Insofar as we are able to maintain any presence in modern society we do so by being communities of care. Pastors become primarily people who care. Any attempt in such a context for the church to be a disciplined and disciplining community seems antithetical to being a community of care. As a result the care the church gives, while often quite impressive and compassionate, lacks the rationale to build the church as a community capable of standing against the powers we confront. That the church has difficulty being a disciplined community, or even cannot conceive what it would mean to be a disciplined community, is not surprising given the church’s social position in developed economies. The church exists in a buyer’s or consumer’s market, so any suggestion that in order to be a member of a church you must be transformed by opening your life to certain kinds of discipline is almost impossible to maintain. The called church has become the voluntary church, whose primary characteristic is that the congregation is friendly. Of course, that is a kind of discipline, because you cannot belong to the church unless you are friendly, but it’s very unclear how such friendliness contributes to the growth of God’s church meant to witness to the kingdom of God.²

We in the church must resist the temptation to shrink from discipline under the cloak of “care” or “friendliness.” As Hauerwas has
articulated it, discipline is not a simplistic question of “law vs. grace.” Discipline is a question touching on our basic identity.

The Joint Review Committee is called together to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) about the behavior of a colleague. As a group dealing with church discipline, at times the truth which the Joint Review Committee must speak is a word of judgment. Let us, then, be clear about this task of judging, since that is a term that does not fall easily from the tongues of Christians.

**Judgment and Hypocrisy**

There will always be many who will remind the members of any Joint Review Committee that Jesus has said, “Do not judge so that you may not be judged” (Matt. 7:1). This however is hardly the last word on morality and the evaluation of character. It does not even fully express the views of Jesus on these issues.

We must all be clear that the biblical injunction not to judge does not bring about an abolition of morals. Mercy is not the same thing as pretending that there are no moral standards. On the contrary, God has set a moral standard—love—and we will be held accountable by God for upholding that standard (cf. Rom. 14:12, “So then, each of us will be accountable to God.”).

What is ruled out of the Christian life by the biblical condemnation of human judging is hypocrisy. Consider the passage referred to above: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” The real meaning of this passage is clear only if one continues reading. It is not the process of making character assessments that is being ruled out.

*For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.* (Matt. 7:1-5)

This full reading makes it clear that Jesus was here condemning hypocrisy rather than the evaluation of character. Consider another passage which makes the same point:
Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. (Rom. 2:1)

Hypocrisy is what is condemned by these passages, not the act of holding other believers accountable for the high standards of Christian life.

Such clear warnings against hypocrisy should make us humble when we are called to make assessments of others, for indeed, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). However, if the Annual Conference interprets this scripture passage as precluding the weighing of the relative strengths and weaknesses of ministers, then we might as well disband the whole Board of Ordained Ministry and issue orders to anyone who wants them.

We apply standards of behavior to our ministerial members because we trust that, even if there are no ministers in our church found worthy to do God's will, our Lord will raise up the stones to sing God's praises and do God's work. We cannot presume to sit in judgment on the eternal soul of any minister. We cannot presume to send people to either heaven or hell, for that is the Lord's prerogative. We are given, though, the task of humbly, and in the presence of God, deciding who should function as a minister. We must not skirt that job in the name of mercy, forgiveness, or compassion.

 Forgiveness and Leadership Positions of Trust, Privilege and Power

The Joint Review Committee must decide how to deal with a person who violates the community covenants of the church while serving in a privileged position of leadership and trust. This is a question that deals with more than forgiveness. It also has to do with whether or not to place this person again in a position of trust and authority.

When people advocate for reinstatement, one biblical story that will very quickly be on their lips is that of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3). Jesus spared her and told her to "go and sin no more." However, since this woman was not serving in a trusted position in the community, the applicability of that biblical example is limited. Furthermore, Jesus was sparing the woman from capital punishment,
literal death. To equate this with the loss of ministerial credentials is to fall into secular “careerism” at its worst.

One might better bring up King David, who continued to serve as king after committing adultery and murder, or Peter who denied Christ and then was forgiven by him. But the whole biblical truth on the question of failed leadership is not that simple either. Consider:

—Moses, who led the Hebrews on their most defining journey—the Exodus—but who also was denied entry to the promised land because the Lord was angry with him (Deut. 3:26)
—Ananias and Sapphira, whose crime of withholding money from the church led to their deaths (Acts 5:1-11).

No one consistent principle can be drawn from these various examples. Because of this, I suggest that the passage we might best refer to is that found in 1 Cor. 4:1-2. There Paul says, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” Trust and accountability are at issue in cases of clergy misconduct, and ministers should be held accountable for their breaches of trust. Integrity, not just the minister’s but also the integrity of the ministry and the integrity of the whole church, is at stake in our response to the behavior exhibited by people who function as church professionals.

We cannot question the fact of God’s forgiveness for sins confessed and repented of. We should not seek to deny a minister membership in God’s church, or even in any particular United Methodist Church. But, in light of Paul’s admonition in First Corinthians, we must be prepared to deny the chance to serve further to those who in the most egregious cases violate the responsibility of their position of trust and authority.

Sin and the Sanctified Life

When confronted with their inappropriate actions, ministers are usually asked why they had engaged in this activity. Sometimes their responses come down to referring to Rom. 7:15ff, where Paul says,
“What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” This theological position calls for a theological response.

While Paul’s statement in Romans 7 might be taken as describing the behavior and self-understanding of some ministers, this scripture passage by itself is not fully descriptive of even Paul’s own view of the Christian life. We might keep reading in Romans to see Paul assert, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Rom. 8:9). How these two Scripture passages are reconciled is clearly a matter of interpretation. But that is not to say that it is an arbitrary question, for we in the United Methodist Church have a specific theological tradition that we are called to use to help us interpret Scripture. The part of our tradition which is most relevant to this case is our understanding of sanctification.

This understanding is clearly spelled out not only in Wesley’s Sermons and Notes but also in the Book of Discipline, Par. 67, “Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules.” The Articles of Religion concerning sanctification can be found on pp. 65 and 68-69. We can also look under the “General Rules” and see that we are to continue to evidence our desire for salvation: “First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind . . .” (p. 72).

We also need to make reference to the historic questions asked at ordination (Book of Discipline, par. 425), such as:

2. Are you going on to perfection?
3. Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?
4. Are you earnestly striving after it? (p. 226)

This consistent emphasis of our United Methodist tradition is reflected in such comparative analyses as H. Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture. Most instructive for our purposes would be a comparison of Niebuhr’s interpretation of Luther, which he called “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” and his reading of John Wesley, “Christ the Transformer of Culture.”

Martin Luther clearly enunciated a view of simul justus et peccator—that we are both justified and sinner at the same time. While virtually all Christians would agree with this, Luther emphasized this duality to such an extreme that he felt that our lives in this world were totally paradoxical: we have one foot in both camps and there is no getting beyond that. Hence Niebuhr’s description of this view as “Christ and Culture in Paradox.”

Some clergy attempt to claim this theological position when they are caught breaking their covenant commitments. They say, “We are
sinners. It is regrettable that these things happen, but what else can one expect?" This is totally at odds with the Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification and the power of the Holy Spirit to conquer sin, the power to "transform" the world.

This does not mean that all ministers are expected to achieve "sinless perfection," for even Wesley did not like that phrase. But we, like all Christians, are expected to avoid evil, do good, and attend to the means of grace (the General Rules). When we do not, there are consequences to our actions. Ministers, going back to the very beginning of our denomination, have been held accountable for maintaining a high standard of behavior, and they have been removed from their positions when they have not lived up to these standards. (See, for instance, the Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828, Vol. I, p. 66, minutes for 1796, question 9—"Who have been expelled from our connection for immoral conduct? Richard Ferguson.")

If an appeal to Romans 7 is to be the overriding defense for any clergy guilty of misconduct, then there can be no justification for maintaining any standards for professional behavior, since we are all apparently doomed to ping back and forth randomly between sin and holy living with no expectation of an explainable pattern of life possible. The whole gospel, as interpreted by our tradition, however, tells a much different story about sin, human freedom, and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about sanctification.

Conclusion

The question of what sanctions to apply in any particular case is not clearly answered by referring only to the theological criteria which I have been discussing. At this point we must come back to our pastoral and professional criteria and bring these together with our theological criteria and the facts of the particular case. What our reflections show, however, is that we must as a church make relative and humble—yet decisive—judgments about our fellow professionals. We must see that there is no contradiction between discipline and grace, even discipline that results in the separation from our ranks of those who choose to violate the community covenants. Finally, we must see that we need not, indeed we cannot, rely solely on psychology, the courts, or
insurance companies to declare our identity for us. We must be prepared to do so using our own theological resources.

Notes

1. These criteria were developed by the Joint Review Committee appointed for the 1992-1996 quadrennium. Included on this committee were Dr. Charles Smith, chair; Dr. Mary Pope; Dr. Roger Coulson; Rev. Eldon Nolte; Rev. Deb Kiese; and Rev. Tompsie Smith, district superintendent; and the author.

The fact that there are now challenges to minister to different cultural groups within the same geographic area hardly needs to be proven anymore. Especially in urban centers on this continent, different ethnic communities jostle each other in neighborhoods, in schools and churches, and in the workplace. The problem is, of course, not a new one; this country has seen a steady flow of immigrants and refugees from the very beginning. But the pace and the variety have intensified. The 1990 U.S. census indicates that this country became more culturally diverse during the 1980s than in any other decade in this century. The Asian population increased 114 percent in the 1980s; there are now at least 22 distinctive Spanish-speaking cultures represented in the United States. There are now parts of the country where no cultural group constitutes the majority of the local population (Los Angeles County being perhaps the most diverse). Only Australia is proportionately more diverse culturally than the United States.

These changes affect not only the coasts and the big cities; even relatively homogeneous parts of the country now feel the tensions that
the encounter between the cultures can create. Our economy is deeply
interdependent in its ownership, its markets, its flow of goods. Recent
debates about that constitutes an “American made” automobile
illustrate the fact of a crosscultural existence: Does the Americanness
depend on the ownership of the company? or the assembly takes place
and who does it? or the percentage of parts manufactured in this
country? The discussions go on and on. People in rural areas thus
participate in the encounter (and sometimes clash) of peoples as much
as those living in centers of direct immigration.

The church is called to minister in these situations and is often
unprepared to do so. This is especially so because of important shifts
in attitudes toward cultural minority groups that began to take place in
the 1960s. Prior to the 1960s, immigrant communities were urged to
give up cultural practices that would hinder their assimilation into the
mainstream of society. These cultural practices—language, customs,
and the like—could be maintained in the private circle of the family
but would need to be forfeited in the workplace, the school, and the
larger society. In return for doing this the dominant culture promised
the benefits of liberal ideology that grounded its approach to life in the
United States: social mobility, economic prosperity, and participation
in wider civic life. However, it became apparent in the 1960s that the
same dominant culture was not delivering on these promises to some
groups—especially African Americans, Native Americans, and
Hispanic Americans. Race was a principle reason for this.

Consequently, these and other groups experiencing this discrimination
began to insist on not assimilating but maintaining their distinctive
features. Rather, they suggested, the dominant culture would have to
accommodate to them. As the language of the 1970s put it, the United
States went from an ideology of the melting pot to that of a salad
bowl. Some ethnic groups proclaimed themselves “unmeltable.” In the
1980s, the continuing discussion evolved into the language of
crossculturalism.

The vocabulary of crossculturalism has helped the church see the
complexity of the issue without necessarily providing a great deal of
guidance about what to do. That cultures in their integrity should be
esteemed and affirmed; that cultural differences should be celebrated,
not repressed; that it is not simply a matter of accommodating
minority cultures to the dominant culture but also the other way
around—all of this is accepted by most people trying to be sensitive to
human and pastoral needs of diverse groups. Likewise, conservative
critics have made us aware that the language of crossculturalism can be misused. It has been wielded as a weapon to bash Western European cultures and to promote often uncritical agendas of self-interest.1 The latter has been evident in some of the debates in education. Others fear that the emphasis on crossculturalism will undo the glue that holds a pluralistic society together.2

Despite the confusion and the potential misuses of crosscultural language, it still reflects a reality that churches have to deal with. A Presbyterian minister on Chicago’s North Side told me some years ago that he knew of fifty-three language groups within his parish boundaries, five of which held services in his church each weekend. What do ministers do when they are called to serve several cultural groups in the same area? And how do dioceses, districts, and other judicatories organize themselves to support both communities and their ministers in these mosaics of cultures?

This essay tries to offer some suggestions about this. First, how to approach this question of crosscultural ministry. Ministerial mindsets are still often shaped by dominant-culture dreams of assimilation (especially if the minister comes from the dominant culture). Wanting to affirm cultural difference is a necessary starting point, but it is not enough. Thus some ways of thinking about crosscultural settings give a framework for approaching the matter in a fresh way. That framework can provide a movement to a second concern: namely, what are some practical things that we can suggest to implement more effective crosscultural ministries?

These first two parts draw heavily on the social sciences and studies in intercultural communication. For the minister, however, something more is needed: a theology that gives coherence to ministry in crosscultural settings. That will be taken up in the third part of this essay.

Frameworks for Understanding Crosscultural Settings

It is important to have a basic respect and esteem for each of the cultures in which and between which one ministers. Without that, crosscultural ministry is bound to fail. The minister expressing these values of respect and esteem sets the stage for people responding in trust to the minister. They also bespeak the minister’s willingness to
learn from people in the culture. The question then arises: what is the next step?

For someone having responsibility to offer ministry to several cultures at the same time—especially when the minister is not a member of any of the cultures or of only one of the several cultures present—it becomes important to have ways of viewing the workings of culture. This is so in order to understand not only each culture but also how cultures will be able to interact. So-called subjective views of culture, in which each culture is considered unique, are useful as one is being immersed in a single culture. Approaches like Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” can then be used. But more objective approaches are needed to complement the subjective approaches in the crosscultural settings. Objective approaches stress commonalities between cultures in their structures and processes. These do not homogenize cultures; rather, they emphasize similar dynamics that allow us to compare and relate cultures. And crosscultural ministry frequently involves relating different cultures to one another.

Using the results of objective studies that have investigated a variety of cultures and cultural characteristics, I would like to suggest frameworks for understanding (1) adaption in cultural groups, (2) elements of analysis for relating cultural groups, (3) communication patterns, and (4) patterns of attributional response.

**Adaptation in Cultural Groups.** An important thing to keep in mind is that while a culture group in the United States might look like and even consider itself to be the same as it was in its home setting, it takes on a different set of dynamics in an immigrant situation. That Honduran Americans came from Honduras is important for their identity. However, their constant encounter with non-Honduran groups every day in the United States means that they are not the same as they once were. Life in Honduras continues to change, but Honduran American life changes in a very different way. Cultures become “ethnic” in an immigrant setting, whether they want to or not. This becomes especially important generationally as children are born and grow up in a new setting, never having seen the home setting. What happens is that the language gets corrupted or even forgotten, home customs take on different or even exaggerated importance in the new setting, and new relations are negotiated. Indeed, these processes of change are going on all the time.

It is important for ministers and leaders in a cultural group to recognize this. These dynamics affect both those who came to the new setting by
choice and those forced into the new setting, i.e., refugees. Theorists such as James Banks have suggested that these processes of change within cultural groups go through cycles. Modifying Banks's framework somewhat for a pastoral setting, I would suggest that there are four stages of adaptation to other cultures (especially those seen as dominant to or more powerful than the culture group which must adapt).

The first stage is *accommodation*. During this stage, the culture group tries to come to terms with the dominant group and to gain the rewards promised by the dominant group in return for giving up features of its cultural distinctiveness. At a certain point, frustration builds up about not being accepted by the dominant culture that leads, in turn, to a scrutiny for the causes of this breakdown. Then a second stage sets in, that of *separation*. Here the culture group closes in on itself to protect its identity and repair its self-esteem after the bruising failures of accommodation. New emphasis is placed on the culture's language and folkways. A somewhat exaggerated cultural identity often emerges. When this rejuvenation is sufficient, a third stage of *dialogue* occurs in which the adapting culture group, now surer of itself and wiser about the dominant culture, will press its claims for its rightful place in the larger picture. If the dialogue is successful, the fourth stage of adaptation, described as *institutionalization*, takes place wherein certain features of the adapting cultural group gain acceptance in the wider culture. In this fourth stage, a certain level of assimilation into the dominant culture has taken place, but not at the expense of loss of identity.

