Methodism and Education: From Roots to Fulfillment
James Laney

Connectionalism and College
Russell E. Richey

"The Winter Guest"
Mothers and Miracles
Sara Anson Vaux
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On Learning the Liberal Arts

Who was the first person in your family to go to college? Many honor their first college-educated ancestor as the one who elevated the family's social and economic prospects. In U.S. history, colleges and universities have enjoyed great prestige, and their graduates carried this aura with them. Colleges and universities were also exclusive institutions: in North America in the early nineteenth century, the sons of prosperous men went to college as if by right, and no one else did. But little by little, more schools and colleges were founded for the sons and eventually the daughters of the less well off, swelling the ranks of the college-educated. Even today, when a family sends its daughters and sons off to college it signals continuity with educated family members of the past, and its strongest hopes for the future. If you are the first person to go to college in your family, then you are probably aware of the dreams and expectations that went with you.

Most people anticipate the benefits of higher education—especially since it costs so much—but seldom stop to think of what is supposed to happen during those critical four years. Since we have forgotten what we learned in college but remain educated people, what did college do to change us? About ten years ago, Jonathan Z. Smith, a Professor of Religion at the University of Chicago, wrote an article about introductory college classes (Journal of the American Academy of Religion LVI/4) that was so good I put it on my list of small classics. Smith's idea is that in college students learn how to "turn narratives into problems." Suppose someone offers you a plausible account of how a certain event came to be. Now you have a choice to
make: either you accept this characterization as adequate or you stop and consider. Is this the best possible explanation? How would you know? To what could you compare this so-called plausible account? Can you see the possibility for an alternative explanation? Where once you had only a story that required of you only a good memory, now you have an interesting set of problems to explore. You are debating interpretations, and you are on the road to a liberal arts education.

Learning the art of critical reasoning is the number one agenda item in class after class, whatever the subject. Furthermore, the classroom itself is essential, because the ultimate goal is to think, speak, and write independently among one's peers, guided by someone with far more experience, the professor. When this happens, college students argue productively about intellectual problems—that is, without rancor, sulks, or eccentricities. They are also discovering their own stake in these problems. Smith emphasizes that intellectual arguments clarify choices, and choices entail responsibilities. Life responsibilities. So we are back where we started: a family's most cherished dreams about improving its quality of life. Young people—older students, too—who get a good liberal arts education are able to clarify the choices they must make to live responsibly.

Now we might ask what United Methodism could add to such a noble venture. I'll let James Laney take over the discussion, because his article, based on a speech he made at a meeting of United Methodist educators from around the world, all but defines our denomination's distinctive understanding of higher education. To the process of higher education United Methodism adds commitments, or values. Chief of these are inclusiveness and service. Now inclusiveness means first of all reaching out and providing education to as many as possible, on the model of John Wesley. The riskiness of this behavior in every generation must not be underestimated, as Laney describes. But he adds a dimension of depth to the picture: inclusiveness and service in education, understood fully, plunge us into new waters of relationship between the givers and the receivers of higher education. Education becomes dialogical and more deeply creative than we might have perceived, touching both our public and private lives. If you want to know how education really changes people, read Laney's article and apply it.

Russell Richey's article about church and college focuses on the development of institutions that provide a context for the education of
individual students. Again, one of the major benefits of Wesley's approach to Christian evangelism is the legacy of organization-building, and nowhere is this more important than in education. Richey describes the pattern of growth from Wesley's original vision of the teaching office and its dissemination through Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury and then, through them, to several generations of Methodists who founded and supported colleges, watched them grow, and, in many cases, saw them leave the fold. Richey's keen historical vision enables him to make astute comments about the challenges that lie ahead for the relationship between churches and colleges. This article is required reading for anyone who wants to know how United Methodism developed its stake in education and what issues must be understood when approaching the topic of United Methodism and education today.

But education is not the final word in this issue. From there we go to two splendid essays on the arts and religion. The art form here is film—mostly a popular medium, but capable of undeniable richness and sensitivity, as devoted filmgoers (and longtime readers of James Wall’s reviews in The Christian Century) know well. One of the amazing aspects of film is its ability to create images that draw forth an emotional response from viewers. In writing about Places in the Heart, a thoroughly American vision of social reconciliation, Robert Jewett creates a number of these images himself. Anchoring the Letter to the Ephesians firmly in the context of Roman prisons, he evokes the dark pit of despair and oppression that corresponds beautifully to the cinematic images of Places. You will find that scripture enlivened because of his insight. And Sara Anson Vaux spins a web of imagery and interest in The Winter Guest, an independent film directed by Alan Rickman. Her portrait of a family, even a fragmented, hurting one, brings us renewed knowledge of household pain and need—a reality to which we may have grown too inured. Happy endings are slippery things, but a skilled writer such as Vaux can make us see and cherish even small victories.

Next we have a pair of extremely helpful articles on the topic of health-care. Marie Giblin has addressed the question of health-care ethics at its most foundational level: the stories ill people and their caregivers tell about illness, how it feels to be sick and what it means to recover. She bases her exposition on an important book by Arthur Frank, The Wounded Storyteller, but goes on to show the vital connection between private stories of illness and public health care.
delivery systems. Ralph Underwood offers a fine orienting view of the dual systems—ministry and medicine—and the differences between the two on the questions of health and wholeness, the meaning of suffering and sacrifice. Underwood tells us what our theology must do if it is to deal adequately with modern medicine. This reflective task is not only within our reach, but it should be started right away.

We end with Tom Choi's heartfelt and quietly effective meditation on 1 Peter. Rev. Choi has a clear inner vision of the gospel, but, as you will see, it is strong and flexible enough to wrap around a number of difficult pastoral issues. We wish him and his wife all the best in their new ministries in Hawaii.

I want to give the last word on Methodism and higher education to the late Merrimon Cuninggim, a trailblazer, truth teller, and warrior on behalf of education for most of his life. Here is his assessment of the future of church-related higher education, taken from Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church (Abingdon, 1994):

... we who consider ourselves supporters of the church-related colleges of the United States will grow in our appreciation of them, and others will also grow in their appreciation. Not all of these colleges are as good as they ought to be, but on balance they are good. Not all of them are as proud of their church heritage and connection as they ought to be, but in the main, they are glad about it. Not all of them take with sufficient seriousness the academic values implicit in their life—truth, freedom, justice, and kinship—but on the whole they try. Look around at what we have, and what the church-related colleges have a chance to become. And be thankful.

Sharon Hels
James Laney

Methodism and Education: From Roots to Fulfillment

We have gathered here in the long shadow of John Wesley, and for good reason. John Wesley’s legacy is extraordinary. The institutions established by his impulse through the Methodist Church are unmatched by any other ecclesiastical communion, with the possible exception of the Roman Catholic Church. It is an astonishing heritage, made all the more so because John Wesley was at heart an evangelist. But he was also an educator. A formal portrait of Wesley hangs in the beautiful dining hall at Christ Church, Oxford, where Wesley was a student. (It took many years for them to acknowledge him, but they finally did.) Later, as a fellow of Lincoln College, Wesley was learned, scholarly, and erudite.

So it is hard to imagine how someone like John Wesley—an Oxford don and in many ways a very prim and proper man—could have unleashed such enormous power in the world. We have to ask, how did this happen? We know all about the warmed-heart experience at Aldersgate Street. But a warm heart by itself would not have amounted to much if Wesley hadn’t been persuaded by Whitefield to go out to the west, around Bristol, and preach in a rather—for Wesley—uncouth and

James Laney is former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea and President Emeritus of Emory University. This speech was delivered on July 21, 1998, as the keynote address to the International Association of United Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities at Harlaxton Manor, England.
vulgar way. He had a terrible disinclination for preaching of this kind; it was not in his character. And he had a reluctance, almost a revulsion, at the thought of going outside the established church and, indeed, the establishment of the England of that day. John Wesley was a scion of the church; his father was a rector at Epworth; he was a privileged scholar at Oxford University. John Wesley was a product of the establishment of privilege to privilege; and he could have remained within that system, being very dedicated and pious.

He could have preached politely in Anglican churches and advised his local followers to follow their spiritual disciplines—but it wouldn't have amounted to much. Instead, it was his breaking the bonds of constraint and propriety, innovating, doing something new, allowing the Spirit to move through him beyond the borders of what was acceptable—this is what unleashed the power of the English Methodist revolution. He went to the ordinary people—and by ordinary I mean the poor people, many of them unwashed—and he told them of the love of God in such convincing ways that they believed him, and they wanted to hear more. But rather than leave them simply touched, maybe converted, he banded them together in little societies; and he began to educate them. Because he took those common people outside the establishment, outside the concerns of the upper classes and, indeed, the church, and educated them in those Wesley societies, his evangelism took hold and bore fruit.

The Wesleyan Model of Education

John Wesley has given us a metaphor for education in our own time that is more than simply a historic relic. Wesley was inclusive, and his inclusions cost something. He had to break through those things that other people thought were really not what one should do. Bishop Butler, the great British theologian of Wesley's time, tried to persuade Wesley not to do those things; he told him that if he didn't stop he would ruin his career. It is a message many of us may have heard ourselves: If you do that, you will be washed up. The big boys are watching you, and they want to see you move up the ladder. But Wesley broke out of that career-ladder lockstep to do what he did; and it included the great masses of the people in England, Wales, and Ireland, and later in America and around the world. Inclusion—the education of those societies so that people who couldn't read were
now able to read the Scriptures, newspapers, and legal papers and become conversant with the world. People who had irresolute, even dissolute, lives were admonished—not unlike the Twelve Steps of AA—to find purpose, direction, and discipline for their lives. They became new people, people with power. Wesley’s educational vision opened the door to these people; it changed their hearts, gave them a motive for improvement, educated them, and turned them upon the world. Now, that’s a revolution! People who would have been left untouched, unnoticed, and ignored became the basis not just for the Methodist church but for a true revolution of the broadest, deepest kind—a social revolution born of the Spirit but cemented through education. Wesley reached out to include, and his education empowered.

But it wasn’t that they become empowered just so that they could then live lives that would be for themselves; it was an education for service. Wesley’s vision went full circle. Including the poor meant to bring them in, educate them, empower them, and then turn them upon the world so they could become productive citizens, people who had a sense of purpose, a direction, a focus, people who made contributions—who, in short, took upon themselves the dignity and honor of being children of God. You can’t do much better than that.

Methodism and Education Worldwide

When we look at what Methodists accomplished around the world, we are astonished. In the nineteenth century, the Methodist Church in North America not only evangelized the frontier all the way across the Pacific but established hundreds of schools and colleges with very little resources and founded hospitals for the sick and homes for abandoned children, orphans, and the elderly. The record is unbelievable: they simply transformed the social fabric of the United States. And in addition, they found hundreds, if not thousands, who wanted to go abroad and share the same joy, the same possibilities, the same inclusion, the same empowerment, the same ideal of service.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. My grandfather was born on a little farm in Arkansas, just a few years after the Civil War. He was born into a Presbyterian home, but it was the Methodists who gave him the opportunity for an education. The Methodists had founded a college in Conway, Arkansas, called Hendrix. My
grandfather went to Hendrix, the first in his family ever to go to college. From Hendrix he won a scholarship to another Methodist school, Vanderbilt; and he went there with his young bride to study for a master’s degree. This was the Methodist mechanism everywhere: include people who had no opportunity for an education, empower them, and give them an opportunity. After my grandfather finished school, he left Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife and went back to northwest Arkansas to run a school for girls. My grandmother cooked and did the washing and cleaning and taught elocution; he did all the rest of the teaching and administering. It was a two-person show. My grandparents were empowered by educational opportunity—but in the end, whom did they teach? Girls, who at that time in that part of the country had no other chance to receive an education.

The Methodist education movement is one of enormous creativity. I think of the first Korean to come to the United States for a college degree, Yun Chi Ho, who later became one of the great patriots and leaders of Korea. He came to the U.S. in 1889—the inclusion—being urged to come by a young Methodist missionary. First he went to Vanderbilt, and then he came to Emory College. Mr. Yun spoke beautiful English and kept a diary that has now been published. His extraordinary reflections let us see another side of the U.S. South in the late nineteenth century—particularly its provincialism, its narrowness of mind. Mr. Yun was invited one evening to dinner at the house of the president of Emory, Dr. Warren Candler. After dinner Dr. Candler took him aside and said, “You know, Mr. Yun, Emory is a small college, but we are roughly equivalent to Harvard or Yale.” Mr. Yun observed dryly, “I think President Candler may have been carried away by his enthusiasm.” This story appears in Yun Chi Ho’s diary.

Yun Chi Ho went back to help found some boys’ schools in Korea so that those boys could be included and empowered and could in turn serve.

Students in the student volunteer movement at the turn of the century, having themselves been empowered, wanted to share that opportunity with the world. I think it was centered up in Princeton at that time—hundreds of young people went out all over the world. At the time, it was like a Christian version of the Peace Corps. One of the students was a man named Henry Winters Luce, who went to China and helped found Yenching Christian College in Peking, now Beijing, the direct predecessor college of Peking University, the greatest university in China. For years during the communist regime there was
no mention (indeed the history was deliberately suppressed) of the Christian origin of that college. But in the past ten years, they have proudly claimed this foundation. Now, on the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Beijing University, the Chinese have brought back people who are related to the founding and celebrated with them the enormous contribution that Yenching Christian College, later Beijing University, has made to that great nation.

The Challenge for Today's Educators

What's the secret of this? It's not just education seasoned with evangelism; instead, it's the kind of education that does more than give mastery. I said it gives empowerment, but not just empowerment for the richest, fullest life, not just empowerment that we might have the tools and the techniques and the technology that enable us to take charge and become masters of our universe. Christian education does not exist so that people can become privileged in order to live the rest of their lives in privilege. None of our schools were founded so that people could become fat cats.

Our schools—all of them—were founded so that people educated and empowered within them might be of some value to the world. And that is a basic premise we must never forget. It is not something that is simply in the past—it is the living power of our schools today. There are enormous opportunities today for new discoveries of science, advances in medicine, better understandings of organizations and business, and pursuit of the theory of the law. All these things collaterally can bring enormous benefit to humankind; and, if practiced in the right way, they can also bring great rewards to the practitioners. To take education alone and to use it only in that way, simply imparting the skills that enable someone else to become one of the brightest and the best in one of the firms or the hospitals or in the universities—that is not the purpose of Methodist education.

What we must see is what John Wesley saw. We must not be seduced by the blandishments of prestige alone. Our educational vision, our educational philosophy, our understanding of this holistic approach which would include, empower, and send forth to do more than just make money for themselves—these are themselves part of the redemptive activity of God in the world. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We don't have to prattle like evangelists. We don't have to
be ashamed of the fact that we are related to the church. We don’t have
to soft-pedal it as if it would somehow be offensive.

In my conversations with people around the country and in my city,
Atlanta, and indeed around the world, what I hear most is that what
leaders are looking for moral guidance. They don't want a bunch of
new bright kids; they want people who care. They want people who
have “know how,” to be sure, they want those who have been
empowered, but who in that empowerment are linked to something
greater than just self-aggrandizement, who are motivated by
something other than self-interest.

How do we do that? Well, I think we first of all realize that the very
act of inclusion itself changes the way we educate. I was a long time
coming to that understanding. When we first began really to make a
lot of scholarships available to inner-city kids and others who we felt
were worthy but didn’t have the means, I thought that just bringing
them to the campus would do the job. They could become Emory
graduates! I thought that going from 3 percent to 10 percent minorities
enrollment was a big change and that I should get a lot of credit. I
knew I was getting a lot of grief, but only in retrospect did I realize
that it was legitimate grief. It wasn’t enough to bring in minority
students and say, “Okay, there you are; you’re in the promised land.”
They wanted a share in it; they wanted to feel as if they were not
simply recipients but participants, that they had something to give.
And, of course, they did.

It was a pretty difficult adjustment to make, especially for a
middle-aged, white male who thought he had a good heart. I had to
acknowledge that I had some growing to do, that our campus had
some growing to do, and that our faculty and our trustees had some
growing to do. Inclusion means change, not only with regard to
minorities but in the way we understand the role of women. When all
of the people who have not had a seat at the table are fully included,
there will a corresponding shift in the systems approach. It’s not easy,
but it can happen.

I remember one day when I came home from work feeling tired and
sorry for myself, having spent the day being beaten up by various
people, including special-interest groups. I walked into a quiet house
around six o’clock and saw there was no supper waiting. I went back
into the kitchen, and no one was there. During this time my wife was
working as a hospital chaplain. I waited and waited; and the longer I
waited; the more impatient I got and the more I felt sorry for myself. I
even began to get a little angry, because here I was carrying the load of this university and no one was supporting me. About an hour later my wife came home, happy. “Where’ve you been?” I asked. “You know I work at the hospital.” “Oh, yeah. What’s for supper?” I said. “I don’t know,” she said. “What would you like?” So I said, “You know, I looked in the cupboard, and we don’t even have any saltine crackers.” (I thought that was the coup de grace.) And my wife replied, very sweetly, “Why don’t you go to the store and buy some?” It was a moment of illumination.

Inclusion is a vital part of the education that continues all our lives. The bastion of privilege which we think of as the modern university is not fixed. It has a lot of expertise but very little understanding of the heart. When we go out as Wesley did and include others, something changes not only in them but in us. And the empowerment is not only with them but also with us, in the new way that we can live a more open and sympathetic and understanding life. But education in this mode on the campus implies that we will consciously and deliberately reach out beyond our small campus environment to the larger world outside. This is obviously important for students, so that they might have the opportunity to serve and to learn that they are able to make a contribution and not be just passive recipients of a college education. But, more critically, it must involve the faculty. We make a mistake when we think our volunteer programs are limited to students only.

The university is a microcosm of the world; it has an enormous obligation to the community in which it is located. And this obligation is fulfilled only partly by students to doing after-school tutoring. Now that, to be sure, is very important. But the obligation is fulfilled only when the president and the other officers of the university and the faculty begin to do some of the things they are able to do uniquely in the larger community. The university must seek its renewal in the social milieu, in a social context, so that true reciprocity can begin. The inclusion in that reciprocity and those changes, and the service in that reciprocity and those changes create a constant, living dynamic. It says on behalf of the educational institution that we see ourselves as more than a bunch of experts who know how to do complicated things; it says, rather, that we know how complex things can be applied for the well-being of the world in which we live.

When universities, colleges, and schools begin to behave in this way, we do more than take in students, educate them with a fixed
curriculum, and then send them out. That's the old, privileged understanding of simple empowerment, and it has its place. But it's not nearly enough in this day. It is that total range of inclusion, of active inclusion, and all the changes that will ensue and the total range of service and all the changes that ensue that allow us to see the university and the college as a living organism within the community. The educational institution, therefore, is not something that merely takes but also gives; it is the center of hope, because the kind of education that it imparts sends out people who are both very good at what they do and also very caring.

That is the mission, the task, the calling, the vision of the Christian school for the twenty-first century. And it is simply an adaptation of what John Wesley did: going outside the bounds of propriety and bringing them in, schooling them, empowering them, sending them forth in lives of service and doing that in such a continuing, spiraling fashion that our institutions have a redemptive cast and tone. And that is really what our Christians schools are called to be. The others can do other things. But that's what we are about.
Connectionalism and College

I begin with four propositions:

1. American Methodism has been, and United Methodism continues to be, a connectional church.¹
2. At the heart of the connection, of that connectionalism, lies education.
3. Both the expression of connectionalism and the way education has related to the connection have differed over time.
4. We appear to be in the process of rethinking the connection and redefining education's relation to it.

