From Text to Sermon
Lloyd R. Bailey

A Ministry of Presence
Brina Gill

Christian Faith in a Declining Civilization
Arthur J. Landwehr

The COCU Statement on Ministry
with comment by J. Robert Nelson

Plus homiletical resources and book reviews
Quarterly Review provides continuing education resources for professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. A scholarly journal for reflection on ministry, Quarterly Review seeks to encourage discussion and debate on matters critical to the practice of ministry.

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Protective coloration seems to have become the chief means by which the church hopes to preserve itself in an age of disbelief. The political field has become dominated by pressure from special constituencies, so a denomination organizes its programmatic life around certain of those interests. If the organizations and institutions of our day are filled with misgivings and uncertainties, the church has them with a vengeance. As for communications, S. J. Perelman could have been speaking of the church when he wrote that the importance of an event is inversely proportional to the number of reporters sent to cover it.

When we ask what we can do about the problems facing us, the answers typically spring from conventional wisdom—more clarity, more communication, and above all, more coordination. (Plus evaluation, of course.) Most of the debate then involves criticism of those who aren’t oiling the gears enough. Perhaps that is why letters to the editor have become so popular in the church press. The limitations of this form of individual potshooting are clear enough. An organization in which the predominant form of expression is opinion-giving is one that has conceded it cannot significantly affect the depressive conditions of our time.

Perhaps a starting point for reform would be a use of the resources we have for the sake of the whole system. Serious reflection and promising experimentation are going on, not only in the higher education system and the bureaucracy, but in the local churches and annual conferences. If we can bring these ideas and forms to the surface, we might be able to demonstrate that the corpus Christi is a resurrected body and not a corpus delicti.
Alfred North Whitehead wrote that "in a live civilization there is always an element of unrest. For sensitiveness to ideas means curiosity, adventure, change." In the church, as in civilization, one sign of life is responsiveness to ideas and the courage to abide by their implications.

CHARLES E. COLE
"FROM TEXT TO SERMON": REFLECTIONS ON RECENT DISCUSSION

LLOYD R. BAILEY

The movement from exegesis (what the text said to its own time) to application (what the text says; its implications for the "believing community" in the present) transforms a lecture into a sermon. Very little has been done to assist the preacher with this crucial transition. While there are endless volumes of sermons, denominational publications with "sermon starters," and abstract discussion of hermeneutical theory, their helpfulness is reduced by their isolation from each other. Even the widely used Interpreter's Bible contributes to the problem by assigning "exegesis" and "exposition" to different authors.

Since interpretation is a highly individual art, conditioned by communal confession and cultural values, objective evaluation is extremely difficult. Therefore my primary goal will only be to inform the reader of some recent work and to pose questions for further discussion.

The Methodist Theological School in Ohio Journal (hereafter Methesco) contains a series of fourteen articles entitled "Preparation for Biblical Preaching." The authors are professors at the school, and they arrange each article as follows: (1) The Preacher Approaches the Text (questions that come to mind when the text is read); (2) The Preacher Studies the Text (background and structure; verse-by-verse analysis; the intent of the passage as the original audience would have understood it); (3) The Preacher Develops the Text (including several false

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directions the sermon might take). The strength of this series is that a single methodology is consistently applied to a variety of text-types, and that the scholarship is of high quality. The authors avoid technical vocabulary (e.g., redaktionsgeschichte, or even redaction-criticism; they merely mention the need to consider the wider context of the passage). Other basic methods (e.g., form- and tradition-criticism) are illustrated in the same nontechnical language. The authors stress the need to study the entirety of each biblical writer’s language as a guide to how vocabulary is being used in the present text. Some general principles for evaluating divergent modern translations would have been helpful to the reader.

The texts chosen for study alternate between the two Testaments and come from the lectionary. One weakness of this approach is squarely faced: the lectionary’s brevity has often disrupted the structure and boundaries of a textual unit. Thus restoration of deleted verses may be necessary to preserve the biblical author’s message. A brief discussion of how one determines the boundaries of a pericope would have been helpful.

Another problem with the lectionary approach is faced less directly: by using the Old Testament in connection with the church’s year, it becomes easy to “Christianize” it. The authors correctly observe that “For to us a child is born” (Isa. 9:6) likely will be heard in terms of Handel’s Messiah. They warn us that sound interpretation must begin by taking the Old Testament seriously on its own terms: the child is possibly Prince Manasseh, seen as a manifestation of God’s unending zeal for his people. A later manifestation of that zeal is Jesus, whose life does not contain the failures attributed to Manasseh. But the question left unasked is: Must one always study the Old Testament in terms of its continuity or discontinuity with the New, or in view of “fulfillment”? While this widely held principle of Christian interpretation is not encouraged by the authors, the use of the lectionary makes it difficult to avoid.

The crucial discussion deals with the transition from exegesis to sermon. A general principle is not stated, but it may be gleaned from the articles: there must be a “rehistoricizing of the text,” developed in view of “the particularities of the present
local situation." Does the passage describe our experience, depict us as we are, interpret us? For example, when the serpent (Genesis 3), a "dramatic objectification of an inner process of seduction," asks, "Did God say . . . ?" is my reaction to God’s commands also portrayed? Or, the authors will suggest that God ever continues as the text depicts. Thus if divine zeal for the community is the real message of Isaiah 9, may we not assume that this zeal continues for us?

Two reactions to this procedure are in order. (1) Is there no difficulty in recognizing our experience in the text? Do we not, for example, tend to read it and identify with “the disciple whom Jesus loved” rather than with Judas? Do we not read the prophets’ denunciations of civil religion and hear only a condemnation of ancient “Jewish” nationalism? (We will return to this point below.) (2) While God may continue to act in accordance with the text, should we not remember divine mysteriousness (Isa. 45:15), radical freedom (Exod. 33:19), and ability to do “a new thing” (Isa. 43:19)? Is the portrait of divine action the same in Deuteronomy as in Job? (We will return to such tensions below.)

The authors encourage us to proclaim the dominant theme of the text rather than subordinate details. Failure to heed this advice is indeed the major failing of modern preaching. My favorite example comes from Jacques Ellul’s Judgment of Jonah, where he remarks that Jonah had no right to rest in the shade (4:5), since “God’s work is never done.” Shall we preach from this text, since it accurately depicts both us (resting) and the deity (striving with humanity)? Not in my opinion, since this is only the advice of Ellul and not of Jonah! It is not even related to the thrust of Jonah’s message (of which Ellul makes scant mention). Such a sermon might be illuminating, but (in the words of the authors) “in focusing on something which the original text does not say we will miss what it can say to us.”

While a given passage may have one dominant theme as the authors suggest, others may be more complex. Independent stories, each with a theme, may have been joined to create a new meaning. Thus the preacher may recover not only the theme of a pericope about Jesus, but also of the Evangelist who gathered
Perhaps separate sermons will result, or both themes might be treated in a single sermon. This is an important point, which the authors have neglected to discuss.

Perhaps the most widely read series on our topic in English is entitled "From Text to Sermon," of which twelve specimens have appeared in Interpretation. The "introduction" states that the purpose is to "furnish case studies for discussion and reflection" rather than to present a model for everyone to follow. Thus each article is by a different author and the format is not standardized.

The difficulties with this format are soon apparent. In no instance is there a listing of all exegetical methods. A few authors ignore one or more of them, and one goes so far as to say, "I found . . . that for my purposes no general historical-critical or text-critical analysis of the . . . record was necessary." A few authors seemed uncritical (or unaware?) of their presuppositions in moving from text to sermon. The order of presentation (generally discussion-sermon) and terminology vary from one article to the next. Some authors define "hermeneutic" as the overall process of interpretation (of which "exegesis" is the initial step), while others view the hermeneutic problem as emerging only after the exegesis is finished.

Only four of the sermons are based on the Old Testament, although it constitutes 80 percent of the canon! While this may reflect the presuppositions of much Christian preaching, it is an imbalance which, one hopes, the editors will correct in future installments. If rabbis have been invited to contribute, none have accepted. Is the hermeneutic problem limited to Christianity?

The series is initiated by John Bright's article, "An Exercise in Hermeneutics," which is one of the most instructive in the series. He outlines four steps: (1) Grammatico-historical exegesis, in order to clarify "what the text actually sought to convey to those to whom it was originally addressed." (2) Theological exegesis: What informed the speaker? How is the text "expressive of some aspect of the normative faith of Israel"? (3) What has the New Testament done with the ideas proclaimed by the text? "We cannot . . . preach from it as if Christ had not come." "It stands on the other side of Christ, in B.C." (4)
Application: Who, under Christ, is being addressed in a way that corresponds to the text?

 Application of these principles to the text in Jeremiah 31:31-34 produces the following results: (1) Jeremiah announces to his defeated countrymen (post-587 B.C.) that God will extend a new covenant-relationship: not different in form or content from the previous (Mosaic) one, but accompanied by the ability to obey it. The Covenant is (only) “renewed,” but the people are “made new.” (2) This vision is made possible by viewing the long history of God’s graciousness. Even the recent destruction does not terminate it. (3) The relationship between the Testaments is one of promise-fulfillment: “Christ gave to his disciples . . . the promised new covenant.” (4) “Our world is still largely a B.C. world.” So, if Jeremiah speaks to B.C. persons, he can speak to us! He speaks of self-interest and false hopes, of God’s judgment in the troubles that beset us (e.g., social unrest). When we realize that we can never live in that cozy little world of our dreams, we are open to Jeremiah’s words. When we realize that we can never live in that cozy little world of our dreams, we are open to Jeremiah’s words. But how is this vision possible, given human nature and a history of failure? These are non-Christian questions (says Bright), since God has already acted! When one accepts the lordship of Christ, a new society is formed “in fellowship with one another . . . the redeemed society of the promised new age.”

 The following reflections on Bright’s approach may be in order. (1) Jeremiah speaks after a national defeat that has demolished the idea that God was committed to the protection of sacred real estate (Jerusalem) or to a given form of government (Davidic monarchy). Nonetheless, he says, a worshiping, obedient Israel is still possible. How and why can Bright move from this Word for the community (following national disaster) to a Word for the frustrated modern individual? Does this not deserve discussion? (2) Can one always speak, as does Bright, of “the normative faith of Israel”? Is not the faith dynamic, grappling with history, growing, in dialogue with itself? Is the Word (i.e., that which is “normative”) to be determined by majority vote of the biblical writers or modern interpreters? (3) Is a detour through the New Testament really helpful here? Is the synagogue any less challenged and sustained by this vision of a renewed community? The
anticipated actualization of the new covenant is to be evident from the behavior of the community: as a whole it will be perceptibly obedient as never before. There will be no need to remind it of its obligations. But this is certainly not the case in our day, as Bright himself admits when he characterizes us (including most church members) as “B.C.” persons. This means that Jeremiah’s vision has not come to pass, New Testament and “faith” assertions to the contrary. We stand then with Jeremiah, hearing and needing to hear what God may yet bring to pass.

A related approach is taken by Daniel Lys, who tells us that the New Testament is “the final and decisive reinterpretation of the traditions which were again and again reinterpreted all along (in) the Old Testament.” It is the “target” which shows that the movement, at a particular moment in Israel’s thought, was “right.”

The following questions may be asked. (1) Is it helpful to make faith-assertions that cannot be proved from the text itself? Is anything more being said by Lys than, “I do not accept the intrinsic authority of the Old Testament because I choose not to accept it”? (2) May one properly use the words “right” (or “wrong”) in describing Scripture? (3) What is to prevent the identification of “right” with personal opinion? If the New Testament is the standard, then the New Testament as interpreted by whom? (4) Since the process of reinterpretation is also evident within the New Testament, which level becomes “decisive”? (5) Was not every biblical story preserved because, at a specific time and circumstance, it gave and maintained the community’s identity? Has not each story been validated by history and communal recitation (canonization), regardless of agreement with a “target” that was likewise fashioned by time and circumstance? Cannot the earliest form of the Word challenge and judge as well as (or perhaps better in some circumstance than) a later Word? (6) Is it not the task of the interpreter to listen to all voices from the tradition and bring them into dialogue with each other, rather than impose a subjective value-structure (a canon within the canon)? Should we not perceive tension within the text as evidence that life under the covenant is complex, that there may not be a clear “right” or
“wrong,” so that one should act tentatively and with humility?

A slightly different approach is taken by Iain Wilson, preaching from Isaiah 19:23-25. How does this beautiful vision of Israel worshiping with and witnessing to its traditional enemies address us today, since its fulfillment has been “denied by history”? (Dare we make that statement about the New Testament proclamation of the return of Christ and of the end of the world?) It addresses us when “we receive this prophecy as from him” (Jesus Christ), the interpreter of Scripture, causing it to burst “into a living flame in our hearts.”

Several matters need further clarification. (1) Is all Scripture to be received in this fashion? Would the author propose it for the dietary laws of Leviticus? If not, where is the line of demarcation? (2) If it is important to note that history has “denied” the fulfillment of this oracle (and I would suggest that it has not), how is the difficulty removed by the author’s proposal? (3) Does this approach not destroy the authority of the Old Testament under the guise of trying to establish it? (4) If Christians, unlike Jews, cannot accept the text on God’s authority in whose name it was proclaimed, how can they do so by the mental gymnastic “as from”? Perhaps the concluding words of the Lazarus story (Luke 16:31) are to the point: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead” (RSV).

The remaining sermon from an Old Testament text is J. A. Ross Mackenzie’s interpretation of I Chronicles 11:22-23. Such stories were repeated, he suggests, in order that the hearer “imitate the faith and loyalty of the old heroes and leaders.” But this original purpose will not suffice for the Christian preacher, who must show that “in what seems to be a peripheral work of the God of Israel there is a witness to the central work of God in Christ.” The fact that Benaiah “wasn’t afraid of fighting alone” must remind us that “Jesus stood alone before the enemies of man . . . sin and death.”

If preachers want to remind us of Jesus’ work, should they not do so directly, with the aid of a New Testament text? Why use the text in Chronicles as a pretext in disregard for its original intent? With this method, any text can remind us of anything and everything.
All these authors seem to propose that the basic hermeneutic problem is: How can we Christians preach from the Old Testament? Is it not rather: How can anyone, regardless of faith-stance, correctly hear and enter into dialogue with any ancient speaker, given the cultural, linguistic, and chronological gaps, as well as the cultural conditioning of the hearer? This applies equally to the words of Confucius, Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed. The problem is the same for both Testaments, for Christian as for Jew.

Not all the writers in *Interpretation* share the opinions of the authors studied thus far. Thus James Cleland lists four steps in sermon preparation: primer (what occasions the sermon); purpose (the single goal the preacher has in mind); pattern (structure, organization); and proposition (the thesis or point made). Once the proposition has been derived from the text, one asks whether it is "a valid message for all times, as proved by the long history of the Church." Is "the good news still effective when removed from the geographical, cultural surroundings in which it was originally spoken or written"? Once such a proposition is isolated, it must then be "re-inserted into time," namely, into the present. (No necessary detour through the New Testament is mentioned. I am assured by my colleague Professor Cleland that I interpret him correctly at this point.)

The reader would have been helped by discussion of the following matters. (1) Was it the intent of the biblical speakers to issue timeless propositions? (2) To what extent is any proposition historically conditioned? (3) Is "timeless" the same as "valid"? Or may "valid" depend upon the particular circumstance? May Scripture be described as "invalid," and if so, by what criteria? (4) Would the "long history" of the synagogue also be a useful test of "valid"? (5) How is the proposition to be recognized? Will everyone agree? May we not rationalize away a proposition that challenges our preconceived notions? At this point the advice of Paul Mickey seems relevant: "What . . . about this text . . . offends me?" This is the key to the "cutting edge" which must not be avoided.

This appears to be a basic rule of interpretation: When the text
is read in such a way that the status quo is supported, when one
is inclined to identify with those in the text perceived as "the
good guys," then one likely has misunderstood the intent of the
text. Has this not implications for the Christian attitude toward
the Old Testament? Do we find the interim otherworldliness of
the New Testament authoritative in part because it enables us to
escape the social demands of the Old Testament?

The latest installment in the series, by Leander Keck, makes
this same point: "But hearing the text calls for discerning a
critical word, one which addresses both extremes in the
polarized situation."

A more basic approach is taken by Lawrence Toombs in "The
Problematic of Preaching from the Old Testament." He
proposes the following steps in the process of interpretation. (1)
"To what facet of the human condition was the passage
originally directed, and what was it saying to that situation
in its own terms and in its own time?" (2) "In what
contemporary forms does the human situation to which this
passage speaks manifest itself?" (3) "How must the ancient
word be transfigured and transformed so that it will speak its
authentic message to the new forms in which the human
situation has found expression in the present day?" And
further: "The specifics of a divine demand heard in an earlier
time cannot merely be transposed into the existence of another
person. It must be transformed into a demand which rises from,
and speaks back to, his own distinctive situation." In
accomplishing this, the preacher "must concern himself with
the direction which the work of God takes, with the goals it
pursues, and with the end to which it is directed, rather than
with the specific acts which the biblical writer attributes to God."

Thus the biblical narratives "show us the kinds of issues
which arise in an existence lived in history under God's demand
and invite us to see how these issues take shape in our own
existence."

One should notice, in this approach, the direct transition from
then to now: there is no inevitable detour through the New
Testament. The function of the sermon is apparently not to
remind us of "promise" and to demonstrate "fulfillment," not to
state timeless proposition, but to describe and to question the
human situation in the light of the tradition. (This approach is
very similar to that of the authors of the Methesco series.)

A series of nineteen articles has appeared in *Etudes théologiques
et religieuses* under the title "Du texte au sermon." A summary
and reflections have been provided by Jean-Paul Gabus, and I
shall confine my remarks to his article.

He begins by noting that twelve of the articles, to one degree
or another, have not conformed to the intentions of the series.
Since an objective evaluation would be difficult, his goal will be
"to present a number of fundamental theological remarks
concerning preaching today, in constant dialogue with the
contributors to the series."

What is the function of the sermon, and is it still useful? It is
not an end in itself, he suggests, but only a part of the larger
worship service. It is a prelude to the Eucharist which actualizes
the presence which the text has announced.

The common denominator of the articles, he proposes, is that
the authors believed scientific exegesis to be possible and
desirable. After discussing some of the problems of this
approach, he concludes that the authors have wrongly assumed
that they could recover "the pure word of God, stripped of all its
human and mythological elements." What is an alternative? Is it
not possible to give up this goal of scientific exegesis "in order
that we be seized by the dynamics of the text and by the breath of
the Spirit"?

While one may agree that presuppositionless exegesis is
hardly possible, does the radical proposal of Gabus follow
logically? Would not caution and humility in the use of scientific
exegesis be a more fitting conclusion? What is to prevent
subjectivity from contaminating the recognition of the "Spirit"?
Why will the "dynamics" not be perceived as a support for
personal or denominational confessionalism?

His dimension of the difficulties of a proper "actualization"
includes a helpful criticism of approaches taken by some of the
other articles (especially of the tendency to search for a present
situation that is analogous to that depicted in the text). Essential to a "good" actualization, he says, is "the judgment
It seems appropriate to mention several "text to sermon" publications that have appeared since the above article in *Councilium*.

1. The Supplementary Volume to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* contains an excellent article by James Sanders, entitled "Hermeneutics." His reliable, practical, readable approach is expanded in the "Introduction" to his *God Has a Story Too,* which contains a series of excellent sermons with homiletical commentary.

2. A clear, homiletically oriented discussion of exegetical method, presuppositions in moving from exegesis to sermon, and a detailed illustration involving a specific text (Hosea 4:1-2), may be found in the *Duke Divinity School Review* written by my former students, John Bradley White, R. Michael Casto, and David C. Hester.