Banks notes that these four stages of adaptation are not a one-time process but rather a recurring cycle that cultural groups go through negotiating their identity in terms of the dominant culture or other surrounding cultures. What becomes important for the minister and the leadership in the adapting cultural groups is not just to look at themselves as Vietnamese, Haitians, and Mexicans but to see themselves as *ethnic* Vietnamese, Haitians, and Mexicans who are likely to be in one of these four stages of cultural adaptation at any given time. Moreover, different generations within the same cultural group may be at different stages of adaptation. Thus, recovery of identity (separation stage) is usually more important for third-generation members of a cultural group than it is for second-generation members. Ministers and leaders should, therefore, try to identify where in the adaptation process each cultural group is. That helps in charting their needs at a specific time and in responding
to those needs. Likewise, by comparing where cultural groups are at any given time, it becomes clearer if there is any likelihood of groups working together. Forging common links works best when two groups are both at the dialogue stage.

Banks also suggests that groups maintain their cultural distinctiveness in three areas: identity, sources of moral authority, and frameworks of meaning of explaining life. Cultural distinctiveness will not be surrendered unless each of these are found at a satisfactory level in the larger community. Thus, groups told that they are culturally inferior or “deprived” will cling to their distinctiveness all the more, since being labeled inferior is not a satisfactory alternative to being “ethnic.”

Categories for Relating Cultures. A good deal of crosscultural study has been done on cultural characteristics. Hofstede studied forty countries to derive a set of four categories that would allow comparative studies of cultures. His work has been expanded by a group of researchers to six categories. These are summarized briefly here. Each of these categories describes a dimension of culture that can be seen as an axis or continuum upon which a characteristic of the culture can be described.

A culture can be viewed from its approach to immediacy. “High contact” cultures emphasize standing in close proximity, eye contact, smiling, touching. These kinds of cultures occur frequently in South America and Eastern and Southern Europe and among Arabs. On the other end of the spectrum are “low contact” cultures that emphasize distance and less sensory involvement. These are frequently found in North America, Western Europe, and Asia.

The second category is individualism-collectivism. This spectrum defines how people live together, what they value, and why they communicated. In Hofstede’s aforementioned study, the five most individualistic countries (ranked) were the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands. The five most collectivistic were Venezuela, Colombia, Pakistan, Peru, and Taiwan.

Gender is the third category. From the research, a masculinity index measured attitudes about strength, assertiveness, competitiveness, and ambition, while the femininity index measured affection, compassion, nurturance and emotionality as values. In terms of these scales, Hofstede found Japan, Australia, Venezuela, Italy, and
Switzerland the highest in masculinity, and Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Finland the highest in the femininity index.

Power distance is the fourth dimension, describing the degree to which power, prestige, and wealth are equally distributed. High power distance cultures tend to concentrate these in the hands of a few; lower power distance cultures distribute power more widely. Hofstede found the Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, and Singapore to have the highest power indices. Lowest power distance countries were Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Ireland.

Uncertainty, the fifth dimension, refers to the ability to tolerate risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity in a culture. Those countries with the lowest tolerance were Greece, Portugal, Belgium, Japan, and Peru. Those with the highest tolerance of uncertainty were Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, and Ireland. Hofstede also notes that predominantly Catholic countries are usually less tolerant of ambiguity, while Protestant, Hindu, and Buddhist cultures are more tolerant.

High and low context provides the final dimension. High context cultures rely on the environment and social relationships to communicate, with less information explicitly encoded. Low context settings try to provide most of the information explicitly. Thus, communication between longtime friends or family members is likely to be high context, whereas computer communication is low context—everything needs to be explicit. Hofstede does not provide research on this axis of high and low context, but the aforementioned researchers provide some speculations. Asian and Native American cultures rely on high context modes of communication. Northern European cultures and the dominant cultures in North America are more low context.

It becomes useful for ministers and leaders in cultural groups to think about how the cultures of which they are a part and to which they must relate might be plotted on these various axes. Where a culture is on each of these axes helps explain both values and what will constitute effective communication. A culture may adapt its approach to accommodate others in the new setting or, at the stage of separation, exaggerate its differences.

Communication Patterns. So much of crosscultural ministry has to do with the ability to engage in intercultural communication. There are four sets of issues about which ministers must be aware.
The first is the relation of language use to identity. Language is more than a means of communication; our very identity is wrapped up in it. Think of the experience of going to a place where you know the language imperfectly or hardly at all. The feelings of inadequacy and insecurity are strong. People will have a tendency to treat you like a child (engage in babytalk) or as less intelligent than you really are because you cannot express yourself. A not-infrequent experience adult members of culture groups have is being treated as children by their pastors, often unintentionally, because of their inadequate competence to use the language. Both a minister’s ability to use the language of the culture group and how the minister responds to the use of the dominant language by the culture group member are crucial to effective cultural ministry.

The second is understanding the role of nonverbal cues. Eye contact, physical proximity, touching, body language, laughter, and voice tone all vary as carriers of messages. They are exceedingly important in high context communication. Realizing how these function in the cultures to which one ministers and how they function in one’s own culture can make the difference in effective crosscultural ministry.

Third, the alternation of speech and silence in communication is important. High context cultures tend to allow for silence as a vehicle for communication, whereas low context cultures prize speech and see silence as noncommunication. Anyone who has worked with Native American peoples, for example, knows the importance of silence as a communicative vehicle.

Fourth, the communicative rule system of a cultural group must be known. In other words, all the rules about how to ask questions, how to convey an undesired response (i.e., how to say no), how to vary communication patterns with persons of different age or gender—every culture has an elaborate system of rules about these things. Not to understand these patterns is to fail to communicate.

Many of the issues noted are things ministers learn through experience—often in failed communication. This can be instructive, but it should be noted that one can learn them in a more systematic way to enhance crosscultural ministry.

Patterns of Attributional Response. Attributional response has to do with how we read someone’s communication from another group and how we respond to them on the basis of that reading. This is especially important in how we relate to one another. Intercultural
communication theory distinguishes between dispositional attributions that explain why the other says or does what it says or does on the basis of personality, attitudes, social institutions of that group, and beliefs and situational attributions, based on the context in which the communication occurs. What groups tend to do is to attribute positive behavior of their own group to dispositional factors (e.g., they did what they did because they have the right values) and negative behavior to situational factors (e.g., unfortunate circumstances). Those familiar with the Romance languages see this embedded in language itself, where unfavorable events are explained in the third person reflexive (e.g., “se rompió la copa,” “the cup broke itself” versus “rumpí la copa,” which would mean, “I [meant to] broke the cup”). A problem in intercultural communication is that this pattern of dispositional and situation attribution is usually reversed when the outgroup behavior is evaluated: if they did something well, it was because of the environment; if bad, it was their attitude. The latter presents a frequent pastoral problem, best overcome by (1) making ingroup members more comfortable with outgroup members by getting to them as individuals, and (2) broadening the kinds and numbers of causal factors in the attribution processes.

Practical Suggestions for Intercultural Ministry

What practical suggestions might be derived from the use of these different frameworks for understanding culture and intercultural communications?

The Minister. Three things provide a focus for a minister becoming better prepared for crosscultural ministry. The first is language. Dominant-culture North Americans tend to be monolingual and think it a great achievement if they learn a second language. People in nondominant cultural communities must negotiate at least two and often more languages. Language learning is indispensible for crosscultural ministry, not only for better communication but also to appreciate the identity of the community. Ministers should set themselves the goal of learning one language well and at least one more language adequately. The fact that the minister cares enough to try to learn counts for so much.

Likewise, it is worthwhile for the minister to become more aware of how language shapes identity. Third-generation members of a culture...
group may speak that group's indigenous language badly, but speaking it in some fashion is a badge of identity in the community. Likewise, research has shown that, when confronted with an undesirable outgroup member speaking the ingroup's language, the ingroup will resort to highly colloquial language to exclude the outgroup member. This can say a lot about identity.

Second, being able to situate where a culture group is in the adaptation process can help shape pastoral strategies. A group in the accommodation phase will need help identifying and channeling its anger and frustrations. The separation phase calls for a celebration of the culture's special gifts. The dialogue phase is crucial; it helps cultures see themselves as others see them and see themselves as a changing culture amid other changing cultures. The institutionalization phase requires helping the culture see how it has been assimilated, both positively and negatively, into its larger environment.

Third, communicative competence—the capacity to understand the communication pathways of a culture—requires knowing how the culture communicates and how it feels in the presence of other cultures. The better that is implicitly known, the more effective communicator the minister will be. The better that is explicitly articulated, the better the minister will be able to help the culture group itself come to a greater awareness.

For the community, there are some practical goals as well that can be suggested by the minister but need to be taken up within the community itself. First of all, communities need to acknowledge their ethnicity. That is, they must realize that they are not the same culture they were in their home country. To be aware of those changes is a gift probably given only to the first generation or to those who visit the home country frequently. To say that they are not the same doesn't mean they have no identity. It is simply a reminder that a process of change is happening. Understanding that will help ease the pain of the inevitable change that comes about. It is the first step in helping a community to see where it is going.

Second, more often than not, racism is an issue, experienced both at the hands of the dominant culture but also evoked in the friction between cultures. Both ministers and leadership need to draw attention on a regular basis to the insidious ways racism obtrudes upon communication.

Third, generational changes add another layer to the complexities of intercultural communication, since each successive generation deals
with the relation to the culture group's identity (and with that, its sense of sources of authority and meaning) in a different way. The adaptation and language issues are intensified exponentially in the second and third generations. Sensitivity to these changes is essential for effective communication and ministry.

Finally, two very practical suggestions. To the extent that members of different cultural groups get to know each other as persons and not just as members of outgroups, in-cultural communication is improved. The second suggestion is to encourage multiple memberships, i.e., for members of a cultural group to see themselves as members of several groups. Parish organizations provide a vehicle for this. Research suggests that people with multiple memberships are more tolerant of outgroup members than those who identify solely with their cultural group.

Toward a Theology for Intercultural Ministry

Persons in ministry do not live by social science research alone; they need nourishment from the Word of God. There is no well-developed theology for intercultural ministries, although there are local theologies of culture groups who have come to terms with their location in the wider society. James Banks has suggested three elements that are the goals of crossculturalism in education. I would like to adapt these for crosscultural ministry. They might be called (1) cultural pluralism, which emphasizes the values and gifts of each culture; (2) cultural difference, which highlights the special features of each culture; and (3) cultural relatedness, which looks to the new reality formed by the genuine coming together and dialogue between cultures. It seems to me that all three are needed in a healthy crossculturalism and a crosscultural ministry. Without the first, a culture's integrity is not respected and a mindless assimilation takes place. Without the second, important elements of identity are lost to the culture group, and important perspectives are lost for others. Without the third, we can end up without a genuine sense of unity and have only a system of noncommunicating monads.

As a way of getting started with a theology of crosscultural ministry and a spirituality by which to live it out, I would suggest thinking of biblical stories or narrations that might exemplify each of the three goals of cultural pluralism, difference, and relatedness. Might the
Pentecost narrative exemplify the pluralism motif—each nation hearing the gospel in its own tongue, implying that every tongue is a worthy vehicle of the gospel? Might the story of Ruth exemplify the value of cultural difference—how God works through foreignness to bring salvation? Feminist exegetes who have explored the theme of women as “other” in the Bible might suggest additional passages. Finally, might the 144,000, or the elect, of the Book of Revelation, coming from every tribe and tongue, people and nation, exemplify relatedness—having come through the great tribulation (and such is cultural adaptation!), now a new people but in continuity with their past, all bearing the seal of the Lamb? The eschatological nature of the image reminds us that truly effective crosscultural ministry is still ahead of us but is a goal worth pursuing.

By expanding the list of stories in each category, we will have the beginnings of a biblical theology of crosscultural ministry.

Notes

Globalization and Its Ironies: Some Implications for Theological Education

Globalization in theological education has been a major preoccupation of the Association of Theological Schools since 1980, making it more than a passing vogue. The initial mandate of an ATS committee was to explore the “internationalizing” of theological education, but strong momentum led to the creation in 1986 of a second task force that has explored ways to sustain the conversation on a wider scale. Several pilot projects have already brought about changes, while continuing experiments in globalization will inevitably have an increasing influence upon the way theological schools do their work.

As theological educators, the two of us find ourselves asking questions about this effort and its results and what it will mean not only here in the United States but in other parts of the world as well. In this essay we look at the globalization of theological education out of our multicultural experience, to see if we might open some further avenues in the ongoing conversation. We also examine the effects of globalization on the students we are teaching and ask whether the effort is producing worthwhile results in their lives and ministries. We feel that an awareness of the ironies in many globalization efforts may enhance the rewards and lead to an even greater commitment in this promising area.

Ruben Habito, Professor of World Religions and Spirituality, and Edward W. Poitras, Professor of World Christianity, are faculty members at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Habito is the author of Healing Breath: Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth and works on interreligious themes. Poitras has published in Missiology and Korean Studies.
What in the World Is Globalization?

Functioning as a buzzword in many disciplines, globalization has become a sprawling concept with many connotations. There are at least three senses in which the idea is commonly discussed: globalization as (1) a number of movements, activities, or relationships; (2) a consciousness, ideal, or goal; and (3) a variety of methods used to reflect those activities or foster those goals.

Globalization, then, often refers first to the worldwide, or broadly inclusive, extension of networks in business, politics, communications, education, religion, and other human activities. Sometimes there is an assumption that power-sharing and international equality follow from this expansion, but economic and administrative power often remains concentrated in the older, familiar centers.3 When theologians and theological educators speak of globalization, they are often referring, at least in part, to such activity as worldwide Christian witness, ecumenical cooperation, interreligious dialogue, or Christian mission in behalf of human welfare and justice.

Globalization also often refers, secondly, to a global consciousness or the pursuit of such an awareness. The sense of one world, the ideal of shared cultures, or the now familiar recognition of the “global village” are aspects of the ideational side of globalization. Sociologists refer to holism or the nostalgia for a lost sense of community, while religious thinkers speak of a developing sense of the presence and importance of differing religious groups.

The third dimension of globalization can be found in the large number of methodologies proposed for acknowledging the activities or fostering the consciousness. These methods take many forms. In education and the arts the fostering of appreciation of differing cultures and traditions has a long history. The comparative or integrative study of differing cultures and religions seems to be gaining momentum in our time. The use of a globally based fund of information, following an inclusive-inductive style of thought rather than a locally based deductive scheme, appears in many reflections related to globalization. In education globalization usually means the restructuring of courses and curricula to reflect global realities and foster global consciousness. While the tension between the importance of the global and the local is apparent in all three meanings of globalization, it is in methodology that the stresses become obvious.
and acute. Perhaps the issue is clearest when the attempt to preserve local cultural expressions challenges ideals of wider integration that seem to lead toward a homogenized universal cosmopolitanism or oppressive majority culture.

The conversation about globalization in theological education has recently accepted a four-part descriptive definition (as proposed by Don S. Browning in 1986): the church’s mission to evangelize the world, ecumenical cooperation among Christians, dialogue between Christianity and other religions, and the church’s mission to human welfare and social justice. Globalization is also defined with reference to the worldwide attempt to contextualize the gospel message within local cultures. These working definitions overlap and have to be considered together in assessing the possible impact globalization may have for theological education. These descriptions tend to include the three principal aspects of globalization—activity, idea, and method—often undifferentiated, making clarification helpful in assessing globalization concerns.