Implicit in these propositions are several contentions. The first is that higher education in Methodism has always been connectional rather than scattered, diffuse, and ad hoc. This point runs counter to common assumption, as illustrated in an otherwise excellent study of the University Senate by Beth Adams Bowser. She writes:

The Senate's work was designed originally to bring a sense of "connectionalism" to the institutions of learning that considered themselves, or wanted to be considered, under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This had been missing in the planning and administration of these institutions since 1820, when Annual...
Conferences received the authority to act autonomously in establishing schools. The resulting chaos was unacceptable to the Methodist Episcopal Church, especially if it was to have a system of "quality" schools that could compete with the best schools in any given region.

A second point follows. Contrary to popular impression, connectionalism has not always been national, and certainly not bureaucratic, in character. Long before the creation of national boards, (United) Methodism and its colleges enjoyed a lively, substantive, and mutually enriching connection. This connection can survive and, perhaps, even be enhanced by radical changes in the existing national, corporate, bureaucratic structures and systems of accountability.

A third contention will become evident as I proceed, namely, that an overview of the connection between education and the church will reveal at least four clear stages: the episcopal, or personal; the conference, collegiate or regional; the national, agency or bureaucratic; and the professional, or segmented. What will the fifth and emerging stage be like and be called? Each stage turns a different facet of the church towards the college, engaging colleges in slightly different ways, connecting colleges to the church through different adhesive principles. How ought a fifth and emerging stage to look? Where will it engage the college? How will college and church be joined? These questions I leave for college and church to define.

The Inherited Pattern

Methodism's connectionalism and the centrality of education to the connection derive from John Wesley. When we think of Wesley, both his own classical education and formation at Oxford and his endeavor to supply education to his people at Kingswood come immediately to mind. But the entire Wesleyan system evidenced his teaching or the educational role. His investment in education was pervasive, extensive, and personal.

Wesley was the teacher for Methodism. There was a teaching purpose to almost everything he did, and he was willing to teach anyone he met who proved in any way open and responsive. Certainly he taught his preachers, in conference and out; and he held them accountable to educate themselves using the resources which he
provided. He gave similar incentives to the people, directly and through correspondence. He created systems which clearly served educational purposes. His correspondence, tracts, republications, sermons, controversial and apologetical pieces, magazine, schools, classes and societies, rules, republished libraries, encouragement to families and societies to create libraries, Sunday schools, conference sessions, training and supervision of his assistants and helpers—indeed the entire structure of Methodism—betray a remarkable drive to educate his people in the faith, to identify the heart of the Christian gospel, to teach the faith.

Through much of this, Wesley wrote what might be called a "curriculum" of the faith. He did so formally and self-consciously by preserving deposits of his teaching. The Large Minutes, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, Standard Sermons, and for Americans, Wesley's modified version of the Anglican Articles of Religion—all of which came to us from his hand—Wesley identified as touchstones of faith and practice. In making such provisions for the guidance of his people, Wesley exercised what theologians call the teaching office. In Christian tradition that office was exercised by the bishops—and, in Roman Catholicism, by the bishop of Rome, the pope.

We need not pursue the fine points about Wesley's scriptural episcopal office here. Rather, I want to emphasize that Wesley, both by his personal actions and organizational initiatives, made Methodism into a giant classroom. These very activities and structures connected Methodists to Wesley and to one another. Therefore, education in Methodism was connectional, and the connection was educational—and at the heart of both was Mr. Wesley.

### Education and the American Methodist Episcopacy

There is no question that the first two American bishops, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, aspired to play a comparable educational and connective role for the American Methodists. When we think of American Methodism and education, what usually comes to mind is the ill-fated and several-times-started Cokesbury College, modeled after Kingswood, or the circuit riders and the practice of horseback reading. But, like the teaching role of Wesley in British Methodism, the American pattern involved substantial informal educational processes.
Coke in particular attempted to inherit Wesley's teaching role in American Methodism. He consciously took upon himself the exercise of intellectual leadership—studying on shipboard the texts that bore on church order, carefully crafting sermons that would lay the groundwork for a Methodist "episcopal" self-understanding, conducting a planning session for the Christmas Conference, speaking eloquently on the conference floor, advocating the establishment of an academic institution, preaching throughout the connection, championing antislavery. In many ways he provided ideas for the new American church.

Although neither Asbury nor the American preachers could suffer Coke's presumptuous style of intellectual leadership, Wesley's model of episcopal teaching did not disappear. It was Asbury, who is not highly regarded either as a thinker or an educator, who proved more successful in exercising Wesley's various educational roles.

Some aspects of this leadership were highly visible. For example, Asbury encouraged Methodists, particularly in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, to found boarding schools, although none of them flourished for long.

And, like Wesley, Asbury found other, less obvious conduits for education. He oversaw the publishing efforts of the movement, issuing directives and counsel to the books agents, first John Dickins and then Ezekiel Cooper. By making the itinerating preachers agents for the publishing enterprise, Asbury and the book agents turned all of the circuit system into a gigantic educational distribution network.

Other education projects earning his sponsorship included a magazine, which appeared as The Arminian Magazine in 1789 and 1790 and as The Methodist Magazine in 1797 and 1798 (not a stunning success, obviously); an American version of Wesley's works; a variety of republications of British items and a few American originals; his own Journal, initially serialized, and then as an independent book; his own version of a Hymn Book; a compilation intended to address the James O'Kelly schism and entitled graphically The Causes, Evils, and Cures of Heart and Church Divisions, Extracted from the Works of Mr. Jeremiah Burroughs and Mr. Richard Baxter; and Asbury's effort at a history of the movement, Extracts of Letters Containing Some Account of the Work of God since the Year 1800.

Asbury's most self-evident educational effort came in 1798 and involved Coke as well. It was an annotated version of the Discipline.
an endeavor to instruct the Methodist faithful through and about Methodist belief and practice. But Asbury’s most important educational practices were oral, not written. We can see this most vividly in several valedictory statements, which he intended to guide the movement. More elusive—but arguably even more effective—were his daily interventions in the lives of those with whom he traveled, resided, and spoke. The educational practices in which he was probably most successful are now completely lost to us; namely, his sermons and prayers, his statements in conference, his conversations, and his talks with horseback companions. Asbury taught, as early Methodism taught, in a seminar of the road. He exercised the teaching office best simply by talking to people. Unfortunately, the substance of his conversation can only be inferred from the notations of biblical texts in his Journal, from the concerns which prompt his Letters, from the chance comment recorded by his companions. By these means he gave intellectual leadership to the Methodist movement.

These same efforts were what held Methodism together, connected it, and made it a genuinely connectional church. Asbury moved daily so as to traverse the length and breadth of Methodism. He lived out the notion to which we still formally subscribe, namely, that our bishops are itinerant general superintendents. His connective and educative functions interplayed; indeed, they were the same. Methodism was held together by an itinerating bishop and, to a lesser extent, by a ministry that was also itinerating nationally. What education Methodism could claim was maintained by itinerating teachers. As education went, it wasn’t very high, and it wasn’t very formal; but it was extensive and connective.

The College Era

Asbury’s—and Coke’s—dream of schools for Methodism materialized after both had died; Coke in 1814, Asbury in 1816. In 1820 and 1824 General Conference charged annual conferences with the establishment of schools, literary institutions, and colleges. The annual conferences responded by founding some ninety secondary-level institutions. Gradually, conferences, often collaboratively, launched collegiate institutions, beginning with Augusta College in Kentucky (1822), followed by Randolph-Macon in...
Virginia (1830), and Wesleyan University in Connecticut (1831). The first women’s college, Wesleyan in Georgia, was approved and chartered in 1836. By the Civil War Methodism had established or was affiliated with some 200 such institutions. Many were poorly funded, staffed, supported, and attended; and they did not long survive. By one estimate Methodism succeeded in establishing 34 “permanent” colleges before 1861.

Bowser’s study of the University Senate comments negatively on this stage, viewing it as a time of disarray, inconsistent standards, poor planning, misused and inadequate resources, isolation, and unnecessary competition. From her vantage point, which echoes that of late-nineteenth century Methodism, conferences were unsuited for managing educational enterprises or holding them in relation to the church. But in truth the conferences were what connected Methodism’s enterprises as a whole from the death of Asbury through the Civil War. This role came to them was by default to some extent, since the bishops were by then plural and not working together very successfully. The agencies (the Missionary Society) and Advocates functioned to channel resources and to communicate across the church. But the necessary work of whatever nature—missions, fund-raising, evangelism, education—had to be delegated to the conferences. The church connected itself through a network of regularly meeting conferences—quarterly, annual, general—with annual conferences playing the key administrative roles. The system was highly decentralized, but it functioned quite well.

Among the first successful projects of this conference-style connectionalism were colleges. Augusta College, for instance, derived from the initiatives in 1821 of the Ohio and Kentucky conferences. Leadership came from both conferences, Ohio contributing the first president, Martin Ruter, who came to the office from the helm of The Western Christian Advocate, and also John P. Durbin. The latter would go on to edit The Christian Advocate and from there to assume the presidency of Dickinson College. And that college, taken over by the Methodists, enjoyed the sponsorship of Methodism’s two strongest conferences, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

If Asbury epitomizes the episcopal phase of Methodist education and connectionalism, then Durbin epitomizes the college phase. Born in 1800 of Methodist parents in Bourbon County, Kentucky, Durbin was apprenticed as a cabinetmaker at the age of fourteen. At eighteen he experienced conversion and about the same time a call to
preach. Accepted into membership one week and licensed to preach the next, he was immediately sent to the Limestone Circuit. In 1820, when the Western Conference was divided, he went with Ohio. During appointments in the 1820s he began his education, responding to the tutelage of several senior itinerants, including Martin Ruter, whom he would later join at Augusta. The popular image of the circuit rider reading on circuit, Wesley-like, was apparently not the common practice. But Durbin was an exception. He started with the requisites, Wesley’s and Fletcher’s works and Clarke’s Commentary, and went on to grammar, Latin, and Greek. Eventually, he enrolled formally as a college student. He attended Miami University while appointed in that vicinity and Cincinnati College while there, finally receiving an M.A. degree. Soon thereafter Durbin was made professor of Ancient Languages at Augusta, a position he held for a few years. When he stopped teaching for health reasons, he continued as agent for the college, in effect the itinerating admissions and development officer.

Durbin served briefly as chaplain of the United States Senate and also briefly as editor of The Christian Advocate (New York). In 1834, he became principal (president) of Dickinson College, a post he held until 1845. He transferred to the Philadelphia Conference in 1836 and eight times earned the conference’s token of highest respect, election to represent it at General Conference. Five of those times he led the delegation, the highest accolade that conferences then—or now—accord their own. Philadelphia turned to him at every point. The 1845 Conference appointed or elected him to preach the Conference sermon (for 1846). He also served as examiner in the Committees for Examination of the second-year exam on the “Bible as to ordinance or Sacraments.” Durbin also headed the Visiting Committee to Dickinson College in 1846 (the agency through which the church exercised its oversight of institutions). In 1849, the bishop concurred in the Conference’s high estimation of J. P. Durbin and made him presiding elder (P.E.) of North Philadelphia. A year later, in 1850, Durbin succeeded Charles Pitman as secretary of the Missionary Society. He would make that perhaps the most important leadership position in the church.

Durbin’s prominence during his presidency at Dickinson and his overall career well symbolizes the nature of the college-church relationship and what served to connect Methodism at this juncture. Just as Asbury-the-bishop incarnated Methodist connectionalism in the early years, Durbin-the-president incarnated connectionalism for
the pre-Civil War decades. From the 1830s to the Civil War, colleges constituted the church's primary benevolence, the focus of its efforts at social and cultural uplift, its training ground for ministry, its center for inquiry and theologizing, and the agency through which the church exercised the teaching office. The Durbins quite literally knit the church together on education's behalf. Into the colleges the church poured its (limited) financial resources. On the colleges' behalf the emerging lay elites began to take leadership roles. There the church equipped its ministry—Wesleyan, Dickinson, and Randolph-Macon serving, in effect, as the seminaries of their day. Through the colleges the church would carry on its larger mission of reforming the nation, joining with other denominations in common endeavor to instill Protestant commitment, republican ideals, and civic virtue in the nation's rising leaders.

The Protestant effort to build a Christian America produced much collaboration but even more competition between denominations—especially for the hearts and minds of the rising leaders. Until the Methodist church could found enough of its own institutions, the potential new leaders in Methodism were being forced to attend colleges belonging to other denominations. Thus, the founders and benefactors insisted that Methodist colleges would protect the Methodist affiliation of its youth, who were at risk of being lured into other denominations by attending their institutions. So thought Stephen Olin, president of Wesleyan. He said in 1844:

"No Christian denomination can safely trust to others for the training of its sons. . . . History has too clearly demonstrated that, without colleges of our own, few of our sons are likely to be educated, and that only a small portion of that few are likely to be retained in our communion."

He estimated that three-quarters of the Methodists who had attended colleges of other denominations had been "lost":

"Many of them have gone to other denominations, many more have gone to the world. All were the legitimate children of the Church. They were her hope, and they should have become the crown of her rejoicing."

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The biographer of Wilbur Fisk, founding president of Wesleyan, sized the matter up similarly:

The Methodists had become the most numerous body of Christians in the United States, and had greatly increased both in wealth and intelligence. As they became able to educate their children, they found the importance of having institutions of learning under their own control. Prior to this they had been satisfied to send their children to colleges under the influence of other denominations, and, as a natural consequence, many became alienated from the views of their parents. Besides, most of the colleges in the country were under the direction of some one denomination, and this secured to those churches who had most influence in this line, a control over public sentiment that was hardly compatible with the equal rights of the several churches. . . . Moreover, while we had no such institutions among ourselves, the importance of education was not likely to be so generally felt as it ought to be . . .

The colleges indeed educated the church's youth for service. Of Randolph-Macon's early graduates, 210 in all, large majority entered the professions:

- 48 teachers (13 of these professors)
- 43 clergy (12 also taught or served as president of school)
- 39 lawyers (8 legislators)
- 31 farmers
- 29 physicians

Of Wesleyan's first forty years of graduates (919), a third entered the Methodist ministry, and, according to Duvall, Wesleyan produced three-quarters of the ministers who had college degrees.

How Methodist were these institutions? Recent scholarship has divided on that point. Charles Sellers pronounced Dickinson after the Methodist takeover as "sectarian." By contrast, James Edward Scanlon accented the more public, civic, and local nature of Randolph-Macon's early years, as did David Potts for Wesleyan. Agreeing, Glenn Miller observes, "These schools were more secular than the present-day observer might suppose from their presidents' rhetoric." What Miller found—really across American higher education—was a pattern of schools under denominational governance but operated clearly in communal and "public" interest, chartered by colony or state but eschewing religious tests. These schools opened their doors to individuals from various denominations;
provided for religious and moral character formation through a regular pattern of worship; and offered a classical, liberal arts educational diet capped by moral philosophy. Miller terms the denominational college “a curious hybrid”: a public, incorporated institution yet under the control of trustees accountable in some fashion to a denomination.34

These divergent estimates are the result, to some extent, of looking at different aspects of collegiate life. But, perhaps more importantly, they show differences between the interpreters as to what constituted a denomination and the relation of denomination to college. Those who minimize the Methodist character of the pre-Civil War colleges understand denominational control as emanating from some central agency or judicatory. For Methodists no such central agency existed. The denomination was a collection of conferences, and the conferences themselves had nothing in the way of permanent administrative machinery. A school might relate to more than one conference. Indeed, by the 1870s Wesleyan claimed thirteen patron conferences.35 Even such patronage developed more from the college than from the conference side.

In reality, Methodist influence in its colleges was exercised within rather than imposed upon the institution from without. Its nature was informal—the rhythms, lifestyle, and ethos given to a place by its Methodist president, faculty, and board. Conferences—Baltimore and Philadelphia in the case of Dickinson—could send visiting committees to the college to observe and report on a day’s or a week’s activities. Touring agents would render similar reports across the conferences. Since these were the connections, the Methodist character of a school or college could be measured by nothing else.

But the proof was in the pudding: these schools did produce the church’s leaders. Noteworthy, as we’ve already remarked, were the numbers entering the ministry, some of those probably also being identified as teachers. And not only did their graduates become the rising leaders in the denomination; their faculty members and presidents became bishops and agency heads. Indeed, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a college presidency was a stepping-stone to the episcopacy.36 For good reason, then, in the 1870s and 1880s Wesleyan would be termed “the mother of our denominational institutions,” “the crown and glory of our Church,” or, as the Methodist press in New York and Boston put it, the “mother of us all.”37 And yet by the time such
accolades became common, the nature of Methodist connectionalism and the relation of college to church were changing.

A National Church

Northern churches emerged from the Civil War and from their involvement in the war effort with a key insight, that mobilization on a national scale could do wonders for the denominational enterprise. It could provide adequate funding, coordination, quality control, uniformity, efficiency, and fair distribution of time and resources. Methodists especially recognized that activities or projects previously undertaken or overseen by conferences could be more accountable and better supported on a national level. So they (the Methodist Episcopal Church) launched, on behalf of education, a great celebration and capital campaign in recognition of American Methodism’s upcoming centenary (1866). This event might be seen as American Methodism’s coming of age (that is, the MEC’s coming of age). Somewhat hesitantly, the church announced its financial goal as $2 million. It elicited $5 million in pledges and eventually produced $8,700,000 in receipts.38

A church capable of raising money on this scale soon found itself in need of governing structures accountable to the denomination as a whole. First it established, in 1868, a Board of Education responsible to General Conference. Four years later (1874 for the MECS, and still later for the Methodist Protestant Church, United Brethren, and Evangelical Association), General Conference responded to “The Report of the Special Committee on the Relation of Benevolent Institutions to the Church” by directing the bishops

to take such measures as they may deem proper to secure by law such form of organization of the various benevolent corporations of the Methodist Episcopal Church as will place all under the full control of the General Conference.39

By this action the church turned its voluntary societies into formal, national denominational agencies, accountable to General Conference through elected boards and corresponding secretaries. Two of these boards symbolized the will of the church to achieve a national policy in higher education—the Freedmen’s Aid and Southern Education Society, to coordinate northern Methodist educational ventures for
African-Americans, and the Board of Education (which had initially been established in 1868 on the plan extended to all agencies in 1872).

Why a board? What was it intended to fix? The problem had been identified earlier in the decade. In 1860, General Conference took up the question of whether it, rather than annual conferences, should supervise and have control over collegiate education. But a committee studying the problem conceded that it was "unable to fix upon any plan for the organization of a permanent Board of Education which they deem practicable." It affirmed, "What of ecclesiastical control has been exercised has been by the Annual Conferences. . . . without any established law or uniform plan, and with but little concert between the Conferences or the different institutions." Furthermore, it expressed skepticism about the possibility of fruitful change:

The committee are confident that the Annual Conferences would not consent to a transfer of the control of the literary institutions under their care to the General Conference, or a board created by its appointment; nor are they sure, could this be done, that the educational movement of the Church would not be robbed of much of its vitality and freedom of action in adapting itself to the peculiar wants of the different sections of the country by attempting to direct it by a uniform and rigid system.

But by the late 1860s Methodists recognized that vitality and freedom were being purchased at too high a price. Methodism had simply become too big, too complex, too institutionalized, and too wealthy to run itself by conferences that met only periodically, whether once a year or once a quadrennium. Its enterprises deserved the care, resources, and oversight that only a national organization could provide. It needed boards and agencies that were constantly and genuinely accountable to the church. Hence the revolution of 1872.