3. The popular series, *Proclamation: Aids for Interpreting the Lessons of the Church Year,* is reviewed by me in the article "Lectionary Preaching," in the *Duke Divinity School Review,* winter, 1976, pp. 25-35. The series has no discussion of exegetical method or of the presuppositions invoked by the authors in moving "from text to sermon." There are a few excellent volumes, but more usually the exegesis and exposition (by different persons) seem to have been done in isolation from each other. The exposition does not often develop the main thrust of the biblical text.

4. Excellent assistance in how not to use a biblical text in preaching may be found in Ernest Best's volume, *From Text to Sermon.* He discusses such common (and problematic)
techniques as direct transference, allegorization, spiritualization, anthropologizing, substitution, individualization. Very little assistance is offered from the positive side, however.

5. The series Interpreting Biblical Texts,26 will study types of biblical literature (e.g., apocalyptic) or canonical sections (e.g., the Gospels) under three headings: the nature of the literature, assumptions about the move "from text to sermon," and contemporary meanings of specific texts in view of the aforementioned assumptions.

NOTES

1. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 12 volumes.
2. Published in Delaware, Ohio 43015. The series began in the fall, 1967, issue and concluded with winter, 1972.
4. Specifically, for Epiphany (Matt. 2:1-12; Isa. 49:8-13), Pentecost (Acts 2:1-8, 12-21; Gen. 3:1-6, 22-23), Ash Wednesday (Matt. 6:16-21) and Lent (Ezek. 33:7-16), Advent (Rom. 13:8-14) and Christmas Day ( Isa. 9:2, 6-7), Easter (Mark 16:1-7) and Ascension Sunday (Dan. 7:9-10, 13-15), King Pentecost (Rev. 19:1, 4, 6-8; 1 Kings 18:21-39), Advent (Ps. 97) and Christmas (I John 4:9-16).
6. Published quarterly by Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23227. The initial article, 20 (1966): 188-210, does not bear this specific title.
13. This is similar to the point I raised about the Merton articles when they call for us to recognize our "experience" in the text.
17. In ibid. 23 (1969): 302-14, which is not a part of the "From Text to Sermon" series. The title may be slightly misleading, since the word "Bible" could be substituted for "Old Testament" (for so it appears to me).
18. Published by the Faculté de théologie protestante de Montpellier. Some of the articles (e.g., of Daniel Lys and John Bright) appear to be revisions of those published in Interpretation.
20. Rudolf Bultmann, "Ist voraussetzunglose Exegese möglich?" Theologische
It is 4:45, and I am preparing to leave the office for a rare early night home. The phone rings, and a young woman's voice on the other end says, "I need help and would like to see a minister." I ask her if she can briefly tell me what is troubling her. She says, "No, I can't talk here."

"Could you come in tomorrow?"

"Oh, no. Please, won't you see me today? I don't know if I can go through one more day. I must see you today."

"O.K. Can you come now?"

"No, I work until six."

"All right, come right after work."

An hour and a half later an exhausted, hassled, exasperated young woman of twenty-six is sitting on my office couch. I am the first person, she says, who hasn't tried to refer her somewhere else. She is newly arrived in the city with her seven-year-old daughter, having just left "a bad scene" with her husband in the East. She is earning three dollars an hour at a local department store and trying to support herself and her child. She is sick and obviously in generally poor health. She is barely making it, but she is. It is just hard and lonely.

She talks and talks, with tears at the beginning and end as she unfolds all that has brought her to this moment. She asks if she may leave some luggage in my office. She was assaulted in the lobby of her apartment building and moved out without having found another place to live.

This visit was the beginning of several meetings and
telephone calls dealing not only with the emotional turmoil of her life but with the nitty-gritty of making it in the city—poor, single, and with a child. For several days her belongings sat in my office reminding me of her burden, the heaviness of her life, and all that she could not leave behind.

In the weeks that followed, as I tried to help this woman, I once again learned the gift and limitations of being a pastor in the city. The gift was being able to care and to help someone in whatever way I could. The limitations were many: housing shortages, unjust wages, discrimination against children in apartment rentals, and the fact that she was one of many who would need my time and attention that week. Such pastoral concerns lead me to the larger struggles against injustices in the city. But these activities also take time from the personal side of ministry. One of the hardest lessons has been accepting my limitations in helping others. I must continually remind myself that although I cannot do everything, I can do something.

This encounter, though in its own way unique, demanded what is again and again required of a clergywoman with major responsibilities in pastoral counseling in an urban church. It is what I call “a ministry of presence”—a ministry that is oriented to individuals, not just to problems. It is easy, when confronted with so much suffering on a daily basis in the city, to forget the face and to see only the problem. It is a self-protective way by which we minimize the impact of others on our lives and avoid what they may be asking of us. Yet as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I must catch myself when this begins to happen. It is too easy to put individuals into categories—the hungry, the homeless, the psychotic, the drunk—and thereby discount them and my responsibility to them as unique persons. As a minister, I must remember that each person is totally distinct, and therefore his or her situation is unique.

A ministry of presence through pastoral counseling is characterized not so much by the skill, knowledge, or technique of the pastor as by the minister’s manner of being with another. It is a ministry of being, not merely of doing.

I cannot heal another person; I can only create the environment and relationship where God’s healing may take place. I must let go of the incessantly busy Martha within me and
let her sister Mary be hostess. (Mary offers hospitality to the stranger not by "doing for" but by creating the kind of space in which the stranger is made to feel welcome and by being receptive to what this person brings.) My first act of engagement with another person should be one not of self-assertion, but of making a space where the other feels his or her presence is received.

What I am asked to be and to do is made easier, in part, by the fact that, like many women, I was raised to be relationally oriented. Women in our society have survived by being exceptionally sensitive to the unstated and subtle aspects of relationship. In many cases women have developed as second nature an ear that is geared to attentive listening.

It is in being a good listener that one is the most enabling counselor. However, it is not a passive listening in which I withdraw from any emotional involvement, not a listening that is simply a vehicle for a person to dump whatever is on his or her heart or mind. Rather, it is an involved listening that helps focus the communication. Ultimately, my listening helps the person hear himself or herself. It is a listening that requires me to step over to the other side to hear with the other's ears and see with his or her eyes. For me to listen means to be able to experience what that person is feeling. It means to put myself in the other context and to be open to the vulnerability that person is feeling. This is often frightening, for it requires me to open myself to so many cries of pain, loneliness, despair, stagnation, meaninglessness, and ambivalence. Yet there is not a ministry of presence without this kind of opening.

A ministry of presence incarnates self-giving love. It knows that the sacred is not something set apart but something that dwells in the concreteness of our daily existence. "As you do it unto the least of these, you do it unto me." In bringing our full presence to an encounter, we meet Christ and touch the eternal.

A legend from the Talmud illustrates how it is precisely in reaching out to our neighbor in self-giving love that we reach the eternal. A rabbi disappears from the synagogue for a few hours every Day of Atonement. One of his followers suspects that he is secretly meeting the Almighty and follows him. He watches as
the rabbi puts on coarse peasant clothes and cares for an invalid woman in a cottage, cleaning out her room and preparing food for her. The follower goes back to the synagogue. And when he is asked, "Did the rabbi ascend to heaven?" he replies, "If not higher."

The eternal is not something one attains in the beyond; it is the transcendent dimension that is immanent in what Martin Buber calls "real meeting." Buber observes, "God is present when I confront you, but if I look away from you, I ignore him. As long as I merely experience or use you I deny God, but when I encounter you, I encounter Him."

A ministry of presence allows the sacred to unfold in each of us and between us. A ministry of presence reminds us that God's revelation does not come to us in the discovery of specific knowledge about God's essence as much as it does in the unfolding of an ever-faithful Presence. In our being faithful to one another in the encounters of our lives, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us.

Yet, life is such that we are moved and touched by more people, relationships, and events than we have the time or energy to be responsive to. We must make the difficult choices that our finitude necessitates. Out of those choices emerges an overwhelming number of questions and concerns for theological reflection. It is precisely at those times when we feel most vulnerable, anxious, and in crisis—when our world and lives have been jolted in some major way—that faith and our own experience must be in dialogue. In pastoral counseling this is an ongoing process.

In a single week of ministry in the city I am asked to be responsive to countless individuals and to the concerns and questions their presence raises. In one such week I am awakened at 6:15 by a phone call from a mental patient at a local hospital who wants me to be her legal guardian to oversee her Social Security checks. I have never met this woman, but she heard me preach once and thinks I would be a person who cares. What do I owe this person? To say yes here means to say no elsewhere. Do I have the energy to make such a commitment? Are there other options that don't include me?

Three people die: a lonely, abandoned church member dies in
a home removed from the city; a middle-aged woman dies of cancer; a former counselee is assaulted and murdered, her naked body found on a street three blocks from the church. In the midst of death, so many questions. Did it have to end this way? What does a dying woman need most? What genuinely comforts those who grieve?

A man whose marriage ceremony I performed drops in to tell me that his son is gay. He is ashamed, bewildered, groping. I am the first one besides his wife with whom he has discussed this. What will enable this man to love and accept his son? Will he learn to accept himself as a father of a gay son? What is it that really bothers him about his son’s being gay?

I make four visits to four different hospitals and see a seventy-six-year-old woman recovering from heart surgery, a man dying of cancer, a woman who has just been told that her only child has two months to live, and the new mother of a nine-pound, thirteen-ounce baby boy. Sickness and health, death and birth, joy and sorrow—these are all part of God’s creation. How do we claim the wholeness of life without seeking only to hold on to a part? How do we respond to unanswerable questions like that of the mother who asked, “Why my daughter and not me?”

That same week there are appointments for marriage counseling with six people whose lives are shaky and uncertain. They are questioning the commitment they once made. Feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, fear, and desperation arise in these painful encounters. There are profound feelings of loss and sadness. Where is there hope for these individuals or for their marriages? What would wholeness mean for them? Does human finitude make some distances too great to bridge?

There is counseling with a young woman who is bored with life and her work. She is so isolated that her only conversational contact outside her work is our regularly scheduled hour. What has locked this person inside herself? What does, or could, the church mean for her?

Seven walk-ins off the street ask for money for food, shelter, and transportation. How much time will I give to each of these people? Why will I say yes to one and no to another? If I say no,
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have I sensed his or her real need and tried to address it? Can I forgive myself when my strength is spent and I'm too tired to really care?

I walk down Powell Street for a lunch appointment and see a paraplegic, a young man playing a guitar with arms that have only stubs for hands, a beggar with a harmonica and a tin cup, a man without legs on a skateboard, a very young prostitute covered with makeup, a screaming man whose experience is imperceptible to people around him. The despair of the city takes hold of me. How do I let the suffering in without letting it overwhelm me or harden my heart against it? How do I, will I, respond to these and others?

Our lives are never more profoundly touched or inalterably changed than at the place of suffering. It is an experience we cannot escape. Yet often we attempt to turn our eyes away from rather than toward other people's suffering.

Women, perhaps because of biological necessity, have come to accept pain more easily than men. Childbirth teaches us that we must go with the pain and not resist it. If we resist, we cut off the life that is trying to be born. We must help people do the same thing with spiritual pain. Helping people hear and listen to the inner cry is often the beginning of their spiritual journey. We do not aid them by helping them flee from their pain, but by offering a presence that allows them to listen to their pain so that something new may be born. Not only is our more ready acceptance of pain a part of our identity as women, it is integral to our identity as followers of Christ.

From the cross Jesus turns to his mother and beloved disciple and says: "Woman, behold your son!" And to the beloved disciple he says, "Behold your mother!" Jesus does not tell them or us to go away from the cross but to "behold." Behold the one sitting, standing, living in your midst. To behold the feelings, the condition, and circumstances of another is to transcend the boundaries of the self and to take in the reality of another.

In an interview for the British Broadcasting Company, a woman who was dying of cancer made an astonishing observation about Jesus and his mother at the cross. The
interviewer, a clergyman, confessed that when he is faced with his own death he would like to go away to some secret place so his wife and children will be spared the heartache of seeing him "go a bit peculiar in the head or go in coma, and all this sort of stuff." The woman, from the depth of her pain yet sustained by her faith, made this reply: "Our Lord carried his cross to Calvary and his mother followed him. And she was the sort of mother who would stand at the foot of the cross when her son was crucified. And he was the sort of son who would let her. And what more perfect love, and what more perfect understanding could there be than that? Can't you let us do the same? Can't we love each other in that way—in him?"

Mary and the beloved disciple stand in the shadow of the cross, dazed, bewildered, stunned, enduring the agony of the one they love. Jesus, knowing that their eyes are transfixed on him and his suffering, transforms their pain in a new awareness.

"Behold!" The imperative he gives us is to see, to gaze upon, to hold in one's sight, to keep one's attention on the other. In speaking he summons the mourners to call forth the relational resources in their midst. The beloved disciple and Mary now see not simply the agony of the crucified one but the sorrow of each other. What they cannot do for Jesus, nor Jesus for them, they can do for one another.

It is never our task as pastors to assure others that all will be well. Rather, it is to give them the confidence that we will be with them and stand by them in the midst of their struggles and uncertainties. Our task as clergywomen is not to turn our eyes away from suffering but to help people find ways to move through it, transforming it into new awareness and new possibility. It is in faithful presence, our standing with them, that they may first find the courage to face what is so they can feel empowered to move to what might be.

A person is born into community. Human existence is designed to be lived, at least in part, with and for people. There is no such thing as a self alone, only a self in the world. Paul Tillich in *The Courage to Be* speaks of how the identity of participation is an identity in the power of being. It is not merely a matter of having the courage to be as oneself but the courage to
be a participant. "Only in the continuous encounter with other persons does the person become and remain a person. The place of this encounter is community."

A person in counseling may begin on the fringes of community, but that person must be regarded as a communal, and not just a solitary, being. As pastoral counselors, we need to foster those aspects of the person which are actualized within community or in relations with others. We most often help people deal with questions of relationships in their lives, so we must aid them not only in the inner struggle but in their external life as well.

Women today have found new strength and hope in their solidarity with other women and in the communal nature of their struggle. They know the healing effect of community. This consciousness is a gift that can be lifted up in an important way in the context of pastoral counseling and care in a church.

Women, who have a primary identity as relational selves, are in a place to draw upon the community as one resource in healing. Classes, small groups, social gatherings, and meetings all can be occasions for healing. The healing resources that lie within a church provide the pastoral counselor with a unique asset.

One very isolated and fearful woman who was in counseling with me began to attend church and participate in some of its functions. She said to me, "This is the only place I have experienced such unreserved acceptance." A man with real talents but very isolated came to find meaningful relationships and a sense of purpose as a member of one of the church boards. Another man, who was going through a divorce, was able to find a community where his new identity as a single male could be accepted and where new friends could be found. In a downtown church, where loneliness is one of people's predominant concerns, there is no substitute for the healing that comes from a sense of belonging. The church is a place where people minister to one another. The Holy Spirit and the gracious healing of God may happen "in the between" anywhere in the life of the church.

A ministry of presence requires a patient waiting, an attentive attitude, and total receptivity. We have to know that the soul
seeking wholeness has its own time, its own period of gestation. Just as nine months of pregnancy cannot be rushed, neither can the time it takes a human being to grow or heal. Our counseling must be done prayerfully, allowing and trusting that God’s healing presence will be there. As we let go of our need to cure, God may use our caring.

Trying to assess the unique gifts women bring to the role of pastoral counselor is not easy, because generalizations always cloud the larger truth. In this case it is made more difficult by the fact that many men who are attracted to ministry have developed or possess qualities that often are labeled as gifts of the feminine.

Initially, congregations may be reluctant to accept women in the pulpit, but I have found that individual members find few difficulties in going to a woman for pastoral counseling. Perhaps this is because traditionally authority has been more readily bestowed on women in the private spheres of life than in the public arenas. Only recently has this situation begun to change significantly. (Ultimately, our authority as women or men in ministry has its source in our vocation as servants of Jesus Christ. It is God who grants us authority when we are open to such leading. As Daniel Day Williams observed, “The crisis of authority is the crisis of faith itself.”)

We must trust continually that what we are able to do and be comes only through our receptivity to God’s leading.)

A part of every clergywoman’s journey, I would venture to say, has included much self-reflection and self-assessment. Too many questions have been raised along the way for such women not to have done some in-depth self-examination. Any good counselor needs to have a high sense of self-awareness and to have undertaken the same intensity of self-exploration that she asks of others. The effects of the women’s movement have been such that women struggle with their past, present, and future in an intense and wholehearted way, privately, in therapy, and in groups. Questions of identity, self-confidence, meaningless-ness, purposefulness, work relationships, loss, despair, and religious concerns have all catapulted women from a lack of self-awareness to an incredible new self-consciousness. This
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experience has been and is a rich asset to women involved in pastoral counseling. They know that they share in the same struggles and predicaments as others. This is not intellectual acknowledgment; it is the assent of experience.

Because most women have been raised to be relationally oriented, they have, perhaps, less need or desire to give in to what I call “the professionalization of relationship.” Frequently people find their place of greatest intimacy in a weekly appointment with a psychiatrist or psychologist. I do not deny the need for these professionals, but too often too much of too many lives is relegated to the isolation of an office. As a result, our most intimate relationships have become professionalized. The parish, by its very nature, has a built-in resistance to the professionalization of relationship. More often than not a relationship between a minister and a parishioner exists before a counseling situation. Trust has often been established beforehand, a trust tied to the kind of person one is as a minister.

I am not known to my counselees simply as a counselor or therapist, nor they to me simply as counselees. Belonging to the same church community makes our relationship multifaceted. In one week, we may worship together, work on the same committee, socialize at a party, and mourn the loss of a common friend. I am likely to know the significant people in their lives. Trust is enabled when people sense that you know them as a whole people. You see them not only at their pained places of existence, but in many settings and in many interactions.

It is also the case within the Christian community that if a relationship lacks reciprocity, it appears artificial. This does not mean it is necessary or even wise in a counseling situation to share frequently from my own life experience, but it does mean that I am open and sensitive to what is most fitting and growth-producing for the counselee. There is a desire to eliminate boundaries between theory and life.

Clergywomen may have an advantage in one important respect: Often we are the first woman minister a person has met, so we may carry fewer stereotypes with us. Frequent
comments are: "You sure aren't like all the ministers I have known"; "You don't look like a minister"; "You're a different kind of minister." Freedom from stereotyped images tends to elicit responses that people might be more reluctant to share elsewhere, and gives us the opportunity to shape the encounter as we see necessary. On the other hand, others may be inhibited until trust is built.

For many women a woman in a nontraditional woman's role as a counselor is a helpful and an encouraging model. Through you they begin to dialogue with unacknowledged or newly awakened parts of themselves. As a clergywoman, I often think of myself in the role of midwife, one who does not create something new but stands patiently by, helping the other give birth to newfound parts of herself or himself.

By their very presence in ministry, women open up questions of vulnerability for those in the congregation. The unexpected, unanticipated opens up queries not previously addressed with the same intensity. Seeing women in a role that has traditionally been viewed as male raises questions about many assumptions, attitudes, and presuppositions upon which people have built their lives and sometimes even their faith. Women's tendency to be more vulnerable than men also readily opens the places of hurt and sensitivity in other person's lives. This is often scary, for with increased vulnerability comes the fear of a loss of control and image. Though it is frightening, our ability to be vulnerable with one another is essential to loving relationships. I am reminded of the Jewish story about the enthusiastic disciple who told his rabbi that he loved him. The rabbi asked "Do you know what hurts me?" When the disciple said, "No," the rabbi replied, "If you do not know what hurts me, how can you say you love me?"

Several women have sought me out specifically because I am a woman. For many women the male pastor often has been an intimidating presence and one with whom they feel they have to protect their image. Some find more permission to be vulnerable with a woman. Struggles with sexuality and mothering are raised with less self-consciousness and without as much fear of loss of self-esteem. Could it be that clergywomen do not carry the stereotype of the judgmental pastor?
My identity as a feminist and my identity as a Christian clergywoman do not conflict; each creatively informs the other. Part of pastoral counseling is consciousness-raising: We need to help the counselee reflect on what is happening. Where am I? Where do I want to go? We need to be particularly careful that we are not simply helping the other person adjust to current cultural expectations. Our own experience has increased our sensitivity to how we all suffer unnecessarily. As Henri Nouwen has written, "One of our tasks as ministers is to help people from suffering for the wrong reasons."