Christianity has exhibited a global consciousness from its earliest years, of course; and through its missionary and ecumenical activities has, especially in its more recent history, maintained a worldwide network of relationships and communication second to none. Globalization has also affected many other areas of world activity as well. Trade and business, for example, have long depended upon world awareness and international contacts, while in the political arena the League of Nations preceded the formation of the World Council of Churches. In view of the long-standing existence of global structures, perhaps the most surprising aspect of the current conversations about globalization is the lateness of its surfacing as a theological issue and as a theme in theological education.

From these conversations a growing consensus seems to be emerging. Globalization today calls for a renewed witness to the gospel precisely in an interdependent world characterized by marked divisions within Christianity; where other religions show vital activity; and also where poverty, oppression, and ecological deterioration pose a threat to the very survival of our planet. In this context our ecumenical dialogue within the Christian family seeks a depth of unity which accepts our varied gifts and does not settle for a least common denominator. Our dialogue with other religious traditions invites us to reflect upon our understanding of claims of uniqueness and universality as we reaffirm our Christian identity. Our solidarity with
all humanity and our mandate to serve extend to the well-being of the whole of creation. And surely our witness is not an attempt to impose one cultural form upon all Christians. That was the problem in the colonial era; now we celebrate and anticipate an authentic form of the gospel in each local culture.

Ironies in the Globalization Attempt

Several ironies appear in globalization programs as we observe them from a multicultural perspective. One of these ironies is noted by Justo González, who has said, “Sometimes I wonder to what degree talk and programs of ‘globalization’ serve as an excuse—even as a subconscious excuse—not to deal with issues of real globalization in our own backyards.” In Western theological schools there is widespread acknowledgement of the claims of liberation theologies, feminist theologies, and the many other thematic theologies; and this may have led to sincere attempts at meaningful response. Yet on the whole there seem to be few changes at the deeper level of commitment or in the concrete dimension of local action. It is not a little ironic that the very attempt at globalization may often serve as a barrier to its realization at the local level.

Another irony is that globalization, that quest for the widest possible sense of identification, is often seen as a partisan cause and is associated with other positions sometimes accused of being divisive, such as feminist or liberation theologies. Peter Beyer closes his study in Religion and Globalization with a striking statement of this irony. He writes, “We live in a conflictual and contested social world where the appeal to holism is itself partisan.”

It is ironical as well that the association of globalization with “liberal” agendas has also led some to view it as a threat to evangelization. In addition, many in the Two-Thirds World are claiming that the day of evangelism is over, at least in a traditional sense, while others cling to inherited Western patterns of Christian evangelism, resisting the contextualizing tendencies now often associated with globalization.

In a nation like Korea, with strong nationalist feelings, residual xenophobia, and an ambivalence toward Western culture, it is not surprising that there are poignant ironies related to globalization in theological education. Many local theologies have emerged in recent
decades, including Minjung Theology, a “Yellow Theology,” and a powerful theology of interreligious dialogue. In most cases, strong protestations are made against Western concepts and methods, while those same tools are employed in the building of the local theologies. Koreans desire to do “world theology” as well, but conversation with others, especially Westerners, is often vehemently rejected. One reason for this repudiation of things Western, of course, is the desire to be free of overpowering influences from the wealthy, still-dominant Western nations. Surely it is ironical as well as painful that those who protest so greatly against the theological influence of the West still drink at its wells and must enter the world theological dialogue in its languages and upon its terms.

Japan is a society that presents many ironies, not only within itself but even more in its relationships with the rest of the world, especially the West. Among Christians in Japan familiarity with Western culture is taken as a prerequisite for understanding the Christian faith. Many students of Christian theology tend to be more at home in Western categories of thinking and find little time for the appreciation of their Japanese intellectual, cultural, and religious heritage. Some even show a tendency to disdain certain elements of it as “pre-Christian” or “pagan” and unworthy of their attention. Yet there is also a felt need among Christians to overcome an image of themselves as “hataa-kusai” (“smelling of butter,” a Western odor) and to assert their Japaneseeness. Thus, an ambivalent attitude toward the West characterizes the self-consciousness of many Japanese Christians.

The Western graduate degree is still coveted in most places, even when its prestige is used to promote anti-Western programs. It should not surprise us, then, that globalization is sometimes seen as another Western program of conquest imposed upon others for the sake of objectives foreign to local needs. In any case, we suspect that such ironies exist all around the theological world.

For this reason, globalization and contextualization might be best served by Westerners leaving others alone for a time. Even observing others’ theological reflection can become a burden and lead to contamination. The very attempt to listen in on another’s theologizing can appear to be the imposition of an outside agenda of “globalization,” a subtle attempt at a new form of control.

It would seem that we have an onion of ironies, layer upon layer of seemingly self-contradictory situations in which the quest for globalization is taking place. The tension is further heightened by the
deep religious emotions and cultural feelings which often underlie theological assertions.

Emerging Challenges

As we have mentioned above, one of the most difficult challenges in today's world is the resolution of the tension between globalization and localization. We live in a world where social trends binding us together are contradicted by national, ethnic and other divisions which drive people apart and produce violence. Robert J. Schreiter describes this as the "simultaneous homogenization and implosion of societies." Many Christians see globalization as contradicting their attempts to contextualize their faith within their particular cultures.

At the same time, contextualization is not always a desirable ideal, as when Christianity becomes too closely identified with the jingoism or consumerism of certain societies, or when adapting to indigenous customs is seen as a surrender to values incompatible with true Christian commitment to the gospel. An example would be the case of Japan, where there is an ongoing controversy concerning ancestor veneration among Christians. Acceptance of this timeworn practice, deeply rooted in the Japanese soul, into Christian liturgical life by those who would "baptize" elements of Japanese culture, is regarded by many Christians as a capitulation to the Tenno system, a complex political and socio-psychological component of Japanese society which has been deftly used by the militarists in past eras to legitimize Japan's wars of aggression.

The collapse of the two-world conflict between communism and the West, leaving the world with a loosely organized and shifting capitalist economy, also presents new and as yet poorly understood challenges. Schreiter has written about these matters and concludes that the Christian calling for today may well be reconciliation, or bridge-building. He also feels that the new geopolitical situation may undermine the perceived relevance of liberation theological models. If so, this could bring a reconsideration of the way in which many theologians have understood globalization as a call to join the common struggle for human welfare, social justice, and ecological well-being.

Certainly one of the main theological challenges of our time will be the need to find a way to relate the many differing theological ideas,
formulations, and cultural expressions which are emerging around the world. Shall they be considered equal, and all share in some kind of assembled harmony (or cacophony?) of voices? If they are to be evaluated and somehow related to one another, what shall be the norms and who shall set them? It might be that the arts offer some encouragement, and even a model for theology, with their constant search for creative new forms and with productions that still require some arbitration. Surely we may seek mutual respect and welcome different, new forms of faith, even when these challenge our cherished assumptions.¹⁴

Perhaps theology can also find encouragement in recent research and reflection upon chaos theory. Given even a small number of limiting conditions within the family of Christian faith, freedom of expression may well appear chaotic, but we can probably trust that a pattern will emerge exhibiting order. We will most likely need to learn to see truth not as a given but as the horizon of a quest. Truth will emerge only as Christians with differing perspectives critically reflect together and with others in the trust that something greater will emerge in the pattern of their joint effort.

We may thus be assured that the world community of theological reflection will continue to affirm something recognizably Christian in our efforts toward globalization and contextualization. The real challenge for theological education, then, is to transform and reexpress our institutions following this kind of model of globalization.

Implications for Theological Education

Widespread differences in views about the purpose and method of theological education make generalization difficult. In both Western and Asian societies we can find schools that seek to prepare professional leadership for their churches, those that pursue academic forms of “theoretical” understanding, and those that seek to form, or reform, the faith of their students.

In Korea, for example, the neo-Confucian tradition, with its love of thought and suspicion of practical physical involvement, favors incessant rumination upon European philosophical theology. At the same time an anti-intellectual evangelicalism has combined readily with the Shamanist religious tradition in pursuit of worldly security and prosperity. As reflected in theological education, some of these
differences are superficially similar to Western and other counterparts, yet the cultural underpinnings and inner understandings are quite different.

In an attempt to move beyond disparate views and find a coherent structure for theological education, Charles M. Wood has suggested that the theological curriculum be seen whole as a three-part structure for the cultivation of the capacity, or habitus, for authentic theological reflection. Vision and discernment, the capacities for seeing whole and seeing in particular, are proposed as the keys to a mature theological stance.15

Wood's proposal is "global" in the sense of being all-encompassing, which suggests that the globalization of theological education should begin with a comprehensive overview of its purposes and structures. In that total context we are better able to see where world perspectives and differing cultural forms might inform a more globally responsive and responsible theological education. If we are able to see theological education whole and agree that its purpose is to nurture the habitus of mature theological reflection, then globalization and contextualization are a natural fit, with globalization corresponding to vision and contextualization to discernment. Such a relationship would inform theological education across disciplinary lines and would permeate consciousness and critical thought, as well as the specific results of theological activity.

This understanding has the advantage of promising a thoroughly integrated globalized theological education. Without such an integral understanding, the attempt at globalization can lead to facile attempts at the addition of certain texts, courses, or cultural experiences, while leaving intact an existing basic theological stance and a timeworn curriculum.

Globalization calls for both a new consciousness and a new commitment which could best be expressed as the pursuit of depth, where a global consciousness touches those assumptions affecting all of theological reflection, and concreteness, where specific action in a local context accompanies the global transformation of worldview.16

Globalization, then, means a growing awareness that an inclusive dimension and universal vision are integral to a religious (certainly Christian) understanding of the world, while recognizing the world involvements inherent in all local Christian contexts and the potential world significance of all particular manifestations of Christian faith and life. Many questions remain to be worked through, not the least of
which might be: What are valid local forms of globalization? Can globalization help in overcoming local conflicts? What would a globalized world look like? Are there limits to the possibility of globalization?

Effects of Globalization on Seminary Students and Ministry

Although our institution, Perkins School of Theology, has not undertaken a comprehensive globalization program, we have made some specific attempts, and our students are exposed to a variety of global influences. For example, all students are required to take the course “World Religions and Christianity: a Global Perspective,” which exposes them to the world social and economic context for the religions, attempts to provide an inner “feel” of other religious traditions, and requires personal contact with non-Christian communities in our area. Perkins also requires participation in workshops in the alleviation of racism and sexism. We offer courses in interreligous dialogue, world Christianity, worship, music, and other fields which stress global dimensions. The required systematic theology course includes readings from a variety of cultures. The school sponsors some international study opportunities, and students have initiated mission trips which have included international students. Student groups also bring to the campus speakers who stimulate global awareness. The Mexican-American program on our campus brings a global dimension to our life. Yet our theological school has not begun programs which involve groups of faculty or others in crosscultural settings, and we do not have a meaningful intercultural requirement for students.

If the test of the pudding is in the eating, we should ask whether such attempts at globalization have made a perceptible difference in the results of our theological formation and teaching. We feel that they have, and often in ways that have outrun our expectations.

In most cases students who have been exposed to global concerns have some of their assumptions challenged and find their awareness of others and the world heightened. The results often appear first in the areas of gender, race, culture, and environmental sensitivities. Classroom encounters among persons of different backgrounds, especially when international students are present, often become occasions for painful but productive new awareness. Especially when
global issues of intercultural communication are on the table, students find that their own lives and relationships are brought under scrutiny. When these encounters go well, the conclusion often takes the form, “I never realized that you felt that way, or that I seemed that way to you.” Such has been the poignant resolution of many discussions, for example, between African-American men and white feminists.

When confronted with the world context, especially movements for justice and the new theological thought taking place in other continents or cultures, students may be drawn into intense, often painful discussions with those who come from different backgrounds. Exposure to Third World views of the world economic structure will sensitize students to systemic problems in their own communities and can lead to vigorous discussions and clashes of opinion in the classroom. A typical exchange goes like this:

White student pastor: “There seem to be parallels between international economic exploitation and some of our problems here in Dallas.”

Black student: “The situation in our cities is an exact mirror of the world scene, and those of us who suffer most understand the system best.”

At this stage some students may withdraw into their orbit of received opinion, but most will reach out and begin asking new questions, soaking up information not only from books but also from their fellow students and, before long, from the people with whom they associate outside the school in their churches. This process is reinforced by requirements in both classes and spiritual formation groups. All students must make meaningful contact with Christians of traditions other than their own and also are required to seek out persons of other religious backgrounds, interviewing them and observing their activities and rituals. Perhaps because we are in the Southwest, one of the subjects which often engages students and bridges their differences is the study of Native American life and spirituality.

Through such encounters and dialogues, both within and beyond seminary activities, students will usually show signs of personal growth and change in their attitudes. Openness to others, delight in discovering unexpected riches in hitherto strange places, and a desire to expand knowledge and consciousness begin to appear. These things not only show up in the classroom but often result in changes in local church work. It is at this point of final application that the results of
globalization become most clear. Perhaps a few anecdotal cases chosen out of our experience with students and pastors will serve to show how globalization has worked in our teaching.

After a study of the contextualization of the gospel in Asia, a young African-American woman pastoring a struggling rural congregation in Louisiana became interested in certain symbols her people were using. She investigated and discovered a fascinating story of cultural transmission to Methodism from Africa and Roman Catholicism, deepening her understanding of her people and enriching her ministry.

After a study of Christianity and Islam in the Near East, a student invited a Palestinian Christian speaker to visit his local church, beginning a program of global education in that church that has continued.

A former student recently telephoned to request information on resources for developing a program of teaching international cultural awareness to her congregation in Oklahoma. She intends to embark on a long-term program of globalization in her parish.

One student pastor, sensitized to the need to bridge human differences, befriended the family of a young man who contracted AIDS and had been ostracized in their small rural community. As a result of this experience, this pastor has taken the lead in organizing a number of support groups in his area.

A local pastor recently began a series of joint Bible study meetings between classes in his white congregation and a nearby black church. Neither group had ever participated in such shared activity. This same pastor, also as a result of new awareness acquired during his global studies, has also begun a support group for battered women in his church, a problem he had not even suspected until his sensitivities were awakened.

The results of a concern for globalization in seminary education, then, have included a broadening and deepening of student and faculty consciousness, better relationships among diverse groups, an awareness of the wider world community and its local manifestations, the implementation of programs in local churches, and new ties with global networks of mission and service.

It would seem, then, that globalization in theology and theological education must begin with persons whose experiences have brought them to a new depth of identification with the Christian community in its various contexts throughout the world, yet it must go further than this conscientization and take concrete form locally in a way that leads
toward the transformation of local communities. Anything less than this in contemporary Christian life, but especially in theological education and ministry, would be ironical.

Notes


2. Both of the authors teach at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Habito, a native of the Philippines, came to North American theological education after some twenty years of research and teaching in Japan, while Poitras spent over thirty years in Korea, most of that devoted to theological education. Both have attended ATS meetings about globalization and have been following the literature.

3. See, for a good example, Alan Famham, “Global—or just Globaloney?” in *Fortune*, (June 27, 1994): 97-100. Famham writes that many of the supposedly global corporations are really locally controlled, and that rates of international trade have not significantly increased during the era of “globalization.” He also believes that we should look for globalization in concrete connections and movements of goods and services, not in “globaloney” talk about internationalization. The main change, he maintains, has been in the speed of communications worldwide.

4. From Don S. Browning, address to the 1986 Biennial Meeting of ATS. (This reference is from *Theological Education* XXX: 5) See also the further development of this definition by Barbara Bowe, RSCJ, in “Teaching Introduction to the New Testament from a Global Perspective,” *Theological Education* (Spring, 1993): 29, where the note of social justice is introduced.

5. It must be pointed out that the ecological dimension as a theological issue has not yet been given its due in the discussions on globalization and is only beginning to catch the attention of participants. Initiatives have been taken, however, and a group has been set up to address this issue in the context of theological education, and to plan activities and workshops along these lines. This group, entitled Theological Education to Meet the Environmental Challenge, has its headquarters at 2100 L Street, Washington, DC 20037.