Aspiration for national and what we would now call bureaucratic control of Methodist schools came not only from General Conference and national church leadership. The educational institutions were also committed to it because they clearly saw the need for greater efficiency by the denomination. For instance, arguing for a better educational system, George R. Crooks, editor of the New York paper, The Methodist, called for a trans-regional association of Methodist colleges in the mid-1860s: "Methodist institutions . . . holding the
Methodist name ... *culturing Methodist piety and ... chiefly of Methodist patronage." Like sentiment recurred through the Methodist press.

As David Potts has shown, friends of Wesleyan College used a variety of stratagems intended to bring the benefits of Methodist support and influence to that institution. Indeed, the case can be made that the colleges and their friends themselves engineered the establishment of national, denominational, corporate boards charged with oversight and support. Still, the process was gradual. For instance, the same John Durbin who taught at Augusta and led Dickinson experimented with greater system and national coordination as head of the Missionary Society. That experimentation continued, as far as education was concerned, until the creation of the University Senate in 1892.

Most Methodists, however, would be surprised to learn that it was we, rather than the regionals, or other professions, who established the first accrediting organization. In relation to the Board of Education, the University Senate served:

- to establish academic standards,
- to apply them to individual institutions,
- to determine which schools qualified according to those standards and as Methodist,"
- to identify those Methodist institutions,
- to visit and investigate,
- to give counsel and guidance,
- to play a role in distribution of resources.

The Senate decided what constituted quality education. It also determined what counted as "Methodist," giving denominational identity a national connectional touchstone for the first time. We take this so much for granted today—that the national church would determine who a Methodist is and who can use the name—that we fail to recognize its novelty in the late-nineteenth century. But new it was. Scanlon, Potts, and others who see the colleges becoming more Methodist in the closing decade of the century can be forgiven for failing to recognize the nature of the earlier, conference-based connectionalism and identity. Indeed, 1892 marked something of a watershed. The northern church created the Senate, mandated a national fund for the support of students, and looked forward to a national educational system. To that end it authorized the establishment of a central graduate-level university in the nation's
capital "to be called The American University, which should be the crown of our educational system.".

Comparable national efforts for education went into African American communities through the Freedmen’s Aid and Southern Education Society (founded in 1866). Its efforts were coordinated with those of the Board of Education and the Woman’s Home Missionary Society. By 1892, after twenty-five years of operation, it boasted "A Federated System of Schools" and a "thoroughly unified system of schools," which was "so graded and located, and related in courses of study, as to form a federation of institutions, including professional, classical, academic, and industrial schools." This "federated" system ran under national management, a Board of Managers elected by General Conference which reported to a General Committee in the interim between General Conferences. Its corresponding secretary took "personal direction" and responsibility for "the buying of lands, the erection of buildings, the employment of teachers, and the superintendence of institutions of learning of various grades." The general committee took responsibility for determining what institutions shall receive aid for the ensuing year; the total amount to be expended as far as practical; the amount each school shall receive . . . what amount shall be apportioned to each Annual Conference to be raised . . .

It was also "to counsel and direct the board in the general administration of its affairs." By 1892 the Freedmen’s Aid and Southern Education Society spent close to three million dollars, a million of that in the prior quadrennium ($1,010,980.25 to be exact). Real estate the Society valued at $1,808,800. In the prior fiscal year, the Society had disbursed monies to the following collegiate or higher level institutions:

Bennett College  
Central Tennessee College  
Claflin University  
Clark University  
Gammon Theological Seminary  
George R. Smith College  
Little Rock University
Morgan College
New Orleans University
Philander Smith College
Rust University
Samuel Huston College
U. S. Grant University
Wiley University

For that year, 1892, it claimed a total of 447 teachers and 9,310 students, though only 172 students in college. It boasted 326 persons preparing for the ministry and, over the prior quadrennium, "twelve hundred and fifty conversions . . . among the students." In its report, the Freedmen's Aid and Southern Education Society assured General Conference of the following results:

1. The property is absolutely safe to the Church.
2. Schools of similar grade have substantially the same courses of study.
3. Local responsibility and cooperation are being developed as rapidly as the financial ability of the people will justify.
4. College degrees, in course or honorary, are only conferred by institutions of collegiate grade, and then, as a rule, only in consultation with the authorities of the Society.
5. No new schools will be founded in the South, among our people, either white or colored, without the consent and cooperation of the central office.
6. No teachers can be employed not in thorough accord with the doctrines and usages of the Church.
7. The English Bible is introduced as a text-book in all grades of every school, whether theological, collegiate, or academic.
8. To a very great extent the same text-books are used in all schools of the same grade, making it possible to contract for them at the lowest rates, as well as to insure the use of the best books.

Here, then, was the national system as the church wanted it—written post-Civil War on a blank slate, as it were, without the distraction of pre-existing institutions and their support systems and with nothing to stand in the way of national control, standardization, efficiency, purpose. It was a system that produced both teachers and conversions,
both new citizens for the South and new ministers for the denomination.

Of course, national efforts, whether the Freedmen's Aid Society or the Board of Education and University Senate, never sufficed to run the schools. More local and regional support for institutions continued in the new era. But from the 1890s through the first half of the twentieth century a national connectionalism predominated and set the terms for what was implemented more locally. The University Senate, the Board of Education (now Board of Higher Education and Ministry), the Board of Global Ministries, and organizations such as the National Association of United Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (NASCUMC) effectively served the Methodist interest in higher education.

A Professional Stage

The role of the national church in education continues so effectively to the present that we might readily conclude with Bowser and others that the new age began and ended with the establishment of the University Senate. However, the terms for Methodist connection shifted subtly in the twentieth century. They did so generally, but also in relation to higher education. Both generally and specifically Methodism fell under the influence of professionalism. The pattern of professionalism increasingly became the new mode of connection.

The effect of professionalism on Methodism was strange indeed. Methodist conference structures, annual conferences specifically, came increasingly to behave like professional organizations that supported and protected the interests of accredited practitioners, on the model of the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association. Ironically, they did so during a period when the lay presence gradually increased and conferences took on qualities of representative democracy. The two trends, toward a specialized elite on the one hand and toward a representative presence on the other, interplayed in complex fashion. Both could be accommodated because conferences divided their life, reserving what was truly specialized for certain committees and the executive sessions and exercising the governmental roles elsewhere. In the former, conferences dealt with questions of academic content and quality, concerns that defined
professional life generally—setting standards; determining who would be admitted; raising the minimum salary; improving quality by heightening educational requirements and controlling admissions; guaranteeing insurance coverage; establishing and interpreting pension programs; exercising ethical oversight; protecting professional ministerial privilege. In this respect conferences behaved like professional societies.

Professionalism has affected virtually every other aspect of American life, higher education included. It has done so in relation to other long-term trends—the nationalization of culture; the prominence of new media (radio and then television) and of advertising in setting cultural standards; the subsuming of economic life under huge national and international corporations; the growth of the military as employer and purchaser; gradual shifts in gender roles and race relations; secularization; the increasing diversity, individualism, and pluralism of society; growing prominence of technology and science; and the general "commodification" of life.

Other trends have especially affected colleges, including many, if not all, church-related colleges. Among them are:

- the growing fiscal and regulatory roles of the federal government,
- the dominance in higher education generally of the research university and its values,
- the consequent displacement of the liberal arts ideal as an integrative principle,
- the fragmentation of faculty and curriculum into disciplinary specializations,
- the pressure to accommodate the career orientation of students (and parents),
- and the increased pluralism of American society.

These larger societal trends affecting higher education and the plight of the church college have been overwhelming. They have dominated consciousness of those in church and college leadership and virtually reshaped our interpretive framework. We do our work in the midst of the war between religion and science, between denominationalism and secularism, a war in which our most prized institutions, North and South, namely Wesleyan and Vanderbilt, were the first casualties, the beginnings of a long series of captures or losses. But it is a cold war rather than a hot war, as Douglas Sloan and my former colleague, George Marsden, have so eloquently shown.
Today the war centers not on attacks on religion and the loss of institutions but on the more pervasively undermining character of Enlightenment epistemology—naturalism, Kantian dualism, rationalism, materialism—all of which reduce the life of the Spirit (aesthetic, ethical, religious) to what can be observed and quantified. The Enlightenment-based philosophical approaches to knowledge, practiced uncritically, eviscerate the spiritual innards from academic life. We have yet to find, argues Sloan, a qualitative mode of knowledge that would give faith a foundation on which to build within the university.

It should come as no surprise, then, that interpreters have focused on religion in higher education and the church-related college as questions, as problems, as challenges. What remains of church relationship in denominational identity? in religious ethos? in curricular coherence? in faith community? in leadership sensitive to the church? in the shaping of persons for church professions? These substantive questions and others like them—pursued so resolutely by Merrimon Cuninggim in Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church—remain terribly important.61

We must assume the task of addressing the substantive side of those questions lest the subquestions—including the matter of church relationship itself—devolve into a variety of separate professional prerogatives. Signs of this process are already evident. Denominational identity belongs to those who work interstitially—denominational executives, presidents, board members. Religious ethos and community have been delegated to the chaplain. To curricular coherence department chairs and deans give passing attention, though many do not see much beyond the interests of their own discipline. Departments of religion oversee specifically religious curricular matters and, in some places, worry over whether persons go on to seminary. Few of the faculty can be counted on to belong to the sponsoring denomination, and fewer still to have ordination. Each of the ingredients, or dimensions, of church relationship then has resolved itself into a professional prerogative. Each takes professional form. Each belongs to a professional cohort.

Before we distress too much over that point, we need to acknowledge that professionalism defines the United Methodist Church and indeed, the whole of American society. Professional networks constitute the communities through which the church (and much of our society) now work. The church quite literally ties itself
together, connects itself, through these networks. Typically each will have some official sheltering—under a denominational board, commission, caucus or affiliated group; a contact person, coordinator or staff person at the national level; a newsletter, jurisdictional and conference affiliates; a regular, perhaps annual, gathering; ongoing programs and promotional efforts dedicated to furthering that profession’s interest; in short, a group identity. Conference directors, communicators, business administrators, youth ministers, church-growth experts or evangelists, chaplains, librarians, Christian educators, editors, continuing educators, spiritual directors, church musicians, financial officers, legal counselors, camping ministers and special ministries of all sorts—each have their professional gatherings.

Other affinity groups, not typically thought of as “professional,” nevertheless function in a similar, quasi-professional fashion. Caucuses, program experts, groups with specific concerns or causes, specialists of various kinds gather in quasi-professional fashion, perhaps disguising themselves by their official status in relation to an agency. Around boards cluster groups that seek or have attained professional status—around GBHEM, for instance, Christian educators, chaplains and campus ministers, several varieties of deacon or diaconal minister, field educators, teachers of religion and divinity, presidents.

The church connects itself, binds itself together, undertakes its tasks through these professional and quasi-professional networks. Like so many twisted wires, the church hangs together by what also divides it. For even as these professional groups connect, they also, like the caucuses and various “struggle” groups, divide and disconnect.

Higher education experiences a disconnect of the same kind and to the same degree as other sectors of American life. Campus-based individuals and groups that ought to be in conversation about religion really are not. Religion departments do not confer with chaplains. Admissions personnel may present a college quite differently than would its president or faculty. Development officers will tailor their representation to suit the donor. The left hand knows not the business of the right. Campus life, like denominational life—like American life—divides as well as unites along these strange professional lines.

Ultimately, what divides both church and college internally, namely professionalism, also divides the church from its colleges. Few of the
professional groupings bring together church and academe. And the religious leadership on campus infrequently connects with persons within the denomination with whom they really share concerns—area pastors, superintendents, youth workers. A kind of professional no-man or no-person land divides church and college. I know this firsthand from having served on at least four committees of three of our general agencies, committees that intentionally put together academics and church leaders. We also structured our Lilly project along similar lines. In each case overcoming the division between church and academe constituted the major work of the body. Little else could be accomplished until the groups negotiated the tensions and mistrust and misunderstanding and different rules and distinct languages. Professionalism produces a new tribalism, tribal groupings that pit college against church, as well as tribes competing within church and tribes competing within academe. Who or what gets blamed for these divisions?

A Further Stage?

What will connect denominations in the decades and century ahead? And what will connect church to college? Will it again be the bishops? or conferences? or national boards? or professions? Or will it be yet something new that college and church leadership create? Will it be a mode of connectionalism that overcomes the incredible challenges that knowledge has posed for faith in the twentieth century? And finally whose responsibility is it or whose initiative ought it be to propose the new connectionalism and establish the relation between college and church? Might it be in the future as in the past that college as well as church would lead in the forging of the new connection and the new relationship?

Notes

1. For treatment of this concept, see Russell E. Richey, Dennis M. Campbell, and William B. Lawrence, eds., Connectionalism: Ecclesiology, Mission, and Identity (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998); Thomas Edward Frant, Policy, Practice and the Mission

2. Beth Adams Bowser, Living the Vision: The University Senate of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church, 1892-1991 (Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, 1992). Bowser observes that the Senate “was the first body in the United States to establish and apply standards for educational institutions on a nationwide basis,” a fact appreciated, she notes, by neither the regional accrediting associations nor other denominations.


4. On this point see Richey, Campbell, and Lawrence, eds., Connectionalism: Ecclesiology, Mission, and Identity, 1-38.


10. JLFA, III: 232-233, letter to Ezekiel Cooper, the book agent, dated Dec. 31, 1801. There he spoke about his several publishing ventures. The preface to the hymnal
appears in III: 397-398. For Asbury’s personal efforts in its creation, see entries in II: 554 for Aug. 1807; 558 for Oct. 25, 1807; 559 for Nov. 4, 6, 1807.

11. (Philadelphia, 1792); republished in 1817 and 1849.

12. (New York, 1805). The subtitle read “Written by the Preachers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church to Their Bishops.”


20. For further information on Durbin, see the entry in Kirby, Richey, and Rowe, eds., The Methodists, 291-292; also the estimates of him by John A. Roche, The Life of John Price Durbin (New York, 1889) and “John Price Durbin,” Methodist Quarterly Review 69 (May 1887): 329-354.


22. J. P. Durbin was, for instance, listed first as delegate to the 1844 General Conference. Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844, 10.

23. Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845, 12.

24. Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1846, 14.

25. Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1849, 5. This office is now known as the district superintendent. By that time the Minutes listed a North German Mission in North Philadelphia District and South German Mission in South Philadelphia District Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1849, 5-6.


31. Duvall, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education*, 39-40. The great majority of these would have been for the Northern church, the MEC.


37. Cited by Potts, *Wesleyan University*, 76, 73.


"Although organized by order of the General Conference, the corporate body was, by the terms of its Constitution and Charter, a "Society" composed of such members and friends of the Church as might contribute to its funds the sum of one dollar per annum, or twenty dollars at one time. These had the legal right to elect its managers; but only such as could be present at the annual meetings in Philadelphia could share in the exercise of this right. It was, therefore, clearly beyond the reach of the Church government, and equally beyond the reach of all contributors to its funds, except only a portion of those who resided in the city of Philadelphia."


43. Cited by Potts, Wesleyan University, 63.

44. Potts, Wesleyan University, ch. 3 and 4.

45. See Dowser, Living the Vision, 7-43.

46. This estimate comes from Samuel Platts, The History of Education in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1892 to 1917 (New York: The Board of Education of The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1918), 3-4.


48. Journal of the General Conference/MEC, 1892, 480-481, 703. The General Committee included the bishops, the officers and agents, representatives from each general conference district ("appointed by the General Conference") and "a number equal to the district representatives, to be appointed by the Board of Managers."

49. Ibid., 481.

50. Ibid., 694, 701. "Of these 22 are among colored people, 1 being theological, 10 collegiate; and 11 academic in grade. Among white people there are 3 of collegiate and 17 of academic grade. The number of students of all schools in attendance the past year was 9,495." 692-693.

51. Ibid., 693, 699. Emphasis in the original. A different total of students was reported on the same page, namely 9,495. Of interest are the gender proportions: male teachers 184, female 150; male students 4,696, female 4,614.

52. Ibid., 697.

53. A rather nice indicator of its ongoing character is Robert H. Conn, A Handbook for Higher Education and Campus Ministry in the Annual Conference (Nashville: Division of Higher Education/GBHEM, 1989), which takes ten chapters to summarize conference responsibilities. For a longer view with respect to one conference, see Carl H. King, Historical Highlights of the Educational Ministry: Western North Carolina Conference Seventy-five Years, 1890-1965 (N.P., 1965). It should be noted, perhaps, that during this era Methodists invested heavily in institutions. Lay Methodists saw colleges, universities, and seminaries, but also hospitals and homes, as appropriate vehicles for stewardship and benefaction. Wealthy Methodists demonstrated their commitment with liberal gifts. Methodists of all classes saw institutions as expressions of the church's place in and responsibility for American society. Proudly
they displayed pictures of these in the Advocates, in conference journals, in commemorative volumes. Through institutions Methodists expressed their faith. In institutions Methodists had faith.

54. See the treatment in Robert H. Conn with Michael Nickerson, United Methodists and Their Colleges, foreword by F. Thomas Trotter (Nashville: United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1989), especially ch. 5.

55. This is not the twentieth-century development that looms largest in treatments of religion and higher education. Instead, the themes that predominate are secularization, the increasing role of the federal government, the dominance in higher education generally of the research university and its values, the consequent displacement of the liberal arts ideal as an integrative principle and the effective marginalization of religion (in religious studies, student groups, chaplaincies, and the Christian college).


56. These processes began early. Note, for instance, this 1911 Philadelphia action:

RESOLUTION ON MINIMUM SALARY OF $800.—On Motion of J. Watchorn, the following was adopted:

"Resolved, That a committee of fifteen, including the five District Superintendents, five ministers, one from each district, and five laymen, one from each district, be appointed to prepare an equitable plan to raise the minimum salary of all effective members of the Conference and members on trial to $800, and to report the same at the next Annual Conference." Official Journal and Year Book of the Philadelphia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1911, 86.

57. See, for instance, the attention to group life insurance by the Philadelphia Annual Conference in 1924, Official Journal and Year Book of the Philadelphia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1925, 837-840; and similarly the following year, Ibid., 1926, 44; and in 1930, Ibid., 1930, 295.

58. The 1928 Philadelphia Conference passed a resolution for General Conference asking that any changes in the pension system "assure adequate and full protection to all the approved claims of the present members of the Conference, and that no plan be approved that proposes apportionments above the present rate, or the raising of additional funds, without the consideration and consent of the Annual Conference." Official Journal and Year Book of the Philadelphia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1928, 762.

The same conference urged a commission "to study the matter of pastors' salaries, so that a minimum salary of living support shall be given to every member of each Annual Conference," 774.

59. It should be pointed out how important both career orientation of students and disciplinary preoccupations of faculty have been to the dominance of professionalism in American and denominational life. Higher education constitutes for many, perhaps most, persons the starting point for professional formation and professional
consciousness. Increasingly over the century the curricula shifted towards professional and pre-professional training.


62. A good place to discover these networks is through the latest *United Methodist Directory and Index of Resources,* especially the section entitled "Programs and Resources," which identifies contact persons.