Being a woman also can be helpful in marriage counseling. Often it is the wife who insists on seeing a woman counselor, and the man comes along with the feeling that it is going to be "two against one." Many couples I have worked with are in very painful struggles of changing self-awareness and role expectation. Stagnation has caused the relationship to deteriorate to a function and role orientation ("I'll do this if you do that"), and couples seek a key to greater intimacy. Cataclysmic changes taking place in the woman's life often throw the relationship out of balance. Women's changing self-perceptions have had a powerful effect on relationships. Some women who married with the hope that they would be taken care of are now expressing a need to be seen as whole women, not as indulged children. As women grow stronger, with a greater sense of self, much of what has been taken for granted in a relationship gets called into question.

On the whole, I find young men, more than young women, to be unsure of themselves. Men feel threatened in what they perceive as their masculine role because they frequently see women as rivals rather than partners. They have been raised to be competitive, but not with their wives and lovers. Young women, on the other hand, are standing in newfound places of recognition and status. They continue to be wives and mothers, yet they are successful in a "man's world" as well. Often they fail to see how uncertain and precarious men feel and how they need to be affirmed.

In the struggle for more depth, communication, understanding, and acceptance in the marriage relationship, men, I believe,
find it very helpful to know that I am "for them." To know that I am able to see their side and to feel their loss and vulnerability decreases the sense of polarization and feeling of "over-againstness" at a critical time in their lives. Support from a woman who is for both partners in marriage offers hope.

It is important to state that clergywomen can be as important an influence in men's lives as in women's. I am a minister not simply for women; I care with the same intensity about the well-being of men. For many men it is less threatening to be vulnerable with a woman than with a man; they do not feel the need to protect an image they may need to project elsewhere. Often they find it easier to be in touch with their anger. In some respects it is easier for men to direct anger toward a woman; unfortunately, however, this is often because they feel more entitled. Women in positions of authority and responsibility will inevitably experience some projection of men's unworked-through attitudes and relationships with women.

Beyond the special possibilities open to clergywomen in pastoral counseling, however, there are also special temptations.

Women's upbringing has most often included the much-needed qualities of good counseling: nurturing, supportive, accepting, nonjudgmental ways of interacting. For many counselees there is an increased feeling of safeness simply because the counselor is a woman. This can undermine the enabling relationship if we are not aware of it.

The safety a counselee might initially feel with you because you are a woman can potentially undermine growth in the relationship. Although the initial building of rapport may be eased, the inherent hazard is the temptation to get stuck in compassion without being able to move to confrontation and objectivity. We must take our role and presence seriously ourselves as well as asking to be taken seriously.

We must not fall into the easy role of simply being a "hurtsoother." My office is not a place to dump hurt and negative feelings while I sit listening passively and finally apply a Band-Aid. I am there not simply to share in the pain but also to affirm the other as he or she struggles. My vocation as a
Christian minister is not to treat my counselees as children but to assist them in the kind of growth that leads toward greater wholeness and responsibility.

I must avoid the temptation to be shaped into what they think they need from me. Women have succumbed to this temptation in many different ways, with detriment to themselves and others.

The church remains an easy target for projection and a paradigm for unresolved and conflicted parental relationships. It is also too easy, and at times self-satisfying, for the minister to play the surrogate parent. We must resist the temptation to play “supermother” by inappropriately taking on the role of parent for another person. That is not to say that the nurturing parent is not sometimes needed, but we must not let ourselves become a substitute for a relationship that needs to be reworked somewhere else. And we must never “parent” in such a way as to interfere with the growth of another. To allow ourselves to assume the parental role helps others to evade their responsibility.

A temptation women who are mothers know only too well is to want to hold on when it is time to let go. As the other person grows, so must I. I need to accept and even demonstrate the possibility of a change in relationship. There needs to be the sensitivity to know when it is time to withdraw. A model for this can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of Tsimtsum: “God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. God filled the universe with his being. How then could the creation come about? God had to create by withdrawal. God created the not Him, the other, by self-concentration. On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being.”

The letting go happens as we make space for the reality of another to unfold and as we become increasingly sensitive to the time when we are not needed. The pastor, because of her multifaceted relationships with the congregation, has the challenging opportunity to let the relationship take new form and shape. As the other matures, so must the nature of the relationship.

One temptation that I believe women are particularly prone to
is over-accessibility. People feel less reluctance in calling upon a woman than a man when anything—major or minor—is on their minds. They also seem to feel little hesitation in raising the trivial and inconsequential. The sense people carry for women as the maternal presence, receptive and inviting, often leaves us feeling used and abused, with minimum time for ourselves. Women traditionally have lived to satisfy the needs of others. If this is done at the expense of self-nurturing, the nurturing mother becomes depleted sooner or later.

Because people find it relatively easy and unthreatening to ask something of a woman, we must learn the necessity of sometimes saying no. Without a no there cannot be a genuine yes. Without the no, we lose all sense of boundaries, as well as the humility necessary to know that we cannot be all things to all people. Without learning to say no, and even at times making ourselves unavailable, we risk resenting others who ask for our time and attention. Experience continually teaches me that when we meet our own deepest needs, we are also more inclined to serve others' real needs.

Closely tied to this is the temptation of overgiving, well known as the mother's suffocating love. Giving without boundaries or discrimination can stifle or cripple others in development. It also leaves them feeling an unfair burden of indebtedness. Giving what is not needed chokes and kills and may lead to infantile behavior rather than maturity. To love another means to know the need and to give proportionately. Sometimes we overgive when we get caught in the trap of thinking that it is we who heal, rather than God. No matter how loving, understanding, or skillful we may be, God does not always work through us in the ways we might hope.

Finally, and understandably, there is the temptation to take on the male value system, structures, and ways of doing ministry by not trusting our own perceptions and experiences or following our intuitions. One issue men struggle with, and one which women are coming to terms with, is seeing ministry as primarily something we do rather than a manner of being—being in relationship to others in all we do. To get caught in overactivity, mental or physical, interferes with depth relation-
ships with God and other people. When our work becomes primary, we have lost our calling as women and ministers of the gospel. Whenever women take on the role of minister and define their work by their function, loss of full human identity will occur. We must remember that our vocation has a face and a humanity; we must not think of ourselves as simply professionals performing a role. Although our identity is as workers, our task is relationship.

There is a need for women to model a kind of relationship that influences the whole quality of interactions within a parish. I am convinced that congregations are diminished by hierarchical structures. One goal of Christian feminists is to develop and work in less hierarchical structures. We murder people's relational capacity if the critical and depth relationships are seen as only between clergy and congregation, or if the clergy's primary concern is with vertical versus horizontal relationships. We need a relational perspective to influence the very church structures that often interfere or hinder relationships built on mutuality, reciprocity, and equality. We need to create structures within community that really allow for dialogue. We are programmed to death but have a blindness to relationship in too many areas of church life.

 Ultimately, it is not any one function that will reveal our identity and our calling as clergywomen, but our capacity for strengthening loving and humanizing relationships. We must resist the temptation as clergywomen to be relegated to any one role or function. We must be seen in all arenas in the life of the congregation so that we and the congregation will have the opportunity to relate to one another on many levels, and so that we can facilitate a greater involvement and relatedness among the people in all facets of church life. Each arena of ministry—be it preaching, teaching, administration, pastoral counseling, or care—is a place where we can reach out to others with a ministry of presence and help them to do the same for one another. We must avoid the danger of limiting the relational perspective we embody to any one aspect of church life. This perspective needs to be lifted up and celebrated, modeled and affirmed, respected and followed in the most public as well as the most private spheres of ministry.
NOTES

The following interpretations of epistle lectionary texts for the first four Sundays of Eastertide reflect my own engagement in the process of exegesis and appropriation. Interpretation is a dialogue between text and interpreter. The interpreter listens to the text to hear what is meant and what it says. The text projects meanings that the interpreter takes in or discards. For the concrete task of moving from text to sermon, various questions guide the listening and appropriating process. Although these questions may proceed in a sequential order for pragmatic purposes, listening and appropriating are confluent. They “flow together” as one dialogue with the text. You may find helpful the following questions to guide your own interpretation.

1. What are my initial impressions of the text?
2. What are some differences among various translations? Which translation shall I use and why?
3. What does the text say and what did it mean in its own context? Does its thought flow toward a particular intention? Does its form relate to that intention? Does the context illumine the intention? What is the text’s intention or purpose in its context?
4. What are the needs of my congregation and how does this text relate or not relate to it?
5. How do my professional and personal experiences relate to this text and the task of preaching this sermon?
6. What is the purpose and outline of my sermon? How does it relate to the text, the needs of the congregation, and myself?

In preparing these articles, I have written my interpretation.
Since this includes both exegetical and appropriational thinking, my writing is moving toward something like a new genre. It is not, strictly speaking, exegesis or exposition. The appropriations are developed in light of issues I perceive to be important and issues the church in general confronts. These are not sermon outlines, but rather it is my own dialogue with the texts with the hope that it will stimulate your own.

**EASTER SUNDAY**

*Lectures*

Exodus 14:10-14, 21-25; 15:20-21  
Colossians 3:1-11  
Matthew 28:1-10

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. (Col. 3:1-11 RSV)

"If you then have been raised with Christ” states the condition upon which the entire hortatory section of the letter (3:1-4:6) is based. In contrast to the present imperatives which follow (e.g., “seek” and “set your minds”), the text begins with a presupposition that the community has participated in the resurrection of Christ. The “if” is not “if perhaps” but “since” (NIV, JB). It is easy to miss or skip over this statement of
accomplished experience in light of the preponderance of positive (3:1-4) and negative (3:5-11) commands which follow (and continue throughout 3:12-4:6). Also, we might be more prepared and willing to explicate the morality of the Christian life, than to spell out the gospel that underlies and gives shape to that morality, especially when that gospel says that we have been raised already. Quite the contrary is Paul's mode in this letter. He regularly refers to the gospel as the reference point for his work and the Colossians' life (1:5-6, 23; 2:9 ff.; 3:15 ff.). Here as elsewhere in New Testament literature, grace is the presupposition of ethics. But what does that gift ("raised" is passive referring to God's working, as in 2:13) mean when it is expressed in terms of being raised with Christ?

The language "you have been raised with Christ" functions figuratively. These people did not literally die and come back to life. They "died" to a former way of life (e.g., "to the elemental spirits of the universe" and "regulations") even though they may still "live" in that way. That they were "made alive together with him" (2:13) refers to experiences of forgiveness, cancellation of the regulations, and disarming of the "principalities and powers" (2:15). Of course, the phrase "raised with Christ" is not just a figure of speech. It is a powerful symbol which illumines our vision so that we can recognize the reality of resurrection. We may see this reality take shape in persons opened up by new ideas so that they live life more adequately and richly, or in marriages that blossom after facing the death of divorce, or in a society that rises above racism and sexism to provide equal rights for all. Yet we do not need to speak of such renewing experiences as being "raised with Christ." They may just be renewing experiences. What makes the difference? The figurative function of the phrase in the text suggests one answer. But to hear that, we are directed to the larger context (as the "then" in 3:1 clearly indicates).

The locus of meaning of the phrase "raised with Christ" is the ritual and symbol system of the community of faith. The plural "you" in 3:1 points to the communal context. Specifically the community's burial (death) and resurrection with Christ takes place "in baptism" (2:12). This rite symbolizes the formation of
the community at Colossae. The experience of baptism celebrates their hearing of the gospel and the shift of allegiance and life style to Christ from "the elemental spirits of the universe." Baptism represents their deliverance from "the dominion of darkness" and transference to the "kingdom of his beloved Son" (1:13). This newly formed community of faithful subjects of the Lord of all (1:13-20) is being enticed by teaching which Paul considers destructive to the community. He polemizes against the false wisdom in 2:6-23, considering it the same as the religious experience to which they formerly died (2:20). His argument to preserve "the whole body" (2:18-19) is based upon the authority of received tradition (2:6-8) and the experience, symbolized in baptism, of being raised to form a new body.

The presupposition of 3:1-11, therefore, is the church's self-understanding as the community of faith "raised with Christ" by God's working. This presupposition can be embraced by individuals within the church whose "death to life" experiences make sense in light of the symbol of resurrection. In what ways, however, can congregations of the American church in general claim this self-understanding? To what extent have American churches experienced any kind of death from which to be "raised with Christ"? Similarly, can middle-class American churches that enjoy material success live out of the image of God as deliverer (1:13) which is also projected in the Exodus story (see Exod. 14:10 ff.)? God delivers the powerless and dispossessed, those oppressed by political and social "principalities and powers." For those of us who do not yet experience this kind of oppression, the symbol of resurrection and deliverance may function as a disturbing challenge or word of judgment. To buy into the text's presupposition that we are "raised with Christ" may require of us confession and repentance.

The formal challenge and intention of the text is expressed in present tense imperatives, "seek the things that are above" (3:1) and "set your minds on things that are above" (3:2). Participation in Christ's resurrection requires a radically new alignment of self-understanding, values, and behavior. At first glance this alignment toward "things that are above, where Christ is" may seem otherworldly and irrelevant or idealistic at best. In the
The text's logic, however, the spatial references to the heavenly world accent the community's true life-giving center of faith. The community affirms the powerful rule of Christ through whom God delivers the community from previous subjection to cosmic powers and oppressive regulations (2:12 ff.). The community's Christ-hymn in 1:15-20 expresses the shaping vision of its center of faith and the cosmic reconciliation and peace Christ creates in his death (1:19-20). This vision of shalom shapes the way the community sees and responds to itself and the world. It discards and affirms evidences of shalom in its life and in society (3:12 ff.). It sees and judges the lack of shalom in its life and in society (3:5 ff.). To appropriate this vision and embody it require confidence and freedom. These are provided by the vision itself, the vision of the Christ in whom "your life is hid" (3:3). Life is not kept by "the things that are on earth" which oppress (3:2). The community is free because it died to these (3:3). It is confident because it hopes in the manifestation of the vision (its "life") itself (3:4). Is this community and its vision ours? Can we claim freedom and confidence in order to live and bring about shalom in a society characterized by racial and sexist oppression, in a dichotomous world of rich and poor, humanity and nature? This text's spatial language does not call us to extract ourselves and create another dichotomy, church and world! Rather, the phrase "things that are above" directs our attention to the vision of shalom and a life of struggle until that vision is manifest in glory.

The exhortations which the text introduces in 3:5-10 delimit both negative ("put to death," "put away," "do not lie," "put off") and positive ("put on") aspects of the community's struggle toward the time of the vision's manifestation. The command "put to death . . . what is earthly in you" specifies five typical Hellenistic moral vices (3:5). These represent the rival center of faith, the opposite of "the things that are above." The label "idolatry" for "covetousness" functions to interpret the entire list. All occasion God's wrath (3:6). All are dismissed as the character of former loyalty and existence (3:7). Even though once discarded by the community, rival claims for allegiance entice with resilient charm. So do concomitant
behaviors which destroy community life. These are addressed in the next command, "now put them all away," specified with another typical list of five vices (3:8). The following "do not lie to one another" (3:9a) functions to interpret this list in terms of intramural communal relationships. The community's life struggle, therefore, includes faithfulness to God and responsibility to one another. The church "raised with Christ" clarifies its values and concerns in light of the shalom vision, and lives these values and concerns in its life together. The church, in effect, becomes a model community in the world, a leavening presence which has the capability of transforming the whole social order into a new creation of peace.

The last two commands, "put off . . . put on," are reminiscent of baptism and the formation of the community under Christ's rule. Discarding "the old person with its practices" reiterates the previous commands (3:5-9a) but shifts the imagery to accent the exchange of "persons" (anthrōpos, "nature"—RSV, NEB; "self"—NIV, JB). Taking on the new person of Christ involves the new community in a continual process of renewal: "Being constantly renewed in the image of its Creator and brought to know God" (3:10 NEB). The knowledge of God's will and working (1:9-10; 2:2 ff.) is the goal of renewal, the image of which creative and redemptive activity is Christ. "Christ is all, and in all" (3:11) gives an image of wholeness with contours of meaning which exclude racial, religious, political, social self-interests (as well as sexual, in Galatians 3:28). As the church lives out of this image, it cannot be only a model community, for it embodies the radical re-ordering energy of God. This working of God from death to life (2:12) continues to activate the new community into a newer one that lives beyond distinctions of minority and majority, evangelical and liberal, West and East, young and old, helpers and helped, poor and rich, humanity and nature. It is a community with a mission to allow that energy to transform itself and its society. To "put on" this energy or to be "turned on" by it is the text's challenge to us. It calls us into a mission that seeks to transform society in light of the vision of shalom.
3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his
great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and to an inheritance
which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for
you, 5 who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation
ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now
for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, 7 so that the
genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though
perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor
at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Without having seen him you love
him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice
with unutterable and exalted joy. 9 As the outcome of your faith you
obtain the salvation of your souls (I Peter 1:3-9 RSV).

This text strikes me as something alien to my own experience.
The heavy style seems laborious, convoluted, and diffuse. It
dulls the lure of otherwise vibrant words such as “anew,”
“living hope,” “resurrection,” “rejoice,” and “joy.” Also the
center distances and perhaps alienates me. The text values
heavenly (1:4) and future (1:5, 7, 9) realities. Is this escapism
from the “now” which is given significance only in relation to
the future? What about my present relationships—work,
running, new house, the symphony, church activities, playing
with the children? My present and future are all wrapped into
one now. In this text, I also resist the moralistic notion that
suffering various trials demonstrates genuineness of faith
(1:6-7.). I prefer Job’s wrestling with this issue. In this beginning
dialogue with the text, I sense that I have been caught reading
somebody else’s mail. I discover that I am exiled from the text,
rather than being one of the exiles to whom it is written (1:1).
How then can this text shed light on my personal and corporate
experiences? I suspect that I shall need to listen to it rather
attentively.
The limits of the text are determined for the lectionary. Clearly the blessing formula ("Blessed be the God . . .") in 1:3 distinguishes itself in form and content from the preceding salutation with which this letter begins (1:1-2). The blessing initiates the body of the letter (as also in Ephesians 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 1:3). It is not evident, however, that verse 9 concludes the sense unit. Verse 10 elaborates "this salvation" which was mentioned in 1:5 and 1:9. This connection is clear in the NEB, which includes 1:8-12 in a single paragraph (compare also NIV and JB, which follow the Greek word order in 1:10 more closely than RSV). Verse 12 more naturally concludes the section, since it continues the discussion of the prophets, and "therefore gird up your minds" in 1:13 begins an exhortation characterized by imperatives. The sense unit should be 1:3-12, integrally linked with what follows by "therefore" (1:13). The sense unit, therefore, lays theological groundwork for the ethical exhortation which follows.

The first section of the text (1:3-5) begins with a traditional liturgical formulation to express shared ("our," "we") praise of God. The content following the blessing suggests that some of the text's material is derived from a baptismal liturgy (see also 1:23; 3:21 ff.). A reason follows the blessing, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth" (NIV; see also NEB and JB—all three properly translate the active verb which controls the thought of this section). God is blessed for past activity in forming the people. "To a living hope" states the purpose of God's activity, and "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" the means. This connection of "resurrection" to "new birth" to "living hope" begins to establish a constellation of images, constructing a world of meaning which the letter offers to the readers.

Verses 4-5 elaborate ("and to") the purpose of the new birth in terms of "an inheritance" which is portrayed with three appositional phrases. It is eternal ("imperishable, undefiled, and unfading"), presently "kept in heaven," and a future "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The world or order of existence pictured here suggests a contrast, which elsewhere in the letter is characterized as perishable (1:18, 23), "in the flesh" (1:24 and other places), and "now" (1:6, 8). When
the blessing formula shifts to address the readers in 1:4 ("you" plural), they are reminded that they are newborn heirs of the eternal order. Their inheritance is not a geographical space subject to devastation, moral decay, and annihilation. Their inheritance is the "home" from which they are dispersed and to which they sojourn (1:1-2).