13. It is clear that this has been the central motif in much of the theology of interreligious dialogue and in those theologies advocating theocentric Christologies. A good case in point is Hick and Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

14. Keyama calls for this mutuality in the article cited above.

15. Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Discernment* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). Wood's creative organization of the theological curriculum into historical, philosophical, and practical theology, with each mutually informing the others, is, as he suggests, more radical than most theological schools are prepared to accept. His analysis is addressed to theological education in North America, but the overwhelming influence of North Atlantic patterns upon other areas of the world is indisputable, and his analysis also seems valid even where other patterns have made the Western influence less decisive.

16. Max Stackhouse has raised questions about the sufficiency of a conversion to globalization without concrete expression in local action. See the article mentioned above, e.g., p. 110. The global challenge can also be seen as a set of emerging conditions to which Christians are called to respond in specific ways. See p. 118 on this.
Globalization of theological education, according to S. Mark Heim, has become a current rallying point in North America. For many North American theological educators, globalization is the new strategy for future directions of the missionary movement in Christianity. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has now included globalization as one of the criteria for accreditation. But the troubling question is, What exactly do we mean by globalization?

In August 1992, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, organized a “Conference on Networking for Globalization,” which was designed in consultation with the ATS. At the heart of the discussions was the definition of globalization; therefore, some participants were invited to share their insights in the process of defining globalization. These participants were also asked to share their views on what they perceived as key curricula issues on and the events that shaped their commitments to globalization. I attended this conference, and my questions and reflections on the vision and language of globalization grew out of listening to the issues and questions that were raised by the various speakers.

I would like to preface my reflections with a brief autobiographical note. I grew up in Ghana, West Africa (formerly the Gold Coast), in an atmosphere of the confluence of foreign political and Christian
missionary influences and its consequences, which I will call "the African experience." Marked by the memory of the struggles against the colonial system and Western cultural imperialism, I find myself perplexed as to whether, in light of centuries of betrayal, neglect, and colonialism, the North American anxiety about globalization of theological education is not merely "old wine in new wineskins."

In a preamble to the discussions at the Conference on Networking for Globalization, John Wagner, one of the conveners of the conference, emphasized the connectedness of "all of God's creation, all of God's people in a manifest destiny." He also drew attention to how much we have to learn about truth, goodness, beauty, peace, and hope from one another. Dr. Wagner concluded the preamble with these words: "This beauty reflects our grand commitment to theological education, to recognizing and learning from that connectedness." This, to my mind, is the rationale for the globalization of theological education. But the African experience has been anything but goodness, beauty, peace, and hope. Rather, it has been degradation, distortion, violence, and oppression. In this article, I hesitantly recount some of the bitter memories of the African experience, and the concomitant suspicion and fears of African peoples with regard to talking about connectedness.

I will organize my thoughts around two of the dimensions of globalization defined by Don Browning, viz., mission and evangelism and struggle for justice, in the context of the African experience.

Globalization, Missions, and the African Experience

Globalization is a very specifically North American agenda, "addressing," according to Heim, "the context of theological schools and their need to attend to the whole church and the whole world." But the nagging questions are about the nature and content of this new missionary enterprise. Does globalization mean that North Americans are going to expand their theological sensibilities to the rest of the world while implicitly acknowledging, it appears, the consciousness that mission has to be something quite different than what we have had in the past?

Mission in the past has been the extension of the peculiar amalgam of secular and religious ingredients known as Christendom. The
religious intentions of Western missionaries were easy to grasp, but their larger ideologies, the religious and cultural ideas by which the mission forces justified their activities resulted in the dominance of Africa. Throughout the history of missions, Christianity has practiced a dehumanizing control of African peoples, forcing them brutally to sever their roots and lose their authenticity. With regard to these practices within the Basel and Bremen missions, which worked in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Karl Renstich observes that “the Sendungbewusstein of these two missions was from the beginning very dominant.” Renstich illustrates his point with a statement made by the Danish Governor to the Gold Coast, Friedrich S. Mörek, to the first Basel missionary to the Gold Coast (1932-45):

> These stupid people will never be able to learn how to read and write. . . We will extract from Africa as much and as quickly as possible without too much effort. . . Only we the Danes are free people and all those people who are still crouching under the burden were subjected to the Danish crown. We are lords and we know how to break their pride, so that they will bow before the white man as low as the white man wishes.

This is not an isolated case; in order to justify the injustices done to Africa, Europeans in general had to forget, or pretend to forget, all they had previously known about Africa, African history, African peoples, and their culture. Historians have omitted the stifled cries of an entire people who have been exploited repeatedly throughout the centuries. This brash denial of history and culture to Africa, and indeed of human qualities and capacity for civilization to the indigenous peoples of Africa, according to Simon E. Smith, has resulted in a false Africa created by Western anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and missionaries. Smith also points out how the media in the North has paid little or no attention to Africa, and only then to its aberrant phenomena with little or no analysis. According to Enoch H. Oglesby, misconceptions, deceptions, and misbelief played out in Western media have depicted the African as “mindless, savage, uncivilized, and forever dependent on the white Euro-American for guidance and social affirmation.”

The significance of recounting these stories is to demonstrate that a form of globalization has already taken place but with bad consequences for Africa. Some mainline churches would like to break with this missionary-colonist past, according to Robert
Schreiter, by downplaying the mission and evangelization dimension of globalization. But the past should be allowed to illuminate the present. Jean-Mark Ela clarifies this point brilliantly by saying:

*If the past does indeed shed light on the present, we need to rethink the Christian message today; otherwise it becomes one more disturbing influence in Africa, at a time when Africans who refuse to part with the cultural identity confront an erupting foreign civilization bent on conquest.*

This is the vital context of our reflection on globalization; it is not “a mere exposure ‘trip/immersion’ in a foreign setting”; it is not merely helping to fill empty libraries of Third World schools “by donations of cast-off ideas in the form of books we no longer have use for.” The idea of globalization reaches to the depths of African identity: the restoration of our broken pride and distorted history. Kwesi Dickson has said that it is often taken for granted that the task of theological education in Africa is merely to pass on Western theological scholarship to succeeding generations of African students. Dickson adds that what is needed is for Africans to start afresh and to restate the Christian faith in answer to African questions, with African methodologies and terminologies. As pointed out in “*Justice et évangélisation en Afrique,*”

*The presence of Christianity in Africa will no longer be assured by large gifts from overseas. From now on, what will count is the extent of concern the church shows for human beings in search of justice and liberation. There can be no more questions about presenting ourselves to God with a "borrowed humanity." The inhumanity of our people’s condition is what now challenges our faith as Africans. We ask if evangelization has produced sufficient fruits of justice.*

This brings us to the issue of justice and solidarity in globalization.

**Globalization, Struggle for Justice, and the African Experience**

Browning’s fourth dimension of the definition of globalization emphasizes “the mission of the Church to be in solidarity with the
poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice.” It has been suggested that Westerners run the risk of oversimplifying the issue of the poor to the extent of making it a fad. Dickson illustrates this point with the story of a group of theological students from New York who visited Mexico City to observe the situation of the poor and meditate upon it. Dickson comments that if the students concerned did not consider that New York exhibited all the poverty that could be meditated upon, then they could hardly have known what to look for in Mexico City.17

The real oppression and injustice in Africa and other parts of the world are seen through the economic disparities that result as new political élites are integrated into the dominant world system. These individuals prosper from the external economic powers supported by Western capitalism and militarism. The problem with globalization and solidarity with the poor, as Mark Kline Taylor and Gary J. Bekker see it, is that North American theological educators “who are using the grammar of globalization” are “politically privileged” and “economically affluent.”18 Consequently, according to Taylor and Bekker, they experience “socio-psychological tension” constituted by the contradiction between an awareness of global need and an inability to address these needs. One way of resolving this tension, Taylor and Bekker point out, is to come up with “another North American inspired agenda that is at best paternalistic, and at worst ethnocentric and imperialistic.”19 Our suspicion is that globalization is precisely such an agenda. Jobling also draws attention to Fredric Jameson’s observation that subordinated cultures are “ceaselessly drawn on to restore vitality to an enfeebled and asphyxiating ‘high culture.’” He adds that this drawing on happens “especially when associated with a sense of impotence to really change things,” and in his opinion, “globalization seems to be very much a drawing upon the ideas of the disadvantaged to enrich the ideas of the advantaged.”20

The resurgence of racism in North America and decades of Western militarism in suppressing Third World nations for exploitation by Western multinational corporations have put a question mark on Western traditional Christianity, which makes the issue of solidarity appear to be self-serving. The kind of solidarity depicted in the vision of globalization by Taylor and Bekker is referred to by them as “politicized solidarity.” This means, in essence, helping the poor and oppressed to overcome the conditions that threaten their survival, e.g., medical and hunger needs.21 It is true that the real world of the poor
and oppressed is one of hunger, sickness, and death. The importance of medical work and the image of the missionary doctor was made popular by Albert Schweitzer a long time ago, but even then there were allegations about Dr. Schweitzer’s derogatory attitudes toward Africans, how he treated them as children. But the hunger, sickness, and death, the so-called threats and dangers, are only symptoms of the real situation. The roots of these threatening conditions lie in the socio-economic system. Through the centuries, African societies have been destructured by foreign trade and political and ideological domination. Multinational corporations and banks have invaded a diversity of situations and political systems in Africa and have put these systems into a debt trap that strangles the mass of African peoples. African bishops, meeting in Yaounde in 1981, called on Africans

\[
to \ become \ aware \ of \ international \ domination \ from \ a \ political, \ economic, \ social, \ cultural \ point \ of \ view \ldots to \ realize \ the \ control \ of \ the \ multinational \ corporations. \ldots \ All \ these \ factors \ burden \ the \ African \ continent; \ they \ perpetuate \ unjust \ situations \ and \ create \ often \ insurmountable \ obstacles \ on \ the \ road \ to \ development \ and \ to \ economic \ and \ social \ progress.22
\]

What is needed is a re-creation of structural conditions for survival. This requires a “conscientizing” evangelism at home and abroad that raises strong voices against exploitation and oppression of Third World countries by the rich of First World nations. African churches have long waited to hear this strong voice from Western churches denounce Western exploitation and domination in Africa. As Ela has pointed out, the reason for the striking silence maintained by the Western churches and their missionaries alike with respect to the interests of foreign capital and their “watchdogs,” the African political systems that serve their interests, is not hard to find. He draws attention to Father Carré’s statement in his book Kellam, Son of Africa, where Carré has his hero say:

\[
Whites, \ you \ see, \ are \ very \ cunning. \ They \ have \ created \ many \ miseries \ for \ us \ldots \ and \ then \ to \ comfort \ us, \ they \ send \ their \ brother \ the \ doctor \ to \ care \ for \ us \ and \ their \ father \ to \ talk \ to \ us \ about \ God.23
\]

Different African Christian thinkers have wondered what God the people of the West are talking about, and, since the beginning of the
slave trade, what God Christianity has been talking about. The
dominant theology (talk about God) of the church has always justified
and tried to legitimize the ecclesiastical practices in which it is rooted.
It has subordinated the message of the gospel to the interests of the
powerful. The intellectuals—including theological educators—who
generate official ideologies of domination, are often nothing more
than the stooges of the ruling power.

The concern about the vision and the language of solidarity is one
of credibility, viz., whether solidarity is the perpetuation of the same
old cunning of whites. What is happening is that Africans are
learning to make solidarity their own business, to learn to be together,
to work to solve their own problems, and to share their life and
struggles. In this case, they must bring Christianity face to face with
the African reality. The legacies of colonialism and its ideological
apparatus challenge African Christians to "rethink God" and talk
about God in solidarity with the history of the African people. They
don't need any new disturbing influence, which, in Matsuoka's
words, are "promises without honest experiences and the
acknowledgment of pain and alienation [that] offer merely cheap
grace."24

Conclusion

This article has expressed the view that Western churches have for
too long condoned the unfair treatment of Africa, African peoples,
and their history and culture, denying them any participation in the
history of humanity. They have also neglected the poverty and misery
of African peoples, created on the African continent by forces of
injustice, exploitation, and oppression generated in their own Western
countries. All this should lead Africans to reflection, a reflection on
Africa having come to a turning point in Christian life and thought.
In this connection, the problem with the globalization discourse of
African people is the credibility gap between a self-serving agenda
and a genuine conscientizing cry against poverty and injustice. In
spite of the good things that have taken place as a result of the
globalizing agenda, our suspicion remains that the program may be
the same "old wine in new wineskins."
Notes


2. Dr. John Wagner and Ms. Phyllis Schaefer were in charge of the conference. For details of the views of the speakers, see the videotape "Networking for Globalization—Conference Interviews" (UTS & CODEL: A Citrone/Leff Production, 1993).

3. The "African Experience" is part of the general experience of all black people, which Ohaegbulum describes as "the totality of the events and factors that make up the life of Africans and their conscious past." For further details, see Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulum, Towards an Understanding of the African Experience from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 22. See also Enoch H. Oglesby, Born in the Fire: Case Studies in Christian Ethics and Globalization (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990), vii. For the impact of Christianity as foreign influence on Africa, see Kwesi A. Dickson, Theology in Africa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984), 75.

4. See videotape "Networking for Globalization."

5. Heim's other dimensions of globalization are "ecumenical cooperation" and "dialogue and cooperation between Christianity and other religions."


8. Ibid.


12. Ela, My Faith as an African, 13. Ela also points out that an imperial image of Christ did play a large role in the history of the colonial conquests both in the massacre of American Indians and in the slave trade (p. 111).


15. Dickson, Theology in Africa, 144.


17. Dickson, Theology in Africa, 225.


19. Ibid.
"subordinated/high culture" do not indicate, to this author, “inferior/superior culture” 
but “suppressed/suppressing culture.”
23. Ibid., 76.
Melting Pot or Mosaic: What Difference Does Difference Make?

The question I address in this paper is one of the deepest perplexities in our seminaries, churches, and culture at the end of the twentieth century. It boils in our society today like molten ash at the inner core of a volcano, although it is frequently concealed behind the guise of polite posturing. What is the place of “the other” in our various worlds?

Let me introduce my topic with an historical example. In 1500, on the eve of the conquest of Mesoamerica (Mexico and the Caribbean) by Cortez, the world population was approximately 400 million, of whom 80 million inhabited the Americas. By the middle of the sixteenth century, out of those 80 million, 10 million remained. On the eve of the conquest, the population of Mexico alone was about 25 million; by 1600 it was one million. If the word genocide applies anywhere, it applies here. Ninety percent of the population was exterminated, a loss of some 70 million lives. Through direct murder, bad labor conditions (especially in the mines), and “microbe shock” (disease), the Spanish all but eliminated the native population in the sixteenth century.

Why were Europeans able to do this at the beginning of the modern era? From the days of Columbus through the conquest, the conquerors did one of two things. Either they considered the native population as

Tyron Inbody is Professor of Theology at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He is the author of The Constructive Theology of Bernard Meland: Postliberal Empirical Realism (Scholars Press, 1995) and a number of shorter works. He is the editor of The American Journal of Theology and Philosophy and the UTS Journal of Theology.
identical to themselves and therefore assimilated the natives or they considered the native population as different from themselves and therefore inherently inferior. "What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself."  

The invaders were able to do what they did because both viewpoints rested on a common ground, the refusal to recognize the native population as having the same rights as themselves but different. Toderov says, "The entire history of the discovery of America, the first episode of the conquest, is marked by this ambiguity: human alterity is at once revealed and rejected." In their greed for gold, their desire to spread Christianity, and their fascination with nature, the invaders had to create inferior beings. On the other hand, the prejudice of identity, which refuses to acknowledge the other as other, was as insidious as the prejudice of inequality, for one can identify the other purely and simply with oneself, and thereby eliminate the other as other. Without both aspects of this essential premise, the destruction could not have taken place.

The social and cultural awareness of "the other" is as old as humankind itself. Jonathan Z. Smith explains that the worldview of any people consists essentially of two pairs of binary opposites: human/not human and we/they. These two oppositions are often correlated, i.e., we=human; they=not human. Indeed the distinction between "us" and "them" is present in our earliest written records. This dilemma of how to deal with "the other" is at the core of our master of divinity and doctor of ministry programs in our mainline or old-line seminaries today. We are afraid to talk to each other; we do not know how to talk with each other; groups do not feel permission to talk with each other. We don't know how to deal with each other as "the other," and so the issues of the gender, the race, and the class of the other person or group is dealt with mostly through posturing—which either isolates or assimilates "the other," thereby denying real "otherness."