For many United Methodists, the "extraordinary, restorative, deeply American film," Places in the Heart, is a favorite. It resonates with a text from Ephesians that provides a key premise of the recently distributed document on the issue of "theological diversity within the United Methodist Church." The preamble of this document develops the idea of the "unity of the Spirit." The text from Eph. 4:1-6, in my translation, is as follows:

I, therefore, a bondsman in the Lord, exhort you to lead a life worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, bearing up one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bonding together of peace. There is one body and one spirit, as you were called in the one hope of your calling:

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.

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To open up a dialogue involving this text, the study document, and the film, we need to begin with the intriguing wordplay on the theme of peaceful bondage in the Ephesians text, a wordplay that is disguised by the usual translations. The New Revised Standard Version refers to Paul as a “prisoner in the Lord” and of believers as “bonded” together. For the current consideration it might be better to translate this as referring to Paul as someone “chained in the Lord” in 4:1, which is then picked up by “the chaining together of peace” in 4:3. Or if one prefers the older English term bond for the Greek desmos, we might translate the reference to Paul as “the bondsman in the Lord” echoed by “the bonding together of peace.”

That Christians were frequently chained in jail had apparently already come to be a mark of pride and distinction by the time of the writing of Ephesians, toward the end of the first century. Ephesians was probably written by a member of the Pauline tradition several decades after the apostle’s death with the double purpose to “intensify the readers’ adherence to the Christian convictions, values, and concepts” of the Pauline tradition and to “persuade them to take action that will bring their lives into greater conformity to what he deems to be appropriate to their shared perspective.” By this time, the ordinarily shameful experience of being chained together as prisoners had become a sign of their countercultural identity, in which believers emulated the suffering of the apostles. Being chained together indicated where their true citizenship was, in the new community of believers, not in Ephesus or Rome. But what does all of this have to do with Places in the Heart or with the “Dialogue on Unity and Diversity within The United Methodist Church”? Let’s start by describing what it really meant to be “chained together” in a Roman prison.

Bondage Together as a Basis of Unity

The recent studies of Roman prisons by Brian Rapske and Craig Wansink clarify the impact of being confined in Roman prisons. They provide vivid background for the Ephesian references. Prisoners were typically kept together in confined spaces, often underground. The typical conditions of crowding, inadequate ventilation and sanitation, deprivation of nourishment and sleep, and violence among inmates were frequent causes of complaints. The use of iron chains and stocks
often added a significant measure of torturous punishment to Roman imprisonment, along with routine beatings. Wansink quotes a letter detailing such tortures, sent by a bishop to the fellow believers who had written a letter of support to imprisoned Christians:

you have refreshed their suffering breasts; you healed their limbs wounded with clubs; have loosened their feet bound with fetters; have smoothed the hair of their half-shorn head; have illuminated the darkness of the dungeon...; have even placed fragrant flowers to their nostrils, and have shut out the foul odour of the smoke.

In particular, Wansink points to the “deprivation of the sun and of light” in underground dungeons as having a “tremendous psychological effect on the imprisoned.” He cites Cicero’s description of the horrors of a friend’s imprisonment:

There is the darkness—the chains—the prison—the tortures of being shut up, of being shut off from the sight of parent and child, nay, from drawing free breath and looking upon the common light of day: from such evils escape may well be bought with life itself—I cannot assess them in terms of money.

The oppressive crowding was disorienting and debilitating; the complete lack of privacy and the unsanitary conditions quickly broke down morale and led to despair and an early death in many examples that Rapske has discovered. Citing Libanius, Wansink observes that death in prison did not discriminate between rich and poor, guilty and innocent: “Among them slaves and free die alike, some guilty of no offence at all, others of offences that do not deserve death.”

Yet by the time of the writing of the Ephesian letter, only short decades after the formation of Christian congregations, being a prisoner is obviously a sign of approval, “a badge not of shame, but of honor.” Being chained as a prisoner is crucial in portraying the identity of the apostle and thus becomes the model for all Christians. Of particular interest is the social framework of Christians being “co-bonded” or “chained together” as they found themselves together in jail, or made new converts there with whom they found solidarity. This formulation makes clear that they were turning an institution of violent oppression into a vehicle of solidarity and peace.
Places in the Heart is the story of a jailor's family finding a new form of togetherness by being chained together, so to speak, with outsiders whom they would ordinarily avoid. At the beginning of the story, Sheriff Spaulding is called from the dinner table to deal with Wiley, a harmless drunken youth who is waving a pistol around down by the railroad tracks. Thinking he is out of bullets, he points the gun in the direction of the sheriff and kills him. In the Waxahachie, Texas, of 1935 this young black man is lynched immediately. Spaulding's wife, Edna (played by Sally Field), admits she doesn't know how to support her two children or run the small farm on which they live. Right after the funeral, a hobo by the name of Moze Hadlock shows up at the back door, asking if there is any work to be done around the place. He suggests that the forty acres out back could support her family if they plant cotton. Edna turns him down flat until the banker arrives and announces the sheriff still owed $3,000 on a loan secured by the little farm. In six months she will have to make a payment of $200, or the house and land would be lost. The banker suggests it would be wise to sell now and to split the family up among the relatives.

Suddenly, the sheriff's wife and the unemployed black farmer (played by Danny Glover) discover they are chained together by tragedy, prejudice, and economic pressure. They decide to make the best of it, guided by his experienced grasp of cotton farming and by her faithful grit. They begin to create a new kind of familial community in the depths of the Depression.

Soon a man blinded by poison gas in the First World War shows up. Mr. Will's family wants to be rid of this social misfit (played by John Malkovich), so he needs a place to live, intending to earn his living by caning chairs and making brooms. Under pressure from the bank, Mrs. Spaulding takes him into her house. This embittered man demands only to be left alone, taking a particular dislike to the Spaulding children, who like to sneak into his room to play the prized book recordings from the Society for the Blind. But by the time a tornado strikes Waxahachie a few months later, he rescues the Spauldings' little girl, nicknamed Possum, and shares the narrow confines of a root cellar where they find safety from the storm. It is an underground space very much like the Roman prisons reflected in our text from Ephesians.

In one indelible scene in this film, Mrs. Spaulding and her two children, along with the black Moze and the blind Will, are holding hands together in the dimly lit cellar. As the tornado roars by
overhead, as vicious and relentless as the prejudice and poverty that imprisons the entire society, they discover a form of what our text calls "the unity of the spirit in the chaining together of peace."

Later in the film the KKK makes its appearance, brutally beating Moze because of his success as a cotton farmer. His life is narrowly saved by the blind Mr. Will's coming into the barn with his revolver and recognizing the voices of the Klansmen behind their disguises. Although in bondage himself to the ravages of war and blindness, he participates in the "bond of peace" that links him with his abused colleague.

This film leads me to wonder whether the acknowledgement of struggling together in our various forms of bondage and vulnerability might allow us more readily to find unity with fellow Christians. The "In Search of Unity" document overlooks the second half of the powerful line from Ephesians: "the unity of the Spirit in the bonding together of peace." This bonding is undertaken in times and circumstances when risk and danger abound. For example, one reason the issue of homosexuality is so intractable is that the development of sexual identity during puberty, especially for males, requires intense and sometimes violent struggle with vulnerability. And whether one's identity is formed as a heterosexual or a homosexual, the exercise thereof involves everyone in lifelong vulnerability. There are risky forms of "bondage" inherent in the exercise of all sexual choices, including the intensely discriminatory circumstances faced by persons with same-sex inclinations. Yet the debate within the church seems so preoccupied with proving the theological and ethical superiority of one side over another that these problematic aspects of sexual identity—shared by all, to some extent always—remain largely unexplored.

Could it be that one of the factors that undermines unity is the desire to avoid the acknowledgement of shared vulnerability? Could it be that we have misinterpreted "a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" in Eph. 4:1? Is it possible that factions within our churches are defining "worthiness" by liberal or conservative definitions of honor and shame, derived from our secular culture, rather than by the calling to celebrate our being chained together?

**Bearing Up One Another in the Love Feast**

The parallel expression for the "bond of peace" in our text is "bearing with one another in love." As with imprisonment, there is a need to
take the social context of these words into account. "Bearing one another in love" occurred on a daily basis for these early churches in their sacramental love feasts. In many small house and tenement churches, Christians gathered to eat their evening meals together, sharing their daily wages and celebrating the presence of the risen Christ as the Lord of their feast. When the writer of Ephesians requests them to "bear one another up," this means to share burdens. The unity in love that Ephesians describes was real because the sacrament went beyond theorizing and theologizing. It was a matter of the employed sharing with the unemployed, the able-bodied with the infirm, females with males, each bearing the other up in daily forms of solidarity. One of the greatest scandals about these early Christians, which contributed to their frequent imprisonments on various complaints, was their sharing of bread in a unity that transcended their immediate families and blood relatives. They were accused of undermining family values as defined by Greco-Roman society.

Bearing up one another in love is the underlying story of Places in the Heart. Five people, equally stranded and desperate, none capable of making it alone, join together in working and eating. The various scenes of families eating together in the opening of the film when the credits are running suggest the sacramental basis of this radical American form of the Pauline love feast. As Jack Kroll observes, "grace permeates the entire film." The body of the film shows the members of this new fictive family picking cotton all day and night to win the monetary prize for the first crop in, so the bank can be paid off, saving the family, and keeping Moze off the hobo circuit and Mr. Will out of the county home. They pick their fingers to the bone in those seemingly endless rows in the hot sun, with fingers bloody and backs sore, while the blind Mr. Will takes over the daunting task of preparing food and doing the baking. Edna decides to take the risk of hiring a few local pickers, feeding them breakfast together as these impoverished families start their day. They race against the deadline until the point of exhaustion, with the neighbors and relatives pitching in to work through the last, exhausting night. And they prevail.

Many reviewers noted the crucial role of eating together in Places in the Heart, from the beginning to the final communion service. As the film closes, the citizens of Waxahachie are singing "Blessed Assurance" again and hearing a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13 concerning the theme of agape. Agape is contextualized in a wonderful manner, quite consistent with recent discoveries about the
early Christian love feasts, as they pass the bread and cup along to those seated among the pews, whom are now a formerly alienated married couple, the banker, the cotton mill manager, and some of the other Klansmen. They pass the peace of God to each other, and as the camera pans along, suddenly Moze and Will and the children and Mrs. Spaulding are shown sitting beside each other in the same pew, with her husband by her side. His murderer sits beside him now, resurrected from the lynching and wishing him the peace of God. As Rex Reed observes, the “people who have occupied places in her [Edna’s] heart are reunited. . . . The dead and the vanquished share a pew with the living survivors in a bold cinematic departure from the rest of the film’s realism.” This shocking, “surreal ending” of Places in the Heart conveys the “ideal of reconciliation” \(^19\) in a manner that is strongly reminiscent of the Ephesians text. It offers “a joyful glimpse into the true earthly paradise” \(^20\) that the early Church was attempting to embody. For many modern viewers, however, there is probably a feeling (articulated by some reviewers) that this communion scene is saccharine, sentimental, and false. \(^21\) Ever since the banning of the love feast in the fourth century, as the meal came under centralized control that reduced it to a sacramental fragment, it has been difficult to imagine that the Lord’s Supper has the potential of uniting enemies.

The film reminds us of a lost substance, that the truest expression of Christian unity is the sacramental love feast that joins black and white, rich and poor, criminal and victim, male and female. Our homes may well remain apart in their daily meals, just as the Spaulding family did; yet by sharing a more inclusive feast on special occasions, we show ourselves to be mutually bonded in peace. With regard to the controversies currently wracking our churches, perhaps there is greater potential in inviting members of other factions to share our love feasts than in staging formal debates, as envisioned by the “In Search of Unity” document. \(^22\) The peace of Christ experienced in such meals might link us together, creating a unity that is stronger than the bondsman’s lash, more lasting than the jailor’s chain.

The Final Source of Our Unity

One might conclude from these reflections on Ephesians and Places in the Heart that eating together unites us or that the experience of shared bondage is required. Perhaps it is the feeling of peaceful
harmony we experience with our brothers and sisters in an inspired worship service that provides the unifying glue. But the writer of Ephesians did not place the final emphasis on any of these important factors. Instead of the "overwhelming optimism" about the human prospect that the film seems to reflect,23 our author retains the God-centered focus of the Pauline school, dealing with the final source of the "unity of the Spirit."

All who share the Christian life are one in origin, as vv. 4-6 insist. Form critics have detected an allusion to a creedal or hymnic fragment24 in the words that celebrate:

\[
\text{one Lord, one faith, one baptism,}
\]
\[
\text{one Lord and parent of all,}
\]
\[
\text{who is above all and through all and in all.}
\]

Hymns like this reflect early Christian celebrations of the most significant social revolution in the ancient world. Members of disparate families and classes and races were eating together and sharing each other's life and work. They knew very well that this miraculous unity did not come from them or from their culture. They recognized that single source of their unity as being so encompassing, so ecumenical, indeed, so cosmic, that they dared to break down traditional barriers, and even to risk chains together. Even though they remained in disagreement about many things, retaining cultural differences in their outlook and worship, they knew there was a "bond of peace" that united them, provided by the "One Lord" of the universe.25

This hymn could provide a significant resource in the search for unity in the United Methodist Church. The theme of the lordship of Christ is missing from the document produced by the representatives of competing arenas of the church. In its place, Section IV, entitled "Sustaining Unity and Avoiding Schism," argues as follows:

\[
\text{For the preservation of unity is the love of Jesus Christ and the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the life of the church as a whole.26}
\]

The problem with this rationale is that in a church conflict, it is all too easy to claim that only our side is acting in love and in conformity.
with the Spirit. This rationale provides only the skimpiest barrier against the rise of judgmental attitudes that destroy community.

The theme of the Lordship of Christ provides a much more cohesive basis for unity, because if there is only "one Lord and parent of all," it follows that opponents share an identical status as children of the same Lord Jesus. Whether we agree with their theology or ethics, the same Lord "who is above all and through all and in all" is working in them just as surely as in our side. The cohesive social implications of this theme of the Lordship of Christ are worked out in Rom. 14:4-12, in the context of the struggle between conservatives and liberals in the early church. No Christian has the right, according to that passage, to "pass judgment on servants of another. . . . It is before their own Lord that they stand or fall." Since each side is acting "in honor of the Lord," they are to be respected and welcomed in full fellowship.

Unity under the Lordship of Christ does not mean that we will suddenly resolve our disputes, that we will all join one faction in the church. But it does mean that we keep our disputes within humane limits. It means that we learn to respect others as children of the same Lord, whose campaigns are aimed at obedience to the same faith. It also means that we recognize that our political and religious programs are never flatly identical with God's will. The Lordship of Christ qualifies all of our other loyalties, providing a powerful resource to avoid giving our final allegiance to the values of the culture. If we truly believe that Christ is "above all and through all and in all," we would thus become less strident about our party being absolutely in the right. We would be more willing to compromise, to find common ground. Without this, the current controversies could well tear our church apart.

Conclusion

It is appropriate, therefore, for those moved by this film and text to join in the hymn of praise to the oneness of God in all its manifestations: "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Some of us may prefer less traditional language in articulating this, but the oneness transcends our language and accent and vocabulary and ideology. Places in the Heart opens on the same theme, singing the words "praising my Savior all
the day long” in scenes of various churches and various meals before
the story opens in the sheriff’s home, where he gives thanks to the
heavenly “Father” for the meal they are sharing. Whatever name we
wish to ascribe to that one Lord of the whole universe, who created
“all” and works “through all” and manifests himself/herself “in all,”
we are called to give that one true God honor and glory. This means
that we cease giving the place of honor to ourselves and to our faction.
Without this decisive turn toward the Lordship of Christ, “the unity of
the Spirit in the bonding together of peace” will be impossible to find.

Notes

1. Sheila Benson, Los Angeles Times (Sept. 21, 1984), Calendar Section, 1.
2. “In Search of Unity: A Conversation with Recommendations for the United of the
United Methodist Church,” produced by the Dialogue on Theological Diversity within
The United Methodist Church, Nashville, November 20-21, 1997, Dallas, February
19-20, 1998 (Published by the General Commission on Christian Unity and
Interreligious Concerns of the United Methodist Church in March, 1998).
3. “In Search of Unity,” lines 11-40, the theme is continued in lines 43-57.
4. Unfortunately this wordplay is overlooked by the standard commentaries; see, for
instance, Markus Barth, Ephesians 4-6: A New Translation with Introduction and
Commentary. Anchor Bible 34a (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 425-429; and Andrew
5. Lincoln, lxxv.
Custody (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994).
7. Craig S. Wansink, “Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul’s
Imprisonments,” Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 130
10. Wansink, 33, citing Cyprian, Epistle 77.3.
11. Ibid, 34, citing Cicero, Verrine Orations 2.5.9.
12. Ibid, 43, citing Libanius, Orations 45.11.
13. Ibid, 204.
14. See “Tenement Churches and Pauline Love Feasts” in Robert Jewett, Paul the
Apostle to America: Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 73-86; adapted from “Tenement Churches and
15. Among articles on this passage, E. John Hamlin has the clearest grasp of the


17. I am therefore able to accept only with a grain of salt Alice Cross’s critique that this aspect of *Places in the Heart* is “part of the romantic Republican vision” that “determination” is all that is required to make Eden into “the model capitalist,” *Cinaste* 14.1 (1985): 40.


20. Kroll, 86.


24. See the discussion in Lincoln, 228-229.


It's your worst nightmare come true. Your mother comes to call. She comes to call—bursts right in—intrudes—just when you're keenest to protect your privacy.

No, you're not in bed with someone. No, you're not spanking her grandchild. No, you haven't forgotten to mop the kitchen floor. No, your husband has died; and to mourn the death of love and bondage, you've cut your hair. Worse: you're still in the bath at 9 a.m. on a work-day.

So begins The Winter Guest, actor Alan Rickman's directorial debut. Mother Elspeth (Phyllida Law) marches implacably across the ice right into her daughter Frances's sorrowing life, setting her insistent needs and her daughter's hidden ones on full collision course. Frances's son Alex, past witness to the women's pitched battles of will and word, spots them striding off for a day's "outing" and trembles. So might we, too, if we ourselves are a mother or a daughter or anyone related to such ancient and practiced adversaries as these.

For the sparring between Elspeth and Frances (Emma Thompson, Law's real-life daughter) is intense, articulated as much through gestures (hands over ears; head slipped beneath the forgetful waters of the bath to close off her mother's cheerful greeting of "Cherub") as in any pithy phrases exchanged between the two. We feel we have joined a battle in medias res: Elspeth has made a grand entrance, yes; but she

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merely picks up tales, commentaries, and injunctions where she left off the last time she saw her daughter. (We are not told how long ago that was.) This is a struggle as least as old as the years that have passed since the moment of Frances’s conception; Frances’s, too, are heavily prescribed, almost as though they were wired into her brain from the beginning of time.

I know this familial territory, just as I know the terrain in which the film takes place—Scotland, cold, wet, and dark, in a place not too many hitchhiked hours from magical Edinburgh. My mother, like Frances’s, had the perfect moves—the tightened mouth, the masked eyes, the glacial stare. “Isn’t it time you got on to your real work?” (A cruel thrust, since true; I was tending four children, typing my husband’s writings, and researching his family tree.) “That baby can’t be getting enough to eat. Here’s a nice bottle.” (Those babies are now 6’4” and 6’8”.) “You need help with this house.” (Did Joan of Arc hire someone to lead her troops? Please, Mother.)