This sojourn to and in the alternate world of existence is a struggle. The first allusion to this struggle and their situation of suffering is in the phrase "guarded" (NEB—"under the protection" and NIV—"shielded") "by God's power" (1:5). This divine protective power, however, functions "through faith" (not "because of faith" NEB) in synergistic fashion. Through faith, therefore, the realm to be inherited by the newly born people begins to take shape in the "now." The power of God guards through their faith. Likewise resurrection/life that characterizes the inherited realm is also present in the "living hope" (1:3). This paradoxical understanding of the inheritance (here but not here) discloses itself more forcefully in the next section.

In the text's second major section (1:6-9), the writer directly addresses the readers, "you rejoice." This describes the style of existence which is based upon the content of the preceding blessing ("in this"). Their joyful style contrasts sharply with their present circumstance of suffering. The phrase "various trials" points to an array of situations mentioned throughout the letter: abuse (4:4, 12 ff.; compare 2:19 ff.; 3:14 ff.), "the fiery ordeal" (4:12), the war waged by "passions" (1:14; 2:11; 4:2), the devil's prowling (5:8), or their total experience as "exiles of the dispersion" (1:1; 2:11) and "aliens" (1:17; 2:11). Whatever the particulars of these situations, it is clear that the people were oppressed and alienated. The central concern of the entire letter is to interpret and cope with the people's oppression (2:11, 19 passim). The interpretation which occasions their joy is based on the affirmation that the people were newly born for an inheritance other than suffering. They live in hope and faith that when the glory of that inheritance is manifest, their situation will finally be reversed (e.g., 1:5, 9). Since this salvation is "ready", the writer can further interpret that the suffering is "now for a little while" (1:6; see also 4:7). Moreover, suffering is
not unrelated to God’s purpose (“you may have to” or “it has to be”). As explained in 1:7, the purposiveness (“so that”) of suffering is its test of faith’s genuineness. The analogy of determining the genuineness of gold “by fire” argues from the lesser to the greater. There is an ultimacy or imperishable quality of faith’s test. Gold perishes. Faith when proven genuine occasions “praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). This is not praise for moral virtue. The time of revelation is the time of judgment, when those who are proven will receive a decision of “grace” (1:13) instead of condemnation. At that time the trial of the faithful is reversed (4:13; 5:1, 10).

Verses 8 and 9 portray the character of faith’s genuineness and relate this to the paradoxical nature of joy which such faith occasions. In two contrasting statements, loving and believing Jesus Christ are set opposite not “now” seeing him. They do not see him, because he is now in heaven (3:22). Faith, like love, is a human capacity not based on observation. This capacity is evoked by the preaching of the gospel (1:10-12 introduce and amplify this point; see also 1:25; 4:6) and the people’s experience of new birth (1:3, 23; 3:21). Moreover, through this capacity God guards the newborn people until their salvation is revealed (1:5).

Just as the experience of new birth and divine protection through faith are cited as the basis for rejoicing in 1:6, so in 1:8 genuine faith (not based on seeing) is a presupposition for joy. This joy is paradoxical. It is a present mode, but “inexpressible and glorious” (NIV), because it derives its gusto from the future time when Christ’s “glory” is revealed (1:11; 4:13 passim). Yet this “glory” is also present (1:21; 4:14).

The final clause (1:9) provides the reason for the joy and further accent the paradox, “for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (NIV). Previously (1:5) and subsequently (2:2), “salvation” is futuristic. Here it is being received (see also 3:21). This could be a rhetorical reference to the future as already present. It is more probable that the paradox is intentional. As “sojourners and aliens” the people are in the world but not of it. They live with the joy that belongs to those whose ill fortunes are reversed in the end time. But they are reminded in 1:3 ff. that they have already been born into that end time. They “are receiving the outcome [telos]” (1:9) and are
told that the "end [telos] is at hand" (4:7). They are being "guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5) while receiving that salvation, the goal of their faith (1:9).

The text intends, therefore, to remind the readers of their paradoxical state of existence. The joy they now have belongs to the end time. The salvation they anticipate is now being received. The faith through which God guards them now will, if proven genuine, be the basis for their participation in glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. They are already born into the new order of their inheritance, but experience the sufferings of the old. Even though they may experience the ambiguities of this paradoxical state, they rejoice because they know themselves to be "sojourners of the dispersion" and "aliens" on the way to a glorious place in which they already live. How they are to live constitutes the major portion of the entire letter which 1:3-9 introduces.

How might this text illumine our experience today? The following suggestions emerged out of my own dialogue with the text.

1. The language of the text is powerful. It both hides and discloses meaning to the reader. Actually its forcefulness depends to a large extent upon the situation of the reader. My exegesis indicates that this is an "in" language or ghetto vocabulary of a specific alienated people. It constructs a symbolic world of meaning which enables them to live with hope in the midst of suffering. Yet because it is an "in" language peculiar to those addressed, one needs to exercise caution in assuming a direct line of application for today.

2. The text's intention might move in several directions in today's churches. In 1 Peter the people are reminded of their birth into a new order of existence. This gives them identity and purpose while they continue to live in the old order which oppresses and alienates. Individuals and societies who know this world is not their home may readily identify with this good news of new birth. Will they, however, see that the text directs the people to acknowledge, interpret, and cope with suffering in terms of its benefit for them? Individuals and societies who
know this world is their home may find the text abrasive. It witnesses to God's activity in establishing an order of existence that is not identified with a specific culture, institution, or place (not even the pluralism of United Methodism). In that sense, we are all sojourners. Will they, however, seek to discover the values of this new order which transform human lives and societies from situations of suffering to joy?

3. The image of new birth in this text directs us to think about Christian existence in communal and revolutionary pictures. To be born anew refers to the formation of a people and not to individualized experiences. The narcissism of our culture may shape our perception so that we read new birth vocabulary as "born again," meaning a privatized religious experience. Today "born again" sometimes functions as a slogan for security or position of privilege. In the text, new birth involves the faithful people in the struggle of God's revolution to reverse the circumstances of oppressed and oppressors.

4. How the text deals with the issue of suffering is in itself paradigmatic. Despite the language of newness, it draws upon traditional language. A standard blessing, allusions to baptism, ancient images such as inheritance, common religious words such as salvation—all function to construct a meaningful world for the alienated. Even the concept that suffering is a testing of faith is traditional (e.g., Wisdom 3:5 ff.). People learn who they are and what they're about through rituals, symbols, and stories. Tradition is both a vital process and a revitalizing force. It provides a history and the seeds for renewal of that history. This doesn't suggest that we become traditionalists. It does question attempts to be innovative that ignore and deny the power of tradition to renew our understanding of ourselves as the people of God in but not of the world.

5. Finally, this text helps us to see and appreciate the common human experience of ambiguity. We may not see such experiences as paradoxes, but most of us feel the uneasiness that ambiguity creates (e.g., in decision-making). In this text, the new birth does not eliminate ambiguity. Although it projects an image of a realm of existence beyond paradox, for the present paradox and the accompanying ambiguities a faithful people confront are not pictured as alien to God's purposes.
17 And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. 21 Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (I Peter 1:17-23 RSV).

Taking away the lectionary frame of Isaiah and Luke, this text requires identification of the literary frame in which it sits. The “and” connects it with the preceding material which, beginning at 1:13 with “therefore,” contains a series of imperatives. The letter’s salutation (1:1-2) and opening blessing (1:3-12) introduce these general exhortations (1:13-2:10), which in turn are followed by specific exhortations (2:11-5:11) and the letter’s conclusion (5:12-14).

The general exhortations of 1:13-2:10 begin with three commands in 1:13. After two stock commands (“gird up your minds, be sober”), “set your hope . . .” builds on themes already presented in 1:3-12 (hope and revelation). The address, “as obedient children” in 1:14 starts a flow of covenantal commands and teaching which continues to 2:10. The series deals with covenantal (1) holiness or loyalty (1:14-16) and awesome conduct (1:17-21) and (2) communal love, including teaching on the people’s self-understanding (1:22-2:10).

The lection choice of 1:17-23 for a sense unit is undoubtedly
artificial, presumably shaped by the redemption portraits in Isaiah and Luke. Grammatically and conceptually 1:17 is linked with 1:14-16. The conceptual link includes references to father, children, former ignorance, and conduct. Also, 1:24-25 round out 1:23 with the clarifying scriptural quotation (linked with "for"). The citation of Isaiah 40:6-9 explicates "living and abiding word of God" and sets up the identification of this word as the gospel in 1:25. Moreover, the idea of "born anew" in 1:23 is picked up and extended in 2:1 ff.

Why this concern for setting the limits of the unit? We see through frames of reference. Images, concepts, feelings, experiences, shape how we see. And how we see is just as important as what we see. Meaning exists and emerges in the interaction of the two. Let's see, then, how the hortatory framework presents the text to us.

After the address in 1:14, the first command to "be holy yourselves in all your conduct" antithetically relates to the admonition "do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." "Ignorance" is shorthand for pre-Christian existence (e.g., Acts 3:17; 17:30; Eph. 4:18) from which they have been converted. The holiness command is based on the holiness of God who "called" them (see also 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10, and their status as chosen in 1:1; 2:9), and on the quotation of Leviticus 11:44-45. God's holiness evokes fidelity and corresponding conduct, the fundamental structure of covenant between God and obedient children.

This covenant structure is amplified in 1:17-21. The command "conduct yourselves with fear" is concretely tied to their life situation, "throughout the time (chronos) of your exile" (1:17; compare 1:1; 2:1). This is the chronological time between Christ's manifestation and his revelation "in the last time (kairos)" (1:5; 4:2-3). Identifying the merciful Father (1:2, 3) with the impartial judge (1:17) conditions the imperative for awesome accountability. Invoking the name Father (as in the Lord's prayer) does not guarantee one's salvation. Individuals among the obedient children are judged according to their work (1:17; 2:12). God's judgment begins with "the household of God" (4:17). Their chosenness means responsibility and accountability. However, the reason following the command stresses God's
redemptive action (1:18-21) rather than power as a judge. The people are reminded of their conversion, interpreted here as a “ransoming” from their conventional “futile ways” (see also 4:3 and Acts 14:15).

The following antithetical clauses specify the means of redemption, “not with perishable . . . but with the precious blood” (1:18-19). The cost of the means is indicated; God ransoms with precious blood and not with perishable money. Here traditional language is not unpacked for its interpretive value about atonement. Rather, hymnic or creedal phrases amplify the significance of Christ. He was “destined” before creation and “made manifest at the end of the times” (1:20). This refers to the end of chronological time (chronos), hence referring to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The result of this manifestation “for your sake” is “confidence in God” and “faith and hope . . . in God” (1:21). Christ’s blood, therefore, particularizes God’s redemptive power which extends from beyond creation to beyond the end of times. Such power distilled in Christ’s blood signifies the costliness and effectiveness of God’s ransom. Hence the motivation for the command to awesome conduct is based on God’s extensive power to judge and redeem, and the accessibility of this power in Christ’s blood and the invocation of God as Father.

Whereas the preceding commands deal with covenant loyalty and conduct between God and the new people, the commands in 1:22 ff. emphasize the communal life appropriate to the newly born. The command “love one another earnestly from the heart” (1:22b) is introduced with a reason (1:22a) which is elaborated after the command (1:23-25). The love command here narrows the scope to “one another” which continues throughout the letter (2:17; 3:8 et passim). Its importance is noted with “earnestly from the heart.” The initial reason for the command is again their conversion. Different metaphors previously noted the circumstance (“having purified your souls”) and the means (“by your obedience to the truth”) of conversion (1:14, 22). The converts’ purpose is “sincere love of the brethren.” “Brethren” refers to the believing community and not to all humanity. The exiles’ survival and purpose depend upon their solidarity in love, and upon the truth which they obey. Verses 23-25 expand
this latter point. The reminder "you have been born anew" continues the thought of 1:14, 18, and 22, conversion and its basis. With homiletical playfulness, contrasting statements center on the life-giving "seed" (sic) which is "imperishable" (1:23). This seed is God's "living and abiding word," which as Isaiah 40:6-9 reminded past and present exiles, lasts beyond the transitoriness of humanity and the rest of nature (1:24-25a). But this "word" is what was preached to them, the truth to which they are obedient, and the seed which caused them to be born anew. This people belong to that same imperishable realm which exists now in their love for one another but also waits to be revealed in the last time.

First Peter 1:17-21 intends to exhort the newly formed people with commands to awesome conduct and communal love. This is part of a larger exhortation (1:13-2:10) which formulates an ethic of grace for the covenant people. A possible summary of our text is: "Love the brotherhood. Fear God" (2:17). This does not, however, show the elaborate reasoning which anchors these commands in God's holiness, particularized cosmic redemptive action, and life-giving word. A commanding array of theological images frames the commands with an ultimate sense of freedom and responsibility.

In this dialogue I have chosen to respond to two frames of the text. What are some implications?

1. Appropriation of this text depends on the frame of reference in which it is read. The lectionary evokes response to the image of redemption. The letter itself evokes response to the covenant commands. Mixing the two may evoke yet another response. For me, meaning resides in and emerges from the dialogue and interaction. It's always on the move. Also, let's not forget the frame of reference we bring to the text.

2. The weight of theological thinking in I Peter 1:17 ff. impresses me. Peoplehood, ethics, authority, and the work of Christ are all grounded in God. The text sees God's activity as freeing, demanding, creating community, evoking confidence. If we speak with such forcefulness today, we need to be as expansive, positive, and imaginative as this text.

3. The text intends to exhort, but within the context of theological reasoning. We also need to exhort ourselves about
responsible behavior and love to one another in the church. What we say, however, will be shaped by our particular situation and our theological images. Images of God shape the way we see and respond to the world. Perhaps one gift of this text is the directive to think theologically about our exhortations before we speak.

4. The text reiterates the newness of this people who left their former ways in response to God’s call, as redemption and “birthing” action. Such turnings do not happen frequently. They are major events. The text does not discuss repeated repentance, but recognizes the initial commitments which involve shifts of value systems. It suggests that we need to examine the values which shape our lives together as God’s people. This may require a self-imposed admonition: “Do not be conformed” to American culture or to a special brand of Christianity. According to our text, neither can claim ultimacy. The text directs our attention also to those events which generate and regenerate us as God’s people. We do not necessarily return to these events, as if in retreat. Rather, as in the text, they provide a foundation, a point of departure, a reminder of what it means to be God’s people.

5. The text depicts new life as communal. God’s seed begets a people and not isolated individuals. The people take shape through common allegiance to one center of faith, God who judges, creates, redeems. The people’s life together reflects the character of God. Unfortunately the text seems to work against its communal emphasis in two ways. It sets up a dichotomy between the exiles and the rest, although acknowledging responsibilities of the exiles toward the rest (2:11 ff.). Also its exclusive language (e.g., “Father,” “brethren”) sets limits which otherwise are stretched (e.g., “holy,” “love,” “imperishable,” “living and abiding”). One of the text’s mandates is to create covenant communal life. To do this today, we may need to speak a word of admonition to the text about “futile ways” and forge communal self-understandings and practices which are effective in our contemporary world.

6. Finally, despite the parochial tone of the text’s language (e.g., scriptural citations, liturgical-creedal pieces, jargon), it is also universal. Holiness, awe, love, faith, and hope represent
19 For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (I Peter 2:19-25 RSV).

First Peter 2:18 introduces the concrete subject matter of the text. The address “servants” and command “be submissive” initiate the second in a series of exhortations (2:11-3:12). The series patterns itself after social codes used in other New Testament literature (Col. 3:12-4:1; Eph. 5:21-6:9) and in conventional moral instruction throughout the Hellenistic world. In I Peter, the series begins with a general exhortation (2:11-12) and follows with duties of all to government (2:13-17), slaves to masters (2:18-25), wives to husbands (3:1-6), husbands to wives (3:7), and “love of the brethren” (3:8-12). The command “be subject-submissive” links the first three together. In 2:18 ff. the word “for” introduces reasons for the command. These
reasons include a general principle (2:19), specification of the principle (2:20), and exemplification of the principle (2:21-25).

In 2:18 the text moves from the general command, "servants be submissive to your masters," to its specification "not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing." The practical problem is intensified, since the mode of subjection to "harsh" (NIV) or "perverse" (NEB) or "unfair" (JB) masters should be "with all respect." If this respect (literally "in all fear") is towards God who impartially judges each person's deeds, the problem is intensified further since such submission would be in accord with God's will (as implied in 2:13 ff.) As 2:19 ff. clearly indicates, the text discusses the painful consequence of obeying such overbearing masters (and not the institution of slavery per se).

The text presupposes that servants will suffer pain when they obey unfair masters. It says nothing about their own willingness to accept these consequences. It does proceed to state a general principle about this. God approves (compare 2:20) endurance of pain for two reasons: if one is "mindful of God" and while "suffering unjustly." The first means literally, "on account of conscience of (in) God." This may be an internalized sense of duty to God rather than merely that "God is in his thoughts" (NEB). In 3:16, 21, references are made to a "clear conscience." The duty, however, would not be to suffer, but to do right (3:14) or good (2:14; 3:17). To do what is right and experience suffering (e.g., arbitrary brutal treatment?) is "unjust." In such instances, it may seem that a servant cannot please a master. He does please God, however, if the servant is "mindful of God."

The text specifies this principle along the lines suggested above. The rhetorical question in 2:20 asserts that there is no "credit" in enduring a beating (patiently, RSV, JB), if "you" (plural) "do wrong" (literally, "sin"). The opposite, however, meets God's approval—enduring suffering "if you do right (literally "good")." The text assumes that suffering is a reality and that persons endure it patiently. The crucial issue in 2:20 is the cause and nature of the suffering. Here as elsewhere the criterion of doing "right" or "good" determines if the suffering is justified. One should not suffer as a doer of wrong, but "as a Christian" (4:15-16; compare 3:17). God approves the doing of
right, even if such behavior results in suffering. The text, however, does not specify what is right beyond the initial command to be submissive. There is no guarantee that subjection to masters will immunize servants from suffering, especially when the command unconditionally includes obedience to overbearing ones. Only God's approval is guaranteed for such behavior. This is what counts, since God is the ultimate judge before whom servants and masters will stand, hopefully with a clear conscience (3:15 ff., 21 ff.; 2:17).

The general principle to do right, and if necessary to endure unjust suffering, is exemplified in 2:21-25. A general connection of “this” principle with their calling (see also holiness in 1:15 and nonretaliation in 3:9) introduces a creedal and hymnic portrayal of Christ. It begins with a common creed-like statement, “Christ...suffered” (2:21; 3:18), which is applied to this situation (“for you”). His suffering is “an example” they should follow. Hymnic, scriptural, and interpretative material are inextricably mixed to shape the pattern which describes Christ's behavior (2:22-23) and then the effects of that behavior (3:24-25).

2:22 who did not do sin
    nor was deceit found in his mouth; (Isaiah 53:9)
2:23 who when being reviled, did not revile in return,
    when suffering, did not threaten,
    but entrusted himself to the
    One who judges righteously;
2:24 who himself bore our sins (Isaiah 53:4)
    in his body on the tree,
    in order that having died to sins
    we might live to righteousness,
    by whose wounds you were healed (Isaiah 53:5)
2:25 for you were a sheep being led astray, (Isaiah 53:6)
    but you have now returned to the shepherd and
    guardian of your souls.

Two parallel lines from Isaiah 53:9 generally describe his righteous or innocent behavior (2:22). Nonretaliatory responses to abuse and suffering, and trust in God as judge, extend the general description (2:25). The exemplary outline sketches one
who is righteous and suffers, but does not retaliate since he trusts in God’s vindication. This mode of responding to unjust suffering becomes itself the criterion of what is right (see also 3:9 ff.).