Our dilemma in our radically pluralistic context is how to establish and maintain one's identity without banishing the other through absorption or quarantine. My specific thesis is this: There are sound theological reasons to acknowledge the importance and ambiguity of the other as "other." Furthermore, diversity in partnership is a Christian alternative to the elimination of the other through either the liberal project of ingestion or the conservative project of egestion.
The Importance of “the Other”

How can we deal with each other as “other”? Why does “the other”—the other gender, the other races, the other religions—matter to us? Why should we care about “the other”? The goal of pluralism as a perspective, as I understand it, is to show that and how the other is essential to one’s own world. Interconnectedness is the primary reality in any partnership, but interconnectedness is not the same thing as uniformity, as unity, or even as wholeness. Real partnership begins with and sustains difference and diversity. As Susan Thistlethwaite has put it, “As a white feminist, seeking to understand the experience of black women, my thesis is that the boundaries of difference are to be respected.” Why should we acknowledge, celebrate, and maintain our differences in partnership? I offer three reasons, which I will designate as aesthetic, moral, and theological.

The Aesthetic Dimension of Difference. God is creating a rich, diverse world and values this kind of creation. In a famous passage in Alice Walker’s novel, The Color Purple, Shug describes her separation from the white male God and her own emerging concept of the divine. It is significant to note that her new God is tied up with her growing sense of beauty. God, for her, is identified intimately with the concrete, sensible richness of the world, with Shug’s notice and enjoyment of the concrete diversity of her world.

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and cried and I ran all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can’t miss it. It sort of like you know what,” she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh.” “Shug!” I say. “Oh,” she say, “God love all them feelings. That’s some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves ‘em you enjoys ‘em a lot more.” . . . “Listen, God love everything you love—and a mess of stuff you don’t. But more than anything else, God love admiration.” “You saying God vain?” I ast. “Naw,” she say, “No vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you
walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it,” “What it do when it pissed off?” I ast. “Oh, it make something else.” . . . Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I’m still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?). Not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing.

Some Christians are so preoccupied with only part of our Bible—with God the moralist, the unchanging absolute, the controlling power, the sanctioner of the status quo, the male God—that they forget the God who creates, sustains, enjoys, and celebrates the diversity of the creation. In the God speeches from the whirlwind in Job, God does not create the world for human benefit alone; it is created in all its variety and richness for God’s enjoyment. “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?” says God, the lover of carnivorous tigers as much as small birds. Note, in the list of the wondrous and unconquerable creatures God created, that the animal kingdom described consists primarily of undomesticated animals—animals that were not for direct human benefit: peacocks, lions, wild goats, oxen, and asses; ostriches; cliff-eagles, all recited joyously to the much-abused Job. They were creatures of sheer delight.

We might also be enlightened here by C. S. Lewis’s response to his literary correspondent, Malcolm, to whom he addresses a series of letters. Lewis is commenting on Rose Macaulay, a woman who evidently had a passion for collecting written prayers. He says,

But though, like you, staggered, I was not, like you, repelled. One reason is that I had—and you hadn’t—the luck to meet her. Make no mistake. She was the right sort; one of the most civilized people I ever knew. The other reason, as I have so often told you, is that you are a bigot. Broaden your mind, Malcolm, broaden your mind! It takes all sorts to make a world; or a church. This may be even truer of the church. If grace perfects nature it must expand all our natures into the full richness of the diversity which God intended when God made them, and Heaven will display far more variety than Hell.

From the ancient “principle of plenitude” in Neoplatonism, which served as a major pillar in Augustine’s theodicy of sin and evil,
through the modern Romantic celebration of concreteness, novelty, variety, and diversity, to the postmodern penchant for the open, the fragmentary, the ambiguous, and the different, the belief that the creation is better because it is richer in possibilities and concrete reality has been a key to Western philosophy and theology. Of course, one cannot ignore the fact that premodern and modern Western thought were blind to vast reaches of the creation which it excluded from this “principle of plenitude.” But the aesthetic was clear, and it has been reasserted with a new vigor in postliberal and postmodern thought: the creation is better if it is beautiful, and it is more beautiful if it is diverse in texture, tone, and design.

The Moral Dimension of Difference. But the ideal of beauty alone can become a distortion, and it can undercut an adequate theology of diversity in partnership. I know of no theological idea that is not capable of gross distortion and exploitation, and this is certainly true of the beauty of diversity. If diversity is an aesthetic value in isolation from issues of justice, diversity can function as a means of isolation and exclusion as well. As Shelby Steele notes, “a word like diversity is so vacuous that in some places it connotes integration, and in other places (many college campuses) it justifies segregation. We don’t know whether multiculturalism blends or separates cultures.” If multicultural diversity stands in isolation from justice, multiculturalism can become a justification for any human value or behavior one can imagine.

Thistlethwaite has made this point in her criticism of poststructuralism. If the beauty we experience and the truth we know from our own perspective is wholly relativized, there is a tremendous danger, particularly for women, both black and white. If justice is not central to our understanding of diversity as a theological affirmation, then there are no grounds, except whim at worse and social convention at best, on which to make moral judgments. It can mean, finally, that “there is no place to stand to absolutely condemn sexual violence against women, or even the sexual abuse of children... I find that postcritical theory does not always allow me to declare that violence against women is wrong in all circumstances.” If our affirmation of multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism does not make justice as a distribution of power central to our agenda, we threaten to turn the ivory tower into an ivory tower of Babel.

According to Jonathan Smith, the other is a political category and not simply an aesthetic one. “Difference,” he says, “is rarely
something simply to be noted; it is, most often, something in which
one has a stake. Above all, it is a political matter... a ‘theory of
otherness’ is... essentially political. That is to say, it centers on a
relational theory of reciprocity, often one that is rule governed.”

Affirmation of diversity alone can ignore the problem of justice as
the distribution of power in our society. The celebration of diversity
alone, without any claims for justice—the right to participate, the right
not only to feel good about oneself and one’s group but to share in the
power of our culture in all its forms, political, economic, and
educational—can end up isolating people and groups from expression
of real power. As Richard Rorty says in his criticism of some extreme
forms of multiculturalism in Harper’s,

*Teaching [students] that the two groups have separate cultural
identities does no good at all. Whatever pride such teaching
may inspire in black children is offset by the suggestion that
their culture is not that of their white schoolmates, that they
have no share in the mythic America imagined by the Founders
and by Emerson and Whitman, the America partially realized
by Lincoln and by King... by proclaiming the myth a fraud,
multiculturalism cuts the ground out from under its own feet,
quickly devolving into anti-Americanism, into the idea that
“the dominant culture” of America, that of the WASPs, is so
inherently oppressive that it would be better for its victims to
turn their backs on the country than to claim a share in its
history and its future.*

The Theological Dimension of Difference. My third reason for
discussing variety and partnership together is strictly theological. How
one thinks about diversity and partnership, I think, depends a great
deal on how one experiences and thinks about God. I say this in part
because of what I understand religion, finally, to be about. To sense
something as holy is to want to be in accord with it. If one’s
experience of God and one’s understanding of God, for example, are
that of absolute perfection, power, unity, and wholeness, the place of
diversity in God’s creation will be understood a certain way. In some
forms of Christian theology, plurality and diversity are a result of the
Fall; the goal of human life is to return to the unity of absolute
perfection where plurality and diversity are overcome in the oneness
of God.
If, on the other hand, one has what I call a "radical empirical" experience and concept of God, God is more complex and diverse than most Western theology has acknowledged. In that perspective, the nature of God and the purpose of the creation are not about unity and oneness so much as they are concerned with holding together with integrity the rich variety of the creation in a partnership of real diversity and plurality.¹⁴

It is difficult, I think, to sustain theological monism and cultural pluralism together. If you try to, and if you are consistent, then pluralism is nothing more than a provisional condition, destined finally to be overcome now or later in the one, unified, monistic God. All things finally get included into, and thereby reduced to, the One; and genuine difference, including "the Other," is assimilated finally into the One, all-inclusive, omnipotent Being. That is not finally pluralism; it is monism. It is provisional pluralism with a trump card: And guess who holds the trump card! It is the one who represents the omnipotent, unifying One.

I am fully aware of the arguments of the Barthians and the Niebuhrians (i.e., Richard) expressed in the biblical and neoorthodox theology of the previous generation, which defended radical monotheism. Unless a person has a wholly transcendent, abstract God who functions as a principle of judgment on every creature and cultural creation, they argued, these creatures and creations will be made into idols and therefore instruments of control and destruction. There is evidence that this is not a bad argument. My problem is, though, a pragmatic one. I think the dynamics of radical monotheism actually work in the opposite direction: someone will be designated to know, represent, embody, and finally enforce the ideal, omnipotent goodness and power of the one God.

That leads me to a practical reason for affirming a more complex, pluralistic, and ambiguous picture of God (this is not the place for a theoretical defense of a radical empirical concept of God). Abstractions, including abstractions about God, are not reality. If traditional theistic monism is retained, we must be prepared to accept the consequences or at least take the risks of perpetuating such a concept of God. Provisional pluralism will sooner or later be trumped by some kind of monism—all in the name of the unity and wholeness of God—and all diversity will finally be melded into one, unified by absorption, as in a melting pot or in assimilation, or by obliteration, as

MELTING POT OR MOSAIC
in ethnic cleansing. This will be done by God in the hereafter or by God's representatives in the here and now.

Reality is complex, plural, and ambiguous, not simple and perfect. Perhaps even for God as well as for us, the ultimate category of value is not perfection, unity, oneness, uniformity, the One but rather stature.

Size—or stature—is the ability to absorb more and more dimensions of the world into the unity of your own being, and thus to add to the stature of your soul. How much of the other can you incorporate into your own being? How many of the contrasts and contradictions of life can you take in without being disorganized, thrown, or broken? Size is increased by the number and intensity of contrasts that you attempt to unify within yourself. . . . The largest Size is achieved through the transformation of the contradictions of life into compatible contrasts.\(^{15}\)

If we use the whole range of our experience to inform our concept of God, a more complex, intricate, enigmatic, even ambiguous notion of God emerges. Western theism has given us a God of perfection, unrelated to the ambiguities of the world. But in our experience, God seems to be more complex than simple goodness and wholeness. Given the nature of the world as we experience it in all of its plurality and complexity and interconnectedness and dynamism and dialectic and mixture of good and evil, the advance toward perfection and wholeness is a movement toward the vacuity of abstraction. The yearning for perfection, for oneness, is at best the yearning for the bloodless existence of clean-cut orderly abstraction, and at worst a yearning to exclude or to assimilate the other into me. It is, in short, a yearning for death.\(^{16}\) And if what we mean by God is connected to what we experience our world to be, then God is greater in size and stature, more complex and ambivalent in holding together contrasts than the sterile perfection of oneness.

This experience of the ambiguity of God is far broader than my process-relational theology from an empiricist point of view.\(^{17}\) In contemporary theology, the theme has been present in Bernard Loomer, Bernard Meland, Eli Wiesel, Fred Sontag, John Roth, Nancy Frankenberry, and William Dean.\(^{18}\) It is also the experience of many biblical writers, including Job, Jeremiah, and the Psalmist. A current compelling and controversial description of the complex, perplexing
God has been offered by the Jewish theologian David Blumenthal in his book *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*. He argues that in a post-Holocaust world, neither Jews nor Christians can continue to talk about God as a monopolar being of divine goodness.

*In the post-Holocaust era, it is not enough to push abuse out of our minds and hearts . . . it is not enough to accept reality for what it was and go on with life. To have faith in God in a post-Holocaust, abusive-sensitive world, we must acknowledge the awful truth of God's abusing behavior, adopt a theology of protest and sustained suspicion, develop the religious affections of distrust and unrelenting challenge, open ourselves to the good side of God, painful though that is, and turn to God, face to Face, presence to Presence.*

Blumenthal's God is complicated, loving as well as abusing. I agree with Wendy Farley's criticism of his view: "This book looks like the ultimate form of nihilism, because it projects the emptiness of despair and cruelty of sadism onto God, and makes them the ultimate principles of reality." But my point here is not to critique Blumenthal's God. It is to take account of an experience of God as complicated and ambivalent, pluralistic through and through, beyond the abstractions of theistic simplicity, oneness, and perfection. Some contemporary feminists have made a similar argument about the complexity of God in the world of our actual experience. A "nice" female God, Judith Plaskow argues, does not take us sufficiently beyond traditional images of God. "Unless the God who speaks to the feminist experience of empowerment and connection can also speak to the frightening, destructive, and divisive aspects of our lives, a whole side of existence will be severed from the feminist account of the sacred." Recounting a series of biblical stories about divine unpredictability, she writes, "These stories confront us not with a choice between God as good or evil but with the irrationality and ambiguity of the sacred." And Catherine Madsen, in an article entitled "If God Is God She Is Not Nice," reports about a feminist conference she attended.

*I heard only about God the Mother as nurturer, healer, caretaker, peacemaker, as though no other attributes were permitted God once she was fitted with a female pronoun . . . Having been told that God is good, and discovered that 'he' is not, they still hope that 'she' may be. They are unwilling, or*
afraid, or perhaps it has simply not occurred to them, to match their will against God's. They are still in search of a God they can approve of. . . . To establish a Goddess in place of the Father God accomplishes nothing if we try to make her good.23

If these divergent experiences are at all instructive for a conception of God in a radically pluralistic age, then plurality, diversity, complexity, and ambiguity go to the very heart of reality, divine as well as human. In such a perspective of "ontological pluralism" the goal of the church is not to create unity or uniformity, not to reduce the other to oneness or even wholeness by erasing differences in assimilation or elimination. The goal of the church is to take all of the ambiguity of our experience, all of the diversity we know, and to struggle toward a stature or larger size that holds our diversity together in tension. In short, it should be to foster partnership in the context of diversity that goes all the way up and all the way down and all the way across.

The Contribution of Each to "the Other"

One cannot be a multiculturalist or a pluralist, however, without having a place to stand, a social identity, a community which creates and shapes and sustains who and what one is as a person. Our task today is to help create a context of mutuality from our various perspectives. Therefore, the preceding section focused on the importance and character of diversity in a Christian theology of "the other." But in our various contexts, "Otherness is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction. . . . A "theory of the other" must take the form of a relational theory of reciprocity."24 Consequently, our final question is what kind of reciprocity Christians envision in a radically pluralistic context.

Is it possible to affirm pluralism without the kind of multiculturalism in which each group—each race, each class, each gender, each denomination—descends into what Shelby Steele calls "the new sovereignty,"25 in which each group becomes a "nation" unto themselves with elimination or isolation as the final goal? Is it possible to affirm diversity all the way down and all the way up and all the way across without being immobilized by guilt and contrition or fragmenting into isolated groups in which we talk about each other in private but never to or with each other as Christians or Americans or human?
I think it is obvious that Christians have a vision of reciprocity that goes beyond sheer pluralism to some form of essential interconnectedness. Christians cannot simply celebrate diversity. We also have another theme in our faith: unity. Paul speaks of the dialectic between diversity and unity in 1 Corinthians 12. “Now, there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. . . . For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (vv. 4-6, 12, 27). My question is this: How can we be one unity, one body of Christ, in an age when unity seems to mean at best assimilation and at worst unification under the most powerful? How can we be “though many, one” in an age not simply of plurality but of pluralism?

My argument is that unity within a pluralistic context does not mean uniformity, sameness, oneness, or even wholeness. Unity in a pluralistic context means interconnectedness; oneness in a context of diversity means inclusion in a partnership of shared power. Partnership hinges on genuine otherness and on interrelationship and interconnectedness. When interconnectedness means the obliteration or even subordination of real difference, it becomes an ideology of elimination, because it makes invisible or unimportant the difference and the authenticity of “the other’s” experience. Thistlethwaite makes this point several places in her book when she critiques the white liberal call for connection, and Jacquelyn Grant makes a similar point in her critique of the liberal emphasis on reconciliation. Thistlethwaite calls instead for an “ontology of struggle,” because there is both connection and destruction at the heart of the cosmos and Grant advocates coalition as the best possible solution. For me the word partnership best describes the inclusion of real differences within an interconnected context of shared power.