This is a film that could have been made in the laboratory of my own imagination. Any film set in Scotland triggers years’ worth of memories of whipping winds, soaking rains, and skies and buildings blackened by the assaults of nature and technological caprice. I loved and love the power of that land’s ravaged beauty—if only you cleaned it up, as Elspeth raves, it would be the most lovely place on earth. What a pleasure to see my own concerns as mother and daughter explored with such care and insight.

Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes: There Was a Little Girl Who Had a Little Curl

For concerns there are. Elspeth’s commentaries on her daughter’s life and loves pursue and puncture, specific to this mother and daughter yet universal for all women who love too much. “You used to have a light in your eyes,” she laments to Frances, a photographer who is now widowed and rent. There’s little obvious sympathy here but more railing against what we begin to suspect is a long history of Frances’s submersion in her husband’s identity. But Elspeth steps over the line into the dark area of human possession and release, saying in effect: I’m glad he’s gone, for what he’s done to you. Your photographs are devoid of color, like your life; they are angular and distorted, absent human drama or any human presence at all. “Why do you not use
colour? The world's in colour, cherub." Daughter, I blame your husband for what has happened to you. How do you plan to change your life?

So it goes through a full half of the movie, the mother in dogged pursuit, the daughter in full and resentful retreat. To Elspeth we want to cry, "Your child has discovered her sexuality; she chose, she loved, she suffered. You can't have her back, that little girl with the thick long curls, even though she is now alone as you are alone." We may well ask what direction the film will take, what the implications of these highly confrontational and painful opening sequences might be. What exactly constitutes the essence of each woman's difficulties with the other? We're not sure, so little background information is given us. We look, we listen, we flinch with each parry and thrust.

This is forbidden territory, the mother pushing the daughter until she hears the words she both fears and desires: "I don't need you." Yet if we have ever struggled for our own freedom against the demands of an all-important other, we must admit the justice of Elspeth's reply to Frances's rejection of her: "You taught me to care... Demanded that I... that I care... Just because you're all grown up, I've got to stop? All that caring, I've to stop?"

Yet who represents the voice of reason, of moderation, of morality in this portion of the film, the mother or the daughter? Is Frances's talent—her life—her own to exercise or even squander as she deems fit? Or is Elspeth right, that Frances's "dead" artistic style speaks of a dead spirit which must be revived at any cost? If so, how can Frances be healed; how can she emerge from the chrysalis in which she has taken refuge? We rightly wonder how the conflicts (both gloved and bare) that we witness between mother and daughter will be resolved and their suffering healed and transformed.

Ghosts: The Not-So-Dead Husband

We also realize that there's another player in this drama—Jamie, the deceased husband. In the spirit of recent movie ghosts, he's far from dead yet. Alex recognizes the bond between his mother and his dead father for what it is, a haunting, where memories strangle and do not enlighten. Where we might have "read" the omnipresent images of the dead man in the film as sentimental reminders of a lost love and lost chum, we discover in a burst of the boy's uncanny insight that his
father was a man of shadows when alive who now stalks their living space and holds back their lives. "My dad haunts this house," Alex confides to Nita, his newfound sweetheart. "She was sleek, my mum, when he was alive. He wants her now."

So Elspeth's visitation is not the only one that plagues Frances and her son. They must contend too with the power of the father's ghost—the eerie image of the man that they protect by posting it on every available surface in the house (he is a handsome devil). When Alex looks in the mirror each morning he sees not a blossoming schoolboy with hair the burnished gold of the bright summer sun of Scotland but his father's photo in black and white, with "all the life drained out." Those omnipresent images of Jamie, Argus-like in their watchfulness, are avatars of parental caution; a large photo of Dad positioned strategically above the one warm place in the house, the fireplace, arrests Alex's secret tryst with Nita, for example. Outsider in this family, alert to the damaging interactions between its caring and carping inhabitants, the savvy young Nita turns all these photos to the wall—surely a symbolic exorcism.

Is this perhaps what the film is "about"—not working things out between mother and daughter as suggested above but exorcising a harmful patriarchal presence? Will—would—Frances go to Australia as she threatens not so much to escape an aging and controlling mother but to escape an even more oppressive spirit, that of her dead husband? She hints as much to her mother. "I could leave him behind me. If I go." If so, then Frances is squeezed between two formidable powers, her husband's and her mother's, both of which lay claim to her talents and her store of memories. It is conceivable that director Rickman might have designed a film that featured exactly that—not so much a generational as a gendered struggle.

Meanings and Messages: Generations, Gender, and Generosity

One of the many beauties of this film is that it plays with such possibilities among many others. It is a film of extensions and stretchings, each vista opening onto another; each broader, more generous and humane than the one before.

On one level the story of mother and daughter moves toward illumination of the abandoned woman's plight. Seemingly pinioned
and arrested by memory and regret, the young widow must shake off what George Eliot long ago called "the dead hand of the past" and embrace her own living self. Frances does fight to free herself from her husband's hold; it becomes clear (slowly, and in fragments) that she suffers deeply not only from loss but also from a feeling of desertion. She is both sad and angry, furious somehow that he has died and left her all alone—alone with a son to rear; alone to shape an independent vocation; alone with the dark and the cold and the things that don't work (significantly, it's the heating system). She wakes to the memory of the live man and the hangover of the dead one, as we sense in our opening views of her bedroom. We see her from a number of angles, the camera cutting into her space to reveal her waking, hiding, mourning.

The agony of the grieving process could have been explored without mother and husband, but it isn't. "Mother" and "Beloved" remind us of the inescapable demands of relationship. We say we don't need others, but those others intrude to remind us that we all need each other. Frances's history with her husband is inseparable from her history with her mother and with those unnamed others (including those in Australia, whoever they might have been) who have shaped her. If she is to live beyond her husband's grave and not die, she must turn toward those others and read her future in their piercing eyes.

The Hinge Tales: The Human Story

So the stories of Elspeth and Frances, Frances and Jamie, Alex and his parents shift over the course of the movie from parasitical feeding to relational nourishing. Yet the "extensions and stretchings" in this movie are given further scope by the daring and unexpected presence of three hinge tales. It is with those small dramas placed alongside the larger one involving Frances that the film is carried to another level and gains its full range and power. As with Dickens's novels and Shakespeare's plays, the powerful and wrenching story of a family in grief and denial acquires density and depth when set against subplots, or stories, that mirror its preoccupations. In The Winter Guest, that mirroring is intensified because the four tales, major and minor, are unified by time (one day) and place (a small village set along the jagged coast of Scotland).
Little effort is made to link the stories by common characters, as in *La Ronde*. Instead, fragile connections among the stories are provided through the time-favored image of the spectator (think Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* or Kieslowski’s *Red*). Elspeth, using Frances’s telescope, spies on Alex and his new girlfriend (story 2) and on the two women friends, Lily and Chloe (story 3), making sage comments on their attempts at happiness. When late in the movie one of the young boys from story 4 meets Elspeth and Frances out on the rocks by chance, the juxtaposition of tales is startling and unexpected. The young boy’s admiration of Frances and her butchered hair breaks into the sealed world of the women with the lightest bit of humor and affection. Otherwise, the characters, absorbed with the drama of their own passages, pass each other on the street, as in Kieslowski’s *Decalogue* episodes, but do not become part of each other’s unfolding histories.6

What purpose is served, then, by linking—hinging, as I’ve said—the major story with three others? This structure is not one we frequently encounter in mainstream movies. Schooled in our expectations by thousands of movie plots where every detail, character, and move has significance only in relation to some other, we may be tempted to lament the absence of a “tight” structure for this film. We may wish for the predestinarian powers of the omniscient director who places each character in the right place at the right time and releases us from the trouble of thinking about the life issues the movie might raise. Our Hollywood “improvements” to the script of *The Winter Guest* might read like this: One of the older women slips and falls into the sea; Alex happens to be nearby and rescues her. The younger boys, Sam and Tom, become acquainted with the old women, who teach them some valuable lessons about managing in life. Elspeth has a shouting match with Alex or with his girlfriend which turns out to be magically therapeutic for all. And so it might go with dozens of saccharine and predigested variations on the basic plots we know from Hollywood blockbusters.

Many movies ring shallow changes on a deterministic script such as this; we “happen” onto characters exactly at those moments when they suffer conflict, meet significant people, or experience moments of revelation. One example of such a simplistic narrative is *Con Air*, which places an amazingly well-conditioned and street-smart Nicholas Cage on an airplane full of insane convicts, “hitching a ride home.” He alone has the muscle and smarts to outwit and outbox this
group. Very satisfying, the way this works out! And very profitable for
the studio that made the movie. Tales of terminal illness accompanied
by mushy theme music (Love Story, even Terms of Endearment);
movie miracles with neither prayer nor sweat (Leap of Faith, even
Forrest Gump); narratives created by MTV-style cuts rather than by
arresting content (Die Hard and The Rock)—films that manipulate the
emotions of the minute are neither memorable nor entertaining. Such
films play “like advertisements for themselves” rather than connecting
us with something deeper and more majestic than ourselves.

_The Winter Guest_ takes a different—and bolder, in these overheated
movie budget days—attitude toward its characters, toward its
“meanings.” It is as tightly scripted as a James Cameron epic or a
Hitchcock thriller, but its rules are different. Its tightness comes from
a singleness of purpose: to explore love and death in mortal combat,
within loving embrace; to move us outside ourselves to a place of
meditation and reflection. This exploration is allowed to unfold at its
leisure, as life does; it is no prisoner to an overarching dramatic
structure that demands brief stasis, violent conflict, and cheap
resolution. No moments are played for high drama, no cuts made to
emphasize the quick-and-easy fix—the noisy imitation epiphany.
Epiphanies there are, but they take their time.

How do they do so? First, the terrain and the season in _The Winter
Guest_ establish parameters that carry their own special symbolic lead.
It’s the same rugged coast of Scotland that moved the unpredictable
Danish wonder boy, Lars von Trier, to draw representations of a harsh
religiosity (and a harsher religious response from the heroine, Bess) in
_Breaking the Waves_ (1997). After all, it was Scotland, not the
Bahamas, that was one major host to Calvin’s Reformed Church.

Time, in that land where dark rules supreme (unless it’s light all night,
as in June and July), is suspended on this day between the bookends
of the rising and setting of a weak midwinter sun. Remembering
Ingmar Bergman’s stark _Winter Light_, we may fear that at day’s and
film’s end, all characters will have reversed their ascent and descend
into their former lives (that great film invites alternate interpretations,
of course). That is, we fear that “dark” and “cold” will have some
metaphoric stranglehold on the characters’ heads and hearts and that
the “winter guest” will be not even blessed death but emptiness, as in
another winter’s tale, _Un Coeur en Hiver_.

Second, Rickman returns us to the days of a moving art, the cinema,
that challenges the intelligence and perceptivity of its audience—the
days of Buster Keaton and of Chaplin's *City Lights*, F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise*, John Ford's great western *The Searchers*, and Carl Theo. Dreyer's *The Day of Wrath*—works of great religious as well as artistic merit. The background history of Elspeth and Frances or Frances and her dead husband need not be spelled out nor their emotional load be amplified by an overbearing soundtrack, as in *Amistad*. The hints of passion and mutual destruction in Frances's and Elspeth's pasts are permitted to smolder, to tease us into meditation and madness, to make us work with our minds but also with the finer parts of ourselves—those sensibilities that allow us to *compassion*, to enter another person's heart and experience and make it our own.

The questions we ask within the compass of the Elspeth/ Frances story, for instance, are both limited and general, providing the differing levels of meaning referred to above. Why are Frances and her husband both photographers? Elspeth clearly points out that it matters what kind of picture a person takes of the world—what choices are made, that is, in the way representations are preconstructed. What relation does photography have to the act of seeing—to spectatorship, such as that of a movie viewer? Is spectatorship a moral choice in itself (to look at others as they live their private lives), or is its ethical nature determined by the use the viewer makes of this knowledge? In *Red* and similarly in Kieslowski's earlier *movie, A Short Film about Love*, to intrude on others' lives is a highly charged act; the person who does so may do irreparable harm. Yet when in *The Winter Guest* Elspeth looks through the telescope and comments on the lives of the persons she spies, she allows the movie audience to acquire an involved and yet distanced perspective on those same persons—information that may allow the movie viewer a more generous consideration of the fears of aging or a new appreciation for the difficulties of young love.

Other key and essentially religious questions are raised in the film when Frances's vocation is highlighted. Has she, like Julie (Juliette Binoche), the heroine in Kieslowski's *Blue*, been buried beneath her husband's success, smothered by his more aggressive marketing of his craft? Is Frances the true author of Jamie's artistic accomplishments, as Julie may have been of her husband's musical compositions? *The Winter Guest* encourages us to ask how loss, sorrow, self-definition, and freedom are connected and how self-esteem and spiritual health may be won against all odds. These topics are hardly restricted to the main women in the film; all characters feel the force of the elements
that might sweep them off the world. The warmth of other creatures—the small, furry kitten nestled against your heart—corrects and connects.

The Winter's Guest: Life in a Wintery Season

The movie prods us, then, not so much to crave the particulars of the characters' histories but to understand the interlacings of relationships; to meditate on human problems of maturation, disorientation, aging, and ethical choice; and to contemplate life's passages. This is not a film conceived to cater to the greatest number of people with the widest possible range of interests. Its breadth exists rather in its appeal to universal human concerns, not life in a theme park, all sharp edges filed down, but life in a wintery season.

Who then is "the winter guest," film critic Roger Ebert has asked (Chicago Sun Times, 16 January 1998)? Is it Death? Is it emptiness? Is it just Mother? What finally of the three "minor" stories; how do they help us to understand Elspeth and Frances, ourselves, and each other? Their characters teeter as the mother and daughter do between love and hate, needy and denying need. To break out of the destructive pattern of hating whom you most love—to move forward in trust across the ice, the film's final image—that's what these stories hold most in common, beyond any classical unities of time, place, or action.

For although Rickman works in a good number of references to the presence of absence, the void, the death of the member, sterility, terror of the night, and yawning tombs (I loved the nice soft thud of dirt as it covered the coffin, as one of the little ladies nostalgically remembers about pre-cremation days), his attitude toward all four stories tends more toward Bergman's loving reconciliation from Wild Strawberries or the escape of the strolling players in Seventh Seal (where the Knight "accidentally" upsets Death's chessboard and breaks his inexorable power over these frail humans) than toward any overwhelming obsession with cold and dark.

Rickman works slowly and experientially toward small moments of understanding between the characters in each of the four stories. The little ladies Lily and Chloe echo Elspeth's and Frances's long history of hyperattention to each other's flaws ("You always take the window seat"); they seem almost to have melded one into the other. Death stalks them as certainly and as relentlessly as they themselves pursue.
funerals; only their mutual irritation keeps the Reaper at bay. But when Chloe falls, admitting to Lily that she has suffered a moment of memory lapse ("The world fell away"), her friend is there with a small, strong arm of support—a bodily symbol of the sweet consumption of tea and cakes the women had shared only hours before.

Similarly, Alex and his seductive new friend, Nita, dance around each other's desires and scruples, scrapping during almost all their hours together. A Hollywood-style tryst is denied us; "satisfaction" must wait until another day. But what the teens learn about the small pleasures and pains of love during that day sweetens their faces with happy smiles after they've separated.

The young boys' truant day out is no less serious an exercise in testing trust and practicing to love than the flashier sparring of their elders. What begins in hurt, as with the other couples, ends in comfort, as each boy warms a small, abandoned kitten under his jersey and sets off toward a new, uncharted world across the ice. As the last frame of the film dissolves, we feel we have achieved some greater comprehension of the ways in which all of us, like these four sets of friends, negotiate the painful terrain that lies between hate and love, death and life with mothers, fathers, friends, sweethearts. It's a glorious film ending—exhilarating in its beauty and rich in poetic associations—that promises new beginnings within each of the stories, and within our own.

Who is the Winter Guest? The phrase is formidable in its evocation of ice, abandonment, and death. But it reminds us, too, of the heart and the hearth—the open door that summons and invites and welcomes us inside.

Notes

2. Ibid., 65.
3. Ibid., 62-63.
4. Ibid., 134.
5. Ibid., 115.
6. *La Ronde* (Max Ophuls, 1950) is one of the visual joys of French film. A certain ironic distance toward human failings is tempered with deep humanity. *Rear Window* is a classic of suspense with a finely tuned sense of the perils of distanced intrusion. The character played by Jimmy Stewart spies on the character played by Raymond Burr, just as the audience spies on the movie’s unfolding drama. *Red*, a film that urges the responsibility of all persons for the well-being of others, is itself an interlocked part of the trilogy *Blue, White, and Red*, which celebrates the finely calibrated ways in which lives are bound together. *Dekalog*, ten one-hour television episodes that explore the implications of the Ten Commandments in daily life, has yet to be released in the States.

7. *Breaking the Waves* tells of the prayerful and sacrificial response of a simple young woman, Bess, to her new husband’s sudden injury and paralysis. Miracles are in this probing and disturbing movie, but they stimulate doubt and debate rather than provide easy comforts.

8. *Winter Light*, *The Winter Ghost*, and *Un Coeur en Hiver* (A Heart in Winter) draw in part on Shakespeare’s great comedy *A Winter’s Tale*. Where Shakespeare unabashedly turns the story of Othello-like winter’s jealousy into a midsummer night’s comedy of blessed repentance and rejoicing, *Un Coeur en Hiver* is dark, despairing, and unforgiving toward its characters’ attempts to find love. *Winter Light* admits light into the spare sanctuary of its hero’s heart as its structure turns up and in on itself. *The Winter Guest* recognizes the dark and cold but trumps these with light and warmth.

9. Janet Maslin hits the mark on soupy music perfectly when she writes of the newest summer insult to viewers’ intelligence, *Armageddon*, that “the story needn’t be followed closely, since the music constantly informs viewers whether to be happy or sad.” *New York Times* (1 July 1998), B6. The advertising quote above is also from Maslin’s article.

10. Tom Gunning and others call this the “profilmic” event: the artistic and ethical choices the director makes when selecting actors, setting, props, camera angles, lighting, and the like, the elements that color not only what the audience will see but how events, characters, and issues will be perceived. Elspeth’s comments about her daughter’s photos reflect her awareness that Frances has reduced the world she allows her camera to record to the darkness in her own heart. See Gunning, D. W. *Griffith and the Origins of the American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994) and Sara Amos Vaux, *Finding Meaning at the Movies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

11. Camera movements in the film emphasize that we in the audience are similarly “spies” on the dramas unfolding on the screen before us. When Elspeth first enters the village, the camera cranes up to see her from an angled distance, a small and frail creature in a tiny settlement that’s spread along the edge of the frozen sea. The camera pans along the barren yard, suddenly an impersonal and omniscient observer unconnected with the intense human mission that has driven the old mother to her daughter’s doorstep.
When it comes to health care, everybody has a story. This is true literally—everybody has a story—but it is also true figuratively: everyone has had a part in life stories of sickness, suffering, and death of kin, friends, or self. Stories of illness are often rich and complex, especially when they reveal affective and spiritual dimensions of illness and the particularities of its familial and social context.

People can and should be encouraged to tell such stories. I recently gave a talk at a Catholic parish on Christian ethical reflection on health and health care. I argued that as individuals and as members of families and communities, all of us have a stake in health-care policies and practices because most of us will eventually face difficult health-care decisions for ourselves or our loved ones. Serious illnesses may impose new tasks on our spiritual journeys. Within our communities there is hard-won wisdom on these issues that should be shared. In closing I asked for comments rather than questions. The response was amazing. One person after another stood up and gave a kind of witness to the suffering that he or she had shared with another—a spouse, a sibling, a client, or patients met through volunteer work. People were eager to reflect and to speak, their energy...
born of participation and in searching for expression and validation. They had struggled for meaning in the face of suffering and had felt a reciprocity in self-giving between the ill person and the one taking care.