The final two portions depict the effects of his behavior (for “our” sins in 2:24, “you” in 2:25). In the first, part of Isaiah 53:4 is expanded to include the cross. The implied sacrificial death occasions “our” dying to “sins” and living to “righteousness.” Christ thereby incorporates “us” into his right behavior, described in the preceding section (e.g., by dying to sins, we become like him who did not sin and so forth). In the last portion, citations from Isaiah 53:5, 6 underscore the servants’ solidarity with Christ. Their healing is interpreted as their turning or conversion, spelled out in the image of stray sheep returning to the shepherd. As shepherd and guardian, Christ is the pattern which enables and sustains those who follow in his tracks.

The pattern which incarnates the general principle is composite and functional. We should not press it into service of a particular doctrine of atonement, be that moral example (2:22-23) or vicarious sacrifice (2:24-25). Nor should we make too much of Isaiah 53 and the so-called suffering servant image used both for Christ and “servants.” Nowhere in I Peter are there such conceptual connections. Rather, 2:19-25 functions to give reasons for the conventional but unconditional command that servants be submissive to all masters. The extensive reasoning demonstrates awareness of both practical and theological consequences of this command. The reasoning acknowledges conventional institutions, conflicts of value systems which occasion suffering, and a criterion of right which intends to guide subordinates caught in the crunch so that they can live with dignity and hope.

My conversation with this text has begun to shape my understandings about it, the subject matter it addresses, and myself.

1. The text acknowledges human institutions which subordinate persons. It is grounded in sociological realities of its own day and ours. I’d prefer to have a Bible which projected only images of a new creation in which there is “no slave nor free” (as
Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28). So whatever this text says, it does not say enough about human liberation. Nevertheless, it does direct us to deal with the hard experiences of living within "given" human institutions. It does not consider the possibilities of bucking or opting out of the system, be that government, church, school, family, or humanity itself. I admire the text for tackling head-on the hard questions raised by the inequities of conventional morality.

2. The text acknowledges the reality of human suffering. There is no immunity from suffering. Not only is this common to human experience, it is indigenous to Christian faith, especially the affirmations about resurrection. Participation in Christ's resurrection presupposes and necessitates participation in his suffering (e.g., 4:1 ff., 13 ff.). The text deals with this suffering functionally by developing a theology of suffering based on its perception of Christ's suffering. This perception as well as the "experience of suffering" (5:9) is communal. The community draws upon its tradition in order to develop meaningful ways of coping with adversity.

3. The text raises the question of ethical norms by valuing the doing of right or good. No simple answer is given to the exiles, although a clear directive to "maintain good conduct" governs the exhortation from 2:11 on. Living between the times (see 1:3-12) requires an ethic. Right is determined out of the interaction of at least conventional morality (2:18), the situation (2:18 ff.), and the people's tradition (2:21-25). Norms of righteousness are thereby dynamic. Such norms acquire shape by the people's central commitment to God and patterns or images of faith. These images shape persons' views of and responses to their situations. For example, through the image of the suffering righteous Christ, one sees a conventional subordinate situation as opportunity rather than constraint. The servants, as Christ, are not martyrs, living as victimized, helpless, isolated, quiescent people. They are responsible selves called to do what is right in this situation (i.e., be obedient to all masters) and then by enduring any suffering while doing right they embody another right, as did Christ. This very style of being in the world is a norm of righteousness. It involves respecting the rights of others even when they take away your
rights (e.g., 3:9 ff.). For us today, this text might present ethical norms ranging from a concrete command to be obedient to the picture of a responsible self, who is willing to suffer for commitment to the right.  

4. When all is said and done, we may still ask if this text’s intention is functional today, without spiritualizing or psychologizing it. No matter what theological reasoning is given, we must recognize that this text will be offensive to some persons who live in socio-political subordination. To label them suffering servants like Christ may add insult to injury. Moreover, the text does not endorse the social transformation necessary and possible for dispossessed persons in our society. It does, however, present values that could provide direction and impetus for our constructive response to the social ills of our day. For example, if our “approval” is ultimately from God, we need not justify ourselves by societal norms and structures. We are given the rights to life, to choose to do good and to accept the consequences if this brings us into conflict with society’s laws and institutions. We then have the right to claim such rights and embody them institutionally, whatever the cost. That means knowing the workings of conventional morals, politics, etc.; living within them to affirm where rights are embodied and challenge where they are not; and being willing to suffer for these rights.

NOTES

1. References here are taken from those developed by the Section on Worship, United Methodist Board of Discipleship, and published in Seasons of the Gospel: Resources for the Christian Year (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).


4. This text says nothing about the possible “winning” to faith of the masters by such good conduct (compare 2:12-13; 3:1-2; perhaps 2:15).

5. The norm one sees may depend on one’s development in moral reasoning and social perspective. See Mary M. Wilcox, Developmental Journey (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

Scripture quotations noted RSV are from the Revised Standard Version Common Bible, copyrighted © 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the
The persecutions and sufferings endured by the Christians of the Hellenistic world appear to be far removed from our western civilization. Christians are not thrown to the lions in our athletic arenas, unless one wishes to suggest as an example born-again Roger Staubach, who suffered five concussions in 1979-1980, precipitating his retirement. Too, one might suggest such courageous martyrs as Archbishop Romero in El Salvador or the Christians in Estonia who suffer valiantly for their faith or the Christians killed in Zimbabwe.

Persecutions and suffering are easily identified when heads are being lopped off or when people are thrown into prison. Such an obvious display of persecution ought not to lead us to think there is none for us. The more sophisticated the society, the more subtle the subversion. Without knowing it, we find our very faith being slowly strangled to death. If that is the case, do we simply turn blue and die in a convulsive panic? Pastors, counselors, chaplains, and others whose directive is to minister to human need are challenged in a new way in the 1980s.

To persecute is "to afflict or harass constantly so as to injure or distress; oppress cruelly." There is no greater seduction and in a sense "cruel oppression" in persecution than that of the mind and the human spirit.

THE RISE OF MODERN PAGANISM

Peter Gay has effectively demonstrated that the Enlightenment was anti-Christian and that it was a revival of the paganism

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found in Democritus and Epicurus. Those of the upper class making up the driving forces of the Enlightenment possessed the deep conviction that Christianity and Islam were uniquely inhumane because they gave sacred dimensions to life in their cities. The aim of the Voltaire and the Diderot of the eighteenth century was to conquer religious superstition found in traditional religious orientation and announce in its place the autonomy of knowledge, science, the arts—the autonomy of the self. Autonomy laid the foundations for new movements in literature, philosophy, and theology which would put into fundamental question the validity of revelational truth. Slowly and subtly theological assumptions were replaced by those of the Enlightenment.

Secular faith is able to speak of "euthanasia"—good death—while Paul says death is the "last enemy." "Whatever problems technology creates technology can fix," goes one article of faith. Cancer today, gone tomorrow. Whatever human problems we have, pharmacology will take care of, provided there is enough money in research-and-development budgets and time enough to make it a priority. These articles of faith are the legacy of the Enlightenment. The communication from the moon, "One step for mankind," became the premise of the new kerygma and the geography for the new exodus from human misery.

SCHIZOID FAITH

These maxims forming the new creed have so permeated the Christian mind-set that Christians have been absorbed by the culture. "One step for mankind," however, is running into difficult times in the areas of politics, education, and religion. It can hardly be said that the years following the first orbit of the earth have fused the human spirit into one, though they may have made our globe smaller. Many Christians today are schizoid in their faith, a problem of monumental proportions in our day as it was in the first century.

One of the primary attacks on Christian values today comes cloaked in the costume of enlightenment. "Broad-minded" was the older virtue encouraged by the cultured elite. "Modernity,"
"getting with it," "being with it," "consciousness raising," "being aware" are the names called upon to evoke the new mentality.

LOSS OF TRUST

Erik Erikson states that a healthy personality has three components: "A general sense of basic trust, a sense of autonomous will, and a sense of initiative." If these were applied as a measurement of a healthy society we would be convinced that contemporary culture is having a grand mal seizure. Trust in one another has deteriorated to a single affirmation of "I gotta be me." In the adoration of the self, trust of others and oneself has decreased proportionally.

Lawsuits are piled up by patients against their physicians, students against their teachers, spouses against spouses, children against their parents, all of which aptly support this thesis. Parents sue school systems for producing incompetent young adults who cannot read or write. Recently a graduate physician sued his fellow doctors who treated his injured hip following a skiing accident. The surgical procedure left him in such discomfort that he did not feel he could pursue a private practice, and he thereby was forced into academic medicine. He estimated that such a career shift cost him close to two million dollars over the years of his professional life. The damages were allowed!

THE AUTONOMOUS SELF

To the degree we have placed our sole reliance for the full life on the development of our human potential based on the autonomous self, we have joined our culture. In homage to the autonomous self, the cults of self-awareness, self-consciousness, self-assertiveness have grown lavishly. The proliferation of self-help groups, support groups, crisis centers, hotlines with their 800 prefixes is incredible. Yet we see no measurable cures; only the need for more help. As Christopher Lasch put it: "To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast
losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future."

"Therapy constitutes an anti-religion, not always to be sure because it adheres to rational explanation or scientific methods of healing, as its practitioners would have us believe, but because modern society has no future and therefore gives no thought to anything beyond its own immediate needs." This loss of faith in the future may be why there is a resurgence of religion that is therapy oriented.

Our intensive care of the self has had its spillover into religion. Religion is centered on the success syndrome basic to American life. Belief in Jesus means an abundance of health, wisdom, and prosperity. One scans Sunday morning's electronic church to see Miss America telling her experience of being "slain in the Spirit" and seeing the miraculous growing of her shortened injured leg to the length of her normal one. Another channel gives out the prophetic word, "Life is a cinch inch by inch." A good and acceptable phrase for the Crystal Cathedral's rich and protected clientele, whose worst trauma may be a hangnail!

The analogue between the twentieth-century forces of subtle persecution and the blatant kind in I Peter can be made. The same crisis exists—that of authentic faith in the face of persecution that would bury both the faith and the faithful.

THE PARADIGM

The word to the suffering Christians in the orbit of challenge was simple and direct. Endure it! To endure suffering means not to succumb, to have duration. To endure is to stay for the time and not waste it. The paradigm for such endurance is in Jesus Christ who endured the cross. The endurance of the cross issued in salvation. Christians stand in that living tradition. They are heirs of Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of God's salvation, to make them heirs of Jesus Christ.

No maxims, no phrases to remember in hard times, no hope talk. Only the reality of Jesus Christ and what his sacrifice and suffering implies for those who will really follow him. They are to be truly happy over this process "even though now you smart
for a little while” (I Pet. 1:6 NEB). In the oppression, in the heart of the world's diatribe they are to experience the real stuff of their faith and the complete sufficiency of Christ.

In this vital experience with Jesus Christ who is with them in the fires in which they presently stand, they are to be happy. Why? Because they are in fact being immersed in the very redemptive acts of Jesus Christ himself.

In this paradigm nothing less than radical faith is required and expected. To trust Jesus Christ alone, and completely, is the admonition. No other support systems suffice during times like these. They are not given any other possibility.

THE PARADIGM FOR TODAY

Immersed in the alien environment of twentieth-century life, Christians are tempted to walk away from the faith because it is not worth the bother. To be possessed by the integrity Jesus Christ gives to human life seems out of step with the business world. Maintaining a sense of decency and ethics that are not simply defined within the borders of what the law allows is extremely difficult and at times a sheer impossibility.

One could draw from the files of counseling experiences to illustrate what the dynamics are for our culture. A businessman with impressive corporate responsibilities is in anguish over his company's South African operation. His anxiety results from a pain of conscience that intensifies the injustice he sees and the feeling of impotence to do anything about it.

Further his fear is heightened by the consequences of any decision he might make. He must be assisted to come to the reality that he does not act alone. The persecution that may follow his decision participates in the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus Christ. That is to be his story. The objective is for him to be happy in this decision as one of his "wise choices." When such an awareness dawns upon the consciousness of a human being, faith is strengthened. Faith becomes living faith.

Physicians concerned about the quality of health care for patients find their own ethical parameters and self-identity challenged. "If you need surgery, go to a busy surgeon. The rest of them need the business too badly, and you may end up with
an operation you did not need." A gynecologist-obstetrician considered giving up her practice after thirty years. The pressures of 100 percent accountability were becoming too much. She has delivered several thousand babies. Now she feels further removed from her patients because of what she considers technological restraints. She senses that she is becoming more of a technician and less of a physician.

Our discussion finally centered on the question of her participation in the healing ministry of Christ. Her own self-understanding of her servanthood had eroded over the years. The cynicism of society over life's value had reached her depths. She needed help in finding the core of reality expressed in Jesus Christ the Great Physician.

Teachers are tempted to be more concerned about their power over the administration and their benefits in the next two years than they are in bringing about some basic value changes to enhance the lives of their students. Parents find themselves in a constant battle with the value system of an age that continually squeezes out regard for truth, honesty, humanness, so that parents too quickly give up.

Endure the suffering because Christ is our model. What makes Christ's understanding of God worthwhile enough for which to endure suffering? One of the key concepts touched upon is in 1 Peter 1:17. Having been accepted into fellowship with Christ believers may call God their Father. Earlier writers have intuited the importance of the concept. In more recent years some scholars, Schillebeeckx, in particular, have given exegetical depth to the Abba passages of the Gospels.

"Abba," the term for father used in the intimacy of the Jewish home, becomes the characteristic name Jesus gives God. Or in first announcing, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased," did God give him that privilege? In any case one does not find this intimacy expressed in other great religions of the world.

Jesus is about "his Abba's business." The Son does what the Father wills. Words and deeds make up a drama to tell all sons and daughters that Jesus' Abba wants to be their Abba too. The Father does these things for their happiness, for their joy, to fulfill their human potential. That is why it is said that Jesus who
as a baby sucked milk from his mother's breast is the fullness of God whom he calls Abba.

It is difficult for us to believe that the end of all life is to enjoy God—the Father—forever, and that this is the supreme content of the right and good way of being human. We are invited to trust God, the Abba of Jesus, as our Abba so that we might realize this, and experience life through faith. We are then able to exercise the power to believe in word and deed that the rule of God, the politics of all human happiness is in fact revealed to us, shared with us, and experienced by us through the Son who shows us the Abba.

This concept is not to trigger an argument over the semantics of sexism or the psychology of familial relationships. It is to demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is really more than any human being.

ANALOGIA ENTIS VS. ANALOGIA REVELATIO

For all too long we have asked our questions backwards. The ugly head of the historic analogia entis asks, "How can we apply this to human life?" The argument from what is seen upward to God has always enticed the pride of the human mind. Analogia revelatio, the analogy of revelation, asks, "What does life demand from us? God's life centered in Jesus' Father? How shall we conform our life to what we see through his life?"

Karl Barth contrasts the option clearly:

If man believed, he would listen, but in religion he talks. If he believed, he would accept a gift; but in religion he takes something for himself. If he believed, he would let God himself intercede for God; but in religion he ventures to grasp at God. Because it is a grasping, religion is the contradiction of revelation.*

The most humanizing experience to be found in enduring suffering for the sake of Christ is what it does to the development of the self. It brings refinement to character (I Pet. 1:7). In a society that desires to be pain-free and finds no virtue in any kind of suffering whatsoever, Christian character is not sought out.
Beyers Naude of South Africa was banned in 1977. He cannot see more than one person at a time. His mail is read and his telephone is bugged. He endures great personal pain from such isolation. His sin is against Afrikanerdom for his stand against apartheid, the cardinal doctrine of South African existence.

His pain has brought from his depths a peace and joy that is contagious. How does he do it? He believes the story. The reality of the story is heard again and again. The spirit of that story becomes his as he opens himself to the discipline of prayer. In the midst of suffering for the name of Christ ethical fruit is to be produced (1 Pet. 4:1). When Abba becomes "our Father," we find strength and power to do the righteous thing. This relationship frees us to experience the happiness that comes from no longer being compulsively conformed to the zeitgeist. The squeeze toward conformation is intense.

It is true that there are no obvious Christian answers to most of the world's problems. However, our relationship of trust in the Abba whom Jesus trusted provides an opportunity to be free from the compulsion to consume. To place one's happiness and well-being within the context of the Abba as Jesus did frees one from enslavement to the laws of prestige and competition. To refuse to take part in the cult of abundance is to be happy in poverty of spirit and one's new freedom.

In this story the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Abba, is to be in control of one's existence (1 Pet. 4:14). This is to bring about ultimate participation in the glory of the coming age (1:7; 5:1, 4, 10).

Recently a village lost two thousand of its three thousand residents. An eighteen-foot tidal wave swept up mud-walled houses, drowned livestock, and carried the living and the dead several miles farther inland. Mother Teresa came. She said she came "only to distribute the Lord's compassion." One is reminded of Jesus saying, "In the world you have tribulation; fear not, I have overcome the world."

The world is the object of God's affection. It is to be our opportunity to witness to the world. Opportunity because it is God who invites us to fulfill our God-given purpose in the world.

It is the Father who waits for the prodigal long before he ever
wanted to come home. Is the Abba less the Abba of the world? So we look to find ways to be authentic christs in the world, faithful as our Lord who not only picked up his cross but took a towel and basin and washed the feet of humanity.

NOTES

4. Ibid., p. 13.
MINISTRY: CONSULTATION ON
CHURCH UNION

A QR SEMINAL DOCUMENT

Each of the ten denominations participating in the Consultation on Church Union has been asked to make an official response to the following statement on ministry by December, 1981. These responses will then be considered by COCU, amendments made, and the final document remanded once again to the denominations with the hope that they will take official action on the statement by the mid-1980s in their various governing bodies. The statement is reprinted here in its entirety, with a commentary by J. Robert Nelson, in the hope that professional ministers across The United Methodist Church will participate in this discussion.

Chapter VII
MINISTRY

Preamble

This chapter has its foundation in, and brings to concreteness, the understandings of faith, church, and sacraments expressed in Chapters I-VI of IN QUEST OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST UNITING. The theological agreements represented in these chapters have enabled each church in the Consultation on Church Union to affirm the mutual recognition of the others' members.

The present chapter on ministry, and the previous six, are

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intended, together, to provide the theological framework in which a reconciliation of the ministries of the participating churches can take place. The churches are requested to receive it for study and response, as a statement of emerging theological consensus and for guidance for furthering the mutual recognition of members, and working toward mutual recognition of ministers.

The understanding of ministry here proposed does not presuppose that our goal must be pursued in a particular manner, nor that the unity we seek must take a particular form. Rather, maintaining both diversity and freedom within the perspectives outlined here, we seek together to enter fully and organically into God's promise of covenant faithfulness to the one People of God in each place and in every place, searching for the form or forms of church life which will be most faithful to that calling.

The Ministry of Jesus Christ and the Ministry of God's People

1) The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a ministry of God to all humankind. Through the Holy Spirit, God's people are called to share that ministry and are empowered to fulfill what it requires. By the power of the same Spirit, the ministry of God's people appropriates and continues what God sent Jesus to be and do.

2) The ministry of Jesus Christ summed up and brought to focus all that God has done in the history of Israel and of all peoples to set men and women free and to open them both to one another and to God. His was therefore a liberating and reconciling ministry. Sent by God to be and proclaim the fulfillment of all things in God's kingdom, he spoke with the authority of the Servant of God and of humanity. Accordingly, his mission was to "preach good news to the poor," to "proclaim release to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18 ff; Isaiah 61:1). In him God began to put down "the mighty from their seats," and exalt
“those of low degree,” to scatter “the proud in the imagination of their hearts,” to fill “the hungry with good things and to send the rich empty away” (Luke 1:51-53). His authority was displayed in his healing the sick, forgiving sins, comforting the afflicted, challenging the arrogant, transforming traditions, and bringing into being a new covenant people in the midst of the old. His authority was also made manifest in his announcement of the end of oppression and of the overturning of unjust power structures through the assertion of God’s rule. Through his solidarity with the outcast, and through his compassion for those who oppressed and executed him, he called all humankind to conversion and to repentance and summoned all to glorify God and love one another. In his risen life, Christ’s ministry continues both through the life of the church and through the intercessory role he now exercises in the presence of God.