What does partnership mean in a pluralistic context? It means, first of all, listening and talking with each other. The common word for this is dialogue, a word so trite that it probably should be shelved for a generation. In an editorial in The Christian Century on the Christian and Jewish approaches to Israel and Palestine, James Wall suggests that neither side will listen to the other. They either argue vociferously on the basis of ancient assumptions or evade the topic altogether with polite conversation. Quoting Mendes-Flohr on the radically new
discourse needed to resolve this impasse, he says Jews and
Palestinians must “tell their respective tales—relating their history,
with all its woes and hopes . . . while acknowledging and
compassionately confirming the tale of the other.” Such dialogue, he
says, would acknowledge “that the other who confronts us, who
encroaches upon our life, also has a tale, a story perhaps no less
compelling, certainly no less real, than one’s own to tell.”

In genuine partnership, listening and talking go deeper than simply
being interested. In real partnership, we enter each other’s stories and
lives and are creatively transformed through out interconnectedness in
partnership. Partnership also means an openness to what Henry Nelson
Wieman calls “creative interchange.” “Creative interchange . . . creates in
those who engage in it an appreciative understanding of the original
experience of one another. One gets the viewpoint of the other under such
conditions that this original view derived from the other integrates with
one’s own personal resources.” The creative work of God is found not
in posturing but in the actual transformation of entering the worlds of
each other. In creative interchange we are transformed; our world is
enriched and enlarged. We are made “new creatures.”

In this kind of partnership, stories are decisive. I cite a personal
element. A friend of mine gently suggested for months, actually years,
that I read Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved.* I resisted for several
reasons, but finally I began. Set in Cincinnati after the end of the Civil
War, Sethe, who eighteen years earlier had fled from slavery at Sweet
Home, a Kentucky plantation, is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, her
two-year-old-daughter. Tracked down by slave catchers only a month
after sending her children to freedom and then escaping herself, she
tries to kill both them and herself but is stopped before she can do any
more than slit her older daughter’s throat. This act both saves and
destroys Sethe. Shortly after the baby’s ghost is driven from Sethe’s
home, along comes a strange, beautiful, real flesh-and-blood young
woman, about twenty years old, who can’t seem to remember where
she comes from. She talks like a young child, has an odd raspy voice,
and takes an intense, devouring interest in Sethe, claiming her name is
Beloved. With a two-year-old’s insatiable need for its mother’s love
and attention, Beloved is both a destructive and a healing force in the
lives of the other characters. The latter part of the book details the
harrowing struggle between Sethe and Beloved, as she desperately tries
to give her daughter the experiences she has missed and attempts to make
Beloved understand and forgive what her mother has done to her.
This gripping, relentlessly grim ghost story immerses us in the tragedy at the core of the existence of the slave, the terrible horror and destruction of “the other” as slave. That in itself is reason to read the novel. But it had a transforming effect on my own life as well. After reading the novel, I realized that the pain and suffering and desperation—the tragedy—of “the other” in the novel connected with the tragedy of two exceedingly painful events in my own life, the untimely death of both my father and one of my best friends at their own hands. The horror of Sethe’s deed was based not in some weakness, some mistake, some moral failure, some rational calculation but on the burdensome tragedy of her existence. Her story disclosed a point of contact between the tragedy of Sethe’s life and the tragedy in my own existence that goes beyond Camus’s philosophical reflections on suicide. I recognized in a new way the tragic structure that sometimes pervades our common worlds. There is some similarity between her world and mine, a similarity best described as similarity-in-difference, that is, analogy.

To understand the concrete reality of each other, we need examples, whether they be texts, symbols, events, persons, or rituals. Some command our attention, stand out as paradigmatic. David Tracy calls these “classics.” “If any human being, if any religious thinker or theologian, produces some classical expression of the human spirit on a particular journey in a particular tradition, that person discloses permanent possibilities for human existence both personal and communal.” Such stories actually exist, and they exist between, among, and across our boundaries of gender, class, and race. “We find ourselves compelled both to recognize and on occasion to articulate our reasons for the recognition that certain expressions of the human spirit so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot but grant them some kind of normative status.” Such stories are not timeless; they are, rather, permanently timely. Such stories confront us, surprise us, shock us, and transform us. Thank God, and I mean that literally, in our time the range of stories finally has increased. In old-line theological seminaries, the classics today can include more than Augustine and Niebuhr; they include also black and feminist theology, womanist fiction, and spiritual autobiography; they include voices that offer all kinds of possibilities.

Finally, then, I am not altogether averse to using the word love to describe the kind of mutuality that can be shared between us in our common humanity, our common citizenship, our common loyalty to
Christ through all of our diversity. But love is a consequence of our interrelatedness in our diversity, not the other way around. If the world is a dynamic web of interrelated and interdependent events, our interrelatedness is given. We do not become interdependent; we already are interdependent. Love is grounded in our interconnectedness; interconnectedness is not grounded in love. We love the other because the other exits and because the other’s life is bound up with our own. Without the givenness of our interconnectedness, love will be nothing more than a matter of self-interest, whim, or idiosyncratic temperament. But with the basic condition of our interdependence, we can love. Although love does not create relatedness, love does acknowledge and redeem and re-create our relatedness. Wendy Farley calls this kind of love compassion, by which she means sympathetic knowledge, disposition toward the other, self-transcending delight, and care. Marjorie Suchocki calls it forgiveness, by which she means to will the well-being of the other, whether they are enemy or friend.

In conclusion, I reflect on this kind of love in a pluralistic context in two forms: first, from two theological texts, and second, from a novel. Rebecca Chopp writes, “The fusion of voices in theology, then, is not so much a melting as an orchestrating of differences that are irreducible to one another, conflicting in their interests, but also mutually enriching.” And Marjorie Suchocki says, “The empowerment of this nondualism is its embrace and celebration of diversity in the unity of well-being.” It is possible to move from a melting pot to a mosaic, or a quilt, or a salad, or a symphony (M. L. King), or an improvisational jazz band, or fractal patterns. But love of God, of creation, of each other, and of oneself is expressed best by Celie in a letter to Nettie: “I’m poor, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here. Amen, say Shug. Amen, amen.”

Notes

2. Ibid, 49.
3. Ibid., 165.


10. Thistlethwaite, Sex, Race, and God, 14, 15.

11. Rebecca Chopp has made the same criticism of our postmodern emphasis on the open, the ambiguous, the difference and fragmentary. Postmodernity, she says, stands not in opposition to limits so much as for blurring, questioning, and playing with them. “From a postcolonial perspective, the problem with postmodernity is how to support its celebration of openness and fragmentation in a way that also responds to moral demands of the contemporary world. Working to free victims of colonial and neocolonial domination, such a postcolonial critique enriches postmodernism and prods it to move toward emancipation and not simply to dwell in self-indulgent play among cultures of privilege.” Rebecca Chopp and Mark Taylor, Reconstructing Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 8-9.


17. For a strong criticism of the appeal to this kind of experience as religiously significant and as instructive for our concept of God, see John Cobb, “Response to Loomer,” American Journal of Theology and Philosophy 8/1-2 (January and May, 1987): 52-55.

18. Although Thistlethwaite does not opt for the radical empiricism of Loomer, Meland, and Dean as an alternative to the rationalistic tone of most process-relational theology, she seems to come close to the “feel” of that strand in her statement: “I believe there is both connection and destruction, creativity and evil at the heart of the cosmos.” Thistlethwaite, 107. See also, for example, Elisabeth Moltman-Wendel, “Is There a Feminist Theology of the Cross?” in The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering, Yacob Tesfai, ed. (Garden City, Orbis, 1994), 93-94, or Stanley Hauerwas’s criticism of the “niceness” of the process God in “Knowing How to Go On When You Do Not Know Where You Are: A Response to John Cobb,” Theology Today 51/4 (January, 1995): 567.
22. Ibid., 70.
32. Ibid., 198.
36. Chopp, 4.
Byron C. Bangert

Why Owls Matter, Mosquitoes Bite, and Existence Remains a Mystery: A Case for Creatio ex Chaos

Soon after I became a college student I saw a film that seemed to speak to my newly surging doubts about my Christian faith. As best I remember, it was a Moody Bible Institute film about creation. It attested that God created the world, presumably ex nihilo—literally, out of nothing. At the time that seemed an important affirmation to make. For me, in that moment, to be able to say “God” was to account for everything!

Two logical possibilities had occurred to me, either that “in the beginning” only God existed, or both God and the “stuff” of material existence existed. But why affirm two things, the original existence of both God and “stuff,” if it was only necessary to affirm one? Where did the “stuff” come from, if not from God? If God existed, on the other hand, there was no need to postulate anything else. God, being God, could account for all that is, including the special fact and meaning of my own existence. The film confirmed my previously nurtured conviction that the order of creation was such as only God could have created. I was thus able to affirm that God exists, with consequent assurance regarding everything else.

It hardly occurred to me that postulating the existence of God might be insufficient to account for the world as I had come to know it. My

Byron C. Bangert is Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Bloomington, Indiana 47408.
implicit, naive, unquestioned assumption was that God by definition had to be unconditionally capable of bringing all else into being. As reasonable as it might be to entertain the possibility that God had created out of an original something, there was simply no need to assume that possibility! My concept of God precluded the thought that God might not (ever) create out of nothing.

I have long since been compelled to other conclusions, both because the ex nihilo doctrine has become unintelligible to me and because, as is now generally recognized, "creatio ex nihilo . . . is not an adequate characterization of creation in the Hebrew Bible." More recently I have come to see that "the legacy of this dogmatic or propositional understanding lives on and continues to distort the perceptions of scholars and laypersons alike." The doctrine of creatio ex nihilo continues to function as an impediment to insight and understanding in Christian thought about some very important matters of faith and life in this world.

The Ex Nihilo Doctrine in Christian Thought

The origins of the ex nihilo doctrine within Christianity remain somewhat obscure. It does not appear to be a Jewish idea. It may have had antecedents in Greek philosophy, for example, the analogous Pythagorean doctrine that all things derive from the One. Gerhard May identifies the Christian Gnostic Basilides in the second half of the second century as the first Christian writer to interpret creatio ex nihilo precisely in terms of the original existence of God without anything besides (May, 1978). Frances Young, however, maintains that Basilides' idea of creation out of nothing had a very different function from the one it has in Christian theology. We may at least conclude that the doctrine evidently emerged by the early third century, probably arising out of second-century debates with gnosticism and philosophy about origins of the world (Young, 1991). The important point here is that, so far as Christian thought is concerned, the doctrine arose subsequent to the New Testament writings. Traceable antecedents are to be found, if at all, not in Jewish or canonical Christian writings, but in Greek philosophy and gnosticism.

The primary theological significance of the creatio ex nihilo doctrine for Christianity has been as a statement about God, as an
affirmation of divine freedom and transcendence. The doctrine has served above all to corroborate the sovereignty of God. Earliest Christianity regarded God as the Creator, without whose creation the world as we know it would not exist. The doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* became a philosophical extension of that conviction to encompass the very stuff of material existence. It entails that God cannot be subject to any material conditions. As such, however, the doctrine, at least in its ecclesiastical vestments, fails to provide any metaphysical conception of how God might be related to material existence. More specifically, this doctrine stands as a formidable obstacle to the formulation of a doctrine of God, trinitarian or otherwise, that could articulate a metaphysical conception of divine agency in creation.

**Theological Criteria of This Essay**

Two prior assertions are critical to this conclusion: 1) in our contemporary setting, an adequate metaphysical conception of God must incorporate contemporary scientific understandings of the nature of the universe; and 2) affirmations of divine immanence that hinge upon theological formulations of the Second Person of the Trinity provide an insubstantial basis for a Christian theology of creation. That is to say, except by rejecting or ignoring contemporary scientific perspectives on our world, *which raise for us the question of the causal nexus of all physical events*, the classical trinitarian formulations of God’s relationship to the world as understood through the activity of Jesus Christ offer us no way to understand or express the work of God in creation. Nor, it may be added, can this deficiency be remedied merely by an elaborated theology of the Holy Spirit. Without a philosophical theology to provide some account of the presence and activity of the Divine in events that the natural sciences seek to understand primarily in terms of causes and effects, it becomes sheer assertion to maintain that the (material) world is a creation of God.

The argument here takes a point of view that is hardly universally acknowledged, namely, that good theology needs metaphysics or at least some understanding of the general nature of being and existence. Obviously, much theology in recent decades has proceeded without metaphysical preoccupation. Most forms of neo-orthodoxy, as well as various current liberation theologies and narrative theologies, proceed
as if metaphysics hardly mattered. However, these theologies tend to be highly anthropocentric, and they typically have much more to say about the redemption and renewal and restoration of humankind than they do about the divine activity of creation. The reason is obvious, once the metaphysical question has been raised: These theologies have no way of describing divine agency in our material world as we have come to understand that world through the investigations of modern science.

Ways That Theology Matters

The argument here would be merely academic if theology were a merely academic enterprise. There is widespread conviction, however, that Christianity needs a more thoughtful and elaborated creation theology in order to address many of the important ethical and social issues of our time. In the first place, the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, because it lacks a contemporary account of divine agency, yields no appreciation of the stake that God, as Creator, must have in the creation. In the second place, this doctrine provides direct as well as residual resistance to the critical reformulation of a Christian theology of creation. The alternative proposed here is clearly more biblical and, I believe, intellectually more compelling as well. In addition, it offers us new and constructive ways to think about human responsibility in and toward creation.

To deny that God created out of nothing is, first of all, to assert that God created out of something. The biblical view of creation, whether one consults the priestly account in Genesis 1, the earlier writings of many of the prophets and psalmists, or such wisdom literature as Job, assumes the primordial existence of a watery, primeval chaos. Without being literalists we may accept this as a positive affirmation that there was "in the beginning" some "stuff" (matter/energy) out of which God created the universe. Moreover, that "stuff" has not ceased to exist as the result of God's creative activity. Rather, God's work in creation is to give form and structure and life to the chaos. So far as we know, the "stuff" of creation is neither manufactured nor destroyed. Rather, God is the Artist who molds and shapes and fashions and orders out of original chaos—the "formless void" of Genesis 1:1—a creation of wonder and mystery and goodness and beauty.

Where did the original "stuff"—the primeval chaos—come from? How can we think of this "stuff" as having being or existence apart
from God? Or is this “stuff” to be regarded in some way as part of
God’s being? These are imponderables. To most of us, obviously, the
“stuff” exists. Many among us believe that as many as 15 (give or take
a few) billion years ago it was all so densely compressed that it
exploded from almost nothing (in size) to what seems like infinity.
Some cosmologists speak of a “vacuum genesis,” as if once there
were nothing, but their language is metaphorical, not literal. For such
theorists, even more than for many of the rest of us, the fact that there
is something and not nothing remains one of the wholly mysterious
and inexplicable realities of our existence. Christian doctrine cannot
explain this fact; it can only obscure it, as the ex nihilo doctrine has
done. That this something now possesses order and form and beauty,
indeed that at least one remote locale within the universe is capable of
sustaining life, still seems sufficient reason to believe in a divine
intelligence, whom most of us call God. That there remains much
within the created order that is disorderly, much that still bears the
aspect of chaos, much that imperils life even where life is known to
flourish, hints that the creative work of this God has hardly been
completed.

By what means does God effect that which we call creation? It is
beyond the scope of this essay to elaborate a metaphysics of divine
being and agency. The most sustained and intelligible efforts to do so
are to be found in the process theologians, who are philosophically
indebted to Alfred North Whitehead and his writings on metaphysics,
especially Process and Reality. Insofar as an account of divine agency
is integral to a current theological understanding of creation, that is,
one that coheres with present scientific understandings, process
theology is surely the most compelling contemporary theological
option. The argument here does not hinge upon acceptance of some
form of process theology, however. It does hinge upon recognition of
the scientific worldview as the dominant way we comprehend the
“what” and “how” of events in the material world, regards that
worldview as valid, and assumes that an adequate theology must take
that worldview into full account.