On a pastoral level, their stories raised a question: Could such reflectiveness and energy be channeled to build communities of support and compassion in the midst of illness? This question was made yet more complex by one gentleman who spoke about his brother who is chronically ill and able to work only part-time. Without health insurance, his brother cannot afford visits to the doctor to manage his condition. This man’s story imposes a social dimension on the pastoral question, how can Christian communities extend their ethical reflection to include the social inequities of health care today, even to the point of becoming advocates for those who are marginalized by our health-care system?

The move from a personal ethic to a social one is difficult in the United States, where the dominant culture has granted highest status to individualism. Likewise, secular bioethics has concentrated on the principles of autonomy and self-determination. In this regard a Christian perspective is countercultural because it does not consider self-love apart from neighbor love (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” Matt. 22:39). At the heart of Jesus’ teaching was love of neighbor and desire for community that includes the poor and the despised. The New Testament social vision is one of solidarity and inclusive community, as manifested in Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners and outcasts, his relationships with women, his emphasis on love of neighbor and even of enemies, his teaching about the Good Samaritan, and the healings that brought the marginalized back into the community? Solidarity and community need not undermine respect for the individual; rather, they presume that the individual is better understood as a being in relation.

Many issues in health care today are profoundly personal and profoundly social: the lack of access to medical care, the lack of prevention and holistic care, and the assisted-suicide debate. These are only a few of the issues that require sustained moral, theological, and spiritual reflection. The starting point for such reflection, I contend, is precisely the richness and drama of individual illness stories within our local communities. To illuminate these stories, I will draw from insights in narrative ethics and supplement them with the critical insights of feminist/liberation ethics. Together with the stories, these
theoretical models can help us to grapple with the ethical and spiritual challenges of illness and our inequitable health-care system.

A Narrative Approach

At the heart of people's reflection on illness after my parish talk were the stories they told. Although the importance of stories to health-care ethics can be easily intuited, there is no precise definition for narrative ethics in health care. As Mark H. Waymack has noted, in medical settings narrative ethics is understood in four different ways. Narrative ethics can be viewed as a teaching method, the case studies approach, which grips the attention of the practical-minded students of the health care professions. Narrative ethics can be seen also as a decision-making tool, taking the form of a "values biography" that is sought from the patient, the family, and from the professionals themselves as their own values and professional commitments are affected. A third view of narrative ethics posits it as an ethical system competing with and correcting more abstract ethical theories, in which narrative supplies data more appropriate for moral attention. All three of these understandings presume some moral framework apart from the story. The fourth view of narrative ethics is more radical, proceeding from the claim that no meaningful, plausible moral theories exist apart from narrative. Some proponents of this view argue that values are always embedded in narratives and cannot be abstracted into a short list of principles. Some argue further that apart from narratives there is no objective moral order—indeed, that there can be no search for moral truth but only an effort to "hear" the narrative of the other.

Like Waymack, I have misgivings about equating meaning with narratives, because in doing so we give up our ability to criticize any narrative on moral grounds. All narratives are not equal. Some are cruel and oppressive. Some are shallow and perverse. Narratives need other narratives, other interpretations, for dialogue and critique. Rightly done, this process of critique is ultimately productive; over time, narratives of good and evil are distilled into a moral framework of norms and principles. The four principles of medical ethics (respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice) are described by Howard Brody as "a tightly compressed synopsis of a very large body of case experience during a good portion of the
history of our culture." On the other hand, dense narratives underline the limitations of abstract principles and the complexities of ordinary life. Nuanced stories of patients and families correct the notion that principles can be mechanically applied.

In most medical settings, the second understanding of narrative ethics—the exploration of the story to seek resolution of an ethical dilemma—is perhaps the most dominant. But narrative ethics can have a richer quality if participants (patients, families, caregivers) shift the goal of evaluation from "well-reasoned solutions" to "well-lived lives." Here we are diverging from an ethics of decision-making to an ethics that merges with spirituality. Ethics entails more than making a decision about a particular action; it also embraces reflection and decision-making about character and being. Ethical reflection goes beyond moral decision making to moral vision and virtue. Often we are faced with the question, "How does one [or how do we] rise to the occasion?" Thinking about ethical issues deeply and in the light of faith gives rise to reflection on spirituality. How do these realities about my health or the health of my loved ones or my community reshape my spiritual journey? As William F. May notes, the decision-making aspect of health-care ethics may pass rather quickly, but the aftermath of a decision may alter our lives irrevocably and call us to a new existential and spiritual identity. In fact, both the decision-making and life afterwards may require a host of virtues—wisdom, courage, justice, self-restraint, fidelity, benevolence, honesty, and humility—and new spiritual growth.

Many narrative ethicists presume that the story, whatever it is, will be told by the health-care professional or ethicist. Arthur Frank, in *The Wounded Storyteller*, emphasizes the need for the person who is ill to voice her or his own story. The patient is not simply the object of caregivers' concern but a person struggling against the "narrative wreckage" that serious illness causes. That is, each seriously ill person has to deal with a kind of shipwreck caused by the storm of disease. One has lost one's map and destination. Storytelling begins the work of repair and may lead to an entirely different destination. At its best, it is a self-story that reaffirms the self and strengthens relationships with others. The story needs the audience of both the self and the others.

Storytellers have something important to say about life and about suffering, and they need listeners and witnesses. Frank uses the phrase the "pedagogy of suffering" to denote his observation that the ill have
something to teach, and the suffering have something to give. All of us have some deficits and some abundance. For some, suffering is their abundance. Others lack what the suffering can communicate. The pedagogy of suffering springs from "a ground of loneliness seeking communion." 18 Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's book, A Gift of Peace, is an example of this pedagogy; but it also occurs in conversations of ill persons and their families and friends. 19

Arthur Frank proposes three major narrative types, which he defines as "the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories." While these three narrative types are not exclusive, one narrative type will usually predominate. Knowing each narrative type enables the listener to hear the story more acutely. They are "listening devices," valuable because they help "the well" listen to those in distress. 20

The first narrative type delineated by Frank is the restitution narrative. This is often the dominating narrative of the recently ill, much less often heard from the chronically ill. The basic story says, "Yesterday I was healthy, today I'm sick, but tomorrow I'll be healthy again." 21 The metaphor good as new lies at the core of the narrative. Sickness is a riddle for professionals to solve with some commodity—a drug, treatment, or service of some sort. In our culture, this kind of story somewhat naively affirms that all breakdowns can be fixed. This is less a self-story than a story of the expertise of others. The narrative has its benefits, but "the problem arises when the ill person does not find restitution, or when someone who can tell only restitution stories encounters another whose health will not be restored." 22

The second narrative type is the chaos narrative. The opposite of restitution, this plot imagines life never getting better. These stories are chaotic, lack coherent sequence, and can be psychologically threatening to hear. They are anxiety producing, perhaps because they reveal, as Frank says, "how easily any of us could be sucked under." 23 Frank notes that those who are truly living the chaos cannot fully express it because they do not yet have reflective grasp of it. The chaotic story implies that "what can be told only begins to suggest all that is wrong." 24

The challenge of listening to the chaos narrative is how to hear the story being told "on the edges of speech," despite the discomfort it creates. A listener who denies the story or pushes it away drives the storyteller more deeply into chaos. Chaos stories are especially
difficult for physicians to hear because they contradict modernist assumptions of clinical work (which correlate with the restitution narrative). Modernity emphasizes fixing; chaos stories seem to have no place. Helping a person out of chaos, Frank implies, requires less fixing and more listening—becoming a witness to the chaotic story.

The final narrative type described by Frank is the *quest narrative*. Here illness and suffering are accepted, and the sick person seeks to use them in a broader quest. The object of the quest may remain unclear, but it is assumed that something can be gained through the experience of illness. In the quest narrative the *teller* has a larger story to tell—i.e., not the story of the physician or the drugs (restitution), and not of the suffering which has so overcome the self (chaos). Rather, it is the story of the self on a significant journey. Restitution and chaos may not be eliminated from this narrative type, but they remain in the background.

Quest stories have risks—of hubris, of romanticizing illness, of communicating the pretense of invulnerability, of seeming to deprecate those who do not rise from their own ashes. But the restitution and chaos stories that often remain in the background serve as antidotes. Quest stories and even chaos stories call for acknowledgment of a hero as Bodhisatta—the hero of perseverance through suffering who, instead of grasping the prize, makes it accessible to others. "Human illness, even when lived as quest, always returns to mourning. The boon is gaining the ability to mourn not for oneself only, but for others."

Frank believes that within the context of suffering there arises an opening to others, both on the side of the teller and on the side of the listener. The teller and the listener become witnesses, and the testimony implies a social ethic. Regrettably, this social ethics is not developed in Frank's book.

Frank’s approach in *The Wounded Storyteller* is rooted in respect and concern for the suffering and the relationship between those who suffer and the wider community. On this level, he offers a useful framework for considering narrative ethics and the individual person. Unfortunately, Frank does not take into account those marginalized from the health-care system, except for a few allusions to "poverty medicine." He assumes that the ill have access to care. Furthermore, although Frank sees all knowledge as situated in particularity, the particularity is essentially individual; the social variables of race, class, and gender receive no special attention from him.
Feminist ethicists will be delighted by Frank's work and at the same time dissatisfied with it. They will appreciate Frank's emphasis on the ill person as the central moral agent in the illness story. This shift is an improvement on an older model for medical ethics that saw the physician as the central figure in a conflict of principles and the patient's condition as the problem setting but rarely concerned itself with the patient as person. It is also an improvement on more recent medical ethics that focuses only on the patient's rational autonomy. Frank invites ill persons to explore the complex reality of their lives and how its various dimensions affect or are affected by the experience of illness.

Like feminist ethics, which values emotions as part of moral reason, Frank is sensitive to the affective dimensions within stories. Feminist ethicists' valuing of emotions brings to life the larger principle of embodiment and the effort to overcome the mind/body split in intellectual and social life. Emotions and bodies serve as wellsprings of moral power and sources of moral data. While sentiments cannot be given authority without consideration of their sources or effects, the denial of feelings incapacitates a person's moral agency and energy.

Feminist ethicists will also be pleased with Frank's invitation to listen carefully to narratives. The wisdom of listening attentively follows from the fundamental epistemological position of feminist ethics that all knowledge is situated and all perspectives are partial. The point is not relativism; rather, it is the recognition that too often the dominant group is imposing its partial vision while attesting to its universality. Feminists, in contrast, want the perspective of those who have been oppressed to correct and expand the view of the dominant group, replacing the "universal" view with what Donna Haraway calls "embodied objectivity"—situated knowledges which are locatable and responsible.

Recognizing that views "from below" are not "innocent positions" but also require critique, Haraway nevertheless affirms that "[subjugated] standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world." This is akin to liberation theologies that want to root their work in the struggles of the oppressed and gain from their perspective what those better off might never see.

Frank uses The Cancer Journals of black lesbian poet Audre Lorde as an example of a quest narrative. He emphasizes that "each of us can only witness from the particularity of who we are," but he does not attempt to comprehend Lorde's particular perspective. He describes...
her outrage as against social secrecy and hypocrisy when she is told at
the doctor's office to wear a prosthesis for her mastectomy. Frank
focuses on Lorde's insight about the need to face our common
mortality, but he overlooks her own interpretation of the role of
prostheses following breast surgery as "merely a reflection of those
attitudes within our society towards women in general as objectified
and depersonalized sexual conveniences."31 She objects to a white
sexist culture that equates women's value with feminine appearance
and that practices social and economic discrimination against women
who have breast cancer. Frank's reading of Lorde's narrative
homogenizes her political criticism, which is disappointing from a
feminist perspective.

Frank hints at the need for a social ethic but gives little room to the
elements that are needed to construct one. It is precisely here that
feminist and liberation ethics make important and necessary
contributions. Frank advocates an individual and personal approach
(although couched in postmodern claims to be political); in contrast,
feminists and liberationists emphasize a social and political approach
that places the personal in a social context. A feminist ethic cultivates
sensitivity not only to gender difference but to other kinds of
differences as well. This is why the feminist and liberationist ethical
approaches are linked: "[Feminism] asks not only, 'Where are the
women in this picture?' but also, 'Where are the children? The
destitute? The African Americans? The Latinas?'"32

Feminists are working to shape health-care ethics so that gender,
race, class, insurance status, disability, and other factors will be taken
into account.33 The "social location" of the sick and their families
often determines their health status, the kind of health care that is truly
accessible, and the conditions in which it is given. We are not simply
"generic" patients with the same opportunities for care. Brazilian
 ethicist Marcio Fabri dos Anjos makes the same point: "The patient as
subject is no longer understood as a single individual, but rather, as a
member of a particular social class."34 Thus, we need a critical view of
the broader social structures within which medicine is practiced. From
a feminist and liberationist perspective, respect for the narrative
journey of each person must consider the web of social relationships
and living conditions that can cause ill health: poverty, violence,
hunger, and exposure to environmental toxins.35 While these
conditions are on the agenda of public-health professionals, they are
rarely on the horizon of health-care ethicists.
Feminist ethicists oppose harm to women and other marginalized groups by showing how oppression occurs in the health arena. They also seek to strengthen the moral agency of the marginalized. Frank illustrates the latter goal when he characterizes the person who is ill not as a passive victim but as a storyteller who "transforms fate into experience." In the "pedagogy of suffering" the power of storytelling and its possibilities are lifted up. How much more powerful this pedagogy might be if it showed the indivisibility of individual and social context, if it provoked not only personal psychological insight but social criticism and advocacy for social justice and health-care reform.

A Pastoral Possibility

Let me return to the question I posed at the beginning of this essay: How can the kind of reflectiveness and energy displayed by that parish audience be channeled to build communities of support and of compassion? As hospital and rehabilitation stays are reduced and the range of care thought to be appropriate to homecare is increased, more and more people and families (especially women, who do most of the caregiving) are negotiating illness and care with little institutional support. Even in the best of circumstances, when the sick have supportive families, economic security, health insurance, and transportation, caregivers and the ill need support. More vulnerable still are those without supportive families, economic resources, health insurance or transportation and those who suffer from racial or ethnic discrimination or language barriers.

An example of a pastoral response (in a homogeneous setting) is provided by Lutheran theologian Stephen A. Schmidt, who wrote of the formation of a chronic-illness group in his local congregation. The pastor asked whether being sick affected members' faith perspective and how the congregation could be more supportive to those dealing with chronic illness. Schmidt, a member of the group, wrote that their initial sharing consisted of telling one's own story, which led to rapid bonding among members. Though pastoral leadership originally directed the discussion toward theological ideas, the group moved on its own toward more sharing of their experiences. Mutual trust developed, and the leadership shifted from the pastor to the chronically ill themselves. Meeting monthly, each session would
begin with one member leading the others in prayer, using a reading particularly important to her/him. Then an hour would be spent reviewing their lives for the past month. Personal struggles, good and bad health news, marital stress, all of these were shared and woven into a faith reflection. Schmidt describes the importance of the group to its members. It provided a place away from family in which they could “unload” deep feelings. It became a place of confession and absolution as people were able to hear and receive each other as they were. The group also became a place of absolute honesty without fears of rejection or judgment or betrayal. Deaths of group members sometimes tapped feelings of failure, inadequacy, and grief. All of this sharing provided a sense of bonding and a new experience of faith and love.

In addition to the kind of group that Schmidt describes, another group in need of support and spiritual strengthening are the caregivers of those who are chronically or terminally ill. Many of these caregivers are older wives (much less frequently, older husbands), many with health problems themselves, who are called upon to give unstinting, twenty-four-hour service (since Medicare does not cover long-term care). Following the husband’s death, it is primarily middle-aged daughters who are expected to take the major role in care for their widowed mothers. The daughters (and sometimes sons) become caught in a squeeze between generations that need them.

Parish or ecumenical groups of the chronically ill and of their spouses/caregivers would be of great value. They would give both women and men a place to share their wisdom and their frustration and to have their faith strengthened by one another. But I want to suggest two possibilities not raised by Schmidt. The first is that such groups might serve as the foundation for educating the broader faith communities about the spiritual and social struggles of those with serious illness. The groups would give participants not only a forum in which to share their narratives but a means to educate other community members. Frank’s pedagogy of suffering can take a communal shape, perhaps though liturgies or panel discussions planned by the chronic-illness group, that will share collective wisdom about facing illness, suffering, and death.

The second possibility is that links between groups could build solidarity among Christian communities by enabling low-income and minority groups to educate more affluent communities about the concrete injustices that their neighbors encounter in the health-care
system and the need for systemic change. Ill members themselves might reasonably rule out social issues as too large for their limited energies, but other community members, those who are stronger and healthier, could serve as advocates in the larger world—not only for the sick and disabled of the local community but for all those who are suffering from the lack of justice within our health-care system.

Even among homogeneous middle-class groups, only the most affluent would lack members suffering from the structural problems of U.S. health care. Feminist experience of conscientization suggests that members of such groups might find themselves being much more critical of the health-care system as they realize that their own problems are not individual but structural and shared by many others. Many elderly people are concerned about money, since Medicare covers less than half of the elderly's health care costs and reductions in projected Medicare/Medicaid payments are part of federal budget deals. Many women feel alienated in hierarchial and unresponsive medical settings. Many employers are choosing not to provide health-care insurance, while other workers lose insurance when they lose jobs. These issues highlight the need to address the faulty social framework which shapes the contours of personal narratives and family suffering.

Newer issues, like assisted suicide, managed care, and the metamorphosizing of health-care organizations into enormous corporate giants, call for reflection from the ground up. The ill who are dealing with these issues concretely can help the broader community to face them. Even those with health insurance must cope with the increasing constraints of managed care. While HMO's that aim to increase profits at the expense of quality care should be monitored, Americans must also recognize the need to restrain health-care spending. This in turn raises the issue of personal restraint in requesting futile treatments and the possibility of other health-care rationing. None of these issues is a solely private, personal (individual) problem, although they may touch us at the most intimate level. We must clarify our understandings of the purposes of medicine and the meaning of death. And we must renew our concern about what is happening to the poor in the midst of current pressures.

These are spiritual and ethical challenges for all of us. What kind of community do we want to become? What kind of persons do we want to become? Sandra Schneider's definition of spirituality can aid us here: "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in
terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives. The tendency toward isolation and self-absorption is present for both the ill and the well. Spirituality calls us to self-transcendence. As Christians, we are drawn toward the ultimate value of love—love of God and of neighbor (as ourselves). This love calls for enactment at the personal and social levels, complex as this may be.

On Beginning at Home

The vulnerability of us all to sickness and death makes the sharing of illness stories a special place for building solidarity in an individualistic culture. Illness stories are a way to engage others in what is not just a private struggle. The wealth of stories can awaken compassion and energize others for action in the public realm. The reflectiveness and energy of ordinary people who are meeting the tasks produced by "narrative wreckage" in their own lives and the lives of family members need to find public voice to influence all dimensions of health care—policy, services, ethics, and spirituality. Perhaps local churches or ecumenical groups can be the starting place.