3) Answering his gracious summons, Christians by the Spirit are gathered into a ministering community, held together and empowered for service in love, hope, and faith. In Christ, this people’s life is vulnerable to suffering, yet strong in the midst of wickedness. It offers and requires relationships of mutuality in need and service, and overcomes despair in the power of hope. This ministry is not confined to those of any one social or ethnic group. It is for and with the whole of humanity. Whenever obedience to Jesus calls his people to be in the world as he was in the world, they are led further by the Spirit into the truth of the gospel.

4) Enabled by grace, the people of God enters upon ministry by taking its stand where Christ is at work in the midst of humanity, in a continuing struggle with the powers of this age. This struggle leads to both suffering and joy. Christ’s people “complete what remains of Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24). They also know a foretaste of the “joy that was set before him who endured the cross and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Therefore, where women and men struggle against poverty and oppression, ministry means entering into that struggle with oppressor and oppressed alike to overcome the causes of suffering. When men and women engage wittingly or unwit-
tingly in oppressive actions and decisions, ministry means acting compassionately toward them for the eradication of these evils. Where people undergo affliction, pain, disease, and death, ministry means sharing witness with them in the calling to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). Where persons suffer because of their choice to work for liberation and justice, ministry means supporting them in their witness (Phil. 1:29, 30; Matt. 25:31-45).

5) Yet, ministry is not simply to those who suffer and struggle. Those who struggle and suffer without despair may themselves so minister to the world that they offer compelling testimony to the power of the cross and resurrection. Their ministries may express to the church the privilege of “dying daily” with Christ, and at the same time of rising with Him to new life. For the ministry of God’s people is at the same time joyful. Those who minister in the midst of suffering are called “blessed” (Matt. 5:1-11). They begin to inherit now a kingdom prepared for them before the foundations of the earth (Matt. 25:34). They are offered a foretaste of that messianic banquet at which the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame have the privileged place (Luke 14:13-14).

6) In all its forms and functions, ministry is a rich interweaving of word and worship, work and witness. In different ways, members of the body share responsibility for the church’s government, administration, discipline, instruction, worship, and pastoral care. These activities are to be held together in a visible ordering through which the church is equipped for its ministry. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:6), the several members bring to the one body a wide diversity of gifts, functions, and services. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Each is a distinctive form of the single ministry of Christ as it is realized in mutually complementary and diverse ways in the whole life of the church and in the world.

7) As the people gather to worship under the direction of the Word, all members both receive God’s grace and make their contribution to the representation of Christ’s ministry before God. There is a ministry of faithful hearing and proclaiming
God's Word, of rightly administering and receiving the sacraments, of responsibly celebrating and living out the church's worship. These are common actions of the whole people of God: all members, including those with physical handicaps or mental impairments, are endowed with special gifts and vocations, and exercise particular functions, thus adding to the richness of Christ's ministry as it takes form in the worship of the gathered community.

8) Members of the church are also called to labor as a people whose action represents the ministry of Christ in the world. God's people bear witness in the organized life of the church. Similarly, all members of the body are summoned to be faithful witnesses in daily life: in trades, industry, agriculture, and commerce; in political life, education, and the family; in professional life, science, and technology; in the arts and recreation, and in tasks that society considers menial. In the midst of the world's structures, or through opportunities they happen to provide, or alongside them in personal relationships, Christ's disciples discover and live out that ministry of Christ in which they are called to share.

9) In all these ways the people are equipped and enabled by the power of the Spirit to forward God's regenerative ministry to humanity, to share in the ministry as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), and to "prove what is the will of God" through the "renewal of (our) minds" on the way toward "what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

10) The ministry of Jesus Christ, and the ministry of the church in him, are intelligible only in relationship to God. In ministry the people enter into a cycle of life in the Spirit that leads from God and to God. Through the ministry of Christ and of his people, God's purpose of uniting all things in heaven and earth is being accomplished (Eph. 1:10).

The Ordained Ministries

11) The ministry of the one people of God, with all its diversity, is the continuation of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ, and this ministry is the context within which what is usually called ordained ministry must be discussed. According
to growing ecumenical understanding, all members of the church are in a certain sense ordained to the whole, corporate ministry. That ministry is "the priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (I Pet. 2:9). Thus all Christians are called to ministry, to a life of faithful discipleship in and beyond the church. The church itself, indeed, was first known in New Testament Greek as ek-klesia, having been called together from all peoples to be the people faithful to God.

12) This calling of each Christian is sealed effectually by baptism/confirmation, when vows are taken and the responsibilities of discipleship conferred. There are distinctions of function, but no distinctions of dignity or worth here, inasmuch as all are called to minister to one another and to all persons.

13) In the usual sense of the term "ordain," the church ordains women and men to particular ministries and appoints them in the name of Christ to fulfill needed tasks and purposes. Minister, pastor, and preacher are general names for them; presbyter, priest, elder, deacon, and bishop are particular names. These women and men share the whole ministry of witness and service with all the people of God. Their ordination marks them as persons who represent to the church its own identity and mission in Jesus Christ. In this capacity they are authorized to undertake services in, with, and for the church: preaching and teaching the gospel, presiding over the liturgical and sacramental life of the congregations, assembling, equipping, and watching over the community.

14) Ordained persons may be professional ministers in the sense that they receive their salaries from the church and have pursued theological education. The church also maintains offices to which persons who are not in this sense professional are nevertheless ordained without leaving their occupation or employment.

15) People are called in differing ways; sometimes persons are mistaken about the reality of their calling. From its beginnings, however, the church has recognized that several elements are essential in the call to the ordained, representative ministry. First, there is an inner, personal awareness and empowerment, which is the Holy Spirit bearing witness to one's spirit (Rom.
Secondly, there is a recognition of the particular gifts and graces, both natural and spiritually given, needed for ministry (Eph. 4:11). Thirdly, there is required the church’s public approbation that the call is an authentic call heard with good conscience. In the judgment of the church, this call requires for its fulfillment, possession and development of appropriate gifts for fruitful ministry.

The church’s act of ordination is performed in the name of Christ on the basis of God’s call and gifts, which come without regard to handicap, race, sex, age, social, or economic status. Those who are charged to make decisions about ordination, while seeking guidance of the Spirit, must rely on human wisdom and discretion. As fallible persons, they can err in accepting some and rejecting others, but faithfulness and serious purpose are presumed.

However the ordination ritual may be written or theologically interpreted, it consists essentially of prayer with the laying on of hands. (Prototypes of such practices in the New Testament are found, for example, in Acts 8:18; Hebrews 6:2; II Timothy 1:6). The prayer is an invocation of the Holy Spirit, asking for divine power to be bestowed on the candidate for the exercise of this ministry. Believing that the prayer will be answered, as representatives of the whole church, the bishop and other persons place their hands upon the head of the ordinand, making a visible and effective sign of the gift of the Spirit, attesting the church’s approbation, and commissioning this person to fulfill a particular ministry. In recognition of the God-given nature of ministry, ordination to any one of the representative ministries is never repeated.

By the act of ordination the community of faith thankfully acknowledges that God provides women and men who possess gifts and graces to lead and care for the church in its total mission. By this act the minister, whether bishop, presbyter, or deacon, who is equal in dignity to all members and shares in the priesthood common to all, acknowledges an obligation to be a servant of God’s servants, to the church bodies which ordain, to the church universal, and to Jesus Christ, the head of the church.
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The Ordering of Ministry

19) The ordained and lay ministries of the church are differing forms of the one ministry of Christ that is shared by the whole people of God. Because they are forms of one ministry, they share in the same reality and complement one another. Thus, they must be ordered in relation to one another in the life of the church.

20) The ordained ministries serve to strengthen the ministry of all baptized members. Several orderings of ordained ministry have arisen in the history of the church. The exclusive warrant of the New Testament cannot be claimed for any one of them. They are adaptations of biblical forms to the needs of the church in differing times and places. In the midst of this variety, however, one ordering has emerged as predominant: the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. This ordering will be continued in the uniting church in ways appropriate to the traditions of the churches and to the future needs of mission. The ministry of the uniting church will be intended to manifest visible historical continuity “with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and in all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all” (WCC New Delhi Statement, 1961).

21) All ministries, lay as well as those of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, are to be understood as at once personal, collegial, and constitutional. In attempting to realize the personal, collegial, and constitutional character of ministry, the uniting church will seek to incorporate “catholic” and “protestant” concerns, drawing sustenance and admonition from both streams of tradition.

22) All ministry in the uniting church will be personal. In every minister, lay and ordained, Christ and the gospel are made present as personal reality and are the source of that life of holiness and devotion which is a mark of ministry. Ministry is exercised by men and women who have been individually called and baptized, and in certain cases, also ordained. Through their baptism, or ordination, they become personally identified with their ministry. They represent, in their own ways, the ministry of Christ to the church and to the world and, in turn, represent the ministry of the church to humanity. In their varying personal...
capacities, they serve individuals and groups within and outside the church.

23) All ministry in the uniting church will be collegial. Baptism and ordination alike associate the individual with others who share the same call. The ministry is a single task common to many. Thus no minister is independent or autonomous. Collegial relationships obtain among persons in different ministries as well as among those of the same ministry. Such relationships include laypersons as well as bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The interpersonal character of collegiality is a basis for partnership in governance and gives life and substance to the institutional structures of the church.

24) All ministry in the uniting church will be constitutional. A person enters ministry through formal procedures of membership as well as through election, appointment, or ordination. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons, having been selected by a representative process, will be ordained by prayer with the laying on of hands by those authorized to do so, and installed in their ministry. No individual’s ministry can be regarded as representative of the church unless it is constitutional, and remains in communion with, and accountable to, other ministers in ordered assemblies in which all ministries are represented.

(i) The Ministry of Lay Persons

25) Lay persons are called by their baptism and membership in the church to manifest and bear witness to Christ’s presence in the world in all their activities. In their baptism, laypersons enter into the ministry of Jesus Christ, into a personal relationship to God in Christ, and at the same time into a relationship to other Christians. No ordained minister ceases to bear responsibility for the ministry of the baptized.

26) The ministry received in baptism is at once personal, collegial and, in principle, constitutional. Laypersons may be formally appointed to various functions, thereby being acknowledged by the church, and, in turn, acknowledging their responsibility for particular tasks. They take appropriate roles in
the governance of the church. They carry out their ministries in a variety of ways.

27) [a] Witnessing to the Gospel. Laypersons hear the gospel and proclaim it. They participate in the worship of the community by offering words and actions of praise; by taking part in the preaching, whether by speaking or by responding; by reading the Scriptures, offering prayers, and bringing the eucharistic gifts. They participate in educational programs, pursue private study, teach and bear witness to others. They inform and test current theological understandings. They discern and practice the implications of the gospel for particular contexts of life. They teach the gospel by word and action in their families, in the congregation, and in all places of daily living.

28) [b] Seeking Justice and Reconciliation in the World. Through active involvement in the world, laypersons represent Christ's ministry of justice and reconciliation. As agents of God's purpose, they speak from within the world to the world for a society both just and humane, where the needs of "the least" are met with sensitivity and dignity. They seek to discern the signs of the kingdom wherever they may be manifest in human affairs as they bear witness to the gospel with boldness, courage, hospitality, and love.

29) [c] Bringing the World before God. The laity makes the connections between Christ, the church, and the world real and visible. In their devotional practices and through their liturgical life, these persons offer to God their public and personal concerns and celebrate the mighty acts of God. By adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and supplication, they bring themselves and others under the transforming justice and mercy of God.

30) [d] Providing Pastoral Care for Persons. Laypersons are called to care for each other and for persons outside the church. Such caring means sensitive listening and discerning counseling. It means visiting the sick, the prisoners, those confined by age or poverty. It means participation in congregational and other programs that enhance pastoral sensitivity to the hurts and dilemmas faced by social groups, families, and individuals.
also means the effort to address systemic social causes of human suffering.

31) [e] Serving the Cause of Unity. In virtue of their baptism and membership in the body, lay persons constitute an inherently ecumenical ministry. In all they do, they embody this reality and raise the question of unity for the church universal. Laypersons meet across denominational lines in prayer and common mission. Thus they can bring new expressions of the church into being, acting out forms of unity which the institutional churches cannot yet express. They transcend divisions and express in anticipation the fulfilled reality of the one Body in Jesus Christ.

(ii) The Ministry of Bishops

32) Bishops are baptized members of the people of God who have been ordained to preach the Word, preside at the sacraments, and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, unity, and continuity in the church.

33) The bishops in the context of all the people represent the continuity of the church’s life and ministry over the centuries, the unity of its communities and congregations with one another, and the oneness of its various ministries in mission to the world. Bishops together manifest, and are particularly responsible for, the continuity of the whole church’s tradition, as well as of its pastoral oversight, as they teach the apostolic faith. The uniting church intends that its bishops should stand in continuity with the historic ministry of bishops as that ministry has been maintained through the ages, and will ordain its bishops in such a way that recognition of this ministry is invited from all parts of the universal church.

34) In doing so, the uniting church will not require any theory or doctrine of episcopacy or episcopal succession which goes beyond the consensus stated in this document. Recognizing that it inherits, from episcopal and nonepiscopal churches alike, a variety of traditions about the ministry of oversight, unity, and continuity, the uniting church will seek to appropriate these traditions creatively, and so to move towards a renewed and
reformed episcopate: one which will perhaps be different from that now known in any of the uniting churches.

35) The service of episcopal ordination will be in the form of a renewal of the commitment implicit in the person's baptism and will include prayer for the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands and an appointment of the bishop to the task of ministry to which he or she has been called.

36) The ministry of bishops, like all other ministries in the uniting church, will be at once personal, collegial, and constitutional. The bishops of the church carry out their ministries in a variety of ways. They function as:

37) [a] Liturgical Leaders. Bishops have responsibility for maintaining the apostolicity and unity of the worship and sacramental life of the church.

38) [b] Teachers of the Apostolic Faith. Bishops have a responsibility, corporately and individually, to guard, transmit, teach, and proclaim the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically in the contemporary world.

39) [c] Pastoral Overseers. Bishops have general pastoral oversight of all the people of the dioceses, districts, or jurisdictions to which they are called. They have particular responsibility, as shepherds, for other ordained ministers. Bishops are responsible for furthering the spiritual unity of their areas, for being available in as wide a range of personal relationships as possible, and for regular visitation of parishes, congregations, and communities in their districts. In such visitation, a bishop will, as opportunity is offered, preach, celebrate the Lord's Supper with the people, and preside at services of baptism, confirmation, and the ordination of deacons within the congregation. Ordinarily, responsibility for administration of church discipline, especially as it applies to ordained ministers, will rest with the bishops—but always as they work in cooperation with other duly constituted office-bearers and representative groups.

40) [d] Leaders in Mission. It is an essential task of bishops, both collegially and individually, to further the mission of God's people in Christ to the whole world, in fostering communities of
faith, and in clarifying the demand for social justice which is directly involved in that mission. In company with other ministers, they take initiative in evolving new approaches for mission to the districts entrusted to their care.

41) [e] Representative Ministers in the Act of Ordination. Bishops, with the participation of other ministers, ordained and unordained, are responsible for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority in the church. This means not only that bishops preside at ordinations, but also that they have pastoral and administrative responsibility for candidates for the ordained ministry (Acts 6:16; II Tim. 1:6; I Tim. 5:22).

42) [f] Administrative Leaders. Bishops also have responsibility for the supervision and administration of the church’s organized life and work (compare I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-12). In the context of the church assemblies, bishops as chief pastors have either directly or by delegation, and always in cooperation with other officers of the church, a central role in the development of administrative policy. Further, as the church’s principal executive officers, bishops are responsible for the effective carrying out of such policy.

43) [g] Servants of Unity. As personal representatives of the given unity of the church in all places and all ages, bishops have, both individually and collegially, an obligation “to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, and to advance toward that unity that the world may believe.” (Constitution of the WCC, III, Functions & Purposes, i).

(iii) The Ministry of Presbyters*

44) Presbyters are baptized members of the people of God who have been ordained to serve among the people as ministers of Word and sacraments. In this role they bear responsibility for the discipline of the church and are teachers and preachers of the

*Presbyter is a biblical name for persons today designated pastors, elders, ministers, or priests.
faith to the end both that the world may believe and that the entire membership of the church may be renewed, equipped, and strengthened in its ministry.

45) All presbyters will be ordained by the church through the bishop, with the participation of other presbyters, deacons, and laypersons. The service of presbyteral ordination will be in the form of a renewal of the commitment to ministry implicit in the person's baptism, and will include prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, with the laying on of hands, and an appointment of the presbyter to the task of ministry to which he or she has been called.

46) The presbyteral ministry is personal, collegial, and constitutional in character. Presbyters personally represent to the church its identity in mission in Christ. At the same time, presbyters are associated together in a corporate concern for the life and government of the church under the Word of God (Acts 15:2). Therefore they participate in decision-making assemblies of the church in which all ministries, lay and ordained, are represented.

47) In order to provide the ministry of Word and sacrament to specific congregations or particular circumstances, the ministry of presbyter may include women and men who, in view of their personal and educational qualifications, are chosen and approved by competent authority for such ministry. Such a form of presbyteral ministry would allow for the continuance of similar ministries in the uniting churches.

48) Presbyters, in virtue of their calling as ministers of Word and sacraments, function in the church in a variety of ways. With allowance made for differing circumstances and specialized ministries, the functions of presbyters include the following:

49) [a] Preachers of the Word. Presbyters have a responsibility to proclaim the prophetic and apostolic word of the redemption and liberation wrought by God in Christ (Acts 6:2-4; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 14:3; 1 Tim. 4:13-14).

50) [b] Celebrants of the Sacraments. Presbyters normally baptize and preside at the celebration of the Eucharist as recognized representatives of the church's ministry in Christ, and thus
offer, with all the people, spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (I
Pet. 2:5). They also bear responsibility for other acts of the
church of a sacramental character, such as confirmation,
marrige, ordination, declaration of the forgiveness of sin,
anointing of the sick, and the announcement of God's blessing.
And they perform or make provision for funeral services and
other rites of the church.

51) [c] Teachers of the Gospel. Presbyters bear responsibility
within and outside congregations for teaching the apostolic faith
and for handing on the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the
church. They have particular responsibility for the preparation
of members for Christian life and ministry. Presbyters with
appropriate academic preparation and ministerial experience
may be called to teach in seminaries, divinity schools,
teological colleges, and universities, to counsel students, and
to engage in scholarly research.

52) [d] Pastoral Overseers. Presbyters have responsibility under
the Word of God for the pastoral care of persons. This includes
spiritual direction of church members, pastoral use of the
church's disciplines, counseling the troubled, and caring for the
sick and needy. Since the members of the congregation have
their own part to play in this pastoral ministry, it is the
presbyter's responsibility to see that they are not only equipped
for mutual pastoral care, but encouraged and enabled to carry it
out. Such pastoral ministry has as its aim to nurture the unity and
witness of the congregation.

53) [e] Pastoral Administrators. It is a responsibility of
presbyters, when they are serving as leaders of congregations,
to see that the many other ministries carried on in the
congregation are adequately planned, prepared, and per­
formed, and helped with every resource and support which the
congregation can provide. Presbyters may also function as
administrators in church boards, agencies, and organizations of
all kinds, including ecumenical organizations.

54) [f] Leaders in Mission. Mission is a responsibility of all who
share the ministry of Christ. Presbyters, accordingly, are called
to leadership in mission. They proclaim and teach God's
purposes. They bear witness to God's work in the world as well
as in the church. They lead the church in calling persons to faith
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and establishing a congregation. As ministers of Word and sacraments, they pioneer in new forms of mission. They enlist, renew, equip, and accompany God’s people as they go out into the local community, the nation, and the world.