Creatio ex Chaos Theology and Ecological Concern

A reformulated doctrine of creation, a creatio ex chaos theology,
would not only be congruent with the biblical witness and current
scientific understanding, but it also would have profoundly beneficial implications for the entire theological enterprise. First, it would underline the precious fragility of the world in which we live. Although by contrast to human labors, which are marked by toil and sweat, the biblical writers portray God's creative activity as relatively effortless, we must realize by now that it took more than a good word from God to bring all that we see into ordered existence. For many Christians today, God remains the deus ex machina of creation, the One who can ultimately fix whatever goes wrong, and do so with relative ease. This is because God is naively conceived in words recently sung by our children's choir in a Sunday morning service: "For God created the heavens and earth by speaking only a word" ("Creation Song" by Joanne Brown; the children, interestingly, objected to their choir director that it took four words, based on their reading of the Genesis account!). A church member in a former congregation once casually dismissed my concerns regarding nuclear holocaust by observing that God could simply create another world if this one were destroyed.

The doctrine of creatio ex nihilo allows us to take God's work in creation much too lightly. It portrays God as absolute if not arbitrary source of all that is. It does not bring into consideration the otherwise apparent refractoriness of material existence to the divine creativity. Some interpreters of Genesis 1 argue persuasively that nature, or material existence, cooperates with God in the activity of creation. Nonetheless, on the whole and in view of the persistence of disorder and what we call natural evil, we can hardly be sanguine about the readiness with which materiality responds to divine summons. Our theology must help us to regard the hospitable ecology of this planet as the result of eons of divine labor, as God coaxed order out of chaos and life out of the raw elements of the primeval soup. Every time a species becomes extinct, with every depletion of the ozone layer, with the destruction of every oxygenating forest, millennia of God's handiwork are put in jeopardy. What it took God centuries to accomplish, humankind may destroy in a matter of minutes. What it took God ages to bring to fruition, humankind may obliterate in only years or decades. Here our theology of creation needs to be informed by a theology of redemption, which impresses upon us how costly indeed it is to accomplish the divine purpose in creation. It is time we recognize that God suffers not only in our human suffering but in the suffering of all creation. Like every harm done to every person, every
injury to our physical environment is a defacing and defiling of the Artist’s creation.

Natural Evil and Divine Creation

Secondly, a *creatio ex chaos* theology intimates an intuitive understanding, though not fully logical explanation, of the existence of what philosophy has called natural evil. Christians have traditionally relied upon the doctrine of the Fall to account for all evil in the world. But the mythic metaphor is hardly persuasive when it comes to natural evil. What bearing has human sin on the existence of earthquakes, mosquitoes, and meteorites? Dare we attribute all diseases, birth defects, and biological and psychological aberrations to sin? Biblical scholars James Barr, Bernard Anderson, and others observe, in concurrence with Jewish theology, that there is no doctrine of the Fall in the creation account of Genesis 2-3. There is a story about human disobedience and sin with consequent divine judgment, but the story does not entail all that has come to be regarded as the Fall. Once we abandon the naive notion that God simply manufactured the primeval stuff of existence, then it is possible to acknowledge natural evil without holding God responsible and without blaming Adam and Eve for everything. What manifests itself as natural evil in this world is the chaotic, the unformed, the still disordered that God has yet to shape and fashion and coordinate with the existing creation. Or it is that chaos and disorder occasioned by humankind’s disturbance and destruction of some of what God had already brought about. Or it is that “persisting dissonance within experience” that is explicable only as an apparently ineradicable given of existence.

Thirdly, a *creatio ex chaos* theology is integral and essential to understanding God’s continuing work in creation. Nothing in our experience suggests that any creating *ex nihilo* is taking place in our world today. Indeed, what we ordinarily mean by creative activity is not a magician’s hat trick—something out of nothing—but a differentiating, shaping, forming, structuring, combining, ordering of elements that already exist into something new. There is no end to the possibilities of such creative work. We ought not to think that we have seen the end of God’s creativity either.

A theology of continuing creation needs articulation in concert with a theology of redemption. They are two aspects of the same reality.
Creation may be regarded as the construction, and redemption the reconstruction, of God's intended order. Roughly put another way, creation is the new addition or growth, while redemption is the renovation and reintegration of what was previously constructed but subsequently neglected or abused or destroyed.

**Theological and Ecological Anthropology**

Fourthly, a *creatio ex chaos* theology allows for a truly meaningful interpretation of the *imago Dei* in terms of creativity. If the creation remains in process, then humankind has both opportunity and obligation to join in God's creative activity in the world. Granted, the human presumption to join in God's creative labors is filled with peril. The thermonuclear genie is already out of the bag, and so, too, is genetic engineering. Even the best and best-intended efforts of human intelligence and imagination will meet with failure as well as success. The creative process is never entirely progressive. Sometimes it is necessary to dismantle, relinquish, reconstitute or reconfigure what has been done and start over. Perhaps God, as in the days of Noah, though with more discriminate and merciful judgment, still finds it necessary at times, due to the recalcitrance and perversity of the human creature, to get a fresh start.

But the human presumption to join in God's creative activity in the world seems unavoidable. Human beings are not ciphers. We must at least be stewards of creation if we are not to neglect, obstruct, or destroy God's handiwork. Better that we look upon our own creative powers as a gift of our Creator, affording us in some small measure the blessing of joining with God in the grandest enterprise imaginable, the ongoing creation and redemption of the universe.

It is crucial in assuming this self-understanding that we not revert to thinking of human existence apart from the rest of creation. Human beings are part of creation, inextricably linked with the universe. Our survival as individuals and as a species is an ecological matter. Nonetheless, human contributions to God's creative purposes in the world should focus upon the nurturing of life in human community and will have even more to do with the quality and character of human relationships than with the alteration of the physical environment. We have learned very well how to exploit the physical environment, and we know quite a bit about how to overcome its debilitating conditions.
and minimize its destructive effects, but we know precious little about how to change it in positive ways. More immediate and relevant is the challenge to care and provide for one another better. It was relatively easy to put a man on the moon. It is incomparably more difficult to create the political, social, and economic structures on earth required to sustain, enrich, and ennoble human life. God may have greater projects going elsewhere in the universe; but, so far as we are concerned, nothing is more important than our participation in the unfolding exercise of God’s creative reign among the peoples of the earth.

Finally, a *creatio ex chaos* theology provides a needed perspective on the place of humankind in God’s creation. We human beings may represent the current “state of the art” but may not be the pinnacle or culmination either of what God set out to accomplish or of what God will subsequently intend. Among other things, this means the rest of creation was not created just for us. As human beings we possess intrinsic value by the very fact of our existence, but we often fail to accord the rest of creation such value. The rest of the creation is valued extrinsically for its usefulness to us but not for its own sake—or for the sake of God! Thus, the loss of a species or the destruction of a rainforest is decried because it means the loss of some potential resource for humankind—e.g., some unknown enzyme that might have had medicinal effects. The loss should be mourned for no other reason than that it was something God had brought into being. We must learn to regard the potential demise of the snail darter, the spotted owl, or anything else that shares existence as a genuine loss, not only to us but to the universe and to God. Some losses are necessary on behalf of other life or for the sake of new life, but there is far more room for humility and misgiving in the expropriation of the rest of creation than humankind has recently shown.

Our need is for a theology of creation that comprehends our current ecological crisis. We need a theology that calls us both to a greater humility with respect to our place in the universe and to a greater sense of responsibility toward all of life and existence than we have previously known. For this, we also need a deeper sense of the mystery of all that is.

**The Challenge of Theological Reformulation**

Many may find the theological perspective offered here uncongenial. Fortunately, concern about the environment and created existence
does not wait upon theology. Nonetheless, an adequate contemporary theology of creation awaits acceptance of the idea of *creatio ex chaos*. This theological reformulation will help us to understand and interpret God’s creative activity in biblically faithful and intellectually compelling terms, to enable us more articulately to address a host of pressing ethical and social issues regarding our created existence.

Is it intolerable to think that we live in a universe in which God is subject to any contingencies and that God’s creative purposes on earth can be thwarted by noncooperation of the human species? But can we deny that the power to commit ecological or nuclear suicide has been placed into our minds and hearts and hands? And who is to say that the eschatological vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” could not point to some other place and time, where and when God will find a way to accomplish with other creatures unknown to us what God was frustrated to accomplish here? That is saying no more than John the Baptist, that herald of God’s coming reign, reportedly said as warning to certain leaders of his day: “God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). Only we ought not think it would be an easy or happy thing for God to do so.

Notes

References


WHY OWLS MATTER, MOSQUITOES BITE
Listening in Time

For people who believe that the Spirit of God is actively present in the life of the Church, reading the Bible means listening for the living Word of God through the written words of scripture. A scholarly approach hears that Word through a literary and critical reading of the text. Reading the scripture by way of the lectionary in the worshiping community has the added dimension of hearing the Word “in time.”

By time I mean, in one sense, musical time; hearing the Word in the rhythm of the liturgical year, in the cadence of the worship life of the church, in the meter of a faithful congregation. We follow the Word through the measures, lines, and codas of the liturgical life of the Church.

An overview of these texts illustrates the point. While a critical approach to the Epistle to the Romans would follow the literary structure of Paul’s theological argument, the lectionary readings for Lent begin in the middle of chapter 5, then leap back to the opening verses of chapter 4, then back to 5, then off to chapter 8, with a text from Ephesians thrown in for good measure. The controlling metronome is not the structure of the epistle but the procession of the church from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday.

Our task, then, is not simply to listen for the living Word through Paul’s words to the Romans but to listen in the context of our journey to the cross. The underlying question becomes: How do these texts

James A. Harnish is Senior Pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida. He is the author of six books, including God Isn’t Finished With Us Yet and Men at Midlife: Steering through the Detours.
enable us to enter into the remembrance of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord?

Pilgrims to Jerusalem find these words at Yad Vashem, the place of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust:

Remembrance is the secret of redemption, forgetfulness leads to exile.

Our soul-purpose in Lent is to re-member, to re-connect ourselves with the secret of redemption revealed in Jesus Christ. That act of re-membering is the metronome which sets the rhythm and meter by which we listen for the Word.

By time I also mean listening for the Word in the particular time in which a particular congregation listens for the timeless Word of God to be made flesh among them.

I assume that readers of Quarterly Review are familiar with the structure, theology, and text of the lessons. Critical and textual commentaries by persons far more capable than I are readily available. I come to this article—in the words of D.T. Niles’s classic definition of evangelism—as “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” I offer here the themes, ideas, and images which speak to my soul and which will become sermons for the congregation I serve during our Lenten pilgrimage. My hope is that by sharing the ways in which I hear the Word in this particular time in the cadence of this particular community of faith, others will feel the rhythm of the Word for their particular place and time as well.

Before he was the invincible star of the Superman movies or the tragic victim of a horseback-riding accident, Christopher Reeve played a young time-traveler who went back to the turn of the century. In the 1980 movie Somewhere in Time. He lost his true love and spent the rest of his days in lifeless sorrow because he got out of rhythm with time.

In Lent, we listen for the living Word through the words of scripture that we may keep our souls in rhythm with God’s redemptive grace made real in our own time.

First Sunday in Lent: Romans 5:12-21

In times past, this was a notoriously difficult passage for “modern” North Americans to comprehend. The modern era, with its addiction
to individual responsibility and linear cause/effect thinking, hardly knew what to do with the corporate typology of this text. How could one person’s sin result in condemnation for all? How could one person’s obedience lead to justification for all? As recently as 1992, the writers of Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary acknowledged:

*Modern readers and hearers . . . will find the typological argument strange . . . The extreme individualism of the modern world—especially in Europe and, even more, in North America—is out of sync with the corporate mentality behind this passage. . . We do not, and perhaps cannot, think in these terms.* (p. 36)

Postmodern readers and hearers, on the other hand, may find Paul’s argument much more user-friendly and easier to comprehend. One of the key elements in “postmodern” culture is “systems thinking,” which looks at things in “non-linear” ways, seeing each part of a system in relationship to every other part. Systems function more like a chess game than a string of dominos.

In the modern industrial era, if a machine shut down the mechanic looked for the specific part which had failed or gone bad. When that individual part was located, it was fixed or replaced and the machine started running again with no intrinsic change in the other parts. In the postmodern information age, however, sophisticated computer systems are far too complex for that type of analysis and repair. (Have you tried to do a tune-up on your Chevy lately?) Rather than fixing a specific part, a systems manager will input new information which is designed to correct the error by changing the way all the elements in the system function together. The same process is at work, whether we are dealing with a “computer virus,” which sets out to destroy the whole system (not an inaccurate contemporary analogy for human sin), or a “computer conversion,” which sets the entire system operating on a new program (an information age image of redemption).

Applying this “systems” perspective to organizations, Peter Senge writes: “*Systems thinking . . . shows that small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they’re in the right place.*”

It may be that the systems thinking in the postmodern era will lead us to a more biblical perspective of the interrelatedness of human
experience, enabling us to hear Paul describe the way sin has effected
the whole of human life and the way “the grace of God and the free
gift in the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many”
(Rom. 5:15).

John Donne’s often-quoted words about no one being an island took
on new meaning for me when I heard them in their original context.
He described the inclusive nature of the church’s ministry in the
less-than-inclusive language of the seventeenth century.

_The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all
that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that
action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that
body which is my head too and ingrafted into that body
whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that
action concerns me. All mankind is of one author and is one
volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the
book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter
must be so translated... No man is an island entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... Any
man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind,
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it
tolls for thee._

We listen for the living, redemptive Word during Lent by sharing in
the journey of our Lord to the cross. When we read of Jesus’
temptation in the wilderness, we are there. When he brings new birth
to Nicodemus, living water to the woman at the well, or sight to blind
eyes, we are there. When he breaks the bread at the Passover meal, we
are there. When he prays in Gethsemane, we are there. When he dies
on the cross, we are there. And when he is raised to new life, we are
there. We are a part of God’s saving action, the recipient of God’s
redeeming grace. The healing power of God’s Word made flesh in
Jesus Christ extends to all of us.

In the play _For Heaven’s Sake_, Helen Kromer wrote:

_A drop in the bucket
Is only a drop—
A minor and moist detail;
For a drop can’t change_
The color and taste
In a ten-quart watering pail.

But if the drop
Has the color of love
And the taste of love divine,
One drop dropped into
The vessel of life
Can turn the water to wine.

Peter Senge may have been closer to biblical truth than he had any idea. “Well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they’re in the right place.”

Second Sunday in Lent: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

I am sometimes fascinated by what is left out of the lectionary readings. In this passage, for instance, it’s probably no great loss to skip over all that circumcision business in verses 6-12. Aside from the obvious sexism, it can be downright embarrassing. I remember a very naive junior high girl in Sunday school who asked, “What’s circumcision, anyway?” Answering the question and keeping the adolescent boys from humiliating her was quite a challenge! For public reading in worship, there is probably good reason to pass by those verses.

But I simply cannot end the reading at verse 17, right where Paul offers this eloquent description of Abraham’s faith: “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God” (vs 19).

Faith, by Abraham’s example, is an unwavering trust that God can do what God has promised, even when the odds are stacked against it. As a onetime resident of the Bluegrass State, I’d say that faith is betting your house, your car, and your firstborn child on a horse with twenty-to-one odds in the Kentucky Derby because you trust the trainer, even if the horse came in last in the Bluegrass Stakes. That’s faith.

One of the theological bones I have to pick with the Reformed tradition, which has been the dominant theological influence in the theology of the Religious Right, is that it tends to take a far too rationalistic view of faith. Asked to define faith, folks in that tradition will probably say that faith means believing a specific list of doctrines
about everything from the virgin birth to the inerrancy of scripture. Faith comes off being a head trip through propositional truth.