Notes


4. The use of brief case studies (mini-narratives) is a common teaching tool in medicine, so it is not surprising that the use of case studies in clinical ethics has developed. Narrative ethics in health care emerged through the linkage in some medical circles of medicine and literature. See the journals Literature and Medicine and The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, 21:3 (June 1996), the issue dedicated to the topic "Literature and Ethics." Some narrative ethicists in medicine, like Rita Charon, come from the background of literary studies as well as medical education. Charon proposes that narrative ethics serves the purposes of ethical decision-making in four ways: by providing the means for better recognition of ethical issues, by
enabling the author of the narrative (an ethicist or clinical professional) to be self-conscious about choices made in narration, by encouraging interpretation in the spirit of the careful reader of literary texts, and by seeking validation testing to assure that the achieved interpretation is reasonable to all the agents involved. The narrative method is seen not as replacing consideration of norms and principles but making them work more accurately and effectively by enabling clinicians to realize the complexity of treatment decisions in the life story of the person. Narrative competence, moreover, enables ethicists and health-care providers to view the meaning of illness from the perspective of those who suffer, thus enhancing the empathic practice of medicine and nursing. Rita Charon, "Narrative Contributions to Medical Ethics: Recognition, Formulation, Interpretation, and Validation in the Practice of the Ethicist," A Matter of Principles? Ferment in U.S. Bioethics, ed. Edwin R. Dubose, Ronald P. Hamel, and Laurence J. O'Connell (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 264-277. See also Kathryn Montgomery Hunter, "Narrative," in the Encyclopedia of Bioethics, 2d. ed., Warren T. Reich, 2d. ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 1789-1794.


6. Ibid., 4.


9. Charon, 277-278.

10. Steven H. Miles and Kathryn Montgomery Hunter, "Commentary," Second Opinion 15 (November 1990): 63. It was Miles and Hunter who proposed the shift of narrative ethics in medicine "from a specialized competency to an integrated responsibility fulfilled by all who are sick and all who care for sick people" (Charon, 277). Their editing of case stories in the journal Second Opinion was a wonderful contribution to the field.


16. Frank, 34. Frank borrows the term "narrative wreckage" from Ronald Dworkin, Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom (New York: Knopf, 1993), and the metaphor of losing the map and destination from...

17. Frank, 64-73.
18. Ibid., 75.
20. Frank, 76.
21. Ibid., 77.
22. Ibid., 92.
23. Ibid., 97.
25. Ibid., 101-114.
26. Ibid., 136.
27. Ibid., 145.
35. See Susan Sherwin, "Feminism and Bioethics," Feminism and Bioethics, ed. Susan M. Wolf, 56.
37. On the role of conscientization in feminist ethics, see Beverly Harrison,


39. Legally the insurance plan is still available, thanks to the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum legislation, but in practice it often becomes unaffordable as the total cost of premiums falls to the person who has just lost the job.

An articulate and well-educated couple in their thirties are active members of your church. They have several children, one of whom has a degenerative illness. They remind you regularly about Jesus’ healing ministry and ask to hear more from the pulpit about healing. They also ask regularly for prayers for their two-year-old with the degenerative condition, and they tell you how they believe this child will be healed. Your own faith on this question is not so bold, and you wonder about the dynamics of denial in their thinking. There seems to be a childlike but nondemanding quality in the way they discuss their cares and hopes. Though they were brought up as Methodists, and they are generous givers and regular attendees at both Sunday school and worship, they are looking for “something more.” On Sunday evenings, when your church has no services, they often attend a nondenominational church service with a more charismatic emphasis. They are faithful leaders in the church, yet you sometimes wonder if they will lose their interest.

As for medical care for their ill child, this couple takes him to a regular pediatrician and a specialist in his condition, but they also take him for
acupuncture and massage treatments. Their child still retains the marks of his illness, but his temper has improved remarkably.

It may surprise you to learn that this family is not unconventional. Instead, it represents a new spirit and mindset characteristic of mainline churches. They are neither untraditional nor disloyal; yet they are questioning and experimental. Their questions, about both medicine and the church’s ministry, are generated by deep concerns and genuine curiosity. For me, this family symbolizes the emerging crises in conventional ministry and medicine.

Theses

I want to develop several ideas about medicine and ministry in the U.S. today. The first is that health care is at a crossroads, and the second is that health and healing ministry in mainline Christianominations is also at a crossroads. Third, the church’s ministry with respect to Christ’s mandate to heal will be shaped by the way it negotiates the tensions between two major theological paths, neither of which the church has fully embraced.

The background for these propositions is a more pervasive uncertainty about two great professional traditions in Western culture: medicine and ordained ministry. These two traditions have influenced and shaped each other over many generations in North America. Physicians have had a powerful leadership role in the medical care system, which encompasses many other professional persons and a significant number of collateral workers and volunteers. Likewise, ordained ministers occupy a key position in the institutional church, which has an analogous structure of other professionals, workers, and volunteers. But because the professional practices of doctors and ordained clergy have been increasingly endangered by social and economic forces, the future of these entire systems has been cast into doubt. The roads chosen by each of these institutional leaders will largely determine the future of these institutions and the ways they relate to each other.

Medicine at the Crossroads

The medical tradition has built impressively on scientific rationality and astounding technological advances. Despite all this—and in
certain respects because of this—many people today, including families like the one described above, are quietly withdrawing a notable measure of their confidence from American Medical Association-certified physicians and their full range of services. A recent survey (1990) measured how often adults consulted their primary care (AMA) physicians when they believed they needed additional care (including some sixteen commonly used interventions not usually taught in U.S. medical schools or available in U.S. hospitals). Based on its findings, the study estimated that 34 percent of Americans visited alternative therapists, an average of nineteen visits per year, for a total of 425 million visits, compared with 388 million visits to all mainstream medical physicians.\(^1\)

The annual cost of so-called alternative therapy is estimated at $13.7 billion, three-fourths of which is paid out-of-pocket. (Compare this to the $12.8 billion out-of-pocket costs for all hospitalization in the U.S.) Seventy-two percent of those who visit the offices of AMA physicians and who also avail themselves of alternative health practices never tell their physicians that they do so and, therefore/never disclose to their physicians why they seek care or relief elsewhere. The highest use of alternative therapy appears to be among middle- and upper-middle-class persons with disposable income. We may come up with a universal health insurance system in the future, but even providing this economic resource to the previously uninsured will not solve the problem of public trust in traditional health care—or the problem of the limitations of conventional health care in the U.S.

At the same time, Americans do not want to eschew or discard the many advances of medical technology. The possibility of the miracle cure, especially the miracle drug, still has its allure. Americans exhibit an ambivalent attitude in that they continue to rely on conventional medicine to a significant degree but resent the higher costs and consider them to be signs of corporate and/or personal greed.

We may also observe U.S. medicine at the crossroads by assessing its performance in achieving health-related goals established in the public arena. One statement of public health goals can be found in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Healthy People 2000 Review, an annual series that profiles our nation’s health as part of a national initiative to prevent disease and promote health by the year 2000. The federal government began to develop measurable goals for public health in the 1980s. By the 1990s these goals were
formulated through a series of public hearings and testimony that gathered the spoken or written witness of more than 800 persons, most of whom represented some educational, professional, or business organization.

HHS has three broad goals: "to increase the span of healthy life for Americans; to reduce health disparities among Americans; and to achieve access to preventive services for all Americans." The first goal refers to the number of years which Americans have a full range of functional capacity, as opposed to the simple life span. In 1990, the life expectancy in the U.S. was 75.4 years, while the years of healthy life was 64. According to government figures, U.S. citizens spend approximately 85 percent of their life span in a healthy state. Within this broad goal there are also age-related objectives. For example, the goal for adolescents and young adults is to reduce the death rate by 15 percent. One must observe that no progress has been made toward this goal. Between 1985 and 1990 the homicide rate for this group increased 23 percent to 10.2 deaths per 100,000 population. In 1990 the homicide rate for young black males was 9 times the rate for white males. On the other hand, the death rate for heart disease in our population declined 25 percent in our population.

But the main point is to grasp the major emphases: a greater portion of life that is functional and autonomous; reduced disparity in health between the rich and the poor, between whites and minority groups; and more universal access to preventive services. In this last area the current debate about the universality of health coverage is one factor. The report shows an underlying vision of progress; every goal area and the total of 540 objectives and subobjectives for the year 2000 assumes that improvement is possible. It also reflects a vision of equality and universality. By attending to such goals and objectives, the government is attempting to hold the medical profession, all health care practitioners, and influential agencies accountable for making improved services, including services that have preventive benefits, available for all persons.

For all its value, the public health vision defined in such goals is still limited because it focuses on what can be measured. The moral and spiritual dimensions of health and healing are not articulated or explicated. To the extent that such dimensions undergird the vision, they are taken for granted. This governmental initiative intends to rally the nation, not just health-care professionals, to advance the health of the people. But can the whole nation be inspired with a vision and be
held accountable for the way we respond to it when the moral and spiritual dimensions of the vision are not being declared? Will health-care professionals exert themselves to reach the goals and objectives for health if they are not attentive to the moral and spiritual dimensions of their own lives and professional practice?

Throughout the industrialized world, those with lower incomes, education, and occupational status have had greater mortality rates. The greatest gains in mortality reduction for our society in this century have come about through improved socioeconomic conditions rather than through more and better medicine. Kitagawa and Hauser state the case succinctly:

Perhaps the most important gain in mortality reduction is to be achieved through improved socio-economic conditions rather than through increments to and application of medical knowledge. . . . If the United States is to demonstrate that she is indeed a land of equal opportunity, she must do considerably more to increase equality of opportunity in all those fronts which affect the most significant index of effective egalitarianism—the ability to survive—duration of life itself.

In what way, then, is American medicine at a crossroads? It is like a giant drunkard who staggers between its powerful technology on the one hand and a vision or a dream of wellness on the other. One form of this vision is distilled in the goals set forth by the government. Technology may be essential for implementing this vision, but the vision itself contains certain foundational commitments and understandings for which technology alone cannot provide or compensate—some of which are even alien to technology as such. For medicine, accordingly, the question is, Which will dominate in the years ahead—medical technology or a human and sacred vision of healing and health?

Several years ago a South African seminary student told me a story of a physician who came to a village and prescribed medicines for two sick children. The mothers protested immediately, telling him that he had medicines for European diseases but did not understand African diseases. They knew this was the case because he prescribed medicines for the children but not for them. If the children were ill, then so were the mothers. These women were not looking for blame for their children's illnesses, but they did expect involvement. I believe
they did so because they knew something about the place of community in health and healing.

One may wonder if the call for more equality and universality in health care is not in part a cry for the restoration of community in a culture that is mourning its loss and feels vulnerable to disease because of it. While all environmental factors are vital to a country’s health, the greatest environmental hazard, in my opinion, is a dearth of community. To surround people with love, sometimes tough love, to be sure, but love, is to call forth the spirit and open ourselves to the way God imparts inner strength to resist evil, including diseases.

Ministry at the Crossroads

But what about the church’s ministry? We are aware of living in a secular society which tends to discount the values and voices of religion in public life, including the major areas where public and private spheres conjoin, such as the U.S. health-care system. In ministry we may not feel persecuted for our faith, but the social recognition of our contributions is limited. People less rooted in Christian tradition than the hypothetical family at the beginning of this essay are leaving our churches for generically Christian and non-Christian groups with simple, inspirational messages that build confidence. Perfectly sane people reject our ministries and choose sects, New Age spirituality, or other philosophical alternatives. In short, alternative spirituality is in; denominational piety is out.

But healing has always been a vital part of the church’s ministry, and throughout the history of Christianity times of decline have occasioned renewed interest in healing. One can identify five main emphases in the church’s healing ministry in this century. One of these is the founding of health-care institutions. While many hospitals and other institutions have been secularized in our society, many were initiated by the caring and healing spirit in the church, and some are still sustained by that spirit. Another branch of the church’s healing ministry is the prophetic ministries of justice. Health statistics show the extent to which racial prejudice and poverty account for the inequality and exclusivity of health-care delivery in this country. Consequently, every ministry toward justice contributes to and is part of a ministry of healing, whether it is recognized as such or not. Third is the ministry of pastoral counseling, a movement that grew out of the
church's response to the psychological revolution in this country. A fourth branch is the proliferation of various kinds of congregation-based health promotion ministries. These ministries are growing along with the acceptance of public health goals outlined above; sometimes they are even joint ventures with hospitals or with county or state health departments. Parish nurse ministries are the most widely known but by no means the only form of such ministry.

Fifth, and in certain respects foremost, is ministry through prayer, especially through worship services of healing and wholeness. This century has witnessed a greatly renewed interest in this form of ministry. As Ruth Duck states:

> the twentieth century is one of liturgical reform, and few reforms are more significant than the recovery of services of healing in corporate worship. Such services are an extension of pastoral visitation of the sick, offering the prayers of the whole community, not only a solitary visitor.

In the Anglican church, social factors such as the decline of church membership and the rising popularity of Christian Science led to a reexamination of Christ's healing ministry and its incorporation into the church's mission. At a series of Lambeth conferences, Anglicans did the theological groundwork to reestablish a healing liturgy in association with the Eucharist. This service was first introduced in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, and its use has grown steadily throughout the world. In 1965 the Roman Catholic Church examined its Last Rites and reestablished a sacramental, healing ministry. Since then, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and United Methodists have recognized healing ministry in the form of services for wholeness, healing, and reconciliation. These are not sacramental services. They may or may not be held with the Lord's Supper, and they may not be conducted with the laying on of hands and anointing of oil. But their underlying vision is one of wholeness for the community of faith and the individual supplicant. When the individual suffers, the community suffers and is diminished. Illness tends to isolate persons; ministry serves to restore persons to community and wholeness to the community.

It is important to note that these new ventures into healing and health came about because of a re-examination of the church's mission in the world. Significant theological issues attend all these forms of health-and-healing ministry; but we should be particularly
aware of the theological issues raised by the practice of healing through corporate prayer, laying on of hands, and/or anointing. All these practices have been legitimized in the recent spate of new healing liturgies in mainstream denominations. What, we must ask, sustains and guides the mission of prayer for healing? Is there some new consensus about how to pray for healing? Far from it! In fact, the church faces a number of crucial decisions about the competing theological visions that would offer guidance on this journey.

The church's mission of healing is characterized by considerable tension. On the one hand, many Christians today want to claim wholeness as God's will. Consequently, they deny that illness is God's will for persons—a major shift in direction and sensibility from the approach that has dominated Western Christendom since the Middle Ages. On the other hand, most mainstream Christians today want to avoid “faith healing” because 1) it pressures the individual to have more faith as a condition for healing; and 2) many faith healing approaches to ministry lack theological depth.

The problem is rooted in a difficult theological choice. A renewed theological vision of wholeness as God's will calls us to ministries that proclaim in word and deed the promise of wholeness in life's various dimensions: physical, emotional, social, mental, moral, cultural, and spiritual. But acknowledging the presence of pain, suffering, and death brings us to a theology of the Cross, which finds God's mercy not in freedom from pain and suffering but in grace experienced in the midst of these things through identification with the crucified Christ. The question for ministry today, then, is not merely how we shall serve the common good and witness through healing ministries; it is what kind of theology will guide our response to God's faithfulness in love for the whole world.

Of course, we live in a diverse time; and we rightly treasure both our differences as well as our unity in Christ. Even so, one might ask if the church's healing ministry finds itself confused in large part because of this theological bifurcation, which is not the same as theological diversity. Though they share common elements and assumptions, their emphases are different; consequently, they will shape the church's actual ministry in different ways. Each has a different moral and spiritual vision to guide the church in the world. For a theology of wholeness, the mandate is to oppose disease as evil; such a vision assumes agency, the ability to make a difference. In a theology of the Cross, on the other hand, the grace of God is
discovered in being subjected to evil. The difference can be seen in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus' life: the earthly ministry of Jesus was one of agency until Judas "betrayed" (or handed over, Gr. paradidomai) him. From then on Jesus submitted himself. He was no longer the active subject but the object of others' actions (the Passion). In one theology, faith is expectancy; in the other, faith is submission (in the sense of obedience, not resignation). The theology of wholeness reminds us that health and healing provide energies that enable service for the glory of God. The theology of the Cross reminds us of the mystery whereby sacrifice of well-being enriches the larger good and healing of others.

Will God's glory be served if we try to combine these two theologies in an eclectic manner, or will their distinctive strengths cancel each other out? In actuality, most ordained ministers today do not interrelate these emphases in an informed manner. Instead, we unconsciously lean in one direction or the other as we lead worship, teach, and provide pastoral care and counseling. That is why I speak of bifurcation. In relation to our hypothetical family, a pastor guided primarily by a theology of the Cross is likely to accept a medical diagnosis as defining a reality, perhaps mysterious and tragic, that the family, church, and community must learn to come to terms with. Ministries of presence and prayer are an attempt to sustain persons undergoing adversity. The pastor does not initiate talk of healing, especially when the scientifically defined reality indicates a poor prognosis. On the other hand, a pastor with a theology of wholeness as a primary outlook is likely to see the diagnosis and outlook as one way among several perspectives for understanding the plight of this family, the church, and the community. The diagnosis and prognosis are taken seriously, but they do not completely define the situation. Ministries of presence and prayers are directed toward healing as promise and hope, despite limitations that cannot always be altered in this life. The pastor and church are likely to respond to the family's perceived needs with ministries of care and cure, including prayers for healing, laying on of hands, and anointing.

Addressing the Crisis in Ministry

I am trying to state sharply the differences entailed in these theological approaches so that the issues become clear. There are, however, commitments held in common: an endeavor to comprehend
the gospel and be faithful to the Christian way, a deep appreciation of
the Christian community and its place in the care and cure of persons
suffering with various illnesses, and a growing awareness of the vital
role of justice in addressing the health-care concerns of the poor. Even
so, the implications of the differences are noteworthy.

If one takes what is unarticulated in our culture’s medical vision
and goals and combines them with a theology of wholeness, one
generates movement toward healing in a distinct direction. This
results in an attempt at synthesis between traditional Western
medicine and the kinds of health practices highlighted in the popular
Bill Moyers television series, “Healing and the Mind,” which aired in
1993. For years now the whole-person health-care movement
(holistic medicine) has produced a literature on spirituality, health,
and healing. More and more persons in conventional medicine are
exploring the possibilities for complementary relationships with
alternative approaches to health care, usually on the model of a
whole-person philosophy. Some argue that these possibilities require
a dismantling of the philosophical foundations of Western medicine
as a paradigm; others do not find this necessary. In any case, a
theology of wholeness guides ministry by envisioning human
flourishing in all its dimensions (biological, emotional, social, and
spiritual) as the gracious will of God. With this in mind, such a
theology will encourage continued cooperation with the best of
Western medical tradition and promote exploratory dialogue with
alternative, potentially complementary approaches.

In terms of the classic functions of pastoral care (guiding,
sustaining, healing, and reconciling), this theology undergirds a
ministry of healing. While the inevitability of suffering and the
positive role of some suffering are acknowledged, a theology of
wholeness is interested fundamentally in the meaning of healing and
human thriving.

If current practices and goals are planted in the soil of a theology of
redemptive suffering, however, I envision a different result: an
emphasis on wholeness as accepting our brokenness as self-giving for
the good of the larger whole. In this theology, suffering, not joyous
flourishing, is the major key for life’s symphony. Moments of health
and wholeness are brief respite from life’s main task of enduring
suffering. As David H. Smith puts it, “... ultimately all medicine is
palliative, engaged in patching, renewing, and perhaps some
redesigning of mortal flesh. The brokenness of life—of healer and

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patient—is there for anyone with eyes to see." In this approach, when we suffer from illness and other evils, we become even more the bearers of God’s image than we do when we are healthy, unconflicted, or free from oppression. If this theology prevails, the church’s ministry will continue to delegate much of the search for cure to secular medicine and will focus its energies on care and spiritual support. This theology guides ministry by envisioning suffering as a sign either of election or of faithfulness to the One who joins us in our adversity. In terms of the classic functions of pastoral care, this theology evokes a ministry of sustaining.

A theology of wholeness runs the risk of setting up false expectations and hopes in certain situations. A theology of the Cross runs the risk of dampening hope and glorifying all suffering as redemptive, when in fact some suffering is simply evil and meaningless. In light of such considerations, is there any homework more vital for the church’s renewal of her healing ministry than the task of theological reflection and construction?

How can the ministry of praying be centered in the spiritual dimension and present before God all dimensions of human life? How can prayers for healing be concretely expectant yet restful because of God-given peace with our own mortality? My analysis fosters such questions and raises numerous and complex issues which cannot be addressed here. The initial task, as I see it, is to keep the dual theological emphases in constructive conversation with one another. One promising approach to this conversation aims for a dynamic balance of realized and unrealized eschatology, a self-understanding before God in which faithful ministry includes praying vigorously and boldly for present signs of the fullness of God’s love and promises, such as healing. At the same time, even when healing as movement toward wholeness is evident, a realistic and faithful theology recognizes that no healing is complete in all dimensions; God’s promises are only partially realized in this world. As God’s gift, life is a dynamic process of breaking down and rebuilding. For this reason, ministry helps persons who are ill to realize that God is making them whole and helps persons who are healthy in a conventional sense to identify with the ill. Even so, healing processes and events are definite signs of the glory to come, such that all healing, however fragmentary, embodies or realizes (contains and expresses) the whole of the abundant life that is coming in God’s kingdom.

God’s way of healing is both temporal and eternal. Biological healing is an example of the temporal, and the existential dimension...
points to that universal transition from earthly life through death into transcendent wholeness. A wholesome theology helps persons both to cherish temporal existence and yet to celebrate mortality and anticipate death: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Whenever death brings relief from inexcusable suffering and whenever death is encountered paradoxically as a movement toward life abundant and not as annihilation, then dying is a form of healing. Such faith, it seems to me, is critical in a death-denying culture whose conventional medical system exacts the majority of its charges during the last months of life, delaying and defying the coming of the unthinkable—death.

This portrait of medicine and ministry in crisis calls for the kind of theological constructions that negotiates a creative dialogue of two contrasting theological paths. The paradoxical character of the Christian vision of human wholeness is evident enough: giving away life restores life. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:35). Lambourne puts the point this way: “… fullness of life is a life of self-committal to others from the depth of one’s being to the depth of another’s being, and … this involves suffering love.” Christian discipleship is a powerful source of healing and wholeness, but it can also lead to suffering and even illness. Taking up the cross can make persons more vulnerable to suffering and disease despite healthy lifestyles. Discipleship calls for a distinct kind of wholeness, one that is both life-seeking and life-giving, one that may not eliminate all brokenness but that does transcend our human brokenness.

Whatever the future directions in medicine and ministry, we need the kind of theological discourse that performs three tasks: first, it must point to the transcendent mercy and mystery of God; second, it must lay claim to the immanent availability of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; and third, it must truly gather and inspire people in community. As we become stronger communities of faith, we shall bring gifts to the world that technology cannot control—yet these are the gifts that prepare the ground in which the promise of medical technology, the blessings of healing and health, and the mysteries of life, suffering, and death can all have wondrous meaning.
Notes


4. Ibid.

5. Two key sources of information regarding congregational health promotion ministries are the Health Ministries Association, P. O. Box 7853, Huntington Beach, CA 92646; and The Interfaith Health Program of The Carter Center, One Copenhill, 453 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307.


Tom Choi

Easter Extraordinary: Reading 1 Peter in Eastertide, Year A

Our readings from 1 Peter come during the weeks following Easter Sunday. The year’s biggest attendance numbers have been recorded. Many senior pastors have elected to have someone else preach the first Sunday after Easter (which is likely to be a lower-attendance Sunday). Perhaps there is a widespread letdown of energy and focus during these weeks. This is the time to go back to “normal” before gearing up once again for Pentecost.

And yet, if the message of Easter is indeed true, this is not a “normal” time. In fact, the lections from 1 Peter suggest something quite the contrary. It was written by the apostle who, as the Gospels record, did not mince words and could never be described as subtle. (While the authorship of the letter has been debated, a strong argument can be made for Petrine authorship; in any case, few in our congregations would mind if we associated the letter with that biblical personality.)

These texts boldly proclaim the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead and the redemption by his blood. They call people to a life that is different from the way they lived before. They speak to a people who are clearly facing trials and the prospect of much suffering. They speak of a standard of servanthood that goes beyond being a moral, ethical person. They address a people who are new in the faith or who

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have discovered a new richness to their lifelong faith, people eager to
grow spiritually that they may be filled “with an inexpressible and
glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). They convey a sense of hope for the world
that surpasses any message in the history of the world. Texts such as
these lift “normal” Sundays to a new level.

In October, 1996, I had the privilege and blessing of attending
the Willow Creek Community Church Leadership Conference in
South Barrington, Illinois. I went as a fairly self-satisfied pastor
who probably regarded the after Easter as ordinary and Sundays
noneventful. The speaker for session four of the plenary session
was John Ortberg, one of the teaching pastors. At one point he
addressed the pastors present to take seriously the job of
proclaiming the Gospel or risk being “guilty of pastoral malpractice
for which you will be held accountable one day.” It hit me like a
shot. I have resolved never to let a Sunday be ordinary or “normal”
again, especially with such extraordinary material from 1 Peter. I
hope you will resolve likewise.

April 11, 1999—The Second Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 1:3-9
Acts 2:14a, 22-23
Psalm 16
John 20:19-31

This lection picks up from Easter Sunday and brings us back to the
central theme of the Christian faith: the salvation of souls through
the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter begins verse 3
with formal praises or blessings to God (see Eph. 1:3 and 2 Cor.
1:3). Verses 3-5 build on this theme of praises to God, which then
speak of how God has blessed the people with the hope of “an
inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (v. 4).
Verses 6-7 refer to the present situation of the first hearers of the
letter, who were being subject to persecution and suffering
(especially if the date of the letter corresponds to growing Roman
persecution of Christians). But here, a radically different
understanding of suffering is emphasized. Whereas in the Old
Testament, suffering was most often seen as punishment for sins
(the case of Job being an exception), here it is seen as a test of faith
for the “innocent sufferer.” Verses 8-9 remind us that readers and
listeners of this letter are among the first to receive Christ as savior without being an eyewitness. And yet they hold a love for and belief in Christ that fills them with an “inexpressible and glorious joy” in response to the love that Christ had for them. This is still another radical difference in the new faith born because of Christ. Whereas the others demanded signs (1Cor. 1:22; John 20:25)—empirical proof—it is now through the witness of the future generations who have not seen Jesus, yet love him, that faith comes.

This text presents a challenge for preachers of mainstream congregations, since there are a large number of what I am going to call biblically uncomfortable persons in the pews. The text is full of words that are sometimes perceived as being “fundamentalist” language, which many in our mainline churches find difficult to talk about. Certainly our typical mainline congregations are filled with wonderful people who have dedicated most of their lives to church—yet they may have lost the ability, training, or willingness to share their faith effectively with the growing numbers of unchurched people who are hungering for meaning and purpose in their lives. Verse 7, with the image of gold that is refined, seems of particular relevance. A “back to square one” approach in renewing the central themes of the Christian faith—which are outlined beautifully in this passage—may be in order. It is to be hoped that churches who attempt to reach seekers do not try to pull punches and water down Christianity in order to make it more palatable. This succeeds only in convincing the unchurched that church has little meaning for them.

A personal confirmation of the witness of Peter would be very effective in these settings. Seekers tend to be very much interested in seeing differences before and after becoming a Christian or perhaps becoming a more committed Christian (for those born into the church). Evidence of a belief that is filled with “inexpressible and glorious joy” is very convincing. It is also helpful to point out that Christian belief necessitates a response. One cannot be a pianist by believing that pianos exist or even by listening to and enjoying piano music. One becomes a pianist only by learning to play. It is the same with becoming a Christian. This is a marvelous passage that focuses on key themes for congregations focused on social justice. A “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (v. 3) and the theme of suffering grief

EASTER EXTRAORDINARY: READING 1 PETER IN EASTERTIDE, YEAR A
through all kinds of trials (v. 6) speak volumes to any congregation or
group that hungers for justice.

April 18, 1999—The Third Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 1:17-23
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Ps. 116:1-4, 12-19

Most of the original readers of this letter were apparently Gentiles
and new Christians. Whatever their previous traditions, Peter here
sets out a clear understanding of the nature of God. Verse 17 calls
the readers to invoke God as Father, as Jesus had instructed (Matt.
6:9). This immediately gives the image of an intimate and personal
God, who judges as a function of love, “holding up a standard with
expectation that it be observed.” The “fear” is to be seen as awe
and reverence and not terror, as understood in contemporary times.
Verses 18-19 show the great of love of God by using the image of
ransoming the people through the unsurpassed preciousness of the
blood of Christ. Verse 20 demonstrates the purposefulness of God’s
gift of Christ to the world. Verse 21 shows the significance of
Christ as the one who makes it possible for people to understand
and trust God. As a result of realizing the ultimate sacrifice of
Christ by a loving Father God, vv. 22-23 focus on the purified souls
which result in genuine mutual love. Because of Christ, the new
community of faith, which God had always intended, is born anew
and endures through the word of God.

In preaching this text, it is important to understand the
intimacy and forethought of a wise and loving God who would
continue to love a people even though they had adopted “futile
ways” (verse 18). Many have a distanced and remote
relationship with God. Seeker-sensitive congregations will
especially wish to focus on the importance of Jesus as the
ransom. Many believe they can earn their way into God’s favor,
especially after reading that God will judge according to their
deeds (v. 17). However, we are judged not by our actions but by
our response to the grace given to us through the sacrifice of
Christ Jesus. It is only through the sacrificial love of God
through Jesus that we understand the true nature of God.
April 25, 1999—The Fourth Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 2:19-25
Acts 2:42-47
Psalm 23
John 10:1-10

This lection begins a section of rules for household conduct, in this case, originally directed toward slaves. It is interesting that there are directions for slaves but not for slave owners. Fred Craddock wonders if there were no slave owners in the churches of Asia Minor. This text reminds him of the words of Jesus, who instructs those who are forced to go one mile to go two but is silent about those who force others. Could this mean that the followers of Jesus were always the abused and not the abusers? This shows the inadequacy of using this text to justify slavery, as interpreters have claimed in the past. Being an abuser or a slave owner simply does not have a place in the Christian community. One way to approach this passage—particularly in the way the lection has been edited—is to assume that the condition of servanthood is normative for all Christians. Gilbert Bilezikian (among others) makes a particularly compelling argument for this. He refers to Gen. 2:25, which contains the odd phrase "they were naked, and were not ashamed." He points out that in biblical times nakedness was seen as a posture of servitude. Yet Adam and Eve were not ashamed. Bilezikian sees this as evidence that the original intent of human nature was mutual servanthood, the man serving the woman, and vice-versa. The original sin of eating the fruit was a breakdown of that servant posture.

Throughout scripture, the breakdown of community and the divine-human relationship comes from people seeking to reject servanthood as the faithful life. Jesus restores the servant posture as the ideal for human behavior (e.g., Phil. 2:7; John 13). Peter makes several allusions to the "Suffering Servant" from Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:22, 24-25, and he uses them to describe Jesus, who is not only servant but also the "innocent sufferer." Jesus' suffering was for others, and for Christians in particular. Suffering indicates solidarity with Christ. It must be clear, however, that this passage should not be interpreted to convince persons in abusive relationships to remain in them. Verse 23 seems to indicate that our behavior is not to retaliate against the abuser, but it does not necessarily rule out taking action in a Christlike manner. It definitely should not prevent the possibility of
the Christian community's acting in solidarity and defense of the fellow sufferer. Indeed, although the text was directed specifically toward slaves in the church, perhaps others in the church were meant not to ignore these directions but, in the spirit of solidarity in suffering, to use their influence and efforts toward easing the suffering and conditions of those who were slaves. The importance of this text cannot be underestimated, since many in mainstream congregations seem to be experiencing "compassion fatigue." Concerns about institutional survival and divisiveness over certain issues have eroded the sense of the fellow servant sufferer, who serves and suffers with those as Christ served and suffered on our behalf. Indeed, many churches concerned about shrinking budgets often cut benevolences and other outreach ministries first in order to "survive." Of course, one wonders what is left of the Christian community when such decisions are made. When the essence and mission of the church Christ modeled have disappeared, the congregation will soon disappear as well.

Solidarity in servant suffering is no less important as churches wrestle with issues such as homosexuality. While it is unlikely that our churches will soon be of one mind in deciding if homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" or not, it is clear that all churches must accept and welcome gay and lesbian persons into their congregations, showing solidarity with the long-suffering of one of the most persecuted groups of persons in history. There must also be acknowledgment of the suffering that is endured by both sides of the issue. It is perhaps easier to observe and understand the persecution and suffering of those who favor full and unqualified inclusion of homosexual persons into the church. But the suffering and persecution of those who feel they are acting out of integrity and their understanding of the scripture to uphold monogamous, heterosexual marriage as the Christian ideal must also be acknowledged. As v. 23 points out, though we all have suffered, we do not threaten. Christ has shown us a better way.

Preachers and teachers will also find valuable the rich imagery of v. 24, which in some translations reads, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (NIV). The reference to the cross as a tree fulfills the intention of God's plan for humankind in Genesis 2 with the tree of life. The great miracle of Christ is that he turns what has always been a "tree" of death
(the cross) into a “tree” leading to eternal life. Those who embrace the cross (tree) will inherit eternal and abundant life through Christ.

May 2, 1999—The Fifth Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 2:2-10
Acts 7:55-60
Ps. 31:1-5, 15-16
John 14:1-14

Of all the lections in this series from 1 Peter, this one focuses most on the collective community. As is often the case in churches, the foundational spirit of genuine, mutual love in 1 Peter 1:22 diverts to malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander (v. 1). By using the image of a newborn infant, whose entire focus in life is receiving nourishment from mother’s milk, Peter encourages the congregations to renew their hunger for the purity of the gospel. Verses 4-8 use the imagery of stones in describing Christ and the church. Jesus is described as a living stone, “not as a monument or a dead principle, but as the living, resurrected, and therefore life-giving one.” Peter emphasizes the rejection of the stone (Christ) that has become the cornerstone. This continues Peter’s desire to identify Christ with the churches who were rejected and persecuted by others. They are then encouraged to be living stones, using themselves to build a spiritual house. Peter refers to Old Testament scripture often: Isa. 28:16 in v. 6, Ps. 118:22 in v. 7, and Isa. 8:14-15 in v. 8. The challenge of vv. 6-8 places Christ firmly in front of all of us to be the solid foundation upon which we build our lives or the obstacle which trips us up.

Craddock speaks to this:

Everyone who seeks to make a difference in the world encounters the pain that is God’s pain: In the very act of trying to help, have my efforts hindered some? Every well-meaning parent ponders this matter in the rearing of children. Every preacher feels the pain of it when someone leaves angrily during the preaching of good news. Did I drive someone farther away? Did I place a stumbling stone in the path? Whoever walks into a room and turns on a light has therefore created shadows, but what is the alternative?
Peter then introduces a new concept: All of the people in the churches were part of a royal priesthood. This image refers to a group of priests belonging to a king. Traditionally, a priest was thought of as someone with the right to offer sacrifice on behalf of others; in the Bible, a priest was someone “who serves God and has the right of access to him.”10 In designating the entire church community as the royal priesthood, Peter declares that all are to serve God and have the right of access. This is a point of indescribable joy but also one of great responsibility. Finally, Peter once again encourages a rejected and marginalized people that they are indeed included and uplifted. The language is fascinating to note. In being inclusive, Peter actually uses the very terms that would have been regarded previously as exclusionary. As pagan Gentiles who were considered “not a people,” they are now named as one again and again: “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.”

Preachers and church leaders will find this passage very valuable in helping congregations prepare for the new millennium. Most mainline churches are concerned about falling numbers and decline. The cry for more members and more money grows louder. This passage places the proper focus on any plan for church growth. It begins with renewing a passion and hunger for the gospel in order to nourish the Body of Christ for growth. Numerical church growth has always come as a result of authentic spiritual growth. The image of Christ as cornerstone and stumbling block along with the image of “pure, spiritual milk” emphasizes the need for congregations to be unapologetic about the gospel of Christ and to not water it down. All people in the church are considered legitimate ministers who identify their spiritual gifts and are trained for ministry. Finally, Peter’s desire to identify the new Christians with Jesus and to be inclusive is key. Many growing congregations are effective at identifying with the needs and cultural perspectives of the unchurched and nominally churched, as opposed to remaining in a churched culture formed in past decades. These churches are filled with people who would never have considered attending a traditional church. They have done as Peter did and have made those who felt that they were “not a people” in church understand and identify with Christ so that they became “God’s people.”
May 9, 1999—The Sixth Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 3:13-22
Acts 17:22-31
Ps. 66:8-20
John 14:15-21

The theme of suffering continues in this lesson, addressing the challenges that these early Christians faced in a hostile environment. Christians who did not worship the Roman gods were called "atheists." This term “questioned their character, citizenship, patriotism, and social responsibility.” Peter encourages the readers not to be intimidated and to continue in their focus on Christ. No matter the circumstances of life, hearts that are filled with Christ and eager to do his will are blessed and will overcome their fears. Frequently challenged by others, Peter encourages them to defend their faith, but to do it with “gentleness and reverence.” It is not enough merely to argue and prove a point. Character that reveals a heart transformed by Christ is just as important. Peter once again uses the example of Christ as the sufferer and triumphant one, with whom the readers can identify and in whom they have their hope. By understanding the experience of Christ, they can look beyond their present sufferings to a life beyond the suffering. Christ’s proclamation to “spirits in prison” in vv. 19-20 appears to be a reference to the power of Christ that extends for all time, even before the earthly life of Jesus. The introduction of Noah has significance first because the readers of the letter identified with Noah and his family, a small group of persons among nonbelievers. Second, the imagery of being saved through water coincides with being saved through the waters of baptism, which evokes a conscience focused on the resurrection of Christ, whose heavenly ascent at the right hand of God is a wonderful image of hope for the suffering faithful.

Suffering for the sake of one’s faith is a somewhat foreign concept for mainline churches in 1999. Most congregations today do not face the religious persecutions that the readers of 1 Peter faced (although there are some who do). But a largely skeptical media has kept many Christians “in the closet.” Many persons of deep faith hesitate to share it with others. Unfortunately, the Christians who do get media coverage by and large seem to disregard Peter’s insistence on “gentleness and reverence” in defending the faith. Peter challenges us to cast aside our fear of those who intimidate us and set our hearts on
Christ the Lord, so that the gospel may be declared boldly and authentic change may happen in the lives of those around us.

Notes

4. Gilbert Bilezikian, workshop on Building Biblical Community, Willow Creek Community Church Leadership Conference, October 1996. Bilezikian was Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College.
5. Craddock, 49.
6. Davids, 36.
8. Ibid, 84.
12. Davids, 142.
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