55) [g] Servants of Unity. As representative ministers of the church, presbyters work ecumenically across the walls that continue to divide the one Church of Jesus Christ. Specifically it is important for them, by their personal relationships and leadership, to facilitate a vital communion with persons, congregations, and communities of other traditions. At the same time it is their responsibility to give active support and leadership to ecumenical worship, programs, coalitions, councils, and church unions in their local community and, as opportunity may come, at the levels of the region, the nation, and the world (Acts 15:2; II Cor. 8:1-4, 20).

(iv) The Ministry of Deacons

56) Deacons are baptized members of the people of God who have been ordained to represent to this people its identity in Christ as servant in the midst of the world. It belongs to diaconal ministry to struggle with the myriad needs of societies and persons—economic, political, scientific, educational, cultural, moral—in Christ’s name, and so to exemplify the interdependence of worship and mission in the life of the church. The ministry of deacons will be ordered in the uniting church as personal, collegial, and constitutional.

57) The essentials of diaconal ministry already exist in the uniting churches in a variety of forms and under a variety of names (for example: ruling elder, elder, diaconal minister, perpetual deacon, steward). It is important that this ministerial office, neglected or poorly defined in the recent past but now being recovered and re-evaluated, should be shaped with a certain flexibility. In this process of recovery, however, it is important that the diaconate be recognized as a distinctive ministry, and that it not be seen as an initial stage in the preparation of presbyters, even though some who have been ordained as deacons may later be ordained as presbyters.
58) All deacons will be ordained by the church through the bishop, with the participation of presbyters, other deacons, and lay ministers. Such ordination presupposes careful consideration of the candidate's qualifications and recommendation or election by a congregation. The service of diaconal ordination will be in the form of a renewal of the commitment to ministry implicit in the person's baptism, and will include prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, with the laying on of hands, and an appointment of the deacon to the task of ministry to which he or she has been called.

59) Some deacons may be employed by the church; others may have secular employment; and they may change from one to the other.

60) All deacons represent and take leadership in the diaconal responsibility of the congregation in which they serve. Deacons serve in a variety of ways:

61) [a] Servants in Worship. Deacons, whatever their particular arenas of activity, normally participate as leaders in the worship within local congregations. It is their responsibility to read the Scriptures, including the Gospel, preaching when called to do so, leading the assembled people in prayer, assisting in the administration of the sacraments.

62) [b] Partners in Governance. When elected by a congregation for that purpose, deacons share in the oversight of the ministry of that congregation. Together with presbyters and laypersons, such deacons will be concerned with the discipline and deployment of their congregations as collective expressions of the gospel and in governance at other levels of the church's life.

63) [c] Leaders in Mission. Deacons carry a responsibility for the development of mission both within and beyond parishes and congregations. Some may find the focus of their ministry primarily in their regular employment. Some may be volunteers with regular responsibilities in mission.

64) [d] Servants in Pastoral Care. Deacons have a responsible share in the church's concern for the pastoral care of persons. This includes not only their traditional responsibility for the care of the sick and needy, but also a responsibility for the spiritual life of the congregation and its discipline.

65) [e] Servants of Unity. With their special concern for mission
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in the world, deacons are called to witness to the unity of humankind in Christ by bringing the church into dialogue with the society in which it is set. In the midst of diversity, they further, through their witness, the practical acknowledgment of human community.
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND SACRAMENTS: A COMMENT ON THE COCU MINISTRY STATEMENT

J. ROBERT NELSON

Doctor, lawyer, merchant—minister. Who is an ordained minister of the church? One professional among others in society? A “divine” or a “person of God”? Or just a human being trying to make an honest and useful living?

Most of the voluminous writing on this subject can be reduced to three questions:

How does ordination distinguish a person from other church members, if all are called to be serving ministers?

Is the ordained ministry primarily, or exclusively, a matter of function, or also of being someone?

How can the diverse and contrary understandings of ministry in presently divided churches be reconciled and united in the coming years?

The Consultation on Church Union has struggled with these issues for more than a decade. In 1980 the plenary session, representing the ten denominations, came to agreement on the definitive statement about ministry. It constitutes a distillation of many years’ converging ecumenical study and thought. It does not merely put traditional doctrines of ministry in a blender and produce an ecumenical potage. Instead, the statement is intended both to retain what has been proven to be valid and valuable in diverse understandings of the past years, and to give new emphases and directions for the church of the future.

In this commentary it will be shown that there is an inseparable theological bond between the ministry and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and that these are

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all grounded in the same four main doctrines of the Christian faith.

Christians of all churches can agree on certain affirmations of faith. We hold these truths to be self-evident:

that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19);

that there is but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 4:4);

that, as there is one loaf and one cup of our common sharing, there is but one eucharist and all members are to be at one in it (I Cor. 12:12);

that the commanding purpose of the church is to proclaim, exemplify, and commend the justifying, liberating, and saving love of God for every human being, through both the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry.

These affirmations are not self-evident truths to everyone, of course. Apart from the eye and ear of faith and the tongue and hand of confession, these are merely four religious propositions. They are four among the hundreds which belong to the beliefs of all human religions. Some scholars find analogous or even identical or equivalent forms of each of these Christians beliefs. They can show, for example:

that there are many ideas of incarnation, such as the *avatar* of friendly, benign divinities;

that ritual washings and cultic meals are common to extinct as well as living religions, both primal and sophisticated;

that others besides Christians believe they are impelled by divine will to spread good will, love, and peace; and that mercy, service, justice, and liberation are causes which also spring from nonreligious, humanistic convictions about politics and human welfare; and finally

that concepts such as harmony, solidarity, unity, and union are propounded by all sorts of religions and philosophies.

So what is unusual or unique about Christian faith?

When we engage in discussion of church, sacraments, and ministry we need to keep in mind the fact that we are meeting and talking within the theological circle of a common faith. What is self-evident to us who consciously belong to Jesus Christ is neither evident nor believable—nor even interesting—to mil-
lions of thoughtful, responsible men and women. Our discussions are literally "in house," that is, in "the household of faith."

Even within this Christian household, however, the gravity of our concern is not of uniform attraction. According to the utterances and writings of some of our sisters and brothers in the faith, the sacraments and ministry are as irrelevant to the real problems of human existence as the famous fiddle, or harp, of the Emperor Nero was to the conflagration of Rome. It has often been recalled that during the October 1917 upheaval in Saint Petersburg, members of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy were too preoccupied with a dispute over a question of the proper use of vestments to be concerned with Lenin's revolutionary protest. Is it unfair to ask today, then, what a theological discussion of sacraments and ministry has to do with terrorism in the Middle East, torture in South America, starvation in Asia and Africa, or all the social ills and political injustices in our own land? Perhaps these discussions are just our kind of liturgical vestments.

Unless we can find umbrage in an absolute separation of the sacred and the secular, or a total divorce of religion and culture, or of spirit and matter, we must be nagged by the question of the relevance of these issues of the faith and order of the churches. It is by no means difficult to explain and justify this important relation if our theology is not cast loose from its biblical moorings. What is meant by theology? By biblical moorings here?

There are four main theological doctrines which form the basis and provide the impelling force for the ecumenical consideration of sacraments and ministry. These are:

1. Jesus Christ: christology;
2. Holy Spirit: pneumatology;
3. Church: ecclesiology; and

The biblical moorings of these four are the written history and interpretation of certain conjunctions between God and the creation. Transcendence and immanence, eternity and history, divinity and humanity—these are conjoined in the biblical
witness to God's providential and redemptive work. So what
God has joined together let no one put asunder.

Put asunder they are, though, by two ancient and perennial
nemeses of Christian faith. They have various names. Here they
are designated "docetism" and "naturalism." Though polar
opposites, each undercuts, distorts, and tends to destroy the
significance of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and
God's creation/redemption.

A modern variant of ancient Gnosticism is the docetic way of
thinking and believing which drains the four basic doctrines of
their earthly, historical human reality. Thus, Jesus Christ is just
a concept rather than a person; the Spirit is a psychic power or
spook; the church is an invisible idea; and creation itself is
illusion. In docetic view, baptism and the Lord's Supper are
quaint, subjective ritual experiences for individuals to experi­
ence in their quest for self-fulfillment; and ministry means a
generalized exhortation to everyone to be friendly and kind.
Feeling is everything, and life is but a drama in this docetic
world.

In polar contrast is stark naturalism. According to this popular
view, Jesus Christ was a good rabbi and prophet, but nothing
more; spirit is the electrical energy which makes the brain
function; the church as religious society is either a static club or a
movement for social reform; and creation is the inexplicably
given material reality, which is the ultimately hopeless sphere of
human existence. For naturalistic or materialistic philosophy,
baptism and eucharist are just cultural vestiges of a superstitious
age, and the ministry is only a practical way of allocating
functional responsibilities to certain adherents to the sect called
Christianity.

These opposing movements have been pulling Christian faith
in one or the other direction ever since the first century. They
continue to tear at the fabric of faith today. But this fabric is
woven of dual strands. Integrity requires them to be kept
together. They are best represented by the traditionally
designated divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. It took the
ancient church more than two centuries to resolve the problem
of duality-in-unity without falling into either dualism or
monism. The definition of the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451,
confirmed as canonical doctrine the faith in Jesus Christ as the God-man: one person, truly human and truly divine, the theandric Savior.

Why should we even mention this ancient council in relation to the present ecumenical discussion of ministry and sacraments? For two reasons:

First, because the reaffirmation of this classic christology, with whatever intellectual reserve, has made possible the present experience of ecumenical convergence. A simple simile is often used to illustrate the unifying power of Christ. Imagine a large wagon wheel with many diverging spokes. These radii are the divided denominations, communions, and parties of Christianity. The hub is Jesus Christ as presented in the New Testament, witnessed to in apostolic tradition, and revealed by the Spirit in present faith. Starting from the circumference, the nearer we move to Christ the center the closer we come to one another in unity.

The second reason for Chalcedon's importance is our need to appreciate the divine-human character of the Holy Spirit, the church, and the work of creation/redemption. Neither the docetic nor the naturalistic concept can suffice to account for an authentically ecumenical understanding of their reality.

These introductory theological considerations may be summarized this way: God the Creator and Redeemer works for the salvation of all persons and all things by the agency of Jesus Christ in human history, by the Holy Spirit in our lives, and by the ministry of worship, witness, and unity of the church in all the world. Apart from some such presupposition of faith, the discussion of ministry, baptism, and eucharist seems trivial and sectarian.

Thanks also to the dimension of true humanity in the Chalcedonian doctrine, we can give a credible answer to the skeptic's questioning of the practical relevance of sacraments and ministry, and hence also of church unity, to the actualities of daily struggles and conflicts in the world. Therefore, we may ask, what is the value of a recognized ordained ministry, a proper priesthood or an episcopal succession if these are not effectively representing today the ministry of Jesus Christ for personal servanthood and reconciliation? To paraphrase a
promise of Jesus: Seek first the reign of God and his righteousness, and the credentials of the ministry may be added unto you.

In ecumenical encounters and studies today we are learning of new aspects and gaining new understanding of the ministry and appreciation of the church. We see the lines of convergence carrying the churches forward. The growing consensus is not about where we have been, or are, but where we are going. What is promising and exciting about the current quest for consensus is that it moves us to gather up the theological wisdom of the past, test it against our understanding of the Bible and tradition, and keep it open to the coming unity of the future.

Now we may reintroduce the four major doctrines with which we began: Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the church, and creation/redemption. We perceive how the church union negotiations and bilateral conversations have all come closer to agreement because they first have dealt with these four basic doctrines; or else they have found their ways implicitly to consensus on the import of the doctrines before dealing explicitly with the diversities and contradictions of polity, canon law, liturgical practice, and church order.

The outline of a theological "grid" which follows serves only to suggest to a reader's comprehension both the richness of meanings of these four doctrines and the pertinence of each to the ministry and the two sacraments. At each "synapse" of vertical and horizontal columns is a cluster of theological ideas.

In the COCU chapter it is clear that the very concept of ministry is derived from the particular affirmations of theology as contained in these four doctrines. The same is true, but to a less extent, in the definition of ministry found in the Discipline of the UMC. This is not a coincidence; it is a demonstration of the extent to which the theology of ecumenical convergence has already influenced denominational definitions.

The theological content of this chapter should be acceptable to United Methodists, and so should the description of the laity and the threefold ordained ministry. Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and members of the United Church of Christ and the community churches may have more difficulty espousing this

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A Theological Grid

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<tr>
<th>BAPTISM</th>
<th>EUCHARIST</th>
<th>MINISTRY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Jesus’ baptism from Jordan to Calvary.</td>
<td>a. Institution of Lord’s Supper.</td>
<td>a. Jesus’ ministry as paradigm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Dying and rising with Christ.</td>
<td>b. Anamnesis of Jesus’ whole life of sacrifice.</td>
<td>b. Priesthood of all members.</td>
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<tr>
<th>HOLY SPIRIT</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Enablement to have faith in God through Jesus Christ.</td>
<td>a. Invocation of the Spirit (epiklesis).</td>
<td>a. Epiclesis in act of ordination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Reception of divine power for new life of freedom.</td>
<td>c. Enabling of faith to receive the body and blood of Christ.</td>
<td>c. Apostolicity of the tradition maintained in preached Word and pastoral service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Baptism as sustained by nurture through lifetime, being sealed by Spirit.</td>
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<tr>
<th>CHURCH</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Church as such baptized at Pentecost.</td>
<td>a. Common meal of faithful people.</td>
<td>a. Pastoral authority for personal care and building up the Body of Christ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Church’s exercise of rite or act of baptizing.</td>
<td>b. Ministry ordained for celebrating as “president.”</td>
<td>b. Collegiality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Initiation into being member of the Body of Christ.</td>
<td>c. Congregational amen.</td>
<td>c. Church’s recognition of ordinand’s worthiness.</td>
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<td>e. Empowerment for mission.</td>
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<th>GOD’S CREATION AND REDEMPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Use of water: creation from chaos.</td>
<td>a. Bread and wine made from God’s creation.</td>
<td>a. Persons used as finite instruments of God’s will.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Requirements and cost of discipleship.</td>
<td>c. Saving history prefigured in Israel.</td>
<td>c. Diakonia unrestricted.</td>
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<td>d. The commission to serve and witness to gospel.</td>
<td>d. Use of art forms in liturgy: culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Reconciliation (peace).</td>
<td>e. Bread of heaven for life of the world.</td>
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<td>f. Transfiguration: new creation and hope.</td>
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scheme, since their reading of church history has not induced them to regard the ordained ministry as threefold. The chapter does not speak of three orders, however. Indeed, it avoids the ambiguous and unclear concepts of order and office. The designation by name and title and the description of special responsibilities suffice.

An effort is made by COCU to clarify the ministry of deacons, just as the UMC has been trying to do. The attraction of the idea of a permanent diaconate is strong. It suggests a way to give the church greater versatility in its total mission in the world. But the clarification is not yet adequate. It awaits future decisions to be made when the constitution of the Church of Christ Uniting is drawn up. Also waiting are matters so dear to Methodists as conference membership and the mode of appointing ministers to pastorates or other responsibilities.

We may not yet all see all the lineaments of the future church and its ministry; but we know what kind of goal we seek, and why we seek it now. We seek a form and presence of the church of Jesus Christ in each human society: a form in which legitimate freedom and diversity will be maintained within a genuine unity of faith, worship, sacramental life, ministry, and mission. Why are these to be sought? Because this church is intended by God, the Creator and Redeemer, to be the sign and instrument of the coming unity and peace of all persons in the human family. If this hope were thought to be of ambiguous certitude or even of sentimental illusion, then there are better things to do in life than bother with the church and the ecumenical movement. But if it is a well-founded hope, it should be a commanding purpose of our lives.
BOOK REVIEWS

AMERICA AS A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM

Reviews by Russell E. Richey


All three of these books are in one way or another concerned with America as a religious problem. But in style, methodology, and orientation they differ markedly. Van Allen’s book emerges out of a series of Bicentennial lectures given at Villanova University addressed to “the values, events, and features in our American religious experience that need to be called to mind if we are to meet our present and future challenges both resourcefully and effectively” (viii). The book is, thus, intentionally prescriptive. Cuddihy’s essay on civil religion, on the other hand, is an exercise in intellectual history. Civil religion is viewed as the interaction ritual between and among the three major religious communities—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish. The focus here is on behavioral codes. Wilson’s work pays particular attention to institutions and institutionalization, endeavoring to determine whether and to what extent civil religion has really existed. Values, behavior, institutions—each of these books touches on all of these features of religion, but each orients itself primarily around one of them. In this way all three books provide a distinctive insight into America as a religious problem. Wilson and Cuddihy explicitly treat civil religion; the articles in Van Allen’s do so in varying degrees. It will

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be my endeavor to look at civil religion and these books with an eye to their bearing on United Methodism, the local church and the minister.

CIVIL RELIGION: AN ACADEMIC AFFAIR

Civil religion is a much canvassed topic. Several important conferences, a number of sessions at professional meetings, books, and articles in abundance have been devoted to it. Historians and sociologists, theologians and biblical scholars, politicians and preachers have all used and abused the concept of civil religion. It is employed for such diverse subjects that the essays written to clarify the issue are now becoming tiresome. Apparently civil religion covers the lost cause of the Confederacy and the black nationalist movement of Garveyism, the radicalism of the 1960s and of the Right, sports and the public schools, Abraham Lincoln and Richard Nixon. One scholar, Sidney E. Mead, has devoted much of his academic career to a discussion of the topic. In various ways the scholarly community has sought to render these discussions accessible to pulpit and pew. From my own engagements with clergy and laity, I would judge that the academic discussions of civil religion have had negligible impact upon the life of the church. Most people—clergy and laity—would draw a blank when asked about civil religion. If they were told that it concerned national, political, or public piety they might well end the enquiry by observing that they were in favor of more of it. That response—typical at least of my soundings in local churches—suggests the nature of the problem and the importance of ministerial engagement with books like these.

CIVIL RELIGION: AN AMERICAN AFFAIR

Religion considered as a political institution powerfully contributes to the maintenance of a democratic republic among Americans. Alexis de Tocqueville, the nineteenth-century French observer of American life, discovered a democratic and republican religion which suffused American culture, molded the manners and intellect of the people, and reigned by universal consent. This republican religion was “indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions” and was “the first of their political institutions.” Almost a century earlier, reflecting upon societal requirements, Benjamin Franklin had foreseen “the Necessity of a Publick Religion” (Wilson, 7). But he left it unclear whether this religion was to be distinct from Christianity. Looking
back from our own times upon the interplay of religion and national life, Sidney Mead resolved Franklin's indecision. Mead also discerned a religion of the republic. He described America as the nation with the soul of a church.

Though ostensibly describing the same state of affairs, de Tocqueville's and Mead's assessments represent quite different readings of the nature of civic piety. De Tocqueville had discovered a piety which grew out of and was sustained by Christian institutions, Protestant and Catholic. Mead, on the other hand, found a republican religion that was transcendent, universal, and legitimate in its own right, but also a rival to—though intertwined with—denominational religion. The difference in these two assessments is more than academic.

Rather different implications for and responses from Christianity and Judaism would seem to result if civil piety constituted a distinct religion as opposed to a cultural expression of traditional religion. During the 1950s and 1960s interpreters other than Mead, notably Will Herberg, Winthrop Hudson, and Martin Marty, worked with variants of de Tocqueville's conception. Though they worried that America's Christianized culture was a degenerate version of the faith and that this culture had come to exercise a significant degree of autonomy, they refused to endow civic piety with legitimacy and respect.

What most stimulated scholarly gravitation to Mead's interpretation was an essay by Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America." Both Bellah's concept and his forceful statement of the issue radically altered perceptions. Bellah insisted "that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America," a religion possessing the seriousness and integrity and requiring "the same care in understanding that any other religion does."

To a generation of scholars who were weaned on Neo-orthodoxy's critique of culture religion and its encouragement of political activity, and who were moving increasingly in scholarly university circles where the study of religion still smacked of sectarianism, and whose attention was focused by Kennedy and Johnson on national life and the dilemmas of Vietnam, Bellah's concept rang true to experience and perception. Sensitive to both the pluralism of American religion and the secularism of much of American life, not also disposed to objectivity in assessment, scholars found "civil religion" an appropriate and inoffensive concept for the exploration of the various religious features in American public life. Some followed Mead and Bellah in stressing the Enlightenment's influence on civil religion. Others
followed Robert Handy's Christian America, Martin Marty's Righteous Empire, or Sydney Ahlstrom's Religious History of the American People and continued to view civil religion as a legacy of the Protestant and Puritan domination over American culture.

CIVIL RELIGION: A HISTORICAL PROBLEM

The scholar most persistent in his agnosticism about the existence of civil religion is John F. Wilson. In Public Religion in American Culture, questions and objections which he has doggedly posed in a variety of forums are developed into a sustained analysis of civil religion as a "reality" in American life (?) and as an interpretive problem. In places pastors may find this book overly concerned with conceptual matters, but for that reason it is now the most definitive statement on civil religion and certainly the resource for pastors who have reflected on the problem.6

Public Religion is a sustained reflection on Bellah's thesis that civil religion is a well-institutionalized and differentiated religion. Wilson's conclusion is that it is not. Wilson prefers Franklin's concept of a "public religion." Public piety exists in rich profusion, but it is elusive, diffuse, episodic, pluriform, and shifting. Readers will be able to draw their own conclusions, however, for Wilson has meticulously adduced, categorized, and assessed the evidence proposed on behalf of civil religion. After an initial chapter which examines various perceptions and theories of civil religion, past and present, Wilson explores the covenantal understanding of the nation and its mission as seen in the use of the rich Hebraic imagery utilized from Puritan days to the present to give purpose and cohesion to colony and nation.

Then follow four chapters in which Wilson assesses the evidence for civil religion against constitutive parts of religion—belief, behavior, corporate meaning, and institution. The chapter on belief focuses on the religious language of American presidents and analyzes the several forms of presidential utterance. For ritual behavior Wilson explores the use Americans make of ceremonial occasions such as presidential inaugurations, Memorial and Armistice days, July 4th, public funerals and birthdays, and less formal ritual events in the media, entertainment, sports, and merchandising worlds. The religious meanings of the corporate community Wilson gathers into four constellations: America as a perfected society, America as the fulfillment of dreams frequently framed in millenarian terms, America as a new homeland, and America as the land of opportunity. Interpreters of civil religion have located its structural or institutional dimension in various ways.
Wilson entertains proposals that the public schools function as the national church and that the law, the media, leisure activities, patriotic organizations, and voluntary societies have sacred functions.

As mentioned, Wilson provides evidence in abundance, but not to convict.

Has civil religion been prominent in the sense of representing a specific, positive religion within the American society? The answer seems clear if by it we mean a well-institutionalized religion continuous across 200 years of American history. In this sense, there has not been an American civil religion.

Readers new to the discussion and confronted with Wilson's competent survey may conclude otherwise. They will be considerably assisted in drawing their own conclusions by the following chapter in which he gathers the interpretations of civil religion into four models: social, cultural, political, and theological. These models might be seen as perspectives or disciplinary options for the reader. Leaving open the possibility that a civil religion (in his terms) might yet develop, in a final chapter Wilson turns the concept on itself and suggests that the civil religion discussion might itself be civil religious, an effort to revitalize American culture.

CIVIL RELIGION: A TOLERANT AFFAIR

Wilson's second model—the social—focuses on those values, sentiments, and beliefs that unite Americans, make American society the object of civil religion, and conceive of civil religion as sustaining social order. To date, the most forceful statement of this view has come from the late Will Herberg who wrote of the religion of Americanism and the religion of the American way of life. Cuddihy's No Offense brings sophistication and refinement to Herberg's argument. But what Herberg derided, Cuddihy humors. Like Herberg Cuddihy is sensitive to identity as a central problem for America, he is attentive to the religious meaning of everyday behavior, he is impressed with the significance of the interplay of the three major religions; he is insistent on taking tolerance and pluralism seriously, and he is convinced that civil religion is not differentiated from but mixed with denominational religion. Yet Cuddihy nevertheless departs dramatically from Herberg in taking theology to be a significant ingredient in civil religion. Cuddihy sees the ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue to be the bearer of civil religion and tolerance (rather than the array of American folk patterns) to be its essence. Cuddihy, then, gives new life to a
conceptualization of civil religion recently eclipsed by the Mead/Bellah interpretation.

Cuddihy begins by insisting that civil religion is to be known by what it does, by the behavior it produces rather than through its theology. In fact, he appropriates Martin Marty's recent book title "A Nation of Behavers." Cuddihy builds his case by assessing the contributions of major religious thinkers, chiefly Reinhold Niebuhr, John Courtney Murray, and Arthur Hertzberg. These spokesmen to and for the three major religious communions are credited with instructing their followers in religious tact. They adjusted traditional theologies and codes of religious behavior to the exigencies of inter-faith tolerance (and in so doing actualized a tolerance and pluralism previously rather potential) and intra-Protestant ideals.

Cuddihy terms his new code of inter-faith behavior "civil religion." Civil religion is characterized by civility, religious tact, and a generalized niceness. It is the demand for mutual respect that one faith extracts from another in pledge for the same. This commitment Cuddihy labels a religion of civility. Civility is, according to Cuddihy, a prerequisite to genuine pluralism. Cuddihy measures the value but also the cost and the fragility of achievement. Even so he perhaps exaggerates civility's triumph. It is quite one thing for intellectuals to trim truth claims and relinquish particularity. It is quite another matter for them to bring along troops who have long measured religious zeal by the intolerance it yields. Cuddihy's religion of civility has still not conquered in all quarters. But he has certainly made us aware of the dynamism of tolerance. For it to live, it has to be exercised, renewed, rethought. His insights into this trio and their compatriots in that endeavor are most illuminating.

Less persuasive in my view is his attempt to back the religion of civility out of the twentieth century and to trace it back through American history to the Puritans and back through Christian history to Christ. Chapter 8, which makes that effort, might best be ignored. His case is best illustrated with twentieth century evidence, evidence which makes this an interesting book.

CIVIL RELIGION AND THE FUTURE

Cuddihy's formulation of civil religion legitimates the dialogue contained in American Religious Value and the Future of America. In it a Protestant (Martin E. Marty), a Catholic (David J. O'Brien), a Jew (Marc H. Tanenbaum), a black (Benjamin E. Mays), and a woman (Rosemary Radford Ruether) reflect on American religious values and the future
of America. The volume is framed by an introductory historical survey of the topic by Sydney E. Ahlstrom and a concluding assessment by Michael Novak. The contributors provide introductions and responses to one another’s papers. Often the literary expression of a conference or of a series of lectures fails to translate their oral dynamics into something that can be profitably read. The editor and author of the idea for this undertaking, Rodger Van Allen, is to be congratulated for having (1) assembled scholars who would speak to the announced topic; and (2) transformed those Bicentennial addresses into an interesting volume.

Organizing a book along the lines of the “zoo theory” (one of each kind) also often yields failure. Here it succeeds because each spokesperson has endeavored to look at the question in relation to the community represented. In several cases, arguments that the author has worked out at considerable length elsewhere are here compressed. Beginning with Israel and coursing through church history, Ahlstrom’s introduction, for instance, captures the major emphases of his Religious History of the American People. Ahlstrom argues that America has sustained itself until the mid-twentieth century with a Puritan-Evangelical ideology. Impressed with the seriousness of the demise of the Puritan epoch, Ahlstrom sounds a note of crisis, calling Americans to a new vision through reclamation of the values of the Revolution.

Tanenbaum concurs. He criticizes the Bicentennial as “a moral tragedy,” finding in America a deep pervasive crisis in values, and urges a return to the Revolution to humanize the American dream. O’Brien, in echoing Ahlstrom’s theme, suggests that America’s civil religion lacks the capacity for transcendence and prophetic utterance and tends toward chauvinism. He examines the Catholic experience for contributions to a new consensus, envisioning John Courtney Murray and current Catholic concern for social justice as offering hope for renewal. Mays recounts the struggle of the black church, the “child of rejection by white Christians.” In the Black church and white remnant he hopes for the ethical and spiritual leadership lacking in American society as a whole. Similarly, Ruether portrays America as having violated its two covenants with freedom, the Christian and the Revolutionary. She calls for a new order, not merely for renewal of the covenants. Crisis and judgment are largely absent from the other two essays.

Marty in his statement on Protestantism and Novak in a concluding perspective centered on Catholicism eschew the prophets’ enterprise and undertake what Marty has elsewhere termed a mapping exercise, an attempt to locate religious features on the American landscape.
AMERICA AS RELIGIOUS PROBLEM

Marty accents the pluralism of Protestantism and the diversity of values that it might contribute to the American future. Novak counters stereotypes of American Catholics, bemoans the Protestantizing of Catholicism (moralism, anti-institutionalism, crusading puritanism), and calls for Catholics to contribute to America's future out of their traditional religious, cultural, and social strengths.

CIVIL RELIGION AND THE PROTESTANT FUTURE

Scholars have been as perplexed about what to do with civil religion, as they have been in trying to define what it is. Novak is perhaps right in identifying a recurrent theme in American life—a dualistic and crusading spirit that tends to embrace and acclaim, or to reject and destroy.

Reactions to civil religion have often gone one of two ways. Out of commitment to objectivity or in genuine regard for it, some accord civil religion legitimacy, transcendence, significance. On the other hand, not a few judge it by Judeo-Christian standards and pronounce civil religion idolatrous. The virtue of these three books is that they provide the discerning reader with some intermediate positions.

Though it can scarcely be Wilson's intention to do so, in questioning the formal status of civil religion, his Public Religion displays the richness and diversity of public religiosity. He insists on the interplay of civil and denominational religion, permitting the Christian to consider civil religion as a cultural artifact and as an instance of the age-old problem of the relation of Christianity to culture. Civil religion is less a rival faith than it is one dimension and one way of conceptualizing the religious diffusion in and pluriformity of American society. Americans are presented with a range of invitations to be religious, some explicit, others veiled. Surely that is no surprise to the pastor, looking for laborers in the vineyard. The question still remains, "Is Wilson correct?" Is there a civil religion in America? What is to be made of the religiosity diffused through American society? In response to that public piety, how exclusive, totalistic, and judgmental should the Christian faith be stated and structured?

Here Cuddihy is instructive. Sharing Wilson's sense of the interaction of denominational and civil religion, Cuddihy considers civil religion to be the product of the struggle toward genuine pluralism and mutual respect among the major faiths. Civil religion is the socio-cultural echo of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. Its tones produce interference with Christian (and Jewish) endeavors to sing the Lord's song. But the problem is the ancient one in a new guise, how to
singing the Lord's song in this strange land of religious pluralism. From American Religious Values the reader gains choral suggestions, the nuances of which are only partially captured in this essay.

My own counsel is modest. First, I think that such works are helpful to the pastor seeking to discover, to follow, and to preach the good news in American society. Second, I firmly believe that strategies for Christianity's relation to culture should emerge from within the household of faith. The scholar's function is to investigate, which means these books won't preach and should not. Pastors and churches must transform these scholarly findings for their own purposes. Third, I would recall H. Richard Niebuhr's discerning analysis of the several postures that Christians have taken toward culture. The five classic relations of Christianity to culture detailed in his Christ and Culture might fruitfully be reviewed and tried against the contemporary problem of Christianity and civil religion. No one stance may emerge as best. Rather, the diversity and pluralism within American Christianity and within United Methodism may well occasion a variety of legitimate Protestant futures.

NOTES


5. Bellah's essay first appeared as the lead essay in the Winter 1967 issue of Daedalus, pp. 1-21. Probably no one article in recent American religious studies has had
comparable impact. It has been frequently reprinted and is included in the volume by Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion*. The following quotation is taken from p. 21 of the latter.

6. Those wholly unfamiliar with civil religion may still find our anthology *American Civil Religion* a useful place to begin. At any rate Wilson’s volume is the next place to read.


SEMINARY JOURNAL ARTICLE REVIEWS

John L. Topolewski


Duke has made a significant contribution to our ongoing discussion around the question, "Which Bible is best?" As Lloyd R. Bailey, who served as editor for this particular issue, points out, this matter is not simply a scholarly concern, but one that is raised by "students, pastors, and members of various congregations." In fact, in light of such wide interest in this question, and the comprehensive treatment of the problem in the Review, we can look forward to a slightly expanded discussion of the issue which will soon be published by John Knox Press.

The structure and content of the volume are helpful. Following a lead article by Bruce M. Metzger, professor of New Testament language and literature at Princeton Theological Seminary and chairperson of the Revised Standard Version Bible Committee, concerning the history behind the Revised Standard Version and some comment on forthcoming directions, a variety of scholars has been asked to provide a critique of each of the major versions published since the Revised Standard Version. Consideration is given to the Jerusalem Bible, The New English Bible, The New American Bible, The Living Bible, Today’s English Version or The Good News Bible, The New International Version, and The New Jewish Version.

Each article is well done, and James D. Smart’s piece on The Living Bible is both insightful and revealing, but in my own mind, the one that was most helpful was Metzger’s, particularly when he speaks of "The Next Stages." Here he outlines and illustrates some changes being considered for incorporation in an edition of the RSV presently being

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projected for mid-1980 publication. Archaic usages of the second person singular pronouns will be dropped from the Psalms and prayers of the Bible, and perhaps, most significantly of all, attempts will be made to introduce, whenever appropriate, "inclusive" language. E.g., John 2:10, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine," will become, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk" (p. 81). In some cases, the insertion of "man" or "men" had no support in the Hebrew or Greek, and in other cases such exclusive language is no longer appropriate within the fluid linguistic setting in which we currently, and undoubtedly in the future will, find ourselves.

In summarizing his article, Metzger points beyond the RSV to speak of the ongoing task of editors, translators, and revisers:

"Other men and women have labored, and we have entered into their labors. This process cannot stop in 1611 or in 1952 or in 1979. Slowly, not spectacularly, knowledge of Hebrew and Greek text and language may be expected to grow, and the English language to change. At some future date a new set of revisers will again echo the words in Preface to the King James Bible of 1611:

". . . As nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being helped by their labors, doe endeavor to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade our selves, if they were alive, would thank us" (p. 83).


Charles Rice and Ronald E. Sleeth are both teachers of preachers, a rather awesome responsibility when one reflects upon the possible impact their instruction and modeling might have upon the church. Rice is associate professor of homiletics at Drew Theological School, and Sleeth, professor of preaching at Iliff School of Theology. In his article, Rice raises the question, "What makes for lively preaching?" (p. 21). Following a review and critique of some of the more pronounced trends of the twentieth century, Rice goes on to speak of his perceptions concerning a renewal which is, in his judgment, bringing new life to preaching today. It is a renewal based in biblical
preaching, a willingness to see the task as one shared with and carried out within a congregation, the recognition of preaching as an oral art form which can be both prophetic and human, and an appreciation of the power and mystery of storytelling. In some respects, the article is too short, giving the reader only a scant overview of the subtopics being considered, but then Rice has included within the body of the text a number of references to key and seminal works which are accessible to those who wish to pursue these matters further.

Superficially, Sleeth’s article is an anniversary piece, written to commemorate the publication, fifty years ago in Harper’s Magazine, of Harry Emerson Fosdick’s article, “What’s the Matter with Preaching?” But this is more than just nostalgia, for Sleeth recognizes that “an evaluation of that essay a half-century later provides an interesting historical view of the American pulpit and an uncanny note of relevance for our own day” (p. 28). In effect, Sleeth’s review of Fosdick’s question is yet another way of raising Rice’s concern. “What makes for . . .” and “What’s the matter with . . .” are incestuous bedmates. By lifting up Fosdick’s concern for method, i.e., arrangement (structure), dialogical intention, human transformation, etc. Sleeth is, in fact, providing a model whereby we might criticize our own pulpit labors. There is, however, a note of nonconcurrence, as Sleeth helps the reader to see that Fosdick’s rather utilitarian use of the Bible, “a searchlight,” is simply not adequate, particularly in light of the advances made in the area of biblical scholarship over the past five decades. Any application of the Bible to the preaching task must be made with the knowledge that the Bible is a thing of value in itself, not just a tool; indeed it is “. . . an existentially relevant word for this moment” (p. 30). This is an enlightening article, and it leaves the reader with a renewed appreciation for Fosdick’s witness in the past and wisdom for the present.

But there is more to be said, other questions to be asked, more relatives in this bed than we first perceived. Admittedly, there is a renewal of interest in preaching; but is there a revival of lively preaching? Does a resurrected interest in this aspect of the pastoral office, or the emergence of group approaches to the exegetical and homiletical task, or a movement away from a deductive to an inductive format, really guarantee enlivened results? Not necessarily. Far too many sermons enlivened that I hear, and preach, are monological in tone, didactic in character, and patronizing in intent. Perhaps the question needs to be turned again; instead of a “how to” approach, perhaps we need to raise the “what is” question. We can criticize our method, alter our arrangement, and become inclusive in our approach,
biblical in our orientation, and inductive in our style, but the question remains, "What is preaching?" To raise McLuhan's question, if we change the medium, what do we say about the message? Perhaps lively preaching grows out of the assurance that we know what we are being called upon to do, and knowing what to do empowers how we do it.

This is not to suggest that the questions addressed in these articles are inappropriate, or that the authors are not aware of related issues, but it is to suggest that because of these articles, additional questions—fundamental questions—have been raised.


The novel is God's reminder that truth is not dependent upon facts. In that unique blend of experience and fantasy, recollection and imagination, the writer of novels is able to bring to us what Amos Wilder called "news of reality" (p. 17), a news we might have missed, a reality we might not have seen. Robert E. Luccock, professor emeritus of worship and preaching, Boston University School of Theology, in an effort to share some insight with the reader concerning the profession of ministry, looks to three mid-twentieth-century authors. "These writers, William Golding, Graham Greene, and Georges Bernanos may have intended no such observations about ministry, but their novels serve as mirrors in which we may see ourselves reflected with both promise and peril in the work to which we have been called" (p. 17). By skilfully reconstructing the central theme of each novel, and by allowing the reader to listen in upon the internal struggles and foibles of each priestly protagonist, we begin to discover what is indeed both real and true.

In Golding's work The Spire, we are confronted with Jocelin, Dean of the Cathedral Church of the Virgin Mary, a man with a vision to build, against seemingly insurmountable odds, a four-hundred-foot tower over the nave of the cathedral he considers to be his own. Graham Greene, in The Power and the Glory, writes of the whiskey priest, a dissolute and undisciplined man, who for eight years has managed to remain a fugitive from a government which has closed the churches and executed the priests. The Dairy of a Country Priest, by Georges Bernanos, is the gentle story of a sickly man, who discovers in the monotony of parish life, in suffering and rejection, the meaning of his call.
Luccock has skillfully discovered the news that each of these stories holds and is able, in a caring and sensitive way, to share this truth with those who seek to be empowered for the task of ministry.

"There is no innocent work," says Dean Jocelin in . . . The Spire. "Grace is everywhere," says the priest before his death at the end of . . . The Diary of a Country Priest. "For Christ's sake, father," with these words the half-caste persuades the renegade priest to return to his duty and his death in . . . The Power and the Glory. These words of confession, affirmation and appeal coming from characters far removed from the scenes of our calling, I find provocative for understanding the perils and promises of ministry where we find ourselves (p. 17).

One could only hope that in some future endeavor, Luccock will discover for us the truth of our calling, as perceived within those priestly, yet shadowed, images of Iris Murdoch, those ecstatic, yet mystical, Hasidic rabbis of Isaac Bashevis Singer, and finally, and perhaps most disturbing of all, those angered, tormented ghosts of Elie Wiesel.

NOTES

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