It certainly wasn’t that way for Abraham. The Old Testament definition of faith is recorded in Genesis 12:4: “So Abram went...” He risked his wealth, his life, his family, and his reputation on a call and a promise:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:1-3)

Faith is living, active obedience based on an unwavering trust in the ability of God to do what God has promised, not because we understand or fully comprehend it but because we trust the One who stands behind the promise. Faith is not dependent on our ability to accomplish the task to which God calls us. It is not dependent on our being faithful. It is utterly dependent on God’s prior action—to use John Wesley’s term—God’s prevenient grace.

Paul’s interpretation of the events recorded in Genesis 12 puts to rest the simplistic though widely held misunderstanding that the Old Testament reveals a God of law and judgment and the New Testament reveals a God of grace and love. God’s gracious choice of Abram was prior to his response, prior to his faith, prior to his obedience, prior to circumcision, and prior to the law. The story begins with God’s choice to bless Abram and through him to bless the whole creation.

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes, “Faith is not a matter of continually new decision. It means faithfulness to the decision which God made for men and women in Christ.” Biblical faith is an active, human response to divine action which continues to depend on divine action in the future.

In 1986 the hope for freedom in South Africa seemed hopeless. The injustice and repression of the apartheid regime was at its most severe. The possibility of nonviolent change seemed utterly impossible. But an Anglican bishop named Desmond Tutu stood before the World Methodist Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and joyfully declared:

Praise be to God that our God is a God of righteousness. Our God is a God of compassion. Our God is a God of liberation...
Our God is a God who enlists us, all of us, to be fellow workers with him, to extend his kingdom of righteousness, to help change the ugliness of this world...to transfigure it into the laughter and the joy, the compassion and the goodness, the love and the peace, the justice and the reconciliation of his kingdom...And, hey, victory is assured! Because the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ declares forever and ever that light has overcome darkness, that life has overcome death, that joy and laughter and peace and compassion and justice and caring and sharing, all and more have overcome their counterparts...Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor, power and might, be to our God forever and ever.

With all the odds stacked against it, his hope seemed hopeless. But “no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.” He led the Christians of South Africa in acting on that faith, and four years later we began to see that hope become reality when the pillars of apartheid fell and Nelson Mandela walked out of the prison gates.

That’s faith. Faith which sees beyond the limitations of human resources the possibility of God’s action to fulfill God’s promise. Faith which looks beyond the facts of human genetics to the possibility of new birth from above when no one else can “conceive” it. (Compare the obstetrics in the Old Testament lesson with Nicodemus’s questions in John 3:1-17.) This is the faith Charles Wesley described when he wrote:

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, “It shall be done!”

During Lent we face the darkness that looms over us in the cross. There are days when all the odds seem stacked against the promise of resurrection, the hope of new life, the vision of God’s kingdom coming on earth as it is already fulfilled in Heaven. In short, Lent is a great time to discover what it means to live by faith!
Third Sunday in Lent: Romans 5:1-11

“When were you saved?” The way he asked the question left no doubt that it was more of an inquest than an inquiry and that he already knew the only appropriate answer. He was obviously disappointed when I answered, “I was saved around 3:00 P.M. on a Friday afternoon in about 33 A.D., when Jesus said, ‘It is finished!’ and died on the cross.”

Neither was it the answer he wanted nor did it answer the question he was really asking, but it was my answer to the question he posed. It's all a matter of the tenses of our salvation.

Paul is working his verbs in this passage. Something happened in the past: “While we were weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6). “... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8).

God’s action in the past causes an experiential change in the present: “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (5:1). “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (5:8). “We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (5:2). “We boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (5:11).

But it doesn’t stop there. God’s saving action in our lives and in our world will be fulfilled in the future. “Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God” (5:9). “… our hope of sharing in the glory of God (5:2). “… hope does not disappoint us…” (5:5). Past, present, and future are all combined in verse 10: “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, we will be saved by his life.”

We were saved, reconciled, brought into right relationship with God at the cross. We are saved, justified, living at peace with God by faith. We will be saved, glorified, in the fulfillment of God's saving purpose for the whole creation. (See 1 Cor. 15:21-28 for a spectacular picture of that fully accomplished salvation.) Salvation comes in all three tenses, and all of it is the result of God’s gracious action in Jesus Christ.

In addition to being a huge merchandising success, Disney’s hit movie The Lion King has become the most popular morality fable of
our time, an animated musical portrayal of the struggle between good and evil. It holds a bushel basket of preaching and teaching possibilities. But I have a major problem with the conclusion of the movie. In the final struggle, Simba learns that he was not responsible for his father's death after all. Relieved of his guilt, he finds the strength to save himself and the lions' pride. What about those of us who know that we are guilty? What about those of us who know that we have sinned? What about those times when we know, deep within our bones, that we cannot save ourselves? That we are powerless to save our world?

The Lion King creates the opportunity to introduce a whole generation to the more profound and better told stories of another lion, namely, Aslan, in The Chronicles of Narnia, by C. S. Lewis. As the Christ figure in the stories, Aslan saves those who cannot save themselves by taking their guilt, their pain, and their sin into himself.

"Son of Adam," said Aslan, "Go into that thicket and pluck the thorn that you will find there, and bring it to me." Eustace obeyed. The thorn was a foot long and sharp as a rapier. "Drive it into my paw, Son of Adam," said Aslan, holding up his right fore-paw and spreading out the great pads toward Eustace. "Must I?" said Eustace. "Yes," said Aslan.

Then Eustace set his teeth and drove the thorn into the Lion's pad. And there came out a great drop of blood, redder than all redness that you have ever seen or imagined. And it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King. At the same moment the doleful music stopped. And the dead King began to be changed. . . . His eyes opened, and his lips both laughed, and suddenly he leaped up and stood before them.

In the end, Simba leaves us to try to save ourselves. The good news of the gospel is that when we are most helpless, God saves us by the self-giving love revealed in Jesus Christ.

When were you saved? It's a very good question. Some folks believe in God's salvation in the past but have no experiential sense of their salvation in the present. Some are so narrowly focused on their present experience that they have no vision of the fulfillment of that salvation in the future. Some keep looking for a way to save
themselves, unaware that all they need to do is receive the gift of God’s grace by faith. Jurgen Moltmann writes:

_Salvation is whole salvation and the salvation of the whole, or it is not God’s salvation... It is therefore more appropriate to present the salvation which Christ brings in ever-widening circles, beginning with the personal experience of reconciliation and ending with the reconciliation of the cosmos, heaven and earth._

The Samaritan woman (Luke 4:5-42) offers a case study of the process by which a person experiences salvation. There is reference to the past: “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain...” (4:20). There is present need: “Sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty...” (4:15). There is future hope: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (4:14). And through her witness, there is the present realization of salvation: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (4:42).

On our Lenten pilgrimage we listen for the living Word which proclaims the good news of all the tenses of our salvation.

**Fourth Sunday in Lent: Ephesians 5:8-14**

In her autobiography, _An American Childhood_, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Dillard described one of the important lessons of her life.

_What is important is anyone’s coming awake... the moment of opening a life, and feeling it touch—with an electric hiss and cry—this speckled mineral sphere, our present world._

St. Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians to know that what’s really important, the thing which makes all the difference in human experience, is coming awake: the opening of our lives to a whole new way of living and being which is illuminated by the light of Christ. What matters is our whole being awakening to new life in Christ.
“Once,” he reminds them, “you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light” (Eph. 5:8). Awakening to the grace of God in Christ is as radical a change as moving from midnight to the dawn. It changes the way we see everything. The apostle calls to all of us: “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!” Although he doesn’t identify the source, the apostle is evidently quoting an early Christian liturgy, hymn or baptismal affirmation which was rooted in the propheesy of Isaiah:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will rise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
(Isa. 60:1-3)

It may be difficult for us to feel the full power of that image. We live in a constantly illuminated world where there is hardly a time when we actually experience the full power of darkness. It’s easy to forget just how “thick” the darkness can be.

I remember going into the depths of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. Miles below the earth, the guide turned off the electric lights which had guided our path, and for a few moments we were in absolute darkness. I remember a sense of helplessness, a feeling of disorientation, and the awareness of the utter impossibility of finding our way.

The biblical writers knew how it felt to be left “out in the dark.” It became the measure of human existence without the light of the presence of God: disoriented, helpless, unable of finding its way. When they felt the power of the light breaking in upon them, it was such a total contrast to the darkness that the only way to describe it was to call it “the glory of the Lord.” To awaken to the good news of God’s salvation in Christ is like awakening from the darkness to the dawn. It is, according to the Gospel of John, like the movement from blindness to sight.

The story of the man born blind (John 9:1-41) was more than just the historical record of a miraculous healing of a specific blind man. The early Christians knew it was their story. They knew how it felt to be spiritually blind. They knew what it meant for their eyes to be opened. They experienced the conflict with the religious authorities.
And they knew what it meant to become witnesses of that light: “Once I was blind, but now I see!”

This text was a particular favorite of Charles Wesley. In 1742 he preached a student sermon at Oxford entitled, “Awake, Thou That Sleepest,” which became one of the “standard sermons” for the early Methodists. In one of his greatest hymns, he used the same image to describe his own experience of God’s saving presence.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

But what about us? Can we hear in this lesson the living Word in our own experience? Do we really sense that the Christian faith calls us to that kind of total transformation of life? Can we hear the Spirit call, “Sleeper awake!” Will we be among those who live as children of light?

What is important is coming awake, the opening of life. What really matters is coming alive to the life-giving light of God’s love in our own experience.

Fifth Sunday in Lent: Romans 8:6-11

Paul doesn’t pull any punches. In this passage he declares that the work of the Spirit in human experience makes the difference between life and death. The chapter is built on the fundamental contrast of the “Spirit-of-life-in-Christ-Jesus law” versus the “sin-and-death law” (8:2). Coming in “lectionary time” on the last Sunday before Holy Week, the selected verses provide both a warning and a promise for what lies ahead.

The warning: “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” (8:6) The story we hear, the events we remember during Holy Week are a matter of life and death. Not only do we hear the story of the suffering and death of Jesus but, because of the spiritual connection described in the lesson for the First Sunday in Lent, we come to understand that the passion story is a matter of life or death for us as well.

Driving through the Colorado Rocky Mountains at 12,000 feet elevation on Trail Ridge and again at Independence Pass, we
crisscrossed the Continental Divide. From the northern tip of Alaska to the southern tip of the Andes, it divides the continent so that moisture which falls on the east side flows toward the Atlantic and moisture which falls on the west flows to the Pacific. Immovable and unchanging, it divides the whole continent.

In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul set the cross as the Continental Divide in human experience. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). He drew the same dividing line in the sixth chapter of Romans, when he described the difference between the death of sin and the life of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14).

We enter the events of Holy Week with the awesome awareness that the way revealed in Jesus, the way of self-giving love, the way which leads to the cross, is the way of God's redemptive, life-giving grace in human experience. Along with all of the people in the passion story, we are forced to choose what we will do with this Jesus. The choice is a matter of life and death, because it means choosing to live under the controlling power of the "Spirit-of-life-in-Christ-Jesus law" or the "sin-and-death law."

That's the warning. But the apostle also offers a promise: "If the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also ..." (8:10). We know where the passion story will come out. We know that the way of suffering and death will be transformed into new life by the power of the resurrection. We enter into the suffering of the cross assured that "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).

The Old Testament and Gospel lessons for the day are spectacular illustrations of the truth of the text. Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is the powerful picture of a people who said, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost" (Ezek. 37:11). That's just how it feels to be under the controlling influence of the "sin-and-death law." But as they heard Ezekiel's prophecy, they experienced the living Word of God energizing their dry bones and bringing new life. That's how it feels to be under the influence of the "Spirit-of-life-in-Christ-Jesus law."

The Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus appears on this Sunday, in part because in John's chronology it is the last, catalytic event prior to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But it also serves as the dramatic promise of God's resurrecting power, which is not for Jesus alone but
for all who believe, for all who go into the darkness of death with unwavering trust in God (John 11:41-42).

As people of faith we do not go blindly into the passion. We enter the remembrance of our redemption fully aware that it is the dividing line between life and death, but we enter it with the hope of resurrection. All of this, according to the epistle, is accomplished by the activating, animating power of the Spirit dwelling within us.

C.S. Lewis described this process in a memorable passage in *Mere Christianity*, in spite of his use of the generic “man.” (He was, after all, writing as a traditional Oxford don in the first half of the century!)

> What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man.
> That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is.
> They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God. . .
> What man, in his natural condition, has not got, is Spiritual life—the higher and different sort of life that exists in God. . .
> And that is precisely what Christianity is about. The world is a great sculptor’s shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going around the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life?

If we listen closely we can hear it during Lent, even on the threshold of the passion. The rumor is going around that by the power of the Spirit of God at work within us, some of us, someday, are going to come to life!

Notes

Contents

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

Articles

United Methodism in the United States: Retrospective and Prospective Considerations
Dennis M. Campbell ..................................................... 5

Adaptation or Resistance: Christian Churches in Germany and their Policies under Totalitarian Regimes
Manfred Marquardt ...................................................... 23

The Situation under the Nazi Regime............................ 25
The Situation under the Soviet Regime......................... 36
Understanding God’s call in the Breakdown of Political Systems......................................................... 52

Abortion, Grace and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral
Kathy Rudy .............................................................. 71

QR Lectionary Study

Stand Firm in Freedom: Summer Lections from Galatians
Jack Albright .......................................................... 89
Contents

Introduction
  Sharon J. Hels .................................................. 113

Articles

The Wisdom de Profundis of Benjamin E. Mays, Black College, and the Good Life
  Samuel DuBois Cook ........................................... 115

The Legacy of Francis Asbury: The Teaching Office in Episcopal Methodism
  Russell E. Richey ................................................ 145

Challenges to the Teaching Ministry in the Contemporary Church
  Gayle Carlton Felton ........................................... 175

Christian Theology as the Practice of Hope
  Millicent C. Feske ............................................. 185

QR Lectionary Study

Jesus the Savior of the Least, the Last, and the Lost
  Ben Witherington III .......................................... 197

Review Essay

Church Perceptions of Power
  Sally Brown Geis .............................................. 213
Contents

Introduction

Sharon J. Hels ................................................................. 225

Articles

Calling Prowls About in Our Lives
Rosemary S. Keller ......................................................... 227

Our Theologies of Preaching
J. Irwin Trotter ................................................................. 237

When the Pain Outweighs the Promise: Some Reflections on the "Problem" of Clergy Morale
Leroy T. Howe ................................................................. 251

The Crisis of Males in Ministry
William S. Reed ................................................................. 263

Suffering into Wholeness: Vulnerability and the Imprisoned Child Within
J. Paul Jones ................................................................. 275

The Idealization of Male Strength in the Pulpit
Richard T. Frazier ............................................................. 287

QR Lectionary Study

Light in the Darkness: Rediscovering Advent Hope in the Lectionary Texts from Isaiah
David Carr ................................................................. 295

Critical Response

Abortion and the Quadrilateral: A Reply to Kathy Rudy
James C. Howell ............................................................ 321
Contents

Introduction

Sharon J. Hels .......................................................... 335

Articles

Telling Our Story: Can Marketing Help Us?

Thomas W. Ogletree ............................................. 337

Clergy Misconduct and the Gospel:

Gregory S. Clapper .............................................. 353

Crosscultural Ministry: Theory, Practice, Theology

Toinette M. Eugene .............................................. 363

Globalization and Its Ironies: Some Implications for Theological Education

Ruben Habito and Edward W. Poitras ......................... 375

Globalization in Theological Education Reflections from an African Perspective

Solomon K. Avotri ................................................. 389

Melting Pot or Mosaic: What Difference Does Difference Make?

Tyron Inbody ...................................................... 399

Why Owls Matter, Mosquitoes Bite, and Existence Remains a Mystery:

Byron C. Bangert .................................................. 415

QR Lectionary Study

Listening in Time

James A. Harnish .................................................. 427
Quarterly Review is a publication of The United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry.